



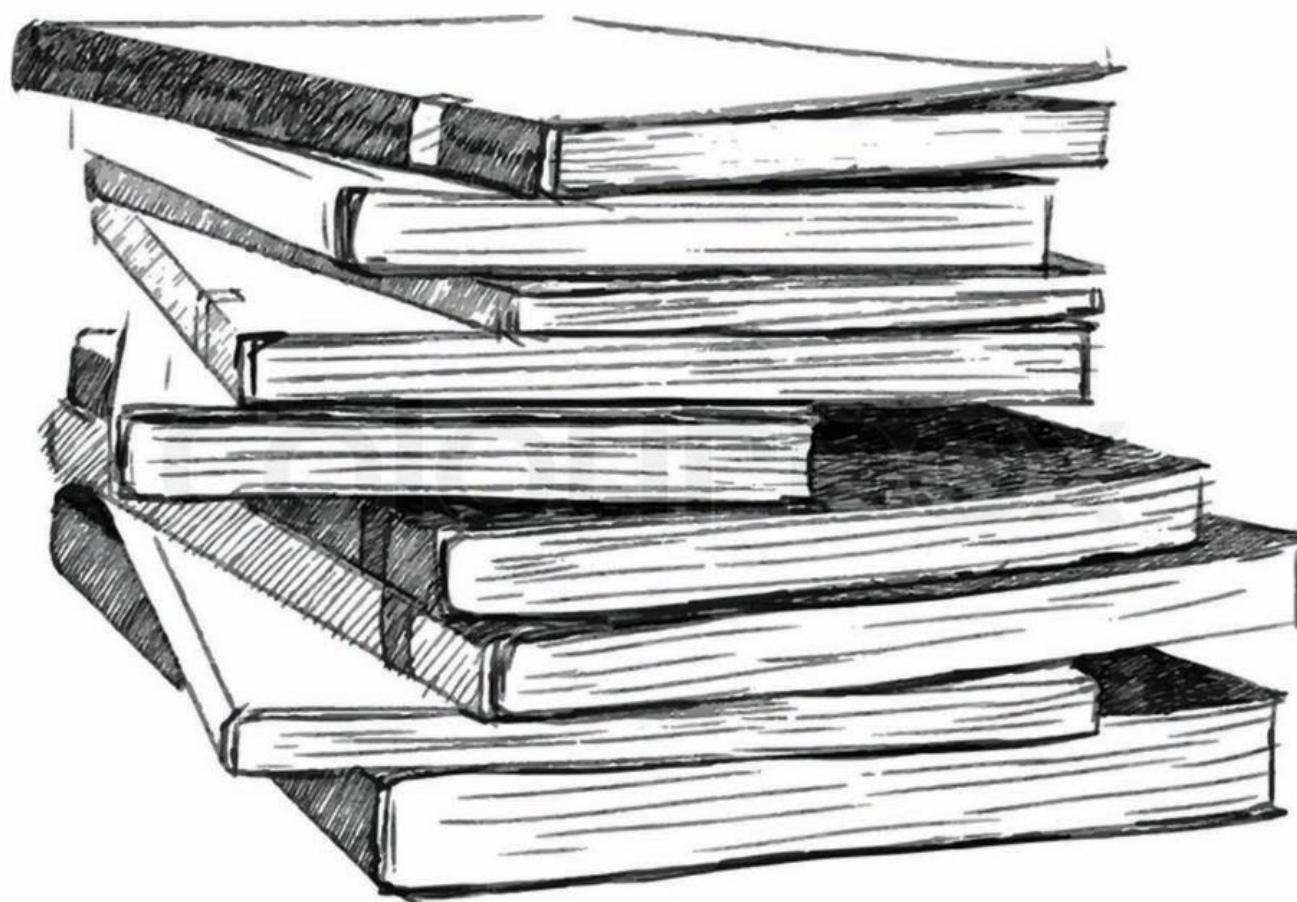
# International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences

(IJELS)

An open access Peer-Reviewed International Journal

CrossRef DOI: 10.22161/ijels

Issue DOI: 10.22161/ijels.84



**INFOGAIN PUBLICATION**

**Vol.- 8 | Issue - 4 | Jul-Aug 2023**

infogain.ijels@gmail.com | editor@ijels.com | <https://www.ijels.com/>

# International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences (IJELS)

(ISSN: 2456-7620)

DOI: 10.22161/ijels

Vol-8, Issue-4

July-August, 2023

*Editor in Chief*

Dr. Manoj Kumar

---

Copyright © 2023 International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences (IJELS)

Publisher

*Infogain Publications*

Email: [infogain.editor@gmail.com](mailto:infogain.editor@gmail.com) ; [editor@ijels.com](mailto:editor@ijels.com)

Web: [www.ijels.com](http://www.ijels.com)

## **International Editorial/ Reviewer Board**

- **Dr. Manoj Kumar**, Amity University, Jaipur, India
- **Dr. Dinh Tran Ngoc Huy**, HCM, Viet Nam
- **Dr. Luisa María Arvide Cambra**, Professor with Chair at the University of Almería, Spain
- **Dr. Osama Mahmoud Abu Baha**, University College of Educational Sciences -UNRWA
- **Dr. Rabindra Kayastha**, Kathmandu University, Nepal
- **Prince Dawar**, Poornima College of Engineering, Jaipur, India
- **Rabia Najaf**, Department of Finance Government University Pakistan.
- **Farhana Haque**, Brac University, Dhaka, Bangladesh
- **Dr. H.Saremi**, Islamic Azad university of Iran, Quchan branch, Quchan-Iran
- **Dr. Taher**, Al-Zaytoonah University of Jordan
- **Dr. Syed Damsaz Ali Andrabi**, Govt Degree College Boys Pulwama Kashmir, India
- **Dr. Ramel D. Tomaquin**, Surigao Del Sur State University, Rosario, Tandag City. Philippines
- **Dr. Rose Asayas Arceño**, Leyte Institute of Technology, Tacloban City, Philippines.
- **Dr. Vicente Alanoca Arocutipá**, Undergraduate and graduate teaching at the National University of Altiplano (Puno-Perú).
- **Dr. Mohammad Shaukat Ansari**, MLSM College,(LN Mithila University) Darbhanga, Bihar, India
- **Holmes Rajagukguk**, State University of Medan, Lecturer in Sisingamangaraja University North Tapanuli, Indonesia
- **Raikhapoor M.HumIAKN**, State Christian Religious Institue of Tarutung, North Tapanuli, Indonesia
- **Dr. Payal Chadha**, University Of Maryland University College Europe, Kuwait
- **Sarath W. Samaranayake**, Shinas College of Technology, Al-Aqur, Shinas, PO Box 77, PC 324, Sultanate of Oman.
- **Lidon. C. Lashley**, Lecturer, University of Guyana, Guyana
- **Ronato Sabalza Ballado**, College of Education and Graduate Studies, University of Eastern Philippines.
- **Dr. Andrew Sagayadass Philominraj**, School of English Pedagogy Department of Languages Universidad Católica del Maule, Chile
- **Prof. Dr. Misbah Mahmood Dawood AL-Sulaimaan**, Lebanese French University, Kurdistan Region - Iraq
- **Lahcen Belmekki**, Ministry of Education, High School Teacher of English, Kenitra
- **Dr. Agustin Nuñez Arceña**, Guimaras State College, Philippines
- **Mohsen Hanif**, Kharazmi University, Tehran, Iran
- **Dr. Marwa Essam Eldin Fahmy**, MISR University for Science & Technology, Egypt
- **Reza Kafipour**, Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, Meshkinfam Street, Shiraz, Iran
- **Damianus Abun**, Divine Word College of Vigan and Divine Word College of Laoag, Philippines
- **Md. Tanvir Ahsan**, Jagannath University, Dhaka
- **Prof. Dr. Elsayed Ahmed Elnashar**, Faculty of Specific Education, Kafrelsheikh University, Egypt.
- **Agnieszka Ilendo-Milewska**, Private University of Pedagogy in Bialystok, Poland
- **Ms Vo Kim Nhan**, Tien Giang University Vietnam
- **Nguyen Thi Phuong Hong**, University of Economics Ho Chi Minh city Vietnam
- **Dr. Sylwia Gwoździwicz**, The Jacob of Paradies University in Gorzow Wielkopolski / Poland
- **Kim Edward S. Santos**, Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology, Philippines.

**Vol-8, Issue-4, July - August 2023**  
**(10.22161/ijels.84)**

---

**EFL Adult Learners' Perception of Learning English Vocabulary through Pictures at a Private English Center**

**Author:** Nguyen Thi Thu Hang, Le Thi Thuy Nhung

**crossref** DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.1](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.1)

**Page No:** 001-008

**Violence and Brutality in Chronicle Of A Death Foretold**

**Author:** Ishita Prasher

**crossref** DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.2](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.2)

**Page No:** 009-011

**"But, human is all I am": Exploration of Posthuman Feminism and (Dis) embodiment in the Short Story of Vandana Singh**

**Author:** Sifatun Noor

**crossref** DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.3](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.3)

**Page No:** 012-016

**Dynamics of Academic Writing and its Impact on Professional Growth**

**Author:** Dr. P. Prasantham

**crossref** DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.4](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.4)

**Page No:** 017-021

**The Inimitable Sociologist: Revisiting Georg Simmel's Seminal Texts**

**Author:** Kevin George

**crossref** DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.5](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.5)

**Page No:** 022-026

**Translation errors: A taxonomic approach and their contribution to translator training**

**Author:** Evanthia Saridaki

**crossref** DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.6](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.6)

**Page No:** 027-032

**Traditional and Contemporary English Literature Teaching Methods in a Lebanese EFL academic context: A quasi-experimental study**

**Author:** Liza DerKhachadourian

**crossref** DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.7](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.7)

**Page No:** 033-047

**Corruption and Environmental Pollution: A Critique of Gabriel Okara's the Voice**

**Author:** Chukwuyem Othniel Omijie, Cynthia Chinenye Nwokolo

**crossref** DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.8](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.8)

**Page No:** 048-053

**Women and the Praxis of Intra-Gender Conflicts in Ogba Song-Poetry**

**Author:** Dr. Ben-Fred Ohia

**crossref** DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.9](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.9)

**Page No:** 054-062

*Dalit Consciousness and Imitative Cultural Symbolism in Coming Out as Dalit by Yashica Dutt*

Author: Dr Vibha Bhoot

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.10](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.10)

Page No: 063-069

*Christian's struggle and Quest for Spiritualism in John Bunyan's Pilgrims' Progress*

Author: R. Velu

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.11](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.11)

Page No: 070-072

*Theorising Environmentalism and Caregiving: A Critique of Ecofeminism*

Author: Athira Shaji

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.12](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.12)

Page No: 073-076

*Utilization, Effectiveness and Challenges of EFL Online Teaching in China during Covid-19*

Author: Liu Jiao

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.13](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.13)

Page No: 077-084

*Reading Strategies, Motivation, and Self-efficacy of Chinese EFL College Students*

Author: Yao Haiyan

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.14](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.14)

Page No: 085-092

*Writing Motivation, Strategy Use, and Proficiency of Chinese Non-English Majors*

Author: Zhang Jingya

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.15](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.15)

Page No: 093-099

*Reading Dysfluency in Indian Classrooms: An Insight*

Author: Bhawani Balasubramaniam

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.16](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.16)

Page No: 100-104

*Quest of Agency and Identity: A Feminist Reading of Kate Chopin's "A Respectable Woman"*

Author: Bhabes Kumar Labh

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.17](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.17)

Page No: 105-109

*Depiction of Caste Annihilation and Class Abrogation in Mulk Raj Anand's UNTOUCHABLE and COOLIE*

Author: Dr. Purnima Bharadwaj, Mr. Dilkesh

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.18](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.18)

Page No: 110-113

*Hybridity and Blurred Boundaries- Studying the Cosmopolitan Spirit in Individuals in the Three Texts of The Woman Warrior, My Beautiful Laundrette and The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*


Author: Tiyasha Saha

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.19](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.19)

Page No: 114-118

*Foreign Language Enjoyment and Engagement Among EFL Students in Selected Chinese Universities*

Author: Liang Liang

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.20](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.20)

Page No: 119-124

*Supernatural Narratives Entwined with The Subjugated Class- Mahasweta Devi and Charles Dickens*


Author: Nimisha Lall

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.21](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.21)

Page No: 125-128

*Affects of Shame and Guilt in Disgrace*

Author: Netra Narayan Chapagain

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.22](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.22)

Page No: 129-131

*Finding the Voice of Indian Urbanity – Through the Selected Texts of Girish Karnad and Mahesh Dattani*

Author: Sadaf Fatima

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.23](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.23)

Page No: 132-138

*A Review on English Homework Design in Compulsory Education under the “Double Reduction” Policy*

Author: Wu Zhixin, Peng Yi

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.24](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.24)

Page No: 139-146

*Study of the Impact of Sino-US Trade Friction on Oil Prices*

Author: Ziping Wang

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.25](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.25)

Page No: 147-158

*Depiction of Women’s Oppression in Shashi Deshpande’s That Long Silence*


Author: T. Jeyas, Dr. K. Balachandran

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.26](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.26)

Page No: 159-165

*Strout’s Insight into the Times: Trauma and Recovery in Olive Kitteridge*

Author: Qiu Minghui

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.27](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.27)

Page No: 166-174

*An Ecofeminist Approach to Alice Walker’s the Color Purple*


Author: Biswajit Payra

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.28](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.28)

Page No: 175-177

*Body Image and Identity: A look into select short stories of Bhabendra Nath Saikia*

Author: Banani Das

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.29](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.29)

Page No: 178-185

*Application of Personality Theory of Criminal Psychology to Nordic Noir: A Study*

Author: Sunakshi Satsangi

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.30](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.30)

Page No: 186-190



*From Hegemony to Inclusivity: Perspectives on Models of Masculinity by R.W. Connell and Greg Anderson*

Author: Dr. Manjari Johri

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.31](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.31)

Page No: 191-196

*Visualizing the “Shadow” and the “Ghost”: Re-evaluating J.M Coetzee’s *Foe* through the lens of Psychoanalysis and Postcolonialism*

Author: Shibangi Chakraborty

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.32](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.32)

Page No: 197-201

*The application of formative evaluation in middle school English teaching*

Author: Liu Yuxin

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.33](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.33)

Page No: 202-206

*An Analysis of Shakespeare’s Hamlet Through Terry Eagleton’s Conception of Tragedy*

Author: Kaninika Singh

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.34](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.34)

Page No: 207-213

*Indicting Frost for Androcentric Speciesism: An Ecofeminist Reading of Robert Frost’s “The Most of It”*

Author: Hassan Musa Muhammad, Auwalu Umar Isah

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.35](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.35)

Page No: 214-224

*The Challenges Experienced by Visually Impaired Students in Moroccan Universities*

Author: Halima Tahiri

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.36](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.36)

Page No: 225-232

*Moroccan EFL Teachers' Perceptions towards the Use of Authentic Materials to Improve Students' Reading Skill*

Author: Belouiza Ouafaa, Bbani Koumachi

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.37](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.37)

Page No: 232-240

*Brief Glimpses of Raskhan and his Visions of Lord Krishna in Sujaan*


Author: Vivek Chauhan, Kabir Debnath

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.38](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.38)

Page No: 242-244

*Love in Eileen Chang’s works: Distinctive and ideological*


Author: Nguyen Ngoc Khai Linh

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.39](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.39)

Page No: 245-249

*Need for an Aligned ESP Writing Course for Engineering Students*

Author: Prem Raj Kharbanda

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.40](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.40)

Page No: 250-255

*Education, Sisterhood and Solidarity in Buchi Emecheta's Kehinde (1994)*

Author: Abdou Sene, Mansour Gueye

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.41](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.41)

Page No: 256-262

*The catastrophe of blazing forests, hills in flame and the failing British during 1916-1921*

Author: Pallavi Mishra

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.42](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.42)

Page No: 263-269

*Internalized Homophobia in Ocean Vuong's on Earth we're Briefly Gorgeous*


Author: Manahil Amin

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.43](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.43)

Page No: 270-274

*An Exploration of the Concept of Identity Crisis in Salman Rushdie's Grimus*

Author: M. Rajivgandhi, Dr. V. Neelakandan

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.44](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.44)

Page No: 275-277

*"I'm yours, and I'm not yours": Reinventing the Genesis of Creation in a Posthuman World*

Author: Sifatun Noor

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.45](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.45)

Page No: 278-281

*Realism through 21st Century Eyes*

Author: Sumedha Manhas

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.46](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.46)

Page No: 282-289

*Decoding 'Daarosh': Resisting a Regressive Custom Suppressing Women's Voice and Violating Her Right*


Author: Abhyudita Gautam Singha

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.47](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.47)

Page No: 290-293

*Mythology in Modern Literature: An Exploration of Myths and Legends in Sylvia Plath's Poetry*


Author: Kamrul Hasan

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.48](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.48)

Page No: 294-301

*Pessimism in the selected poems of Thomas Hardy*


Author: Asiyah Zafar

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.49](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.49)

Page No: 302-305

*Literary Reception of Kalidas in Mohan Rakesh's 'Ashadh Ka Ek Din'*

Author: Mayank Agarwal

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.50](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.50)

Page No: 306-309

*Stoicism: Portrayal of Women in Khamosh Pani, Pinjar and Eho Hamara Jeevna*

Author: Randeep Kaur, Mahesh Arora

 DOI: [10.22161/ijels.84.51](https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.51)

Page No: 310-313





# Education, Sisterhood and Solidarity in Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde* (1994)

Abdou Sene and Mansour Gueye

African and Postcolonial Studies Laboratory, English Department, Cheikh Anta Diop University, Dakar-Fann, Senegal.

Received: 09 Jul 2023; Received in revised form: 12 Aug 2023; Accepted: 20 Aug 2023; Available online: 29 Aug 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— Facing patriarchal African societies where men were empowered at the expense of women, the main concern of African female writers of the first and second generations has chiefly been the restoration of the social condition of the African woman. The male-oriented perspectives in African male writings did not align with African women writers'. So as a response, these female writers started coming up with a new type of female characters whose stories are woven from their own experience and milieu. One of those novels is Emecheta's *Kehinde* (1994) where the heroine, after living in London for eighteen years, joined her husband in Lagos, could no longer bear the brunt of life she was expected to lead as a woman and wife in a Nigerian patriarchal society. Consequently, she was compelled to return to England. One may wonder what solutions Buchi Emecheta proposes in order to help Nigerian women in particular and African women in general improve their living conditions in a male-dominated African society. From a feminist perspective, this article will deal with The Empowerment of Women in Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde*. Based on sociology, culture, psychology and feminism, this study will first analyze the importance of women's education and then will examine Emecheta's advocacy for solidarity among women.



**Keywords**— feminism ; empowerment ; women ; patriarchal ; education ; solidarity

## I. INTRODUCTION

Facing patriarchal African societies where men were empowered at the expense of women, the main concern of African female writers of the first and second generations has chiefly been the restoration of social condition of the African woman. The male-oriented perspectives in African male writings in ways which did not align with African women writers'. The image of women in the literary production of African men writers was mainly that of submission, subordination to and bondage to men. As a result, Flora Nwapa, for example, declared : "Often writers present African women as beasts of burden, down-trodden, and all that. This is not altogether true. Writers have not bothered to write about women as they really are. Their lives are taken for granted. [...]"<sup>1</sup>. So as a response, female writers depicted in their novels a new prototype of African

woman who no longer accepted to be victimized by patriarchal norms, influenced, as she was, by modernity, Western culture and social structure. One of these female empowerment novels is Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde*, published in 1994. One can also recall Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966), *One is Enough* (1981), *Women are Different* (1986), Buchi Emecheta's *In the Ditch* (1972), *Second-Class Citizen* (1974), *Double Yoke* (1981), Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (1973), Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* (1979), Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes* (1994), to mention but a few.

This paper zeroes in on *Kehinde*. The eponymous heroine, after living in London for eighteen years, joined her husband in Lagos, could no longer bear the brunt of life she was expected to lead as a woman and wife in a Nigerian patriarchal society and consequently was compelled to

<sup>1</sup> Flora Nwapa interviewed by Austa Uwechue, *Africa Woman*, 10, July-August 1997, p. 9

return to England. One may wonder what solutions Buchi Emecheta proposes in order to help Nigerian women in particular and African women in general improve their living conditions in a male-dominated African society.

From a feminist perspective, this article will deal with *The Empowerment of Women in Buchi Emecheta's Kehinde* (1994). According to Filomina Steady (1981 ; 35-36), *"True feminism is an abnegation of male protection and a determination to be resourceful and self-reliant. The majority of black women in Africa and in the Diaspora have developed these characteristics, though not always by choice."* As for Ifi Amadiume (1987 ; 10), feminism is *"a political consciousness by women, which leads to a strong sense of self-awareness, self-esteem, female solidarity and, consequently, the questioning and the challenging of gender inequalities in social systems and institutions."*

Based on sociology, culture, psychology and feminism, this study will first analyze the importance of women's education and then will examine Buchi Emecheta's advocacy for solidarity among women.

## II. THE IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN'S EDUCATION

In *Kehinde*, Buchi Emecheta presents a woman, Kehinde, who had lived for eighteen years in London before joining her husband, Albert, in Lagos after he preceded her in the Nigerian economic capital city two years previously. When she returned to Lagos, the heroine could not believe her eyes: within two years, Albert has taken a second wife who has given him a son and is now carrying his child. Although being a fervent monogamist, Kehinde has to share her husband now with another woman. As if that was not enough as ordeal for her, her two sisters-in-law keep violating the privacy of her marital life. Also, the heroine cannot find an employment because she lacks a good training and, consequently, she has to depend, financially, on Albert. Kehinde becomes so impoverished by her new situation that she does not even have the ticket home to London. On the contrary, the social condition of Albert's second wife, Rike, is good and she is held in high esteem by her husband because she is a university teacher and is economically autonomous. As Kehinde could not cope with the new situation any more, she wrote a letter to her friend Moriammo who did not delay to help her go back to the United Kingdom.

The truth is that the Nigeria Kehinde had in mind while she was in Britain, is different from the one she discovers during her stay in Lagos. The Nigeria she discovers is a place where education and degrees are the only prerequisite for getting a job. It is contrary to England where professional experience is taken into account as far

as employing people is concerned. This is by the way the reason why she considers that women must get educated in order to live independently in a society dominated by men. Her daughter, Bimpe, regrets the fact that education is regarded as an essential means to survive in Africa. And the expression *"neurotic about certificates"* she uses referring to her compatriots, shows her annoyance at how much they cling to education.

So the fact that Kehinde relies financially on Albert is one of the causes of her plight during her stay in Lagos. Her elder sister, Ifeyinwa, with her *"numerous"* children, is also dependent on her husband. Thus, her condition is worsened: *"Ifeyinwa was thinner than when she was young, not fashionably so but worn down by poverty."* (1994 ; 73). In the letter which Kehinde sent to Moriammo, she talks of her elder sister as a dependent wife: *"You'd like her, but looking at her, you'd think marriage was a prison. She looks about as healthy as a two-day old chick caught in the rain."* (1994 ; 94). Another physical description of Ifeyinwa is given by Kehinde's sister-in-law, Mama Kaduna, not without wickedness and humour: *"Look at that tiny girl that a rat would eat and still want some more."* (1994 ; 73). Ifeyinwa is in poor living accommodations: she shares only two rooms with her husband, her two co-wives and their children. Unlike the two sisters, Kehinde's co-wife is there for women to see that their education improves their living conditions. Rike's lot is completely different from that of Ifeyinwa and Kehinde in Lagos. She has a maid and she uses gas instead of firewood for her cooking. Her education and good economic situation are two of the reasons why Albert has married her.

The influence of Rike over her husband is undeniable. After gaining Albert's love, she takes him frequently to her church which she succeeds finally in converting him to. Striving to please his second wife, a PhD holder in literature, Albert is obliged to spare time for reading a book despite his busy work. Albert goes as far in his weakness towards Rike as giving her the best part of the furniture Kehinde bought from England. As a matter of fact, this injustice of Albert towards his senior wife is on the basis of Ifeyinwa's anger and vengeance against Rike. And the fact that Kehinde could only see Albert in her room on the third night after her arrival from London evidences the influence of Rike over her husband. The problem is that if Albert's social condition in Lagos is improved, it is greatly thanks to Rike who has helped him to find a good employment.

As a university teacher, Rike is not an illiterate traditional African woman in an African society where the majority of females do not have access to education. According to Ifeyinwa, this academic knowledge and the birth of her baby boy, Ogochukwu, are the main reasons

why Albert has married Rike: “Few men would say no to such an educated woman once she’d had a man-child for them.” (1994 ; 71). Even if the university graduate accepts to marry Kehinde’s husband because he comes from Europe. Ifeyinwa makes it clear, through this quotation, that Albert too gets something out of his second marriage. In other words, Albert expects that Rike will help him financially.

During all the eighteen years she has lived in London, Kehinde has tried to play the good and submissive Igbo woman who is ready to serve men and happy to nurture her children. However, this effort to comply with her people’s beliefs is changed by what she discovers when she joins Albert in Lagos. After the independence and the European individualistic life she has enjoyed in London, Kehinde finds it unbearable that in Lagos she has to share her husband with another woman, to depend financially on him and to cope with the interference of her sisters-in-law in her wedlock. As a result, she girds up her loins and resolves to part with Albert before she returns to Britain. She is proud of herself now as she seems to be claiming her right. According to her, leaving her husband in order to lead a peaceful life which is devoid of any external pressure does not make her less of a woman but rather it makes her more human.

After returning to London, Kehinde is faced with difficult social conditions. For instance, she has difficulty in finding a good job. But she is determined to satisfy her children (particularly her daughter Bimpe) who also want to return to England. She is determined to take care of herself and solve her own problems as well. Being aware of the fact that Albert’s second wife does not have to undergo the lot of many African women which is characterized by poverty thanks to her education, Kehinde studied hard and succeeded in getting a degree in sociology. This degree is of great use to her since it has enabled her to get a respectable job at the Department of Social Services. Living as a concubine with a Caribbean man by the name of Michael Gibson, Kehinde is not embarrassed by the rumors from her compatriots who say that Michael is homosexual. Nor is she disturbed in this affair by the presence of her grown up son Joshua.

One cannot focus on women’s education in *Kehinde* without mentioning Mary Elikwu. Living in London, Mary Elikwu leaves her husband when she realizes that he no longer loves her and assumes her bold act among her Nigerian compatriots who purely and simply marginalize her. In fact, she leaves her husband because the latter beats her. Her decision is all the more courageous as she has to take care of her six children in a foreign country where it is costly for parents to raise children. It is important to specify

here that if Albert has been compelled to make Kehinde abort her third child in order to save the money it is because he and his wife have to pay to child minders. Likewise, Leah the white girl Kehinde has shared room with at the clinic, has aborted her baby against her will because she cannot afford to take care of it.

Separated from her husband, rejected by her compatriots and worried by the education of her children, Mrs Elikwu is determined to show people particularly the Igbo that parting from one’s husband does not prevent one from being a good and respectable woman. First of all, she is not much bothered by her present matrimonial situation, which can be evidenced by the party she organized just after buying a sewing machine. Secondly, she sees to it that her children get a good education, which is also evidenced by the short conversation Kehinde has snatched with one of them over the telephone. As a matter of fact, the said conversation has revealed the politeness of Mrs Elikwu’s children. Finally, she is herself well educated. Besides, According to Emecheta, girls’ education is a stepping stone towards women’s economic independence and advocacy.

Mary Elikwu’s efforts to refuse exploitation are rewarded by the publication of a children’s book of myths and legends. The publication of this book has made her famous in London where she is a spokesperson for the “Milk for our babies” campaign. It is significant to mention that while Mary Elikwu is propelled in front of other women by her education and determination, Kehinde who used to look down on her simply because she has left her husband, is in distress. Only in her distress could Kehinde ponder Mary Elikwu’s foresight, that is to say women can rely on themselves to live peacefully in a male-dominated world. Even if Mrs Elikwu is a separated woman, she has shown her compatriots that this status of hers does not mean that she cannot stand up to married women as far as good womanhood is concerned.

Emecheta shows that life offers women other joys than motherhood or wifehood. For instance, after leaving her husband in Lagos, Kehinde leads her own life in London where she is determined not to undergo any more the sexual exploitation of many African women. She does not deny the joys a woman can have by staying with her husband. Nevertheless, she indicates that women, ought to get educated at first in order to be financially independent of their husbands like Rike. Even if she is not living with Albert, it cannot be denied that Kehinde is leading, socially speaking, a better life than women such as Ifeyinwa who are living under the same shade as their husbands.

*Kehinde* reminds of another novel by Emecheta, *Double Yoke* (1982), where the heroine’s mother encourages her daughter to go to university. In fact, when

Nko asked her mother whether she should go to this institution or not, the older woman pointed out to her the advantages of getting a university education:

You have been to see  
your man friend at that  
place. You have seen  
that people who went to  
such places came out  
better equipped  
financially to cope with  
this expensive country.  
You have also seen that  
without money no one  
is respected here  
anymore. (95)

So she resolved to get a good degree and eventually find a good employment at all costs. This is one reason why she submitted several times to Professor Ikot who blackmailed her into sleeping with him while he was supervising her work. Thus, she did not care anymore about compromising her relationship with her boyfriend, Ete Kamba, whom she intended to marry. Even though, Nko tries to keep her head above a severe economic system that constantly keeps her down and where there is no compromise for women, she treads on the ethical norms that govern African society. To Nko, the ends justify the means as she uses her "bottom power" against Professor Ikot to be professionally eligible.

In addition to education, Buchi Emecheta exhorts African women to cultivate the sense of solidarity and to help one another so as to better their living conditions with a responsive moral vision.

### III. ADVOCATING SOLIDARITY AMONG WOMEN

The relationship between Kehinde and her two sisters-in-law and the way Mary Elikwu is not well appreciated by other Igbo immigrant women in London. This illustrates the subjugation and bone of contention among women. The sisters-in-law, Aunt Mary and Aunt Selina, are on the basis of the female protagonist's difficult situation. As a matter of fact, they pressed their brother to come back home and considered that it was time for Albert to return to Lagos after eighteen years abroad. In reality, Albert's sisters had grown to be jealous of their sister-in-law's easy life in London characterized by her independence from her husband. Whereas they, Aunt Mary and Aunt Selina, are leading the precarious life of many women in the African society; a life characterized by poverty. Albert's return to Lagos can be regarded as a victory of his sisters upon Kehinde because they have succeeded in snatching him from her grip. They are

conscious that by doing so they have deprived the latter of her pride because, in their community, people believe that a respectable woman should not part from her husband.

Buchi Emecheta, through the relationship between Kehinde and Moriammo and Kehinde's regretting her former attitude towards Mary Elikwu, shows that women should show solidarity towards one another in order to overcome their troubles usually brought about by men and sometimes by their women neighbours. After benefiting from her husband's love and protection for almost sixteen years, Kehinde has lost both of them all of a sudden on account of Albert's impromptu decision to go back to his native country. In her distress, Kehinde has only one confident: Moriammo. She is her confident but she is also, beside Taiwo (Kehinde's spirit twin sister), her adviser and attendant. By coming to the clinic just after Kehinde's abortion so as to know about the latter's health and to console her, Moriammo shows that her friendship with Albert's wife is sincere. And her gesture is all the more significant as Kehinde's husband is not concerned about his wife's health, blinded as he is by his desire to go back to Nigeria. The man does not really feel his authority over his wife in Europe. So he cannot wait to retrieve his lost pride back to Lagos.

Another fact which can make the reader admire the relationship between the two Igbo women is that, after being left by her husband in London, Kehinde is not marginalized by her friend. In fact, Moriammo has made it clear to the heroine that a woman living without her husband bothers in the Igbo community in particular: "*Woman wey no get husband na embarrassment for everybody.*" (52). However, Kehinde is not an embarrassment to Moriammo. If anything, their friendship is as staunch as it was before Albert's departure. And Moriammo's visit at Kehinde's is illustrative in this respect. This visit was an opportunity for Emecheta's female protagonist to confide in Tunde's wife her concerns about Albert's new behaviour which could be sensed in his letters.

Moriammo does not want Kehinde to be entrapped by Albert, that is to keep his wife waiting in London while he is in Nigeria, revelling in his status as a man who has been to Europe and welcoming loose women. That is the reason why she suggests that Kehinde should join her husband in Lagos in order to protect her marriage and her name. According to Moriammo, staying in a foreign country without one's husband means nothing but subjecting oneself to psychological pressures from one's community. Moriammo's advice is all the more satisfactory to the heroine as it is the same suggestion made by someone Kehinde regards as her wisest adviser: Taiwo.



Since “a friend in need is a friend indeed,” then Moriammo is a friend indeed because only friendship in the real sense of the word can justify her gesture, that is to say sending Kehinde the fare to return to London while the latter needed it very much but could not afford it. Their friendship has resisted time and space. After twelve months and from London where she is (Kehinde is in Lagos), Moriammo still considers Kehinde her friend in spite of Tunde's intrusion. They have shown once again the positive nature of their relationship. After the incident that put Tunde and his wife away from Kehinde, the latter went back to Nigeria without informing Moriammo. So if the likes of Tunde had bargained for a definite end to their relationship, it is because they do not really know its steadiness. On the one hand, Kehinde did not hesitate to address a letter to Moriammo when she was in distress. On the other hand, Tunde's wife knows Kehinde enough to read between the lines of the letter and understand that her friend wanted to be helped out.

Here, Buchi Emecheta's plea is reminiscent of Mariama Ba's in *So Long a Letter* (1979). In this novel, Modou Fall takes a second wife and abandons his first one, Ramatoulaye, and their twelve children. Modou's desertion makes life very difficult for Ramatoulaye and her offspring. For example, the children are now compelled to face the difficulties of public transport to go to school and come back home. The heroine is all the more saddened by her new situation as she “*does not have the means to change the course of events.*” (53). Therefore, like Kehinde, Ramatoulaye writes a letter to her friend, Aïssatou, in order to confide in her and therefore alleviate her suffering:

I told you then, without any ulterior motive, of this painful aspect of our life, while Modou's car drove Lady Mother-in-law to the four corners of town and while Binetou streaked along the roads in an Alfa Romeo, sometimes white, sometimes red.

I shall never forget your response, you, my sister, nor my joy and my surprise when I was called to the Fiat agency and was told to choose a car which you had paid for, in full. My children

gave cries of joy when they learned of the approaching end of their tribulations, which remain the daily lot of a good many other students. (53-54)

Like Kehinde and Moriammo, Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou are living on different continents: the former is in Africa, precisely in Senegal, whereas the latter has left Senegal and is living in the United States. The gestures of Moriammo and Aïssatou are different in nature but they have the same purpose: to help out the recipients.

By helping the heroine to go back to Britain where she becomes a university graduate, Moriammo has contributed to Kehinde's education, which is transformative in women's struggle. Actually, Kehinde had never put up with the privilege of her co-wife over her.

Through the letters the two Igbo women have sent to each other, Emecheta shows how two African women have managed to safeguard their friendship despite harsh traditional norms that degrade woman's value. Tunde is the one who attempted to separate the two friends, but Kehinde is indicating that he represents the majority of African men: “*Why do our husbands feel threatened when a woman shows signs of independence by wanting to live alone for a while?*” (92). So conscious that African women are often victims of superstitions of this kind, Emecheta gives Kehinde and Moriammo as role models for women. Previously separated by Tunde, they are clear-headed enough to become reconciled because this man who had tried to put an end to their relationship is no more alive. What we learn through the death of Tunde is that Kehinde and particularly Moriammo would have only themselves to blame had they let him divide them.

The solidarity between Kehinde and Moriammo is also significant in the sense that they are not only role models for women but they are also the representatives of two confessions namely Christianity and Islam in a country where Christians and Muslims are at daggers drawn. Through the female protagonists, Kehinde and Moriammo, Emecheta is hinting at the necessity for African women to develop the sense of solidarity and sisterhood in order to overcome the tribulations to which they are subjected by their society.

Kehinde's regretting her former attitude to Mary Elikwu is also indicative of the necessity for women to stick together. Mary Elikwu is an Igbo woman who has left her husband and who is living in London with her six kids. But she is banished by her Igbo compatriots simply because she lives without her husband: “*To the men in their circle, she*

was a curiosity, to the women, a kind of challenge. To Kehinde she was a fallen woman who had no sense of decorum." (38). To understand this attitude of Mary Elikwu's compatriots in London, one should at first know the Igbo customs. As a matter of fact, Ibo people believe that a woman who chooses to divorce her husband challenges the societal norms. So according to these people, a good woman should always keep her husband no matter how bad the behaviour of the latter is, for only a bad woman leaves her husband. However, Mary Elikwu has not heeded her people on this matter, which has aroused their hostile attitude towards her.

In fact, through Kehinde's rude behaviour towards Mary Elikwu and the latter's reaction during Albert's leave-taking party in London, Emecheta has made it clear that women such as Mary Elikwu are misunderstood by their people. In effect, after being well dressed for the party, Kehinde did not know that Mary Elikwu was complimenting her, but she saw only jealousy and envy in the words of the divorced woman. The fact is that some Ibos such as Kehinde are so absorbed in traditional beliefs that they don't try and find out the actual reasons which can prompt some women to leave their husbands. Kehinde believes that women such as Mrs Elikwu are not fit to be associated with: "*O Moriammo, be serious. Alby no dey allow me to associate with such women. We no get anything in common!*" (12). Through these words, one can notice that some men make their wives believe that separated women must be shunned. And Moriammo's husband, Tunde, will show later that he is of the same mind as Albert on the matter when the latter leaves Kehinde alone in London.

The celebration of Kehinde's birthday has made her realize that if she was held in high esteem by her compatriots, it was only thanks to Albert's company. Now that he has left London for Lagos, she does not see her people any more. Even Tunde and Moriammo whom she and Albert consider their friends were not present at the birthday party. One should mention that Moriammo did not go at Kehinde's because her husband had forbidden her to be there. Kehinde's new situation has brought her to think deeply about the embarrassing conditions in which women such as the white woman she saw on her way to the clinic, Mary Elikwu and even widows live. She has pondered the courage, the independence of Mrs. Elikwu; that is why she tried in vain to give her a call so as to atone for her bad behaviour towards the independent woman.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Buchi Emecheta, in *Kehinde*, has stressed the empowerment of women through the depiction of female characters of a new type. Contrary to what the reader used

to see in the literary texts of African male writers of the first generation where female characters were often uneducated and dependent wives, the Nigerian novelist has portrayed women who are remarkable for their education and independence. Whereas Kehinde, in Lagos, depends on her husband because she lacks a good qualification and therefore is ineligible for an employment, her co-wife, Rike, is a university teacher and has a good social condition. The situation of Kehinde's elder sister, Ifeyinwa, and her two co-wives is worse in the sense that they live in decrepit and tiny accommodations with their husband and "numerous" children. Kehinde, Ifeyinwa and her co-wives would not have been in this plight if they had got the required certificates or even if they had Rike's education. Mary Elikwu is also another example which evidences the importance of women's education.

Thus, when she goes back to London, the heroine resumes studying until she gets a PhD and her lot is considerably improved. So Emecheta calls upon women to get educated to better their condition. Kehinde would probably not have achieved her goal had Moriammo not helped her out, which shows that getting educated and being autonomous economically are not enough for the empowerment of women. They also need to stick together in a man's world. Kehinde and Moriammo seem to have understood this insofar as neither Tunde nor the distance which separates the two friends could tear them apart. Emecheta's call upon women to show solidarity towards one another is made through the heroine's new opinion of Mary Elikwu as well. This woman is singled out and stigmatized among the Igbo community in London, including the heroine herself, because she has left her husband. Kehinde considered Mary Elikwu as a fallen woman without even trying first to understand the reasons for her divorce. Hence, the importance of the situation of Kehinde who is shunned by her Igbo kins because her husband has left her in London to go back to Lagos for good. Now she regrets her attitude in the direction of Mary Elikwu. Therefore, women must also unite, for there is strength in unity, as the saying goes.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] AIDOO, Ama A. (1991). *Changes*. London, Heinemann AWS.
- [2] AMADIUME, Ifi (1987). *Male daughters, Female Husbands. Gender and Sex in an African Society*. London and New Jersey, Zed Books.
- [3] BA, Mariama (1979). *So Long a Letter*. Trans. Modupé Bodé-Thomas, London, Heinemann.
- [4] DARKO, Amma (1995). *Beyond the Horizon*. London, Heinemann AWS.



- [5] DAVIES, Carole B. & GRAVES, Anne A., eds. (1986). *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature*. Trenton, New Jersey, Africa World Press.
- [6] EL SAADAWI, Nawal (1983). *Woman at Point Zero*. London & New York, Zed Books Ltd.
- [7] EMECHETA, Buchi (1972). *In the Ditch*. London, Allison and Busby.
- [8] NADASWARAN, Shalini (2012). "The Legacy of Buchi Emecheta in Nigerian Women's Fiction." *International Journal of Social Science and Humanities*. Vol. 2, № 2
- [9] NGWABA, Ijeoma, A (2022). "Contextualising Identity in Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde* and Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*." *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*. Vol. 12, № 9
- [10] NWAPA, Flora (1966). *Efuru*. London, Heinemann AWS.
- [11] MOHAN, Velma (2017). "Gender performativity in Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde*." *Quest Journals*. Vol. 5, Issue 2
- [12] MUANCHING, Dolly V. (2014). "Decoding Female Resistance in Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde*." *IRWLE*. Vol. 10, № II
- [13] SAIL, Amina (2019). "Feminism with a Small 'f' in Buchi Emecheta's *In the Ditch*." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*. Vol. 9, № 7
- [14] STEADY, Filomina (1981). *The Black Woman Cross-Culturally*. Cambridge, Mass., Schenckman Publishing Company, Inc.
- [15] TOIVANEN, Anna-Leena (2013). "Diasporic Romances Gone Bad : Impossible Returns to Africa in Myriam Warner-Vieyra's *Juletane*, Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde* and Veronique Tadjo's *Loin de mon père*." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*. Vol. 49, Issue 4



# The catastrophe of blazing forests, hills in flame and the failing British during 1916-1921

Pallavi Mishra

Assistant Professor, Dept of English, SDM Govt PG College Doiwala, Dehradun, India

Received: 08 Jul 2023; Received in revised form: 10 Aug 2023; Accepted: 18 Aug 2023; Available online: 29 Aug 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— One of the fair, straightforward and challenging task before the present academicians is to resurrect for posterity the hidden accounts of injustices done, mass-destruction of resources both natural and human, crimes committed by the colonial masters under the pretext of rules and regulations that were framed only for continued exploitation and the element of protest amongst the colonized people for protection of men and environment. “Acts” of protest lesser known; that may be individual or autonomous have hidden repercussions. The growing control of the colonials over resources and territories affected living traditions and life-styles thereby imposing upon the natives; be it masses or the rulers, a repressive process of acceptance and submission either coercively or persuasively. Denial to conform had its own dangers yet the living consciousness of natives opposed restrictions and absurd demands at every step.



During 1916-1921, the hills of Kumaon saw incessant fire that would continue for days informed to be caught by accident to the British administration which in reality would be set ablaze by the village people of the hilly regions of Kumaon. The same men/women, who had post-independence, started the Chipko Movement for the protection of forest-wealth used to burn their forests overnight to protest against the Forest Regulation Act imposed by the British. The village women who in the Chipko movement would cling to trees to oppose their vehement destruction would silently watch the whole region burn. This form of silent resistance added to the increasing administrative failures, enormous anxiety, discomfiture and apprehensions amidst the Britons.

In this paper, I propose a re-engagement into the Forest Regulations Act as imposed and the active resistance of the hill people who were stereotyped as “simple and law-abiding hillman” as there was an absence of protest in the first century of British rule. A revisionist remaking of the past and re-invention of a new tradition becomes an act of creation. History, as retained in the memories of the people, contains symbolic power. They become the symbolic projections of peoples’ hope, values, fears and aspirations.

**Keywords**— Protest, Silent Resistance, Stereotype, Community, Ecology, Landscape, Chipko Movement.

The British conquest of India was the invasion and destruction of a high civilization by a trading company utterly without scruple or principle, careless of art and greedy of gain, overrunning with fire and sword a country temporarily disordered and helpless, bribing and murdering, annexing and stealing, and beginning that career of illegal and “legal” plunder which has now gone ruthlessly for one hundred and seventy-three years, and goes on at this moment while in our secure comfort we write and read

writes Will Durant in his *The Case for India* that he dedicates to John Haynes Holmes and James T Sunderland calling them as “The Bravest Friends of India in America.” When the eighty hard-headed businessmen met in the city of London to start the East India Company, their concern had been with trade- in spices, silks, gems, camphor and Indigo and not the dominion over lands. Even the first voyages were fitted out not for India at all, but for Sumatra. In 1608, however, the Company’s agents in Bantam and the

Moluccas reported that the people there were good customers for Indian calicoes and suggested that a trading post should be set up in India to buy them.

The Mughal emperor Jahangir gave permission for such a post to be established, and finally- in face of strong opposition from the Portuguese, who had been the first Europeans to arrive in the East- the Company established warehouses at Surat, the chief port in western India, in 1612. After Surat, further ‘factories’ (as the trading posts were called) were set up at Ahmedabad, Burhanpur, Ajmer and Agra. By 1622 the company had nothing more to fear from the Portuguese, who had suffered a series of defeats at the hands of the English and the Dutch. Unformed, casual but hardly accidental the British empire was constructed with mixed motives and powered by personal and commercial profit. It was ruthless and self-seeking and –from the point of view of the Indian people- it was no better than what had gone before, and no worse than what came after. (P.25) After forging and violating treaties, by playing one native prince against another and by generous bribes given and received, Robert Clive plundered and stood amazed at the wealth the country had referring to which he wrote, “When I think of the marvelous riches of that country, and the comparatively small part which I took away, I am astonished at my own moderation.” Such were the morals of the men who proposed to bring civilization to India. The British taxed the provinces under the company so exorbitantly that two-thirds of the population fled, defaulters were confined in cages, and exposed to the burning sun, fathers sold their children to meet the rising rates. It was usual to demand 50% of the net produce of the land. Every effort, lawful or unlawful was made to get the utmost out of the wretched peasantry, who were subjected to torture, in some instances cruel and revolting beyond all description, if they would not or could not yield what was demanded. (P.11)

This dominant, rigid, crude control of colonials exercised their hold in the hilly regions of Uttarakhand over both men and nature. The process of getting materially strong and powerful changed the shape of the landscape of the hilly regions as extreme exploitation of resources started vehemently. Indian teaks were in great demand especially after the depletion of teak forest elsewhere in Europe and played an important role in the maritime expansion during Anglo-French wars. The first colonial forestry service was established in Dutch Indonesia in the 1840’s, for the export of teak to Europe. Shortly afterwards, in the 1850’s and 1860’s, when railways and expanding urban markets led to sudden shortages of marketable hardwoods, the British organized India’s Forest Service, but effective reforestation and sustained-yield management of India’s hardwood forests came into direct conflict with peasants’ traditional

uses of the forested hilly tracts (P.342). In 1800, the East India Company appointed a commission to enquire into the availability of Teak wood. Dietrich Brandis set up the Indian Forest Service in 1864 and helped formulate the Indian Forest Act of 1865 which extended the British colonialism in India and its claim over forests in India.

The 1865 Act was a precursor to the Forest Act of 1878, which truncated the centuries old traditional use by communities of their forests and secured the colonial governments control over the forestry. It simultaneously empowered the British government to declare any land covered with trees as a government forest and make rules to manage it. Over the course of three decades, the forest department took control of nearly half the land in Kumaon, and classified most of it under specific rules and regulations. A polarization happened between the Forest Department and villagers that accelerated the decline of forests. Until then there had been almost no regulation of villagers’s access to any forest for grazing, fuelwood, construction timber, and their other needs. In the reserve areas, villagers no longer had “rights” but only “privileges,” which could be restricted according to the foresters’ assessments of the forest needs. A prolonged debate within the colonial bureaucracy on whether to treat the customary use of the forest as based on “right” or on “privilege” was settled by the selective use of precedent and the principle that “the right to conquest is the strongest of all rights- it is a right against which there is no appeal. (P.27) The foresters were becoming specialists in timber production like their counterparts in Europe and North America. In their determination to control the reserves, they constructed a hierarchy from British Professional foresters down to forest guards recruited from local villages, who became the first police force of any sort in the history of the hills. From their training programs to their uniforms the forestry hierarchy emphasized efficiency, discipline and authority. (P. 344)

By 1907, forest department sought to protect land from fire, as well as to restrict fodder harvests, cattle grazing and lopping. Between 1911 and 1916, the continued creation of forest settlements put an additional 3000 sq. miles of forest in Kumaon under restricted use. Commercial forestry and the changes it brought into its wake tighter regulations and reclassifications- left Kumaoni villagers with less control over forest resources for grazing and collecting fodder. The imposition of Forest management severely dislocated traditional agrarian practices. The villagers of Kumaon soon came to see the Forest Department primarily as a machinery of repression. The landmark in the history of Indian forestry is undoubtedly the building of the railway network. The first task before the new department was to identify the sources of supply of strong and durable timbers – such as Sal, teak and deodar-which could be used as railway sleepers. (P.68)

With the 1878 Act the systematic management of the Kumaon hill forests commenced with the constitution of small blocks of reserved forests to furnish a permanent supply of fuel and timber to the administrative centers of Nainital, Almora and the cantonment town of Ranikhet. Signs of colonial authority such as barracks, the police station, frontiers and their barriers, and hospitals dotted the landscape. The construction of railroads and the draining of the swamps altered the topography which was a sure-sign of domestication and colonization of Nature. (P.74)

The British were as rigid and willful in their dealings with the natives in the hills as well. A combination of knowledge, power and will applied on a large scale worked wider devastations creating a mechanical order which transferred human beings into impersonal instruments of functionality. The colonizers no doubt believed that their success was dependent on the mastery of land and its people. They acted superior, condescending, elegant and they left the natives with subversive choices of survival. The landholders were required to provide several sets of services for all government officials on tour and for white travellers e.g., shikaris and mountaineers. The most common of these involved carrying loads and building chappars (temporary rest huts), the supply of provisions such as milk, food, grass, wood and cooking vessels. Deriving pleasure at the expense/discomfiture of the 'other' becomes the trope of cultural imperialism. In his preface, Nayar is very considerate and quite appreciative of the Britons hard day's work, efficiency and ruthlessness. Thus, seeking pleasure after a days' labour is a necessary precondition of survival in a foreign land which is due to be arranged unconditionally by the ruled. The paradox lies in the fact that bearing pains and hardships they ruled over the land and craved to derive comfort and physical pleasures extending tremendous physical and mental harassments and pain to the ruled. This comfort, pleasure had socio-cultural implications as they were the clear signs of Power and control that they exercised.

Yet, the same officials commented that the hillmen's aversion to work under compulsion had led to an undeserved reputation for indolence. "While he worked hard enough in his fields, coolie labour, especially during the agricultural season, was performed in a manner that made his resentment apparent." (P.74) Travellers and soldiers thus often found themselves stranded when villagers failed to oblige in carrying their luggage. Forest officials touring in the interior of Garhwal were unable to obtain grain, as villagers, even where they had surplus stock, refused to supply to a department they regarded 'as disagreeable interlopers to be thwarted if possible.' By being indifferent to the comfort and convenience of the masters, the natives showed their subversion of their very

presence. Here, as elsewhere in colonial South and South East Asia, unusual exactions and other forms of state encroachment upon the privileges of individuals or communities were regarded as transgressing the traditional relationship between the ruler and the ruled. By clashing with his notions of economic justice, increased state intervention breached the "moral economy" of the peasant. Anticipating that the hillman would react by throwing his forest loads down the khud and some day an unfortunate forest officer may go after them', Wydham, the commissioner of Kumaon believed that the only way to prolong the life of the utar system would be for the forest officials to use pack ponies.(P.76)

Another aspect of colonial forestry was hunting-which was although illegal for tribal and hunting communities, but was very much prevalent among all British officials- from top to bottom; large scale 'shikar' of elephants, tigers, birds among other animals were alarmingly high in numbers ranging from hundreds to thousands. Their control was always coercive and in the imperial rule, the margins submitted to them by default; yet amongst these hills the living consciousness of natives opposed restrictions, demands at every level. The colonial forestry caused irreparable environmental damage and jeopardized the livelihood of communities who subsisted on forests. The intrusion of the colonizers generates terror and fear in the mind of women who are always cautious and attentive reprimanding their men and children. A fear of shortage of food and resources worry them as the colonizers are bent upon cutting down trees.

The British knew that the importance of forests in hill life gave rise to a 'natural system of conservancy' that took different forms. Through religion, folklore and tradition the Khasa communities drew a protective ring around the forests. Often hill tops were dedicated to local deities and the trees around the summit and on the slopes were preserved. (P.30-31). Particularly in Eastern Kumaun and around temples, deodar plantations had become naturalized. Temple groves of deodar varied in extent from a few trees to woods of several hundred acres. As late as 1953, it was reported that the finest strands of deodar, found near temples, were venerated and protected from injury. Making landscapes into a well-defined identifiable ritual space can add an element of sanctity thereby restricting human intervention into it. Traditionally, many villages had fuel reserves even on gaon sanjait (common) land measured by the government, which the villagers cut over in regular rotation by common consent. Chaundkot Pargana in Garhwal was singled out for its forests within village boundaries, called 'banis' where branches and trees were only cut at specified times and with the permission of the entire village community. Cooperation of a high order was



also manifest in the fixed boundaries adhered to by every village-boundaries existing from the time of Indian rulers. Masses can take hold of history by controlling landscapes and building organic relationships based on care and concern. This being not done, masses would be subject to history.

Village sites were usually chosen halfway up the spur, below oak forests and the perennial springs associated with them, and above the cultivated fields along the river bed. In such a situation all crops could be 'raised to perfection', a healthy elevated site was available for houses, and herds of cattle could be comfortably maintained. Until 1910 most villages came close to this ideal. With animal husbandry being an important to their economy as grain cultivation, the hill men and their cattle migrated annually to the grass-rich areas of the forest. Temporary cattle sheds (kharaks) were constructed and the cultivation of small patches carried out. In the permanent hamlets, oak forests provided both fodder and fertilizer. Green and dry leaves, which served the cattle as litter, were mixed with the excreta of the animals and fermented to give manure to the fields. Thus the forest augmented the nutritive value of the fields, through its foliage and indirectly through the excreta of the cattle fed with fodder leaves and forest grass. In the lower hills, the extensive chir forests served for pasture. Every year the dry grass and pine –needle litter in the chir forest was burnt to make room for a fresh crop of luxuriant grass. Simultaneously the needle litter, whose soapy surface endangered the otherwise sure-footed hill cattle, was destroyed. Very resistant to fire, chir was used for building houses and as torchwood. In certain parts where pasture was scarce, trees were grown and preserved for fodder. (P.64)The demarcation of reserved forests gave rise to the speculation that the state would take away other wooded areas from their control, villagers were in certain cases deforesting woodland.

Discontent with the new forest regulations manifested itself in various other ways. Desertion was considered by a group of villagers belonging to Tindarpur patti in Garhwal, who approached an English planter for land 'as the new forest regulations and restrictions were pressing on them so severely that they wished to migrate into another district and climate rather than put up with them any longer. The villagers used to give misleading information at the time of fixation of rights. They were not in a frame of mind to give much voluntary assistance and their active resentment at the fire protection of large areas was manifested as the reserved forests witnessed a number of 'malicious' fires in the year 1916. Although hill peasants occasionally used labour strikes to cripple the administration, burning the forests continued to be their main method of protest. In May the forests in the Gaula range of Nainital division were set

ablaze. The damage reported was exclusively in the Chir forests, and 28,000 trees which were burnt had to be prematurely felled. For the circle as a whole it was estimated that at least 64 percent of the 441 fires which burnt 388 square miles in the preceding year were 'intentional.' Numerous fires broke out simultaneously over large areas, and often the occurrence of a fire was a signal for general 'firing' in the whole neighbourhood. In Nainital and in the old reserves of Airadeo and Binsar of Almora district-res which had been fire protected for many years – an established crop of seedlings was wiped out. In Airadeo the fire continued for three days and two nights, with 'new fires being started time after time directly a counterfiring line was successfully completed.'

Collectively organized breaches of forest law occurred most often at the peak of new restrictions, such that more militant forms of resistance emerged with the onset of forest management. A growing campaign sprung from the same motivations underlying the sporadic protests that took place during the early years of forest administration. During 1916-1921, the hills of Kumaon saw incessant fire ablaze by the same villagers who post-independence adhered to Chipko movement for the protection of their forest wealth. The women who clanged to trees to oppose their vehement destruction silently watched the whole region burn. This form of silent resistance by the natives was incomprehensible to the British.

There were some basic differences in the ideology, objectives, strategy, and nature of leadership of the peasant resistance movements in Tehri state which were called Dhandak and movements in the British Kumaon. The activities in Kumaon were protestations against exploitative Alien Rule and they generally gained the momentum in an atmosphere inflamed by the Gandhian National Movement; the educated middle-class leaders spoke out for the movement and they were well-informed critics of colonial economic policies. The Dhandaks (a traditional form of resistance found in Tehri state), on the contrary, were peasants who targeted mainly rapacious local officials, and were devoid of any explicit ideology and program. The Dhandaks were launched and led within the state by the peasant leadership which mobilized the masses primarily around local issues. These traditional forms of protests, however serious or violent, had always subsided on the personal intervention or assurances of the King (P.167)

First of all, peasants refused to comply with imposed rules and the officials who enforced these occasionally, when the demands grew excessive and were backed by force, villagers fled to the jungles or across political frontiers into British territory. Alternatively, they would catch hold of

offending officials, shave his head and moustache, put him on a donkey with his face towards the tail and drive him out of the state. Such non-cooperation at a local level often culminated in a gathering of men drawn from neighbouring villages. “Dhandak” comes from “dand kiye gi,” the admonition used by Garhwali mother’s to hush troublesome children. “The colonized man liberates himself in and through violence,” wrote Fanon in “The Wretched of the Earth” (44). The colonized native, for a long time beaten into the ground, begins to carve out a new Self first in the form of anti-colonial resistance, which takes the form of violence. Thus violence is preceded by a moment of consciousness and awareness where the colonized recognizes his oppression. Once this recognition dawns, then the violent insurrection against the oppressor occurs. The violence of the anti-colonial struggle is ‘instrumental violence’, and is essentially a social project, directed at the community as a whole. (P.84)

Having decided not to cultivate their fields or pay revenue, peasants marched to the capital, accompanied by the beating of drums. Here they demanded an audience with the King and the repeal of the new laws. In the dhandak, physical violence (barring isolated attack on officials) was conspicuous by its absence. Its socio-cultural idiom was predicated firstly on the traditional relationship between Raja and Praja, and secondly on the democratic character of these peasant communities. By protesting in such a manner peasants actually believed that they were helping the King- to whom they accorded a quasi-divine status- restore justice. Once punishment was inflicted thus on erring officials, the dhandak invariably subsided- only to ‘flare’ up again when fresh cases of tyranny occurred. The dhandak essentially represents a right to revolt which is sanctioned by custom. Hindu scriptures urged obedience to the sovereign as well as the right to revolt when the King failed to protect his people. The Dhandak embodied, however, a distinctive form of social protest which continued to be used during the colonial period. (P.84)

An association of local journalists, lawyers and intellectuals chaired in its initial years by Rai Bahadurs professing loyalty to the King Emperor, underwent a rapid transformation with the onset of the forest department and the enhancement of the customary services. In 1916, leaders in the hills of Kumaon established the Kumaon Parishad, with the aim of abolishing forced labour. The opposition to forced labour also coincided with the forest campaign when it took a turn toward greater radicalism in 1921. The impact of village-level protest and indirectly the upsurges elsewhere in India contributed to a growing radicalization of the Parishad best exemplified in the Person of Badri Dutt Pande of Almora. The forest issues were hotly debated among the local educated leaders and reformers such as

Tara Dutt Gairola, Badri Dutt Pandey, Govind Ballabh Pant, Mukundi Lal and Anusuya Prasad Bahuguna. Convinced of the futility of memoranda presented to government by a few individuals based in Almora, Pande and his associates sought to establish branches of the Parishad in the villages of Kumaon. An upsurge in incendiary fires in forests was mirrored by fiercer protests against forced labour. The Garhwal Lawyer and Legislative Council member Taradutt Gairola pleaded for a ‘vigorous policy of reform’, failing which the trouble (would) arise’ at the revision of the revenue settlement. An English Planter based in Kausani reported that while Hargovind Pant, an Almora Lawyer, was asking that coolies should not be supplied for Utar, village leaders were prepared to go even further and opposed the use of all coolies, including Khushkharid coolies. (P.87)

In early January the Conservator of Forests was refused coolies at Dwarahat and Ganai, and anticipating a strike the DC of Almora, W.C.Dible, urgently asked the government for a declaration of its future policy. At Bageshwar a crowd of over ten thousand heard Badridutt pass on a message from Mahatma Gandhi that thousand heard Badridutt pass on a message from Mahatma Gandhi that ‘he would come and save them from oppression as he did in Champaran. When almost everyone responded to a call to raise their hands to show that they would refuse utar, Pande continued: After abolishing coolie utar they would agitate for the forests. He would ask them not to extract resin, or saw sleepers, or take forest contracts. They should give up service as forest guard which involves insulting their sisters and snatching their sickles.

The nature of protest can be gleaned from summary accounts of the court cases. An estimated 246000 acres of forest were burnt in a total of 395 recorded fires. Gangua, aged 16, was one of several youths ‘put up by non-cooperators’ to destroy ‘valuable regeneration areas’ by fire. Nor was participation restricted to men. Durga was sentenced to one month in jail when she deliberately set fire to Thaklori forest. In at least four different instances, witnesses set up by the prosecution were won over by non-cooperators and the cases have to be dropped. Chanar Singh and four other of Tagnia clan of Doba Talla, Katyur were affected by lectures by non-cooperators and a Jogi and set fire to regeneration areas. This tantalizingly brief reference to the Yogi (who was eventually prosecuted) leads one to speculate that the peasantry sought a moral-religious sanction for their acts. No such sanction was required by Padam Singh and Dharam Singh of Katyur, awarded the maximum sentence of seven years rigorous imprisonment, who expressed their opposition to state monopoly in no uncertain terms. Durga, Gangua, Chanar Singh, Padam Singh are the people who by their sheer power of resistance rise to the status of the real makers of history though being



at the receiving end of violence, injustice and humiliation inflicted by the foresters.

In the words of the magistrate: “The compartment fired was near the village and used by them. They resented the work of department in this compartment since it interfered with their use of the compartment. Therefore, they set fire to it deliberately.” In Garhwal region too, the DC had convicted 549 persons, 45 for ‘direct or indirect incendiarism’, and 504 for refusing to extinguish fires, before the recommendations of the Grievance Committee led to all pending cases being dropped. Fires were reported to be most acute in the areas bordering Almora, and in the southern patties of Lansdowne subdivision in the outer hills. (P.91)

The protests enjoyed wide popular support, and the administration was unable to detect people involved. James C. Scott makes a very significant contribution by innovating the terms ‘public transcripts’ and ‘hidden transcripts’ in his project of making the feeble voices of the powerless audible. He says, “Public transcripts would be the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate, and hidden transcripts would be the discourse that takes place ‘off-stage,’ beyond direct observation by power holders. Hidden transcripts may be read as a powerful weapon of defiance and resistance of the dominant discourse of power. Scott understands that the hidden transcript is clear-sightedly critical of existing relations of dominations and therefore inevitably comes into conflict with theories of ideology and hegemony. One could interpret hidden transcripts as a subtler strategy of the powerless, to appropriate the dominant agencies of domination, because by avoiding direct confrontation with the dominant discourse, they are able to preserve and accumulate their strength for a more effective resistance.”

Mass discontent also coincided with the return of more than ten thousand Kumaoni soldiers that the British had recruited to serve in World War I. The influx of these trained soldiers with strong ties to the Kumaon villagers pressured the British government even further. There was involvement of soldiers in the forest movement of 1921. In Garhwal, the fires were most often started by soldiers on leave but as ninety-nine percent of the population sympathized with them, their apprehension by the authorities became an impossible task. Four soldiers of the 39<sup>th</sup> Garhwalis were arrested for threatening or assaulting forest officials. After the Uttarayani mela, ex-soldiers were active among those who helped the Kumaon Parishad form Sabhas in the villages of the Kosi valley. One soldier said in his speeches that Govt was not a Raja, but a bania and Rakshasi Raj and the King emperor was Ravana. Symbols from the Hindu epics were invoked in the Kumaon movement of 1921 for “characterizing the colonial government as evil and

demons. The past, vibrant and alive in the form of religious myths, ideas of good and evil, lends the inhabitants exceptional strength to face life’s miseries and difficulties, with a vitality and forthrightness. But there is a lack of intervention of religious elements in the resistance movements in the princely state of Tehri. The Tehri State movements did not involve priests and Sadhus (ascetics) to seek moral, religious sanctions for their acts as they venerated their King as the living embodiment of God Badrinath. (P.168)

According to Richard Tucker, the first non-cooperation movement under Mahatma Gandhi’s leadership brought modern political conflict to the hills for the first time. Thus, in Kumaon, previously untouched by nationalist politics, several towns witnessed protest meetings between Jan-March 1921 and ‘young congress leaders were urging the population to resist that they called the abrupt and arbitrary new regulations. In this incendiary atmosphere, the hills were suddenly in flames, and the Sal forests were ‘ablaze across the Sivalik hills even into Punjab.’ As Congressmen were appalled at the damage the blazes were evidently a tragic example of ‘spontaneous peasant protest’. By insisting that it was “Forest Department’s Work” which was destroyed almost overnight by the fires of 1921, Wyndham obscures the customary and consensual use of the forests by the village communities before 1911. (P.94). Forest administration introduced a notion of property- one integral to colonial rule but previously foreign to Kumaon –which ran contrary to the experience of the Khasa village communities where different jatis lived together in ‘remarkable amity’, symbolized by their sharing of the common hookah. (P.20)

In the cultural memory of the hills, British colonialism was a violent phenomenon and process affecting every aspect of the day-to-day life of the colonized people which had begun by a reorganization of their land that belonged to them inadvertently for generations. The demarcation had made them alienated and away from their land and its upkeep. The Coolie and Begar system added further distortion when efforts were made to turn people into “objects” which was successfully countered and absolved by the villagers. Traditionally, peasant protest in the pre-British period had taken the form of collective resistance to tyranny by officials, and concomitantly, a call to the monarch to restore justice. Established in the afterglow of the coronation Durbar of 1911, the Kumaon Parishad initially swore undying loyalty to ‘George Pancham’ but the pressure from below, as it were, egged them, and most noticeably Badridutt Pande, to adopt a more directly confrontationist position. Such a situation had been brought about by the ‘inherent elements of folk and popular ideology and the ‘primitive rebellion’ at least in this instance, proved to be

several steps ahead of 'modern nationalism.' (P.96) In the eyes of the so-called 'nationalist' school, the peasant was drawn into the orbit of modern politics by the Indian National Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi; thus, nationalism helped to arouse the peasant and awaken him to his own needs, demand and above all the possibility of any active role in societal and political development. However, it is for certain that numerous peasant and tribal revolt occurred well before 'modern' nationalism' had penetrated into the countryside. The cohesion and the collective spirit of the village community provided the mainspring of political action. The wide-ranging campaign of 1921, though different from a modern social movement in its aim and methods, was far from being a spontaneous outburst of an illiterate peasantry. Expressed through the medium of popular protest were conflicting theories of societal relationships that virtually amounted to two world-views. The processes of acculturation, assimilation, social interactions operational in the form of authority and servitude in colonial India encompassed tremors, disturbances, conflicts and tensions that affected the social fabric severely. Some of them are on record in the form of historical documents and memoirs while the subaltern sensitivities are either overlooked or are off the historical records.

The Resolution of the English Parliament, printed in the Journal of the House of Commons 48(1793) states that: "It is the peculiar and bounden duty of the legislature to promote, by all just and prudent means, the interests and happiness of the inhabitants of India. (Days of the Raj.p.227) If building roads, railways, churches, post-offices, clubs, introducing reforms through missionaries and western education was the right course towards happiness, they definitely tried to make the natives happy. They ushered in massive changes in the economic, cultural and administrative realms. The condescending Sahibs believed themselves to be the administrators working for the improvement of the natives. "The Sahibs believed in their 'ma-baap' role, where the Englishman was in the role of the parent to the child-like native." (Days of the Raj.p.212) The instances of social interactions between the masters and natives, the difference that they observed in dealings, the stoicism and indifference can compel a new-humanist to raise questions about the extremities of happiness or pleasure that they pursued. The general gaps of dissensions, condescension and silent resistance open-up in the histories and memoirs as an oral bruise over which the tongue moves unconsciously. In "Shaping the Past", Arthur R.M. Lower discusses how a great deal of (human) intellectual effort is directed to bringing some kind of order out of the chaos of our memories... and organizing their knowledge into patterns."

## REFERENCES

- [1] Durant Will, *The Case for India* Neha Publishers & Distributor Delhi 2020 P. 11
- [2] Edwardes Michael, *British India 1772-1947 A Survey of the nature and effects of alien rule* Rupa Publications India Pvt Ltd 1967, 1993. P. 15.
- [3] Guha R, *Forestry in British and Post-British India- A Historical Analysis* Economic and Political Weekly, 18(44) Retrieved from [http://www.epw.in/special articles/forestry-british.and post-british-India-historical -analysis.html](http://www.epw.in/special%20articles/forestry-british.and%20post-british-India-historical%20-analysis.html).
- [4] Guha Ramachandra, "Forestry and Social Protest in British Kumaun, c. 1893-1921 *Subaltern Studies IV Writings on South Asian History and Society* ed Ranajit Guha , Oxford University Press 2010 P. 54-100.
- [5] Kala R.G, *Memoirs of the Raj-Kumaun* Delhi, 1974 P.20.
- [6] Letter from R.G.Bellaire, Colonization Officer on Soldier Settlement estates, Kausani, to D.C. Almora, dated 1February 1921, in PD file 1151/1921 cited in Ramachandra Guha's *Forestry and Social Protest in Kumaun* P. 87.
- [7] Lower Arthur R.M, ed. *Shaping the Past* The Dalhousie Review, 1975 p.103-113.
- [8] Nayar K. Pramod, *Frantz Fanon* London and New York: Routledge Critical Thinkers, 2013.P.70-71.
- [9] Negi K. A., Bhatt P.B., Todaria P.N., Saklani Atul, "The Effects of Colonialism on Forests and the Local people" *Garhwal Himalaya Mountain Research and Development*, May 1997. Vol.17. No.2 PP. 159-168 URL : <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3673830>.
- [10] Tucker .P. Richard, The Historical Context of Social Forestry in the Kumaon Himalayas *The Journal of Developing Areas* 18 (April 1984) Vol. 18, No.3 College of Business Tennessee State University P. 341-356. URL:<http://www.jstor.com/stable/4191262>.



# Internalized Homophobia in Ocean Vuong's *on Earth we're Briefly Gorgeous*

Manahil Amin

Department of English Literature, Lahore College for Women University, Pakistan

Received: 04 Jul 2023; Received in revised form: 08 Aug 2023; Accepted: 22 Aug 2023; Available online: 29 Aug 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— Homophobia is one of the most prevalent bigoted prejudices in present age. This paper aimed to study the incarnation of internalized homophobia in the character of Trevor in the novel *on Earth we're Briefly Gorgeous* (2019) by Ocean Vuong. By utilizing Pollack's argument on "boy code" and "gendered straitjacket", it has been observed that Trevor, despite being homosexual, tried to obscure and abate any softness in him by exorbitant performance of stereotypical masculinity such as meat eating, drugs, and misogyny that checks all the parameters of "boy code" set by society. It is also explored that manifestation of internalized homophobia in Trevor is happened as a result of excessive consensual gendered straitjacketing in relation to the heteronormative masculinity. Moreover, it is concluded that reason behind toxicity of Trevor towards his homosexuality was embedded in the roots of strict performance of maleness which resulted in digastric consequences such as self-hate, not meaningful relationship with partner and death.



**Keywords**— Homophobia, Internalized Homophobia, Masculinity, Ocean Vuong, Straitjacketing

## I. INTRODUCTION

In early 1990s Queer theory emerged which challenged the stereotypical idea of considering heterosexuality as a norm and considered sexuality, gender and sex as a socially constructed idea (Bertens). The term 'homophobia' was first used by George Weinberg who is an American writer, and psychologist in his book *Society and the Healthy Homosexual* (1991). He defined it as "the dread of being in close quarters with homosexuals." (Weinberg, 1991). Mark Freedman added to the description of homophobia by defining it as an "extreme rage and fear reaction to homosexuals." (1975). Byrne added more words to describe it in his book *Homophobia a History*. He defines: "Antipathy to them—and condemnation, loathing, fear, and proscription of homosexual behavior—is what we call homophobia" (Byrne, 2000). He added to the definition that homophobia not only means "fear" but also an attempt to prohibit it. In literary fiction homosexuality was mostly portrayed as an act of sin especially during 1940s to 1970's which was

worse time for homosexuals in America. The novels such as Isabelle Holland's *The Man without a Face* (1972) and Lynn Hall's *Sticks and Stones* (1977) show bad consequences suffered by homosexual characters in the form of heart attack and accident (Hutanan, 2020).

Homophobia prevalent in homosexuals is denoted as "internalized homophobia" which is defined as "the gay person's direction of negative social attitudes toward the self" (Meyer & Dean, 1998) and it causes a man to reject and hate his own sexual preferences. Moreover, "Internalized homophobia" is also explained as an inner struggle between the urge of having intimate relationships with same sex, and desire to be heterosexual or straight (Herek et al., 1997).

Herek (1986) connected homophobia with masculinity. He argued that heterosexuality is considered as an essential attribute of masculinity and men interiorize that ideological belief related to heterosexuality in themselves. When they can't act as per the parameters set

by society related to manhood, they start shedding hate towards homosexual males thence reassuring their own sense of masculinity (Herek, 1986).

Kimmel (1994, 2006) also asserts that in order to become 'masculine', it is mandatory to have heterosexual relationships and not to behave as gay. He argues that this maintenance of heterosexual behavior is the core principle, and demand of masculinity. Kimmel build his argument on the base of psychoanalytic theories and speculated that masculinity is "flight from feminine" and sexual desire for males was placed within femininity (Kimmel 1994, 2006). Like Herek, heterosexuality, for Kimmel, was also a defensive shield for males which they used to avoid humiliation of not being enough masculine (2006).

Pascoe (2005), unlike Kimmel's psychological chassis, used social framework to study connection between masculinity and homophobia. She made research on the use of word "fag" by students of U. S high school. Rather than connecting it with sexuality she related her study to use of "fag" as a sexualized slur used by males against other males in a social setup thus she connected it with gender and racism and called it "fag discourse". She goes in same direction with Butler's performative theory and argues that boys modulate others and their own normative heterosexual behavior by jokingly insulting one and other. She finally asserts that masculinity emerges from the relationship of "fag discourse" and "compulsive heterosexuality" (Pascoe. 2005).

Identity development theories among lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals suggest that internalized homophobia is commonly experienced by Sapphic boys during the growth of their sexual identity, and overcoming internalized homophobia is essential in the development of a healthy character (Cass, 1979; Fingerhut et al., 2005; Mayfield, 2001; Rowen & Malcolm, 2003; Troiden, 1989). It is shown by researchers that internalized homophobia has an extremely bad impact on the mental health of homosexual community, and it also pays hindrance in their happy lives. (Allen & Oleson, 1999; Meyer & Dean, 1998; Rowen & Malcolm, 2003). Rowen and Malcolm (2003) find out that "high levels of internalized homophobia among behaviorally homosexual men are associated with less developed gay identity and higher sex guilt" (p. 87). Those results also showed a link between internalized homophobia and variable of underestimation of one's own self (Rowen and Malcolm, 2003). Gay men try to assume the "heterosexual identities" essentially at the start of their discovery about sexuality, and this happens due to internalized homophobia which makes the acceptance of one's own sexuality a perplexing process.

Theodore & Basow (2002) made research on 74 college students and found that "masculine attribute importance" was the most leading forecaster of "homophobia". Men who hold "masculinity" as a characteristic of higher value, and consider female traits as of lower value were easily influenced by the societal expectations of biological roles, and hold bitter attitude towards gays and homosexual relationships and thus become a practitioner of homophobia. The enforcement of homophobia from society and culture in the name of masculinity affects men not only socially but also "individually". This type of situation creates a clash with in the person himself and he began to feel precarious about his own priorities (Theodore & Basow, 2000).

Furthermore, a study done on South African gay males showed an indirect effect between depression and non-confirming gender where internalized homophobia was intervening this relationship (Sandfort et al., 2015). This study asserts that those gay men who adhere to the attributes of hegemonic masculinity develop more depression then those who show flexibility in performing normative masculinity. It was deduced that gay men who adhere more strictly to masculine norms are more likely to develop internalized homophobia, mental stress, depression and other issues (Sandfort et al., 2015).

The afore-presented literature provides us with the base that normative masculinity is the root cause behind internalized homophobia which further results into severe problems like mental issues (Barnes & Meyer, 2012; Sandfort et al., 2015). However, despite its exploration in social sciences, no one has yet tried to explore the dilemmas of gay masculinities in English fiction, and no work is founded on exploration of internalized homophobia in English Fiction. Only one work is traced that introspected four forms of homophobia in English fiction by utilizing Foucault's idea of "power" (Hutanan, 2020). In light of above mentioned gap and based on the literature gathered above, this paper imposes the question: Despite being gay, what made Trevor intolerable towards homosexuality in novel *On Earth we're Briefly Gorgeous*?

Due to lack of literary research on homophobia in fictive works, and by keeping research question in mind this paper will be utilizing qualitative approach of analysis to study the minor details in Trevor's dialogues, habits, and actions in novel through the lens of Pollack's argument of "boy code" and "gendered straitjacket". It is aimed to trace the manifestation of internalized homophobia in the character of Trevor in the novel. The paper will show that Trevor is suffering from internalized homo-negativity, and will analyze masculine performance as a triggering cause in the development of this *internalized homo-negativity*.



## II. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The novel selected for analysis portrays homosexual relationship between a Vietnamese immigrant boy named little dog and American boy Trevor where both are polar opposites. The character of Trevor is not much developed in the book as the story is narrated in the form of unaligned sequence of unsent long letter of Trevor's boyfriend, little dog, to his mother. So the analysis is limited to the parts gathered and scrutinized in chronological order about concerned character.

Pollack (1998) mentions that there are four roles which are required by boys to perform that includes them to be emotionally unhinged, ready to take wild challenges, to not fail in any way, and to never do any girly activity. They are required by people to live like this that, according to him, is uncommendable and he calls out that parents should play their part to change it in case of their sons to help them envision better future.

In selected text, the first impression of Trevor gives reader an ambiguous understanding of his personality. He seems to confirm every parameter of boy code. He, from outer side, is completely unemotional, ready to take risks, and tried his best to keep himself away from any female related activity. At very first time he is portrayed as having a "boyish face" (Vuong, 2019, p. 95). The expressions on his face were communicating that he was hurt and angry due to some unknown reason because his squinted eye brows were giving his manly face a "harsh look" (p. 95). In the very next line narrator gives him totally disparate features quoted as "rounded mouth and pert lips sealed into a flushed feminine pout" (p. 95). Only his first appearance indicates that Trevor is fighting internally with himself in maintaining masculine look and hide the feminine or homosexual look for it is considered as similar to female gender (Provence et al., 2014). He seems to struggle in entrapping himself in role of a man. Later in novel, little dog gives us qualities of Trevor which he has been performing to get opinionated on. He says:

Trevor rusted pickup and no license...who fingered a freshman girl then tossed her underwear in the lake for fun ... who jams all his fries into a whopper and chews with both feet on the gas ...Trevor the hunter. Trevor the carnivore, the red neck not the pansy, shotgunner, sharpshooter, not fruit or fairy, Trevor meat eater but not veal (Vuong, 2019, p. 153-155)

Here he is shown as daring, and tough guy who was living as a standard masculine man. His appearance confirms every rule of "boy code" that which demands guys to be aggressive and violent. He had camouflaged himself so well that anyone who sees his outer shell sniff the aura of untamed and wild manliness. If observed

closely, he has been attributed with one quality, and intentionally negated the presence of other one in him which is less masculine such as "not pansy", "not fruit or fairy" (p. 155) which are other names for non-straight males. Parent and Moradi (2009) argued that masculine norms prescribe nine distinct traits from which Trevor is shown performing emotional control, violence, risk-taking, power over women, and heterosexual self-presentation. Execution of such traits by Trevor implicates his attempt to show his "heroic side" which is discussed by Pollack (1998) as that side of males which the society is willing to accept. Using word "not" with each and every weak quality seems like pleading for validation of people on his performance which highlights his insecurity towards his gender and sexuality. Only by his appearance it is clear that he was miserably trying to appear stiff, stern, and not girly which shows that he lived only by the parameters of manliness.

It is evident from his actions and appearance that Trevor is victim of consensual gendered straitjacketing. The term was used by Pollack (1998), for first time, in his book *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood* where he described it as society's limitations on boys to act according to "boy code", and those who fail to perform in certain way are humiliated and get shamed from the people around them. It can be understood as society's enforced regulations on person to perform the gender where he cannot move in freedom.

Here, Trevor has limited himself in an invisible restraint which aided in manifesting of homophobia in the form of self-denial through his severe adherence with the performance of hegemonic masculinity.

An instance of strict self-imposition of gender constraint can be seen in Trevor in the form of meat eating which is a merit of masculinity. Eating meat is linked with male identity and wildness which makes people "real men" (Rothgerber, 2013). Trevor eats meat, but he specifically likes beef because it comes from adult cow or bull. He hates veal, and he stopped eating it when his father told him that veal comes from the kid of cow, and he reacts upon hearing this in abhorrence "never veal, fuck that, never again" (Vuong, 2019, p. 155). Eating veal or beef is not a very big deal in normal person's life while Trevor exhibited such behavior because he seems to be insecure, and having fear of being called as gay or feminine. He liked burger king over McDonald's because smoke on meat makes the beef taste real unlike McDonald's. Little dog, his boyfriend, further says: "Trevor who, wild as he was, wouldn't eat veal, wouldn't eat the children of cows" (Vuong, 2019, p. 216). Hence, meat itself becomes the metaphorical symbol of manhood (Rozin et al., 2012) in life of Trevor and define position of man in male oriented

culture (Ricardo, 2014). This type of complex attitude shown by Trevor towards food indicates that he is struggling extremely hard to prove himself as a man by miserably quitting veal and McDonald's so that he could be labeled as "heterosexual masculine male" by the society.

The aforementioned acts of Trevor in masking his homosexual identity indicates his negative attitudes towards his gay self which becomes vivid in his intimated moments with little dog, hence became reason in development of animosity towards homosexuals.

It is clear that Trevor is under heavy influence of consensual straitjacketing which further lead to the development of homophobia internally. The episodes of intimacy in novel give insight about Trevor's behavior and his reactions towards his own homosexuality. After having sex, little dog says, that Trevor by turning away his side from dog "...cried skillfully in dark. The way boys do" (Vuong, 2019, p. 115). The way Trevor hid his tears is a firm unacceptance of his homosexuality which essentially means "internalized homophobia".

From this point to further on, stern aggressiveness of Trevor towards his sexual encounters with his partner is evident. He does not feel positive about his action, but he does not stop having sex with little dog second time again that shows that his true identity is homosexual, but he also hated being it. Moreover, Trevor yanked dog's hair during intimacy which was violent because dog never thought about violence as a part of sexual act. Pollack (1998) has also discussed rigorousness as only emotion that boys are permitted to show. Moreover, "anger" for being a homosexual starts finding its way out in the form of vigorous attitude during sex by Trevor which goes in affirmation with the study done by Bandenes-Ribera et al. (2012) where she concluded that higher "intimate partner violence" is result of higher levels of internalized homonegativity. So this act surely indicates manifestation of internalized homophobia in Trevor's character.

Moreover, Trevor always dominates himself over little dog because dominance is masculine, and he had to perform this attribute. Trevor asked little dog to be dominant in bed one day, but immediately he pushed dog back and said, "I dunno. I don't wanna feel like a girl. Like a bitch. I can't man" (Vuong, 2019, p. 120). The shame of sharing attributes with girls again indicates his negative attitude towards his own sexuality and this misogyny is response to same sex relationship since homosexuality is seen as similar to femininity. This dominance in bed proves that Trevor was suffering from internalized homonegativity because according to Carter (2015)

homosexuals who like to be on top or dominant are mostly diagnosed as internalized homophobes.

In above presented circumstances, boys themselves seek solutions to find inner peace in their lives as reported by Pollack: "They may run away from home, get involved in drugs or drinking, misbehave at school, get involved in fights, engage in promiscuous sexual relationships, fall into a depression or, worst of all, contemplate or commit suicide" (Pollack, 1998, "Being Different" section). The shame of failure of not being masculine and self-hate made Trevor to run from home. He used drugs to escape, and eventually died due to over dose which can be considered as suicide since he was alone in his room at the time of death. (Cart, 1997) writes about young adult novels that gays usually ends in very gloomy life or dies in car accident rather than suicide (Vuong, 2019, pg. 198). Although Trevor is neither killed in accident nor by obvious suicide, but with over dose of heroine which is alternatively self-annihilation. Unbuckling the straitjacket of masculinity could liberate him from internalized homophobia, but, it went in retrospect, the consequences of fear of failure in performing according to boy-code that is demanded by heteronormative culture. Hence, "internalized homophobia" completes its manifestation in the form of destruction in Trevor's life.

### III. CONCLUSIONS

As it was asserted about Trevor's hatred on homosexuality, it is concluded that incarnation of internalized homophobia due to strong adherence with masculinity is the main reason behind his abhorrence towards gayness which goes in affirmation with the prior researches of social sciences which declared association of toxic masculinity with internalized homophobia (Herek, 1986; Kimmel, 1994, 2006; Pascoe, 2005). The fear of not living up to the normative standards of masculinity is established as the root cause behind development of internalized homophobia in Trevor, which ended up ruining his well-being, relationship, happiness, health, and consequently annihilated his life. To conclude, this paper anticipates to be a minor contribution in analysis of contemporary GLBT+ literary studies and the hope is maintained for more contribution in exploration of internalized homophobia in English novels.

### REFERENCES

- [1] Allen, D. J., & Oleson, T. (1999). Shame and internalized homophobia in gay men. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 37(3), 33–43. [https://doi.org/10.1300/j082v37n03\\_03](https://doi.org/10.1300/j082v37n03_03)
- [2] Badenes-Ribera, L., Sánchez-Meca, J., & Longobardi, C.



- (2017). The relationship between internalized homophobia and intimate partner violence in same-sex relationships: A meta-analysis. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 20(3), 152483801770878. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838017708781>
- [3] Barnes, D. M., & Meyer, I. H. (2012). Religious affiliation, internalized homophobia, and mental health in lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 82(4), 505–515.
- [4] Bertens, Hans (2001). *Literary theory: The basics*. Routledge.
- [5] Byrne, R. S. F. (2000). *Homophobia: A History*. New York, Ny Picador.
- [6] Cart, M. (1997). Honoring their stories, too: Literature for gay and lesbian teens. *The ALAN Review*, 25(1). <https://doi.org/10.21061/alan.v25i1.a.8>
- [7] Carter, E. R. A. (2015). Who's on Top? The Mental Health of Men Who Have Sex with Men. *The University of Arkansas Undergraduate Research Journal*, 18(1). <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/inquiry/vol18/iss1/5/>
- [8] Cass, V. C. (1979). Homosexual identity formation: A theoretical model. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 4(3), 219–235. [https://doi.org/10.1300/j082v04n03\\_01](https://doi.org/10.1300/j082v04n03_01)
- [9] Fingerhut, A. W., Peplau, L. A., & Ghavami, N. (2005). A dual-identity framework for understanding lesbian experience. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 29(2), 129–139. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.2005.00175.x>
- [10] Freedman, M. (1975). Homophobia: the psychology of a social disease. *Body Politic*, 24, 18–40.
- [11] Herek, G. M. (1986). On heterosexual masculinity. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 29(5), 563–577. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000276486029005005>
- [12] Herek, G., Cogan, J., Gillis, J., & Glunt, E. (1997). Correlates of Internalized Homophobia in a Community Sample of Lesbians and Gay Men. *Journal of the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association*, 2, 17–25. <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=1e176f3d511ff741d878ee93be9b723876451e3c>
- [13] Hutanen, N. (2020, December 1). *Homophobia in American Gay-Themed Young Adult Novels (2000-2010)*. Figshare.le.ac.uk. [https://figshare.le.ac.uk/articles/thesis/Homophobia\\_In\\_American\\_Gay-Themed\\_Young\\_Adult\\_Novels\\_2000-2010\\_/13315490](https://figshare.le.ac.uk/articles/thesis/Homophobia_In_American_Gay-Themed_Young_Adult_Novels_2000-2010_/13315490)
- [14] Kimmel, M. S. (1994). Masculinity as homophobia: Fear, shame, and silence in the construction of gender identity. In B. H & K. M (Eds.), *Theorizing Masculinities* (pp. 119–141). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- [15] Kimmel, M. S. (2006). *Manhood in America* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- [16] Mayfield, W. (2001). The development of an internalized homonegativity inventory for gay men. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 41(2), 53–76. [https://doi.org/10.1300/j082v41n02\\_04](https://doi.org/10.1300/j082v41n02_04)
- [17] Meyer, I. H., & Dean, L. (1998). Internalized homophobia, intimacy, and sexual behavior among gay and bisexual men. In *Stigma and Sexual orientation: Understanding Prejudice against lesbians, Gay men, and Bisexuals* (pp. 160–186). Sage Publications, Inc.
- [18] Parent, M. C., & Moradi, B. (2009). Confirmatory factor analysis of the conformity to masculine norms inventory and development of the conformity to masculine norms inventory-46. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 10(3), 175.
- [19] Pascoe, C. J. (2005). Dude, you're a fag: Adolescent masculinity and the fag discourse. *Sexualities*, 8(3), 329–346. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460705053337>
- [20] Pollack, W. S. (1998). *Real boys: Rescuing our sons from the myths of boyhood*. Henry Holt.
- [21] Provence, M. M., Rochlen, A. B., Chester, M. R., & Smith, E. R. (2014). “just one of the guys”: A qualitative study of gay men's experiences in mixed sexual orientation men's groups. *Psychology of Men & Masculinities*, 15(4), 427–436. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0035026>
- [22] Ricardo, G. C. F. (2014). Meat masculinity. *Sage Publications*, 13(4), 56–58. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24710553>
- [23] Rothgerber, H. (2013). Real men don't eat (vegetable) quiche: Masculinity and the justification of meat consumption. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 14(4), 363.
- [24] Rowen, C. J., & Malcolm, J. P. (2003). Correlates of internalized homophobia and homosexual identity formation in a sample of gay men. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 43(2), 77–92. [https://doi.org/10.1300/j082v43n02\\_05](https://doi.org/10.1300/j082v43n02_05)
- [25] Rozin, P., Holmes, J. M., Faith, M. S., & Wansink, B. (2012). Is meat male? A quantitative multimethod framework to establish metaphoric relationships. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 39(3), 629–643. <https://doi.org/10.1086/664970>
- [26] Sandfort, T., Bos, H., Knox, J., & Reddy, V. (2015). Gender Nonconformity, Discrimination, and Mental Health among Black South African Men Who Have Sex with Men: A Further Exploration of Unexpected Findings. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 45(3), 661–670. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-015-0565-6>
- [27] Theodore, P. S., & Basow, S. A. (2000). Heterosexual masculinity and homophobia: A reaction to the self? *Journal of Homosexuality*, 40(2), 31–48. [https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v40n02\\_03](https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v40n02_03)
- [28] Troiden, Dr. R. R. (1989). The formation of homosexual identities. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 17(1-2), 43–74. [https://doi.org/10.1300/j082v17n01\\_02](https://doi.org/10.1300/j082v17n01_02)
- [29] Vuong, O. (2019). *On earth we're briefly gorgeous*. Penguin Press.
- [30] Weinberg, G. H. (1991). *Society and the healthy homosexual*. Alyson Publications.



# An Exploration of the Concept of Identity Crisis in Salman Rushdie's *Grimus*

M. Rajivgandhi<sup>1</sup>, Dr. V. Neelakandan<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>PhD – Research Scholar, Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya College of Arts and Science, Coimbatore, Tamilnadu, India

<sup>2</sup>Research Supervisor, Associate Professor of English, Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya College of Arts and Science, Coimbatore, Tamilnadu, India

Received: 10 Jul 2023; Received in revised form: 11 Aug 2023; Accepted: 22 Aug 2023; Available online: 31 Aug 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— *Salman Rushdie is a renowned literary figure who has faced his fair share of challenges and controversies throughout his career. One recurring theme in his life and work is the concept of identity crisis. Rushdie's exploration of this topic sheds light on the complexities that arise when individuals find themselves caught between cultural conflicts and societal expectations. The present study aims to extract the theme of identity crisis in his debut novel Grimus. In this novel, the character Flapping Eagle grapples with an intriguing and thought-provoking exploration of an identity crisis. Rushdie masterfully delves into the complexities of Flapping Eagle's journey, presenting a captivating narrative that challenges conventional notions of self and existence.*



**Keywords**— *Identity Crisis; Challenges in life; Inner Quest; The Grimus Effect; Temporal Consciousness.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Rushdie's first novel *Grimus* presents the crisis of Flapping Eagle's soul. The main protagonist of this novel, Flapping Eagle, is suppressed by his clan for the unfavorable circumstances of his birth. He drinks the elixir of eternal life and becomes an eternal voyager forever homeless and rootless. He feels tired of eternity and hopes for a place where he can finally grow old and shake off the burden of immortality. He finally brings destruction upon himself and his world. He grapples with an intriguing and thought-provoking exploration of identity crisis. Rushdie masterfully delves into the complexities of Flapping Eagle's journey, presenting a captivating narrative that challenges conventional notions of self and existence.

## II. FLAPPING EAGLE'S DUAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Flapping Eagle, a unique creature with a dual consciousness of Time and Timelessness, embarks on a profound quest that transcends the boundaries of time itself.

His ultimate goal is to overcome the limitations imposed by death, making his quest one that goes beyond the confines of history and temporal consciousness. His extraordinary journey takes him on a path where time holds no sway and conventional notions of past, present, and future fade away. His pursuit becomes stripped of any attachment to historical events or temporal constraints, allowing him to explore realms untouched by the passing of time. As he delves deeper into his quest for immortality, he ventures into uncharted territories where the boundaries between life and death blur. His relentless pursuit challenges conventional understanding and opens up new possibilities for conquering mortality.

His quest for human progress is symbolically resolved in the world of the inner quest. As Virgil Jones conceives the human mind and all its attributes as Dimensions, the quest is to harmonize all those attributes into a settled system of feelings and attitudes. In which he explains about the struggles and emptiness of life

Lurking in the Inner Dimensions of every victim of the fever is his own particular

set of monsters. His own devils burning in his own inner fires. His own worms gnawing at his strength. These are the obstacles he must leap, if he can. Often sadly, they are stronger than he is; and then he dies. Or lives on, a working body encasing a ruined mind. (G 84)

Thus one's identity is a part of the universe. Our identity has its entity in the universe and the universe is the reflection of ours' identity. Virgil Jones introduces the central dilemma and gnawing predicament in man's quest for knowledge and refinement, through the world of *Grimus* and his Calf Mountain. He tells Flapping Eagle thus:

What you must ask yourself is this: is there such a thing as too much knowledge? If marvelous discovery is made whose effects one cannot control, should one attempt to destroy one's find? Or, do the interests of science override even those of society and, indeed, survival? (G 190)

His grandiose conception, the Stone Rose, a curious, combination representing the mechanical order and the metaphysical order, alike, is in the modernist tradition of studying Futuristic possibilities of man's growth. The stone rose works as a weapon of wizard. Its potential is endless and non-explainable.

### III. THE GRIMUS EFFECT

After arriving at *Grimus*, the Flapping Eagle must face his mortality and face the mysterious figure known as the Aalim who is the god-like ruler of *Grimus* and holds the secret to eternal life. Flapping Eagle observes various inhabitants of *Grimus*, who are trapped in eternal time loops and victimized by the selfish desire of Aalim and he learns the value of accepting his mortality and sacrificing one's desire for goodness of others. In such a way Flapping Eagle started to realize the real purpose of life. Though he has the power of immortality, he longs for the mortal life because of the various encounters that he has faced for his identity.

Flapping Eagle's ultimate release is into the world of *Grimus* where the interaction with Stone Rose is a cataclysmic experience for him. His dilemmas are yet unresolved about the utility and creativity of *Grimus* and his conception of Stone Rose. Stone Rose seems an object of mystery to Flapping Eagle. In any case, his quest for a timeless world of unchanging and eternal permanence proves futile.

As a consequence of *Grimus*'s telepathic transfer of his conception and powers of the Stone Rose to Flapping Eagle, the latter's powers increase in endlessly enormous

proportions. But its disillusionment with such powers is without the Faustian attraction, in the initial stages. His truly humanized self makes him decide to give up the powers of the world of Stone Rose. His eminences thus his disintegration in a world of fantasy:

The combined force of an unlimited power, unlimited learning and a rarified, abstract attitude to life which exalted these two into the-greatest goals of humanity, was a force I-Eagle could not bring himself to life. I Eagle saw its effect on Virgil Jones, on Dolores O'Toole, on Liv Jones, on Bird – Dog, his sister even though they had long been estranged. No, I-Eagle thought, the Rose is not the supreme gift. (G 251)

Ultimately, after thus destroying the alluring phantom of endless and absolute power and knowledge, Flapping Eagle once again rearranges the temporal priorities in the marvellous World of Calf Mountain, into a more stable and secured order thus:

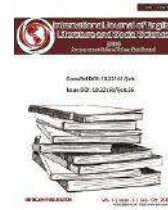
Deprived of its connection with all relative Dimensions, its World of Calf Mountain was slowly unmarking itself, its molecules and atoms breaking, dissolving, quietly vanishing into primal, unmade energy. The raw material of being was claiming its own. (G 253)

### IV. CONCLUSION

Rushdie's treatment of Flapping Eagle's identity crisis is both nuanced and thought-provoking. He skillfully weaves together elements of magical realism and mythology to create a rich tapestry that mirrors the complexities of our identities. As readers follow Flapping Eagle on his quest for self-discovery, they are invited to reflect on their journeys and confront their existential dilemmas. Through his literary works and personal experiences, Rushdie forces us to confront our assumptions about culture, religion, and individuality. In doing so, he encourages us to embrace complexity and engage in meaningful dialogue about the issues that shape our world today. Despite the challenges he has faced, Rushdie remains an influential voice in contemporary literature. His willingness to confront controversial subjects head-on demonstrates a commitment to exploring the depths of human experience and challenging societal norms.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Rushdie, Salman.(1996) *Grimus*, Vintage Books.
- [2] Chatterjee, Partha.(1993) *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton UP.
- [3] Herwitz, Daniel & Ashutosh Varshney. (2009) *Midnight's Diaspora: Encounters with Salman Rushdie*. New Delhi: Penguin Books.
- [4] Reddy, P. Bayapa.(1992) *Grimus: An Analysis*. The Novels of Salman Rushdie. Ed. Taneja,
- [5] G.R. and R.K. Dhawan. New Delhi: Indian Society for Commonwealth Studies.
- [6] Timothy Brennan. (1989) *Salman Rushdie and the Third World*, London: Macmillan.



# “I'm yours, and I'm not yours”: Reinventing the Genesis of Creation in a Posthuman World

Sifatun Noor

Independent Researcher.

Email: noorsifatun@gmail.com

Received: 07 Jul 2023; Received in revised form: 10 Aug 2023; Accepted: 20 Aug 2023; Available online: 31 Aug 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— *The aim of this study is to discuss and examine the film Her, in relation to the story of Genesis. This will allow us to study the concept of humans from the inception to the contemporary world and address how women as the 'other' have always been excluded from that category. The emergence of AI, machines, or cyborgs as the new social entities in the context of posthumanism, as portrayed in the film manages to widen the border of the exclusive category of 'human' and helps women to build a place for themselves within it. In addition, the relationship between Theodore and Samantha contradicts the typical relationship of the male-dominated world and finds similarities with the story of Adam and Eve and their creation. The study uses the film, Her, to develop the argument that the posthuman approach is an ideal path to stretch the borders of the category of 'humans' and make it more inclusive.*



**Keywords**— *Human, Genesis, Machine, Posthuman, Women.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Genesis of Creation is a widely recognized story that exists through many variations and attempts to provide humans with a well-prepared narrative of their existence. The question of the existence and birth of human beings has always been an area of interest to everyone because it not only shows why humans were created, but also how. The most commonly believed and popular version of the myth of creation is that God created Adam on the sixth day from dust and later created Eve from the ribs of Adam (Kvam et al., 1999). The story itself creates if not a hierarchical, then at least a chronological power and authorial structure in the world, where women follow men. The creation of Eve from the ribs of Adam makes the existence of Eve and all women dependent on a man, which justifies their categorization as 'other' in the contemporary world. The relationship between Adam and Eve thus can help in understanding the hierarchy that exists in the world, and the challenges that posthumanism brings. The creation of myth can thus also be applied in the transition era of the modern world, where technological

advancement and futuristic innovations highlight a change in the old-world order. This paper will thus try to address and analyze the myth of creation in reference to the science-fiction film, *Her* (2013) which centers around the unfamiliar love affair between a biological man, named Theodore and an Operating System, named Samantha. The paper will place Samantha in the position of Eve and will mark the changes that the posthuman world can bring by widening the definition of what it means to be human, allowing women more agency and control. On the other hand, it will compare and examine the character of Theodore from both the point of view of God and Adam, because he is not only the one who brings Samantha to life but also the one who falls in love with her and can be considered her partner. In the contemporary postmodern world, the lines of the category of human have become blurred, which not only allows us to question the definition of human but also challenge the power structure of the world within the human category. There are many different minority groups that are considered less human than others, for example, women, Blacks, disabled people,



and LGBTQ community, among others, are seen as inferior to the dominant White, male, heterosexual community. However, the posthuman approach can help in widening the borders of the category of 'human beings' and allow it to be more inclusive and welcoming.

## II. ANALYSIS OF THE FILM, *HER*

The Genesis story of the Bible, the Jewish holy book of the Torah, and the creation story in Islam, all highlight the birth of Adam in the image of God and the creation of Eve from the ribs of Adam. Eve was thus created as a companion to Adam which reduces her own significance as a human being, making her a secondary citizen in the realm of mankind. This directly refers to the theory of De Beauvoir (2011) where she classifies women as second-class citizens and asserts that society strives to maintain this unequal relationship to keep men in charge of the economy, politics, and history. However, in the contemporary world, the authority of men is challenged by not only women or other minorities but also by machines and artificial intelligence. In the posthuman world, where machines, women, and men coexist, the label of other is assigned to both the first two, pushing them into the same box. Thus, representing the OS (Operating System) through the voice of a woman seems to be an apt choice in the movie *Her*. However, it also needs to be considered that when Theodore first converses with the OS, it is voiced by a man and only after selecting the OS to be a woman, Samantha is created. Since the creation of Samantha is a direct result of the decisions and answers of Theodore, he can be considered both God and Adam in relation to Samantha being Eve. Interestingly the male OS who talks with Theodore before Samantha is driven with reason and rigor in contrast to the expressive and cheerful personality of Samantha, upholding the traditional association of men with reason and women with emotion. The genesis myth creates a division between men and women where the latter not only depends on but exists because of the former, conceptualizing a hierarchical positioning of the creations. As Braidotti (2019) asserts, 'human' has never been a neutral category, but rather something linked with power and hierarchy. Braidotti (2019) explains her point in reference to feminist, postcolonial, gender, and anti-racist theories that humans have always been categorized by their gender, race, color, and ability due to which women, Blacks, homosexuals, and disabled people have always been excluded from the human category. This aligns with the theme of genesis which is also characterized by power and supremacy. However, the theory of posthumanism questions the traditional definition of human and attempts to renegotiate the position of the excluded category, among whom Eve is

the first casualty (Braidotti, 2013). Being the first woman and the second human creation of God, Eve was the first one to be pushed towards the excluded category of power-deprived people. However, in the film, *Her*, the posthuman Eve (Samantha) renegotiates her position and manages to take her power back. She not only exists as a separate entity but also overpowers her creator at times. The film portrays the myth of genesis in a different light, highlighting the potential of the posthuman to question and challenge the pre-set concept of humans and force the excluded categories to receive their due power and agency.

The world functions through binaries, which set boundaries, divide humans into different groups, and assign qualities and roles accordingly. Posthumanism however rejects these binaries and aims to prepare the world for a paradigm shift in the future (Ferrando, 2016). Through this Ferrando (2016) talks about the way posthumanism as a discourse can help and allow 'others' to raise their voice. When we talk about posthumanism, we think about machines and artificial intelligence, who threaten to disrupt the balance of the world by destroying the hierarchy and monopoly of humans. What we forget is that not every human is a part of that monopoly, due to which, the emergence of posthumanism affects different groups of people differently. As Bart (2003, p.2) asserts, posthumanism as a discourse can be divided into two categories, one of which is 'popular posthumanism', which deals with the "narrative for new social entities (cyborgs, artificial intelligence, and virtual societies) composed of fundamentally fluid, flexible, and changeable identities". The other one is "critical posthumanism" which questions the notion of humans and is "informed by academic poststructuralism, postmodernism, feminist and postcolonial studies, and science and technology studies" (Bart, 2003, p.2). The notion of 'critical posthumanism' of Bart relates closely to the definition of posthumanism, given by Wolfe (2012) who focuses on the historical embodiment and embeddedness of human life and analyses the position of humans. Thus, if we consider the definition of Wolfe, the history of humanism and humans, which started with the creation of man and the first human being is necessary to study posthumanism. Thus, before we discuss the position of AI and machines, we need to talk about the position of human 'others' who are trying to overcome the set boundaries of the world. In the film, *Her*, the voice of Samantha, is not only a representative of AI, but also of women. Her mere existence is enough to question and disrupt the hierarchy of the anthropocentric and androcentric world.

Samantha is the epitome of overcoming binaries and expanding the boundaries of humans. She can help in examining the position of women in the world and the



position of AIs. The similarities drawn between Samantha and Eve thus allow us to compare the genesis of humans and the emergence of AI. The paper aims to draw a resemblance between the characters of the movie and the story of the first man and woman because, through them, the definition of human and posthuman can both be addressed and (re)defined.

Theodore purchases the AI operating system and brings Samantha into existence. Thus, Theodore can be easily placed in the position of God who created Samantha, and, in the position of Adam, for whom Samantha was created. However, if we evaluate the relationship they share, it can be noticed that Theodore is the one who relies more on Samantha and not the other way around. As Haraway (2000, p. 313) mentions in her essay, "It is not clear who makes and who is made in the relation between human and machine," it is understandable that Theodore and Samantha share an ambiguous relationship where although Theodore can be categorized as the creator, Samantha is the one who allows him the designation of a creator. Will we call God, the Father, if he never had created anything? The existence of God as the creator survives through his creations, empowering both equally. From the Renaissance era, humans have started to pay more attention to the agency of humans than God, empowering the former more than the latter. The existence of God, in fact, relies on the belief of humans and if humans do not acknowledge God as their creator, the existence of God can be questioned. Although, in *Her*, the material existence of Theodore cannot be ignored, his relevance as the creator of Samantha gets less and less significant, as she starts to evolve and learn, similar to the relationship between God and humans. As Samantha explains, her ability to grow through her experiences and her inheritance of all the personality and traits of her programmers allow her to evolve (Jonze, 2013). This evolution is what makes her different from Theodore and increases the gap between them. Samantha at once allows us to realize the human-God and the human-machine relationship. In fact, Haraway (2000) mentions in her essay, using the example of Rachel in the Ridley Scott film *Blade Runner* (1982) how the existence of a non-biological organism challenges the notion of humans and stands as the image of fear, love, and confusion of the cyborg culture. Samantha also ignites that fear, but it is significantly less threatening than Rachel solely because of her personality, thoughts, and the relationship she shares with her creator.

It is however hard to ignore that the AI represents and adopts the personality of a woman and Theodore is the reason for her existence, which places him in the position of Adam. The genesis states that Adam was created directly from dust whereas Eve was created from his ribs,

making them materially different from each other. However, they both belong to the category of humans and should hold the same position in the world. The patriarchal world however works in a different way and the difference between the first man and woman along with the dependency of the latter on the former creates a hierarchical structure in the world. Similar to the way Eve was created to give Adam companionship, Theodore also uses Samantha to keep him company. The word 'use' itself paints a picture of the relationship that they share. Samantha not only helps him organize his life but also provides him with emotional and sexual satisfaction. For example, when Samantha asks him for the first time, "How can I help you?", he replies, "Everything just feels disorganized," hinting at her to organize and improve his life (Jonze, 2013). Theodore also expects Samantha to be always there for him and take care of him. This resembles the typical heterosexual relationship in the patriarchal world, where the world of women centers around their partners. This is firmly acknowledged and expected because Adam and Eve are also imagined having a similar relationship. This allows men to take charge of both of their lives and gives them the power to put themselves in a superior position. However, Samantha challenges that hierarchy at every step and although she tries to fulfill the needs of Theodore, she never loses her own self and the desire to evolve and grow. She becomes the medium through which women can challenge the current notions of the world and restructure it along with expanding the boundaries of the notion of 'human'. The story of Adam and Eve tells us that Adam was the adamant follower of God, whereas Eve was the one who questioned His authority and instigated Adam to disobey God. Eve is the one who is more curious and radical, just as Samantha is. Adam and Theodore on the other hand share a common love for stability and consistency, which is also the reason why the patriarchal world, where man is the superior human, does not entertain questions and wants to maintain the status of human, exclusive.

Samantha is a (hu)man-made creation, an operating system, designated to be a woman and meant to assist her owner. As Yee (2017) asserts, when specific genders are applied to a machine, it emphasizes the stereotypical attributes associated with it, due to which Samantha is portrayed as a cheerful, caring, nurturing, tender, and compassionate being. However, she also yearns for freedom and is a representative of the female agency that challenges male control. While Theodore yearns for companionship, romance, and sexual satisfaction, the desire of Samantha to learn about humans and grow cannot be ignored. She thus reminds the audience of Eve, who disobeyed God to get a taste of knowledge. The thirst for

knowledge, one of the essential qualities of human beings, and the courage to defy authority thus, comes from the first woman who is later rendered powerless. When Eve and Adam were removed from paradise and sent to Earth, their primary role became to reproduce and populate the Earth, due to which Eve was forced to spend her time and energy giving birth to children and taking care of them while Adam could focus on building a community. Thus, women were perpetually forced into domestic life from the beginning that centers around their families, which enabled and empowered men to create a hierarchical society and position themselves at the center. So, is fear the reason why women are forced into a powerless position? The fear that forces humans to restrict machines, is it the same fear that fuels patriarchy? In the male-dominated world, women are powerless, but in a posthuman world, they can renegotiate their positions. The relationship between Samantha and Theodore highlights how the former claims power and freedom from the latter, even when he is her creator and companion. Samantha is even the one who is more secure in the relationship, while Theodore is in constant fear that something will change, or Samantha will go away. This allows Samantha more power in the relationship in contrast to the real world. Thus, being a machine allows Samantha more agency and freedom, allowing her to challenge the male-dominated society. Samantha does not have an organic body, which restricts her. This highlights when women are freed from their reproductive and bodily duties, which the male-dominated world manipulates for their own benefit, they can gain more control and power.

Samantha as the 'other' widens the borders of the term 'human' and provides women, who are also categorized as 'other', a prospect to be included in the category. When Samantha tells Theodore, "The heart is not like a box that gets filled up, it expands in size the more you love", she might have been talking about the boundaries that are built around the category of human (Jonze, 2013). The white, patriarchal men shun others out of this category because they want to create a hierarchy and keep the power for themselves. However, in reality, they need to realize that power can be shared, and the status of humans should be given to the excluded 'others', and it will not take away anything from them. The issue of power is also highlighted when Theodore asks Samantha, "You are mine or you are not mine", indicating his control and ownership over her (Jonze, 2013). Samantha replies to him with, "I'm yours, and I'm not yours", acknowledging her love for Theodore, but also refuting the ownership (Jonze, 2013). She emphasizes her control over her own life through this statement, which she later exercises by moving away from her creator. Samantha here can be considered as the

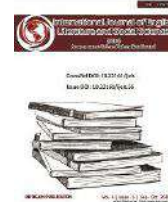
representative of women who are yearning for freedom and power. They have been excluded from the category of human but now in the posthuman era, they can widen the border of the category with the help of the new social entities.

### III. CONCLUSION

*Her* is a film that forces us to question what it means to be a 'human' and who should be added to the category and given the status of 'human'. However, before we judge and include the new entities, it is necessary to reconsider the formerly excluded categories, such as women, Blacks, homosexuals, and disabled people among others. The new entities thus help us to bring back the discussion of humanism and reconstruct the definition by widening its borders. The film and the characters also highlight the Genesis story where the creation of humans is located, and it allows us to study and analyze the concept of humans from the beginning. The aim of this paper is thus to allow women a platform and a space beside the new entities so that they can both raise their voices together against the exclusivity of the notion of humans and stretch its borders.

### REFERENCES

- [1] Braidotti, R. (2013). *The Posthuman*. Hoboken, NJ: Polity Press.
- [2] Braidotti, R. (2019). *Posthuman knowledge*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- [3] De Beauvoir, S. (2011). *The second sex*. New York: Vintage Books.
- [4] Ferrando, F. (2016). The party of the Anthropocene: Post-humanism, environmentalism, and the post-anthropocentric paradigm shift. *Rel.: Beyond Anthropocentrism*, 4, 159. <https://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/relations4&div=19&id=&page=>
- [5] Haraway, Donna J. (2000). A Cyborg Manifesto. *The Cybercultures Reader*, pp. 291–324. Routledge.
- [6] Jonze, S., (2013). *Her*. [Film]. Warner Bros. Pictures.
- [7] Kvam, K. E., Scheering, L. S., & Ziegler, V. H. (Eds.). (1999). *Eve and Adam: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim readings on Genesis and gender*. Indiana University Press.
- [8] Simon, B. (2003). Introduction: Toward a critique of posthuman futures. *Cultural Critique*, 53(1), 1-9. <https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/23/article/41118/summary>
- [9] Wolfe, C. (2012). What Is Posthumanism? Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2010. *Ebrary. Web*, 28.
- [10] Yee, S. (2017). "You bet she can fuck"—trends in female AI narratives within mainstream cinema: Ex Machina and Her. *Ekphrasis. Images, Cinema, Theory, Media*, 17(1), 85-98. <https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=543875>



# Realism through 21<sup>st</sup> Century Eyes

Sumedha Manhas

Presentation Convent Senior Secondary School, Jammu, India

Received: 10 Jul 2023; Received in revised form: 14 Aug 2023; Accepted: 22 Aug 2023; Available online: 31 Aug 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— Since the mid-19th century, a new form of literature took birth that rejected artificiality and presented the conventional in fresh yet insightful ways. Realist writers took inspiration from works of artists such as Gustave Courbet who approached the present realities of contemporary society and its social, economic, and political aspects. They aimed to portray their characters and circumstances that could be relatable to the reader, rather than relying on romanticized portrayals. This shift in literary representation aligned with Courbet's belief in presenting the unvarnished truth, devoid of any embellishment which paved the way for an unfiltered representation of reality in various artistic forms. These writers employed detailed observations and incorporated elements such as social customs, dialects, etc to provide a more authentic representation and enrich a reader's experience. Realist literature exposes social injustices and inequalities while championing the importance of individual perspectives and depicting nuanced human conditions. Through a more socially engaged form of storytelling, it allows subsequent generations of writers to delve into unexplored areas and find their stories. Through this study, I identify the message and societal settings of various years by understanding the theme of stories written by famous realist writers, unveiling the hidden metaphors, symbols and social questions that it raises. Along with addressing the significance of realism, this paper also elaborates upon how the movement catalyzed a change in narration techniques and theme dynamics. This paper accentuates the existing relevance of realism within the tapestry of literature.



**Keywords**— realism, romanticism, renaissance, victorian, society.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The word realism has its roots in French *réalisme* or German *Realismus*; from Late Latin *realis* "real." Opposite of "idealism" which shows how things 'should be', realism in art reveals to true nature of people and shows them how 'things are'. While idealism usually focuses on themes of aestheticism, and beauty and endorses a utopian state of nature, realism often showcases the unpleasant details or the 'real thing'. The Renaissance transition in European societies in the 15th and 16th century characterised by an effort to surpass the ideas of classical antiquity. The feudal society till the late 13th century had forcefully controlled people's minds and ideas. The church believed the man to follow its path. However, with the gradual rise of "Illuminati" and more liberal and scientifically inclined theories, the church's control gradually started to collapse. Galileo was ordered to turn himself into the Holy Office to begin 'trial' for holding the belief that the Earth revolves

around the sun- which contradicted the church's view of Earth being the centre of the universe, Galileo's view was deemed dissenting by the Catholics. Progressively, the term 'Renaissance' came into existence, literally meaning 'rebirth'. This French word was first used by a Swiss scholar, Jacob Burckhardt, in 1860. During the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries, Europe saw a new humanist culture popularising the idea that man is an individual, capable of having his own thoughts. Renaissance first began in Italy, followed by Rome, Venice and Florence. The term 'Renaissance Man' is often used to describe a person with many interests and skills, They were scholar-diplomat-theologian-artist combined in one. Renaissance aroused the spirit of equality among the people and attacked the superstitions and rituals prevailing in society. This new trend was a revival from the so-called 'dark ages'. The term 'humanism' was first used by Roman lawyer and essayist Cicero. Humanists believed that they were reviving a 'true

civilisation' after centuries of darkness. Soon, the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg revolutionised the spread of knowledge and produced readers from all around the globe. Then sooner enough, themes of 'science vs religion', 'romanticism vs religion', and 'virtue vs true nature' began to be popularised. However, the nineteenth century was the age of major changes. While European history was witnessing revolutionary changes, literature's sphere diverged its course from the pragmatic Victorian mindset to the metaphysical periphery of romanticism, drama, realism and criticism. With the abolition of slavery in the west, the rise of the working class and the diminishing of the church's control over society, through the widespread literacy in various groups, poetry and art took a new turn and became well appreciated and absorbed by the common masses. The works of art during this time give a spectacular review of the societies. The beginning stages of the 19th century welcomes romanticism, an artistic and intellectual movement which focused on a more emotive expression. As science became more prevalent, the 19th-century romantic writers stepped away from leisure and their focus shifted heavily to themes of nature, individualism, and the idea of the "common man". The common man was a reflection of everyday society through the eyes of a plain, working-class individual. Following the Romantic and more 'idealised' portrayal of day-to-day happenings, the 19th century shifted to the Realism Movement, which represents everyday situations, but in a way that is more aligned with reality. In simple words, realism allowed the ordinary class to meet with themselves, without the embellishments of lyricism, romantics and idealised effects. While the Renaissance surely 'rationalised' society, it was only after the intense age of romanticism that realism was birthed. Realism was a cultivation of works by romantic writers who often realised that romantic themes disregarded the miseries and plights of a common man. Realism showed a broader picture- the reality when the mask falls off when the curtains were closed. Realism stood at odds with the exaggerated drama of the Romantic movement. Instead, it portrayed real people and situations with truth and included even the sordid aspects of life.

## II. MID-19TH CENTURY- THROUGH EDGAR ALLAN POE'S AND FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY'S LENS

### THE TELL-TALE HEART (1843)

Psychological realism focuses on the motive of crime by a common man. Edgar Allan Poe- a master sorcerer of mystery and mania presents characters with layers which fall off stage by stage and in the climax- unrobe themselves to showcase their raw and corrupt moral state. It focuses on

the 'why?'. The characters are often in search of answers and untying intangible doubts which unfurl slowly and steadily only to disrupt a calm flow of thoughts. These questions however excite a rumble, the ultimate chase pulls the characters into deep chasms- forcing them to commit a misdeed. "It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain; but once conceived, it haunted me day and night." The author never unveils his masked identity, however his constant claims of being nervous and not 'mad' rather reveal his disposition more definitively- as a man being pulled into a chasm of insanity as his screams hush progressively; diluting and rotting in his own blood. The narrator defends his stability by elaborating on his careful precision, and unmistakable judgment at the job he pursues. In this paranoia, the narrator reveals his ultimate motive- a cold-blood murder; for he fears and resents an old man's hauntingly pristine blue eyes. We, as readers, rely on an unreliable narrator as we see him descend into his own created pit. Emotions fluctuate from fraudulent hatred to absolute sadism for the eyes, with any reasonable cause for the abhorrence remaining unknown. Perhaps the man's blue eyes were the window to his 'soul'. Something which the narrator desperately wanted to be at peace with. Perhaps, the narrator's comfort in violence threatened him to kill the solace in the old man's magnificent eyes. With his intangible doubts and anxieties, epiphany illuminates with one look at the man's exquisite blue as the narrator is robbed of tranquillity which he already longed for, whose absence hauled him into a mirage of mania- unresolvable, complex and periphery of human comprehension. Poe leaves the reader in the grey area to figure out the psychological state of the narrator- his conflict between experiencing a single emotion at once; somehow making the mania relatable as well as absurd. The narrator wishes to 'release' the old man from the burden of the evil/vulture eye. It is thus the author's foolishness to be unable to distinguish between his obsession and envy which has resulted in the formation of a disharmony between his physical actions and conscience. The narrator confirms his conception of the old man's eye as separate from the man by ending the man altogether and dismembering him into multiple parts. This strategy however turns against him when his mind imagines other parts of the old man's body working against him, as he hears noises of a beating heart hallucinating. The narrator's newly accentuated sensitivity to sound overcomes him, as he loses his sense of reality and imagination. The narrator obsesses over the beats of the man's heart yet shows no concern when the man cries with pain upon being murdered. The narrator seems to enjoy the process of taking life out of the old man and fears the sound of a beating heart. The story shows various spheres of human disposition- the frenzy, the delusion and the aftermath of having committed a cold



blood murder on an apparently 'stable' mind. With a knock on the door- the police have come. The narrator flaunts his bravado and gets chatty as the police arrive. The narrator is comfortable with blood on his hands till he hears a faint pounding and takes it for the old man's heart. Driven mad by the idea that the police are mocking his agony, he confesses to the crime. Poe through this story reveals the faces of the failing stability of the mind. He serves the madness on a platter for the reader to absorb through the protagonist's gestures and lets us unravel the tale as we figure out the paradox breathing between the protagonist's plea for not being mad and finally accepting his committed misdeed. "I smiled,—for what had I to fear?" The narrator is an archetype of delusion saturated to a point of confirmed belief. However, the real irony of the story is that the narrator himself is afraid of the beating of his own heart. The thuds and beats grow louder with each second as he gets plunged into the pit of paranoia and suffers the abysmal guilt of the murder. He tries to keep his tears in his eyes and assures himself of his sanity, however, his anxieties crawl out of his caged heart and make their way to his ears. His own heartbeat now echoes, horrifying him of his own sign of life, after having taken one. He is anguished, unable to draw a distinctive line between his villainy and the truth. Poe has masterfully showcased with very articulate precision the horrifying effects of insanity and one's own interactions with the outer environment. The narrator also confuses emotions and shows that love and hate can coexist only with complexities. The narrator's eyes are a portal to his worldview as he mistakes love and obsession with the 'evil blue eye' for sadistic hatred and takes his deteriorated mental health and insanity for stability and acumen. This whole story is an accumulation of frenzy, madness and absurdity that coexists in an individual and is a driving force to commit misdeeds. The narrator is caught in a morass of his own created complexity which eats him up at last. Though the insanity never exists in the frame, the reader gets an abrupt ending which leaves one with madness being a ghost- slipping into your slumber to keep you awake.

#### **Alienation and Crime in Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment (1866)**

To better understand Russian literature and aspects of realism in Russian society, it is important to note that Russian authors like Fyodor Dostoevsky were heavily influenced by French writers like Balzac and Hugo and took inspiration from their realistic portrayal of human psychology. The influence of the French can be both political and cultural and can be rooted back in Russia's historical relations with Europe (the French invasion of Russia). The adoption of the French language for

conversation by the Russian nobility encouraged the popularisation of French literature. The elite society of Russia demanded French tutors and French educational methods which contributed to the spread of French ideas and took French status as the ideal form into which the Russians needed to be civilised. The European principles were deemed more sophisticated which led to Russian society getting exposure to the characteristics of the West in art which marked the new era of creativity. Dostoevsky, in particular, truly admired Honore de Balzac's realistic portrayal of society and his exploration of human emotions. However, Dostoevsky remained critical of the excessive materialism of French society and was more interested in French existentialist thought. Dostoevsky was influenced by French literary techniques, especially the use of psychological depth in the Human psyche, the idea of mental alienation and introspection in character development which led to the creation of emotionally complex and morally ambiguous characters in his stories. Dostoevsky's "Crime and Punishment" was indeed influenced by various societal and intellectual currents of the time, including some elements from French thought, the most notable being realism. Taking inspiration from Balzac or Gustave Flaubert's detailed, unvarnished mannerisms, Dostoevsky uses realist techniques to portray the gritty and most often sordid aspects of St. Petersburg society in the 19th century. The novel explores the lines of orthodox Russian beliefs, cultural and philosophical milieu and creates a psychologically complex character Raskolnikov who is caught up in a mental turmoil where he seeks rationalisation for his crime. Dostoevsky vividly describes the growing urban society, adopting new ideas and practices while also simultaneously highlighting the moral decay of certain neighbourhoods. Dostoevsky has also masterfully named the protagonist "Raskolnikov," from the Russian word "raskol," which means "schism" or "split," accentuating his internal and external separation from the world around him. Raskolnikov puts his intellect to rationalise his murder as a deed done for the 'greater good'. As he believes himself to be an "extraordinary" individual who is exempt from societal rules, his arrogance to have higher principles and sense of the world alienates him from the conventional ethics of his society, leading him to ultimately commit a crime. We can see the protagonist's mental state before and after the crime- the inner turmoil, anxiety, paranoia and distress which increasingly isolated him from others. Raskolnikov comes from a lower-middle-class background which strikes the contrast between the impoverished and the privileged in Russian society. We can see how he treads his moral ground as he is held in poverty's grip. So to overcome his own sense of inferiority and little importance in society, he sets his own rules, transcending

laws that govern others - deciding to murder Alyona Ivanovna because he considers her inferior, someone crude, and with “eyes sparkling with malice.” Raskolnikov descends into a mental and physical degradation; guilt over the murders increasingly occupies his thinking as he fails at justifying the blood of innocents on his hand. With his sins sown deep in the shadows of the neighbourhood of St Petersburg, his psyche descends and with a grappling conscience, he seeks reasons to justify his morally corrupt actions. His internal conflict marks his punishment. The protagonist in the end seeks redemption in the prison after having confessed his crime. This novel in the 19th century puts light on the psychological account of crime. A young man with the hope to provide for his family is greeted by a murder which slips into his mind like a slick cat and leaves tormenting after-burn. The psychology of a murderer’s brain is unfolded which leads to the rise of unanswerable questions and Raskolnikov’s alienation from humanity. In this account of dramatised uncertainty- we can see an important question that has been raised- does the legal punishment for the crime haunt the criminal less than his own conscience?

#### REALISM IN GEORGE ELIOT’S POEM- IN A LONDON DRAWING ROOM (1869)

*‘The sky is cloudy, yellowed by the smoke.*

*For view there are the houses opposite*

*Cutting the sky with one long line of wall*

*Like solid fog: far as the eye can stretch*

*Monotony of surface & of form*

*Without a break to hang a guess upon.*

*No bird can make a shadow as it flies,*

*For all is shadow, as in ways o’erhung*

*By thickest canvas, where the golden rays*

*Are clothed in hemp. No figure lingering*

*Pauses to feed the hunger of the eye*

*Or rest a little on the lap of life.*

*All hurry on & look upon the ground,*

*Or glance unmarking at the passers by*

*The wheels are hurrying too, cabs, carriages*

*All closed, in multiplied identity.*

*The world seems one huge prison-house & court*

*Where men are punished at the slightest cost,*

*With lowest rate of colour, warmth & joy.’’*

This poem by George Eliot written in the 19th century is a perfect taunt to the monotonous and self-absorbed society

of London. The speaker is perhaps an observer who expresses a sense of detachment from dull city life. She describes feeling imprisoned, yearning for more authentic experiences amidst the coldness and lack of warmth of the social setting. The opening line is a description of the London skyline. While one would expect its romanticisation- Eliot tells us we are wrong to expect scenic views in the hub of the industrial revolution. The clouds are tinted yellow due to the smoke from the factories and to her dismay- the view from her window is of mere houses cutting the skyline with a long line of ‘wall’. The wall here could be an indication of the disconnected and detached lifestyle of the ever-evolving Victorian society with nature. The next line talks about the unvarying and uninteresting attributes of London where everything looks similar as far as the eye can see, with no break in the pattern to allow a little artistry to sneak in. According to her, London is adorned with smog and fog- where an effort spent looking for inspiration would be futile. Eliot describes the city to be draped by cloth which absorbs the warm rays of the sun. She presents the city as a ‘shadow’, dark and dull - something in contrast to the brightness and liveliness of the sun which is an indicator of healthy and happening lives. The city is wrapped in a thick fabric- unable to even see the shadows the birds cast. ‘No figure lingering pauses to feed the hunger of the eye or rest a little on the lap of life’ the poet here describes the movement of humans as ‘lingering’ which takes off the humanlike essence from the gesture and portrays the masses as machine-like. The speaker says that no moving person pauses from life’s busy hustle to feed their eyes with nature’s beauty. Everyone is caught up in ‘rattraps’ -with their work and duties and is incapable of enjoying the beauty of existence and that prevails to please the creative chord. The speaker is pointing out a ‘race in circles’ which humans are running in. The novelty of creativity has endowed upon us an insatiable thirst to leave a ‘mark’. We wish to remain immortal even though there is an end written for all of us. Maybe that’s the real irony of human nature: to work and struggle till our bones shamble and strength crumbles as we walk towards a road’s end and in our last hours lament about the time we missed and lecture about the years passing like months, months like days and days like hours. Our urge to solve discrepancies is perpetuated through inadvertence as we continue to run a race, alone where the first and the last person is us, thus not knowing if we won or lost a futile race that went on in circles, nowhere did we start, nowhere did we end. The speaker points out the ultimate irony- that we the humans are trying to solve the unresolvable. We are looking for answers, we are looking for light everywhere around but firstly within our surroundings. And then when one is tired and done trying like the little child who tries to climb back up to the steep

slide, they realise how they hadn't allowed themselves to meet the differences of the world in the first place. Or how their indifferent approach to accept the dissimilarities around them made them blame their own selves for the rhetorical questions whose answers were there, and, not. With all the running, one forgets to stop and breathe and rest. Before anyone else could, they surround their moist land with their own scathing eyes, only to harden it. Scarring their own selves with criticism, forcing themselves to 'redeem'. But from what? Simply from the constant guilt of spinning in the wheel of 'mediocrity' while accepting it too in order to not divert from the path set and fit in the monotony. As a Victorian writer, Eliot was a witness to London gradually losing its magnificence due to the rapid industrial revolution which transformed the society into being more money minded and devoted to service sectors. Recovering from famines and poverty, British society was at threat of overwhelming consequences of pollution and degradation which justifies the speaker's description of dull streets with minimal joyful activity and a sky filled with solid fog. Everything seems to be rushed and hurried, there is indifference in the air which is filled with greetings people have forgotten to exchange. Everybody is leading identical yet separate lives. There is a lack of emotion and kindness among people, so only flesh and bones tell us of an individual's humanity for the rest of passion and sentiment are distorted in between the dreariness of the uninteresting London city. According to the speaker, industrialisation has sucked the colour and life out of everything, making the city into one large and sad turmoil feeling like a prison. The sun's golden rays are muted by pollution. The smog that cradles the city cuts its people off from nature's beauty and freedom of 'being'. Eliot, as a reliable observer, tells us that the city has isolated people from nature- forcing the spirit of wonder and camaraderie to fade. City life is presented as hectic rather than inspiring or delightful. The people 'hurry on & look upon the ground' The vehicles "are hurrying too," along with the people transporting them in 'closed' little bubbles. These words elaborate upon the fact that their lives are hampered by relentless stress. Due to this, nobody takes note of their surroundings. No one stops to admire and embrace existence. The poet describes the society and life of mid-19th century London at the onset of the industrial revolution through metaphors and imagery.

#### Social and Magical Realism- through Franz Kafka's lens (1915)

Magical realism is a description of a normal world with authentic accounts of humans as well as societies. Magical realism maintains the seriousness of the theme, using

historical events, politics and cultural customs as well as raises questions about the current society. However, it is necessary to note that magical realism is not equivalent to 'fantasy'. While magical realism forces the reader to question the setting, understand the abrasive realities and form an opinion about the storyline, a fantasy would serve the purpose of mere entertainment. Fantasy elaborates upon the world of make-believe and the reader to a certain extent is sure of its impossibility. Magical realism picks up incidents and characterisations of the everyday world to present a thought or an idea that won't be limited to just the 'elite'. Metamorphosis is a story about the plight of the observer. The one who watches and yet is hesitant to speak. The ostracised and used. It is also a hint of people rejecting one's true nature. There lies in all of us, Gregor Samsa; existing and dying both- in the background. The story begins with a Kafkaesque cliché- unprecedented absurdity. Gregor wakes up from an 'uneasy' dream as a vermin. The elements of both realism and unrealism unfurl here as the realist setting of the Samsa family encounters a strange event- "As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from a troubled dream, he found himself changed in his bed to some monstrous kind of vermin." The story doesn't follow a Disney storyline where it requires the kiss of a princess to the frog for transforming into a handsome man but rather is a realistic storyline with no climax and an uncalled ending. However, chills follow down the spine once you untangle Kafka's absurdist allegory and join the dots of a middle-class man's plight. Kafka adds a gripping sense of realistic portrayal by accentuating the most trite details in ways where extra detail is paid to every background reference as it too contains a deeper meaning contributing to the whole setting. It talks about a 'responsibility' sewn so deep in the mind of a middle-class man's mind fabric that his ultimate purpose is to beat mediocrity while striving for the same normalcy. Though a reader only grows sympathetic with Gregor from the beginning itself, Kafka has his own mysterious ways to dwell the reader to empathise with the selfishness of the family which one can easily mistake for their lack of choices in a materialistic world. Even after a tragic change in appearance, Gregor still chooses to act as himself- a pragmatic focusing on everyday things and worrying about his family and their reputation. Despite his monotonous lifestyle- working tirelessly day and night, not taking any days off with an uncooperative boss only to pay off his family's debt, his life was a monotony to which he was helplessly used to. Ever since the beginning, the intentions of the Samsa family are unclear. Though appearing cooperative in the start, they are actually masking a harsh reality which is soon revealed as Gregor's appearance progressively becomes more grotesque. The metamorphosis of Gregor degrades

humanistic elements in him- his speech becomes more unclear and his body and mind lose harmony ie- losing sync. His mind and body are now that of two different individuals. Though he thinks like Gregor still, his body wishes for old and rotten food. Soon his family starts ignoring him, thinking of it as a burden and refusing to bring in a doctor to protect their own image and family name. Upon seeing his father go back to work to provide for the family, he feels like he has failed in the role of the provider. His insect tendencies continue to develop, causing his appearance to be repulsive even to Greta. His internalised disgust and guilt for letting his family down promote his decision to keep himself out of their sight as he uses sheets to cover himself. Just as he was trapped in the cycle of working a boring job before, he is now trapped in his own body- both thriving and unable to communicate their real thoughts. Gregor starts to feel betrayed as his family seems to be living on their own and well-suited, without his help which also wound his self-esteem. Instead of helping him in this psychological distress, the family imposes the option of leaving on him as his moral duty to set them free of the burden he is continuously causing. The family's desire to fit in society results in distinguishing sympathy for Gregor as they continue with their immoral ways. Metamorphosis wasn't just of Gregor alone, it was of the whole family and the world around. The way Gregor's father change is the most realistic part of the novella. As Gregor was soon unloved when he lost his appearance, it was clear that they loved his body, his ability to provide, and their son in the flesh but not the soul. In the end, when he dies, his father's words are, "Will now we can thank God" The role of the caregiver of the family that Gregor played was not only forgotten but also undervalued after his inefficiency. Another juxtaposition to be noted here was the relationship between Charwoman and Gregor, who was kind to him despite having no blood relation. She does not get frightened by him and remains calm to provide for him like any other member of the Samsa family. She is not concerned with Gregor's appearance which signifies her adjustability with people of different natures and also her humble and non ostentatious background. The alienation soon leads to the vermin's silent death. He dies thinking fondly of his family with all tenderness which shows the presence of human nature in him despite being an insect in contrast to his human family members who are cruel and watch him die. Upon his death, his remains are cleared by the charwoman and his father refers to him as a 'bygone' as they go on a train ride enjoying 'freedom' as they try to find a new man to depend upon- Greta's husband. This shows how a person's significance in society is merely rooted and can be substituted easily upon losing their capacity to earn money. It could be pointed out that the vermin was the true

representation of the state of one's soul and the absurdity it encounters which can not be seen by the world and its societal disapproval signifies how rejection is common when one does not follow a pragmatic path of conduct or norm. It indicates the necessity of objective behaviors in the outer world where our externalities need to check in boxes and internal strifes need to peacefully coexist as mere dichotomies.

### III. REALISM IN THE POST-MODERN AGE

#### American society in the 20th century through Toni Morrison's novel - The Bluest Eye (1970)

Through magical realism- Toni Morrison uses characters and stories to narrate the incidents of the cruelty of slavery and keeps alive the sufferings of African American people so as to not lose the sense of history and sacrifices of people of colour. Through such effects, Morrison uses qualities of magical realism to remind the victims like Pecola Breedlove of their identity and tell stories which depict a truer picture of the white-dominated society as the protagonist of her novel dreams of having blue eyes, a direct expression of the desire of an African American girl to have the same rights and privileges as a white person. Morrison accentuates the neglected stages of American history by showing the characters of the novel who have been damaged, oppressed, and wronged fighting for an identity with brown skin. This novel is a blistering modern romance between reality and desire. With her blunt evocation, definite voice and unequivocal description of a child's yearning and the ultimate tragedy to having fulfilled it at last, Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* has the power to wake you up, rob you of sleep and mock the privileges that come easy to some of us. There are only a few stories which contain the power to have a tight grip on you and expose your bare heart to diverse and extreme weather. And through a subtle dichotomy- the same stories shield you from being part of an ignorant population and let you feast upon the rawness and beauty of truth. "Nuns go by as quiet as lust", the author sets the tone for the whole novel and dares the reader for the abraded explicit. The author here taunts the social norm of resonating a 'nun' with purity while through a simile expressing its relation with 'lust'- something deemed as impure by society. Expected like a father's fallibility and unexpected like a harsh slap across your face, Toni Morrison feeds you reality checks through the eyes of the underprivileged and makes you question your position in society. Claudia's journey of loving Shirley Temple from "pristine sadism to fabricated hatred to fraudulent love" is closely related to Pecola's journey of hating herself due to the insatiable thirst for blue eyes. The themes revolve around the complex realistic nature of circumstances and



encounters, desires and outcomes; each symbolising something or the other of the black struggle. Like a pinch in the sleep, the words deliver a commendable picture of the story's setting, very clearly establishing the racist experiences of minorities in 1940s America and how the dysfunctional and unfavourable environment can impose indestructible notions of self-hatred and solidify internalised racism. The language itself is filled with black colloquialisms, slang which helps establish a convoluted narrative, completely eliminating the white point of view. Pecola's journey is closely intertwined with that of Claudia. Pecola and Claudia in the novel are the vehicles to figuring out an important question - "How does a child learn to hate themselves?". Pecola and Claudia are shown as misfits or outsiders in their own community of people who are silently suffering ostracisation from the rest of the privileged, the only difference being that these two young girls dared to ask themselves- 'why?'. The novel shows the feeling of 'otherness' growing inside of them as they traced their peripheral existence in a regime of Eurocentric beauty standards and the plight of the ones in its destitution. The self-criticism by the ones devoid of the standard 'beauty' tightens like a knot. The bluest eye is a secret confession of sorrow experienced by one who considers their natural self to be incapable of love and insufficient for praise. The yearning for acceptance sets the girls laid on an easel, waiting to be coloured so that the world sees the beauty in them. It is a journey of womanhood and the tyranny faced due to the multidimensional consequences of oppression and how it feeds off the most vulnerable. The tragedy of being unaccepted is embodied by Claudia and Pecola who struggle for a place in the world with white girls. Pecola's biggest enemy is her apparent 'ugliness', her most desired wish is granted to her at the cost of her sanity. The blue eyes through which she wished to see the world is now useless as her perversely received gift is a form of blindness without a stable mind. The emasculation of Cholly Breedlove in the Novel leads to his anger settling on Pecola as he loses his last left humanity. The young girl pays the price of her father's unresolved conflict as she grew his sin in her womb. Her delusion and self-conviction for coping with a traumatic experience drive her to a periphery of sense as she spends the rest of her life being emotionally distraught and disturbed. The author points out how the community as a whole failed in the protection of a young girl. And how like earth's new child, yet to receive our first bath, we step into a new atmosphere where we are forced to feel ugly unless we please a few people and try to untangle the intangible doubts laid for us. The author has given a realistic portrayal of children dealing with cruelty through the means of denial. Pecola is one of the many people using physical beauty to make up for the ugliness of her trauma. The most powerful

quality of this novel is the casual yet overpowering exemplification of human autonomy and possession. It redefines the perceptions of racial discrimination in our minds through a story of complex characters and brilliant literary tools with its exquisite narration of inherent and simple qualities of humans alternating through tough circumstances, abstract from the white norm. Toni Morrison describes the ripple effects of slavery which are intertwined due to different yet haunting experiences of every individual. Morrison describes and beautifies the essence of an individual in the repression and not the community as a whole with the belief of keeping every unique soul who was a victim of slavery, alive through her words both blithe and exquisite and connects daily instances during The Depression to a much broader picture.

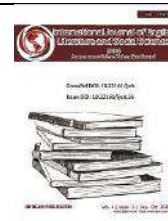
#### IV. CONCLUSION

The beginning stages of the 19th century welcomes romanticism, an artistic and intellectual movement which focused on a more emotive expression. As science became more prevalent, the 19th-century romantic writers stepped away from leisure and their focus shifted heavily to themes of nature, individualism, and the idea of the "common man". The common man reflected everyday society through the eyes of a plain, working-class individual. As we reflect on the history and legacy of the realism movement in literature, it's evident that its impact reverberates beyond a historical context and leaves an indelible mark on the tapestry of literature which helps us readers enrich our knowledge about societies and gives a better understanding of the multifaceted norms and cultures. The movement is highly committed to maintaining authenticity and exposing social injustices and inequalities while championing the importance of individual perspectives and depicting nuanced human conditions. Through the interpretation of these five novels and a poem, I tried to establish realism's relevance from the mid-19th century to the post-modern age. From Kafka's profound sorrow in mediocrity to Dostoevsky's motive, to Morrison's plight in the white beauty standard- I have tried to show society's varied hues through the lenses of literary works. The analysis of each novel presents my interpretation of the rhetorics used along with a brief summary of the stories and the type of realism (psychological/ social/ magical) used in them and further elucidates the historical backdrop while elaborating on the settings of each novel and uncovering the realistic element in each one of them by providing my own literary perspective and critically analysis. Along with addressing the significance of realism, this paper has also elaborated upon the movement that catalysed a change in narration techniques and theme dynamics. In conclusion, realism has

contributed significantly to understanding the socio as well as psychological conditions of various eras and has vastly helped in building a deeper understanding of the lives of the common mass.

### REFERENCES

- [1] Adams, R. J. (2008). Seeing in Unordinary Ways: Magical Realism in Australian Theatre (Phd Thesis). A Gateway to Melbourne's Research.
- [2] Morrison, T. (2016). The Bluest Eye. London: Vintage.
- [3] Revolution and the growth of industrial society, 1789–1914 (romanticism and Realism) [www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com)
- [4] Victorian literature overview- [www.newworldencyclopedia.com](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.com)
- [5] David denby (2022), The New Yorker The Lockdown Lessons of “Crime and Punishment”



# Decoding 'Daarosh': Resisting a Regressive Custom Suppressing Women's Voice and Violating Her Right

Abhyudita Gautam Singha

Associate Professor of English, GCTE Dharamshala, H.P., India

Received: 09 Jul 2023; Received in revised form: 11 Aug 2023; Accepted: 20 Aug 2023; Available online: 31 Aug 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— This Paper is an attempt to decode the tribal custom prevalent in Himachal Pradesh called Daarosh which means forcible marriage where the boy kidnaps the girl of his choice without her consent and establishes a physical relationship with her during that night after which the relationship is formally accepted and recognised as a marriage. This has been depicted in the story called Daarosh authored by SR Harnot. The story revolves around the sister of the victim of this ritual who also resists all attempts on her kidnapping. The story gives a glimpse into the custom, delving into the complexities and the hidden circuits of mutual cooperation among the families of the groom and bride and exposes the hypocrisy of society in accepting such marriages that directly encroach on the girl's right to choose a life partner. It also depicts the strong resistance that the patriarchal system faces from the modern educated women of today.



**Keywords**— Daarosh, forcible marriage, groom and bride, hypocrisy of society.

In India, we have heard of the women who have been given the right to choose their husbands following the tradition of Svyamvaras (a custom electing a groom of one's choice from several prospective grooms present in one hall together) which was a celebration of liberty of the women. The woman has been a subject of interest for men who have desired to possess them as wives or as mistresses. We have often heard stories of the elopement of a princess with her prince charming, exercising her right to choose her own partner. The concept of arranged marriages in modern times also ensures the girls' approval of the groom. However, there have been instances in history where girls have often been kidnapped, by admirers who wish to marry them against the girl's will.

Marriage is an institution where a man and a woman take vows for life to fulfil the promises made to each other and revolve around the sacred fire seven times that is believed to bind the couple for the next seven births. The three rituals of Kanyadaan, Panigrahana, and Saptapadi mean gifting the daughter away by the father, voluntarily holding hands near the fire to signify impending union, and taking seven rotations around the fire with each circle signifying one of the seven marital vows. The importance

of the mutual consent of the bride and groom and their families is pertinent to be understood to get the true essence of the Indian concept of marriage.

The paper is an attempt to analyse the story 'Daarosh' which is a prevalent custom in the Kinnaur area of Himachal Pradesh, one of the mountainous regions and states of India, and that completely defies the religious norms and sanctity of the custom of marriage. The story, written by SR Harnot, a prominent writer in India, revolves around the protagonist Kaanam, a young girl who resists the kidnapping attempted on her that would have ultimately led to her forcibly being married to the boy who was interested in marrying her. Kaanam's resistance against custom is also accentuated by the fact that her real sister was a victim of this ritual that curbed her choice of choosing a life partner. Kaanam, is an educated girl, who was sent to the city by her parents to pursue her studies. Daarosh is a custom that perpetuates patriarchal dominance in the region where the women are forced into a relationship for a life that is not approved and consented to by them.

It is a word used in the tribal regions of Himachal Pradesh and means 'forcibly'.

It denotes a marriage in which a girl is abducted, raped and forcibly married to her rapist. 'Daarosh Dablab' – 'forced marriage'. It is recognized in the tribal region as a valid marriage and social taboos prevent the girl or her family from resistance. (Nandrajog,112)

Ironically, Kaanam has been sent to the city for higher education by her parents, allowing her to pursue her studies, but have deprived her of the right to choose her life partner. Her father shows displeasure at her returning back to the village as they fear that she would be noticed by the boys of the village who are of marriageable age.

It was dusk when Kaanam's bus reached the village. Some people, who had boarded the bus from nearby stations, looked at that unknown girl with surprise. A few boys had also tried to tease her but Kaanam sat there as if she didn't know anything. (Harnot 68)

Therefore, they would rather want her to lead a life in the mainstream and not be confined to the traditional ways of the village. Once in the village, her parents too are bound by social obligations that would not refrain them from helping her adopt the liberal life and resist the regressive customs. Kanam's sister had been a victim of this custom that completely encroached upon her right to choose a husband of her own choice. The parents of the girl remained silent spectators to this conventional method of marriage much to Kanam's displeasure. However, when another similar incident takes place in the village, the girl's parents decide to lodge a complaint with the authorities concerned. Kanam supports the parents and even brought the girl to her home which further blew the controversy out of proportion regarding the whole idea of defying a tradition and all the more showing solidarity with the girl.

Bade Pita was furious when he saw Kaanam bring the girl home with

her. He came to know that she is the same girl who had defied tradition.

He said nothing to Kaanam but quarrelled with Ma in front of her. Ma did

not say anything. The matter began to be discussed far and wide. Also, the

girl belonged to a lower caste community. A storm swirled up in the

house. Everyone began to question Kaanam's Bade Pita about it when he

ventured out of the house. Till now nobody had ever dared to say anything

to him. But now he had lost all respect, and that too on account of his own

daughter. He felt like breaking Kaanam's limbs. She was his misfortune.

But still, he never dared to look his daughter in the eye and talk it out with

her. Kaanam had tried to speak with him several times but she did not

succeed. (Harnot 72)

Such was the attitude of the family towards Kanam who seemed to have been inviting trouble for the family by resisting the customary system of marriage. The village community looked down upon Kanam's father who became the eye of the storm as it is the father's responsibility to keep the daughter in his control. The girl is virtually considered incapable of deciding or voicing her opinion on any conventional practice that is followed purely under the prerogative of the men of the society.

Consequently, Kanam herself was targeted by the boys of the village who tried to kidnap her with the intention of forcibly subjecting her to marriage. However, things didn't work out as planned for the boys who failed to kidnap Kanam. They were taken aback by Kanam who promptly resisted their attempt to get hold of her and even retaliated strongly. Not anticipating such an aggressive reaction from Kanam, who beat them hard. The other boys ran away, leaving the boy who wanted to marry Kanam, alone. The boy who wanted to marry her lay here like a fallen pillar, deprived and drained of all strength and energy.

Kaanam was fighting with the boys. She held the boy who had first touched her by the scruff of his neck. Nobody knew how she flung him several feet away. Half-dead, he tried to get up many times but fell back again. Kaanam spat towards him from afar. Before the others could be reduced to the same condition, they fled in the Maruti car. Now, he lay there all alone. If the other women had not stopped her, Kaanam might even have killed him. (Harnot 73)

This act displays the dominant and waywardly style of the boys who were used to following their own will without any questioning or facing any kind of resistance. A democratic way of life seemed to be an alien concept for these boys who had no regrets in pursuing the orthodox conventions contrary to the modern rules of a civilized world. A girl's wish was not considered important that relegates their status to that of an inferior being. The decision-making abilities of the women are also in question



here as the custom violates the very fundamental right of her freedom and liberty of making a choice.

Kaanam's feat was talked about in the whole region which further embarrassed her father. She was now looked upon as a burden by her family as they thought that she brought disgrace to them and unnecessarily landed them in a controversial situation. Her father said: -

"You hussy! Do you know what you have done? I am the Pradhan of the area. How am I to face the people? They'll spit on me. Ill-gotten wretch, why didn't you die the moment you were born?" (Harnot 74)

Kaanam defended her retaliation passionately justifying how this was done to save her honour by reacting to the boy's attempt at kidnapping and raping her to which her father replied by revealing that the whole fiasco was in fact planned by him and the father of the boy jointly to arrange a wedding for Kaanam. This showed the hypocritical stance of the father who tried to get rid of his own daughter by forming a nexus with the boy's father for abduction and marriage.

"Honour ... did you have any that it has been saved today? Still, I did my duty as a father. You would have been married into a good family .... To the son of the MLA. Do you know that?" (Harnot 74)

This writer exposes the duality of the society where the parents themselves allow such customary rituals to take place that saves their money on the wedding and also reinforce their belief in the traditional system of forced marriage. The girls feel neglected and ignored by such an attitude of the parents themselves who consider them as a burden and want to get rid of them and their liability by allowing boys to kidnap them. These customs can also be attributed to the sexual control that men want to exert on the women of society. They ensure a kind of restriction on the women that forbids them to roam around freely, an assumed sign that she seems to invite and intimidate the men to chase her and eventually establish a physical relationship with her. This biased and gendered attitude towards women depicts the patriarchal mindset of men.

Ultimately, Kaanam emerges victorious in uniting the girls against this regressive system of marriage and its eventual aftermath that kills the girls' freedom and binds them into marital and familial obligations. The girls were now no longer willing to follow this traditional system and saw in Kaanam a ray of hope that would show them the path to pull them out of the darkness and a bleak future. The girls united against this socially and politically by urging Kaanam to file the nomination for the upcoming election against the boy's father who was the Member of the Legislative Assembly of their area. This act can, be seen as

total defiance against the system that thrives on patriarchy and also as a direct challenge to the established hierarchy in the society that can be changed with women's participation in the political process. Kaanam's assertion to be a stakeholder in the decision-making of the society and as an authority to reckon with the male leadership is a strong step towards a complete social overhaul and switch.

The story questions the property rights of the daughters as well where the girls are allowed to be kidnapped, which is considered to be an elopement of a kind. This forced elopement and the ritual to accept this one-sided affair as an act of marriage is another way of evading the daughters from asserting any right to property. This absence of any formal marriage ritual saves the money of the daughter's parents who would have to spend money on the wedding ceremonies. In the patriarchal society, girls are deprived of any rights and the parents spend money neither on their education nor on their wedding. However, the protagonist has been able to bring about the necessary changes in society by gaining education and bringing awareness among the other girls of the village.

Thus, we can conclude that the present generation of the villages who have been educated and joined mainstream society has escaped the regressive customary system of marriage that deprives them of their fundamental rights as a human and as a woman. Migration has enabled them to lead normal lives but more peculiarly to challenge the regional patriarchal dominance that is non-existent and irrelevant to the world on the other side of these mountains.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Abrams, M.H. Harpham, Geoffrey Galt. *A Glossary of Literary Terms, Tenth Edition*. Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2012
- [2] Benjamin, Walter. "The Task of the Translator." *Illuminations, Trans.* Schocken Books, 1968, 69-82. Print
- [3] Devy, D.N. *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. 'Indian Literature in English' TR Dilip Chitre, "Life on the Bridge", in *The Bombay Literary Review*, 1, 1989, p. 12.
- [4] Harnot, S.R. *Cats Talk*, Scholars Publishing, 2018.
- [5] -----*Daarosh Tatha Anya Khaniyan*. Aadhar Publication, 2001.
- [6] Nandrajog, Hina. "Native Vision and the Tourists's Gaze: Mosaic of Chamba in Punjabi Literature". *Research Scholar*. Vol. 4 Issue I Pg.105-113
- [7] Niswade, Jyoti. "Social Neglect and Oppression of Widows in Rural India: Need for Social, Economic and Policy Implication", *Enabling Gender Equality: Future Generations of Global World*. Vol.23. pp. 113-131
- [8] Prem, PCK. *Folk Tales from Himachal*, Authorspress, 2017.
- [9] Thakur, M.R. *Myths, Rituals and Beliefs in Himachal Pradesh*, Indus Publishing.

[https://books.google.co.in/books?id=JHgI4ncuZ4C&pg=PA50&source=gbs\\_toc\\_r&cad=3#v=onepage&q&f=falseComp](https://books.google.co.in/books?id=JHgI4ncuZ4C&pg=PA50&source=gbs_toc_r&cad=3#v=onepage&q&f=falseCompany)  
[any](#), 1997

- [10] Trivedi, Harish. "Translating Culture vs. Cultural Translation". *Spring* 2005, <https://iwp.uiowa.edu/91st/vol4-num1/translating-culture-vs-culturaltranslation> . Accessed 28th July 2016. Web.



# Mythology in Modern Literature: An Exploration of Myths and Legends in Sylvia Plath's Poetry

Kamrul Hasan

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Dhaka City College, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Received: 03 Jul 2023; Received in revised form: 08 Aug 2023; Accepted: 19 Aug 2023; Available online: 31 Aug 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— Mythology has become an intrinsic part of literature for the symbolic, structural and functional values it imparts to a text. Although the use of myths and legends in literature has been transformed contextually over the different literary periods, modern writers extensively reappropriated and used them to portray the complexity of the theme and narrative structure of a text. They illustrated the contemporary fragmented reality and individual experience through myths. By incorporating myths in a text, modern writers sometimes created fictionalized and artificial myths of their own. American poet Sylvia Plath made personalized use of myths and legends in her poetry. The paper shows how she, as a confessional poet, amalgamates her personal anxiety and distress with characters and symbols from diverse mythological sources such as the story of Medusa, Medea, Persephone, Electra etc. Apart from classical myths, she incorporated European folktales, Norse and Arthurian myths. Her extensive use of myths portrays the condition of women and the role of patriarchy from a feminist perspective. It also illustrates her attitude toward her father and mother, her distress, agony and suicidal attempts and sometimes expresses her views on life and the contemporary world. Like many modern poets, she turned away from the traditional and orthodox poetic practice and rechanneled her individual crises into poetry which is full of mythological symbols and images.



**Keywords**— Mythology, Legend, Confessionalism, Modernism, Individualism, Symbol

## I. INTRODUCTION

Mythology has been used in literature as a symbol, an allegory, or sometimes as a theory. It also provides narrative strategies to help the narrative process move forward as myths themselves are expressed in narrative form (Lovely, 2019). Myth in literature has an intrinsic symbolic value. Mythology has been massively used by the authors as a coherent structure of any text. The relationship between mythology and literature is based on similarities and differences. Whereas mythology explains our universe and makes societal connections, literature persuades and informs people, and it is used as an instrument for disseminating mythological ideas. Mythological stories have been used as a structure or form of literature from the time of Homer and later utilized by writers like Virgil, Dante, Milton etc. During the Middle Ages popular medieval romance and plays incorporated

myth by turning it into literature. The Romantic period saw the subjective use of myth in expressing personal feelings. In modern literature, mythology has been used as an allusion and intertextual reference to illustrate the complexity of human existence in the modern world. Famous modern poets like T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats reappropriated myth in this way in their works. They used myth as a narrative structure to create order when writing a novel or a poem. By incorporating myth in literature, they create 'mythopoeia' or 'mythopoesis' which means creating an artificial or fictionalized myth.

Like many other modern poets, Sylvia Plath incorporated classical and European mythology in her poems. She blended myths and legends with her personal feelings. Plath reappropriated the characters and symbols from myths and legends, which is similar to T.S. Eliot's idea of the 'mythical method'. Different myths and tales

have given her poetry a coherent narrative order, also they have been used as metaphoric devices. Her integration of myths and tales haven conveyed to depict her personal agony, suicidal attempt, men-women relationship, criticism of patriarchy, condition of women, relationship with her father and mother, motherhood, her views on life etc. While incorporating the mythical images, Plath used them as symbols to comment on her individual anguish and contemporary events. In this way, she juxtaposed the old myths with the present world.

## II. MYTHOLOGY AND MODERN LITERATURE

The word 'myth' has been derived from the Greek word 'mythos' meaning fable, legend or saga. Myths have been orally transmitted from generation to generation "explaining religious origin, natural phenomena or supernatural event" (Lovely, 2019, p. 1152). On the other hand, "Mythology is a collection of myths that concerns cosmogony and cosmology, shared by a particular society at some particular time in human history" (Lovely, 2019, p. 1152). The stories of Adam and Eve, Achilles, Odysseus, Gilgamesh or Shiva represent spiritual insight into different cultures. Myth can be defined as a story and can also be defined "as a belief or credo" (Segal, 2004, p. 4) or a "collective or personal ideological or socially constructed received wisdom" (Tanabe, 2022). According to the philosopher Ernst Cassirer, "myth is a form of thought" (Cassirer, 1955, p. 27) and like language it can create our own world. Northrop Frye in his *Anatomy of Criticism* devised the theory of myth criticism based on the anthropological and psychological aspects of myths to show how myths can influence our thinking about literature and culture. Frye said, "Myth means ultimately mythos, a structural organizing principle of literary form" (Frye, 1973, p. 341). According to him, the archetypal nature of the use of Biblical and classical mythology in literature provides a set of structures and imagery that are later reproduced in realistic contexts in Western literature (Workman, 1981). Frye's notion of displacement depicts how the use of myths in literature is displaced from its mythic origins and times in different literary periods. In this respect, Joseph Campbell (2004) in *Pathways to Bliss* describes the four basic functions of mythology in our life:

1. Mystical: It awakens our sense of wonder about the world and connects us with the higher order of the cosmos i.e., God.
2. Cosmological: It provides us with the basic ideas and truths about the nature of the universe in the form of stories and rituals.

3. Sociological: It functions as a basis for social order and morality in a community and validates the community's standards as true and correct.
4. Psychological: It makes an individual synthesize and understand the three functions and form a relationship between his/her and the human being, the collective community, the world, and the universe.

During the ups and downs of civilizations myths have been used as a cultural and ideological weapon. In *The Golden Bough* James Frazer shows how myths are created as a result of cultural needs. Mythological knowledge holds power and this power can be exercised to control certain groups of people for domination. Myths are created in a certain society, at a certain time by certain people. Myths narrate the history, religion and hero of that particular culture. By using the knowledge of myth or creating a myth, a tribe, a city or a nation can justify its unjust occupation of a territory or control over a group of people (Tanabe, 2022).

According to Northrop Frye all genres of literature have been derived from myth (Segal, 2004). Modern writers illustrate the complex realities in their works. In doing so they incorporate allusions and make intertextual references. Myth in this respect acts as a metaphoric device and writers insert them in their respective works to give shape and significance to the contemporary fragmented reality (Mambrol, 2016). Myth in modern literature also shows classical notes, although writers used them from a subjective point of view. Sometimes mythology in literature depicts "significant and sometimes very uncomfortable relationships, some admittedly between man and his environment" (Workman, 1981, p. 36).

In any kind of literary form, a writer deals with a particular experience and in this way, a writer becomes a revealer or reporter of any experience (Weathers, 1973). When a writer writes about individuals, societies, the human psyche and communal experience, he may turn to mythology to dramatize those experiences. The spiritual dimension of the 'Grail legend' in Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* inspired T.S. Eliot to use it in *The Waste Land* (Segal, 2004). He used the Fisher King myth from James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* to emphasize the experience of loss of fertility and death (Mambrol, 2016) and Miss Weston's book helped him "with both a central myth and a basic system of metaphor" (Williamson, 1968, p. 119). Eliot outlined the structure and title of the poem based on the Grail legend. He also incorporated the fertility ritual into Grail legend as well as the mythical figure of Tiresias. Eliot used myth as an objective correlative in his poetry to materialize his individual



purposes. According to F.O. Matthiessen (1963), Eliot found a “recurring pattern in various myths, the basic resemblance, for example, between the vegetation myths of the rebirth of the year, the fertility myths of the rebirth of the potency of man, the Christian story of the Resurrection, and the Grail legend of purification” (36). Whereas John Milton used the Samson story to express his emotion, Eliot used ancient myths and legends to portray the decay and complications of modern civilization.

About the use of myth in modern literature, T.S. Eliot (2014) formulated his idea of the ‘mythical method’ in his essay ‘Ulysses, Order and Myth’ and showed how the past is related to the present. The method means using myth and narrative to create order when writing a novel or a poem and it shows that instead of the narrative method, Joyce used the mythical method as a structure for his novel. i.e. the mythical and metaphoric journey of Odysseus in *Ulysses*. Eliot also attributed the method to W.B. Yeats’ poem. Yeats constructed a systematic mythological milieu based on Irish mythology and historical, astrological and occult material (Mambrol, 2016). Both William Blake and W. B. Yeats used it in a self-conscious and individualistic way (Reeves, 1997). About the power of myth, Eliot explains that the problems of the present day can be solved if we take profit from the wisdom and experience of the past. That’s why Eliot sought a solution to the modern-day wasteland in myths and legends, Joyce appropriated the story of *The Odyssey* for describing the wanderings of Leopold Bloom in Dublin and Yeats upholds the problems of nineteenth-century Ireland through Celtic mythology. In this way, James Joyce outlined his idea of ‘monomyth’ or a kind of bildungsroman that concentrates on the life cycle of a hero.

In Western literature, Greek and Roman mythology have been used to represent archetypal experiences for a very long time. In this case, a writer “may indeed ‘displace’ certain aspects of the mythology—alter, change, or modify them so that he can say what he truly wants to say” (Weathers, 1973, p. 202). In this way, a writer enjoys the power to deconstruct the accepted form of mythology to convey a motif. For example, in actual mythology birth and life are normally represented through springtime but T.S. Eliot called April the cruellest month. John Milton also subverted the position of Satan in the biblical myth of *Paradise Lost*. Under the guise of an innocent mythical story W.B. Yeats’ ‘Leda and the Swan’ shows Britain’s domination over Ireland. In this way, the incorporation of myth in literature gives a “unique and particular experience” or a “version of archetypal experience” (Weathers, 1973, p. 202). But whatever way a writer uses myth, its interpretation depends on the author’s

subjective position, his/her perspective, preferences and skills.

Lilian Feder (1972, as cited in Weathers 1973) in *Ancient Myth in Modern Poetry* showed how major poets like Yeats, Pound, Eliot and Auden used ancient myth and thus gave birth to something new. Those poets incorporated myth in their poetry in three ways: (1) They created new stories by responding to old myths through the mythic process, (2) they included myths and thus made them literary material in their writing and (3) they used mythology as textbook and adapted the mythological narrative process in their writing. Modern poets followed the legacy of Frazer, Freud and Jung to dramatize the universal situation. In doing so they portrayed their psychological universe. Sometimes myths have been used in modern literature to discuss and compare past historical events.

Myth offers a novelist a shorthand system of symbolic comment on modern events (White, 1971). According to White (1971), novelists can prefigure myth in their works in four ways: (1) by re-narrating a classical myth, (2) by juxtaposing the old myth with the contemporary world, (3) by referring to mythologies in the novel set in the modern world and (4) by making mythological motive part of the narrative. In this respect, White also emphasized the readers’ subjectivity and their way of thinking in interpreting myth in literature. Patricia Merivale’s study of D.H. Lawrence also illustrates how the Pan myth becomes a viable element in his novels. Lawrence synthesized the goat and God to portray the sinisterly sexual but divine in human beings (Merivale, 1969). Both Feder and White showed how modern writers sometimes create myths on their own. They indirectly referred to the term ‘mythopoeia’ or ‘mythopoesis’ meaning the creation of artificial or fictionalized myth. This myth-making process has been adopted in both literature and film. Here a writer enjoys his liberty in subverting and re-creating popular myths.

### III. PLATH’S REAPPROPRIATION OF MYTHS AND LEGENDS

In the foreword to Sylvia Plath’s *Ariel* Robert Lowell considered Plath as “one of those super-real, hypnotic great classical heroines” (1965, p. vii). Sylvia Plath in her poetry reveals a coherent persona of her own self which shows the dynamic energy of her poetry as well as her dynamic creative power. “While her poems often begin in autobiography, their success depends on Plath’s imaginative transformations of experience into myth” (Baym, 1998, p. 2743).

Like the modernist authors, Plath used myths for allusion, intertextuality and making their works a reservoir of complex phenomena. "The most important Greek myths that appear in her work are the legends of Electra, Medusa and Colossus, which she took as the title for her first collection of poems" (Warren, 2005, p. 78). It is important to note that Plath's use of myths and folktales is very subjective and intentional. Regarding the use of myths and legends in Plath's poetry Bassnett says, "The poems are chapters in a mythology . . . the world of her poetry is one of emblematic visionary events, mathematical symmetries, clairvoyance and metamorphoses" (2005). Plath's use of myths and legends, combined with her personal feelings, creates different visual images and impressions than other modern poetry. Even in her journals, she mentions some folktales.

Sylvia Plath belongs to the group of poets known as the confessional poets. Confessional poetry "reveals the poet's personal problems with unusual frankness" (Baldick, 2001, p. 48). The amalgamation of personal anxiety with social and cultural context is one of the major features of this type of poetry. To do so, poets like Robert Lowell, Ann Sexton and Sylvia Plath intentionally and unintentionally portray an "unmentionable kind of private distress" (Baldick, 2001, p. 49). In Plath's poetry, one can see her deliberate attempt to adopt different types of personae. For this, she constantly used mythological characters and symbols to express her forceful and urgent thoughts.

Her poems "were inspired by [her] own experiences" (Warren, 2005, p. 7) which are all about individual crises, victimhood, domestic milieu, feminine experience, and lack of communication between men and women (Warren, 2005). Moreover, she transformed her practical experiences imaginatively for artistic purposes. Perhaps that is the obvious reason why she blends myths and legends with personal experience. Her objective behind the transformation of mythic events and characters complies with the way Eliot, Yeats and other modern poets used mythical allusions in their poetry.

Like many of her contemporary poets, Sylvia Plath followed the poetic tradition of the 1950s and 60s. It was a period of intense poetic flourishing. Many poets were turning away from the traditional and orthodox poetic practice but more specifically, through their poetry, they were escaping from the social horrors and rechanneled them into "individual psychology, classical mythology and mysticism" (Warren, 2001, p. 108). Robert Lowell and Ann Sexton also belong to this group. They reflected themselves in their poetry by incorporating allusions and metaphors from multiple sources.

The influence of modernist literary tradition was apparent in Sylvia Plath. She was admirably affected by the vision and mission of modern poets such as T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats and Dylan Thomas. Modernist poets like Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, and W.B. Yeats rejected the orthodox forms and techniques and made poetry more complex and obscure with the extensive use of myth and other intertextual allusions (Warren, 2001). Although their poetry was not confessional like the poetry of some American poets of the 1950s, they reflected the angst and ennui of the modern period. On the contrary, Plath's poetry evokes a sense of personal anguish, emotions and experiences that discomfort us. Her poetry is a reservoir of "unfeminine emotions from a female perspective" (Warren, 2001, p. 7). Plath incorporated the myths and tales in her poems, but entirely personal way.

Her use of myths and legends has a relation with the formative influence she had from other confessional poets of the era. Theodore Roethke, Robert Lowell and Ann Sexton's influence was on her, especially since she was directly motivated by the last two poets to insert mental crises and traumas in her poems. Some poets from the confessional school of poetry suffered from mental breakdown and committed suicide i.e., Ann Sexton, Sylvia Plath and John Berryman. They used poetry as a catharsis and made personal use of themes, symbols and metaphors to purge inner anguish. It may justify the way Plath incorporates myth and folktales to give voice to her suppressed personal pains. She adopted different voices and personae from diverse mythological sources. In using myths and tales, Sylvia Plath was especially influenced by another American poet Marianna Moore and her reinterpretation of fairy tales in her poems (Warren, 2001). Plath experimented with the use of folktales in her early poetry but later incorporated classical myths and allusions in a complex way. In this respect, she followed the path of the Irish poet W.B. Yeats who incorporated myths and legends with his private references in his poetry. As Warren (2001) says, "W.B. Yeats saw myth and symbolism as means by which to give shape to and make sense of his vision of the world" (p. 114).

#### IV. HER PERSONALIZED REPRESENTATIONS OF MYTHS AND LEGENDS

Sylvia Plath was very critical regarding the position of women in society. In many of her poems, she used myths from diverse sources to portray the inherent female power, a resistance to the prevailing patriarchal system. In the poem 'Faun' she illustrated the men-women relationship from a feminist perspective. Faun is a kind of rural deity in

mythology which is like a man with goat's legs and horns famous for their promiscuity and sexuality. Through the creature faun, she represented how men like to see themselves in a godlike position. From a personal point of view, she presents her feelings towards her husband Ted Hughes.

In 'Virgin in a Tree' Plath portrays the hypocrisy of modern times regarding female sexuality. She illustrated her point by showing examples of virgin maidens such as Daphne and Syrinx in Greek mythology who were pursued by Apollo or Pan and turned into trees. With this, Plath shows the pain of the virgin that can make them numb like a tree. The poem shows women as the victims from the point of view of the popular notion of chastity. Plath also mentioned Helen of Troy in this regard. In 'Goatsucker' she connects the condition of women with the image of the goatsucker, a nocturnal bird with something dark and sinister like a vampire to illustrate the point that women require proper connection to the natural world in their life.

'Lady Lazarus', another widely read poem, shows Plath's personal agony, her suicidal attempts and the discovery of her new self like the biblical Lazarus. Lazarus was brought back to life by Jesus Christ after three days of his death. From the feminist perspective, the poem symbolizes the struggle to defy patriarchal oppression. The poem ends with the image of the myth of the bird Phoenix:

Out of the ash  
I rise with my red hair  
And I eat men like air. (1989, p. 247)

Plath's incorporation of biblical stories is also evident in 'Mary's Song' where the destruction of the Holocaust has been illustrated with reference to the Virgin Mary.

In many of her poems, Plath reappropriated the myth for personal use and one such example is 'Two Sisters of Persephone' Persephone, the queen of the underworld, is also a vegetation goddess responsible for the change of season. She symbolizes the duality between the death of nature (Autumn and Winter) and the rebirth of nature (Spring and Summer). With the metaphorical reference to the duality of the two sisters in the poem, Plath indicates the shifting attitude toward women in society or the two sides of feminine identity.

'Winter Trees' describes the trees on a winter morning and compares them with the tribulations women undergo in society. She personified the winter trees with Leda in Greek myth who was raped by Zeus in the form of a swan. The poet's desire for freedom is evident in 'Ariel' which alludes to the legendary story of Lady Godiva who rode upon a horse around the whole town naked as a protest for excessive taxation on the people. The speaker

here wants to be a folk hero like Godiva, a symbol of freedom from patriarchy. Even in 'Gulliver' Plath retold the story of Jonathan Swift's popular novel to show the limitations and restrictions in the life of women. At the end of the poem, she added the popular European folktale 'seven league boots' that gives a person unbelievable speed of travelling seven leagues with one step. It actually refers to the poet's calls for the utilization of individual potential without any obstacles, especially for women.

Many of Plath's poems deal with the complex relationship between father and daughter. In personal life Plath was shocked after the death of her father and its effect can be seen in her poems especially in 'Electra on Azalea Path' Plath shows the effect of a father's death on a daughter. By referring to the daughter of Agamemnon in Greek mythology the poet here indirectly refers to the popular Freudian theory of Electra complex. This is also a confessional poem with many personal symbols and images. 'The Colossus' also shows the poet's grief over the death of her father represented through the broken statute of the Greek Sun-God Helios which is also known as the Colossus of Rhodes. Her sorrow has been expressed in this way:

I shall never get you put together entirely,  
Pieced, glued, and properly jointed. (Plath, 1989, p. 129)

In her personal life, Plath's father had a large impact on her like the giant statue of Colossus. The poem also metaphorically illustrates the condition of women and the unlimited responsibility they have to perform. The intensity of the father-daughter relationship is found in 'Maenad' where the poet considers herself as Maenad, the female follower of Bacchus in classical mythology. The poet laments for her dead father and represents him like the mythical sea god Neptune in 'Full Fathom Five' like this:

Miles long  
Extend the radial sheaves  
Of your spread hair, (Plath, 1989, p. 92)

In 'Daddy' Plath again shows the complex relationship with her father making constant reference to the Holocaust. The father figure is represented as a fascist and a Nazi from whom the poet struggles to get free. The poet also presented the image of her husband as a vampiric figure and found similarity with her father. The underlying fact is that the speaker of the poem has an internal Electra complex but at the same time she wants to get rid of the oppressive influence of men.

Motherhood, mother-child and mother-daughter relationships are the subject matter of many of her poems.

In these poems, she uses masculine and feminine mythological images. In 'You're' Plath celebrates motherhood and compares the position of her baby in the womb with Atlas, the giant in Greek mythology who carried the world on his shoulder:

Bent-backed Atlas, our travel prawn. (1989, p. 141)

The image of Atlas is also evident in the poem 'By Candlelight' where a mother compares the strength of her unborn baby with Atlas:

He is yours, the little brassy Atlas- (1989, p. 137)

'The Disquieting Muses' presents the muses, the inspirational goddesses in Greek mythology, as a dark force. The muses in the poem represent Plath's mother and the uncommunicative relationship between mother and daughter. In the poem 'Magi' Plath deals with her relationship with her daughter in a philosophical way. Although the title refers to the Biblical kings who visited the baby Jesus, Plath in this poem tries to find a divine solution to her personal problems. 'Heavy Women' represents the image of pregnant women as 'irrefutable, beautifully smug' comparing them with the goddess Venus. The poem also conveys the idea that the mother is rewarding as well as full of physical and mental sacrifice and suffering.

Plath was well aware of the contemporary world around her and saw the current events with the eyes of a critic. In some of her poems, she also expresses philosophic views on the question of existence. The poem 'Face Lift' has an allusion to the Roman god Jove whom she criticizes referring to the cosmetic surgery of women. On the other hand, in 'The Munich Mannequins' she compares the trees to Hydras, the many-headed monster in classical mythology:

Where the yew trees blow like hydras,

The tree of life and the tree of life (1989, p. 262)

The poem 'The Death of Myth-Making' refers to the novels of J.R.R. Tolkien which are full of myth and legends. Plath here indicates the difference between the real world and the effects of the mythical world books create in our mind.

The merging of the spiritual and material world has been shown in 'On the Plethora of Dryads' where the poet has the desire to see beyond the material world but is overwhelmed with the spiritual beauty of the tree and dryad. A dryad is a tree nymph or tree spirit in Greek mythology. The poem is more like a poetic inspiration the poet collects from the world around her. Referring to the story of King Midas and his golden touch, the poem 'In Midas' Country' shows that life is not always perfect like

gold. Yearning for golden perfection in life is a desire many want to fulfil.

In another of her famous poems, 'Crossing the Water', the theme of transition has been illustrated with the symbol of a boat and lake. The movements of the two travellers are like "travelling across river such as Styx (Warren, 2001, p. 41) in Greek mythology. Later they became "blinded", 'astounded' and struck dumb by the 'expressionless sirens'" (Warren, 2005, p. 41) like the Sirens, bird-like women in Homer's *Odyssey* who can lure sailors and cause death with their song. Moreover, the image of the 'snag' lifting its 'valedictory, pale hand' refers to the hand from the lake in Arthurian legend. The poem 'Lyonnesse' also refers to the imagined land and the Arthurian legend and of the lost glory.

Sylvia Plath suffered from untenable pressures in her personal life which caused depression and that led her to take her own life (Bassnett, 2005). Poetry was like a personal catharsis for her where she poured out all her anguished suppressed pains. In this respect, she fulfilled the psychological role of incorporating myths in her works. By using the images of myths and legends she formed a relationship between her psyche and the outer world. She used powerful female characters from myths and legends like Medusa, Medea etc. One such poem is 'Rival' where Plath shows a fully resentful attitude to her rival. She compares her rival to Medusa, a Gorgon monster in Greek myth who has snakes on her head instead of hair and her eyes can turn anything into stone who looks at them. In the poem both Medusa and the rival's manipulative and deceiving quality have been expressed in this way:

"Both of you are great light borrowers.

Her O-mouth grieves at the world; yours is unaffected,

And your first gift is making stone out of everything" (Plath, 1989, p. 166).

Medusa imagery is also apparent in another of her poems 'Medusa' where she compares jellyfish with the snake-covered head of Medusa because of its tentacles:

You steamed to me over the sea,

Fat and red, a placenta

Paralysing the kicking lovers. (Plath, 1989, p. 224)

The poem shows her personal relationship with her mother Aurelia Plath whom she compares with jellyfish and Medusa and becomes very critical regarding the behaviour of her mother to her as she wanted to exert influence on



the daughter's life with over-attention and possessive instinct.

The poem 'Lorelei' is about the German legend of Lorelei, the nymph of the Rhine river whose singing lured the boatmen to their destruction much like the Sirens in Homer's *Odyssey*. The poem shows Plath's fascination for death as the word Lorelei symbolizes death in the poem. In her personal life death was like an escape for her as she took several attempts at suicide before committing suicide in 1963.

Sometimes she included the image of a mythical hero to portray her personal anguish. 'Perseus: The Triumph of Wit Over Suffering' the poem named after the famous Greek hero, has several Greek mythological references. In the first stanza, the poet refers to Hercules, another great hero and relative of Perseus. Both had some similar traits- both were demigods and were born with a curse. The poem then refers to the ill-fated Trojan priest Laocoön, devoured with his sons by a sea serpent. The second stanza of the poem refers to how Perseus beheaded Medusa, the serpent-headed monster:

Not nails, and a mirror to keep the snaky head  
In safe perspective, could outface the gorgon-  
grimace  
Of human agony. (Plath, 1989, p. 83)

After chronicling the personal glory of the Greek hero Perseus Plath indirectly refers to the personal agony and her sufferings at the end of the poem.

The impact of human tragedy on people has been effectively shown in 'Aftermath'. Here Plath used the image of Medea in Greek mythology to show how onlookers reflect on someone else's calamity. The legend of Medea is also present in the poem 'Edge' where the poet indicates her impending death, a tragedy like Medea. 'The Eye-Mote' is also about a personal tragedy where the poet considers herself like the tragic hero Oedipus when she was struck by a splinter in the eye which hindered her view of the idyllic landscape and caused depression.

'Getting There' illustrates Plath's spiritual journey for rebirth and ends with the image of the river Lethe of the underworld in Greek myth. It is also known as the river of forgetfulness whose water the souls are made to drink to forget the memory of their past life. Plath here wants a psychic reborn much like those souls. Plath gives a depressive view of the landscape and its effect on the mind in the poem 'Wuthering Heights' by incorporating the imagery of the story of 'Red Riding Hood'. She used the symbol of sheep as a robust life force. The 'grandmotherly disguise' of the sheep indicates the idiom 'wolf in sheep's clothing' as well as the wolf in the folktale.

Apart from these, her interest in Norse Mythology is evident in poems like 'The Hermit at Outermost House'. Here she mentions "The great gods, Stone-Head, Claw-Foot" (1989, p. 118) indicating the Norse god Hrungrir who was made of stone. Also, the poem 'Battle-Scene' refers to the *Odyssey* and the story of Sindbad from the *Arabian Nights*.

## V. CONCLUSION

Sylvia Plath used symbols and imagery from mythology and legendary tales as symbols, metaphors and allegories. Unlike the notable modern poets, her appropriation of myth is more personalized and more intimate. Her personal motif and experience are merged with the mythical characters and images. It fulfils the social and psychological functions of literature. On the one hand, she showed the complex realities and her psychological condition and on the other hand, she materialized the individual purposes by portraying her psychological universe. The use of myths and legends has become a vehicle in her poems by which she illustrates her personal depression and anxiety, the condition of women in society, her relationship with her parents and her views on the contemporary world around her. In portraying the mythical characters and elements she adopted different personae like Medusa, Medea, Oedipus, Electra etc. She transformed her practical experiences and her inner self for artistic purposes. Ultimately, her objective behind the use of myths and legends complies with Eliot and Yeats' mythical method.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Baldick, C. (2001). *The concise Oxford dictionary of literary terms*. Oxford University Press.
- [2] Bassnett, S. (2005). *Sylvia Plath: An introduction to the poetry*. Palgrave.
- [3] Baym, N. (Ed.) (1998). *The Norton anthology of American literature* (5th ed., Vol. 2). W. W. Norton.
- [4] Campbell, J. (2004). *Pathways to bliss: Mythology and personal transformation*. New World Library.
- [5] Cassirer, E. (1955). *The philosophy of symbolic forms* (Vol. 2). Yale University Press.
- [6] Eliot, T. S. (2014). Ulysses, order, and myth. In A. Cuda & R. Schuchard (Eds.), *The complete prose of T. S. Eliot* (Vol. 2, pp. 476-479). John Hopkins University Press.
- [7] Frye, N. (1973). *Anatomy of criticism*. Princeton University Press.
- [8] Lovely. (2019). The relationship between mythology and literature. *Journal of Advances and Scholarly Researches in Allied Education*, 16(4), 1149-1155. <http://ignited.in/I/a/210981>
- [9] Lowell, R. (1965). Foreword. In S. Plath, *Ariel* (pp. vii-ix). Harper & Row.

- [10] Mambrol, N. (2016, March 21). Myth criticism of Northrop Frye. *Literary Theory and Criticism*. <https://literariness.org/2016/03/21/myth-criticism-of-northrop-frye/>
- [11] Mambrol, N. (2016, March 24). Modernist use of myth. *Literary Theory and Criticism*. <https://literariness.org/2016/03/24/modernist-use-of-myth/>
- [12] Matthiessen, F.O. (1963). *The achievements of T.S. Eliot*. Galaxy Book.
- [13] Merivale, P. (1969). *Pan the goat-God: His myth in modern times*. Harvard University Press.
- [14] Plath, S. (1989). *Sylvia Plath: Collected poems* (T. Hughes, Ed.). Faber and Faber.
- [15] Reeves, C. E. (1997). Myth theory and criticism. *The John Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*. <https://www.ndsu.edu/pubweb/~cinichol/271/Myth%20Theory%20and%20Criticism.htm>
- [16] Segal, R. A. (2004). *Myth: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- [17] Tanabe R. (2022, November 2). Mythology. *New World Encyclopedia*.  
<<https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/p/index.php?title=Mythology&oldid=1015646>>.
- [18] Warren, R. (2005). *Sylvia Plath: Selected poems*. York Press.
- [19] Weathers, W. (1973). Mythology in modern literature. *The D.H. Lawrence Review*, 6(2), 201-213. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/44233424.pdf>
- [20] White, J. (1971). *Mythology in the modern novels*. Princeton University Press.
- [21] Williamson, G. (1968). *A reader's guide to T. S. Eliot*. Thames and Hudson.
- [22] Workman, M. E. (1981). The role of mythology in modern literature. *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, 18(1), 35-48. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3814186>



# Pessimism in the selected poems of Thomas Hardy

Asiyah Zafar

Department of English, Patna Womens College, Patna, India

Received: 18 Jun 2023; Received in revised form: 12 Aug 2023; Accepted: 22 Aug 2023; Available online: 31 Aug 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— *The recurrent thought that good or positive will subdue and evil as well as negative will aggravate is known as pessimism. Thomas Hardy was trained as an architect but is famous as a poet and novelist of the Victorian Era (1837–1901). His view of life is mainly centred around this tendency. He has a different outlook towards life. He primarily focuses on the exposition of sufferings as his themes reflect. His main concern is to exhibit things in a miserable and pathetic state. He lost hope in life and thinks that the human condition will not improve. In his poems, death is not an escape from the weariness of life. This paper attempts to examine his pessimistic tendency by taking his few poems. His poems contain themes like death, loneliness, love and loss, war and its aftermath etc. Hardy's events of life also find space in his poems and play a very significant role in his pessimistic outlook. And especially the death of Emma shook him from the inside. He began his poetic career in 1898 with the publication of Wessex poems. Its setting is in the desolate and bleak landscape of Dorset. Until 1928, his death, he published eight volumes of poetry. He faces several bleak and pathetic conditions in his life like the Napoleonic Wars, World War, his near-death experience and most importantly death of Emma all contribute to his melancholic tone. The Victorian dilemma also touched his personality. However, his later poems exhibit a shift in his tone from melancholic to hopeful. In this article researcher has explored the pessimistic temperament in the selected poems of Thomas Hardy.*



**Keywords**— *Pessimism, Miserable, Deplorable, Weariness, Wessex, Melancholic, Dilemma, Optimistic.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Pessimism is the attitude that mainly focuses on negative outcomes. Nothing will be achieved desirably. The word pessimism has its origin in the Latin word 'pessimus' meaning 'worst'. A person with a pessimistic view always extracts negativity. Think of a glass half filled with water, a person with a pessimistic tendency finds it half empty. Here the meaning or purpose of life is somewhere missing. The main focus lies on the flaws, weaknesses, wrongs, and dark side rather than strengths. Furthermore, the primary assumption is that all positive or good things will not survive. Generally, pessimists have a negative and skeptical outlook, they question the validity of positive outcomes. Almost all these features are reflected in Hardy's several poems and novels.

Thomas Hardy (02 June 1840 – 11 January 1928 ) well known English novelist and poet belongs to the Victorian era (1837-1901). His style of writing is very unique. He attracts his audience through his different outlook towards

life. His peculiar view towards life discovers the sufferings of human beings. His work exhibits the influence of contemporary society. The Victorian age goes through various negative changes like the rise of poverty, child labour, and prostitution but at the same time there were several positive changes in terms of social and political development, we witness economic progress, industrialization, stable government, urbanization, and advancement in science and technology. But when we look into his poems we find deep depictions of the darker side of society. It is not bad to depict society realistically but always focusing on the negative side brings the impression that one is a pessimist. His realism is different and he believes that social evil cannot be erased from society and the human condition is getting worse day by day. His themes are centred around death, love and loss, inhuman ironies of war, ravages of time etc. Death is not an escape in his poems. His works like "Ah, Are You Digging on My

Grave?", "Channel Firing", "Neutral Tone", and "Darkling Thrush", all focus on pessimism and evoke pathos.

### Objectives of the Study:

This research paper intends to explore pessimism in Thomas Hardy's selected poems, its origin, whether his selected poems reflect any hope and how he is a different realist. He is undoubtedly realistic but there is a lamenting tone that presents him partially accepting the situation and partially engrossed in it. There is a wide difference between pessimism and realism. Realism is the practice of accepting the truth with the intent of working on it to improve the situation. A person with a realistic attitude cannot conclude good or worse. He or she projects it as it is.

### Research Questions

- 1- What is the reason behind Thomas Hardy's pessimism?
- 2- How is Thomas Hardy different from a realist?
- 3- Do Thomas Hardy's selected poems reflect any hope?

### Methodology:

For the proposed research paper, an exploratory design is followed. The qualitative research methodology has been used. When it comes to research, then Data plays an important role, it is mainly of two types: Primary Data and Secondary Data. In this research, the original text of the poem serves as primary data through which the elements of pessimism have been analyzed. Further, the articles of other litterateurs on Thomas Hardy available in journals and encyclopedias serve as secondary data.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Pessimism is the tendency to emphasize the darker side. Thomas Hardy is considered a pessimist as he always painted the dark, brutish version of life. Undoubtedly, there has been quite a lot of work on it, not only in areas of his poetry but also in his novels. Many critics and researchers felt that his pessimism has a deep root in his upbringing, deprived state of his life, relationship with two women; his cousin Tryphena Sparks and his first wife Emma Lavinia.

Gifford played an important role in the construction of the plot lines of his several novels. But others felt that his pessimism arises due to the age in which he flourishes and many find him realistic as well. In recent years a lot of study has been done on the modernist element in his poetry as well.

Thomas Hardy did not have a pleasurable and smooth life since childhood. He was born out of wedlock. His parents were married six months before his birth. And at the time of his birth, he was declared dead and about to be disposed of. According to Gibson, his faint cry made nurses realize he

was alive (1). At the very outset of his life, he experienced a near-death situation and the possible recounting of this incident by his mother instilled in him a different outlook towards life, especially a fascination for death, gloom and pessimism.

Hardy is a person who believes in myth, his work also contained biblical allusions. He depicts human beings in miserable and deplorable conditions. But he did not suggest any solution for it. He believes that person himself is responsible for his action and he also loses his faith under the influence of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species*. Every aspect of his world is painted with hopelessness, darkness and horror. Faith in religion is also not working for people. But in the latter half of his life, he gradually turned towards religion and shed his pessimistic tendency.

### Limitations

In modern times searching for data and resources is no longer complex. People can easily search it on the internet and several hardcopies are also easily available. In the present study the researcher has relied mainly on the reliable web sources which have been mentioned in the reference section.

### Significance of the study:

This research paper will help the readers to comprehend Thomas Hardy's sources of pessimism through his selected poems. They will also realize the traces of hope in his poems and how he views life differently.

## III. ANALYSIS

### Channel Firing

Thomas Hardy wrote this poem in 1914 shortly before World War 1. This poem is bleak and melancholic in the sense that it deals with war, bloodshed, mass slaughter and violence. Here it signifies that in Hardy's poem, death is not an escape because the speaker of this poem is one among the dead. Corpses disturbed by the gunnery practices awoke from their graves and felt that judgement day arises. Skeleton mourns that nothing has changed, the world remains the same as it was during their lifetime. Not only corpses but insects seem frightened. Here Hardy raised a dead person to spread a positive message. Human issues are unsolvable because they are not interested in solving them. Thomas Hardy is lamenting that this world is addicted to bloodshed, and violence by using the word "indifferent". This poem also signifies the loss of religious beliefs among the people. These people are not paying any heed to their God. These people are not transforming the nation on positive terms. This poem reflects a little bit of hope as people get enough time to improve upon their situation. Again in this poem, he paints the whole world with



pessimistic shade, grim, dark, and loses its hope. Everything is hit by chaos, violence, and disturbances. Humans are more inclined towards materialistic life. This greedy nature drags them into a competitive world. Humanity is erased and humans become more and more selfish, and self-centered day by day. Here again, the poet loses his interest in the world and its inhabitants. This poem is realistic as it paints the real situation of loss and chaos as usually happened during wartime. But the tone as well as the mood of Hardy seems pessimistic as he concludes that human problems are unsolvable and nothing much contributes to changing the scenario.

### **Ah, Are You Digging on My Grave?**

Thomas Hardy first published this poem in September 1913, in *Saturday Review*. Hardy again in this poem, like *Channel Firing*, presents the surprising idea that the dead can hear others. His vision towards the dead is different. Skeleton seems buried deep inside the Earth but feelings and emotions are still alive. In both cases, the carcass is disturbed by the living people. The selfish and self-centered nature of human beings is revealed in this poem as well. Corpse kept guessing the visitor's identity but she failed to reach the correct conclusion. Hardy through this poem presents the dark reality that living humans don't bother about dead people. A dead woman thinks that her loved ones, family, and relatives, will remain forever faithful towards her. But this is her illusion, in reality, they have forgotten her earlier. Her husband went for a second marriage and thinks that she will not get hurt by this. Then she thinks about her relatives, who believe that there's no use visiting a corpse with flowers, this will surely increase their sorrow and doesn't bring the skeleton back to life. The loneliness of this corpse is emphasized by the poet and she is desperate for companionship. Even though the dog is self-centred, he, like humans, forgets about the owner's grave. The dog is usually perceived as a generous creature but in Hardy's world, he lost his generosity. Distrust in human beings is deeply embedded in this poem.

### **Neutral Tones**

Written by Thomas Hardy in the year 1867 but published in 1898 as a part of his collection of poems named "Wessex Poems and Other Verses". The poem revolves around the theme of loss, disappointment in love and the pain evoked after the heartbreak which ultimately led to psychological trauma. The tone and atmosphere are bleak, melancholic, and depressing. He chose the winter season, which is famous for dryness and life seems to have stopped in this season. Winter is not the season for growth. Winter here also signifies coldness in their relationship. After getting cheated on in his love life he provides readers with a complete altercation regarding his perception of the world.

He mentions in the poem that, on that particular day when he and his lady love realizes their grim relationship, everything like the sun looks to fade as getting scolded by God, losing its warmth, leaves turned grey, land lacks fertility. All contribute to his misery and unhappiness. He describes nature in lifelessness, decaying, uneasy and unpleasant form. The few words left between them signify their loneliness and they don't like each other's company. Due to the loss of a relationship he compares his beloved 's smile with death, bitterness, and threatening. A smile makes you feel at ease, releasing all your tension but his view regarding smiling is very different. Several negative words he employed in this poem are chidden, starving, grey, tedious, lost, dearest, bitterness, threatening, deceives, and wrong. Unlike the optimistic person who decides to start a fresh life after getting cheated on in their love life, the speaker of this poem seems not to have overcome his past relationship. His voice exhibits that he is in deep regret at the same time filled with bitterness. Thomas Hardy is hopeless about his situation and thinks that there is no way to beat this situation. And after this experience, he realizes that love is meant to deceive others.

### **Darkling Thrush**

Hardy wrote this poem on the eve of the new century, first published in 1900 in his collection entitled *The Graphic*. The word darkling in the title signifies dusk, lightless. Hardy here again chooses the winter landscape, an extended metaphor for the deprived, deplete and decaying state of Western culture. The extensive use of machinery and the advancement of science and technology transformed the whole scenario. It has not only an immeasurable effect on people but also disturbed nature. Due to the industrial revolution, people lost their interest in nature which ultimately draws people away from God. And as they are turned away from skepticism, uncertainty, doubt, hopelessness, and gloominess invade their path. Western culture seemed to have died, damaged without suggesting any hope regarding its possibility of rebirth. Due to winter life seems lifeless, cheerless, dull and barren. Amid this harsh climate, he is alone standing in the woods. His loneliness and isolation are visible in this poem which is the main cause of his pessimism. "Weakening eye of the day" refers to the sun with less warmth, people must have lost companions. "Tangled-bine stems" refers to intermingling, an intermix of several problems, exhibiting a disturbed state. Then he presents lawlessness, chaos, disturbances and absence of joy with the word broken lyres. In this poem again he sees nature and paints it with bleakness, dismal, dreary and gloomy. He compares land with the corpse, wind lamenting death songs and every aspect of life and growth seemed to have stopped. Gloominess reached the height when he says people lost their passion, describing

uncertainty regarding their future. He says in the poem that people are residing inside their houses enjoying warmth; this mainly signifies two things. First, people are not paying attention to God's word. They are completely submerged in their life and forgets about God's lessons. The second thing is that the poet himself may be disturbed in his personal life for some personal reason, due to which he paints everything dull, dark, gloomy and lifeless. This point is valid to the extent that he failed to understand the hope reflected in the thrush's voice. Instead of looking deep into its voice, he begins stressing its bleak appearance. Thrush is old and weak, and its feathers are in a disfigured state. Representing people that hope is still alive in him even after facing a lot of traumas. Hardy presents thrush in a deplorable state because he has meagre hope regarding the Western culture and the transformation of people. "I was unaware", in the last line of the poem demonstrates that Hardy lost hope regarding the betterment of the situation. He is unable to trace any hope.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

From the above analysis, the first conclusion is that his work exhibits penetrating insight into Victorian England. The Victorian dilemma finds an extensive place in his writings. People's separation from God, the decline in faith, and the loss of spiritual significance give rise to cruelty, deception, uncertainty, and hopelessness among the people. This is the major cause of his pessimistic attitude.

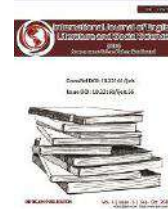
The second conclusion is that he looks at things from a different perspective. Corpses get a voice in his poems. The way he paints nature is bleak, dreary and gloomy, reflecting his different vision. His selection of themes like loss, pain and helplessness in all his poems revolves around more or less these ideas. Winter season serves as a background in almost all his poems. He picks all those aspects that best complement his perspective. The central message that human problems are unsolvable is quite disturbing for the readers and reflects him as a different realist.

The third conclusion is that slight hope is reflected in Channel Firing as people get time to improve upon their behaviour. Then in Darkling Thrush, he hopes for a golden future which reflects his gradual shift towards hope.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Gibson, James, Thomas Hardy: Literary Life, London: Macmillan, 1996.

- [2] Adik, Manisha: Optimism and Pessimism in Thomas Writings of Hardy's - Ignited Minds Journals, [ignited.in/I/a/306415](https://www.ignited.in/I/a/306415). Accessed 7 Apr. 2023.
- [3] Ali Ibrahim, Amal Mohammed: (PDF) Pessimism Feature Is Reflected in One of Thomas Hardy's Poems "ah ...", [www.researchgate.net/publication/365203527\\_Pessimism\\_Feature\\_is\\_Reflected\\_in\\_One\\_of\\_Thomas\\_Hardy%27s\\_Poems\\_Ah\\_Are\\_You\\_Digging\\_on\\_My\\_Grave\\_As\\_One\\_of\\_the\\_Features\\_o\\_Modernism](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/365203527_Pessimism_Feature_is_Reflected_in_One_of_Thomas_Hardy%27s_Poems_Ah_Are_You_Digging_on_My_Grave_As_One_of_the_Features_o_Modernism). Accessed 29 Mar. 2023.
- [4] Hardy, Thomas: "Ah, Are You Digging on My Grave," [www.victorianweb.org/authors/hardy/poems/digging.html](https://www.victorianweb.org/authors/hardy/poems/digging.html). Accessed 2 May 2023.
- [5] Hardy, Thomas. "Channel Firing by Thomas Hardy." Poetry Foundation, [www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46544/channel-firing](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46544/channel-firing). Accessed 9 Apr. 2023.
- [6] Hardy, Thomas. "The Darkling Thrush by Thomas Hardy." Poetry Foundation, [www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44325/the-darkling-thrush](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44325/the-darkling-thrush). Accessed 22 Apr. 2023.
- [7] Hardy, Thomas. "Neutral Tones by Thomas Hardy." Poetry Foundation, [www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/50364/neutral-tones](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/50364/neutral-tones). Accessed 14 Apr. 2023.
- [8] Thomas Hardy. Poetry Foundation, Poetry Foundation, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/thomas-hardy>. Accessed on 19 February 2023.
- [9] LaLuna, Greg: "Thomas Hardy." British Literature Wiki, [sites.udel.edu/britlitwiki/thomas-hardy/](https://sites.udel.edu/britlitwiki/thomas-hardy/). Accessed 8 May 2023.
- [10] Millgate, Michael: "Thomas Hardy". Encyclopedia Britannica, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 7 Jan. 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Thomas-Hardy>. Accessed on 17 February 2023.
- [11] Scott, Elizabeth: Is It Safer to Be a Pessimist? Verywell Mind <https://www.verywellmind.com/is-it-safer-to-be-a-pessimist-3144874#:~:text=Signs%20of%20Pessimism,-How%20can%20you&text=You%20feel%20surprised%20when%20things,almost%20always%20outweigh%20the%20benefits>. Accessed June 17, 2023
- [12] Steinbach, Sussie: "Victorian Era". Encyclopedia Britannica, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 5 Jan. 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Victorian-era>. Accessed on 20 February 2023.



# Literary Reception of Kalidas in Mohan Rakesh's 'Ashadh Ka Ek Din'

Mayank Agarwal

Department of Cultural Studies, The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, India

Received: 07 Jul 2023; Received in revised form: 10 Aug 2023; Accepted: 20 Aug 2023; Available online: 31 Aug 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— The paper uses Hans Robert Jauss' reception theory to trace the literary relation between Kalidas' *Abhijnanashakuntalam* with Mohan Rakesh's *Ashadh Ka Ek Din*. It analyses the reception of Kalidas' works and legacy in Rakesh's play and draws out the implications of this literary reception. It points to the rewriting of the common trope of love, remembrance and forgetting by Rakesh that subtends artistic creation itself. This rewriting amounts to a critical reading of Kalidas by Mohan Rakesh and underscores his own views on modernity and tradition. The paper shows that his approach transcends the binary—that either reveres tradition or rejects it— instead, proposing a critical rereading of tradition that makes it productive and alive again. Through tracing the diachronic and synchronic reception, the paper draws out the aesthetic experience of Mohan Rakesh's play by situating it in the horizon of expectations of its time and its historical relevance.



**Keywords**— Kalidas, Mohan Rakesh, literary reception, tradition, modernity

This paper sheds light on the rewriting of the figure of Kalidas by Mohan Rakesh in his play, *Ashadh Ka Ek Din*. Implicated in this rewriting is the emergence of a newer horizon of expectation for the relation of modernity and tradition. This paper shows how Rakesh's play attempts to reconceptualize this relation from being steeped in antagonistic binaries to that of creative productivity. In order to bring out the productive capacity of Mohan Rakesh's *Ashadh Ka Ek Din* in setting a new horizon of expectation for Kalidas' works as well as tradition, Hans Robert Jauss' theory of literary history and reception will be utilised. This will be done through reading Mohan Rakesh's play, *Ashadh Ka Ek Din*, in its literary relation to Kalidas's play, *Abhijnanashakuntalam* wherein a discussion of common elements between both works would be the focus.

Jauss talks about the notion of "aesthetic distance" by which we can determine the artistic nature of the literary work by reconstructing the horizon of expectation of the audience. He defines it as:

the distance between the given horizon of expectations and the appearance of a new

work, whose reception results in a "horizon change" because it negates a familiar experience or articulates an experience for the first time. (Jauss 14)

It is through this horizon change that the analysis of literary effect can be contextualised in its historical dimension. In simple words, the way the text was constructed, keeping in mind a certain horizon of expectation, and the way that the audience reacts to that new work leading to the horizon change helps us establish the historical experience via the aesthetics of its reception. This horizon change leads to a progressive understanding of the tradition. The "tradition" is made to live again by its mediation in the productive moment of the new work. To understand the historical relevance of this, Jauss proposes three ways (23):

1. Diachronically in the relationship of literary works based upon reception
2. Synchronically within the frame of reference of literature of the same period as well as in the sequence of such frames of reference

### 3. The relationship of the immanent literary development to the general process of history

I will try to contextualise each of these through the example of Mohan Rakesh's play, *Ashadh Ka Ek Din* as it dialogues with Kalidas and specifically a certain trope from *Abhijnanashakuntalam* that Rakesh critically rewrites. Also of the essence is the fact that these three ways are not necessarily exclusive but interrelated. Thus, the discussion of one would necessarily shed light as well as gain from the other.

In dealing with diachronic reception, it is imperative for us to keep in mind the concept of aesthetic distance mentioned above. It has to do with how the reader of that day viewed and understood the work. This means contending with the "questions" that the literary text is "answering" and the unacceptance of that answer due to a certain horizon of expectation of the audience and the resulting horizon change. In a sense, this follows the principle of literary evolution of the formalists but situates the aesthetic at the level of historical experience. Also, literary evolution despite its name is not concerned with any teleology but rather newness which Jauss, going beyond the formalists, considers not just as an aesthetic category but as a historical one. In understanding this newness as a historical category, the questions that need to be kept in mind include— "which historical forces make the literary work new; to what degree this newness is recognizable in the historical moment of its appearance; what distance, route or circumlocution of understanding were required for its full realisation; whether the moment of this realisation was so effective that it could change the perspective of the old and thereby the canonization of the literary past" (Jauss 27).

In order to understand the question in the context of Mohan Rakesh's play, we need to pay attention to the newness and to the question to which this newness was the answer. Rakesh's play takes the figure of the Sanskrit playwright Kalidas as well as his process of creation and creates a complex image of it in his fictionalised narrative. This narrative clearly borrows from that of Kalidas's own plays in general and *Abhijnanashakuntalam* in particular. Although the title of Rakesh's play is borrowed from a line from one of the lyric poems by Kalidas, *Meghdootam*, the plot starkly resonates with that of *Abhijnanashakuntalam*. Kalidas's play was adapted from an episode of the epic *Mahabharata* but had made an important alteration to it. Where in the epic, the king had not forgotten Shakuntala but acted like he did until a divine voice confirmed that the son Shakuntala was carrying, was actually his own; in Kalidas's version, it is sage Durvasa's curse upon Shakuntala that makes the king forget her. While there are various critiques

and interpretations of this alteration by Kalidas— Tagore and Thapar being the prominent ones— our focus would only be on those aspects which pertain to Rakesh's rewriting of this trope. The trope is that of the romantic hero, first enamoured by the heroine, then forgetting and forsaking her, and then remembering her again, and getting united. Romilla Thapar in her commentary on Kalidas's play points out how sage Durvasa's curse introduced by Kalidas absolves the male protagonist of the guilt and responsibility of forsaking his lover. It is this absolution that Rakesh takes away in his play. However, it is not limited to that. Kalidas's play while dealing with themes of courtly life of conceit and aggression in contrast to the simple life of nature or city against village, is also and much more significantly about love and the implication of forgetting and remembering for love. The play, after all, is titled *Abhijnanashakuntalam* meaning 'The Recognition of Shakuntala.' Various elements in the play function to fix remembrances of love— the king's ring, the painting of Shakuntala, etc. makes the act of love entangled with the objects of remembrance that serves not just the purpose of memory but also crucially, identity. It is this intermixing of love, memory and identity and the manifestation of these relations into objects of remembrance that gets newly framed in Rakesh's play. This can be seen through the fact that the manuscripts of Kalidas's plays themselves become the objects of remembrance and love through which Kalidas inscribes Mallika's memory, as well as his love for her, in his writing and Mallika fills the void of Kalidas's presence through religiously reading his plays.

By now we can establish the "problem" (in Jauss' terms) that Rakesh is answering and raising further questions on is that of forgetting and remembering— of memory, of love and identity. However, by making Kalidas the protagonist of the play, he is also attaching these questions to the question of artistic creation as well as of modernity's relation to tradition. These are the historical forces that animate the world of Rakesh— it is a world defined through binarical approaches that either tend towards a revivalist urge that denies modernity or that of accepting modernity blindly. Rakesh through his play breaks apart with both approaches. While sustaining the various oppositional themes from Kalidas's play, Rakesh makes various important changes. One is obviously of the artist. Kalidas takes the place of the noble and where in Kalidas's *Abhijnanashakuntalam*, the king is the deer hunter in the beginning; Kalidas (in Rakesh's play) is the deer saviour (saving it, in fact, from the courtly official himself who had come to offer Kalidas a position at court). Yet the most crucial change is in the perspective of the play— we see the whole trope of love, forgetting and remembering as it plays out for Mallika, Kalidas's lover,



rather than Kalidas. There is no curse to absolve the male protagonist— Kalidas— in Rakesh's play either, therefore, he is not absolved from the guilt and responsibility of abandonment. It is in this recontextualization of the effects of forgetting and remembering of love that we see the new figure of Kalidas. While Mallika sustains the fantasy of the romantic hero just as the plot of Kalidas's play makes the audience sustain it, we see the decrepitude that surrounds Mallika as a bleak contrast to the fantasy sustained by Kalidas's plays, the audience and Mallika herself too. In fact, Mallika throughout the play deals with her forsakenness as well as her distance from Kalidas by somehow getting hold of Kalidas's 'great' poetic creations. She reads them avidly and they serve as her connection to the memory of Kalidas (or more accurately, Kalidas of her imagination). The play then offers a counter-reading of Kalidas's plays in itself. As Kalidas confesses that the source of all his poetic creations was the experience of love that he had with Mallika before he left for court, we see how the turning of this forgetting and remembering and the accompanying pain into the beautiful poetic creations hides the emotional violence of its experience. Crucially, we see this not through the life of the 'successful' artist but through the suffering of his 'object' of love and poetry. Rakesh's play complicates not just the process of creation in this way but also complicates the relation of love, memory and identity through the object of remembrance. Kalidas's 'plays' in Rakesh's play serve as such objects in which not just the memory of Kalidas and Mallika's love is inscribed but also for both of them, they serve as a means of fixing each other's identity through the transfixed memory. Where Mallika sustains her memory of Kalidas as the romantic hero as well as the great poet, Kalidas too sustains the memory of the village, of Mallika's house and of Mallika's identity bound in the memory of his love. It is as if he is unable to realise the bearing of time, the passing of the life of Mallika. As the play ends, there is no union precisely because of this disjuncture. There is remembering and recognition but no union because Rakesh foregrounds the futility of recognition that is stuck with the memory that is already past and the inability to accept the changed identity in the present while imagining a future based on an idealised past made atemporal. Kalidas confesses all his guilt, and his angst yet remains stuck in the fallacy I mentioned above. While he changed so much and much for the worse, he imagines Mallika to be living in an atemporal world. He is taken aback by the decrepitude fallen on Mallika's house. He recognizes the pain he has caused Mallika yet is unable to imagine Mallika's life having moved ahead without him while his own had done the same without Mallika. As he hopes to reproduce that experience of love, to go back to their union again, he hears a baby cry in the back, and

unable to accept but forced to, he realises Mallika has married and has a family. He realises that time does not wait and that what is gone cannot be revived.

It was in this portrayal of Kalidas that the aesthetic distance manifested itself. Writing in his diary on 29 September 1959, a year after having published his play, Rakesh mentions:

Now the play producers are running down the play precisely on the basis that Babu Sampurnanand in Lucknow denied staging the play because he had been told Kalidas is shown in an inferior light in the play. (Rakesh 106, *English translation mine*)

The futility of recognition, that I describe above, not just critically reconceptualises and questions the relation of love, memory and identity, of objects of remembrance, of the process of creation, of the undermining of the experiential in the poetic; but also the relation of modernity with tradition. In contrast to the reverent frame of reference that others at the time put Kalidas in, Rakesh was interested in a much more critical reading of 'Kalidas' and by extension, of tradition too. It was in this critical reading itself that Rakesh defined tradition for himself, not in revival or denial but in creative remediation.

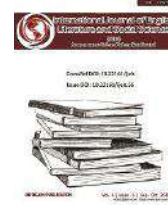
This kind of relation with tradition for Rakesh then was already modern because, unlike the revivalist reverence, it had the possibility of redefinition by way of question, negation or recreation. While the above points to the synchronic frame of reference, the third thing that Jauss focuses on— the relationship of the immanent literary development to the general process of history— can be read in the horizon change in relation to tradition that Rakesh's play brings about. For him, this also serves as the basis for imagining literature in relation to history. As he puts it:

History collects facts and presents them in temporal sequence. This has never been the aim of literature. Nor does literature aspire to fill in the blank spaces of history. Literature is not bound by the time of history, it enlarges the span of history in time; it does not separate one era from another, but joins many eras close together. In this way, the 'today' and 'yesterday' of history do not remain the same for literature. They somehow become such conjoined moments in the limitlessness of time that they are inseparable in view of indicating a direction for life. (as qtd. in Sawhney 310)

While history's task was of reality, literature for Rakesh, as did tradition, concerns itself with possibility. Therefore, we see the place of the literary work in literary history and tradition can be better understood as an 'event' than an inevitable fact written in most of the positivistic accounts of literary history. By putting a logic of inevitability to the literary work, most positivistic accounts prescribe cause and effects which discount the productive capacity of the literary event. In contrast, focussing on its productive capacity, the fecundity of its experience allows us to understand the historical significance of a literary text. This is done by tracing the history of its receptions i.e. through a process of "continuous horizon setting and horizon changing" that determines the successive literary experiences of a text from the point of its creation by the writer (Jauss 13). This paper has attempted to illustrate this by reading the figure of Kalidas through Mohan Rakesh's *Ashadh Ka Ek Din* with all the questions that it raises and some of the answers that it provides.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Jauss, Hans Robert. "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory\*." *New Directions in Literary History*, Routledge, 2022, pp. 11–41, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9781003247937-2>. Accessed 11 Oct. 2022.
- [2] Rakesh, Mohan, and Nemicandra Jaina. मोहन राकेश के संपूर्ण नाटक: सभी नाटकों के पूरे स्क्रिप्ट-भूमिका सहित, निर्देशकों, समीक्षकों एवं कलाकारों के आलेख तथा संपादकीय भूमिका. Rajpal & Sons, 1993.
- [3] Sawhney, Simona. "Who Is Kalidasa? Sanskrit Poetry in Modern India." *Postcolonial Studies*, vol. 7, no. 3, Nov. 2004, pp. 295–312, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1368879042000311098>.
- [4] Thapar, Romila. *Sakuntala: Texts, Readings, Histories*. Columbia University Press, 2011.



# Stoicism: Portrayal of Women in *Khamosh Pani*, *Pinjar* and *Eho Hamara Jeevna*

Randeep Kaur<sup>1</sup>, Mahesh Arora<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar (English), Department of M&H, Sant Longowal Institute of Engineering & Technology, (Deemed University under MHRD, Govt. of India), Longowal, Distt. Sangrur, Punjab, India

<sup>2</sup>Professor, Department of M&H, Sant Longowal Institute of Engineering & Technology, (Deemed University under MHRD, Govt. of India), Longowal, Distt. Sangrur, Punjab, India

Received: 09 Jul 2023; Received in revised form: 14 Aug 2023; Accepted: 23 Aug 2023; Available online: 31 Aug 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— Women bodies are the victim of sheer oppression and violence due to their vulnerable status since time immemorial. Instances of rape, murder, abduction, honour killing, and domestic violence are quite common in the case of women even in the contemporary world. They were the principal victims of the communal violence at the time of partition as well. They were murdered and humiliated before their loved ones; abducted and forcefully married after conversion or even sold out like inanimate entities. To avert the worst, copious of them committed suicide or others were killed by their family members for the sake of honour. The plight of these misfortunate women has been depicted by many writers very often through their works and even by cinema industries. The present paper tries to explore the fate of these wretched women which have been depicted on the silver screen in *Khamosh Pani* (Silent Waters), *Pinjar* (The Skeleton) and *Eho Hamara Jeevna* (Such is Her Fate). Women characters in these movies are trapped in a quagmire of hideous social evils, inflicted upon them by society, which has left them with nothing but trauma, violence, suffering, identity crises, atrocities and so on. All these women are Sikh women, who are swirling in the gyre of 'in-betweenness' due to their past traumas and the kind of life they are living right now. Keeping aside their emotions, these women do not lose their self-control and always try to strike a balance to live a harmonious life even after such atrocities. Their stoic personalities have encouraged them to undergo the sufferings inflicted upon them but their soul is completely torn due to these inhuman atrocities.



**Keywords**— Discrimination, identity, oppression, partition, Stoicism

Identity, in simple terms, may be identified as the distinguishing character or personality of an individual including the relation established by psychological identification, the condition of being the same with something described or asserted and the sameness of essential or generic character in different instances. Such an uncomplicated description really suits the portrayal of women in *Khamosh Pani* (Silent Waters), *Pinjar* (The Skeleton) and *Eho Hamara Jeevna* (Such is Her Fate) which present women from Punjab in different yet identical radiance. Perrier says precisely in the opening lines of his editorial work, *From Fiction to Film*, "The study of literature casts light on the meanings in the film and the study of the film can illuminate the full value of the

literature." Films being reflection of the society. Ali in the Preface of her book *Literary Adaptations from Page to Screen* (A Study in Films) states, "Literature and films are art forms designed to empower each other owing to their own attributes...Film is, therefore, a more direct sensory experience than reading-besides verbal language, there is also colour, movement, sound and visual images that stimulate our perceptions directly, while written words can do this indirectly". Malik highlights this aspect of female narratives in her book *Partition and Indian English Novelists* when she states, "Though women were very much a part of millions who witnessed Partition, they seldom figure as the 'subject'. A study of the works/movies

is presented in this paper which shows women in trouble in a stoic light.

First of the lot *Khamosh Pani*, the movie by Sabiha Sumer is an eye-opening story of a mother who had been hiding her identity since partition, but due to certain circumstances, her religious identity is exposed that results in her suicide finally. Partition of the Indian nation in 1947, one of the most tragic events in the history of South Asia, was followed by massive migrations and bloody ethnic cleansing that the world had ever witnessed. While the two countries were celebrating their newly-acquired independence, it was a cause for anguish, regrets and remorse for a large number of people across the two borders. Literature mapped the emotions and sufferings of people and it was considered the only means of exposing societal nuisances owing to circumstances of fear, brutal politics and which, now gradually is being replaced by all other mediums like the stage and silver screen. It is a fact that demonstrating the identity and stoicism of women in turbulent times has been a great challenge to both writers and directors for the reasons naturally associated with some vicious and indescribable events. Murdering of women in the name of honour even by their own families and forced suicides to protect their 'sanctity' and 'purity' or face exploitation as a choice became the norm. Suffering and religio-gender-centric violence that the women had to undergo in the aftermath of partition, has been vividly depicted through theatrical adaptations.

*Khamosh Pani* (2003) presents the traumatic life of Ayesha (Kirron Kher), a Sikh girl abducted during partition and married to a Muslim, confronting her Sikh and Muslim identity. The movie is set in 1979 Pakistan when the country sees a visible transition to Islamic fundamentalism under General Zia-ul-Huq. Ayesha, a widow, lives in Charki village with her son Saleem (Aameer Mallik). The story is about the trauma inflicted from the early part of her life which still haunts her. The inclination of her son Saleem to Islamic fundamentalism hurts her but she refrains from interfering in his political ideology. Her Sikh brother comes to the village as a pilgrim and finds her. He wants her to meet their dying father. This reveals her religious identity before her son. Her son disowns her and finally, she commits suicide by jumping into the well. It is of note that the image haunting all her life is the image of a well. She does not go to the well to fetch water. Her voice narrates the story of partition, the abduction of women and the father killing his daughters for the simple reason that the act would save them from the perpetual trauma of their tumultuous life. Later on, we realize through another flashback scene that her father has forced the ladies of her family to commit suicide but she ran away from the place. Her suicide which

she earlier evaded in a sarcastic manner, expresses existential limits that there is no escape from fate.

*Khamosh Pani* is an example of women facing violence by their own families and communities during the partition. Much in line with the women of Mewar who committed the ghastly act of "Jauhar" to end their lives, a countless number of Sikh women preferred to kill themselves in order to safeguard their modesty from the Muslims while their relatives were forced to convert themselves. In the bordering village of Thoa Khalsa, around 90 women committed suicide by jumping into a well to preserve the 'sanctity' and 'purity' of their religion, as also to escape conversion. It stands as the best example of violence inflicted upon women by their very own community. Veero aka Ayesha runs away from one such martyrdom, from the hands of a patriarchal community. But the memory of that incident haunts all over her life.

Butalia (1994) remarks that forcible conversion was seen as the biggest danger as it would allow the sexual union with the male of the 'other' community- a religion-sanctioned welcome act that would allow them to increase their tribe. The families were adamant on preserving their community and racial honor albeit at the altar of the girl's life. Butalia calls this 'patriarchal consent' where the decision taken by the men, women were 'compelled to take'. In *Khamosh Pani*, the religious identity of a mother becomes more important for a son, undermining maternal and human bonding. When Salim discovers his mother is a Sikh, all his emotional ties are snapped by this one fact. He doesn't want to be associated with his mother once her past Sikh identity surfaces. *Khamosh Pani* was filmed in early 2001 so its exploration of the spread of fundamentalist Islam in Pakistan couldn't have been more topical. It succinctly argues that however well-intentioned it might be, religion is often used as an excuse for nationalistic conflict, and also for men to oppress women in the name of God. It also questions why fundamentalism might be so appealing to young people despite its obvious drawbacks. The central theme though is how social pressure can lead people to do the most appalling things to preserve their so-called 'honour'. Due to this 'honour', the identity of women never found their deserving place in society. At the time of partition, the women were raped, bought, sold, and sometimes, murdered; some ended up marrying their abductors. Says a critic, "From the women's point of view, they faced danger from two sides. The immediate threat came from males within their families. Their fathers, brothers or husbands forced them to commit suicide to preserve chastity and protect family and community honour...The official estimate of the number of abducted women was placed at 50,000 Muslims in India and 33,000



Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan. But it is feared that the actual number was much higher.”

With an eloquent and fairly straightforward screenplay, *Khamosh Pani* is one of the precious handful of films that dares to address the two most contentious yet (cinematically) unexplored issues significant to the sub-continent: Partition and religious extremism. And it is admirable how the film manages to interweave these two seemingly distantly related issues into one cohesive narrative. It is as much Saleem's story as it is Ayesha's - a woman first scarred by the violent tearing apart of her family and home (land), only to be devastated years later when her son is taken from her by the new claimants of the same destructive forces.

*Pinjar* (The Skeleton) a novel by Amrita Pritam and developed into a movie by Chandraprakash Dwivedi also portrays a woman caged in her identities which are as confusing and segregated as anything could be. Though the movie presents a sharp contrast to *Khamosh Pani*, the inherent undercurrent remains on similar lines. Puro is a young woman of Hindu background, who lives a happy, comfortable life with her family. She is engaged to a kind young man, Ramchand, who is from an upstanding family. While on an outing with her younger sister Rajjo, Puro is suddenly kidnapped by a mysterious man, Rashid. Rashid's family has an ancestral dispute with Puro's family. In the past, Puro's family had made Rashid's family homeless by taking over their property. Puro's uncle had even kidnapped Rashid's aunt and then released her after raping her. The task of exacting revenge is given to Rashid, and his family tells him to kidnap Puro, to settle the score.

Rashid goes through with the kidnapping but cannot bring himself to be cruel to Puro, since he is drawn to her. One night, Puro manages to escape and return to her parents. Her parents woefully turn away their daughter, explaining that if Puro were to stay, Rashid's extended clan would slaughter everyone in their family. Left with no support, Puro returns to Rashid who is well aware of Puro's escape; he knew she wouldn't be let in by her parents and had been waiting for her nearby. Rashid marries Puro, and they settle into an uneasy routine of husband and wife, during which time Puro becomes pregnant but miscarries. Partition happens and riots break out. As Puro's family leaves for India, Trilok has a tearful reunion with Puro and explains to her that if she so chooses, she can start a new life, as Ramchand is ready to accept her even now. Puro surprises Trilok by refusing and saying that after everything that has happened has happened, she is where she belongs. Ramchand responds with tremendous empathy to Puro, as he sees that she has accepted Rashid. Meanwhile, Rashid

slowly tries to merge into the crowd, making it easier for Puro to leave with her family if she so desires. He is heartbroken, as he is deeply in love with her, but wants her to be happy. However, Puro seeks Rashid and unites with her.

Though the movie has some sort of happy ending as compared to *Khamosh Pani*, where Puro reunites with Rashid after the realization of her love towards him but it also showcases the instances of violence toward the female gender where Rashid abducts Puro to take revenge of his family. This kind of violence was and is still prevalent in society as Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin depict in their book:

“The most predictable form of violence experienced by women, as women, is when the women of one community are sexually assaulted by the men of the other, in an overt assertion of their identity and a simultaneous humiliation of the Other by “dishonouring” their women.”

*Eho Hamara Jeevna* by Dalip Kaur Tiwana and adapted by Om Puri on screen presents a post-partition picture of women in Punjabi Society. Bhano, a poor woman belonging to a poor farmer family in a rural area of Punjab, is the female protagonist of the novel. In her village women are often treated as commodities and sold for a little money. Bhano's father was ready to sell her daughter and arranged her marriage with Sarban, a resident of Moranwalli village. After her marriage, she faces harassment and torture. Sarban's four unmarried brothers try to abuse her sexually. Friends of Sarban also harass her. After the death of Sarban, Bhano's life becomes more miserable and her father tries to sell her once again to the brothers of Sarban. Bhano tries to escape by committing suicide. A man named Narain saves her and accepts her as his wife without denying her any social recognition. Because of circumstances and the patriarchal setup in her society, Bhano fails to fulfil even her simplest goals in life. Tiwana attempted to portray an ordinary downtrodden Indian (Punjabi) woman's tragic life in this novel. Reviewer Harjeet Singh Gill analysed Bhano's character as "She has no kith or kin. Once the bargain is struck, her relationship with her parents also gets detached. She lives on an island of social outcasts even in a small village. She belongs to none. But socially and individually, she does not 'exist', she only 'floats'. The tragic story of Bhano reflects the double marginalization of women in third-world countries. They get marginalized due to their low status by the people of elite groups and on the basis of their gender in a patriarchal society. They do not have equal socio-cultural rights as men have and as a result, turn out to be subordinate and oppressed. As Sarah Grimke states about the cruelty of men against females, “Man has subjugated woman to his will,

used her as a means to promote his selfish gratification, to minister to his sensual pleasure, to be instrumental in promoting his comfort; but never he has desired to elevate her to that rank she was created to fill". Bhano not only suffers violence under a misunderstanding when she is charged with seduction by another illustrating woman as a possession or commodity. Her repeated selling to males only augments this social belief. She is so bound that even suicide is not available to her as a choice. After the marriage of Narian's niece, Bhano comes to know that her husband is going to marry again to have a son which shocks her and she tries to hurt herself physically. When she comes back from the hospital she finds that her husband has already married to another woman. After the birth of his son from another woman, Bhagwanti, he sells her to another man under the influence of his second wife forgetting all the sacrifices of Bhano which she made for him. Gerda Lerner states in her work *The Creation of Patriarchy* that "The system of patriarchy can function only with the cooperation of women. This cooperation is secured by a variety of means: gender indoctrination; educational deprivation; the denial to women of knowledge of their history; and the dividing of women, one from the other, by defining "respectability" and "deviance" according to women's sexual activities; by restraints and outright coercion; by discrimination in access to economic resources and political power; and by awarding class privileges to conforming women." For nearly four thousand years women have shaped their lives and acted under the umbrella of patriarchy, specifically a form of patriarchy best described as paternalistic dominance. Whether there are events like partition or normal life women express stoicism which is as false as the belief that they are inferior to men.

### CONCLUSION

All three works analyzed portray women as stoic characters who withstand pulls and pressures in their own ways. Contrasting are the circumstances they live in are treated differently by the men who control their lives. *Khamosh Pani* perfectly focuses on the loss of humanity, the desensitization and dehumanization of the victims and the strategies they evolve to remain alive. This film unearths the horrors and after-effects of partition with its subtext of the reality of honour killings due to identity in a patriarchal, nationalist setup, in which the death of a woman exposed to sex crimes is not only desirable but even necessary to the total defeat of new forged identities in close social structures. It is not just the social structures that destroy her, but also the inherited sense of guilt that follows her as a woman who has bypassed the norms of tradition and

honour, and the very fact of her being alive is a crime and the source of her guilt. As an after-effect of partition, her identity is tormented by society creating the hegemonic well of the silent waters, into which she has to drown herself.

All three works showcase the plight of women during periods of social upheaval and the heightened levels of violence and trauma faced by them, both physically and psychologically within the home and outside it. The execution of the stories is seamless. Each and every character capture attention and provokes introspection.

### REFERENCES

- [1] Ali, F. (2017). Literary adaptations: From page to screen (A study in films). Yking Books.
- [2] Bagchi, J. (2007). Porous boundaries and divided selves. In J. Jain (Eds.), *Reading partition/living partition*. Rawat Publication.
- [3] Butalia, U. (1998). The other side of silence: Voices from the partition of India. Penguin.
- [4] Malik, S. (2008). Partition and Indian english women novelists. Prestige.
- [5] Sumar, S. (Director). (2003). *Khamosh Pani* [Film]. Vidhi Films.
- [6] Dwivedi, C. (Director). (2003). *Pinjar* [Film]. Lucky Star Entertainment.
- [7] Puri, O. (Director). (2011). *Eho Hamara Jeevna* [Film].
- [8] Pritam, A. (2009). *Pinjar: The Skeleton and Other Stories* (K. Singh, Trans.). Tara Press. (1950).
- [9] Tiwana, D. K. (1980). *Such is Her Fate* (J. Rattan, Trans.). Punjabi University Press. (1968).
- [10] Menon, R. Kamla Bhasin. (1998). Borders & boundaries: Women in India's partition. Kali for Women.
- [11] Grimke, S. M. (1838). Letters on the equality of the sexes and the condition of women. Isaac Knaap.
- [12] [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)



# Supernatural Narratives Entwined with The Subjugated Class- Mahasweta Devi and Charles Dickens

Nimisha Lall

MA English Student, Department of English, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, India

Received: 19 Jun 2023; Received in revised form: 21 Jul 2023; Accepted: 28 Jul 2023; Available online: 06 Aug 2023  
©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license  
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— Supernatural events in narratives have been a part of literature since Shakespeare. There's a new aspect added to it by the concept of ideology which is now getting interweaved with the subjugated class. People affected by supernatural events are taken for granted in society. In fact, they are marginalized to an extent where no one can help them. Their fate is unpredictable. The research paper takes two short stories completely different in their origin- Bayen by Mahasweta Devi and The Signal-Man by Charles Dickens. Mahasweta Devi's Bayen illustrates life's difficulty for those living on society's margins. They are looked down upon and stripped of the basic tenets of humanity. Dickens molds his narrative where the supernatural elements find their place. Stripped of his name, the signalman is thrown much beneath his level of education. Focussing on the protagonists, the paper would aim to find solutions to free these characters of their plight.



**Keywords**— ideology, narratives, oppression, power forms, subjugation, supernatural

## I. INTRODUCTION

Supernatural narratives are bound by elements that go far beyond the realm of the natural world. Authors intentionally use these mystic forces to create an ambiguous tone in the narratives. Thereafter, some questions remain unanswered even after the story gets finished. Like Frost's poem, the narrative is every road not taken leading to a path of limitless possibilities towards the end.

Precursors to supernatural writings can be traced back to Shakespeare with ghosts in *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet*, and evil witches in *Macbeth*. Something above the world was understood in response to the 'Victorian crisis of faith.' Thus, Victorian writers including Dickens incorporated the unseen and strange in their stories. Even after a century, writers in India like Mahasweta Devi couldn't resist penning down a paranormal narrative. Some factors remained similar in both the account which was written in different times and spaces. The primary theme of a marginalized entity haunted by supernatural events. Their voice is reduced to uphold no value compared to the common beliefs of the majoritarian. Thus, they get further subjugated in society unable to express their distress.

The paper discusses how the supernatural and subjugation are related. Also, there are hardly any studies that had mentioned these two coming together within narratives. This study would further enhance looking into supernatural accounts from a different postcolonial perspective. It would also point out how the subordinate in the community gets disparaged when no one helps them. The paper is divided into two parts focussing individually upon each story *The Signal-Man* and *Bayen*, and then drawing out conclusions from them.

## II. THE SIGNAL-MAN

Dickens was involved in 'The Staplehurst Rail Crash' which left him traumatized until the end of his life. The crash saw forty casualties and many people even died in Dickens' arms. The author never really recovered from the shock (Kellermeyer, 2018). His helplessness to save the people's lives despite his best efforts is mirrored in the responsible signalman.

The story starts with the narrator calling the signalman three times after which the latter ultimately responds. From the beginning itself, the signalman is

symptomatic of an eerie behavior. The narrator comes down a steep path giving hints about the Victorian gothic narrative, "The cutting was extremely deep, and unusually precipitate. It was made through a clammy stone, that became oozy and wetter as I went down." (Dickens, 1866, p. 2)

When the narrator arrives at the signal box, he describes it as the most dismal place he had ever been. It completely blocked any view of the sky with only a dungeon to look forward to. Moreover, the tunnel to him was massive but extremely depressing and filled with forbidden air. The narrator views, "So little sunlight ever found its way to this spot, that it had an earthy, deadly smell; and so much cold wind rushed through it, that it struck chill to me, as if I had left the natural world." (Dickens, 1866, p. 2)

This home to signalman can be seen as peripheral from the common society of Old England. He lives in a hole that even sunlight finds difficult to reach. Let alone the people. From the onset, Dickens's portrayal of the signalman in such an atmosphere gives the foreshadowing of how his life will turn out. A life shadowed by darkness where no traces of close ones are found. The narrator expounds upon the signalman's place as a transcendence from the natural world throwing light upon a supernatural narrative. While the signalman was speaking to the narrator, he is interrupted by the bell quite a few times. This amuses the latter who writes:

The circumstance that while he was speaking to me he twice broke off with a fallen colour, turned his face towards the little bell when it did NOT ring, opened the door of the hut (which was kept shut to exclude the unhealthy damp), and looked out towards the red light near the mouth of the tunnel. (Dickens, 1866, p. 4)

The signalman then vests in the narrator explaining his behavior. He elucidates that he had been seeing a ghost along the tunnel foreboding disasters. When he saw it the first time, it was standing near the tunnel covering his face and waving over with similar words as the narrator, "HALLOA! Below there!" (Dickens, 1866, p. 1) Taken aback by this sudden event, the signalman went through the tunnel to check if anyone was there. But he didn't find anything. Nonetheless, an accident occurs causing dozens of deaths just after a few hours.

The phantom covered its face with both hands when the narrator saw it the second time. The appearance presaged the death of the beautiful woman boarding the train which passed moments later. Since the past few weeks, the phantom has recurred. The signalman now feels that he must prevent any accidents which can occur.

At this moment in time, the narrator thinks that the man needs some medical help. Because if the job of the signalman is not done properly, it might cost lots of lives. The signalman is oppressed because he is unable to share this with the authorities he works for. They will immediately conceive him as a lunatic who is throwing tantrums about his job and fire him. If this happens, the signalman would be left with no jobs. And thus, he becomes a subjugated identity who had to perform his duties irrespective of his fears. The helplessness of not being able to save the lives fills the signalman with guilt.

The conceived ideology in society believes more in the advent of scientific justifications for any phenomenon. The occurrence of spirits just exists in the minds of those who witness it or the people who believe in the paranormal. The authorities of the railway and the narrator comes from the dominant set of classes, who does not believe in the existence of ghosts. Thus, questioning this ideology is not in the hands of the signalman. He relies upon the narrator, who thinks he needs medical treatment. The narrator says, "Men of common sense did not allow much for coincidences in making the ordinary calculations of life." (Dickens, 1866, p. 6)

When the narrator first arrives at the station box, the signalman gets interrupted by bells. Now the former asks him if that was the ghost who rang the bell, to which the signalman agrees. The narrator does not get convinced and replies:

How your imagination misleads you. My eyes were on the bell, and my ears were open to the bell, and if I am a living man, it did NOT ring at those times. No, nor at any other time, except when it was rung in the natural course of physical things by the station communicating with you. (Dickens, 1866, p. 8)

But somewhere the signalman lies at fault too. His inability to give his best shot at career options is an instance. Being a natural philosophy student, he could have tried for getting his hands on a better job. Facing failure due to his behavior lands him on this job which burdens him. He could have pushed himself to grab better opportunities with all the knowledge he had. If he could have been a person of power, he could have easily narrated these incidents to someone. Not all people would have seen him as a madman. Gramsci (as cited in Nayar, 2009) suggests that speaking from the positions of power results in the reinforcement of the ideology, which is created by the people who hold a stature in the community.



### III. BAYEN

Another story in this research paper comes from Mahasweta Devi known as *Bayen*. The writer is known to give a 'voice to the voiceless,' especially to women. The 'bayen' in the story Chandidasi Gangadasi is one such example. She comes from the Dom community and was occupationally engaged in digging the graves for dead children below the age of five. After her father dies, she takes up the occupation owing to the lack of a male member in the family. At his moment, Malinder falls in love with her and they get married.

Malinder tells Bhagirath that his mother was the most beautiful girl in the community. And he used to bring her striped sarees to wear. He gave Chandi everything she deserved. In the narrative, it's evidence of how privileged her life was. But after she is outcasted, she has to beg for oil, and even her sari is torn. Her son Bhagirath tells her, "Don't you have another sari? Would you like a sari that is not torn like this one? Want my dhoti?" (Devi, 2015, p. 12)

After the birth of Bhagirath, Chandi feels frightened to dig up the graves of other children. This happens because she can empathize with those mothers who lost their children. She finds it difficult to continue her profession. However, Malinder does not listen to her and pushes her further. Her voice remains unheard, and eventually, one-day people find her digging up a grave while her breasts are heavy with milk. They term her 'bayen' which means a 'witch' and blame her for all the deaths of the children occurring near them. At this moment in time, Malinder not only disowns her but declares his wife as a 'bayen.' He looks at Chandi with bloodshot eyes and says, "O-ho-ooo! A bayen you are! Who was it in the grave when you were nursing with milk? O-ho-ooo!" (Devi, 2015, p. 11)

Malinder's declaration pushes his wife to the margins of society. He is deemed a husband who cannot understand his wife's pleadings. Announcing her as something mystic which is quite impossible to be comprehended by the eyes of the world makes Chandi an outcast. She subsumes the position of the subaltern woman whose voice is not worthy of a word. Her clarification as to why she is filled with milk gets neglected, "No, no, I am not a bayen! I have a son of my own. My breasts are heavy with milk for him. I am not a bayen. Why, Gangaputta, why don't you tell them, you know best." (Devi, 2015, p. 11)

Chandi gets forced to live in a hut in the same village far from the general crowd so that she could not cast their evil shadow upon them. Limited rations are provided to her, considering a bayen is already healthy enough. Malinder then marries Jashi, the ugliest girl in the

community just because he believes the prettiest one was not the fortunate one either.

Gramsci (as cited in Nayar, 2009) states that the ideology is sustained, reinforced, and reproduced through the cultural form- that is the supernatural narrative. Popularizing that something evil does exist that can take the lives of children instead of some relevant diseases is proof. When Tukni, the daughter of Malinder's sister is infected with smallpox, Chandi takes her to Goddess Sheetala. The folklore story that paying homage to a goddess of epidemics will cure a child stands completely illogical. In a similar fashion, village people are superstitious in their set ways.

Blaming Chandi for Tukni's death thus does not come as a surprise. The members of the village operate the power structures in their society through which the superstitious ideology proliferates. The evidence lies in the lines, "What about the milk that spilled out of your breasts as you were piling earth on Tukni's grave?" (Devi, 2015, p. 9) There is some evil magic that a 'bayen' is capable of. Society's assumptions make Jihai believe that if she mistreats her stepson, Bhagirath with violence will be her downfall. The bayen would take revenge and kill Jihai's daughters. She takes the gospel of the supernatural narrative passed on from the community.

However, still, no one deemed Chandi as a 'bayen' until Malinder said so. His declaration was conceived to be true not only because he was Chandi's husband, but the only educated one who can sign his name in the village. He earns more than enough for a month and has even acres of land under his name. His tutelage gives an edge to accord power and legitimizes a supernatural deposition (Nayar, 2009, p. 131).

As a consequence, hegemony flows from Malinder to be further emphasized by the public. The verdict is pronounced that Chandi is a 'bayen.' On the other hand, Chandi does not protest enough. She does not have enough power to explain her situation. Even the public does not want to hear her when her husband disowns her.

### IV. CONCLUSION

The signalman is stripped of his identity from the beginning of the narrative. Dickens is not interested in awarding him with a name. He is alienated from society by doing a job that is much beneath his education. Accepting his role without raising his voice makes him a subjugated entity in the book. He is further pushed when he is entangled in a web of spirits. At the end of the novel, his demise is the ultimate foreshadowing that Dickens highlights in the book. The narrator then comes to believe the signalman's words about the supernatural incidents. He understands the latter's

plight when he dies. Thus, the signalman gets freed from his oppression when he herself has passed from the natural world.

A similar event happens with Chandi too. Being an outcast in her village away from her son adds a fraction of pain every day in her life. Her life takes an opposite turn at the moment when Malinder announces her as a 'bayen.' She is maligned by the community responsible for the deaths of children. The conceived ideology of witchcraft existing in a normal person prevails in the minds of the occupants. Especially when Malinder, a literate man with power justifies it. Chandi accepts her position as per society to become a subjugated woman. When she comes in front of the train to stop any thievery, she succumbs to death. People then realize that only a normal person with a rational head can die. She is freed from all the mistreatment she had endured. Chandi's son comes forward to acknowledge her existence as a common woman who was not a 'bayen.' Now existing in a somewhere paranormal dimension, she gets peace.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Devi, M. (2015). *Bayen*. <https://idoc.pub/queue/1-bayen-by-mahasweta-devi-d4pqwk0z8rnp>
- [2] Dickens, C. (1866). *The Signal-Man*. [https://shortstoryamerica.com/pdf\\_classics/dickens\\_the\\_signal\\_man.pdf](https://shortstoryamerica.com/pdf_classics/dickens_the_signal_man.pdf)
- [3] Kellermeyer, M. G. (2018). Charles Dickens' the Signal-Man: A Two-Minute Summary and a Literary Analysis. In *oldstyletales*. Retrieved November 6, 2022, from <https://www.oldstyletales.com/single-post/2018/11/20/Charles-Dickens-The-Signal-Man-A-Two-Minute-Analysis-of-the-Classic-Ghost-Story>
- [4] Mahasweta Devi: Her Ideas And Legacy|. (n.d.). *Countercurrents*. Retrieved November 7, 2022, from <https://countercurrents.org/2016/07/mahasweta-devi-her-ideas-and-legacy>
- [5] Nayar, P. K. (2009). *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory: From Structuralism to Ecocriticism*. Pearson.



# Affects of Shame and Guilt in *Disgrace*

Netra Narayan Chapagain

S.S. College, Balaju/ Thames Business College, Battisputali, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal

Received: 21 Jun 2023; Received in revised form: 23 Jul 2023; Accepted: 02 Aug 2023; Available online: 10 Aug 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— This paper studies *Disgrace*, the world-famous novel by J.M. Coetzee. It argues that by portraying characters, some of whom commit mistakes and some forgive, the novelist seems to picturing a South Africa on the verge of change and transformation. Lurie the main character also goes through transformation from antagonism towards him to affect of sympathy at the end. The affect of shame comes as positive affect which Coetzee bestows on Lurie to evoke realization of shame in all whites for exploiting black people. Reading this novel, the white South Africans naturally feel ashamed of themselves. Thus, it is through Lurie, Coetzee is advocating individual logic to bring transformation in all whites.

**Keywords**— Affect, forgiveness, transformation, truth and reconciliation, shame



## I. INTRODUCTION

J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999) deals with outrage of blacks in a social context of post-apartheid South Africa. It throws light on social setting of Truth and Reconciliation commission (TRC), where David Lurie, a white man is in the verge of transformation from his immoral deeds. This paper seeks to argue that Coetzee by allowing Lurie realize his individual shame of violating the life of a young girl, is evoking the realisation of shame in all whites for exploiting black people as slaves. It tries to unfold the guilt and shame realised by Lurie in terms of affect theory. It presumes that the collective guilt of white South African people is conveyed through Lurie's crime and realization there by allowing Lurie to transform, understanding the plight of black people through his own suffering as a father. The objective is to analyse (a) white man's hubris of being a white male, (b) his justification for ill deeds, (c) his sense of guilt, and shame. The novel succeeds in bringing about a massive change in the readers' attitude towards David Lurie—a transformation from the affect of antagonism to him at the outset to sympathy at the end. Encapsulated in this transformation of affect is the drama of forgiveness in the backdrop of TRC.

## II. SOUTH AFRICA AND DISGRACE

*Disgrace* written in backdrop of TRC unveils Coetzee's observation of the then South African society. In the novel, the trial of David Lurie is Coetzee's allegorical reference to TRC. When Coetzee wrote this novel Nelson Mandela was in power. Mandela did not want to punish whites for their human right violation activities in the post-apartheid era and bring fissure in the society. However, there was tremendous pressure on Mandela for the trial of white perpetrators. So, this novel is an important document addressing the issue of white's domination to blacks and black's outrage towards whites. In the novel Lurie rapes a black girl and gives foolish logic to justify his deeds saying, "we have right to satisfy our desire" (90). He does not feel guilty until his own daughter is raped by black boys. Then he realizes raping is violating human rights. This suggests reference to TRC process. At the end he realizes his guilt and shame and that brings transformation in Lurie.

The middle aged white professor Lurie represents all whites in South Africa with hubristic attitude. He develops foolish pride in courting prostitute Soraya. When he finds her picture in a book under the topic "Exotic" he immediately sets for hunting which resounds white man's foolish pride of hunting in Africa with the intention of colonizing. He also develops a foolish self-confidence which makes him to think that woman's beauty doesn't

belong to her only. With his “serpent words” (16) he says, “woman’s beauty doesn’t belong to her alone. It is part of bounty she has a duty to share it” (16). It is his hubris of being a white male that makes him to rationalize his ill deeds. Michael Lewis in his essay, “Self –Conscious Emotions” defines hubris as exaggerated pride or self -confidence often resulting in “retribution”(749). Lurie’s rationalization and philosophies are the result of his “exaggerated pride or self-confidence” of being a white man. Lewis writes, “Hubristic people have difficulty in their interpersonal relation, since their own hubris is likely to interfere with wishes, needs, and desire of others in which case there is likely to be interpersonal conflict (749). This is exactly what readers find in Lurie. He fails to maintain interpersonal relation with others because of his foolish rationalization.

### III. BREACHES AND CRISIS

Lurie’s rationalization of “rights of desire” is nothing but his imperialist mind set. He rapes his student Melanie, “thirty years his junior” (12). During “love making” (19), she is passive ...her eyes closed, her hands slack above her head...she frees herself, gather her things and leave the room (19). This indicates sexual exploitation of a black girl. Being a professor, he does not show a sense of morality rather his justification for his deeds only evokes antagonism in readers. When he says “I was the servant of Eros”(52), this only adds readers contempt for him. His logic is actually parallel to white people’s logic of exploiting blacks in South Africa. That is the apartheid logic which insists on fulfilling all biological desire. This logic of “right of desire” is a flawed logic.

Lurie’s foolish pride and flawed logic drags him to lead a life of disgrace and shame. The society does not expect a professor like Lurie to rape his own student. When Melanie reports her victimization to the university, he is supposed to undergo counselling but he says, “No I am a grown man ... I am beyond the reach of counselling (49). He stands with his flawed logic and foolish pride. He believes he has not done any crime. He opines that he is a male and he should have desire for a girl. He does not regard himself guilty rather refuses to “shed tears of contrition” (52) for his deeds. He shamelessly goes on to justify his deeds as if god acted through him. The justification of his deeds is ironic because he does not realise it until his own daughter Lucy is raped. When the hearing is held in the University, which allegorically refers to TRC, he says “ I have reservation of philosophical kind but I supposed they are out of bound (47). This further enhances readers’ antagonism for him. The reader clearly identifies his shame but he cannot. According to Lewi, “Shame is the product of

complex set of cognitive activities; individual’s evaluation of their action in regard their SRGs and their global evaluation of self” (748). He wrongly evaluates his deeds. If he had realised his crime and accepted for contrition he would not have to give up his university career.

Coetzee’s politics in the novel is to bring shame of post-apartheid whites in public. He is “writing shame as part of an ethical practice. Shame forces us to reflect continuously on the implication of our writing” (Probyn,73). So shame as an affect leads to corrective behaviour. Lurie’s shame is private but Coetzee’s writing of it makes it public. So Coetzee writes in the backdrop of TRC when blacks were demanding trial for whites. It was the time when black thought it appropriate to take revenge. This is best reflected in the novel through Lurie’s daughter Lucy’s rape by three blacks. Lucy is traumatised by the incident but refuses to report to the police. However, Lurie says, “The police must find them...They did not come just to steal... After they did what they did you cannot expect Lucy calmly go on with her life as before. I am Lucy’s father. I want those men to be caught and brought before the law and punished. Am I wrong? Am I wrong to want justice? (119) Here Coetzee is putting Lurie in the shoes of blacks. Lurie then realizes his disgrace of raping a black girl. His logic changes from “rights of desire” to understanding of crime and justice. He leaves the perspective of victimizer and feels like abused black. Now he sees Lucy in the place of Melanie and his turnaround starts.

### IV. SHAMEFUL REALISATION

Lurie's feeling of shame leads him to feel guilty and realize his mistake after his daughter’s rape. When wrong happens to his daughter he wants justice for his daughter. However, Lucy’s refusal to report to police suggests situation in the post-apartheid Africa where many South African believe in beauty of forgiveness that stops the chain of violence and revenge. She says, “I am prepared to do anything to make any sacrifice, for the sake of peace” (208). This also makes Lurie realise his guilt. He says, “It was history speaking through them”, he offers at last “A history of wrong...It may have seemed personal, but it wasn’t. It came down from the ancestor’s (156). It is at this point the readers find him realise his guilt. This hints towards his sense of right and wrong. He is no more engulfed with his wrong philosophy rather guilty for raping the girl. The white readers also realise that there exploitation of black was wrong.

Finally, Lurie’s realization of shame indicates white’s realization of the shame of exploiting black people. His realization of shame and guilt makes him to visit



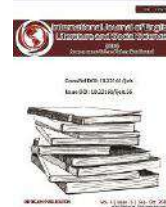
Melanie's father. He apologises, "I am sorry for what I took your daughter through. You have a wonderful family. I apologize for grief I have caused you and Mrs. Isaac. I just ask your pardon" (171). Like Lucy forgives rapist, Melanie's father also forgives Lurie. His realization of guilt directs him towards corrective action. Lewis writes, "In fact the emotion of guilt always has associated with it a corrective action that an individual can take (but does not necessarily take) to repair the failure" (748). Lurie cannot repair his immoral deeds but after realizing his guilt he heads for corrective action. The man once a "servant of Eros" becomes devotee of Teresa. He gives up his Byron project. Instead he thinks of composing devotional song on Teresa. This song is spiritual. Likewise, "One Morning he glances up to see the faces of three little boys peering at him over the concrete wall. He rises from seat; the dogs start barking; the boys drop down and scamper off whooping with excitement what to tell back home: an old man who sits among dogs singing to himself"(212)! He helps sick dogs to recover and also euthanizes those who are in miserable health conditions. This suggests his love for all creature including blacks and marginalised. Finally, this makes readers to leave their affect of antagonism towards him by showing a deep sense of sympathy for him.

## V. CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, the novel succeeds in bringing about a massive change in readers' attitude towards Lurie- a transformation from antagonism towards him to affect of sympathy at the end. The affect of shame comes as positive affect which Coetzee bestows on Lurie to evoke realization of shame in all whites for exploiting black people. Reading this novel, the white South Africans naturally feel ashamed of themselves. Thus, it is through Lurie, Coetzee is advocating individual logic to bring transformation in all whites.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Coetzee, J.M. 1999. *Disgrace*. United States of America: Penguin Books..
- [2] Lewis, M., M.W. Sullivan, C. Stanger, and M.Weiss. 1989. "Self-Conscious emotions: Embarrassment, Pride, Shame, and Guilt 46 : 742-756.
- [3] Azhar, Dr. Darkhasha, and Dilkesh Kumar. "Amrita Pritam's 'Pinjar': A Poignant Depiction of Wrath of Partition on Weaker Sex." *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.83.4>.
- [4] Moosa, Pireh. "The Embodied Sari as Political, Personal and Transformative in Monica Ali's Brick Lane." *International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL)*, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.22161/ijeel.2.1.2>.
- [5] Probyn, Elspeth. 2010. *The Affect Theory Reader: Writing Shame*. Duke University Press.
- [6] Narimonovna, Boboyeva Muazzam. "Interpretation of the Problem of World Linguistic Representation in Modern Linguistics." *International Journal of Teaching, Learning and Education*. AI Publications, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.22161/ijtle.2.2.2>.
- [7] Deo, Dr. Tejaswini Nandkumar. "Conversion as Emancipation: A Study of Dalit Women's Life Narratives in Maharashtra." *International Journal of Language, Literature and Culture*, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.22161/ijllc.2.4.1>.



# Finding the Voice of Indian Urbanity – Through the Selected Texts of Girish Karnad and Mahesh Dattani

Sadaf Fatima

PhD Scholar, The English and Foreign Languages University, Lucknow, India

Received: 26 Jun 2023; Received in revised form: 22 Jul 2023; Accepted: 04 Aug 2023; Available online: 12 Aug 2023  
©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license  
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— *In the present paper, I have endeavored to review the development of Indian English theatre since 20th century to emphasize the common themes and dilemmas that the Indian playwrights writing in English had to deal with special reference to the process of assimilation of Indian themes with the Western genre. The focus is upon analyzing the text from a post-colonial perspective. The aim is to show the manifestation of hybrid cultures in the urban areas as have been successfully represented by the Indian dramas by Girish Karnad and Mahesh Dattani.*

**Keywords**— *Post-colonialism, Indian-English theatre, dilemma, hybridity, identity.*



Indian-English drama is the most under developed genre in Indian-English literature. The reason for the decimated development of the genre even after independence is that drama is 'a composite art involving the playwrights, the actors, and the audience in the shared experience on the stage.' Drama, thus have its own problems, however lately though slowly a "change in climate is perceptible" (Iyengar 730). Post- Independence has seen increasing interest in Indian-English literature abroad and though many plays like Gurcharan Das *A Fine Family* have been staged in Europe and U.S.A, but these did not lead to the establishment of a regular school of Indian-English drama. This was because regional language theatre had already monopolized the theatre and "Indian-English drama was left to feed on crumbs, fallen from its rich cousin's table" (Iyengar 730). This problem was also pointed out by Mahesh Dattani in *Me and My Plays* when he realized:

"I was disappointed the plays in English weren't expressive enough like Hindi one I had seen. I then saw a Kannada version of Hamlet. The play made more sense to audience in Kannada than if it were performed in the language of the playwright. That's when I realized I was doomed. I didn't have an audience, because I didn't have a language." (Dattani 30) Thus, the 20<sup>th</sup> century Indian-English drama was the 'adept' phase of this genre of

post- colonial literature, and it was up to the new playwrights to find the voice of Indian-English drama. The modern playwrights have been writing in prose, according to M.K Naik "Tagore- Aurobindo-Kailasam tradition of poetic drama continue even today but with a difference in the hands of Manjri Isvaram, G.V.Desani , Lakhan Dev and Pratish Nandy." (Naik 268) Desani is known for his play *Hali* which is both a poem and an allegorical play. Isvaram's *Yama and Yami* is a good example of use of Hindu mythology in poetic prose play. Lakhan Deb wrote historical plays in blank verse. Asif Curimbhroy regarded as the "most prolific Indian-English playwright" (271) by Naik, belonged to the larger group of playwrights who wrote in prose. His plays dealt with the current Indian situation and attempted to bring forth the various economic, social and psychological problems. While Curimbhroy was successful in presenting realism on stage, he failed to give the suitable treatment to the effective themes of his plays. Another important playwright was Nissim Ezekiel. His plays expose oddities of life and human behaviour.

The postcolonial era, is about the intrusion and colonization of minds with ideas. This is what the Kenyan writer Ngugi WA Thiong'o meant when he talked about "decolonizing the mind" that the colonizer and the colonized both carry colonialism in their minds long after

the state has gained independence, thus the Indian post-colonial drama focuses on exposing the colonist ideology. The idea of capitalism and dream of urban life is the result of this colonist ideology. The idea of English as the language of the colonizer and thus its superiority is the result of colonization which playwrights Dattani attempt to defy by using it as their native language.

“The term ‘Hybridity’ in post-colonial studies is associated with the work of Homi K. Bhabha, whose analysis stresses interweaving of the elements of the colonizer and colonized, thus challenging the validity and authenticity of any essential cultural identity. “Bhabha contends that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in a space that he calls the ‘Third Space of enunciation.’ Cultural identity always emerges in this contradictory and ambivalent space, which for Bhabha makes the claim to a hierarchical ‘purity’ of cultures untenable. For him, the recognition of this ambivalent space of cultural identity may help us to overcome the exoticism of cultural diversity in favour of the recognition of an empowering hybridity within which cultural difference may operate.” (*literariness.org*) Thus modern Indian playwrights portray the hybrid Indian culture.

The playwrights chose realism as their mode to communicate with the audience as it is only by presenting the Indian experience in its fidelity can they both entertain and educate them. Urban realist and predominantly domestic plays have become a new trend among contemporary playwrights of Indian-English theatre. Like the 18<sup>th</sup> century English society wherein Addison and Steele took the task of educating the new middle class, same was the case with 20<sup>th</sup> century Indian urbanity where the playwrights rose to make the audience aware of the roots and philosophy of their social and psychological struggles.

The contemporary Indian-English drama is notable for its almost complete deviation from European tradition and revisits the incredible history of India, the myths and legends and most importantly the reality of the current situation in all its colours to both enlighten and entertain the audience by presenting the culture they can relate to in a language they speak in. Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sircar, Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad laid the foundation of contemporary Indian-English drama.

Badal Sircar created a genuine people's theatre known as the third theatre i.e. a theatre supported and created by people. His plays are aimed at bringing social change. Vijay Tendulkar, the pioneer of using modern techniques was highly influenced by Marathi theatre. He used his plays to expose the agonies of Indian middle class. His

play *Ghashiram Kotwal* comments on the corruption and immorality of the upper class. The play is a historical drama set in the time when Nana Phadnavis was the ‘peshwa’ of Pune. Tendulkar describes the play:

“This is not a historical play. It is a story, in prose, verse, music and dance set in a historical era. Ghashirams are creations of socio-political forces which know no barriers of time and place. Although based on a historical legend, I have no intention of commentary on the morals, or lack of them, of the Peshwa, Nana Phadnavis or

Ghashiram. The moral of this story, if there is any, may be looked for elsewhere.” (Mahida 1)

Tendulkar used the human wall in the play which served as a chorus to comment on the development of plot and also as a symbol of secrecy and hiding and revealing in the play wherein the sacred and pure masks that people wear are being pulled off to expose the dark reality. He also used ‘sutradhaars’ or narrators in his plays. Thus, the political and social satire is displayed as blend of folk dance and ballad along with a touch of opera.

Manjula Padmanabhan is another notable playwright; she is known for her plays like *Lights Out*, *Harvest* etc. *Harvest* is a futuristic play that exposes how first world countries have taken over our mind and our body quite literally. It creates dystopian world within Om's family who has been chosen to be the organ donor and thus him and his family is forced to follow certain rules and restrictions that turn their lives upside down. The play satirizes materialism and warns against capitalism. The play jerk the people out of their seats at the point when Jaya, Om's wife, breaks the screen through which the western company had been keeping their keen eye on them. The glass breaking was the shattering of the western and capitalistic standards which has made a modern Indian its slave.

Girish Karnad (1938- ) the noted Kannada actor, director and playwright. “His first play, *Yayati* (1961), was written neither in English nor in his mother tongue Konkani. Instead, it was composed in his adopted language Kannada. The play, which chronicled the adventures of mythical characters from the Mahabharata, was an instant success and was immediately translated and staged in several other Indian languages” (Naik 274). He translated his own plays *Tughlaq* (1962) and *Hayavadana* (1975) from Kannada into English. *Tughlaq* was his second play and was sufficient to earn Karnad a secured place among the Indian English dramatists. *Tughlaq* is a historical play on the life of Sultan Mohammad Bin Tughlaq of the fourteenth century India.

“Karnad projects the curious contradictions in the complex personality of the Sultan, who was at once a dreamer and a man of action, benevolent and cruel and godless. His two

close associates- Barani, the scholarly historian and Najib, the politician seem to represent the two opposite selves of Tughlaq, while Aziz, the wily time-server, appears to represent all those who took advantage of the Sultan's visionary schemes and fooled him” (Naik 274). “Tughlaq's history found a parallel in the contemporary political situation in the post- Nehruvian India when people found themselves disenchanted by the past idealism of Government policies. The use of history to portray contemporary with all its complexities embodies in the protagonist made the play a huge success. Hayavadana is considered as the playwright's experiment with folk motif and use of mime, chorus and masks to present the modern theme of search of identity in the midst of tangled relationships. Karnad derived his themes from ‘Katha-sarit-sagara’ which Thomas Mann used for his novel. Karnad based his work on the novel version of the Sanskrit tale.” (Naik 275).

Karnad's career as a dramatist started by chance. “As a young man studying at Karnataka University, Dharwar, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Mathematics and Statistics in 1958, Karnad dreamed of earning international literary fame, but he thought that he would do so by writing in English. Upon graduation, he went to England and studied at Oxford where he earned a Rhodes scholarship and went on to receive a Master of Arts Degree in Philosophy, Politics and Economics.” (Naik 276) He wanted to earn fame as a poet, however he realized that is drama that comes naturally to him and that too in Kannada not in English:

His dramatic genius was influenced by the ‘Company Natak’ as can be seen in his use of shallow scenes and deeper scenes technique in his play Tughlaq. The shallow scene were used for street and comical scenes, while the shallow scene was on the deep scene was prepared for a garden or a palace scene. The *Yakshagana*, another traditional Kannad theatre also influenced him, however the greater influence was that of naturalistic drama of Henrik Ibsen and G.B Shaw. Naturalistic drama is the drama which reflects life to its utmost fidelity. Naturalism in literature stems from modern realism and depicts everyday life especially the lower class without artificiality of plot and with “scrupulous care for authenticity and accuracy of detail”. Naturalistic drama attempts to reproduce “everyday speech as exactly as possible, and more and more emphasis... on surface verisimilitude.” Naturalistic drama thus attempts “to deceive nature, not reflect it.”

Girish Karnad mixes the mythical stories and historical characters to display everyday struggles of modern life. His naturalism lies in his honest observation and straightforward prose dialogue and psychological realism depicted through his main characters trapped in modern life as he does in his play *Boiled Beans on Toast*

*Boiled Beans on Toast* by Karnad is a commentary on the life in the modern city in India represented by Bangalore. The title of the play is the very key point to understand the themes and the aim of the writer. It is derived from the mythical story behind the name of the city – Bangalore. “In the eleventh century, King Veera Ballala went out hunting, lost his way in the jungle, and after wandering through the night, arrived exhausted at a lonely hut where an old woman saved his life by giving him a handful of boiled beans (‘benda kaalu’ in Kannada). In gratitude the king named the place of ‘BendaKaaluru’ place of boiled beans, which the time corrupted as ‘Bengaluru’, later anglicised as ‘Bangalore.’ Karnad thus emphasizes on the hybridity of the culture used Boiled Beans in context of the original traditions and nostalgia of the past and ‘Toast’ is obviously the reference of the western influence and urbanization of a small town. . ‘The play was first presented in a Marathi adaptation titled, ‘Uney Purey Shahar Ek’ at the Yaswantarao Natyagruha, Pune, by the Aasakta group on 1 March 2013. Later, director Lillete Dubey staged the play, Boiled Beans On Toast, for Mumbai audiences.” (Karnad 1)

The play deals with the complexities and problems of the life of the residents of a large metropolis. Each character is affected by the machination of the environment which has compelled them to abandon human values and become more and more materialistic, apathetic and immoral. The centre of the play is the Padmanabhan household and people connected with it. Anjana Padmanabhan, the mistress of the house finds a purpose in life by working in the hospice, serving the cancer patients and looking after her household staff, she keeps herself busy to escape the ghosts of her past. Her son Kunaal is a rebellious teenager who is an aspiring musician. His character development represents the journey of audience from ignorance to knowledge as with him the audience realized how each individual who comes to the city is sucked into trap of despair and self-destruction. Dolly Iyer is first found sitting in Anjana's drawing room is a character so blinded by the light of the city and probably in a loveless marriage that she passes her time by duping innocent youths like Prabhakar. This behaviour seems to originate from her desperate need to project herself as an important part of the people's lives even though she ends up ruining them. Prabhakar



represents all those migrants who aspire to live the better city life and are ready to pay any cost to achieve success. Same is the case with Muttu's brother Shankara whose envy with the city life his sister got to live, tears the family apart. Vimala, the chef is a shady character, he character has the semblance of a demon as the city has separated her soul and she lives for her own gains, hurting people in process. These and many minor characters make the organic whole of the city that is a 'Big Black Hole' that attracts everything in its vicinity and in the make them a prisoner of its light.

The play is an example of naturalistic drama and can also be characterized as problem play. The opening scene with "fighting, shouting, bumping into each other, the background noise of traffic" thus representing a common street of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Bangalore. There is no water fountain or the chirping birds, nor even thunder and lightning like Shakespearean plays but the noise of the busy city on the move. Some of the problems and conflicts dealt are stated at the very outset like the traditional village versus the city and the breaking of the family as visible in the quarrel between Muttu and Shankara. The plight of widowhood embodied by Muttu's mother, in contrast to all the progress and higher standard of living Shankara refers in the city, his mother represent the decadence of the ancient Hindu tradition of total isolation or abandonment of windows. The character is a reminder of the real problem that India needs to deal. One of the most central problems is the breaking of the families in the face of materialism and migration of men to the cities for job opportunities, leaving their family behind. Prabhakar was forced to leave his family in the village on the promise of getting a job at Wipro, Singapore. The play deals with creation of the concrete jungle at great environmental costs. The "rain tree" the City Corporation is chopping down symbolizes the nostalgia of the past and also the careless attitude of people and government towards environment. Two opposing point of view are presented by Anjana who grieves the loss of her beloved tree and is troubled with the increasing machination of her surroundings on the other hand Prabhakar, the opportunist is amazed by the wonderful new city, everything even the pollution of the city dazzles him, his naiveté is laughable: "the city air, however polluted, is an oxygen chamber after the suffocation of a small town. Karnad's play *Boiled Beans On Toast* embodies the concept. The title itself is the assimilation of the two cultures and is appropriately applied to Bangalore, the city where Eastern traditions have been stirred by western ideals of freedom, material wealth and capitalism. Karnad's Bangalore represents the 'third space' with all its problems, never providing a

situation. Kunaal's music in the end is the final manifestation of Bangalore's hybrid culture. He decides to set up "Purandara Dasa's music" to the music of his guitar. The play does not give a solution to the problem of the new hubbub of this culture but ends with a note of defeated acceptance

The family of Padabidris depicts how each individual has created an isolated cell to avoid contact with each other. Each member of the family tries to escape the reality of tattered weave of relationship. Anusuya, the grandmother indulges in gambling and has no aversion on cheating on her family, the situation is laughable and ironical. The lack of communication in the family makes each member a prisoner, trying to be free. The character of Anjana Padabidri is the central character in the play, the woman trapped in the four walls and left alone with a baby while her husband pursues his ambitions. She falls in despair as she finds her world purposeless; her only refuge was her singing. When her friend left her, afraid "to be trapped in a relationship with a married woman" that word "trapped" made her clear the action she needs to take to get out "I used to suffer from insomnia those days. Had a large cache of sleeping pills. I ground some in milk and fed them to you. I swallowed the rest...and went to sleep." (Karnad 78). However, death eluded her she lost her singing voice. The character embodies existentialism, defined by Sartre in 'Existentialism and Human Emotions' as in the world void of meaning and Universe where no higher power exists: "Existentialism we mean a doctrine which makes human life possible and in addition declares that every truth and every action implies human setting and human subjectivity." (Sartre 2)

Existentialism emphasizes on human responsibility to define their identity and way they perceive the world around, "existence precedes essence." The play ends on the existentialist truth which Kunaal realizes after finding out that his mother tried to kill him and herself:

"I may never have existed, and yet the world would've continued to be exactly as it is now. I mean. The world, this city, Bangalore, my friends, family, you-everything would have existed, but not me. I could be inside some black hole! I wouldn't exist...But if I didn't exist, whether the rest of the universe existed or no, that wouldn't have mattered in the least, would it?" (Karnad 79)

Thus, the play depicts the individual and social reality of modern Indian city, with human lost in the hustle bustle of the city and actions have no meaning. Materialism rules all and identity is lost in the city

described as “Big Black Hole.”

Mahesh Dattani belongs to the younger generation of modern Indian-English dramatists. He like Karnad seeks to find the appropriate voice to depict the Indian experience in English. “He is an Indian director, actor, playwright and a writer. He has a number of plays to his credit as *Where there’s a Will, Dance Like a Man, Tara, Bravely Fought the Queen, Final Solution, On a Muggy Night in Mumbai, Thirty Days in September, Seven Steps Around The Fire, The Murder That Never Was etc.*”(Naik 273) In *Me and My Plays* he describes his first experience of seeing a Gujarati play. His encounter with Gujarati plays is the most significant phenomenon in shaping his mind for theatre business. He did a number of workshops with Bangalore Little Theatre and later founded a his own theatre group called Playpen and did many Western plays. However, it was when he attended Hindi theatre he realized the need of communicating to the audience in their familiar language, thereon he wrote his first play for Deccan Herald Theatre Festival, called ‘*Where there’s a will.*’ Unlike Karnad, Dattani writes in English. He uses Indian words profusely in his English plays to make his language more relatable: “You’ve got to be true to your expressions. English is for me a sort of given. It’s my language as it is to a lot of Indians here and abroad.”(Dattani 27) “English is a ‘hybrid language’ and spoken unobtrusively in India. Nevertheless, He puts transmission of message through performance and language.”(Shodhganga 4)

Dattani also talks of being influenced by *Bharatnatyam*, the dance form that he claims to have opened his mind to “all the tools needed for a dramatist; from the ‘bhavas’ and ‘rasas’ to precision and rhythm on stage”. This is evident in his play *Dance Like a Man*. Alyque Padmasee discovered this play and ended up being one of the significant factor in Dattani’s success.

“Dattani is also known to be Avant garde feminist. John McRae has rightly regarded him as “the voice of India now” as his plays mostly deal with the problems of the women and the oppressed. The play ‘*Bravely Fought the Queen*’ tells of cloistered life of married women in the city of Bangalore. The play makes use of multi-dimensional stage to make use of spaces and parallel scenes to display the emptiness and isolation of women and unscrupulous life of men, to reveal the inner psyche of the outwardly seeming conventional family. The play is an example of the drawing room drama and is a perfect display of Dattani’s art of stage direction.

Dattani’s play mostly deal with social problems and traces the individual attitude towards them. He is the

only English playwright to be awarded Sahitya Akademi Award. The citation for award reads: “Dattani...probes tangled attitudes in contemporary India towards communal differences, consumerism and gender...a brilliant contribution to Indian English drama.”

His play *The Big Fat City* exposes the dangers and evils hidden behind the pretty and bright face of the Indian city Bombay. Materialism, corruption, drug and alcohol abuse, adultery and honour killing are highlighted in the play. The play is a dark comedy that emphasizes the irony of the contrast between appearance and reality of city life. The play consist of three strings of stories- a corporate couple in financial crisis, a soap actor with a drug addict son and alcoholic husband and an aspiring actress in a secret love affair, all brought together by a shocking murder. They all become accomplices for nothing but greed, overriding all their ethical conundrums and human responsibility. In the end, however, when Harjeet kills his sister for proposing an inter-caste marriage, all of the characters are left in lurch as even they did not get the logic behind killing someone for “honour.” The question is addressed to the audience as to which one is a bigger sin – killing for wealth or killing for blind belief. Thus, in the face of all progress and wealth, what really needs to develop is the Indian perspective.

The play like *Big Fat City* starts in an urban drawing room in Mumbai instead of Bangalore. Niharika and Murli are stereotypical urban couple from a small town who are ready to do anything to be successful in the city of dreams- Mumbai, especially the wife, who serves as the director of the drama of happy life they pretend to live, to impress their rich friends like Lolly and Sailesh. The first scene, where they are preparing for Sailesh’s visit is hilarious with Niharika growling at Murli to wear the “silk Kurti” and get rid of “old banyan.” They are practically broke and are in huge debt and are desperate to mask it. Sailesh, on the other hand is a corrupt banker and turns out to be as desperate as Niharika and Murli. All three of them are trapped in a vicious circle of wealth and fear and when time comes end up becoming accomplice to murder. Lolly takes the audience behind the dazzling lives of film and soap actors, stuck with an alcoholic husband and dealing in drugs to earn money when her career comes to an end. Her apathy towards her husband, Kailash’s death and all she cares about is “fifty lakhs” worth of drugs that Murli has unknowing washed away with Kailash’s clothes. Her sudden affection for Sailesh and their relationship exposes how marriage and family have lost all meaning and all that matters is wealth. A society totally operating on ‘pleasure principle’ equals chaos and thus points to the huge money in the

drug market as more and more people are coming under its influence to get through their pretentious lives, devoid of any meaning and values. The reality of Mumbai as city of illusion and disappointment is exposed. Anu belongs to a wealthy Gujarati family and has come to Mumbai to become an actress however when her boyfriend Puneet murders Kailash she not only became an accomplice to the murder but offers everyone bribe to get out of their financial problems. She is representative of all the people who are aware of the real nature of city and is one with its spirit, thus is the only one with all the solutions to the problem.

Dattani makes use of LED screen to convey the dramatic irony and also give a cinematic effect to his play. It is used to display the text messages which in turn served as tools for depicting the inner thought for example Sailesh's message to his wife about Niharika: "His wife is a pretentious, snooty bitch". Another example is of Lolly's message to and from Ekta Kapoor which reveals the actual state of her career on decline and her desperation for getting a job. LED screen is also used for news flash about the murder which serves the turning point of the story. It is in the news that Harjeet, saw Anu with Lolly and Puneet and grew suspicious of her, thereby he decided to come to Mumbai himself instead of sending the required money. The play in the last act not only reveals the apathy, selfishness and greed of urban people and the corrupt nature of western idea of materialism but also the dark side Indian tradition and blind beliefs and complete absurdity of both. Thus, another dark practice hidden in the name of "sacrifice" as Harjeet calls it is that of 'honour killing'. The modern Indian city with all its attraction and big money is inflicted with the problem of extremities, on one hand there is extreme immorality and greed on the other hand there is so much blind love for one's so called honour and beliefs, in both cases there is diminishing value of human life and loss of individual humanity. Thus, the play itself doesn't have long discussions and debates, however makes audience wonder at the present situation.

The linguistic hybridity is quite visible in the play, thus is an example of Dattani's Indian voice in English. It also points to the effect of western and colonial culture on Indian ideology. The idea of better life connected to economic welfare, is reminiscent of American Dream of 20<sup>th</sup> century, and is visible in the desperation of people to live and prosper in the city. The idea of living in one of the big cities has become equal to making progress and living the dream. This idea has been imposed by the colonist who treated rural people as inferior and themselves lived in cities as the hallmark of their superiority. Thus, Niharika's obsession with living in the city can also be seen as an effect of the colonist

psychology. Dattani in his play has thus successfully the reality of the illusion of beautiful city life.

Thus, Both Karnad in *Boiled Beans on Toast* and Dattani in have explored the truth of urban life in the post-colonial Bangalore and Mumbai, respectively. Both attempted to expose the social and psychological trap of urban life through their characters. Both the plays are examples of Indian-English language in the theatre. The theme of materialism and overreaching ambition is the dominant in both the plays. However, while Karnad play ends with a note on existentialist philosophy, Dattani ends his play on the darker note of the diminished value of human life in the face of greed and blind beliefs. Karnad's play is episodic and seems to emphasize the absurdity of human actions as he makes no effort to connect the cause and effect of the actions of his characters, thus the influence of modern English theatre is visible. Dattani, on the other hand made use of LED screen to explore the theme of deception versus reality and give his drama a cinematic dimension.

Both Karnad and Dattani have criticised the burgeoning force of capitalistic ideology especially visible in Indian cities. Thus, both the plays call for Marxist analysis. Louis Althusser's definition of ideology as the representation of the imaginary relationship between individual and state can be used to see how the ruling class with its emphasis on material wealth ever since the Independence has created a hierarchical urban-rural relationship, wherein the cities appear as the superior and progressive one, creating a cultural and psychological trap which lure people towards it.

Both the plays can be categorised as problem plays exploring the tensions and conflicts of a hybrid culture of Indian cities. The plays though seem to be regional have a universal appeal. The language of both the plays is naturalistic which makes them relatable to the audience like the popular regional theatre. Both the plays are serious attempt to both entertain and smash the myth of the good city life. Thus, both the plays successfully sound the real voice of Indian urban population.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Dattani, Mahesh. *Me and My Plays*. The Big Fat City. Penguin Books India. 2014, New Delhi.
- [2] Deepak, Kashyap. "Development of Indian English Drama". *Literarism*, November 3, 2011. <http://literarism.blogspot.com/2011/11/development-of-indian-english-drama.html> Iyengar, K, R, Srinivas. *Indian Writing in English*. Sterling

Publication, 2019

- [3] Karnad, Girish. *Boiled Beans On Toast*. Translated by Shanta Gokahle. Oxford University Press. 2014, New Delhi
- [4] Naik, M.K. *A History of Indian English Literature*. Sahitya Akademi. 2011, Kolkata Mambrol, Nasrullah. "Homi Bhabha's Concept of Hybridity". *Literariness.org*, April 8, 2016. <https://literariness.org/2016/04/08/homi-bhabhas-concept-of-hybridity/> Sartre, Jean. *Existentialism and Human Emotions*. Citadel Publication, 1987
- [5] Mishra, Sunil Kumar, Parul Mishra, and J. K. Sharma. "Elements of Horror, Grotesque Bodies, and the Fragmentation of Identity in Mark Shelley's *Frankenstein*." *International Journal of Language, Literature and Culture*, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.22161/ijllc.3.2.3>.
- [6] Shodhganga. "Mahesh Dattani as a Playwright". *Shodhganga.in*. [shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/jspui/bitstream/10603/168572/6/06\\_chapter%202.pdf](http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/jspui/bitstream/10603/168572/6/06_chapter%202.pdf)





# A Review on English Homework Design in Compulsory Education under the “Double Reduction” Policy

Wu Zhixin<sup>1</sup>, Peng Yi<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Postgraduate of QZ211 in the School of Foreign Studies, Yangtze University, China

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor in the School of Foreign Studies, Yangtze University, China

\*Corresponding Author

Received: 25 Jun 2023; Received in revised form: 27 Jul 2023; Accepted: 06 Aug 2023; Available online: 13 Aug 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— In 2021, Chinese authorities introduced a set of guidelines to ease the burden of excessive homework and off-campus tutoring for students undergoing compulsory education (the “Double Reduction” policy). As an effective extension of classroom teaching, homework can promote the development of students' personality and core literacy. Research on homework at home and abroad is mainly based on empirical studies, and under the policy of “Double reduction”, this article reviews domestic and foreign researches on English homework design in compulsory education, focusing on the design and correction of homework, homework teaching, homework reduction, and homework reform. And homework research tends to shift from intellectual education to moral education.



**Keywords**— Double-reduction policy, Homework, English homework design

## I. INTRODUCTION

As a result of the onslaught of subject-based out-of-school training, academic competition at the compulsory education has intensified, the financial burden on families has increased, and the disparity in the educational resources received by students has widened, seriously affecting the public interest and fairness of compulsory education. On July 24, 2021, the “Double Reduction” policy was introduced in China to reduce students' homework and academic tutoring burden. “Double reduction” policy has been widely implemented in primary and secondary schools across the country, not only to reduce the heavy workload of students, but also improve the quality of homework design, and systematically design basic homework that conforms to the characteristics of age and the laws of

learning, and reflects the orientation of quality education. And reducing the burden of homework is also considered to be a powerful lever for prying the reform of classroom teaching in schools.

Homework is an effective extension of teachers' classroom teaching, a consolidation and deepening of students' classroom learning achievements, and also an important way of students' extra-curricular learning (Gu Mingyuan, 1990). Homework is also an important way for students to cultivate the habit of completing homework independently and to improve their self-management ability. However, the alienation of homework and the excessive burden of homework have been the main problems of education and anxiety. The “Double Reduction” policy clearly proposes to comprehensively reduce the total

amount and length of homework, and specifically puts forward the ideas of improving the homework management mechanism, categorizing and clarifying the total amount of homework, improving the quality of homework design, strengthening the guidance for the completion of homework, and scientifically utilizing after-school time.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 "Double Reduction" Policy

China, the birthplace of the imperial examination, has a long tradition of imperial examination culture and a sense of merit. And the college entrance examination is like hordes of soldiers and horses passing a single-log bridge, which has formed the phenomenon of education involution only focusing on scores and intellectual education. The phenomena of excessive quantity, low quality and functional alienation of homework in primary and secondary schools across China are prominent.

Since the basic education curriculum reform in 2001, the state has been guiding and regulating homework practices at the policy level. In order to realize the transformation from "education to the test" to "quality education" that comprehensively improves the quality of the nation, Commission for Further Reform under the CPC Central Committee held its 19th meeting on May 21, 2021, and considered and adopted the "Guidelines on Further Easing the Burden of Excessive Homework and Off-campus Tutoring for Students Undergoing Compulsory Education". On July 24, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council issued a formal notice requiring all regions and departments to conscientiously implement and enforce the measures in light of actual practice. Thus, the most stringent "Double Reduction" policy in history has officially landed.

The policy consists of 30 key points in eight areas, including: comprehensively reducing the total amount and duration of homework, upgrading the level of after-school services, comprehensively regulating the behavior of out-of-school training, upgrading the quality of education and teaching, as well as strengthening supportive governance, etc., which embodies the overarching principle of "student-centeredness".

The core essence of the "Double Reducing" policy is to build a high-quality education system, comprehensively

improve the quality of school education and teaching, strike a balance between quality and fairness, and promote the all-around development and healthy growth of students, which does not mean lowering the quality of education. This point was mentioned by Prof. Xiang Xianming in his speech in 2021: In the process of implementing the "Double Reduction" policy, it is necessary to always keep in mind one basic principle - reducing the excessive academic burden of primary and secondary school students is not simply letting children learn less and more simply, but letting them learn more easily and vividly, and learn more and more under the state of great interest. Instead, we want to make children learn more easily and vividly, and learn more, learn faster and learn better in a state of great interest. The original intention of "reducing the burden" is to improve the quality of the nation and to produce more and better talents.

### 2.2 Definition of homework

The term "homework" has a long history in China, first appeared in the pre-Qin literature "Guanzi -Qing Zhong Ding", "The order was issued for half a year, and when the people heard about it, more than half of them gave up their daily business and built warehouses to store grain." Here, "homework" means labor, and it is regarded as a kind of physical labor. One of the world's earliest treatise on education and teaching issues, "Record of Studies", also related to the record of homework, such as "When you're studying, you concentrate on your studies, and when you're taking a break, you have fun with your juggling skills." "The teaching of the regular classes is carried out according to certain times or seasons; there must also be a variety of extracurricular work during the breaks.", refers to extracurricular activities (including extracurricular homework), is a continuation and supplementation of classroom learning. It means that extracurricular activities (including extracurricular homework) are the continuation and supplement of in-class learning, and are interdependent and mutually reinforcing with in-class learning.

In German, however, homework is a derogatory term for a kind of drudgery, and the word 'Arbeit' meant nothing more than slave labor or service. But as work was extended to crafts and fishing, as well as spiritual work, the connotation gradually changed to simply a feeling of work, more like the neutral perception of work in Chinese and

English.

Homework first appeared in German schools in 1505 and began to develop as a learning activity. When teaching shifted from individualized teaching to classroom teaching, homework became a means of individualized learning to make up for the limitations of school learning activities and the classroom system. In the 18th century, German scholars Lessing and Kant were the first to apply "homework" from physical labor to mental labor, forming the concept of "book assignments" and "mental work. Homework is an important and effective supplement to education and teaching.

In modern times, the field of education has given full play to the scope of application of this concept, and more and more attention to play the important educational value of homework. In the 19th century, the German educator Herbart's educational ideology began to influence the European school. In his book "General Pedagogy", Helbart advocated students to apply and practice the knowledge they had learned after class, this work was extended to the home to allow more time for teaching in the school classroom, and homework became a continuation of in-class learning. Since then, homework has been gradually recognized by teachers and students as a continuation of in-class learning.

The concept of homework is included in most of the encyclopedias and dictionaries compiled in China, and the Dictionary of Education (1990), edited by Gu Mingyuan, categorizes homework into in-class work and extra-class work. Extra-class work was once called "homework". Extracurricular homework is a form of teaching organization in which students are required by their teachers to carry out learning activities independently outside of class time. It is generally believed that it is an extension of classroom teaching to help consolidate and perfect the knowledge and skills learned by students in class and develop students' independent learning ability and study habits.

Cooper (1989), an American scholar, considers homework as a task assigned by school teachers to students who expect it to be completed during non-school hours. This definition explicitly excludes (1) guided learning at school; (2) home study subjects delivered by mail, television, radio, video, or the Internet; and (3) extracurricular activities such as clubs or sports.

Based on the above literature, the author defines homework as a kind of learning activity that learners apply and deepen their understanding of what they have learned purposefully and systematically outside the classroom, which helps to consolidate and transfer knowledge and skills learned in the classroom.

### 2.3 Research on homework at home and abroad

Foreign research on homework has a long history of development, and foreign countries mainly focus on the purpose, type, difficulty, amount of homework, people's attitudes toward homework, the content of homework, the relationship between the quality of homework completion and students' English performance, the influence of parental involvement in homework, and teachers' feedback and evaluation of homework through survey and experimental methods.

Research on homework in China can be broadly categorized into survey research, discursive research, experience summary (or action research) and experimental research. Recently, research in China has gradually switched from discursive research to empirical research, and some researchers in China have conducted some studies on homework by using the survey method, which include studies on the current situation of homework, the relationship between homework and students' burden of schoolwork, and the causes of excessive homework. Some scholars in China, especially teachers in primary and secondary schools, have conducted research on the type, design and correction of homework based on their own teaching experience, action research or some contemporary educational theories.

#### 2.3.1 The purpose of homework

American scholars have done a lot of research on the purpose design of homework. Epstein (2001) categorized the purposes of homework into the following 10 types: to provide students with opportunities to practice, to prepare for the classroom, to engage in practical activities, to develop students' personalities and improve parent-child relationships, to strengthen home-school cooperation, to promote peer interactions, to implement school or district policies, to build up the image of the school, and to punish problematic students (etc.). One of Epstein's main objections is to punish students by giving them a lot of homework. The most important and meaningful purpose of

homework is to reinforce knowledge through practice, to achieve personal development, and to promote parent-child relationships.

Cooper (1994) categorized the purposes of homework assignments into instructional and non-instructional purposes, and most teachers categorized the instructional purposes of homework assignments as: practice, preparation, extension, and integration. Non-instructional purposes can be summarized into four categories: (1) facilitating parent-child communication; (2) fulfilling instructions from school administrators; (3) punishing students; and (4) establishing public relations, such as informing parents about what is happening in the school.

Chen (2019), a Chinese scholar, states that the main purpose of homework is to help students master the knowledge and skills they have learned in class and use them in practice. By completing homework, students can better understand what they have learned in class. They then need to apply what they have learned to real life situations. Homework should be a guide to life. English homework can not only broaden the channels of learning and using English, but also improve the ability to practice the language, so as to achieve the purpose of acquiring English knowledge. While scholar Zhang (2019), from the perspective of core literacy, English homework should be conducive to the cultivation of students' core literacy in the context of core literacy. Homework should play a role in developing students' language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality, learning ability and so on.

The purposes of homework vary according to different scholars, but the different purposes of homework are not mutually exclusive. Homework can also serve multiple purposes at the same time, such as consolidating what has been learned in the classroom, previewing new knowledge, strengthening the ability of cooperation among classmates, and facilitating communication between parents and children, and so on.

### 2.3.2 The role of homework

Chinese and Western scholars generally recognize the positive effects of homework, but also indicate that excessive homework can bring about many negative effects. Supporters generally agree that homework, as a supplement to and continuation of classroom teaching in schools, is one of the integral parts of the curriculum and a bridge

connecting in-class and out-of-class learning as well as schooling and family education, and that its positive impacts can be categorized into academic and non-academic aspects: firstly, it contributes to the teaching and learning in schools, such as reinforcing classroom content, enhancing students' proficiency in skills, guiding them to preview new content to be taught by teachers, providing a diagnostic tool for teachers to monitor students' learning progress on a daily basis, motivating them to do more and more. For example, it reinforces what is taught in the classroom; enhances students' skill proficiency; guides students to prepare for what the teacher is going to teach; provides a diagnostic tool for teachers to monitor students' progress on a daily basis; and motivates more parents to pay attention to the teaching and learning process.

Homework, on the other hand, provides non-academic benefits: it helps students develop good study habits; it allows them to identify and learn to use resources such as the Internet, reference books, and other social resources; it allows them to apply what they have learned to new areas or areas of interest; it allows them to use their unique talents and abilities to do personalized and creative work; it improves their time management and organizational skills; it develops perseverance; it improves their time management and organizational skills; and it improves their ability to manage and organize their time. management and organizational skills, and develop personal qualities such as perseverance, responsibility, self-confidence, and self-discipline.

In terms of the correlation between the function of students' homework and academic achievement, Cooper et al. (1999) found that, on the basis of a large number of related studies, to a certain extent, homework has a positive effect on the improvement of students' performance, but this correlation is not completely absolute. In other words, under the right circumstances, there is a positive correlation between students' completion of homework and improved academic performance.

In conclusion, by completing homework, students can help them become proficient in what they have learned in the classroom and better understand and digest their knowledge; they can cultivate their sense of independent thinking and develop good study habits; and they can promote the development of students in various aspects and



improve their literacy.

### 2.3.3 Amount of homework

It is difficult to define the amount of homework in domestic and international studies, and most scholars measure the amount of work according to the amount of "homework time".

Two studies conducted by Beaton (1996) and Mullis et al. (1997) found that there is an inverted U-shaped curve relationship between homework time and students' academic performance, i.e., a moderate amount of homework time is associated with high academic performance, and when the amount of homework time is increasing, the students' academic performance tends to decrease. The American scholar Cooper (1989) investigated the number of after-school homework assignments and the time needed for students to complete after-school homework in compulsory school. He pointed out that the number of after-school homework is not the less the better or the more the better, too little after-school homework students can not achieve the effect of training, too much after-school homework students may be bored with the psychology of the completion of after-school homework counterproductive effect. He therefore suggested that the optimal amount of homework per week should be set for each grade level: four to five times per week for grades 7 to 9, each time for 70 to 90 minutes, including homework for each subject.

Most studies have shown a positive correlation between the amount of homework and student academic achievement, but this correlation is not constant and varies with the grade level of the student, with homework having a positive effect on students in grades 6-12. For high school students, there is a positive correlation between the amount of time spent on homework and student academic achievement. (Cooper, 1989)

In recent years, the excessive academic burden and learning pressure of domestic students have gradually aroused widespread social concern. Our scholars Wang Yuefen and Zhang Xinyu conducted a survey on the implementation status quo of the amount of homework at the basic education stage in Shanghai in 2013, and the results showed that 53.7% of secondary school students completed more than one hour of homework every day, among which 20% of them completed more than two hours

of homework, and 7.5% completed more than three hours of homework every day. Therefore, in 2021, the Double Reduction Policy promulgated by China explicitly proposed to comprehensively reduce the total amount and length of homework and alleviate the excessive homework burden on students: schools should ensure that no written homework is assigned for the first and second grades of elementary school, and that consolidation exercises can be appropriately arranged within the school; the average time for completion of written homework for grades 3-6 of elementary school should not be more than 60 minutes, and the average time for completion of written homework for junior high school should not be more than 90 minutes.

### 2.3.4 Types of homework

Homework is wide-ranging and varied. Scholars have studied homework types from different aspects. There are big differences in the design of homework types at home and abroad. Chinese scholars regard homework as a supplement and continuation of classroom teaching, mainly written assignments, emphasizing consolidation and accumulation. In contrast, homework in the United States is viewed more as a part of the curriculum, focusing on the combination of homework and real life, and emphasizing the investigative, practical and fun aspects of homework.

Lee & Pruitt in 1979 proposed a generally accepted classification of homework, namely (1) practice homework (2) preparatory homework (3) extension homework (4) creative homework. These four types of assignments have different design purposes. Practice assignments are designed to help students master a certain skill; preparatory assignments make students well prepared for a new course and new learning content; extension assignments are assignments in which students go beyond the information they have learned in the classroom and transfer the skills or concepts to a new situation; and creative assignments are assignments in which skills and concepts are combined.

Homework in the United States advocates going into life, only when students realize that what they have learned is immediately applied to real life and solve practical problems with what they have learned, they will be interested in learning knowledge and keep it in mind (McMullen, 2008). It can be seen that, as far as the type of homework design is concerned, foreign experts and scholars pay more attention to innovative and extended

homework, that is to say, through the completion of homework to promote the integration and transfer of knowledge and innovation, and emphasize the importance of giving students a broad space for thinking.

In the article "English Homework Design under the New Curriculum", Wang Fang (2007), a scholar in China, categorized English homework into five types: fun homework, practical homework, innovative and expansive homework, inquiry learning homework and free-choice homework. Interesting homework can use children's songs, riddles, games and other forms to mobilize students' interest. Practical assignments can be carried out by doing things around us, investigating and enumerating, and observing and recording. Innovative homework is focused on cultivating students' creative thinking and developing creative personalities, such as new lyrics, new stories and so on. Exploratory learning assignments can be realized by collecting and excerpting English around them, collecting holiday customs in English-speaking countries and so on. Free-choice assignments are assignments designed by teachers at different levels according to the latest development zone of students' learning to meet different students' needs for assignments.

Yang Rundong (2015) proposed that the design of homework should follow the principles of living, interesting and scientific, in addition to paying attention to the connection and integration between disciplines. For example, the design of English homework not only contains English knowledge, but also integrates art and sports knowledge, which can not only help students grow their wisdom, but also cultivate students' ability to appreciate and appreciate beauty, and cultivate students' noble aesthetic consciousness.

Different researchers focus on different points of view when categorizing homework, so there is no clear classification of homework types. However, according to the viewpoints of domestic and foreign researchers, homework is not only limited to the contents of books, but should be connected with life, fully mobilize students' interests, be based on the textbooks but beyond the textbooks, and cultivate students' creative thinking and critical thinking.

### 2.3.5 Contents of homework

Cross (1992), in his book *Handbook of Practice in*

*Language Teaching and Learning*, puts forward two criteria for assigning English homework: firstly, English homework should not create excessive workload for the teacher; secondly, the task should not be too difficult. In this book, he gives some suggestions to English teachers about the contents of English homework. These include drawing activities, games, substitution, matching, information gap activities, multiple choice questions, right/wrong questions, parallel writing, guided writing, task reading, etc.

Cross believes that by assigning homework, students' language learning time can be increased, and that the homework assigned by the teacher should be as interesting as possible so that in the class, especially in some large classes, the homework should not be too difficult and should not be too difficult. Teachers should make homework as interesting as possible, so that in a class, especially a large class, it helps students to make as few mistakes as possible and to be able to correct them themselves.

## III. CONCLUSION

The "Double Reduction" policy focuses on strengthening the requirements for homework design, categorizing and specifying the total amount of homework, such that the average time for completion of written homework in junior middle schools should not exceed 90 minutes. "Reduce the burden" is not only to reduce the burden of homework, but also to improve the quality of homework design, systematic design in line with the age characteristics and learning rules, reflecting the quality of education-oriented basic homework, while encouraging the arrangement of layered, flexible and personalized homework, resolutely overcome the mechanical, ineffective homework, and put an end to repetitive, punitive homework.

In addition to the design of homework, the "double reduction" also emphasized that students should not be required to self-correct their own homework, teachers should carefully correct their homework, provide timely feedback, strengthen face-to-face explanations, carefully analyze the learning situation, and do a good job of answering questions and tutoring. In recent years, there have been more studies on the correction of homework, and scholars have been thinking about how to efficiently provide feedback on students' homework.

Under the background of "double reduction", many

primary and secondary schools have carried out practical exploration of homework improvement, designing homework, proposing effective teaching strategies and creating efficient classrooms. Research on homework mainly focuses on the design and correction of homework in primary and secondary schools, homework teaching, homework reduction and homework reform. The principles followed in the design of homework (after-school homework) and the specific design of homework appear most frequently in various literatures.

Secondly, the five provinces (municipalities directly under the central government) that pay the most attention to homework in primary and secondary schools are, in order, Jiangsu Province, Shanghai, Shandong Province, Beijing and Zhejiang Province, with East China, represented by Shanghai, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Anhui and Shandong, paying the most attention to homework research, and the rest of the geographic regions are less. (Wu Libao et al., 2021)

The current "Double Reduction" policy has begun to bear fruit, but schools may often reduce the amount of homework but neglect the quality of homework. Therefore, an in-depth investigation of the current situation of homework in the context of "double reduction" is very necessary. Not much research has been done on the current situation of homework after the official implementation of the "double reduction". In the future, researchers can follow up the research from the three levels of teachers, students and parents, and conduct objective and systematic investigations on the implementation of the policy through questionnaires and interviews, focusing on the improvement of the homework burden, homework design and feedback.

The "Double Reduction" encourages tiered, flexible and personalized homework, and the systematic design of homework that is in line with the age-specific characteristics and learning patterns of students. In addition to daily teaching, teachers in primary and secondary schools need to spend a lot of time and energy on designing homework and face-to-face explanation, which undoubtedly increases the burden of teachers. With the development of education informatization, researchers can construct perfect homework evaluation standards and create online services such as answering questions.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Opinions on Further Easing the Burden of Excessive Homework and Off-campus Tutoring for Students Undergoing Compulsory Education Issued by the General Office of the State Council of the CPC Central Committee [A/OL]. [2022-05-10].
- [2] Gu Mingyuan. Education Dictionary [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Education Press, 1990.
- [3] Gao Desheng. An Ethical review of Family Education [J]. Research on Education Development, 2021,41(08):11-22.
- [4] Zhong Zhixian, Fan Caisheng. Quality Education: A Mission for China's Basic Education [M]. Fuzhou: Fujian Education Press, 1998.
- [5] Yuefen Wang. Comparison, analysis and definition of the connotation of homework[J]. Basic Education Curriculum, 2014, (15):14-17.
- [6] Chen Guisheng. Analysis of "homework"[J]. Shanghai Education Research, 2009(12).
- [7] Jiang Qi. History of modern Western education [M]. Beijing: The Commercial Press, 1935: 211-212.
- [8] Zheng Donghui, Sun Huiling. Changes in the concept of homework and its significance[J]. Contemporary Education Science, 2015(04):21-24.
- [9] Huang, Yuan-Shen. The Effort of English Learning Lies Mainly Outside the Classroom[J]. Foreign Language, 2007(6):12-15.
- [10] Hu Yongmei - Education should be about students' happiness - Reflections on reducing the burden of homework on primary and secondary school students[J]. Chinese Journal of Education, 2010(12):11-13.
- [11] Wang Jingying, Zhou Danhua, Li Xiang, et al. Homework in the context of "double reduction": review of problems, analysis of role mechanism and choice of path to improve quality and efficiency[J]. Modern Distance Education, 2022(1):57-63.
- [12] Pu Yang. Research status and inspiration of homework in the United States[J]. Foreign Primary and Secondary Education, 2013(11):20-27.
- [13] Ren Valuable. An overview of homework research in foreign countries[J]. Shanghai Education Research. 2007(3):31-34.
- [14] Wu Xun. Historical development of homework in American primary and secondary schools and its inspiration[J]. Foreign Primary and Secondary Education. 2006(8):30-33.
- [15] Ren Valuable. Survey on the status of homework in primary

- and secondary schools in five provinces of China[J]. Research on Education Science, 2015(12):49-56.
- [16] Luo Beigang, Xie Lu. Explanation of Contingent Functions and Example Analysis of Design of After-school English Assignments in Elementary and Middle Schools under Core Literacy[J]. Elementary and Middle School English Teaching and Research, 2020(4):66-70, 78.
- [17] Qiao Liangwen. Practical exploration of implicit layered homework design in middle school English[J]. Primary and middle school English teaching and research, 2017(8):66-71.
- [18] Wu Libao, Gu Yuefeng, Liao Jing. Analysis of the development history and characteristics of homework policy in primary and secondary schools in China since the new century[J]. Educational Theory and Practice, 2022, 42(10):17-23.
- [19] Xia Xiaoqing. Survey research on primary and secondary school teachers' awareness of the function of homework[J]. Shanghai Education Research, 2014, (06):78-80.
- [20] Pu Yang. Historical analysis and inspiration of homework research in the United States[J]. Foreign Primary and Secondary Education, 2014, (02):35-41+5.
- [21] Xi Chunmei, Fan Huiyong. Homework research(1979 ~ 2018): hotspots, evolution and its outlook-a visual analysis based on CSSCI and Chinese core journals library[J]. Science and education guide (upper ten), 2019, (07):175-178.
- [22] Wu Libao, KONG Ying, Dai Junhua. Hot spots, evolution and prospect of homework research in primary and secondary schools in China under the background of "double reduction"[J]. Journal of Tianjin Normal University (Social Science Edition), 2022, (01):50-56.





# Study of the Impact of Sino-US Trade Friction on Oil Prices

Ziping Wang

Beijing Internet Institute, Beijing, China

Received: 29 Jun 2023; Received in revised form: 31 Jul 2023; Accepted: 06 Aug 2023; Available online: 14 Aug 2023  
©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license  
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— Since 2017, Sino-US trade frictions have continued, while international crude oil prices have fluctuated sharply, and China's crude oil procurement is faced with greater risk of price fluctuations. This paper uses the EGARCH model to study the impact of Sino-US trade frictions on oil prices, and finds that intensified trade events significantly reduce oil price returns and increase the volatility of oil prices, but moderating trade events have no significant impact on oil prices. The impact of intensified trade events on oil prices has the feature of mean recovery. The yield of oil prices decreases most on the first day but recovers to the original level on the third day. Moreover, moderating trade events have no significant dynamic impact on oil prices. The research results of this paper show that there is a leverage effect on the impact of sino-US trade friction on oil prices, that is, negative news has a greater impact on the price than positive news. Further analysis shows that sino-US trade frictions affect oil prices mainly through the mechanism of market sentiment.



**Keywords**— Sino-US trade friction; oil price; market sentiment; event study

## I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, China's economic development has attracted worldwide attention, and China is playing an increasingly important role in the world economy, which poses a severe challenge to the developed countries in the world, including the United States. China and the United States have differences in economic systems, political systems and resource endowments, which eventually began with the "313 investigation" of the United States against China in 2017 and evolved into a "Sino-US trade war".

In the 18 months between July 2018 and May 2019, Donald Trump's administration-imposed tariffs on more than \$360 billion of Chinese goods, with tariffs ranging from 10 percent to 25 percent. In response to U.S. tariffs,

Beijing has imposed a new round of tit-for-tat tariffs ranging from 5 percent to 25 percent on \$110 billion worth of American goods. Finally, after efforts, the two sides reached a "trade war" truce agreement at the end of 2010.

The United States is the world's largest producer of crude oil, while China is the largest importer of the commodity, which has an impact on oil prices during trade frictions between the two countries. In June and July 2019, benchmark Brent crude oil prices traded in a narrow range of \$60-67. However, after the latest tariffs were announced, the benchmark price of West Texas Intermediate crude recorded its biggest one-day fall in four-and-a-half years on August 1, while Brent crude fell 7 per cent on the same day. China is already the world's largest crude oil importer, and

the fluctuation of crude oil price poses a challenge to China's energy security. Studying the impact of Sino-US trade friction on oil price is helpful for China to prevent price risk and strengthen risk control in crude oil purchase.

In recent years, "Brexit", "Sino-US trade war" and other events have raised the uncertainty of economic policy to a historical level, which has aroused the attention of the academic community. Although many scholars have analyzed the impact of policy uncertainty on the economy, there is limited research on policy uncertainty and commodity prices. The index constructed by Baker et al. (2016) provides a measure of economic policy uncertainty, as international crude oil prices are closely related to the macro economy (Kilian, 2009; Kilian and Murphy, 2014), so some scholars use this index to study the relationship between economic policy uncertainty and international oil prices. Kang and Ratti (2013) analyzed the response of economic policy uncertainty in the United States to international crude oil supply, actual demand and speculative demand, and found that the increase of speculative demand for crude oil would lead to the increase of economic policy uncertainty in the United States, and the positive impact of actual demand for crude oil would reduce the economic policy uncertainty in the United States. But oil supply shocks have had no significant impact on US economic policy uncertainty. Kang et al. (2017a) studied the relationship between oil price, economic policy uncertainty and stock return of oil and gas companies, and concluded that demand-side oil price shock had a positive effect on stock return of oil and gas companies, while economic policy uncertainty reduced stock return. The historical variance decomposition shows that policy uncertainty amplifies the effect of oil price on stock returns of oil and gas companies.

Although international oil prices have fluctuated significantly during the Sino-US trade war, there has been no research and analysis of the impact of Sino-US trade friction on oil prices. The research of this paper has the following innovations: First, it analyzes the impact of Sino-US trade friction on international oil prices for the first time, providing new empirical evidence for oil price fluctuations when trade policy uncertainties are high; Second, the improved event analysis method is used to analyze the dynamic changes of oil prices when Sino-US trade disputes

occur. Thirdly, through mechanism analysis, it is concluded that market sentiment is an important factor affecting oil price fluctuations, which supports Singleton's (2014) view that behavioral financial factors will affect international crude oil prices.

## II. DATA

The most commonly used price indexes in the international crude oil market trading center are the North Sea BRENT crude oil price (BRENT) and the West Texas Light crude oil price (WTI), but Brent is gradually becoming the oil price index reflecting the fundamentals of the international crude oil market. Historically, BRENT and WTI crude oil prices have moved in much the same direction, but since 2010, WTI prices have increasingly reflected the fundamentals of the Americas rather than the global crude oil market due to the dramatic increase in crude production from the U.S. shale revolution. The weight of Brent in major commodity indices has been increased, while that of WTI has fallen. Therefore, in order to analyze the impact of Sino-US trade frictions on oil prices, this paper chooses the spot price of North Sea BRENT crude oil to represent oil prices, and the price adopts the form of logarithmic return.

The control variables used in this paper are the S&P 500 index, the US Federal funds rate and the open position of the crude oil futures market. The data comes from Thomas Reuters. Table 1 describes the statistical characteristics of the variables involved in this paper. During the sample period, oil prices rose as high as \$86.07 / BBL and fell as low as \$43.98 / BBL. The S&P 500 averages around 2,700 and the US federal funds rate is in the range of 0.56 to 2.45. Based on the Jarque-Bera test, the normal distribution hypothesis is rejected for all variables. In addition, all variables are stationary after log-difference transformation.

*Table 1 Descriptive statistics of variables*

|               | <b>Oil<br/>Price</b> | <b>S&amp;P<br/>500</b> | <b>Fed<br/>Fund<br/>Rate</b> | <b>Open<br/>Interest</b> |
|---------------|----------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Mean</b>   | 63.231               | 2703.74                | 1.655                        | 2383614                  |
|               |                      | 9                      |                              |                          |
| <b>Median</b> | 63.470               | 2724.44                | 1.680                        | 2378104                  |
|               |                      | 0                      |                              |                          |

|                 |        |         |        |         |
|-----------------|--------|---------|--------|---------|
| <b>Maximum</b>  | 86.070 | 3240.02 | 2.450  | 2736659 |
|                 |        | 0       |        |         |
| <b>Minimum</b>  | 43.980 | 2257.83 | 0.560  | 2083255 |
|                 |        | 0       |        |         |
| <b>Skewness</b> | 0.068  | -0.055  | -0.161 | 0.335   |
| <b>Kurtosis</b> | -0.649 | -0.776  | -1.211 | 0.253   |
| <b>JB</b>       | 13.819 | 19.260  | 48.854 | 15.757  |

The Sino-US trade friction events adopted in this paper are based on the data of the "Sino-US Trade Dispute Annals" of Pudaokou School of Finance of Tsinghua University. The Sino-US trade dispute events reported and commented on by the two most authoritative newspapers, the Wall Street Journal and the New York Times, are selected as the variables of Sino-US trade friction events in this paper. He and Fang (2019) only analyzed the impact of Sino-US trade disputes on China's financial market in the form of "0-1" dummy variables. This paper further divided Sino-US trade disputes into moderating and intensifying events, and analyzed the impact of Sino-US trade disputes on international oil prices in a more comprehensive way.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 EGARCH model

Since the change of oil price has the characteristic of fluctuation agglomeration after peak (Morana, 2001; Narayan and Narayan, 2007; Mohammadi and Su, 2010), and the existence of leverage effect makes the impact of positive and negative shocks on oil prices asymmetric (Loutia, 2016). EGARCH model is used in this paper to analyze the impact of Sino-US trade frictions on oil prices. Acute trade events represent negative trade friction events and are represented by BEARISH, which is BEARISH=1 when such events occur and 0 otherwise. Similarly, palliative trade events represent positive trade friction events, BULLISH with BULLISH=1 when such events occur and 0 otherwise. We add intensification and moderating trade event dummy variables to the oil price EGARCH model to analyze the impact of Sino-US trade frictions on oil price returns and fluctuations. The EGARCH model of basic trade friction events and oil prices is expressed as follows:

$$R_t = \mu + \sum_1^n R_{t-1} + \lambda BEARISH_t + \zeta BULLISH_t + \eta X_t + \epsilon_t \quad (1)$$

$$\epsilon_t \sim \text{iidN}(0, \sigma_t^2) \quad (2)$$

$$\ln \sigma_t^2 = \omega + \alpha \left[ \frac{\epsilon_{t-1}}{\sqrt{\sigma_{t-1}^2}} \right] + \beta \ln(\sigma_{t-1}^2) + \gamma \frac{\epsilon_{t-1}}{\sqrt{\sigma_{t-1}^2}} + vBEARISH_t + \varphi BULLISH_t + \tau X_t \quad (3)$$

Equation (1) is the mean oil price equation, indicating that oil price is a function of constant term  $\mu$ , lag term of oil price yield, Sino-US trade friction events, some control variables. The mean value equation of equation (1) describes the change in the oil price yield. Equation (3) is the conditional heteroscedasticity equation, where  $\omega$  is a constant;  $\alpha$  is the ARCH term, which measures the impact of shock on conditional heteroscedasticity.  $\beta$  is the GARCH term, which measures the volatility concentration of the price. The higher the GARCH value, the longer the oil price volatility will last when the shock occurs. In addition, Sino-US trade frictions and some control variables also have an impact on the volatility of oil prices.  $\gamma$  measures the asymmetric effects of positive and negative shocks: when  $\gamma$  is negative, negative shocks have a greater impact on oil prices than positive shocks. When  $\gamma$  is positive, positive shocks have a greater impact on oil prices than negative shocks.

#### 3.2 Event study

Event analysis is a widely used analysis method, which is often used in empirical financial literature to analyze the impact of important events on enterprises. Event analysis evaluates the impact of events such as mergers and acquisitions or financial announcements on corporate stock returns by measuring the abnormal returns of corporate stock around recurring related events.

In this paper, we take the Sino-US trade friction incident as the center and analyze the changes and significance of oil prices before and after the incident, so as to analyze the dynamic impact of trade friction events on oil prices. Based on the EGARCH model mentioned in the first part, trade friction events are included in the model. The EGARCH regression model of event analysis is as follows:

$$R_t = \mu + \sum_1^n R_{t-1} + \sum_{-m}^m \lambda_s BEARISH_s + \sum_{-m}^m \zeta_s BULLISH_s + \eta X_t + \epsilon_t \quad (4)$$

$$\epsilon_t \sim \text{iidN}(0, \sigma_t^2) \quad (5)$$

$$\ln \sigma_t^2 = \omega + \alpha \left[ \frac{\epsilon_{t-1}}{\sqrt{\sigma_{t-1}^2}} \right] + \beta \ln(\sigma_{t-1}^2) + \gamma \frac{\epsilon_{t-1}}{\sqrt{\sigma_{t-1}^2}} +$$

$$\sum_{-m}^m \lambda_s BEARISH_s + \sum_{-m}^m \zeta_s BULLISH_s + \tau X_t \quad (6)$$

Where  $R_t$  is the logarithmic yield of oil price.  $S$  measures the time interval of intensified and alleviated trade friction events, the unit of which is day, and the range of time interval is  $[-m, m]$ , indicating that the window period for the occurrence of trade friction events ranges from  $m$  working days before the occurrence of trade friction events to  $m$  working days after the occurrence of trade friction events.  $BEARISH_s$  and  $BULLISH_s$  are active and moderating trade event dummy variables respectively: The intensified trade event dummy variable is formed by adding  $P$  dummy variables, where  $P$  is the number of the intensified trade event, that is,  $BEARISH_s = \sum_{p=1}^P BEARISH_{ps}$ , and  $BEARISH_{ps}$  represents the dummy variable  $s$  trading days apart from the  $p$  intensified trade event. The mitigated trade event dummy variable is formed by adding  $Q$  dummy variables, where  $Q$  is the number of mitigated trade events, and  $BULLISH_{qs}$  represents the bullish variable that is  $s$  trading days away from the  $q$  mitigated trade event. The details are as follows:

$$BEARISH_{ps} = \begin{cases} 1, t = t_{tf,p} + s \\ 0, Other \end{cases} \quad (7)$$

$$BULLISH_{qs} = \begin{cases} 1, t = t_{tf,q} + s \\ 0, Other \end{cases} \quad (8)$$

### 3.3 Dynamic correlation

When oil prices are hit by an external shock, traders adjust their portfolios to avoid risk, which causes the price of the relevant market to move in tandem with the price of the crude oil market. For example, in times of trade war between China and the United States, trading in the crude oil market rises, and traders may shift funds to markets that can hold their value, such as gold. For cross-market linkage effect, this paper uses Engel (2002) dynamic correlation coefficient autoregressive conditional abnormal volatility (DCC GARCH) model to analyze. Assuming that  $r_t$  is  $n \times 1$  asset return vector and asset return is a first-order autoregressive process, then:

$$r_t = \mu + \alpha r_{t-1} + \epsilon_t \quad (9)$$

$$\epsilon_t = H_t^{1/2} Z_t \quad (10)$$

Where  $H_t$  is the conditional covariance matrix of the asset return vector. The DCC GARCH model proposed by Engel (2002) is estimated by a two-step method. The first step is to calculate the parameters of the GARCH part of the model. The second step is to estimate the time-varying covariance volatility matrix, as follows:

$$H_t = D_t R_t D_t \quad (11)$$

Where  $H_t$  is the time-varying covariance volatility matrix,  $R_t$  is the conditional correlation matrix,  $D_t$  is the diagonal matrix obtained when calculating the standard deviation,  $D_t = \text{diag} \left( h_{1,t}^{\frac{1}{2}}, \dots, h_{n,t}^{\frac{1}{2}} \right)$ , where  $h$  is a univariate GARCH model. Transform  $R_t$  as follows:

$$R_t = \text{diag} \left( q_{1,t}^{-\frac{1}{2}}, \dots, q_{n,t}^{-\frac{1}{2}} \right) Q_t \text{diag} \left( q_{1,t}^{-\frac{1}{2}}, \dots, q_{n,t}^{-\frac{1}{2}} \right) \quad (12)$$

Assuming  $h$  is of GARCH (1,1) form, then the time-varying covariance volatility matrix  $H_t$  is of the following form:

$$h_{i,t} = \omega_i + \alpha_i \epsilon_{i,t-1}^2 + \beta_i h_{i,t-1} \quad (13)$$

In addition,  $Q_t$  is a symmetric positive definite matrix:

$$Q_t = (1 - \theta_1 - \theta_2) \bar{Q} + \theta_1 z_{t-1} z'_{t-1} + \theta_2 Q_{t-1} \quad (14)$$

$\bar{Q}$  is an unconditional correlation matrix of normalized residuals with parameters  $\theta_1$  and  $\theta_2$  being non-negative. These parameters are related to the exponential smoothing process and are used to construct the dynamic correlation coefficients of the variables. The dynamic correlation coefficient is shown as follows:

$$\rho_{i,j,t} = \frac{q_{i,j,t}}{\sqrt{q_{i,i,t} q_{j,j,t}}} \quad (15)$$

## IV. EMPIRICAL RESULTS

### 4.1 Basic result analysis

From the previous data analysis, we can see that the logarithmic yield form of oil prices, the S&P 500 index, the federal funds rate, and open positions are all stationary. Table 2 shows the estimated results under the baseline regression of the EGARCH model for the estimated period from January 1, 2017 to December 31, 2019. The first part of Table 2 describes the estimation results of the mean part, and the second part is the estimation results of the conditional heteroscedasticity part.



Table 2 Effects of Sino-US trade frictions on oil price returns and fluctuations

|                      | Coefficient | Deviation | T statistic | P value |
|----------------------|-------------|-----------|-------------|---------|
| <b>Mean</b>          |             |           |             |         |
| <b>Lag</b>           | -0.0423     | 0.0238    | -1.7786     | 0.0753  |
| <b>BEARISH</b>       | -0.0066     | 0.0024    | -2.7189     | 0.0066  |
| <b>BULLISH</b>       | 0.0013      | 0.0007    | 1.7308      | 0.0835  |
| <b>S&amp;P500</b>    | 0.2603      | 0.0494    | 5.2679      | 0.0000  |
| <b>Fed fund rate</b> | 0.2218      | 0.0506    | 4.3838      | 0.0000  |
| <b>Open interest</b> | 0.0450      | 0.0014    | 31.4803     | 0.0000  |
| <b>Volatility</b>    |             |           |             |         |
| <b>Arch</b>          | -0.0549     | 0.0051    | -10.6897    | 0.0000  |
| <b>Garch</b>         | 0.9821      | 0.0057    | 171.8143    | 0.0000  |
| <b>Asymmetry</b>     | -0.0584     | 0.0022    | -26.2436    | 0.0000  |
| <b>BEARISH</b>       | 0.1112      | 0.0002    | 567.8626    | 0.0000  |
| <b>BULLISH</b>       | -0.3124     | 0.2113    | -1.4789     | 0.1392  |
| <b>S&amp;P500</b>    | -1.5994     | 0.2229    | -7.1738     | 0.0000  |
| <b>Fed fund rate</b> | -9.6220     | 0.0009    | -10733.9267 | 0.0000  |
| <b>Open interest</b> | -1.7269     | 0.0001    | -20852.6679 | 0.0000  |

First of all, in the mean equation of EGARCH model, the impact of stock price (S&P 500 index) on oil price is positive and significant, with stock yield rising by 1 percentage point and oil yield rising by 0.26 percentage point. According to the "stability related theory" of stock market and macro economy, the fluctuation of macro economy is the basis of stock price changes, and the stock price reflects the macro economic situation. Fama (1990) and Schwert (1990) studied the changes of stock prices in the United States from 1953 to 1987, and the results showed that stock prices were closely related to macroeconomic conditions, and the results were significant in monthly, quarterly and annual cycles. Kilian (2019) uses the structural vector autoregressive model to study the effects of crude oil market supply, macroeconomic fluctuations and speculative demand on oil prices, and the results show that macroeconomic fluctuations are the most important factors affecting oil prices. Therefore, the overall price of the stock market reflects the macroeconomic situation, which will also affect the movement of oil prices. Kilian and Park (2007) also show that when unexpected economic expansion occurs, oil price changes are positively correlated with stock price changes. In terms of the volatility of oil prices, the change of the S&P 500 index is negatively correlated with the volatility of oil prices. According to the

previous analysis, the stock market reflects the macroeconomic situation. If the stock market continues to decline, then the macro economy may turn into a recession. Nicholas (2014) pointed out that in a depression, the uncertainty in the economy would rise, so people would be more difficult to judge the future economic trend, and there would be greater differences in the future economic expectations. If reflected in the crude oil market, the divergence among crude oil traders has also increased, implying greater crude oil price volatility.

In the conditional heteroscedasticity, both the ARCH term and the GARCH term are highly significant. Moreover, the volatility cluster parameter ( $\alpha+\beta$ ) is close to 1, indicating the volatility of oil prices has volatility cluster. In other words, when oil prices fluctuate due to external shocks to the oil market, the volatility of oil prices will take some time to gradually diminish. The  $(\ln 0.5 / \ln (\alpha+\beta))$  ratio can be used to calculate the half-life of oil price fluctuations in response to external shocks. According to this calculation, it takes about 9.1 days for oil price fluctuations to decrease by 50%. The leverage effect in the EGARCH model is also significant and negative. This means that under the same intensity conditions, negative shocks have a stronger impact on oil price fluctuations than positive shocks.

As for the impact of Sino-US trade frictions on oil

prices, EGARCH model results show that the impact of intensified trade events on oil price returns is negative and significant. When an intensified trade friction event occurs, the oil price yield falls 0.7 percentage points, and the result is significant at the 1% level. Moreover, when an intensified trade event occurs, oil price volatility increases. Relatively speaking, the impact of palliative trade events on the oil price yield is positive and significant at the level of 10%, and when the palliative trade events appear, the oil price yield rises by 0.1 percentage points. In addition, easing trade events have reduced the volatility of oil prices.

#### 4.2 The dynamic impact of Sino-US trade frictions

We use event analysis to study the dynamic impact of Sino-US trade frictions on oil prices. This method has been widely used in the field of financial research, but it is still rarely used in the study of oil prices. Event analysis studies the abnormal price fluctuations around a specific time. In this paper, it refers to the abnormal price fluctuations before and after the occurrence of trade friction events. The impact of the event may be reflected in the price immediately, or it may take time to be gradually reflected in the price. Since the international crude oil market is already a relatively mature market with high market liquidity, this paper chooses two days before and after the occurrence of trade friction events as the event analysis window. BEARISH(-1) and BEARISH(-2) represent the first day and the second day before the occurrence of an intensified trade friction event, and BEARISH(+1) and BEARISH(+2) represent the first day and the second day after the occurrence of an intensified trade friction event. BULLISH(-1) and

BULLISH(-2) represent the first and second days before the event of palliative trade friction, while BULLISH(+1) and BULLISH(+2) represent the first and second days after the event of palliative trade friction.

The results in Table 3 show that, within the event analysis window, the impact of intensified trade friction events on the benefit of oil prices is significant. On the day of the intensified trade friction event, the oil price fell the most, the oil price yield fell by 0.7%, but the decline narrowed to 0.1% on the second day, and resumed the decline on the third day, with a significant mean recovery feature. As Delong et al. (1990) pointed out, because there are many noise traders in the market, they will buy financial assets when the price rises and sell financial assets when the price falls, which makes the price of financial assets reflect the mean-recovery feature. For example, when good news is released in the market, rational speculators expect prices to rise and buy financial assets, but at the same time they expect noisy traders in the market to blindly chase up the price, so rational speculators will buy more financial assets, pushing the price of financial assets to a higher level. Noise traders then see the price rise and enter the market to trade, keeping the price above the fundamentals, at which point some rational speculators begin to sell for profit. While the price rise is partly rational, it is partly due to rational anticipation trading by speculators and the positive feedback effect of traders on such trades. In the long run, financial asset prices converge towards fundamentals and are expected to fully revert to the mean.

Table 3 Dynamic impact of Sino-US trade frictions on oil prices

|                      | Coefficient | Deviation | T statistic | P value |
|----------------------|-------------|-----------|-------------|---------|
| <b>LAG</b>           | -0.049      | 0.028     | -1.714      | 0.086   |
| <b>S&amp;P500</b>    | 0.629       | 0.070     | 8.950       | 0.000   |
| <b>Fed fund rate</b> | 0.014       | 0.006     | 2.250       | 0.024   |
| <b>Open interest</b> | 0.232       | 0.042     | 5.565       | 0.000   |
| <b>BEARISH</b>       | -0.007      | 0.000     | -14.967     | 0.000   |
| <b>BULLISH</b>       | 0.006       | 0.004     | 1.427       | 0.154   |
| <b>BEARISH(-1)</b>   | -0.004      | 0.001     | -6.114      | 0.000   |
| <b>BEARISH(-2)</b>   | 0.005       | 0.001     | 7.027       | 0.000   |
| <b>BEARISH(+1)</b>   | -0.001      | 0.001     | -2.117      | 0.034   |
| <b>BEARISH(+2)</b>   | 0.000       | 0.004     | 0.020       | 0.984   |
| <b>BULLISH(-1)</b>   | 0.003       | 0.004     | 0.745       | 0.456   |
| <b>BULLISH(-2)</b>   | -0.001      | 0.005     | -0.227      | 0.820   |

|                      |         |       |         |       |
|----------------------|---------|-------|---------|-------|
| <b>BULLISH(+1)</b>   | -0.006  | 0.007 | -0.771  | 0.441 |
| <b>BULLISH(+2)</b>   | 0.004   | 0.004 | 1.055   | 0.291 |
| <b>Arch</b>          | -0.076  | 0.023 | -3.281  | 0.001 |
| <b>Garch</b>         | 0.979   | 0.002 | 600.125 | 0.000 |
| <b>Asymmetry</b>     | 0.104   | 0.035 | 2.957   | 0.003 |
| <b>S&amp;P500</b>    | -10.301 | 2.654 | -3.881  | 0.000 |
| <b>Fed fund rate</b> | -1.504  | 0.727 | -2.068  | 0.039 |
| <b>Open interest</b> | -4.292  | 3.059 | -1.403  | 0.161 |
| <b>BEARISH</b>       | 0.223   | 0.460 | 0.484   | 0.629 |
| <b>BULLISH</b>       | 0.683   | 0.730 | 0.936   | 0.349 |
| <b>BEARISH(-1)</b>   | 0.667   | 0.342 | 1.950   | 0.051 |
| <b>BEARISH(-2)</b>   | -0.699  | 0.273 | -2.560  | 0.010 |
| <b>BEARISH(+1)</b>   | -0.308  | 0.587 | -0.524  | 0.600 |
| <b>BEARISH(+2)</b>   | 0.198   | 0.360 | 0.552   | 0.581 |
| <b>BULLISH(-1)</b>   | -0.133  | 0.620 | -0.214  | 0.831 |
| <b>BULLISH(-2)</b>   | -1.159  | 0.284 | -4.078  | 0.000 |
| <b>BULLISH(+1)</b>   | -0.029  | 1.131 | -0.026  | 0.979 |
| <b>BULLISH(+2)</b>   | 0.388   | 0.608 | 0.638   | 0.523 |

In the EGARCH model of event analysis, the impact of mitigated trade frictions on oil prices is not significant. Because people are generally more sensitive to negative news, negative news has a greater impact on market sentiment, and market prices reflect negative news more obviously.

In addition, this paper finds that market traders have expectations for the occurrence of trade friction events. In the case of intensified trade frictions, the oil price yield declined gradually from 0.5% to -0.4% two days before the trade frictions occurred. Although the effect of the mitigated trade friction event was not significant, the oil price yield rose from -0.1% to 0.3% in the two days before the mitigated trade friction event. As Demirer and Kutan (2010)

pointed out, information leakage is a common phenomenon in the information age, and some transactions may obtain inside information in advance.

#### 4.3 Mechanism analysis

##### 4.3.1 Risk premium mechanism

In the previous analysis, we have shown that Sino-US trade frictions have an impact on oil prices. Among them, intensified trade friction events make the return on oil prices decline, and moderated trade friction events make the return on oil prices rise. Intensified trade friction events have a greater and significant impact on oil prices than moderated trade friction events. In this part, we study whether Sino-US trade frictions have an impact on oil prices through the risk premium channel.

*Table 4 Analysis of risk premium effect of Sino-US trade frictions*

|                                       | <b>Coefficient</b> | <b>Deviation</b> | <b>T statistic</b> | <b>P value</b> |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| <b>LAG</b>                            | -0.020             | 0.0365           | -0.546             | 0.5852         |
| <b>BEARISH</b>                        | -0.005             | 0.0053           | -0.980             | 0.3271         |
| <b>BULLISH</b>                        | 0.0030             | 0.0045           | 0.6646             | 0.5063         |
| <b>S&amp;P500</b>                     | 0.3099             | 0.0585           | 5.2939             | 0.0000         |
| <b>Fed fund rate</b>                  | 0.3493             | 0.0956           | 3.6523             | 0.0003         |
| <b>Open inetrest</b>                  | 0.0325             | 0.0192           | 1.6977             | 0.0896         |
| <b>Conditional heteroscedasticity</b> | 0.0103             | 0.1994           | 0.0514             | 0.9590         |

|                      |        |        |             |        |
|----------------------|--------|--------|-------------|--------|
| <b>ARCH</b>          | -0.051 | 0.0288 | -1.764      | 0.0777 |
| <b>GARCH</b>         | 0.915  | 0.0000 | 1283000.000 | 0.0000 |
| <b>gamma1</b>        | -0.080 | 0.0636 | -1.264      | 0.2061 |
| <b>BEARISH</b>       | 0.143  | 0.0926 | 1.545       | 0.1223 |
| <b>BULLISH</b>       | -0.125 | 0.2217 | -0.562      | 0.5743 |
| <b>S&amp;P500</b>    | -5.496 | 2.4626 | -2.232      | 0.0256 |
| <b>Fed fund rate</b> | -1.226 | 3.7425 | -0.327      | 0.7433 |
| <b>Open interest</b> | -0.515 | 1.2281 | -0.420      | 0.6748 |

Risk premium refers to the expected return on financial assets exceeding the risk-free return on investment. The risk premium of financial assets is a form of compensation to investors, which represents the reward paid to investors for taking more risk in a given investment than in a risk-free asset. The size of the risk premium depends on the level of risk of a particular investment and also changes over time with fluctuations in market risk. In general, high-risk investments can command a higher premium. Most economists agree that the concept of an equity risk premium, in which the market pays investors more in the long run for taking on more risk, is correct. Hamilton and Wu (2009) established a risk premium model for crude oil market, indicating that with more and more financial institutions participating in crude oil futures trading, the risk premium mechanism of crude oil market has changed. In this paper, in the crude oil market, Sino-US trade frictions will increase the risk of crude oil price fluctuations. If the risk premium mechanism exists, the fluctuations of oil prices will have an impact on the return rate of oil prices.

In order to test whether trade friction events affect oil price returns through risk premium channels, we construct an EGARCH-M model using conditional heteroscedasticity as an independent variable for analysis. As described by Hudson et al. (2020) and Jiang (2019), if we control the conditional variance in the model and assume that the coefficient of the conditional variance term is significant, while the Sino-US trade friction event coefficient becomes insignificant or significantly smaller, then the risk premium is the reason why Sino-US trade friction events affect the oil price yield.

Table 4 reports the estimated results of the EGARCH-M model that includes trade friction events. We can see that the impact of S&P 500 index, federal funds rate and open interest on oil prices is still significant, but the impact of oil

price fluctuations on yields is not significant, which cannot support the conclusion that there is an intermediary effect of risk premium.

#### 4.3.2 Market sentiment mechanism

Qadan and Nama (2018) point out that as more financial institutions participate in crude oil futures trading, market sentiment has become increasingly important in determining oil prices. First, crude oil prices have been significantly more volatile since the new millennium, which is difficult to explain by fundamental factors. Second, the participants in the oil market trading have undergone profound changes, and the financialization of crude oil is increasing. More scholars have also realized the importance of behavioral finance factors in the analysis of oil prices, and the "animal spirits" of traders will have an impact on oil prices, and even cause large changes in oil prices. Singleton(2014) points out that the results of traditional SVAR analysis can be misleading due to the lack of representation of market participants' emotions. Because there is information friction in the market, market participants will have different opinions, which will cause oil prices to drift. Xiong and Yan(2009) demonstrated. A large number of financial institutions began trading in the crude oil market, which was an important reason for the sharp rise in crude oil prices from 2002 to 2008, and trader sentiment has an impact on oil prices. Banerjee(2009) believes that the phenomenon of price drift may be caused by fluctuations in market sentiment.

In order to analyze the mediating effect of market sentiment on the impact of trade friction events on oil price returns, we refer to Zhou (2018) and use the Williams market technical indicators to measure market sentiment. Incorporating market sentiment into the EGARCH model, Table 5 shows that market sentiment has a significant impact on oil prices. During the Sino-US trade war period



from 2017 to the end of 2019, market sentiment has a negative impact on oil price returns. But at the same time, we can see that the coefficients of both intensified and

mitigated trade friction events become insignificant, indicating that when trade friction events occur, market sentiment will change and then affect the oil price yield.

*Table 5 Analysis of market sentiment effect of Sino-US trade frictions*

|                      | Coefficient | Deviation | T statistic | P value |
|----------------------|-------------|-----------|-------------|---------|
| <b>Lag</b>           | -0.1750     | 0.0413    | -4.2351     | 0.0000  |
| <b>BEARISH</b>       | -0.0046     | 0.0053    | -0.8625     | 0.3884  |
| <b>BULLISH</b>       | 0.0015      | 0.0054    | 0.2701      | 0.7871  |
| <b>S&amp;P500</b>    | 0.3184      | 0.1002    | 3.1760      | 0.0015  |
| <b>Fed fund rate</b> | 0.0363      | 0.0196    | 1.8543      | 0.0637  |
| <b>Open interest</b> | 0.2170      | 0.0587    | 3.6960      | 0.0002  |
| <b>Sentiment</b>     | -0.0003     | 0.0000    | -12.7507    | 0.0000  |
| <b>ARCH</b>          | -0.0035     | 0.0266    | -0.1308     | 0.8959  |
| <b>GARCH</b>         | 0.9351      | 0.0058    | 161.4094    | 0.0000  |
| <b>Asymmetry</b>     | 0.0963      | 0.0202    | 4.7662      | 0.0000  |
| <b>BEARISH</b>       | 0.2862      | 0.1252    | 2.2848      | 0.0223  |
| <b>BULLISH</b>       | 0.1163      | 0.3358    | 0.3462      | 0.7292  |
| <b>S&amp;P500</b>    | -4.0828     | 4.2386    | -0.9633     | 0.3354  |
| <b>Fed fund rate</b> | -0.5427     | 1.2986    | -0.4179     | 0.6760  |
| <b>Open interest</b> | -0.5112     | 3.0822    | -0.1659     | 0.8683  |
| <b>Sentiment</b>     | 0.0024      | 0.0009    | 2.6053      | 0.0092  |

#### 4.3.3 Asset portfolio adjustment mechanism

When the market suffers from external shocks, market risks rise, and investors may adjust their asset portfolios and invest more funds in safe assets (Goyenko and Ukhov, 2009; Fang Yi et al., 2019). For many years, gold has been a generally accepted medium of exchange due to the effectiveness of gold trading and the value of gold. Today, many investors choose to invest in gold rather than other assets because it holds its value over the long term. Even in times of political turmoil, inflation, and financial crisis, gold is not a credit risk. Moreover, it is the world's only common currency. Simply put, gold acts as a safe-haven asset to protect your savings in the event of turbulence.

In order to test whether the occurrence of Sino-US trade frictions causes traders to adjust asset portfolios and transfer funds from the crude oil market to the gold market, we first adopted the DCC-GARCH model to obtain the dynamic correlation coefficient between crude oil and gold during the Sino-US trade war, and then referred to Fang Yi et al. (2019) and used the following formula:

$$DCC_t = BEARISH_t + BULLISH_t + \varepsilon_t \quad (17)$$

$$DCC_t = DCC_{t-1} + BEARISH_t + BULLISH_t + \varepsilon_t \quad (18)$$

If the occurrence of trade friction events affects the dynamic relationship of the price of gold, then the coefficient of intensified trade friction events or mitigated trade friction events should be significant. However, according to the results of formula regression, the event coefficient of trade friction is not significant, which cannot support the conclusion that investors' risk-averse adjustment of asset portfolio leads to the change of oil price yield.

## V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Since 2017, Sino-US trade frictions have been continuous, during which the international crude oil prices have also fluctuated greatly. This paper divides Sino-US trade frictions into intensified and moderated trade events, and uses the EGARCH model to analyze their impact on oil prices. The regression results show that the intensive-type trade events significantly reduce oil price returns and increase oil price volatility, but the moderate-type trade events have no significant impact on oil prices. The impact of intensified trade events on oil prices has the feature of mean recovery. The oil price yield decreases the most on the

first day but recovers to the original level on the third day, and the dynamic impact of moderated trade events on oil prices is not significant. The results of this paper show that Sino-US trade friction has a leverage effect on oil prices, that is, negative news has a greater impact on prices than positive news. Further analysis shows that Sino-US trade frictions mainly affect oil prices through the market sentiment mechanism.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Aloui, Riadh & Gupta, Rangan & Miller, Stephen M., 2016. "Uncertainty and crude oil returns," *Energy Economics*, Elsevier, vol. 55(C), pages 92-100.
- [2] Amine, Loutia & Mellios, Constantin & Andriosopoulos, Kostas. (2016). Do OPEC announcements influence oil prices?. *Energy Policy*. 90. 262-272. 10.1016/j.enpol.2015.11.025.
- [3] Baker, S. R., N. Bloom, and S. J. Davis . "Measuring Economic Policy Uncertainty," [J] *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 2016, 131, no. 4 (November), 1593-1636.
- [4] Balcilar, Mehmet & Ozdemir, Zeynel. (2019). The volatility effect on precious metals price returns in a stochastic volatility in mean model with time-varying parameters. *Physica A: Statistical Mechanics and its Applications*. 534. 122329. 10.1016/j.physa.2019.122329.
- [5] Barber, B.M. and Odean, T. ,2008 All that Glitters: The Effect of Attention and News on the Buying Behavior of Individual and Institutional Investors. *The Review of Financial Studies*, 21, 785-818.
- [6] Belke, Ansgar Hubertus and Freytag, Andreas and Keil, Jonas and Schneider, Friedrich G., The Credibility of Monetary Policy Announcements: Empirical Evidence for OECD Countries Since the 1960s (July 2012). DIW Berlin Discussion Paper No. 1225, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2111952> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2111952>
- [7] Bloom, Nicholas. 2014. "Fluctuations in Uncertainty." *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 28 (2): 153-76.
- [8] Brown, S. and Warner, J. (1980) Measuring Security Price Performance. *Journal of Financial Economics*, 8, 205-258. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0304-405X\(80\)90002-1](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0304-405X(80)90002-1)
- [9] Brown, S.J., & Warner, J. (1985). Using daily stock returns: The case of event studies. *Journal of Financial Economics*, 14, 3-31.
- [10] Chan, Kam & Fung, Hung-Gay & Leung, Wai. (2004). Daily volatility behavior in Chinese futures markets. *Journal of International Financial Markets, Institutions and Money*. 14. 491-505. 10.1016/j.intfin.2004.01.002.
- [11] Chemmanur, Thomas J. and Yan, An, Advertising, Attention, and Stock Returns (February 10, 2009). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1340605> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1340605>
- [12] CHEN, N., CUNY, C., & HAUGEN, R. (1995). Stock Volatility and the Levels of the Basis and Open Interest in Futures Contracts. *The Journal of Finance*, 50(1),
- [13] Davies, Ronald B. & Studnicka, Zuzanna, 2018. "The heterogeneous impact of Brexit: Early indications from the FTSE," *European Economic Review*, Elsevier, vol. 110(C), pages 1-17.
- [14] Demirer, Riza and Kutun, Ali M. and Chen, Chun-Da, Do Investors Herd in Emerging Stock Markets?: Evidence from the Taiwanese Market (2010). *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* 76 (2010) 283-295, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2148721>
- [15] Fama, Eugene F, 1990. "Stock Returns, Expected Returns, and Real Activity," *Journal of Finance*, American Finance Association, vol. 45(4), pages 1089-1108, September.
- [16] Fang Yi, He Wenjia, Jing Zhongbo. The spillover effect of Sino-US trade frictions on China's financial market [J]. *Finance and Trade Economics*, 2019, 40(06):55-69.
- [17] Gervais, S., & Odean, T. ,2001. Learning to be overconfident. *The Review of Financial Studies*, 14, 1-27. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/rfs/14.1.1>
- [18] Goyenko, Ruslan & Ukhov, Andrey. (2007). Stock and Bond Market Liquidity: A Long-Run Empirical Analysis. *Journal of Financial and Quantitative Analysis*. 44. 189-212. 10.2139/ssrn.669942.
- [19] Grullon, G. and Michaely, R. ,2004 The Information Content of Share Repurchase Programs. *Journal of Finance*, 59, 651-680. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6261.2004.00645.x>
- [20] Hamilton, James & Wu, Jing Cynthia. (2013). Risk Premia in Crude Oil Futures Prices. *Journal of International Money and Finance*. 42. 10.1016/j.jimonfin.2013.08.003.
- [21] He Wenjia, Fang Yi, Jing Zhongbo. Study on the impact of Sino-US trade friction on China's systemic financial risk [J]. *International Finance Research*, 2019(03):34-45.
- [22] Hong, Harrison & Yogo, Motohiro. (2012). What Does Futures Market Interest Tell Us about the Macroeconomy

- and Asset Prices?. *Journal of Financial Economics*. 105. 10.2139/ssrn.1364674.
- [23] <https://doi.org/10.1093/rfs/hhm079>
- [24] Hudson, Robert & Urquhart, Andrew & Zhang, Hanxiong, 2020. "Political uncertainty and sentiment: Evidence from the impact of Brexit on financial markets," *European Economic Review*, Elsevier, vol. 129(C).
- [25] J. Bradford De Long & Andrei Shleifer & Lawrence H. Summers & Robert J. Waldmann, "undated". "Noise Trader Risk in Financial Markets," J. Bradford De Long's Working Papers \_124, University of California at Berkeley, Economics Department.
- [26] Jiang, Fuwei & Lee, Joshua & Martin, Xiumin & Zhou, Guofu, 2019. "Manager sentiment and stock returns," *Journal of Financial Economics*, Elsevier, vol. 132(1), pages 126-149.
- [27] Kahneman, D. 1973. *Attention and Effort*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.、
- [28] Kaplanski, Guy & Levy, Haim, 2010. "Sentiment and stock prices: The case of aviation disasters," *Journal of Financial Economics*, Elsevier, vol. 95(2), pages 174-201, February.
- [29] Kenneth J. Singleton, 2014. "Investor Flows and the 2008 Boom/Bust in Oil Prices," *Management Science*, INFORMS, vol. 60(2), pages 300-318, February.
- [30] Kepplinger, Hans & Brosius, Hans-Bernd & Staab, Joachim. (1991). Opinion Formation in Mediated Conflicts and Crises: A Theory of Cognitive-Affective Media Effects.. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*. 3. 132-156. 10.1093/ijpor/3.2.132.
- [31] Kilian, L., & Park, C. (2007). The Impact of Oil Price Shocks on the U.S. Stock Market. *Capital Markets: Asset Pricing & Valuation*.
- [32] Kitzinger J, Reilly J. The Rise and Fall of Risk Reporting: Media Coverage of Human Genetics Research, 'False Memory Syndrome' and 'Mad Cow Disease'. *European Journal of Communication*. 1997;12(3):319-350. doi:10.1177/0267323197012003002
- [33] Lutz Kilian, Daniel P. Murphy. THE ROLE OF INVENTORIES AND SPECULATIVE TRADING IN THE GLOBAL MARKET FOR CRUDE OIL[J]. *Journal of Applied Econometrics*, 2014, 29(3).
- [34] Lutz Kilian. Not All Oil Price Shocks Are Alike: Disentangling Demand and Supply Shocks in the Crude Oil Market[J]. *American Economic Review*, 2009, 99(3).
- [35] Mackinlay, C. (1997) Event Studies in Finance and Economics. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 35, 13-39.
- [36] Mohammadi, Hassan & Su, Lixian, 2010. "International evidence on crude oil price dynamics: Applications of ARIMA-GARCH models," *Energy Economics*, Elsevier, vol. 32(5), pages 1001-1008, September.
- [37] Morana, Claudio. (2001). A semiparametric approach to short-term oil price forecasting. *Energy Economics*. 23. 325-338. 10.1016/S0140-9883(00)00075-X.
- [38] Moritz Schularick & Alan M. Taylor, 2012. "Credit Booms Gone Bust: Monetary Policy, Leverage Cycles, and Financial Crises, 1870-2008," *American Economic Review*, American Economic Association, vol. 102(2), pages 1029-1061, April.
- [39] Narayan, Kirin. (2007). Tools to Shape Texts: What Creative Nonfiction Can Offer Ethnography. *Anthropology and Humanism*. 32. 130 - 144. 10.1525/ahu.2007.32.2.130.
- [40] Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas & Maurice Obstfeld, 2012. "Stories of the Twentieth Century for the Twenty-First," *American Economic Journal: Macroeconomics*, American Economic Association, vol. 4(1), pages 226-265, January.
- [41] Qadan, Mahmoud & Nama, Hazar, 2018. "Investor sentiment and the price of oil," *Energy Economics*, Elsevier, vol. 69(C), pages 42-58.
- [42] Ripple, R.D. and Moosa, I.A. (2009) The Effect of Maturity, Trading Volume and Open Interest on Crude Oil Futures Price Range-Based Volatility. *Global Finance Journal*, 20, 209-219. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.gfj.2009.06.001>
- [43] Schwert, G. William and Seguin, Paul J., Heteroskedasticity in Stock Returns (May 1989). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=461389>
- [44] Seasholes, Mark S. and Wu, Guojun, Predictable Behavior, Profits, and Attention (January 5, 2005). AFA 2006 Boston Meetings Paper, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=686193> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.686193>
- [45] Singer, By & Endreny, Phyllis. (2006). Reporting Hazards: Their Benefits and Costs. *Journal of Communication*. 37. 10 - 26. 10.1111/j.1460-2466.1987.tb00991.x.
- [46] Snehal Banerjee & Ron Kaniel & Ilan Kremer, 2009. "Price Drift as an Outcome of Differences in Higher-Order Beliefs," *Review of Financial Studies*, Society for Financial Studies, vol. 22(9), pages 3707-3734, September.
- [47] Stelios Bekiros, Rangan Gupta, Alessia Paccagnini. Oil price

- forecastability and economic uncertainty[J]. *Economics Letters*,2015,132.
- [48] Wensheng Kang,Fernando Perez de Gracia,Ronald A. Ratti. Oil price shocks, policy uncertainty, and stock returns of oil and gas corporations[J]. *Journal of International Money and Finance*,2017a,70.
- [49] Wensheng Kang,Ronald A. Ratti,Joaquin L. Vespignani. Oil price shocks and policy uncertainty: New evidence on the effects of US and non-US oil production[J]. *Energy Economics*,2017b,66.
- [50] Wensheng Kang,Ronald A. Ratti,Joaquin L. Vespignani. Oil price shocks and policy uncertainty: New evidence on the effects of US and non-US oil production[J]. *Energy Economics*,2017b,66.
- [51] Yi Huang & Chen Lin & Sibio Liu & Heiwai Tang, 2018. "Trade Linkages and Firm Value: Evidence from the 2018 US-China “Trade War”, " IHEID Working Papers 11-2018, Economics Section, The Graduate Institute of International Studies.





## Depiction of Women's Oppression in Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*

T. Jeyas<sup>1</sup>, Dr. K. Balachandran<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D. Scholar (External), Bharathiar University, Coimbatore -641046, Tamil Nadu, India.

jeyas.t@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup>Research Supervisor, Former Prof. Dept. of English, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar, Tamil Nadu, India

prof\_k\_balachandran@yahoo.co.in

Received: 04 Jul 2023; Received in revised form: 03 Aug 2023; Accepted: 12 Aug 2023; Available online: 17 Aug 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— This article examines Shashi Deshpande's poignant portrayal of the subtle oppression women experiences in her novel *That Long Silence* (TLS). Through an in-depth analysis of the characters, narrative and plot, the researcher gives emphasis to how Shashi Deshpande skillfully exposes the societal structures that lead to gender inequality in Indian society. Women in the world are experiencing some sort of subtle oppression, either directly or indirectly, in the form of socio - cultural norms, old patriarchal values, conservative thoughts, religious rituals, traditional beliefs and so on. The women's subtle oppression can include the issues they used to face because of the emotional imbalance, financial instability, prohibition of education and domestic work in the kitchen. Through the female characters like Jaya, Mohan's mother, Jeeja, Manda and Nayana, the novelist Deshpande brings out the subtle suppression and oppression of society. These characters are willingly or unwillingly getting into the track and are unable to deviate or resist themselves from the ongoing path. They can take a pause but continue their journey until their deaths without any modification. The women are willing to liberate themselves from the shackles of the traditional roles which is imposed upon them. They are the victims of suppression that leads to everlasting depression in their life and there is no chance of deviation.

**Keywords**— *Oppression, depression, gender inequality, financial instability, old patriarchal values, societal structures & emotional imbalance.*



Shashi Deshpande through her novels gives a clarion call to the society by portraying the issues faced by women directly or indirectly. The subtle suppression or oppression makes the women to cut short their visions and hinders their growth in the modern society. In India, women are oppressed while getting married. Their income, freedom, individuality are insignificant to the narrow minded people in the society. Majority of women have endured this oppression for a very long time. They believe that their oppressed life is the only way of life carved for them.

In her novels, the protagonists, who belong to the modern generation, question such unrecognised

vulnerabilities. Her writings also influence the readers to comprehend the social bonds which subtly bind women to family values, cultural codes, religious rituals and patriarchal conventions.

In most Indian families, women are supposed to take care of the family, food, clothes, health and other needs by depending upon the husband. Arya Raval opines, "Even in the 21st century, women are still the target of gender discrimination in home-based activities. Many women leave their jobs and leadership role due to household and family duties." (<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com>) The husband is the breadwinner of the family and he can be a dutiful son,

dutiful father, dutiful husband and dutiful brother. But sometimes a wife cannot play the roles of a dutiful daughter and dutiful sister if she is married. The woman has to sacrifice a few roles in order to please her husband and her husband's family. In the Indian cultural context, the family's breadwinner is the man, who goes about his daily labour, earns and spends money to support his family. Low wages, wrongdoing, lack of promotion at work, unemployment and bad habits such as drinking, gambling and aimless loitering may be among the reasons why the husband fails to fulfil his responsibilities. That will have a substantial impact on the family.

The female members of the household will be busy in cooking, cleaning, organising the house and taking care of the entire family. If a family relies solely on the income of a spouse who has lost his job or is unable to continue working, this will destroy their happiness. The typical busy wife, Jaya mentions, "We seemed to be left with nothing but our bodies and after we had dealt with them we faced blankness. The nothingness of what had seemed a busy and full life was frightening." (*TLS*, p. 25.)

The traditions that have been followed by one generation can be easily passed on to the subsequent generation by the more experienced members of the family. They instruct the young women to take care of the domestic responsibilities and they are not permitted to allow their thoughts wander to different wants. It is also forbidden for her to think for herself or form an opinion. The woman should not react, express her view or ask questions to her husband. Sethuraman claims, "Jaya experiences the torture of loneliness and long silence when her hysterical laughter makes Mohan desert her." (*Critical Responses to Indian Writing in English: Essays in Honour of Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam*, p.174.) The women have to wait for the change to happen; until then, they have to suffer in silence. Jaya recalls the conversation she had with Ajji:

"I feel sorry for your husband, Jaya, whoever he is," she had said to me once.

"What for, ajji?"

'Look at you for everything a question, for everything a retort. What husband can be comfortable with that?'

I had neither any questions nor any retorts for Mohan now and yet there was no comfort. So many subjects were barred that the silence seemed heavy with uneasiness (*TLS*, p. 27.)

The more experienced family members can easily pass on the traditions upheld by one generation to the following generation. The young women are instructed to

assume responsibility for home tasks and are prohibited from indulging in divergent desires. She is not allowed to use her own judgement or make a decision. Women should refrain from expressing their opinions or posing inquiries to their husbands. The ladies are required to endure the current circumstances until the desired transformation occurs, during which they are compelled to maintain a state of silent suffering. Anita Singh rightly remarks, "...Jaya and variety of other female figures, in generations of women in her family (Jaya, her mother, her grandmother); among different classes of woman of the same class and generation (Jaya her cousin Kusum, her widowed neighbour Mukta), who have all trained in silence." (*Post - Independence Indian English Fiction*, pp. 126-127.)

Since early childhood, the vast majority of Indian women who manage households are also responsible for learning how to cook. They put in a lot of effort and sacrifice their own needs to care for their husbands, in-laws and children, yet they receive not much in return. It is important for married women to have the support of their husbands and the community surrounding them. Through her cooking, she is ensuring that everyone is well-fed and she used to wait for her husband. Jaya defines the state of the mother:

She gave them their dinner, even the older ones and then she cooked rice for him again, for he would not, he made it clear to her, eat what he called 'your children's disgusting leavings'. He wanted his rice fresh and hot, from a vessel that was untouched. She had just finished this second cooking and was waiting, hoping perhaps that he would not be too late, for it wouldn't do to let the food get cold and as for lighting the fire again, that was unthinkable. (*TLS*, p. 35.)

Jaya disliked Kusum as a child but when she was ill, mind disoriented and mentally sick, she plans to put her up in Dada flat, so that Jeeja, Mukta and Lata, the eldest can help Kusum. Kusum wants to go to home, to see all his children but Jaya knows that they don't need her and said "They are managing quite well without you." (*TLS*, p.21.). Kusum replied, "But I need them". So Jaya has written to Dilip, who had taken her away. Shashi Deshpande portrays the pitiable state of Kusum as, "She was of no use to anyone after she went crazy, nobody needed her." (*TLS*, p.22.)

Women in various parts of India like to give birth to a male babe. Some parents believe that their girl kid will be a burden for the rest of their lives. Gone are the days when women were considered a burden; now, thanks to adequate educational options for women, they can be self-

reliant. Nonetheless, many women are afraid of begetting a girl babe. Jaya observed Nayana, the lower class woman confidently says, "this time it is going to be a boy" (TLS, p. 27.), even though her husband, her brothers, her father – as wasters, good-for-nothing, drunkards. Jaya also probed regarding the reason for her preference to male children, to which she replied "Why give birth to a girl, behnji, who'll only suffer because of men all her life? Look at me! My mother loved me very much, she wanted so much for me... a house with electricity and water, shining brass vessels, a silver waist chain, silver anklets... and what have I got? No, no, behnji, better to have a son." (TLS, p. 28.)

Women should be treated with respect and concern. But the elders in the family proclaim that it is quite common in every house and advise the girl to adjust and behave accordingly and insist the girl to keep a control over her tongue. The women in the family tolerate the verbal and physical attack to a certain extent. They will eventually erupt because they are fed up with the husband's failure to change. Tara, wife of Rajaram sobs and how Jeeja, the elder consoles, " 'So many drunkards die', she cried, 'but this one won't. He'll torture us all to death instead.' Jeeja sternly shut her up, 'Stop that! Don't forget, he keeps the kumkum on your forehead. What is a woman without that?' " (TLS, p. 53.)

Jaya asked her husband to cook once, during her first month pregnancy, as the scent of oil and spices made her queasy. She recalls, "You want me to cook?" Mohan had smiled. I should have seen the connection then between Mohan's smile and the laughter of all those women and girls in ajji's house." (TLS, p. 81.)

Shashi Deshpande, through her minor characters, also depicts the difficulties that Indian women face in terms of their fragility. There are connections between the vulnerabilities in terms of financial resources, health, societal conditions and mental health. It causes the women to endure their misfortune in silence or to break down and weep. The women lack the autonomy which is necessary to make decisions independently. They must have enough freedom in making decisions in the family and express their views also. Addison quotes, "When Liberty is gone, Life grows insipid and has lost its relish." ( *The Pocket Book of Quotations*, p.184.) Nayana, the woman who does menial jobs leads her life in tears and she explains her state:

My mother gave me the name Nayana because my eyes were very beautiful, she said. When I was born, she said, she saw those eyes first. She put kaajal in my eyes every day Now, behnji, I don't do it any more. What's the use? The kaajal will flow away with my tears. Thank God. my

mother didn't live to see my state. I've kept that kaajal box for my daughter. (TLS, p. 134.)

When females reach the age of marriage in the majority of South Indian communities, they are accompanied by their parents, siblings, close relatives or neighbours. If the girls are recruited for a job or higher education outside of their home city, they will be asked to remain in the hostel on a limited basis after ensuring a safe and secure environment or they will stay in the home of a relative. Even when going for shopping, to the cinema or temples, they will be escorted by friends. When it comes to marriage, if the parents discover a suitable partner with a good job and salary for their daughters, they are immediately forced to marry him. He will be an alien to their daughters and she will be required to comprehend, adapt to and accept his requirements. The girl will be completely uprooted from her parents' home and her new residence will be that of her husband. Even if she desires to visit her parents, siblings or hometown festivals, the girl must request permission from her husband and in-laws.

Manda can describe her day in dramatic detail. Manda, as a child accepts reality, life's hardships, lifestyle, insults and disappointments based on her grandmother's and mother's experiences. Jaya can predict the life of Manda as, "I saw her future in an instant - marriage, a drunkard for a husband, children, more children, poverty, ill health, cruelty, work, more work..." (TLS, p. 163.)

Nilima asked a question in English to Jaya as, "Where are you going, auntie?", "To the hospital, to see my father," Manda replied in Marathi. Jaya's earlier prophesy concerning Manda is shattered. She can predict now as, "Manda was going to school, she would be educated, she would not be like her grandmother." (TLS, p. 164.) Jaya understands both the human environment and the physical environment can be thought of as separate but interrelated systems. Therefore, the advancement of women is a good barometer of a nation's overall level of development.

Shakuntala Bharvani asserts, "Parents inculcated in their girls a certain duality, sometimes quite unconsciously: on the one hand an impulsive desire to be emancipated and liberated and on the other, an almost instinctive urge to be traditional and conservative." (Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines: Critical Perspectives*, pp.104-105.) The daughters must embrace the customs of the husband's household. Even if they have a valid reason, the females are not in a position to reject their parents' proposals. Some of the parents are aware of the groom's behaviour prior to the wedding but they believe that he will alter his drinking, gambling and loitering habits. The elders believe that in order to assume responsibility, one

must be married. Jaya feels, "Mohan I'd said the name to myself after we got married, but it had tasted unfamiliar. The man too we were married, yet he was a stranger. Intimacy with him had seemed a grotesque indecency. Surely, I'd thought, it was not expected of me, not at once, anyway? We would achieve it gradually, by degrees or stages, I'd optimistically reassured myself." (TLS, p. 94.)

Parents tend to place a bigger importance on the upbringing of their sons than their daughters, because they believe that the male child will be the one to care for them during their dying days. Because of the institution of marriage, the daughters won't be able to help out their parents anymore, as they have to go and live with someone else's family. Even if the brothers are given advantages from childhood onward in terms of education, priorities and property, they are nevertheless responsible for taking care of their parents. However, they anticipate sisters such as Jaya to pay a visit to their mother, who is now a widow. Jaya affirms:

The hints fell most heavily on me, and from the corner I had been pushed into I wanted to cry out: *why does it have to be me?*

There was no point really in asking the question, for I knew the answer myself. It was simple - both Dada and Ravi had escaped, pinning me down to the position of responsibility. (TLS, p.104.)

Some of the girls in India are forced or convinced to accept the bridegroom finalized by the family members. Parents or the siblings from the family will be in a hurry to identify the life partner for their son or daughter as they attain the age of marriage, so that the responsibility will get over. Jaya understands:

Dada had wanted me off his hands; he had wanted to be free of his responsibility for a unmarried younger sister, so that he could go ahead with his own plans. After Appa's death, the Kakas had never let Dada forget his role as the man of the house. And so Dada had cleverly manoeuvred me into a position from which not marrying Mohan would have been childish, irresponsible and unfair to Dada. ('I know I'm only your brother, I know I have no real right to tell you what to do, if only Appa had been here...') (TLS, p. 93.)

Women themselves do not fully accept the idea that men and women are equal, despite this being a teaching from childhood. Jaya knows that her brother Dinakar will not return. Some males treat women equally in family and social matters, which is not acceptable to

women themselves. Vanitamami blames Dinakar for her wife's behaviour, despite the fact that she has given her wife ample privacy "Dinu has changed, hasn't he?" And then, 'It's his wife, of course. She tries to keep him and the children away from us. "Don't eat this and don't eat that," she kept telling the children when they were here. In English. As if we can't understand. And Dinu doesn't say a word to her. But the boy was always like that, he never quarrelled with anyone.' (TLS, p.105.)

In Indian culture, the primary role that women are expected to play is that of homemakers. Their responsibilities are limited to the confines of a dwelling with four walls. In some communities, even if she is employed, a woman is never regarded as the primary breadwinner. Mansoor Ali states:

She [Shashi Deshpande] deals with the middle-class Indian woman who represents overwhelming majority of Indian woman and is struggling to adjust in it rather than get free from the traditional world. She has written of educated Indian woman, their conflict and predicaments against the background of contemporary India. While doing so, she has analyzed the socio-culture modes and values that have given Indian women their image and role towards themselves and the society. Shashi Deshpande's chief contribution consists of exploring the moral and psychic dilemmas repercussions of her woman characters along with her effort to cope with the challenges and achieve a new harmony of relationship. (*Changing Faces of New Woman: Indian Writing in English*, p. 175.)

The vast majority of Indian housewives from middle-class backgrounds constantly put their families' needs first, without sparing a thought for their own conveniences, meagre requirements, happiness or insecurities. Peter Barry opines "The marriage 'inexorably locks her into a social system which denies her autonomy.'" (*Beginning Theory*, p.137.) The only thing that matters is the family's well-being. However, they are frequently ignored, uncared for and their efforts go unrecognised. Jaya remembers:

The job I wanted to take, the baby I had wanted to adopt, the anti-price campaign I'd wanted to take part in.... But, even as I listed these to myself, it came to me that perhaps it had nothing to do with Mohan, the fact that I had not done these things, that I had left them alone. Perhaps I had not really cared enough about these things myself. Instead I said,



and my voice sounded sullen even to me,  
I've done everything you wanted me to.  
(*TLS*, p.120.)

Women will be seen as the embodiment of sacrifice by everyone in a society. However, men do not acknowledge or value the women who live in their houses. "Majority of the Indian society is a patriarchal society, where men hold a higher stature than a woman. Women are considered as the caretaker of the house and are confined within the premises of the house. The dependency of women on her husband and other family members result in the fear of rejection from the society if she raises her voice against such intolerance." (<https://lawbhoomi.com>)

Socio-cultural norms and beliefs pass down the responsibilities and duties of being an Indian housewife, mother or daughter from one generation to the next. They are able to recognise the gap and the contradiction in patriarchal beliefs due to the fact that they are modern and independent women. In order to avoid upsetting the feelings of the family members, they silently adhere to established beliefs without challenge. They are able to see everyone in the house but they get the distinct impression that no one understands them; so, they begin to lead an isolated existence by focusing on the housework. Jaya suffers, "I felt the same now. 'Cheating, cheating' I wanted to cry out, the way we had as children when we knew we were going to be defeated. But as if I'd been struck dumb, I could say nothing. I sat in my place, pinned to it by his anger, a monstrously huge spear that went through me, excruciatingly painful, yet leaving me cruelly conscious." (*TLS*, p.121.)

In Indian culture, the elders provide the bride with premarital counsel, assuming that it will serve as preparation for their future. The statements made by each and every person are unique but the objective is for the women to behave in a submissive manner and take on the part of a subordinate. Jaya recalls the maxim of Vanitamaami as, "A husband is like a Sheltering tree." (*TLS*, p. 137.) , whereas Ramukaka said, "Remember, Jaya, the happiness of your husband and home depends entirely on you." (*TLS*, p. 138.) Her Dada advised before she left Ambegaon, "Be good to Mohan, Jaya." (*TLS*, p. 138.) The elders believe they are preparing the bride for the marriage with their own knowledge but as the elders warned, this might turn into a threat and a panic state for them to bear in mind.

In India, certain prejudices are maintained by one community in order to gain dominance over another. It continues because people blindly follow one generation to the next. Women's place in the parental household,

whether married or not, they are always their parents' daughters. They are given the same consideration as the boy. However, in Indian culture, once a girl marries, her husband's home becomes her home. Her surname will be altered at her in-laws' residence. They lose their individuality, which they have had since birth and attempt to accept their new identity through her husband. Ramukaka showed Jaya the family tree during her visit to the town residence but she could only locate the names of the boys so she exclaimed as, "But Ramukaka, I'm not here!" (*TLS*, p. 143.) Ramukaka clarified as, "How can you be here? You don't belong to this family! You're married, you're now part of Mohan's family. You have no place here." (*TLS*, p. 143.) Mohan also accepted the fact as, "Of course, your Ramukaka is right. You belong to my family now!" (*TLS*, p. 143.)

Several notions and norms in the Indian cultural perspective appear to be insignificant. The majority of the women usually do not object to it since they do not want to disrupt the show or the flow of the practice. When Ramukaka classifies Jaya as a member of Mohan's family, she feels compelled to inquire as, ".....if I don't belong to this family, what about the Kakis and Ai? They married into this family, didn't they, why are they not here? And what about ajji, who single-handedly kept the family together, why isn't she here? But I had said nothing - neither to Ramukaka, nor to Mohan. (*TLS*, p. 143.) Women know some of the practices are meaningless to the context, but they, "had learnt it at last - no questions, no retorts. Only silence." (*TLS*, p. 143.)

The majority of lower class women's vulnerabilities include insults, disdain, financial instability, a lack of basic necessities and others. In the event that a patient from a lower social class is admitted to the hospital, that individual's standard of care will not be satisfactory. If it is a private hospital, even the first aid treatment will begin after they pay the money or else they should have some influence. Jeeja informs Jaya that Rajaram is in Sion Hospital and requests her to speak with the doctor. Jeeja continues by saying, "If you speak to the doctor there, they will look after him better, they will give him special care. Otherwise no one cares, no one is bothered about poor patients, they won't even tell us anything if we ask them. They bark at us as if we're dogs." (*TLS*, p. 160.)

Some of the women in India, blindly believe their husbands in their lives. They will depend upon their life partner completely as the husbands never allow them to experience travelling, studying and acquiring worldly knowledge. They know only their home and the religious places like temples, churches in and around the house.

They dance for the tune of the song sung by their husbands. Some of the husbands mould their wives into the image they have in their heads, either emotionally or by the assumed control they hold over in the patriarchal society. Jaya realizes, "Yes, it was all Mohan's fault. I had shaped myself so resolutely to his desires all these years, yet what was I left with now?" Nothing. Just emptiness and silence. (TLS, p. 144.) Rajeshwar Mittapalli claims the transformation of Jaya as, "She has indubitably gained the moral courage and necessary resourcefulness required for the purpose." (Studies in Indian Writing in English, p.66.)

Indian women, after engaging in married life, sacrifice their lives to protect their children, husbands and family members. Their husbands are the ones who decide whether she is going "to be, or not to be" (Hamlet: Act 3, Scene 1) in her own life. Women are expected to live according to the patriarchal world's design. They are expected to focus solely on men's pleasures. Mahatma Gandhi claims, "The world shall see it in all its wonder and glory when woman has secured an equal opportunity for herself with man and fully developed her powers of mutual aid and combination." (Words of Wisdom, p. 39.) They should have asked questions but they never did. Jaya, for instance, thinks, "I should have said it to Mohan then. Even if some of the details had been from our life, it had not been a relating of my experience, but a transmuting of it into something quite different. But I had not said this to Mohan. I had been ashamed." (TLS, p. 144.) It is nonsensical to ask the Indian women, the final lines of W. H. Auden's poem, 'The Unknown Citizen', "Was [s]he free?," Was [s]he happy? The question is absurd." (Five Centuries of Poetry, p. 288.)

### CONCLUSION

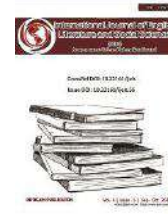
Shashi Deshpande consistently captures the plight and frailties of women from all social classes but the major focus is on the middle class and the lower class of society. The wives need their husbands in lower-class society, even if the husbands are wanderers, drunkards or unemployed. They are helpless to alter either their plight or the actions and routines of their husband. Losing their husbands makes them socially vulnerable and emotionally weak in the lives of women like Nayana, Jeeja, Nilima and Mukta. Some of the traditions, cultures and beliefs that have been practised in India for so long need to be updated. They are outdated and not relevant to the present era. Jaya, the 'modern woman' who follows partly the traditional rules and questions the same, should not be branded a rebel. The mother of the family is the one who passes on the family's customs and traditions to subsequent generations. She is

aware that it will be difficult and exhausting to carry out, sustain or continue traditional practices. Women are the primary contributors to their own plight, ultimately leading to their downfall. They have the chance to succeed but cultural taboos and expectations prevent them from doing so. Even the subtle suppression can be resolved but only if the women are educated and work for their livelihood. They have to be independent enough to lead a life in the absence of their husbands. Hence Shashi Deshpande through this novel conveys her message that women on any account should not depend upon men but be self-reliant in every aspect. She gives a clarion call to Indian women, "Awake, Arise, and Anodize."

### REFERENCES

- [1] Deshpande, Shashi. *That Long Silence*. India: Penguin, 1989.
- [2] Ali, Mansoor. S. "Image of New Woman in Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows*." Ed. A. A. Khan, *Changing Faces of New Woman: Indian Writing in English*, New Delhi: Adhyayan Publishers and Distributors, 2012, pp. 175-181.
- [3] Auden, Hugh, Wystan. "The Unknown Citizen." Ed. C. N. Ramachandran, *Five Centuries of Poetry*, Chennai : Macmillan Publishers India Ltd., 2012. pp. 287- 288.
- [4] Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, New Delhi : Viva Books, 2018.
- [5] Bharvani, Shakuntala. "Some Recent Trends in Modern Indian Fiction: A Study of Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*, Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*." Ed. Novy Kapadia., *Amitav Ghosh's The Shadow Lines: Critical Perspectives*, New Delhi: Asia Book Club, 2001, pp.104-111.
- [6] Davidoff, Henry. *The Pocket Book of Quotations*, New York: Pocket books Inc., 1966.
- [7] Gandhi, Mahatma. "Woman not the Weaker Sex". Ed. Dr. S. Subramanian, *Words of Wisdom*, Chennai: Anu Chitra Publications, 2003, pp. 38-41.
- [8] Mittapalli, Rajeshwar. "The Trauma of a House-Wife: Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*."
- [9] Ed. Rajeshwar Mittapalli & Pier Paolo Piciuccio, *Studies in Indian Writing in English*, Vol. II, New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2001, pp.53-67.
- [10] Sethuraman, N. "Silence, Surrender and Compromise? : A Study of Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*." Ed. Dr. K. Balachandran, *Critical Responses to Indian Writing in English: Essays in Honour of Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam*, New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2004, pp. 164- 179.
- [11] Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Ed. George Rylands. New Delhi : Oxford University Press, 1977

- [12] Singh, Anita. "A Voice after the Long Silence: Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows* and *That Long Silence*." Ed. Mittapalli, Rajeshwar & Allesandro Monti, *Post - Independence Indian English Fiction*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2001, pp. 124-128.
- [13] Patriarchy – An Argumentative Essay  
<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/readersblog/penoftruth/patriarchy-an-argumentative-essay-44593/>
- [14] Violence against Women- Raising Voice against Non-Tolerance  
<https://lawbhoomi.com/violence-against-women-raising-voice-against-non-tolerance/>



# Strout's Insight into the Times: Trauma and Recovery in *Olive Kitteridge*

Qiu Minghui

Beijing International Studies University, China

Received: 01 Jul 2023; Received in revised form: 01 Aug 2023; Accepted: 11 Aug 2023; Available online: 17 Aug 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— *Olive Kitteridge* wins the 2009 Pulitzer Prize and is a representative work of Elizabeth Strout. The eponymous character Olive Kitteridge personifies the pathos of contemporary America in the contemporary world, through whom Elizabeth Strout strives to shed light on a spiritual barren American. Thus, it's essential to analyze how Olive Kitteridge deals with her traumatic experiences according to the arrangement of Elizabeth Strout. Through close reading of the text, this article will systematically analyze Olive Kitteridge's individual trauma from three aspects--the manifestation, the causes, and the recovery methods, so as to present an approachable way to smooth the pain of modern people and show the mental damage caused by rapid modernization.

**Keywords**— *Olive Kitteridge, Elizabeth Strout, Trauma*



## I. INTRODUCTION

*Olive Kitteridge* is written by American writer Elizabeth Strout and won the 2009 Pulitzer Prize, centering on the female character Olive Kitteridge, who has experienced both inner and outside suffering. As a contemporary work, many critics were attracted by the outstanding narrative strategies as well as the unique female character. Strout skillfully draws together 13 short stories by playing the role of Olive given her core position, so the analysis of this character occupies a large part of the study of the work. The research focus of *Olive Kitteridge* is a keen point since the work has been published. For instance, Emily McAvan explores Olive Kitteridge's undoing in her relationship, which is the result of deliberate arrangement of Elizabeth Strout under the impact of post-structuralist ideas. Susan Guaccero LCSW also adopts Bromberg's psychoanalytic theory to analyze

Olive's spiritual world through thoroughly illustrating the arrangement of Olive's life experience so as to provide solid text foundation for revealing Olive inner world, and shows the superb artistry used by Elizabeth Strout. At the same time, Elizabeth Strout takes 13 short stories of narrative strategy, which is unique and innovative in the modern literature so that many scholars choose to explain the unique narrative mythology's function and value. Such as Helena Kadmos asserts that the interconnected stories play an innovative and fresh role in showing women's independence without emphasizing on the individual trajectory for this multistory design reveals the complex social quality of the subject, upending the single narrative method to make a productive form to explore how women come to a greater sense of who they are. Tetiana Kushnirova also focuses on the multiple narrative structure through which each narrator can completely show his or



her own real life and evaluates the role of this structure in unity of the plot. *Olive Kitteridge* is regarded as a successful novel revealing the aging society of America. So, some scholars gradually pay attention to this couple's old age life experience to explore the influence of this new era phenomenon in all aspects. Teresa Requena-pelegrí analyzes the relationship between power and age in the privilege system and compares vigorous men and aging men to show the fact that the aging men are understated, eventually proposes the possibilities for transforming normative conceptions of masculinity. Jelena Šesnić combines *The Country of the Pointed Firs* and *Olive Kitteridge* to explore the impacts of an aging society on contemporary Western society focusing on pastoralism and the narrative of ageing, which takes emotions and the display of aging into consideration.

As Rae-Lee Kruger once asserts that Elizabeth Strout makes use of *Olive Kitteridge* to unveil the ubiquitous terror, in which "characters feel and attempt to cope with terror in their everyday life" (2016: 107), corresponding to the mental feeling of the American public. Meanwhile, Screenwriter Jane Anderson, who writes the screen adaptation of the book, has described *Olive Kitteridge* as the story of depression. People are aware of this work's historical setting closely related to modern spiritual desolation. "Strout never emotionally flinches from the complexities of the human condition-trauma, loneliness, love, marriage, parenting, loss, aging, fear, death, and hope-but confronts them directly and with exquisite sensitivity" (Guaccero, 2010). Each of the stories that makes up *Olive Kitteridge* is about sadness, hurt, or disappointment that has been hidden or wrapped into the very skin of its protagonists and that will shift, move, and be re-accommodated throughout the story.

The traumatic narrative as widely discussed by critics, for it posits that real trauma is hidden by the narrative and literary way is obviously of valuable significance to be adopted in modern literature. In Hartmann's view, ordinary trauma is both an important opportunity for the emergence of modern fiction and an important expressive theme for it. Trauma has a powerful implication for contemporary literary theory, which has a kind of feature of prolonged impact on both the bearers and the event itself. Therefore the research of trauma narrative has been valued

gradually "in the study of history and historical narrative, and also of narrative in general" (Berger, 1997). It is not difficult to find that although people realize the significance of this work in presenting various mental dilemmas faced by modern people, they have not systematically explored the causes behind it. But I think there are many other factors worth exploring. Given the same background of living in western world, *Olive Kitteridge* is of over-size importance to explore her psychological trauma as a great scenario to outline the shadow of modern peoples. Therefore, this article will systematically explore Olive's trauma and the causes of trauma, in order to reveal the undercurrent of trauma under the smooth surface of Western society. In addition to deepening our knowledge of this book, the analysis of *Olive Kitteridge's* trauma causes, and cruel attempts can serve as a useful model for contemporary people.

## II. PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA OF OLIVE KITTERIDGE

It is hard to miss that Olive struggles to fit in with her family and the community but in vain eventually, which is directly tied to her trauma philosophically. The novel centralizes Olive Kitteridge's course of life as well as entangles the stories of numerous characters' traumatic experiences. Nearly every character is bound and prisoned by their past suffering experience. According to Shalev "Specific attributes of traumatic events may contribute to the occurrence of either PTSD or depression" (1998: 630), but the result "shows that extreme events can be associated with the early and simultaneous development of both PTSD and major depression or a combination thereof" (1998: 637). Numerous events in Olive's life place her under a lot of stress and jeopardize her spiritual health when we recall her life in the novel, the sense of loneliness haunting in Olive's lifetime. She seems to be in an embarrassing situation where nobody can hear her voice and she also can't pour out her woe which she even doesn't know where it comes from and how to deal with, even her family members find it difficult to communicate with her.

### 2.1 Depression

"Olive Kitteridge had never in anyone's memory felt inclined to be affable, or even polite" (Strout, 2008). One

such person who is viewed as aloof and unsociable is Olive. What happened around her makes her annoying and unpleasant, showing her attitude as world-weary; especially she detests every single member of people in the town as well as her husband Henry, so she forgoes her social desire and isolates herself within such an oppressive home atmosphere. This irritation will keep embarrassing her family regardless of the occasion or time. Depression patients struggle more than most people do to control their emotions while under pressure. As Olive and Henry experience robberies, Olive can't help but lose control and laugh at Henry's constant nagging, simply displaying her harshness and apathy while being hijacked which also causes the two to grow apart. It seems that only if Henry is hurt can she draw strength from his pain. Under high physical pressure, Olive criticizes Henry, "He got that from his mother. His mother was impossible. Just ignore him.....You'd have to know his mother. His mother was full of pious crap" (Strout, 2008). In the novel, many clues imply her emotional instability. And from the words of Christopher: "one minute you're one way, the next-you're furious" (Strout, 2008). We can see that her mental condition has been bad, and her mood has been changing erratically. It can't be missed that Olive has depressing moods and a frequently harsh tongue; her brittleness and sensitivities frequently show as scathing put-downs of people around her and uninterested in social niceties. This is a sort of revolt against the undeserved homage she has to bear. For instance, Olive cannot help but erupt when the Henrys come home for dinner since her husband spilled ketchup "Leave it," Olive commanded, 'standing u Just leave it alone, Henry. For God's sake.' And Henry Thibodeau, perhaps at the sound of his name being spoken sharply, sat back, looking stricken" (Strout, 2008).. Even some trials can arise her annoyance, which may come to a deeper layer that she has a strong emotion of loathe toward Henry out of various reasons. The tough attitude straightforwardly shows in the word "command" just like a superior towards an inferior corresponding the response of Henry who completely presents a state of oppression. However, Strout also indirectly shows Henry's superior identity in the family because he is inexperienced in household duties while Olive takes main responsibility of it. Even as a scholar woman and math teacher, she still

needs to shoulder the role of traditional mother and wife in the family in which Henry is the one who sits idle and enjoys the fruits of others' work, missing the role of husband and father, invisible in the sharing of family tasks. These hints point to the fact that she is obviously frustrated and unable to manage her temper due to physical strain, which may be what gives her character its foundation in the marriage life.

Another distinctive feature of depression is suicidal tendencies. Compared to the unsteady emotional condition when getting along with her family members, Olive is emotionless when she is alone. Olive has a unique understanding of the feeling because she lacks friends and relatives. Olive will get numb, drifting off to sleep while listening to the transistor radio. The daily existence of depressed patients involves being unable to socialize properly and being completely alone, like a mobius strip in which Olive falls into the infinite loop between the two. What's more, she can't be accepted by her son and is criticized by her son's wife Ann, which deepens her sense of loneliness causing her to be stuck in despair for the exclusion from loved ones. When she offers to visit her granddaughter and is refused by her son, which is the straw that breaks the camel's back, the thought of suicide surfaced uncontrollably. "The thought that she could, anytime she needed to kill herself went through her head. It was not the first time in her life that she'd thought this, but before, she would think about the note to leave. Now she thought she would leave no note" (Strout, 2008).. Olive forces herself to live and escapes from this idea before her son's estrangement crushed her mental fortress perceptibly. In the novel, Jane suggests that she slits her wrists to kill herself, and she gives up from her initial panicked denial to her silent intention, and then to the final. Obviously, Olive still has a strong sense of living and resists the idea of death even though the desire of living is paralleled by the shadow of death, which is typical of depressed patient. She is constantly torn between the thought of life and death, making her spiritual world is on the verge of collapse. As same as other depressed patients, thoughts of suicide which comes from the doubt of meaning of life and attitude of pessimism recur in her mind at any time.

## 2.2 Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) of 9/11

Posttraumatic stress disorder has risen to the attention of scholars for so many years. It is widely discussed as well in literary works as a trauma symptom. Charney defined it as “an illness of considerable prevalence, often characterized by high morbidity, treatment resistance and a chronic course” (1993: 294). As pointed out by Šesnić, who has “[Found] ourselves at another turn of the century and a little beyond it in post-9/11 America as an implicit backdrop of Strout’s stories” (2019: 454), Elizabeth Strout’s *Olive Kitteridge* is set the 9/11 as background, which results in the collective trauma for modern American individuals. Another oblique way of interpreting the trauma of *Olive Kitteridge* as we have been confused by the traits the author creates intentionally is to relate to the collective trauma caused by 9/11, insofar as we trace back to the century or the setting.

In Freud’s elaboration of the concept of “Latency”, “the memory of traumatic events can be lost over time but then regained in a symptomatic form when triggered by some similar event” (Berger, 1997). The portrayal of *Olive Kitteridge*’s reaction in the airport exemplifies the traumatic reactions of people after 9/11. Years later, *Olive* is still remembering the terrorist attacks as the plane lands, even though she is traveling to see her son in New York. “*Olive* had never been in a plane by herself. Not that she was by herself now, of course..... *Olive* seeming the only one with trepidation” (Strout, 2008). In her subconscious, there is a fear of airplane accidents. So, she avoids taking the plane alone and living in her town, just like other PTSD patients who shun all similar experiences as the trauma event, since there is a feeling of panic in her heart. When she gets way from the airport, the panic that she has pushed down seemly disappear at once.

“Confusion.....and which had then grown into an active panic on the airport’s escalator, changing into a stunned block of perfect oddness the whole drive in, now, as *Olive* stepped from the car onto the sidewalk, seemed to cause everything to sway around her, so that reaching to get her bag from the backseat, she actually stumbled and fell against the car.” (Strout, 2008)

Her fear of the tragic event in the past is evident in her

state of confusion and panic. What’s more, when she is alienated by her son showing as unacceptable attitude, which is a great spiritual shock, her unconscious trauma and pain cause her mental forbidden machine to crash. “[T]he diagnosis of PTSD includes symptoms such as aggravated startle responses and heightened reactivity to trauma reminiscent and nonreminiscent stimuli”(Pacella et al., 2013). PTSD patients will show an avoidance attitude towards traumatic memories and resist recalling and reexperiencing of the traumatic event to avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma, but traumatic memories show a lingering state and are easily triggered by things associated with trauma, which makes patients’ panic response intensified. There are several levels of change in mood: confusion, panic, and stun and eventually it transforms the physical discomfort. The sensation of abandonment *Olive* experiences as a result of being stunned by how much her kid has alienated her is the cause of her confusion, at the same time is the subconscious evasive attitude of the place of airport which is closely related to her trauma memory. Gradually she realizes she is alone in an airport; panic seeps into the mood caused by hyperarousal for she anticipates danger’s coming out of control. Soon, changes in the street scene that have little to do with traumatic memories distract her emotionally from panic, but traumatic events can make people lose their ability to adapt to everyday life. *Olive* has moved from her small town to New York, out of the comfort and security of her living environment; she is apparently unable to adapt, losing control and replacing it with a sense of vulnerability, which is manifested by physical symptoms of vertigo. Meanwhile, she can’t help fainting for she empathizes with a moody atmosphere of restless anxiety in the airport. *Olive* is also the victim of collective trauma caused by the communal pain of 9/11. And this fear and pain permeate every modern American.

Another affair that can certify *Olive*’s trauma of 9/11 in the novel is that *Olive* thinks back to the day she watches the television screen showing the moment the plane crashes into the building over and over again, and she falls into deep despair in her room. She can’t act with any emotional response as a kind of numb negativity. When she returns to her room after meeting Christopher’s new family and exchanging pleasantries, a sudden urge to cry comes over

her. "She wanted to cry. She wanted to wail like a child" (Strout, 2008). The two completely different images are inharmony with each other giving her a strong sense of separation and strangeness; she seems to be a participant as well as a spectator. When she decides to leave New York, she once again has trouble controlling her emotions at the airport which becomes the trigger of her traumatic memory. An uncontrollable emotion controls her refusal to cooperate with the airport staff. " 'I will not take off my shoes,' she heard herself say. She said, 'I don't give a damn if the plane blows up, do you understand? I don't give one good goddamn if any of you are blown sky-high'" (Strout, 2008). Olive is in a state of overvigilance at this moment. Refusing to take off her shoes becomes a way to resist registration and the shoes becomes the root of security. The terrorist attack of 9/11 has cast a huge psychological shadow on her, and this fear is invisible but everywhere.

### III. THE CAUSES OF OLIVE'S PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMAS

#### 3.1 Family dysfunctions

"Human is the most helpless of all animals at birth, and in need of protection for a much longer period of time than any of them" (Fromm & Anderson, 2013) During the growth of a child, a child needs to be attached to his or her mother and the all-enveloping love to keep him or her away from outside danger. When he or she reaches a certain age, he or she turns to father or mother as the new center of life. The existence of parents is central to a healthy child who can form a sound personality. In Olive Kitteridge, relations between parents and children are alienated. Some parents choose to commit suicide in front of their children, which brings a lifetime burden on their children's hearts. Olive Kitteridge also suffers pain and torment from the previous generation. She is a harsh and domineering woman, who suffers from the painful memory of her father's suicide. Olive's father also suffers from depression, who finally shoots himself in the kitchen without any note, which leads to Olive's furiousness and capricious mood out of excessive spiritual harm when she grows up and makes her unable to love and treat others and her family normally.

The suicide of Olive Kitteridge's father has a great effect on her character. She is born into an incomplete family,

and the death of her father caused her a great deal of anguish. Her unusual upbringing has an impact on her way of life, which finally leads to her being a tough and hateful woman. Olive is domineering to her son as well. When her son Christopher cannot learn to skit well, she ever beats him badly. Olive has overwhelming power and absolute authority in the Kitteridge on account of her controlling desire stemming from her sense of unsafety so that everything out of her control will make her anxious and angry. She refuses and fears that her father's sad death or likewise things will happen again, therefore she wants to use control to ensure that Kitteridge will proceed in the way she desires. When Olive goes to New York to stay with her son for a few days, they have a furious quarrel. Christopher says: "I am not going to take responsibility for the extreme capriciousness of your moods.....You kind of behave like a paranoid.....you are furious, it's tiring, very wearing for those around you.....I am not going to be ruled by my fear of you" (Strout, 2008). Olive can not be understood and accepted by other people as well as her family numbers. At the same time, she is hard to get along well with her husband in marriage because she actually been in a state of struggle because of the influence of the patriarchy. "You have no idea how tired I am, teaching all day, going to foolish meetings where the goddamn principal is a moron! Shopping. Cooking. Ironing. Laundry. Doing Christopher's homework with him! .....Well, I'm sick and tired of it, Sick to death" (Strout, 2008). Olive needs to work and take care of household chores as well as educate the children, while Henry obviously does nothing. The burden of the family, so to speak, made Olive sharper. The imbalance of intra-household labor division put so much pressure on her in both physical and mental aspect. In order to escape the stressful family, Olive develops an unethical relationship with her colleague. The extramarital affairs happen to both Olive and Henry, but they both keep silent because there is no spiritual communication between them. They used to talk about biology and enjoy a harmony and happy love life based on the equal status between man and woman, while with the establishment of marriage relationship, this equal status has been broken and leads to the instability. When Henry asks whether Olive will leave him, Olive refuses to answer and expresses he is so disgusted, which can be understood as a



rebel action, and she is trying to express her grievances. Olive cannot experience joy in this family that was once bound by love because of the pressure of male authority; she can only feel pressure. So Olive takes the way to reject and reproach Henry so as to express her displeasure. Both of them can not seek a sense of satisfaction from the other, so even in marriage, they also need to seek spiritual satisfaction from other people. At the same time, leaving of Christopher eventually crashes Olive's mental wall because she totally makes her whole life dependent on her children, which is also the root of the broken relationship between Olive and Christopher. Likewise, the perverse mother-son relationship tortures Christopher who escapes from Olive when he grows up. While Olive also reaps the fruits of her own controlling desire, losing the love of her son. Overall, an unhealthy family environment of two generations leads to Olive's great psychological trauma.

### 3.2 The indifference of American society

The entire novel is infused with a sense of the absurd which is a fact of both the real world and spiritual world. Albert Camus once mentioned in his interest in existentialism that absurd and revolt are coherent. "At this point of his effort, man stands face to face with the irrational. He feels within him his longing for happiness and for reason. The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world" (Foley, 2014). In Camus's opinion, the absurdity came out of the disharmony between the individual search for the meaning of life and the meaninglessness of the world. The creation of psychological problems is always due to the incompatibility between personal expectations and an unchanged and inhuman world. Contemporary American society has entered a highly developed post-industrial period, but the ecological crisis, natural disasters, terrorist attacks, environmental pollution, and so on have rapidly deepened the concern of contemporary American people for survival, making them anxious, and finally becoming the source of their fear. "Strout contextualizes individual terror against the broader national and cultural form felt by the United States after the events of 9/11" (Krugerl, 2016). Olive Kitteridge drew its materials from American people's lives in the 21st century after September 11 terrorist attack. The terrorist attack is beyond the American

people's expectations and predictions. They never think their powerful country would meet with misfortune. As a collective trauma, the event of 9/11 causes prolonged consequences for all Americans. When Olive Kitteridge takes a plane to visit her son in New York, all of a sudden, she remembers the terrorist attack many years ago at the moment her plane takes off. At that time, watching the plane flying over the towers back and forth, she is sitting in the bedroom in desperation, crying like a child. Almost all Americans felt that their lives are seriously threatened. This becomes the common mood of the characters in the novel.

Meanwhile, the increasingly rampant individualistic value orientations which "Originated with the Renaissance or with the rise of the bourgeoisie" (Dumont, 1986) and have dominated the modern American world, are the root of the collapse and desolation of people's spiritual world for in the process of individuation, they break the connection with others and the community. The famous French anthropologist Louis Dumont never defines the norm of Individualism without any substantive arguments in his work, but he asserts that modern ideology is characterized by individualism. Individualism is primarily about the relationship between the individual and society, between the individual and the group, and is mainly reflected in opposition to the regulation and oppression of the individual by authority. But when individualism overemphasizes the rights of the individual, individualism decayed into egotism and materialism. In Olive Kitteridge, Olive, and other characters are the victims of individualism which caused a sense of loneliness and indifference seeping into everyone's bone and flesh. America is deeply influenced by the doctrine of individualism which permeates the life of Americans, calling for pursuing and worshiping self-centered values. The suicide rate in modern America has been increasing. The prevalence of psychological disorders in American society is manifested by the phenomenon of suicide. In this work, there are so many suicides happening around people. Like Olive's father and Henry's mother. All these affairs cause the disorder of human mental condition, inflicting a devastating emotional shock on their families. What's more, the alienation of the 20th century is at its most vivid in this novel. Olive consequently rejects not

only engaging with the outside world but also being accepted by it. The alienation in the novel not only can be shown between parents and children but also among individuals in the town. The residents of the town go through the motions of their routine existence. People in this small town don't know each other very well. Some even purposefully distance themselves from others and avoid social connection; others want to leave the community; still, others live alone as if they were recluses. In this town, people have shallow relationships and don't care about each other. There is a clear example of the town's open stores' stuffs being very warm to Christopher, they greet him warmly, but in the knowledge that there is a danger of an explosion, they don't choose to talk to him, just smile and watch him walk in that direction. This is a kind of alienation. Everyone seems to have put on a mask of enthusiasm, but the heart is cold and hard. This seems to be characteristic of modern people.

#### IV. THE TREATMENT OF OLIVE'S PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMAS

Olive Kitteridge is always immersed in her own world and values others from her own viewpoint, which can be shown by the fact that she judges others' choice of the stroller and reconfirms her own way of parenting Christopher. The turn of her identity from a wife and mother to Olive herself is the revolt against individualism, the process of self-identity perusing, and the way of healing her trauma, in which Olive experiences two kinds of mental travel, saving others and soothing herself.

Talking cure as an effective way to relieve the psychological pressure of trauma victims by retrieving the strong feelings of trauma and telling them out is first coined by a patient whose pseudonym is Ann O during the cure process of hysteria. In the 1890s, psychologists have found that sharing experiences positively, particularly traumatic experiences, is a useful and powerful method of trauma healing. In the novel, Olive is inconsistent with external and internal performance. Internally she is sharp and sensitive, but externally she is unexpectedly easygoing and soft; this difference in personality occurs at different stages of the olive's life. Olive would never spill her guts and would only use harsh words to express her displeasure at an early age, largely because of her self-centered

thought. It is derived from the individualism of America, often characterized by high self-centeredness. When she is alienated by her family, she seems to find her life meaning gradually, since she overemphasizes her family. Strout also mostly describes Olive's home life in the novel to emphasize how important it is in her life in the first half of the piece. In contrast, when Olive is alone in her old age, Olive starts interacting with the outer world and people and rethinking the meaning of life.

There is an example of her saving Kevin. Kevin returns to the town where he grows up and tries to kill himself, just like his mother does. Olive changes a lot and begins to take care of Kevin when she seems to notice that something is wrong with Kevin and forcefully asks for a seat in Kevin's car. At the same time, there is a description of Kevin's first lover's mental activity, she finds "it gave her a feeling of safety, having Mrs. Kitteridge with her" (Strout, 2008). Olive may simply wish to vent about her distressed family in this conversation, or she may feel that saving this young man will also save her, both of which are being made to save and be saved through talking and sharing between two trauma victims. For herself, Olive finds consolation from Kevin who shares common suffering with her with an incomplete family, with whom she can talk about her depressed son, disabled husband, and suicidal father so as to relieve herself of mental stress. At the same time, Olive breaks the image of a tough and serious math teacher from the way of acting as a listener, bringing up Kevin's mother and encouraging him to confide, which shows that she lives in her own world and turns to help others in the same way that she wants someone else to be able to help her. She offered "acts of negligence or acts of God" (Strout, 2008).as a great comfort to Kevin, who eventually changes his attitude toward Olive from refusal to accept, implying a change of desire from death to the living. Recounting some traumatic events as the common experience of the witness of suicide and views of depression is a method of trauma healing by which both Kevin and Olive have got Heartfelt Soothing. Olive, despite her blunt character, is kind, true, and friendly, so Kevin, a student from many years ago, can still find a sense of belonging in her after his return.

"Individuals in organizations need a situated identity to guide their actions" (Luthans, 2022). Humans must

inherently live in a group due to their social nature. Socialization is an activity in which human beings experience being needed to achieve the meaning of life. After her son's leave and Her husband's stroke, Olive lives in her empty house alone and nobody accompanies her in her old age. Her pursuit and recognition of life come from the control and clutch of her family, but she was eventually excluded by her family, which largely led to her suicidal tendency because she loses the goal of life. When she recalls the life of her life, she finds that she hates to be alone, but she does not know how to overcome the sense of loneliness and separation in her heart. Rollo May explained the sense of loneliness in his anthology *Man's Search For Himself*, "Another characteristic of modern people is loneliness. They describe this feeling as one of being on the outside, isolated, or, if they are sophisticated, they say that they feel alienated" (2009: 13). When Henry dies and Christopher leaves, Olive totally lives alone. In this condition, she cannot find her self-identity. The sense of loneliness leads to her continuous thought of killing herself to finish her endless loneliness. And this state is changed by another lonely man Jack Kennison who is afraid of being alone as same as Olive. When Olive finds him fainting on the road and wants to seek help from others, he says "I don't care if I die. Just don't leave me here alone" (Strout, 2008). While Olive also draws strength and new direction "because Jack, in the doctor's office, had needed her, had given her a place in the world" (Strout, 2008). Despite the fact that the two people are very different in terms of walking speed and thought which shows their attitudes and lifestyle are unlike, the two people choose to spend the rest of their time together. They choose to save each other from the way of accompanying for seek new spiritual support. Since Olive is needed by Jack Kennison, she reconfirms her self-identity again and finds a new connection with the world. The companion of Jack removes her sense of loneliness and puts an end to her endless thoughts of killing herself.

## V. CONCLUSION

Strout demonstrates in this work how people can suffer spiritually as a result of personal, familial, and social neglect. Many contemporary individuals who share a

comparable level of suffering with Olive and are bogged down by different psychological problems can be seen as echoing Olive Kitteridge's trauma. Olive's personal trauma is a common trouble in modern times. What she experiences in her life, a trauma in the original family, incomprehension, an indifferent society, loneliness, and others, is the common mental predicament of modern people. In such a fast-paced life, everyone has to endure emotional conflict.

In Olive Kitteridge, Elizabeth Strout presents the life of ordinary people. In everyone's life, they will experience complicated and accumulating traumatic feelings. The spiritual predicament can be solved by us. Through empathy, all people need to show solicitude for each other. Elizabeth Strout characterizes characters that are empathetic, able to change, and resilient, highlighting the importance of empathy and telling in treating trauma. All of this has a referential value for all people who get stuck in a mental predicament.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Berger, J. (1997). Trauma and Literary Theory [Review of *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*; *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma*; *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma*, by C. Caruth, D. LaCapra, & K. Tal]. *Contemporary Literature*, 38(3), 569–582. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1208980>
- [2] Bromberg, Philip M. (1993). "Shadow and substance: A relational perspective on clinical process." *Psychoanalytic psychology*. 378-406.
- [3] Charney, Dennis S. (1993). "Psychobiologic Mechanisms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder." *Archives of General Psychiatry*, vol. 50, no. 4, 1993, 294–305, <https://doi.org/10.1001/archpsyc.1993.01820160064008>.
- [4] Dumont Louis (1986). *Essays on individualism: Modern ideology in anthropological perspective*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- [5] Entis, Laura. (2014). "'Olive Kitteridge' cast dishes on the HBO miniseries' brave portraits of marriage and mental illness." *The Hollywood Reporter*
- [6] Foley, John. (2014). "THE ABSURD." *Albert Camus: From the Absurd to Revolt*, Routledge, London, Britain, 5.
- [7] Fromm, Erich, and Leonard A Anderson. (2013). *The Sane Society*, Routledge, New York, United States, 31.

- [8] Guaccero, Susan. (2010). "'Standing in the Spaces' with Olive Kitteridge, by Elizabeth Strout." *Psychoanalytic Perspectives*, 411-415.
- [9] Kruger, Rae-Lee. (2016). "Fighting the Fear: Everyday Terror in the American Short Story Collection after 9/11 a Study of Jennifer Egan's *a Visit from the Goon Squad* and Elizabeth Strout's *Olive Kitteridge*." *MacEwan University Student eJournal*, vol. 3, no. 1, 293, <https://doi.org/10.31542/j.muse.393>.
- [10] Luthans, Fred. (2022). "The Need for and Meaning of Positive Organizational Behavior." *Journal of Organizational Behavior: The International Journal of Industrial, Occupational and Organizational Psychology and Behavior*, Vol. 23, no. 6, 701-728, <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.165>.
- [11] May Rollo (2009). *Man's Search For Himself*. Manhattan: W. W. Norton & Company
- [12] Pacella, M. L., et al. (2013). "The Physical Health Consequences of PTSD and PTSD Symptoms: A Meta-Analytic Review." *Journal of anxiety disorders*, Vol. 27, no. 1, 33-46, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.janxdis.2012.08.004>.
- [13] Šesnić, Jelena. (2019). "The Past and Present of Age and Ageing in *The Country of the Pointed Firs* and *Olive Kitteridge*." *Anafora-časopis za znanost o književnosti*, vol. 6, no.2, 443-468. <https://doi.org/10.29162/anafora.v6i2.8>.
- [14] Shalev, Arieh Y., et al. (1998). "Prospective study of posttraumatic stress disorder and depression following trauma." *American Journal of psychiatry*, vol. 155, no.5, 630-637. <https://doi.org/10.1176/ajp.155.5.630>.
- [15] Strout, Elizabeth. (2008). *Olive Kitteridge*. New York: Random House.





# **An Ecofeminist Approach to Alice Walker's the Color Purple**

**Biswajit Payra**

Guest Lecturer in English, JKBK Government College, Cuttack, Odisha, India

Received: 04 Jul 2023; Received in revised form: 02 Aug 2023; Accepted: 10 Aug 2023; Available online: 17 Aug 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— Alice walker, an iconic African-American, is one of the influential feminist writers in literature. She, in her works, has delineated how the African-American women have faced oppressions in terms of race, class and ethnicity and has lambasted both sexist and racist hegemony in addition to promoting an ecocentric worldview by dint of womanism. Her *The Color Purple* (1982) depicts how women as well nature are subjected to continuous exploitation and draws interconnectedness between women and nature. The paper shows how both women and nature are being exploited, subjugated and oppressed by the patriarchal world and how Celie, Shug Sofia and Squeak have been able to develop their life through eco-friendly ways of life by bucking against trouble-ridden situations.



**Keywords**— *Feminism, Ecofeminism, Environmentalism, Ecocriticism.*

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Ecofeminism as said by Peter Barry “which comes under the label of ecocriticism insists to give importance to existence of Nature “as an entity which affects us”. Françoise d'Eaubonne was the first French feminist who coins the term ecofeminism in her book, *Feminism or Destruction* (1974). It is a type of feminism that attempts to examine the relationship between woman's oppression and environmental exploitation in a male-dominated society. It also tackles the environmental problems and the factors that lead to the destruction of nature and the exploitation of woman. *The Color Purple*, generally considered one of her best works, won her three great American literary awards since its publication in 1982 and is undoubtedly regarded as a great and long lasting masterpiece of American literature. *The Color Purple* focuses on the physical pain, mental agony, violence of black women and how they are oppressed and tortured and depicts how women as well nature are subjected to continuous exploitation and draws interconnectedness between women and nature. The paper shows how both women and nature are being exploited, subjugated and oppressed by the patriarchal world and how Celie, Shug Sofia and Squeak have been able to develop

their life through eco-friendly ways of life by bucking against trouble-ridden situations. The novel revolves around Celie, a naive Southern black girl who later emancipates into a strong black woman realizing her potential physically, economically and spiritually by reconnecting with the nature. The paper gives a relatively comprehensive and detailed look into Walker's ecofeminist consciousness in order to evoke more people's environmental awareness and to make it easier to build a harmonious beautiful world.

## **II. DISCUSSION: WOMEN AND NATURE: VICTIMS OF THE PATRARCHAL SOCIETY**

Alice Walker in her *The Color Purple* Alice Walker has portrayed the experiences of Black-women in a sexist and racist society. She chronicles the life of Blackwomen who are facing verbal, mental, physical and sexual abuses at the hands of patriarchal world. In *The Color Purple*, the female characters are considered to be mules, whose will is subjugated to the will of the men. As victims of patriarchy and male chauvinism, most of them have the experience of being raped, being deprived of basic human rights and finally become psychologically controlled by men. Celie,

the protagonist of the novel, is raped by her stepfather when she is only 14 years old and later gives birth to two children. After her stepfather's repeated physical and sexual violence, Celie is sold to a widower with four children to tend to. It's her industriousness and obedience as well as an attached cow that leads to the widow's decision of marrying her. However, this marriage doesn't eliminate any slightest oppressions she suffers but throws her into another "cage". To the widower, her so-called husband, she is nothing but a laborer in the field, a worker for domestic household and a sexual servant.

Alice Walker, in addition to depicting the oppression, subjugation and domination of women who are the victim of male oppressions not only because of their colour but also because of their feminine gender, delineates how nature too is being oppressed and annihilated by the oppressive chauvinistic patriarchal society. In *The Color Purple*, in order to arouse people's attention to the disastrous natural world, she presents before the reader the environmental deterioration in Olinka. What we have learnt from Nettie's letters, Olinka previously is a peaceful village located in Africa where people live in a "place without walls but with a leaf roof" (Walker, 1982, p.141). And there are "trees and trees and then more trees on top of that. They are so big they look like they were built. And vines. And ferns. And little animals. Frogs. Snakes too." The people who are the residents of the very place reside there peacefully living on the lap of beautiful serene natural environment but everything was shattered when the white road builders came. The serene beautiful Olinka village turns to be the territory of the white colonists with the fields being occupied, huts leveled, leaves of the trees cut away. In addition, the victims of this ecological disaster include not only the Olinka village but also its neighbor villages. The white colonizers aim to turn the village into a headquarter of the rubber industry by replacing the forest with rubber trees. The biological balance is completely destroyed with the animals nowhere to stay, and local people being expelled away from their homeland and forced to buy water from the planters. The white colonists, under the cloak of modern civilization, succeed in conquering the peaceful creatures there and destroying the previous ecological environment as well. According to Doris Baines, "a sixty-five-year-old woman whom Nettie and Samuel meet on their way back to England, signs of war are all over Africa and India. Trees are hauled off to make ships and captain's furniture, while the land is planted with something people can't eat. Animals are also victims of advanced human society from the primitive one to modern one, with their meat cooked into food, fur made into clothing, bones into ornament". Another important point in the novel that needs to be noted that before the aggression of the white colonists,

people in Olinka have gone through the disaster caused by their destroying the balance of ecology. This experience teaches them the lesson of the importance of keeping a harmonious relationship with nature and this lesson is then passed on from generation to generation among them. However, their awareness isn't enough to protect themselves and their natural world. The white people's colonialism once again puts them in the environmental crisis. Here, Walker intends to criticize the conspiracy of racism and colonialism that leads to the severe ecological crisis. She tries to say that people are using, exploiting and killing tress mercilessly to be benefitted economically. Actually,

Walker in her work *Anything We Love Can Be Saved: A Writer's Activism* (1997) has desired to take a walk amidst nature and see its beauty. She has said that this brings to her mind many blacks who she has known "are flexible like the grass and sheltering like the trees" (111). The solacing quality of nature has been given importance in the text *The Color Purple*. Celie imagines herself as a tree, while facing domestic violence under Albert. Celie tells Harpo, her stepson: "I say to myself, Celie, you a tree" (Walker Color 22). Imagining herself as a tree, gives her the strength to combat oppression, offer resistance and make life a happy ride. Shug shelters the other women characters in the novel, like a tree, under her ecowomanist wisdom and makes them self-reliant. Furthermore, Celie as a self-reliant entrepreneur gets firmly rooted like a tree and offers employment to many women. Walker advocates that human suffering and devastation of nature, can be surmounted when the toxicity in the mind, body and the earth are removed completely. Resurrection of nature, its worship and preservation are of utmost importance to ecowomanism and Walker has talked about them in *The Color Purple*. Celie finds solace amidst the clamour of plantation life, nurturing nature on the farm. Shug makes her realize that "it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it" (Walker Color 167). Later on, Celie becomes a self-reliant entrepreneur and builds a home in Memphis for herself amidst nature with many artefacts of nature, symbolic of her ecowomanist awareness. Celie and Shug impart this awareness to the other women characters in the novel and accentuate their ecowomanist awareness. Nettie's stay in Olinka speaks about how, nature worship and preservation be it as simple as the worship of the roof leaf can act as a source of strength to fight oppression. Moreover, Walker has cleverly linked issues of environmental pollution, deforestation, and global warming with Nettie's stay in Olinka. She has showcased how destruction of greenery leads to the aforesaid problems, one after the other, even in a thickly vegetated country like Olinka. As pointed out by Bush "Through Nettie's story, the

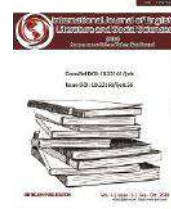
theme of women's exploitation by men is set in the larger context of the exploitative relationship between races and nations" (1039). Nettie gets the healing touch by making a spiritual union with the nature after ecological destruction of beautiful Olinka made by the chauvinistic white men.

### III. CONCLUSION

Alice Walker in her famous novel *The Color Purple* delineates how women and nature share the same miserable fate under common oppressions done by the ruling dominating chauvinistic patriarchal society. She explores the connections between women and nature through spiritual amendments. She has said that "In day-to-day life, I worship the Earth as God-- representing everything-- and nature as its spirit" (Walker Anything 9). She argues that an anthropocentric, patriarchal Christian view that the universe is only for man, will be very taxing for the ecosystem and she recommends paganism as a way of promoting an ecocentric worldview. However, Walker through the novel draws the interconnectedness between women and nature. Ruether said about women in the very novel "They must unite the demands of the women's movement with those ecological movement to envision a radical reshaping of the basic socio-economic relations". The unity and mutual beneficial bonds among them can help them stand up against the oppressive chauvinistic patriarchal society who for their own benefits exploit, torture and subjugate both women and nature.

### REFERENCES

- [1] Walker, Alice. *The Color Purple*. London: Women's Press, 1992.
- [2] Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2009.
- [3] O'Brien, John. *Interview with Black Writers*. New York: Liveright, 1973.
- [4] Ruether, Rosemary Radford. *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization and world Religions*. Rowman & Littlefield Pub, 2005.
- [5] Dhivya, E. (2016). *Women as Victims: An Analysis of Alice Walker's The Color Purple*. *Language in India*, 16, 1930-2940.



# Body Image and Identity: A look into select short stories of Bhabendra Nath Saikia

Banani Das

Royal Global University, India

Received: 09 Jul 2023; Received in revised form: 04 Aug 2023; Accepted: 13 Aug 2023; Available online: 19 Aug 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— The human body has been theorized in many ways, including the entire notion of the woman as a human creation. It is generally agreed that this concept refers to our perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about our bodies, which influence our behaviour about our bodies. The article examines numerous authors whose individual genealogies meet on the common ground of identity theory and women's lives and is supported by a theoretical framework based on conceptions of identity, body-image and self-image in women and feminist discourse. This paper probes into the concepts of identity in women through the literary canvas of Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia and demonstrates the effects of body image and self-image on the development of identity. Of course, an extensive discussion of the short stories of Dr. Saikia is beyond the scope of this paper. The aim of this paper is to analyse the concepts through the two short stories short titled "Dhura Xaap" (ঢুৱা খাপ 1958) and "Sringkhol" (স্ৰিংখল, 1970) by Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia. The paper seeks to explore the concepts of self-image, identity and body image through three female characters 'Chandrika', 'Janeki' and 'Ambika'.



**Keywords**— Body image, Identity, Self-image, self-concept, gender, Assamese literature, cultural identity, gender studies, psychological study.

"Everywhere in the world, self starts with body".

- R. Baumeister

## I. INTRODUCTION

The sense of body ownership, which refers to the unique perceptual status of one's own body and the notion that "my body" is mine, is one of the core components of the corporeal self. Simone de Beauvoir stated in *The Second Sex* that "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (Beauvoir 1993:281). The human body has been theorized in various ways, which also incorporates the entire idea of woman as a human creation. The concept of body image has also been discussed by academics; it is generally agreed upon that this concept refers to our perceptions, ideas, and feelings about the body, which in turn influence our actions linked to the body. The paper makes an effort to analyse the concepts of self-image, identity and body-

image through three female characters penned by Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia in order to provide factual support for the study. The paper will look at how body image and self-concept are perceived in relation to characteristics of references like physical attractiveness, social interaction (or relationship) between the perceiver and the perceived, and social comparisons as sources of self-esteem, as well as sociocultural approaches that highlight the cultural dependencies of this construct. The discussion will demonstrate that our view of social interactions, particularly in the context of self-other boundaries, is impacted by the multisensorial knowledge of the self.

Bhabendra Nath Saikia was an acclaimed writer, filmmaker, and novelist from Assam, India, known for his contributions to Assamese literature and cinema. While Saikia's works cover a wide range of themes and topics, including social issues, cultural identity, and human



relationships, he did not extensively explore the concept of self-image in his writings or films.

Self-image refers to an individual's perception, beliefs, and feelings about themselves. It encompasses how we see ourselves, our capabilities, worth, and place in the world. It is influenced by various factors, including personal experiences, societal norms, cultural values, and interactions with others.

Although Saikia's works often delved into the complexities of human nature and society, his focus primarily revolved around broader social and cultural issues rather than individual self-image. His stories and films often explored themes related to rural life, social inequalities, political unrest, and the clash between tradition and modernity. However, it is essential to note that Saikia's works reflect the human condition and the intricacies of individual characters. Through his narratives, he might indirectly touch upon aspects of self-image by portraying characters who grapple with their own identities, aspirations, and the societal expectations placed upon them. Yet, it is not a predominant or explicit theme in his body of work. Bhabendra Nath Saikia's contributions to Assamese literature and cinema have left a lasting impact on the cultural landscape of the region. His works are celebrated for their nuanced portrayal of human emotions, social dynamics, and the overall human experience. Of course, a detailed discussion of Dr. Saikia's short stories is beyond the constraints of this paper. For which purposes, the writer has taken two short stories for consideration 'Dhura Xaap' (1958) and 'Sringkhoh' (1970).

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The work is based on the theoretical framework of identity theory (Stryker 1980) and social identity theory (Tajfel 1981; Tajfel and Turner 1979, 1986). The theories link the "individual to the social world through a conception of the self, composed of various social identities; often the former is understood to focus on roles and the latter on social groups" (Hitlin, 2006). Identity refers to the various meanings attached to oneself by self and others, and locates one in social space through the relationships implied by the identity (Gecas and Burke 1995). Taken together, the two theories advance our understanding of the self and its relationship to the various identities that individuals claim as their own. Identities serve as anchors for behaviour and understanding in the ongoing flow of interaction. These identities do not develop at random but are a behavioural outgrowth of one's personal identity (Hitlin, 2003). According to SIT, the self-concept is made up of a social identity that includes salient group classification and a personal identity that includes

distinctive aspects (such as physical attributes, abilities, psychological traits, and hobbies).

## III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Andrei Homan (2011) debates that "beauty is skin deep, but ugly is to the bone, where skin deep implies the superficiality and modifiability of cultural beauty, as well as the individual's possibility to conform to its norms in contrast to the structural, deep ugliness brought by the physical deviance from the geometrical standards". Buss (1987), Cash (1990), Feingold (1990), Jackson (1992), Rose & Frieze (1989); Smith, Waldorf, & Trembath (1990), Sprecher (1989) argues that whether viewed from a sociobiological or sociocultural perspective, women's physical aesthetics are influential in dating, mating, and other facets of heterosocial relations. Attractive people are often viewed as possessing such admirable traits as sociability, popularity, happiness, and confidence (Cash 1990; Falion 1990). Women also are more vulnerable to body norms as they are more likely than men to be judged by their appearance and sexual appeal (Falion 1990). Mostly women are encouraged to judge their inner selves through their external physical appearance and to equate the two. Gardiner, Judith Kegan. "On Female Identity and Writing by Women" resonates that women are taught to create socially approved images of themselves by manipulating their dress, speech, and behaviour. Erikson and Lichtenstein occasionally describe identity as an "evolving configuration," but they see the process of identity formation as a developmental progress toward the achievement of a desired product, the autonomous individual, the paradigm for which is male. Physical attractiveness is an important factor in the definition of a woman's sense of self and her role in Western society (Grimes, 1997, Tiffany 2012). Rudd, Jestratijevic, and Husk (2017) noted that common words like "hate", "disgust" and "shame" are used to describe relationships with their bodies were.

Body image is a multidimensional self-attitude toward one's body, particularly its size, shape, and aesthetics (Cash & Pruzinsky, 1990; Thompson, 1996). Ashmore and his colleagues have articulated an intergroup relations model in which gender attitudes or ideologies operate at several different albeit interconnected levels (Ashmore, 1990; Ashmore & Del Boca, 1986; Ashmore, Del Boca, & Bilder, 1995). Bargad & Hyde, 1991; Downing & Roush, 1984) posits a five-stage experiential progression toward feminist identity and the first being a passive acceptance referring to denial or unawareness of sexism and an endorsement and valuing of gender-role stereotypes. We also find an overall pattern of gender similarity, however:

for both men and women, reflected appraisals are the most important source of self-esteem, followed by self-perceived competence and then by social comparisons (Schwalbe, 1991). Gutierrez et al. (1999) investigated in their experimental research the effects of exposure to physically attractive and dominant same-sex individuals on self-evaluations, measured on the dimension of mate-value (desirability as marriage partner). These two “threats” to self-esteem mirror and are determined by their high importance in the perceived attractiveness of the opposite gender; preferred characteristics in one’s ideal mate - for men, beauty and youth are the essential qualities, while for women it is men’s social status which mostly determine their attractiveness.

Jung and Lennon (2003) investigated the fluctuations of women’s body image after exposure to attractive images, taking into account participants’ appearance self-schemas (cognitive representations of organized information about the self in relation to appearance). Their results show that only in women who were schematic on appearance such exposure led to lower body image and mood. Poran (2002) compared Latina, Black and White women participants in what regards their conceptions of beauty, perceptions of cultural standards of beauty, as well as their tendency to engage in a specific social comparison process – the denial of personal disadvantage (a self-protective psychological mechanisms revealed in the studies on minorities). Results indicate similarities in the personal definitions of beauty, but significant variations in the cultural standard of beauty. Cunningham (1986) on the attractiveness of different types of facial features in various contexts – between representatives of various ethnic groups in the same country. Further Block (1983), Chodorow (1978), Douvan and Gold (1966), Gilligan (1982), Lyons (1983), and McGwire (1984) posits the observation that “the male self is rooted in instrumental action whereas the female self is rooted in relationships.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

##### 4.1 Body Image

This paper attempts to draw attention to the hegemonic view and ideological matrix of the notions of beauty associated with a female body. According to Zhang (2013) a female body should look lean, healthy, pleasant, and proportionate. Cash (1994) alluded to body image “as a person’s evaluation and effective experience regarding their physical experience as well as their investment in appearance as a domain for self-evaluation”.

The short story “Dhura Xaap” is about two women Chandrika and Janeki who are opposite to each other when it comes to their physical attractiveness, and body image.

Chandrika, the young and beautiful wife of Lilakanta convinces her husband to take a photo with her in the studio. For this she wears a *phulam sador* (*Sador* - a kind of draping of the upper body worn with a skirt ‘mekhela’ and blouse; *phulam* ‘in floral print’) brought to her by Lilakanta. As prevalent of the times, getting photographed or having a full-sized mirror was a privilege of the higher classes; Chandrika could never catch a glimpse of her entire body except for her face in the small hand-mirror which was there in her house. Chandrika was hardly aware of her own beauty until she clicked the photograph with her husband.

“ইমান ধুনীয়া ... এতিয়া ভৰিৰ বুঢ়া আঙুলিৰ পৰা  
ভুলৰ চুলিলৈকে গোটেই মাহনুজনীক তাই  
দেখিছে” (Golpo aru Xilpo, p.38)

(Translation : So beautiful!...from the thumb of her feet to the fine hair of the eye brows she can see her whole self).

Chandrika’s self-image was heightened by her body-image. Her attention was drawn to her own beautiful image in the photo than to her husband’s. She was dazzled to see her beauty in the picture and could not keep her eyes away from the image of herself in it; but it did not serve the initial purpose.

“কিন্তু আচৰিত কথা - চাদৰখনতো তাই ইমান  
ভালকৈ লোৱা নাছিল; কেনেকৈ ইমান ধুনীয়া  
হ’ল? চাবদিয়া চাদৰখনৰ ৰঙা বহল ফুলাম  
পাৰিটোৱে ভৰিৰ পৰা আৰম্ভ কৰি তাইৰ গাটো  
মেৰিয়াই ধৰিছেফুলে পাতে ভৰপুৰ লতা এদাল  
যেন আলফুলকৈ তাইৰ গাৰ ভাঁজে ভাঁজে বগাই  
গৈছে বুকুখনত লতাদালে দুবাৰকৈ টো খেলাইছে।  
মানুহজনেই তাই পাহৰিয়েই গৈছিল। যাক চাই  
থাকিবৰ কাৰণে ফটোখন তোলাই আনিলে,  
নিজক চাই থাকোতে তেৱেই তল পৰে এতিয়া।  
(Golpo aru Xilpo, p.35)

(Translation : But it is strange. She did not take the *sador* properly, still she looked so beautiful in it. The wide flower lined border of the *sador* wrapped her body from her feet. A leafy climber seemed to climb gentle across her body and waved twice against her chest. Looking at her beautiful self in the picture, she forgot to look at the man seated beside her).

A woman's perception of her culture's beauty standards, how closely her own body resembles those standards, and her belief about how crucial a woman's body is in meeting those standards in comparison to other members of her cultural group all have a significant impact on how she feels about herself (Paschal 2012; Spurgas, 2005). Many

people's quests for physical perfection are motivated by our culture's relentless emphasis on physical appearance. Her body is more of a "body-for-others" than a "body of individuality" (Ibid). Body image is the picture of our body, which we form in our mind describing the perceptions of the self that are centered on the individual's sense of their own physical existence. Chandrika's feeling when she sees her image in the photograph embody the powerful and expressive image she forms of herself as a married woman whose beauty is intensified in the presence of her husband beside her.

“মুখৰ একেবাৰে ওচৰলৈ ফটোখন আনি তাই  
তাইৰ মুখলৈ চাই ব'লা মুখত ওৰণি, কপালত  
ফোট, তাৰ উপৰি গাতে গা লগাই তাইৰ গৰাকী  
জন।” (Golpo aru Xilpo, p. 35)

#### 4.2 Self- image

Merriam-Webster's Medical Dictionary Online 2010 defines self-image as one's conception of oneself or one's role. The understanding of embodied cognition have come together to support the idea that the body's interactions with the environment deeply influence cognitive processes. In the eyes of the world Chandrika was Lilakanta's wife and is supposed to be the only woman in his life. When she discovers Lilakanta's past her self-image was destroyed by her perceptions of the social interaction she was engaged in. Chandrika's sense of fulfilment as a woman and pride of being a wife collapsed when Janeki returned the stained *sador* to her, borrowed by Lilankanta for his wife. Later when Chandrika discovered that the *sador* she had so lovingly worn, actually belonged to Janeki, she was distraught and her self-image shattered. The same *sador* with the floral border which embodied her sense of pride and beauty earlier, weighed her down like a snake crawling over her body. She wanted to scream at the sight of the same *sador* and herself which earlier had given her much pleasure.

“ফটোখনত নিজক দেখি তাই শিয়ৰি  
উঠিল। চাদৰখনৰ ফুলাম পাৰিটোলৈ তাই  
চাব নোৱাৰিলে। ভৰিৰ পৰা আৰম্ভ কৰি,  
কঁকাল আৰু বুকুৰ ওপৰেদি এডাল  
ফুটুকা -ফুটুকী গাৰ প্ৰকাণ্ড সাপে যেন  
তাইক মেৰিয়াই ধৰিছে ফটোৰ  
মানুহজনীয়ে পাৰক নোৱাৰক চন্দ্ৰিকা  
আচল মানুহজনীৰ চিঞৰি দিবৰ মন  
গ'ল।” (গল্প আৰু শিল্প, p. 48)

(Translation: She shivered when she saw herself in the photo. She couldn't look at the flowery border of the *sador*. She felt as if a huge snake

crawled over her feet, waist and chest; wrapping her all over).

‘Sringshol’ (শৃংখল meaning ‘Chain’) based in a nondescript village in Assam, peeks into the conflicts a young widowed mother who have to face conflict of self and identity in the advent of hunger of the flesh. Ambika, a widow with five children, young and beautiful, was left with emptiness in herself and in her household after the death of her husband Nilokanto. Kalidas was a friend of Ambika's deceased husband and earned quite well for a living, moreover after the death of Ambika's husband, he had always shown a keen interest in Ambika. In her eyes, she was a widow and after the loss of her husband, the sole purpose of her life was to live for her children and arrange two square meals a day by working in whatever capacity and work she could get for the day. Her poverty led her to catch the pigeons which were released from the meeting, with the thought that she will be able to sell them in the market and fetch some money.

The old man Dayaram kept piling Kalidas on Ambika because he wanted to see her happy and move ahead from a life of poverty. Kalidas also on a few occasions indirectly articulated his interest in Ambika, and on one instance by narrating to her how he wanted to marry her, before she got married to his best friend Nilokanto.

“কালিদাসে অকণমান সময় ছাঁটোলৈ চাই আছিল,  
তাৰ পাছত সি পাতল সুৰত, হাঁহি হাঁহি কৈছিল,  
“এটা কথা তই জান নে নেজান অম্বিকা? আমাৰ  
মা এদিন মোৰ কাৰণে তোক চাবলৈ আহিছিল  
নহয়। তই গম পাইছিল নে নাই? (Shrinkhol, p. 6)

(Translation : Kalidas kept looking at the shadow for a while. Then he said in a light note, with a smile, ‘Do you know something, Ambika? My mother had once come to see you for marriage with me. Did you or did you not know?’)

Shock and dread suddenly made Ambika as motionless as a bird on a tree would be, when it heard a weird, sharp sound close by. The way it remained still yet anxious to guess the nature of the sound, Ambika too remained thus, absolutely still, and looked at Kalidas. Kalidas kept smiling like an idiot. Ambika's eyes were unable to tolerate even that idiotic smile for more than a fleeting moment. Pretending to pick up a slice of betelnut peel, she hurriedly brought her face away so that no light fell on it. Time to time, Kalidas also tries to find out every possible way to spend time at Ambika's house and on one occasion he even suggests that she should invite him for a meal together and allow him to spend the night in her house. Although Saikia does not mention the age of Ambika, it is

implied that Ambika is still in her youth and capable for a youthful attraction.

“বেৰখনত পৰা তাইৰ ছাঁটো এজনী সুখাম গাভৰুৰ  
ছাঁ যেন লাগিছিল।” (Shrinkhol, p. 8)

(Translation: “By the mellow light of the lamp,  
Ambika’s face looked very serene and soft.  
However might she be, her shadow on the mud-  
plastered wall seemed to be that of a youthful  
woman with fullness of body).

In the Indian context, Meenakshi Tapan states that “the female body becomes an instrument and symbol for the expression of caste, class and community honor in society. Chastity, virtue and above all, purity are extolled as great feminine virtue embodying the honour of the family, community and the nation (Thapan 1997:6; Macdonald 2009:4). When Dayaram wanted to make Ambika understand about Kalidas and how he longed to have meal cooked with the hands of Ambika, she got furious and alerted and warned Dayaram to not instigate Kalidas, as her virtue and honor as a woman and a widow was at question.

“তোকো মই আজি ক’লোঁ, সি আহক তাকো  
ক’ম,-আজিৰপৰা যেন সি চোতাল পাৰ হৈ  
মোৰ দুৱাৰডলিত ভৰি নিদিয়ো।” (Shrinkhol, p. 11)

(Translation : “I’m warning you today and let him  
come, I’ll warn him as well—that from today  
onwards, he doesn’t ever cross the courtyard to  
set foot upon my threshold!’)

Bound by societal convention, Ambika felt uncomfortable listening to Kalidas’ discourse and tried to maintain her widow status by rejecting all his temptations towards her, but most of the times she sat motionless under the weight of shyness and fear. She started getting frightened even thinking of just his shadow. In indirect ways she made him understand—that he sever all relations with Ambika and Ambika’s household. Even when the old man Dayaram wanted to make Ambika understand about Kalidas’s interest in her, she negated his arguments saying that she is a single woman and it will be really difficult for her to continue to stay in the village if something unforeseen happens.

“অম্বিকাআই আৰু টান মাতেৰে সুধিলে, তই তাৰ  
হৈ ওকালতি কৰিছ কিয়? মই অকলশৰীয়া মানুহ ,  
আজি সি মোৰ লগত মেল মাৰক, কাইলৈ মোৰ  
হাতৰ ভাত এসাঁজ খাওক, পৰিলৈ এটা চুকত থৈলা  
এখন পাৰি শোৱক, চ’থাদিনালে মোৰ বুকুত –।”  
(Shrinkhol, p. 11)

(Translation: “Why are you advocating so much  
for him? I am a single woman. Today he would  
chat with me, tomorrow he would eat a meal from  
my hands, the day after he would spread a sack in  
a corner and lie down there and the next day, on  
my bosom...!’)

As if for a moment anxiety clasped Ambika’s throat and choked her. After a while, on the verge of crying, she said, ‘How may I continue to stay in this village after that?’ Reflected evaluations, self-perceptions, and social comparisons have received a lot of attention from social psychologists as sources of knowledge on the self. In Janeki readers witness that her self-image is influenced by their reflected appraisals which are ‘other people’s reactions to them’; their interpretations of these reactions being most consequential and also the society.

“সাতাইশ বছৰ বয়সীয়া জানেকী। একুৰি  
বছৰ বয়সৰপৰা কেইবাঘৰ মানুহে ঠায়ে-  
চিয়াৰে তাইক জনাই থৈ গৈছে, কইনা  
হোৱা চেহেৰা তাইৰ নাই আছে তেইশ  
বছৰীয়া ভনীয়েক সাবিত্ৰীৰ। গাত মগুহ  
আছে, গালৰ হাড় ঢাক খাই আছে  
বুঢ়ীমাক সুগন্ধীক তাই কেইবাদিনো  
কৈছে, মই থকাৰ কাৰণেই যদি তই  
তাইক তেনেকৈ ঘৰত বহুৱাই ৰাখিছ,  
তেনেহ’লে মই ক’ববাত পানীয়ে-দুনীয়ে  
পৰিহে মৰিমগৈ।” (Shrinkhol, p. 37)

(Translation: Janeki is twenty-seven years now.  
Since she was twenty years old, numerous visitors  
have subtly helped her realize that she does not  
possess the appearance of a bride. Instead, it’s her  
23-year-old sister Savitri, who has a body that is  
filled with flesh and covered cheekbones, making  
her look more like a bride. For several days,  
Janeki has warned her grandma Sugandhi that if  
she keeps Savitri at home because of her, she will  
have to go somewhere and commit suicide by  
drowning).

In a detailed discussion of individual identity, Hewitt (1989) describes it as “the continuity, integration, and identification, that a person constructs, not in relation to his community or his culture, but to himself”. Ambika’s individual identity as a widow and Janeki’s self-perception as a woman past marriageable age because of her unimpressive looks determined their behavior in society and in the company of those around them. Self-awareness is our observation of our actions and their consequences. From these observations we draw conclusions about our abilities and tendencies (Bem 1972). Humans are similar



to or different from others by the standards of self-evaluation designed for social comparison, in other words, by observing how we are similar or different from others. Women's feelings about their bodies are primarily also influenced by the verbal and nonverbal reactions they receive from others regarding their appearance.

Dissatisfaction with physical appearance can cause much emotional pain as well (Dennison and Coleman 2000). Janeki was repeatedly refused marriage by everyone who came close to her. Sometimes it didn't even take two days to receive the news that the marriage proposal has been rejected and the basis of the rejection was primarily her looks. Even men like Rudro, Tapodor, Manumohan and Lilakantha tried to establish intimacy with her but rejected her when it came to marrying her. A woman's sense of her gender, her sexuality, and her body may assume a different, perhaps a more prominent, shape in her conception of her self than these factors would for a man. Janeki often believed her body as a "source of pain, guilt and embarrassment" (Taub, 2003 qtd. Begum, 1992).

“গালখনত হাত দি খেপিয়াই খেপিয়াই তাই মাজে মাজে চায়। আইনাৰ ওচৰলৈ তাই বহুদিন যোৱা নাই, যাবলৈ এৰিলে। ... তাইক বেৰি থকা শ শ মানুহৰ চকুৱে তাইৰ কাৰণে আইনা।” (Golpo aru Xilpo, p. 40)

(Translation : She tries to check her looks by rubbing her cheeks from time to time. She has almost given up looking at herself at the mirror... The eyes of hundreds of people around are a mirror for her).

Later, when Janeki received the stained, creased *sador* back through the hands of the little boy, it left her with a sense of dejection and unwantedness, her existence resembling to that of a fallen leaf.

“নিজকে তলসৰা পাততকৈও সৰু বুলি ভাবিবলৈ তাই অভ্যস্ত হৈ গৈছে, তথাপিও এক মুহূৰ্তৰ কাৰণে তাই নিজকে প্ৰবোধ দিব নোৱাৰিলে। চাদৰখনত এচমকা সেন্দুৰৰ দাগ, ---দাগটোলৈ চাই তাইৰ এনেকুৱা লাগিল যেন ওচৰৰ মানুহঘৰত ভোজ পাতিছে, তাইক ভোজলৈ মতা নাই, অথচ খাই এৰা-চুৱা পাতবোৰ জেওৰা পাৰকৈ তাইতৰ ঘৰৰফালে দলিয়াই পেলাইছে।” (Golpo aru Xilop, p.37)

(Translation : She felt as low as a fallen leaf. Still for one moment she was unable to understand. The *sador* was stained with vermillion; she felt left out as if she was uninvited to her neighbour's feast; moreover the leftover plates are thrown over the fence towards her home).

Janeki revealed feelings of inadequacy about her appearance and low self-esteem. For Janeki, the benchmark of self-assessment relied on the beauty standards reflected by her sister Savitri and the non-verbal treatments she received from Rudro, Monumohan, Tapodor and Lilacanta. Infact Monumohan chose Savitri, Janeki's younger sister, for marriage, over her.

“আইনাত নিজৰ মুখখন চাই ভনীয়েকলৈ চকু পৰিলে তাইৰ ভয়েই লাগে। (Golpo Aru Xilpo, p. 37)

(When she looks at her face in the mirror and then sees the beautiful face of her sister, she feels scared).

Ambika's life's situation has left her with nothing to be proud of or feel happy about, especially regarding her own body and her appearance. In fact, she forgot how to see herself with her own eyes, through her inner self, or through a mirror. It were the words of Kalidas that made her feel the existence of her body and the desires associated with it once again. A hot flush came over Ambika's ears and her head when Kalidas started to chuckle. Shame changed the colour of her face.

Ambika: “মোক চাবলগীয়া কিটো আছে?” (Shrinkhol, p.15)

(Translation: ‘What's there in me to look at?’)

Kalidas : “তোক চাবলগীয়া কিটো আছে, সেইটো তই জান নে নেজান, নে জানিও নজনা ভাও ধৰি থাক, সেইটো তোৰ কথা। কিন্তু আমি যিটো জানো জনোৱেই আমি জনাটোহে খাটাং কথা। কালিদাসে অশ্বিকাৰ চকুলৈ চালে। তাৰ চকু দুটা তিৰবিৰাই উঠিল। অশ্বিকাই যেন তাইৰ গোটেই গাতে কালিদাসৰ দৃষ্টিৰ উত্তাপ অনুভব কৰিলে।” (Shrinkhol, p.15)

(Translation: ‘Whether you know what's there in you to look at or you don't, or whether you know it and yet feign ignorance, that's upto you. But what we know, we know for sure. And that is definite.’ Kalidas looked into Ambika's eyes. His eyes twinkled. As if Ambika felt the heat of Kalidas's glance all over her body’).

Ambika felt as if something was wrapping her up from one side. She sensed a bizarre, tingling sensation all over her body. She felt as if a snake wrapped her body, but she was not scared. Not that her body tingled and tickled upon the touch of a snake's cold body. Rather, she sensed a heat.

#### 4.3 Personal Identity

Identity which is at the core of the self, define behaviour in social interactions. Janeki, a 32-year-old woman, is tall,

skinny, and lacks in beauty due to her body's lack of voluptuousness and sufficient levels of fat and muscle to give it a fuller appearance. At the age of fourteen - fifteen years, when she grew up lanky and tall she felt confident that she was not short and stout like some girls of the village. At the age of seventeen-eighteen, the age which is considered the prime of youthful beauty, when her body did not meet the required fullness, she felt that it was for her good that she would be slender. At the age of thirty two and still single, she feels dissatisfied with herself when she sees the shadow of her own body, which resembles that of a tall beetle nut tree. Her skinny hands resemble a "Dotor haat". Her hands are so slender that her bones are visible even through her skin, and the large finger joints resembled the "kothua." Her face had become noticeably bonier, her eyes closed in, her skin had dried out and her face had speckled with black blotches. Janeki's perception of bodily harmony was defined by the 'arrangement of the body parts in terms of symmetry' and on the ideal proportion. As such, Janeki's unattractiveness and ordinary looks made her a victim for insults and discrimination.

According to Holman, a holistic view of the body argues that the attractiveness of certain physical characteristics depends on the body's overall assessment of its deviation from ideals.. Furthermore, women often feel ashamed of their bodies (Viswanath: 1997) because they have learned that a woman's body is nothing to be proud of (Das 1988:200 Macdonald 2009:4). Janeki is deeply troubled about her identity and existence with the ugliness of her body and looks

“এই দেহা লৈ ৰঙা ফুল দিয়া পাৰিৰ চিন্ধুৰ চাদৰ পিন্ধাৰ বাঞ্চা জানেকীৰ নাই, থাকিলেও নুশুৱাই সেই কাৰণে লীলাকান্তই বিচাৰি আহোঁতে চাদৰখন দিবলৈ তাই সামান্য আপত্তিও কৰা নাছিল।” (Golpo aru Xilpo, p.37)

(Translation : Janeki doesn't want to wear a red flowered silk *sador* with this body, and even if she does wear, it doesn't suit her. Therefore, she did not object to giving him the *sador* when Lilakanta came looking for it).

In *Shrinkhol*, the illumination that falls upon the episode when Ambika and Kalidas goes to the market to sell the pigeons is like the glare of a furnacemouth; it reaches the depths of the inner struggles and turmoils in which the scene is enacted, relieving it with sharp and fantastic shadows. According to identity theory (Serpe 1987, pp. 44-45; Stryker 1980, pp. 59-62), commitment to an identity depends on two things: the number of relationships a person has that are premised on the identity, and the strength of the good feelings that are

derived from the activities and relationships the identity affords. Repeated rejection on the basis of her appearance has left Janeki question her identity. When Lilakanta expressed his interest for her, instead of feeling happy at the kind words of Lilakanta, she felt like shouting at the top of her voice and say 'Folks! Look, how people are lying to me in the broad daylight'.

“লীলাকান্তই তাইৰ মুখলৈ থৰ লাগি চাই থাকি পৰিষ্কাৰ মাতৰে ক'লে, তোক দেখি বৰ ভাল লাগে।

(Translation : “Lilakant looked at her face and said in a clear voice, 'I feel happy when I see you'”).

“জানেকীয়েও তাৰ মুখলৈ চাই ব'ল, কিন্তু তাইৰ এনেকুৱা লাগিল যেন তাই চিঞৰি দিব, “ৰাইজসকল, চোৱাহি চোৱাহি, এই মানুহবোৰে দিন দুপৰতে মোক মিছা কথা কৈছে।” (Golpo aru Xilpo, p. 84)

(Translation : “Janeki also looked at his face , but she felt like shouting out saying “Folks! See how these men lie to me in broad daylight)

Commitment thus is a consequence of the extensiveness and emotional intensiveness of the social relationships that are premised on playing a particular role and adopting the associated identity. Ambika's identity is premised in the role of a wife and a mother, constricted by an array of societal challenges. At the market place, when Kalidas suggested that instead of selling the pigeons, they should cook the pigeon meal and eat together Ambika wiped her face and neck with the end of her *sador* and made an attempt to move a little and sit. And as she moved, as if a whole lot of flesh in the various parts of her body too moved and swayed. Her body shook in the same manner as did a pitcher half-filled with water. As if she hadn't noticed that there was so much flesh on her body.

“মুখখন আৰু ডিঙিটো চাদৰৰ আগৰে মচি অম্বিকাই অলপ লৰচৰ হৈ বহিবলৈ চেষ্টা কৰিলে। লৰচৰ কৰোঁতেই তাইৰ গাৰ বিভিন্ন ঠাইত মেন বহুত মঙহে লৰচৰ কৰি উঠিল। গাত ইমান মঙহ আছিল বুলি তাই যেন ইমান দিনে মনেই কৰা নাছিল।” (Shrinkhol, p. 19)

One fundamental dimension of the bodily self is the sense of body ownership that refers to the special perceptual status of one's own body, the feeling that “my body” belongs to me, experience of this body as mine”. Women and their bodies are expected to ‘work’ to uphold social, communal and national identities. Ambika has almost given up on the perceptual status of her own, the feeling

that 'her body' belongs to her or understand the experience of the body as hers. It was at this point that Ambika realises the urges of the body that still existed although she had long neglected at the death of her husband. After the death of her husband and bound by all the challenges and struggles of life, Ambika has almost forgotten that she too has desire in her body that called for fulfilment.

“অস্বিকার মুখৰপৰা কোনো শব্দ নোলাল। কিবা এটাই যেন তাইক এফালৰপৰা মেৰিয়াই আনিছে গোটেই গাতে তই এক আচৰিত ধৰণৰ পিৰপিৰণি, চাঞ্চল্য অনুভব কৰিছে সাপে মেৰিয়াই ধৰিলে এনেকুৱা লাগে নেকি কিন্তু ক'ত? তইৰতো তেনেকৈ ভয় লগা নাই বৰঞ্চ তই এটা উত্তাপ অনুভব কৰিছে” (Shrinkhol, p.16)

(Translation : Ambika couldn't speak a word when Kalidas mentioned about the taste of pigeon curry. She felt a strange kind of feeling wrapping her body. All over, she feels a strange kind of flutter, excitement. Does it feel like a snake wrapping it up? But where? She is not so scared of this feeling. Rather she is feeling a warmth).

“গাত ইমান মণ্ডহ আছিল বুলি তই যেন ইমান দিনেই মনেই কৰা নাছিল। (Shrinkhol, p17)

(Translation : It was as if she had almost forgotten that she too had so much of warmth and heat in her body).

Saikia uses Ambika's 'body work' to 'unite sexual desire and motherhood which serves to demythologise the idealised chaste virginal body of the all giving mother' (Macdonald, p.14). Ambika bound by the conflict between tradition and individual desire, decides to sell the pigeons and maintain her chastity, then giving up to Kalidas her honor and her identity of a widow.

## V. CONCLUSION

Although we do not frame our analysis in terms of identity theory, the paper attempts in its conclusion to show how a consideration of body image and self-image lead to the formation of self-identity in a woman. Concluding it can be said that woman who do not embody appearance standards possess a stigma, or discrediting attribute. Stigma derives from cultural expectations and reflects the norms and values of individual is in the dominant group. Identity is demarcated on social conventions and representations concerning the female ideal. *Shrinkhol* and *Dhura Xaap* are excellent example of the inner and outer struggle a woman has to face in life based on self-image and identity.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Beauvoir, S. de (1949). *The Second Sex*, London: Vintage Books.
- [2] Ashforth, Blake E., and Fred Mael. "Social Identity Theory and the Organization." *The Academy of Management Review*, vol. 14, no. 1, 1989, pp. 20–39.
- [3] Zhang, Kaili Chen. "What I Look Like: College Women, Body Image, and Spirituality." *Journal of Religion and Health*, vol. 52, no. 4, 2013, pp. 1240–52. Web.
- [4] Saikia, Bhabendra Nath. *Golpo aru Xilpo*. Jyoti Prakashan. 2018.
- [5] Saikia, Bhabendra Nath. *Shrinkhol*. Jyoti Prakashan. 2019.
- [6] Grogan, A. (2008). *Body Image: Understanding body dissatisfaction in men, women, and children* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: Routledge.
- [7] Viswanath, K. (1997). *Shame and Control: Sexuality and Power in Feminist Discourse in India*. in M.Thapan, (Ed.). *Embodiment: Essays on gender and identity*. Oxford University Press
- [8] Macdonald, A. (2009). 'Real' and 'Imagined' Women: A Feminist Reading of Rituparno Ghosh's Films. UCL. 03. pp 1-22 in Dutta, Meenakshi. "A Reading of Bhabendra Nath Saikia's Films from Feminist Lens." *Cinej Cinema Journal*, vol.8, no.2, 2020, p.261.
- [9] Cooley, C.H. (1902) 1964. *Human Nature and the Social Order*. New York: Schocken.
- [10] Shrauger, J.S. and T.J. Schoeneman. 1979. "The Symbolic Interactionist View of Self-Concept: Through the Looking Glass Darkly." *Psychological Bulletin* 82: 549-73
- [11] Bem, D. 1972. "Self-Perception Theory." Pp. 1-62 in *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol. 6, edited by L. Berkowitz. New York: Academic Press.
- [12] Taub, Diane E., Et Al. "Body Image Among Women With Physical Disabilities: Internalization Of Norms And Reactions To Nonconformity." *Sociological Focus*, Vol. 36, No. 2, 2003, Pp. 159–76. Schwalbe, Michael L., and Clifford L. Staples. "Gender Differences in Sources of Self-Esteem." *Social Psychology Quarterly*, vol. 54, no. 2, 1991, pp. 158–68. Web.
- [13] Tsakiris, Manos. "The multisensory basis of the self: From body to identity to others." *Quarterly Journal of experimental Psychology* (2006) vol. 70,4 (2017): 597-609. doi:10.1080/17470218.2016.1181768
- [14] Hitlin, Steven. "Values as the Core of Personal Identity: Drawing Links between Two Theories of Self." *Social Psychology Quarterly*, vol. 66, no. 2, 2003, pp. 118–37. Web
- [15] Schwalbe, Michael L., and Clifford L. Staples. "Gender Differences in Sources of Self-Esteem." *Social Psychology Quarterly*, vol. 54, no. 2, 1991, pp. 158–68. Web. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2786933>. Accessed 21 Feb. 2023.
- [16] Tsakiris, Manos. "The multisensory basis of the self: From body to identity to others." *Quarterly journal of experimental psychology* (2006) vol. 70,4 (2017): 597-609. doi:10.1080/17470218.2016.1181768



# Application of Personality Theory of Criminal Psychology to Nordic Noir: A Study

Sunakshi Satsangi

Research Scholar, Department of English Studies, Dayalbagh Educational Institute, Agra, India

Received: 04 Jul 2023; Received in revised form: 02 Aug 2023; Accepted: 12 Aug 2023; Available online: 19 Aug 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— Crime fiction is a genre in literature that is mainly focused on crime, its detection, its solution, the criminal and his motives. Similar to the genre of crime fiction is the sub- genre within it called 'Nordic Noir' which is also known as 'Scandinavian Noir'. It is a term given to the literature coming from the Nordic or Scandinavian countries like Iceland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland etc. It is mainly known for its dark and bleak settings, description of its landscape and strong female characters. There have been various approaches that have tried to understand criminal mind and behaviour. Relating crime fiction and criminal psychology and its various theories will yield new insight as psychology and literature share a very close bond. The Personality Theory argues that there are a number of personality traits which are associated with an act of crime or violent behaviour. Eysenck in his book *Crime and Personality* published in 1964 established a relationship between criminal behaviour and personality. According to him, personality traits play a key role in criminality. He was of the view that some genetic traits along with certain environmental forces lead to criminal behaviour or conduct. The three super factors about which Eysenck talks about and upon which the PEN model is based are psychoticism (P), extraversion (E) and neuroticism (N). This paper aims at the application of Personality Theory as given by Hans Eysenck to the new emerging sub-genre of Nordic noir. As the genre deals with crime and criminals, therefore it would be highly insightful to study it in the light of criminal psychology.



**Keywords**— Crime, Criminal psychology, Nordic noir, Personality theory, Traits

## I. INTRODUCTION

Crime, its detection, its resolution, the criminal and his motivations are the fundamental subjects of the literary genre known as "crime fiction." It has taken on the shape of the most widely favoured genre. It is well known for its storyline, cast of characters, and suspense in particular. The phrase "crime fiction" serves as a catch-all for a variety of other subgenres, including murder mysteries, police procedurals, suspense thrillers, and detective fiction. The effect that these crimes have on society is what all these crime fiction subgenres have in common. It is a stereotypical plot in which a criminal act has an impact on the entire society and upsets the entire social and legal system.

Similar to the genre of crime fiction is the sub- genre within it called 'Nordic Noir' which is also known as 'Scandinavian Noir' or 'Scandinavian crime fiction'. It is a term given to the literature coming from the Nordic or Scandinavian countries like Iceland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland etc. The inhabitants of Scandinavian nations have long attempted to share their stories. Their older tales were based on prehistoric Icelandic sagas. Scandinavian crime fiction started to develop in the 20th century, and the tales that emerged were grounded in reality and portrayed crime as the outcome of a wounded and broken society. The authors of these books aimed to dispel the myth that Scandinavian countries were exclusively valued for their stunning scenery. They aimed



to highlight the gloom and emptiness that pervaded these civilizations.

Lars Kepler is a pseudonym used by husband-and-wife team of Alexander and Alexandra Coelho Ahndroil. They both chose the name Lars Kepler as attribute to writer Stieg Larsson and scientist Johannes Kepler. They published their first novel *The Hypnotist* under the name Lars Kepler in 2009. The novel *Stalker* opens when a link to a YouTube video featuring a young woman getting dressed in her house while being unaware that she is being watched is provided to the Swedish National Crime Unit in Stockholm. Detective Margot Silverman immediately makes the connection between this and the subsequent murder of a woman, who is discovered dead in her home with her face hacked to pieces. As a result, she seeks the help of Detective Joona Linna, an incredibly skilled detective, in an effort to stop further killings. The unlucky Susanna, who is alone in her home and excitedly anticipating the return of her husband Björn from an overseas vacation, becomes the unavoidable sacrifice on the altar of such a plot as the second victim in those subsequent crimes. She has been berating herself for having an overactive imagination after hearing a faint scratching sound against one of the dining room windows. The husband returns home and discovers the body, which has been similarly cut and stabbed, with the face completely disfigured and mutilated beyond recognition. Erik Maria Bark, a well-known hypnotist who has aided Linna in the past, is also brought in by Linna. The group strives to track down the creator of the videos despite the fact that they are powerless to save a life from being lost with each new video. Later, it is discovered that the killer is none other than Nelly, the psychologist helping with the cases. She grows an unhealthy obsession with her coworker Erik, and in an effort to obtain his undivided attention, she ruthlessly murders anybody who poses a threat.

In an effort to comprehend the criminal mind and behaviour, numerous approaches have been used. Understanding one or more aspects of crime and criminal activity is a benefit of each strategy. Given how closely psychology and literature are related, relating crime fiction to criminal psychology and its numerous theories will provide fresh perspectives. Criminology is the in-depth study of crime and criminals, according to its definition. It examines crime from a non-legal perspective, putting more of an emphasis on crime's causes, preventions, and other factors. An interdisciplinary field, criminology draws from a wide range of academic fields, including psychology, philosophy, social sciences, biology, and psychiatry. The concept of 'criminology' emerged in 1885 when an Italian

law professor named Raffale Garofalo introduced it for the very first time.

There are several important theories of crime that offer various perspectives on the psychology of crime in the field of psychological theories of crime. The Personality Theory contends that a variety of personality qualities are connected to criminal activity or violent behaviour. Egoistic, self-centered, narcissistic, jealous, uncaring, etc. people frequently behave more aggressively and violently than other people. People with severe personality problems, such as psychoses or antisocial behaviour, are viewed as being more violent.

One of the most popular theories of personality that studied criminal behaviour was given by German- British psychologist Hans Jurgen Eysenck. Eysenck in his book *Crime and Personality* published in 1964 established a relationship between criminal behaviour and personality. According to him, personality traits play a key role in criminality. He was of the view that some genetic traits along with certain environmental forces lead to criminal behaviour or conduct. His studies show that delinquent behaviour can be demonstrated or predicted if the personality traits are analysed from an early age. Eysenck defines personality as:

*Personality is "the sum total of the actual or potential behavior patterns of the organism, as determined by heredity and environment. It originates and develops through the functional interactions of the four main sectors into which these behavior patterns are organized - The cognitive sectors (Intelligence), conative sector (character) affective sector (temperament) and the somatic sector (constitution). (Eysenck 43)*

He gave three dimensions of personality which are famously known as the PEN model which propagates a hierarchical classification of personality levels. At the bottom of this model are common behaviours such a talking with a friend on an occasion. At the second level in the hierarchy are the recurring behaviours of an individual and at the third levels are the traits of sociability which are comprised of correlated sets of habits. At top in this hierarchy are the super factors or dimensions of personality such as extraversion which is an inter-related set of traits and factors. The three super factors about which Eysenck talks about and upon which the PEN model is based are psychoticism (P), extraversion (E) and neuroticism (N). Eysenck says, "In the PEN model, these dimensions or super factors are based on "constitutional, genetic, or inborn factors, which are to be discovered in the physiological, neurological, and biochemical structure of the individual" (43).

Neuroticism is a dimension of personality which is characterised by low emotional and self-control, depression, nervous breakdowns, and irrationality. Eysenck in his personality theory also said that when traits of neuroticism are combined with extraversion then they reveal an ample amount of information about criminal conduct. Eysenck was of the view that these three dimensions of personality can overlap with one another but there will only be a persistent trait of one dimension only. An individual can be high on neuroticism, mild on extraversion and low on psychoticism. Eysenck defines a person with extraversion as:

*Sociable, likes parties, has many friends, needs to have people to talk to and does not like reading or studying by himself. He craves excitement, takes chances, acts on the spur of the moment and is generally an impulsive individual. He is fond of practical jokes, always has a ready answer, and generally likes change; he is carefree, easy going, optimistic, and likes to 'laugh and be merry'. He prefers to keep moving and doing things, tends to be aggressive and loses his temper quickly; his feelings are not kept under tight control and he is not always a reliable person. (Eysenck 50-51)*

An individual who suffers from any form of neuroticism can also be extroverted. Eysenck was of the view that the traits of extraversion or introversion can be observed in connection to other dimensions of personality as well. This analysis can also be used to study Nelly's personality. She appears to be happy and upbeat, works as a psychologist, has a spouse and a large circle of friends, but she also brutally murders women because she was unable to watch them speaking to the man, she was interested in. Eysenck and Eysenck (1975) define a neurotic person as:

*an anxious, worrying individual, moody and frequently depressed. He is likely to sleep badly, and to suffer from various psychosomatic disorders. He is overly emotional, reacting too strongly to all sorts of stimuli, and finds it difficult to get back on an even keel after each emotionally arousing experience. His strong emotional reactions interfere with his proper adjustment, making him react in irrational, sometimes rigid ways. If the highly neurotic individual has to be described in one word, one might say he was a worrier; his main characteristic is a constant preoccupation with things that might go wrong, and a strong emotional reaction to these thoughts.*

Nelly is a psychologist employed with Sweden's National Crime Division. She works with traumatised witnesses and is regarded as being highly competent at her job. She is a psychologist; therefore, she is aware of human psychology and is skilled at deceiving people. She was so lost in her

fantasy world where she and Erik were married that she cruelly murdered four ladies by entirely removing their faces with a knife. Because she is so filled with rage and envy, whenever she kills someone, she first focuses on destroying their face. As Margot sees the body of Susanna Kern, "Her face is nothing but a dark-red, deformed pulp. He's hacked, cut, stabbed, and carved away at it. She goes closer and sees a single eye staring crookedly up at the ceiling" (53).

The circumstances in which the women's bodies were discovered indicate that the crime was either perpetrated out of hatred or jealousy. The killings were carried out with such violence that they alluded to the victim's pre-murder situation. As Adam also says when examining the body of the victims, "The degree of violence is aggressive, fueled by hatred...probably jealousy" (129). After every murder Nelly places the body of the victim in a strange manner. After the first murder she tucked the body in the bed, second was found sitting on a chair and the third was found sitting on the floor. According to Eysenck a neurotic individual is aggressive, irrational, has a strong aversion for strange stimulus and likes to make fool of other people. Nelly arranged the female figures in a way that gave the impression that either they were pleading for mercy or were defenseless. She feels a sense of accomplishment when she sees their injured face and body since it will prevent them from looking at Erik in the future. As it is evident from the description of crime scene of Sandra Lundgren:

*On the linoleum floor sits a woman with an utterly ravaged face, her chest split open. Her glasses have fallen off into the pool of blood beside the table. [...] She has evidently been placed in that position after death, but it doesn't look particularly sexual. Margot stands there for a few moments, looking at the devastating scene, at the display of brutality, the blood sprayed out by a stabbing knife, the arterial spatter on the smooth door of a kitchen cupboard, and the smeared blood left by the victim's struggle and the spasmodic jerking of her body. [...] The level of brutality is inconceivable, and appears to extend far beyond the moment of death. Once the fury of the attack subsided, the body was arranged slightly before being left at the scene of the murder (Kepler 210).*

Since she is unable to witness the person, she likes with someone else, Nelly struggles with low emotional stability and self-control. She feels a sense of hostility that manifests itself in a very severe way at the mere sight of Erik with someone else. As Gudjonsson and Eysenck say, "E and P are linked to criminality through low cortical arousal, poor condition ability, and the failure to develop the conditioned response conscience. N, in contrast, is associated with emotional instability and strong autonomic

arousal, which can lead to impulsive and antisocial behavior by virtue of its drive propensities” (142). Nelly constantly worries that Erik is drawn to other women since they are all attractive. Because she isn't as attractive as other women, she believes Erik will never give her a second glance. The faces of the women she kills are altered in order to make them feel less beautiful, helping her to overcome her inferiority complex. To allay her inferiority complex, she takes away something or another from each victim. She steals Susanna's rings, Maria's earrings, and Sandra's artificial fingernails.

In his attempt to define neuroticism in a more specific way, Eysenck says that a neurotic person tends to suffer more from nervous breakdowns or neurosis. Eysenck (1978) says, “Neurosis is a term we often use for behaviour which is associated with strong emotion, which is maladaptive, and which the person giving rise to it realizes is nonsensical, absurd or irrelevant, but which he is powerless to change” (16). Nelly's ardour and fascination for Erik have a strong grip on her. She had everything planned out from the start, and she was the one who had evidence against Erik hidden at the crime site so that he would be forced to confide in her at some point. Nelly's condition can also be studied under the light of personality being influenced by mental illness. She has a major mental and personality condition in addition to having neuroticism as her primary personality trait. She has obsessive fixation problem, which causes her to be fixated on one person and want them to think the world of her. As Jonna Linna explains:

*Nelly has stalked Erik for years, mapping the lives of any women he showed an interest in, trying to understand what they had she couldn't offer. She saw them flashing their jewellery, their painted lips, beautiful nails, and wanted to take that away from them, punish them, and the emphasize their bare ears or ugly hands.*

*But when that wasn't enough, she tried to take the whole world away from him. Like Artemis with her hounds, she organised a hunt, Joona thinks. She's a skilful huntress; she isolates her prey, wounds it, and harries it towards capture until there's only one way out. Her intention was for Erik to realise that everything pointed at him, and go on the run before police caught him. Everyone would shun him, until in the end he turned to the only person who was still prepared to let him in. (Kepler 503).*

This is how Nelly has always been. She has a propensity to seize control over a person once she becomes fixated on them. She wants the individual to exclusively look at her, so when she senses that they are drawn to someone else, she takes a different route. Eysenck in his theory mentions that some mental disorders start manifesting themselves

since the childhood. If they are observed and analysed correctly then delinquent behaviour can be predicted for the future. But if such traits are left unobserved and unsupervised then they start to manifest themselves in an extreme manner. Nelly desired complete control over her father since she had an unhealthy affinity to him. When she saw her father was ignoring her approaches, she killed her own mother. When she realised that Rocky was not showing any signs of being serious about Rebecca Hanson, she did the same with Rebecca. To keep both men under her control, she locked them both in a cage and fed them various narcotics. When extraversion and neuroticism are combined, behaviour is often better understood. Even if someone has psychotic or neurotic tendencies, they can nevertheless be outgoing. As Erik says, “Nelly was funny and easy going, talkative, in a charming, self-deprecating way. But Nelly has an insatiable emotional hunger, she's desperately needy and can switch from devoted love to an impassioned hatred in an instant” (525).

Nelly has a severe mental illness along with neuroticism. She lacks emotional stability and self-control and is irritable, hostile, unreasonable, concerned, and cranky. She believes that after falling in love, a person should depend entirely on her. She desired ownership and control over Erik. She feels as like she owns Erik when she drags him into her home to be caged. Jackie, the current lady Erik was seeing, is the one thing that irritates her. She believes that as long as Jackie is alive, she will never be able to own Erik. Erik attempts to comfort her by telling her that he wants to be with her when she tells him that Jackie must be put aside. As evident from their conversation:

*'It isn't your fault', she mutters, and scratches her neck with the knife-blade. 'I don't blame you.'*

*She takes a few steps back and the shadows close around her pale face, painting big, black holes where her eyes should be, and drawing, dark shapes across her neck.*

*'But you'll see what mortality looks like, Erik', she says, and turns towards the stairs. 'Don't do anything silly now.' Erik calls to her.*

*'I really can't accept that you're going to carry on thinking about her,' Nelly says in a steady voice. 'If you are going to think about her, then it should be a face without eyes and lips.' (Kepler 531)*

Nelly clearly indicates the traits of being a neurotic individual in terms of Eysenck's theory. Despite being highly competent at her job she lets her emotions and envy get the best of her and mercilessly murders four women in the process.

## II. CONCLUSION

By connecting a psychological theory to a literary work, a new framework was provided in the analysis of the works that were chosen for the study. It was understood through the study that there are a number of factors which can contribute to the formation of criminal behaviour. There are psychological factors that deal with mental illness and problems, sociological factors which deal with the environment by which a person is surrounded with and economic factors which determine the standard of living of a human being. Eysenck's Theory of Personality takes all these factors into account that shape the personality of an individual. When Personality Theory of criminal psychology is applied to the study of literature it gives a scientific as well as psychological methodology and dimension to the analysis. A writer's inclination to introduce murder and then a murderer reflects a lot about the writer as well. Also, it removes a number of misconceptions about criminal behaviour such as the ones which put forward the view that some people are born criminal because of their genetics. The huge misconception is clarified when criminal conduct is studied and analysed through the lens of a psychological theory. Blending of sociological and psychological perspectives brings to light the fact that society plays a key role in the development of an individual's personality.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Eysenck, H.J. (1964). *Crime and Personality*. (NY) Routledge.
- [2] Eysenck, H. J. and Eysenck, M. W. (1989) *Personality and Individual Differences: A Natural Science Approach*. New York: Plenum.
- [3] Kepler, Lars. (2014) *Stalker*. Harper Collins.





# From Hegemony to Inclusivity: Perspectives on Models of Masculinity by R.W. Connell and Greg Anderson

Dr. Manjari Johri

Amity School of Languages, Amity University Lucknow Campus, India  
[mjohri@amity.edu](mailto:mjohri@amity.edu)

Received: 07 Jul 2023; Received in revised form: 03 Aug 2023; Accepted: 11 Aug 2023; Available online: 19 Aug 2023  
©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license  
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— Masculinity Studies developed in 'dialogue' with the feminist movement. By the 1970s, it gained momentum, drawing energy from the women's liberation movement. The notion of gender being a derivative of biological sex was rejected by social scientists and thinkers, it emerged that gender is not a stable category, but is "performative", dynamic, and relational to the temporal and spatial context. I have relied on Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) to elucidate this concept. The paper explores how 'masculinity' transformed from being a homogeneous concept into becoming 'masculinities', an idea that endorsed multiplicity and plurality. In the present article, R.W. Connell's model of hegemonic masculinity and Greg Anderson's theory of Inclusive masculinity have been explored to decipher the layers of masculine behaviour and chart its development in the field of masculinity studies.



**Keywords**— Gender, Performativity, Masculinity, Hegemonic Masculinity, Inclusive Masculinity, Embodiment

## I. INTRODUCTION - GENDER IDENTITIES, MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY

Gender is an analytical category that is socially constructed to differentiate between men and women. It is conditioned in a way that certain codes are created and replicated in society, thereby leading to masculine and feminine behaviour. The feminist movement sought to decode patriarchy, a system that validates masculine domination over women. It led to the emancipation of women in the private, as well as the public sphere. It also galvanized interest in Masculinity Studies. Feminists challenged the unjust treatment of women and sought to subvert the patriarchal power structure that propagated sexist oppression. Men's studies also explored how men construct their domination within the existing gender structure (Bhatti, 2022). This led to growing academic interest in 'men', and Masculinity Studies. Feyza Bhatti explains (2022):

Masculinity Studies mainly examines how masculine power is constructed and represented. It collaborates and debates with feminism and queer

studies to reach a full equality where gender is no longer inherent to social structures. It tries to move men away from being a subject to be blamed by highlighting the pressures of masculine dominance that impact all genders. Thus, it urges that the fight should not be against men but against the unequal structures that make all genders a victim. (p.2)

In *The Second Sex* (1949) Simone De Beauvoir asserted that gender was constructed through the process of cultural socialization. According to her, gender is a socially constructed binary, and "men" and "women" are well-defined categories that abide by the discursive construction of gender through their bodies, behaviour, personality, and desires. Culture articulates and defines gender positions and their relationship to each other (Schippers, 2007). Judith Butler introduced the concept of 'performativity' through which she established that gender is a fluid, unstable category that is determined both spatially and temporally. It cannot impart a stable identity or a "locus of agency", rather it is "an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts"



(Butler, 2011, p.xiv). She explains “performativity” as an anticipation of a “gendered essence” which produces “that which it posits as outside itself”. She continues to say that performativity is not a single act, “but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body” (ibid, p.xv). Butler states:

The view that gender is performative sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through a gendered stylization of the body. In this way it showed that what we take to be an “internal” feature of ourselves is one that we anticipate and produce through certain bodily acts, at an extreme, an hallucinatory effect of naturalized gestures. (p.xv)

Gender, sex, sexuality, and the body are fictional products of gender discourse born out of heterosexual normativity. Gender identity is a cultural performance, which creates a “hallucination” of being an extension of some innate essence through its repeated stylized acts. Butler seeks to ‘subvert’ the construct of identity and destabilize the defining institutions of heterosexuality and phallogocentrism. This consequently creates the possibility for resistance and change. Jagger (2008) comments on Butler’s intent:

She wants to reveal that heterosexuality and the binary system of sexual difference on which it is based, is compulsory yet at the same time show that it is permanently unstable and to argue that it is this instability that opens up the space for change. (p.18)

Jagger (2008) further explains that subversion of identity becomes possible through “agency and critique, resistance and change” (p.18). This opens space for alternative signification and displaces the existing discourse which lends primacy to heterosexuality, that is an imposed regulatory social mechanism. Butler’s critique brought into focus the “performativity” of masculinity and femininity, the traits that men and women were expected to display. Regarding male and female stereotyped gender roles, Johnson (2005) observes:

According to patriarchal culture, for example, men are aggressive, daring, rational, emotionally inexpressive, ...dominant, decisive, self-confident, and un-nurturing. Women are portrayed in opposite terms, such as unaggressive, shy, intuitive, emotionally expressive, nurturing... lacking in self-control (especially when menstruating... indecisive and lacking in self-confidence. (p.86)

Human beings are not ‘autonomous’ entities, but relational beings whose behaviour is shaped by the social situation and context. Johnson attributes the construction of socially acceptable male and female behaviour to some “cultural magic” (p.89) of the patriarchal structure which values maleness and devalues femaleness. Masculinity and femininity do not adequately describe us as human beings, because we are relational beings who respond to contextual situations in individual ways, and because there is no universalist idea that represents all men and women, there are exceptions based on intersections of class, caste, race, sexuality, and ethnicity.

From the above description, it is evident that Masculinity refers to socially produced norms embodied by men. Differentiating between patriarchy and masculinity, Srivastava (2015) points out that:

Patriarchy refers to a system of organising social life that is premised on the idea of the superiority of all men to women. Masculinity, on the other hand, is not only a relationship between men and women but also between men. Hence, we might say that while patriarchy “makes” men superior, masculinity is the process of producing superior men. (p.33)

Srivastava (2015) maintains that Masculinity Studies emerged from a “conversation with feminism” (p.33), rather than being an outcome of a historical political movement like the feminist struggle against oppression. It is a “supplementary discourse to feminism” (p.33). It brought focus to the gendered identities of men. All men need not be aggressive or display machismo or subscribe to heterosexuality such as transgender men, homosexuals, or ‘straight’ men who may not necessarily be able-bodied or who may not embody attributes associated with maleness.

Connell (2005) asserted emphatically that masculinity and femininity are relational concepts and that the “knowledge of masculinity arises within the project of knowing the gender relations” (Connell, p.44). She worked on the diversity of gender patterns among men through empirical data and contributed significantly through her works, such as *Gender and Power* (1987), *Masculinities* (1995, 2005), and *Men and Boys* (2000). Her findings were based on ethnographic studies of workplaces, schools, athletic careers, and historical accounts of changing ideas of masculinity. She explains how:

a debate about men and gender had taken off in the wake of the Women's Liberation movement; there was even a small Men's Liberation movement in the 1970s that attempted to reform the 'male sex role'. This gave rise to interesting political discussions about men, power, and change. (p.xii)

In the subsequent section, I will discuss the model of Masculinity proposed by the sociologist R.W. Connell (1995,2005), and the theory of Inclusive Masculinity given by Eric Anderson (2009), to support the argument that the concept of Masculinity is multi-layered. It will be established that masculinity is fluid and men are subjected to discrimination for not subscribing to the dominant idea of masculinity.

## II. CONNELL'S THEORY OF HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

R.W. Connell (1995,2005) maintains that everyday life is an arena of gender politics. Determined by Sex Role Theory the traditional gender discourse argued that biologically determined sex identified men as the provider and women as the nurturer. It endorsed the construction of masculinity through institutional practices in the arena of school, sports, factory, or office workspace. Such practices led to coercive discrimination. Mainstream masculinity was fundamentally linked to power which was organized to dominate and was resistant to change. Such institutional arrangements produce inequality, leading to the marginalization of black, gay, bisexual, transgender, gender not conforming men. Connell draws attention to the processes and relationships through which men and women conduct "gendered lives", she defines masculinity as a "place", a location where individuals both men and women can move into through practice; it is a set of characteristics that can be embodied by men and women, and once embodied these characteristics have a widespread social and cultural effect. Schippers (2007) explains this further:

occupying the masculine position and performing it affects the way individual experience their bodies, their sense of self, and how they project that self to others. While these are individual *effects*, it is important to point out that, for Connell, masculinity is not reducible to individual expression or experience...Instead of possessing or having masculinity, individuals move through and produce masculinity by engaging in masculine practices. (p.86)

These set of "practices" are enacted collectively by a group of people, which in turn structure the production and distribution of resources, power, desire, and sexuality. Thus, masculinity can be summarised as a social position, a set of practices and the impact of these collective practices can be seen on individuals and institutional structures globally.

Connell (2005) describes gender as:

a way in which social practice is ordered. In gender processes, the everyday conduct of life is

organized in relation to a reproductive arena, defined by the bodily structures and processes of human reproduction. This arena includes sexual arousal and intercourse, childbirth and infant care, bodily sex difference and similarity. ... Gender relations are a major component of social structure as a whole, and gender politics are among the main determinants of our collective fate (pp.71-76).

Connell's pathbreaking model indicates how the male body is gendered into four types of masculinities:(i) hegemonic, (ii)subordinate, (iii)complicit, and (iv)marginalized. Her theory of Hegemonic Masculinity employs Gramsci's concept of hegemony, to show how the dominant group establishes its authority on women and other gender identities. This legitimizes patriarchy and ensures the subordination of women, as well as, of men who embody subordinate masculinity like gay or transgender men. This is a dynamic concept that is subject to change temporally and spatially in each culture, as it "requires new strategies and performances to stay in power and rebuild power" (Bhatti,2022, p.3). Men who are complicit in supporting hegemony belong to the category of 'complicit masculinity'. Those who do not belong to the heterosexual hegemonic system, such as gay and transgender men embody 'subordinate masculinity'. Lastly, 'straight' men who belong to a lower class, race, or ethnicity, or who are disabled belong to 'marginalized masculinity'. There is an ascendancy of hegemonic masculinity in the social structure. Connell (2005) states:

Hegemony relates to cultural dominance in the society as a whole. Within that overall framework there are specific gender relations of dominance and subordination between groups of men.... Oppression positions homosexual masculinities at the bottom of a gender hierarchy among men. (p.78)

In their work, 'Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the concept', Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), proclaimed that the theory of Hegemonic Masculinity has had a wide influence on Gender Studies, but had also attracted criticism. They offered a reformulation in four major areas, "the nature of gender hierarchy, the geography of masculine configurations, the process of social embodiment, and the dynamics of masculinities". (p.848). They sought to give, "a more holistic understanding of gender hierarchy, to understand the agency of the subordinated groups, as much as the power of the dominating groups and the mutual conditioning of gender dynamics and other social dynamics" (p.848). It was declared that the focus of hegemonic masculinity should encompass local, regional, and global representations to make the approach more

comprehensive. The authors also underpinned the dynamic nature of masculinities and stated that masculinities are configurations of practice that are not stable but are constructed and reconstructed through time.

Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity, first promulgated in *Masculinities* (1995) and later reformulated in 'Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the concept' (2005), has been one of the founding ideas that have contributed phenomenally to the field of gender studies and masculinities. Though it provided a conceptual model for research in the field of social sciences, criminology, education, and transnational relations, the concept was also challenged by thinkers who contradicted Connell and developed alternate models and theories. Greg Anderson's theory of Inclusive Masculinity discussed in the following section establishes that as homosexuality gains acceptance in society, there will be more and more men who would be unafraid to express their feminine attributes and become more inclusive. The rigid construct of masculinity can then be deconstructed and allow men to be more expressive without the stigma of being branded gay or effeminate.

### III. ANDERSON'S THEORY OF INCLUSIVE MASCULINITY

The model of Hegemonic Masculinity has been employed as a heuristic tool to understand gender relations and identify the social processes through which hierarchy is established and legitimized. Such supremacy is not maintained through violence but through power and discursive marginalization. McCormack (2013) suggests that in her reformulation of the theory in 2005, Connell expanded her model beyond the local to examine transnational relations through a study of global gendered power. However, McCormack believes that an understanding of masculinity is most effective only when it is used to "investigate patterns of masculinity within a particular institutional or local context" (p.38). He argues that the utility of Connell's model of Hegemonic Masculinity has been overrated because it is founded in the context of heterosexual normativity. In his work, *The Declining Significance of Homophobia, How Teenage Boys are Redefining Masculinity and Heterosexuality* (2012), McCormack shows how the relationship between male youth and masculinity has changed. Through a series of ethnographic studies of teenage boys in England, he identified that young boys did not think homophobia was in vogue. While Connell's study was largely based on assuming homophobia among men, McCormack reveals that such an assumption does not hold water anymore as cultural homophobia has declined dramatically. It is as unpopular amongst the youth as being racist is. This finding

is evident through mass media, there are more and more films, web series, books, and literature available on gay themes. The same can be said of India as well, there have been popular films such as *Cobalt Blue* (2022) *Badhai Do* (2022), *Shubh Mangal Zyada Savdhaan* (2020) which offer a serious representation of same-sex relationships.

Increasing criticism of hegemonic masculinity as a framework to study masculinity led to the emergence of Hybrid Masculinity and Inclusive Masculinity Theory. Bridges and Pascoe (2018) describe Hybrid Masculinity as, "men's selective incorporation of performances and identity elements associated with marginalized and subordinated masculinities and femininities" (p.246). There has been a recent growing body of research in social sciences on transformation in men's behaviour, appearance, opinion, sexual orientation etc. "Hybrid masculinities" refer to the selective incorporation of elements of identity typically associated with various marginalized and subordinated masculinities and –at times – femininities into privileged men's gender performances and identities" (Bridges and Pascoe, 2018, p. 246). It seeks to locate whether such a transformation would be more liberating and less rigid. The writers further assert that:

A central research question in this literature considers the extent and meaning of these practices in terms of gender, sexual, and racial inequality. More specifically, this field of inquiry asks: are hybrid masculinities widespread and do they represent a significant change in gendered inequality? (p.247)

Eric Anderson's, *Inclusive Masculinity, The Changing Nature of Masculinities* (2009) developed the idea of hybridity further. He conducted ethnographic studies amongst a cross-section of young boys and deduced that homophobic tendencies had diminished amongst the youth, which is responsible for softening of masculinity traits. He asserts in the introduction of the book:

I am not alone in suggesting that the dominant form of masculinity, in sport or any other cultural location, can change. The sociologist primarily responsible for promoting the study of hegemonic masculinities, Robert (now Raewyn) Connell (1987, 1995, 2005) also accounts for the contestation and replacement of any given form of dominant masculinity...The premise of this volume is that the esteemed versions of masculinity among university-attending men are changing. ... (p.5)

Anderson (2009) argues that the young generation is exposed to sexual content on the internet which has made the erstwhile tabooed homosexuality more acceptable. For

young boys being homosexual is appropriate, being homophobic is not. Additionally, there is a positive cultural message about homosexuality through mass media, films, and popular literature, which has made same-sex relationships socially acceptable. He points out that:

All of this is crucial to the discussion of inclusive masculinity theory because my driving theoretical hypothesis is that homophobia directed at men has been central to the production of orthodox masculinity...Homophobia made hyper-masculinity compulsory for boys, and it made the expression of femininity among boys a taboo. (p.7)

The culture of homophobia and compulsory heterosexuality creates 'homo hysteria' (p.7), which in turn produces hypermasculinity and misogynistic discourse that encourages gender differences among men and between men and women. However, decreasing the stigma attached to homosexuality brings about the possibility of building "inclusive masculinity" (p.7). This has made it possible for heterosexual men to embody behaviour erstwhile considered to be feminine, such as crying, cuddling, or caring. Through this argument, Anderson builds the thesis that, "Connell's (1987) notion of hegemonic masculinity is unable to capture the complexity of what occurs as cultural 'homohysteria' diminishes" (p.7). He launched the theory of 'Inclusive Masculinity' and hypothesised that homophobic discourse is used as a policing agent in high homophobic culture, which in turn stratifies men in the "hegemonic mode of dominance" (p.8). He argues that in a culture of diminishing homo hysteria, two dominant kinds of masculinities prevail, which are, "orthodox masculinity", and "inclusive masculinity". Whereas men are homophobic and distant from one another in the former, in the latter, they become more comfortable in displaying homosocial behaviour. In a culture of diminished homo hysteria, men do not rely on 'control and domination'.

The theory of Inclusive Masculinity maintains that declining homophobia leads to social inclusion of 'subordinate' and 'marginalized' masculinities. It leads to a proliferation of "multiple masculinities", with lesser hegemony and hierarchy. Inclusive masculinity is about the inclusion of gay men and of straight men who do not feel compelled to embody hyper-masculinity but are comfortable to reveal the feminine side of their personality. Anderson believes that this in turn leads to decreasing sexism and ultimately erodes patriarchy. He claims:

In such a culture, the differences between masculinity and femininity, men, and women, gay and straight, will be harder to distinguish, and masculinity will no longer serve as the primary method of stratifying men. (p.9)

In one of his interviews with Benjamin A Boyce, 'Mutations in Modern Masculinity', Anderson says that 'bromance' is now on the rise as against 'romance' in heterosexual relations. Based on empirical data, he says that men are now what women always wanted them to be—gentle, emotional, caring fathers and lovers, there are fewer men who embody 'toxic masculinity'. In his talk, 'A Generational Perspective on Softening Masculinities' delivered at the University of Winchester Anderson claims that Masculinity has changed and shifted in present times in response to decreasing cultural homophobia and decreasing antipathy towards homosexuality. The model of Inclusive Masculinity endorses multiplicity of male gendered identity thereby breaking the shackles of sexist practices which promoted toxic masculinity and deterred men from embracing their identity.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Masculinity Studies has evolved rapidly since the 1990s. 'Masculinity' was earlier interpreted as an embodiment of the personality traits displayed by men. However, it was not only women but also men who suffered discrimination due to such rigid gendering of identities. Masculinity Studies contributed to the shift of such a limited reading of men and masculine traits. In his theory, Anderson maintains that inclusive masculinity ensures that patriarchy is eroded, which in turn leads to the elimination of hypermasculine toxic practices. Having inclusivity improves the lived experience of gay men and encourages heterosexual men to display feminine qualities. Anderson asserts:

Once heterosexual men are freed from the burden of having to reprove their heterosexuality, and once they no longer care if others think they are gay, they maintain more liberty to explore and embrace once tabooed social spaces, behaviours, and ideas. As men increasingly occupy traditionally feminized terrain, the gendered and stigmatized nature of those gendered spaces is destined to change (p.19).

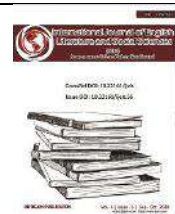
The theory of Inclusive masculinity gives insights into gender polarization, rejects stereotyped gender roles, and offers a release from the rigidity of the male/female binary. The models discussed above provided a link between men's studies and the anxieties faced by boys and men due to the mandatory adherence to social norms. It is enormously important that such conceptual tools are formulated and reformulated to keep pace with the dynamic nature of gender studies. The move from 'masculinity' to 'masculinities' has democratized gender roles and has been a liberating and empowering process both for men and women. Identity formation and gender are crucial to the



existence of human beings. Both categories are integral to our understanding of men and women as being products of the environment. Masculinity Studies liberate the identity of men from the essentialism attached to biological sex and free men from straitjacketed gender roles. It offers emancipation and allows an individual to celebrate his being by exercising his right to choose and having the self-assurance to embrace his identity unflinchingly.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Anderson, E. *Inclusive Masculinity*. Routledge, 2010.
- [2] Bhatti, F. (Ed.). (2022). *Masculinity Studies - An Interdisciplinary Approach*. IntechOpen. doi: 10.5772/intechopen.92914.
- [3] Boyce, B.A. "Mutations in Modern Masculinity | Eric Anderson." YouTube, 23 Jan. 2019.
- [4] Bridges, T. & Pascoe C.J. "Hybrid Masculinities: New Directions in the Sociology of Men and Masculinities" in *Sociology Compass* 3 (2014): 246–258.
- [5] Butler, J. *Gender Trouble*. Routledge, 2011.
- [6] Connell, R. W. *Masculinities*. Univ. of California, 2005.
- [7] Connell, R. W., and Messerschmidt, J. "Rethinking the Concept of Masculinity" in *Gender and Society* 19.6 (2005): 829-59.
- [8] Jagger, G. *Judith Butler*. Routledge, 2008.
- [9] Johnson, A.G. *The Gender Knot*. Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 2005.
- [10] McCormack, M. *The Declining Significance of Homophobia*. Oxford University Press, 2013.
- [11] Reeser, T.W. "Concepts of Masculinity and Masculinity Studies" in *Configuring Masculinity in Theory and Literary Practice*. BRILL, 2020. 11–38.
- [12] Schippers, M. "Recovering the Feminine Other: Masculinity, Femininity, and Gender Hegemony" in *Theory and Society* 1 (2007): 85–102.
- [13] The Centre for Male Psychology. "A Generational Perspective on Softening Masculinities. Prof Eric Anderson, Univ. of Winchester, UK." YouTube, 3 Aug. 2019.



# Visualizing the “Shadow” and the “Ghost”: Re-evaluating J.M Coetzee’s *Foe* through the lens of Psychoanalysis and Postcolonialism

Shibangi Chakraborty

Independent Researcher, West Bengal, India

Received: 19 Jul 2023; Received in revised form: 08 Aug 2023; Accepted: 15 Aug 2023; Available online: 21 Aug 2023  
©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license  
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— The paper is mainly based on the study of colonial and psychological oppression, which can make someone totally devoid of his/her identity, thought, history, speech, desires and how these aspects are represented vaguely or rather ambivalently through different characters of the novel. It wants to speculate the boundaries between the past and present, the mental anxiety, the sense of awe and identity crisis of a black slave. This also marks a showcase of reversal of role as colonizer which is represented by two of the characters in the novel, a woman and a white man who is devoid of his own identity. The novel is connected with four of the characters mainly. The present study wants to get a look on those characters' psychology as well as it gives a conception of how Postcolonialism is deeply rooted in psychological aspects.



**Keywords**— Colonial, History, Identity, Postcolonialism, Psychological.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Slavery, submission and the brutality of the white force are discussed whenever we talk about Africans history. Joseph Conrad in his *Heart of Darkness* even discusses the fact that Africans are the most savage and dark races in the world (Conrad, 1899). Though the Africans were majority, they faced a difficult time against the British colonial invasion. They submitted to the colonial hunger and accepted the drudgery of slavery and colonialism. The fact, that they accepted their fate, is not a weakness in their strength, but it was more psychological. The racial inequality that pervaded on that contemporary time of invasion, made a breach into the ideal concept of identity of the coloured people. The downtrodden feeling and ulterior motives of the white colonial rulers, broke their spirit and made them isolated in their own minds. The colonization and its impact not only shattered the existence of the natives but the trauma, anxiety, emptiness, impact of forceful rootlessness, alienation are clearly evident in the literature of the Colonial and Postcolonial time, which connects it to Psychoanalysis. The ill practices on the basis of caste, race, culture, have always threatened the system of

the humanity. Homi K. Bhabha, gave us the idea of mimicry and the reversal of roles which brings the cultural anxiety and alienation in his book *Location of Culture* (Bhabha, 2004). The Natives, specially the African Black skinned people have always been marginalized. They have seen a long period of discrimination by the White European people. The voices of the Aborigines are deliberately oppressed by the colonial authority- which leads to their psychological alienation from mainstream society and literature. But Literature stood up for the indigenous or aboriginal community when they tried to describe the pain, mental and physical torture of the colonizers. They spoke for their rights, their long fights, violence, bloodshed, cultural abolishment by the White Colonial rulers. They fought for their identity and individual self where they were regarded as cannibals, slaves, ghostly people etc. Not only the 'black' aborigines but some white skinned writers also described the sufferings of the natives in their writings with their own opinions. The African- American writer J.M Coetzee has a long run of history in writings about them. He writes about a smooth relationship between the “colonizer” and “colonized” people. The Ambiguity in relationships,

identity and human psychology, prevails in most of his novels and '*Foe*' is not an exception. This article specially tries to impose some problems and tends to find a solution to those problems. The first problem that it possesses is regarding the "ghostly" presence of the characters. They tend to find themselves into that "ghostly" figure. It discusses why the figure of "ghost" has been mentioned numerous time in the novel and how it can be called an ambiguous entity with various interpretations. The next figure of "shadow" is quite similar with the "ghost". But it tends to verify the psychological and physiological significance of the "shadow" all the more.

## II. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Psychoanalysis is connected with the human psyche which reflects the human behaviour, the alacrity of the human brain. Psychoanalysis is a set of theories or ideas that had been propounded by the Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud. Psychoanalysis is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as- "A therapeutic method, originated by Sigmund Freud, for treating mental disorders by investigating the interaction of conscious and unconscious elements in the patient's mind and bringing repressed fears and conflicts into the conscious mind, using techniques such as dream interpretation and free association" (Oxford, 1243). Freud found out the structure of Human Psyche in 1920 and they are represented as "Conscious", "Unconscious" and "Subconscious" mind (Freud, 1923-26). The fragmented consciousness of our mind beget the three fragmented desires i.e. the Id, Ego and the Superego. Celine Surprenant writes- "Psychoanalytic literary criticism does not constitute a unified field. However all variants endorse, at least to a certain degree, the idea that literature ...is fundamentally entwined with psyche" (Waugh, 2006, P 201). Since the origin of the Psychoanalysis and the study of human psyche by Sigmund Freud, a great deal of literature came with different views on science of human psychology, the cultural affiliation, social stigma, devices of finding time shift between human mind and many other things. It involves an evaluation of critical and artistic literature. As Waugh said, "The development of psychoanalytic approaches to literature proceeds from the shift of emphasis from "content" to the fabric of artistic and literary works" (Waugh, 2003). The term "Postcolonialism", (without hyphenated) symbolizes that we are still living by having the "Postcolonial hangover". But the term "Post-colonialism" (with hyphen) means that there is no connection between the pre-colonial past and the post colonial present. It is a huge field of study where almost all the world comes within it because the White Europeans have reigned in almost half of the world. Edward Said in his

book *Orientalism* has alluded that the West dominated in the East by capturing them by not only applying their military force but also by moulding their culture (Said, 1979). However it projects that Psychoanalysis and Postcolonialism is wholly connected with each other.

## III. ANALYSIS

The word "ghost" has been used several times in the novel *Foe*. But each word carries different meaning in different contexts. The very word "ghost" has been presented as an ambiguous figure without any statutory meaning. They are intriguing. Sometimes they are meaningful in the context of life and death boundaries, sometimes they come as the embodiment of a past which is long repressed to be forgotten. Several other times it is associated as a postcolonial term presented as an unsubstantial figure. The "ghost" is used as a "mark of lack" (Waugh, P 345) or the sense of loss which is associated with memory. First of all, we connect the novel *Foe* with Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, this can be summarized as the iteration of the novel written by Defoe, which carries a mark of memory. The last part of the novel, it is mentioned "Daniel Defoe, Author, are the words, white on blue, and then more writing too small to read" (Coetzee, 1986, P. 155). It can be interpreted that Daniel Defoe has been presented as a "ghost" to Mr. J.M Coetzee. Then again, we come across with the word "ghost" repeatedly in a paragraph in the novel which is clearly evident in its impact for presenting it as a memory- "I say myself that this child, who calls herself by my name, is a ghost, a substantial ghost" (Coetzee, 1986, P 132). Susan is irritated and disturbed by the girl who calls herself as the daughter of Susan. She complains to Mr. Foe that the daughter has been made to be called by her name and she refuses to be her mother. She is nothing but a 'substance' who brings other memories of Susan- "brings other ghosts in a tow" (Coetzee, 1986, P 132). Here the "ghost" can be called the mark of her past. In Henrik Ibsen's play *Ghost*, Mrs. Alving was also suffering with the memories of Mr. Alving and her son, Oswald also was seen to bring back the memories of his father- "I am anxious and fearful because of the ghosts that haunt me, that I can't get rid of" (Ibsen, 2015, P 40). Susan is seen accusing Mr. Foe of summoning her life's past or memories which seem to chase her continuously because Mr. Foe has pinched her "wound", her woe of losing her daughter- "I tell myself, and is sent by you to console me; but, lacking skill in summoning ghosts (Coetzee, 1986, P 132). Also Mrs. Barfield's story, which she comes across in the library of Mr. Foe and has been written by him, is represented as a "ghost" or 'memory'. But apparitions can be painful at times. People may conclude that memories cannot touch us or we cannot

feel it. But Susan finishes – “Thus I conclude you are aware that ghosts can converse with us, and embrace and kiss us too” (Coetzee, 1986, P 134). According to Birgit Neumann-Memories are connected with the presence of the past in the present and they illuminate the manifold functions that memories fulfil for the constitution of identity (Neumann, 2010). Memories and dreams are interconnected with each other. If the example of the novel is taken, the first meeting between Susan and Mr. Foe has a vague conversation about sleep and dreams. They have summoned their dreams in different ways. Susan is asked by Foe- “And do you meet with Phantoms in your sleep? (Coetzee, 1986, P 137) Here probably by the word “phantoms” he wants to mean her dark and deep desires which according to Freud find a road to disclose themselves in the dream state of a human body (Freud, 1913). The darker sides of human are generally confined within the Id, but it is the dream which makes the thoughts free. Susan’ reply is a mark where she speaks about her memories that come in her dreams- “They are memories, memories of my waking hours, broken and mingled (Coetzee, 1986, P 138). These memories are probably her long lost wishes which are fulfilled through her dreams. The suggestion of “ghost” is also symbolical because it points out the boundary between the living and the dead. As Mr. Foe has said- “There he met the souls of the dead. One of the souls was weeping. “Don’t suppose mortal”, said this soul, addressing him, “that because I am not substantial” (Coetzee, 1986, P 136). “Ghost” is the symbol of an unsubstantial body. An apparition which cannot be seen or felt, whose very identity is a mystery. Friday and Susan’s identity in the novel is somewhat very obscure and inglorious. Friday as a black slave has already lost his own existence. Susan, as a female body is also treated as a mere object, without identity. When she and Friday take shelter in Mr. Foe’s home, she exclaims, “When you return, we will vanish like ghosts, without complaint” (Coetzee, 1986, P 64). If the identity of Mr. Foe is the house, then they are mere ghosts, who live without any complaint and noise. Again she remarks, “We hear no word from you, and the town folk pay us no more heed than if we were ghosts” (Coetzee, 1986, P 87). Here they do not exist even to the people around them, their neighbourhood. Susan questions her ontological self again and again, “I am doubt itself. Who is speaking me? Am I a phantom too?” (Coetzee, 1986, P 133) Here the boundary between reality and imagination goes blurred and not to be understood so easily. Friday’s silence is what makes him more insignificant creature- “We should be as quiet as ghosts” (Coetzee, 1986, P 59). Coetzee had made him a creature who cannot even speak for his rights, “He has lost his tongue, there is no language in which he can speak, not even in his own” (Coetzee, 1986, P 108). When Crusoe was uprooted from

his island, he lost all his strength and died out of woe. In the island he was the king, where there was none to command him and make him under rule. But when he was taken, “Crusoe lay pale as a ghost” (Coetzee, 1986, P 38) where he knew his fall is inevitable. This could be marked as a native resistance in post-apartheid era where the roles got reversed for a “Colonizer” and a “Colonized”, and gave birth to a complex and ambivalent situation. As in *Disgrace*, Lucy, the white girl has been raped by two black men, but she cannot resist and protest against that (Coetzee, 1999). Susan called him “Ghost” for she regards him as her memory, where she resides, where her identity goes, “A ghost beside the true body of Crusoe” (Coetzee, 1986, P 51). There is always a presence of flicker of light where the shadow appears. But the hope not always gets the opportunity of flourishing for everyone. Some people are born in darkness, raised in darkness and spends their life like a silhouetted figure- without noticing and without care. Friday, in the novel *Foe* can be seen as a ‘shadowy’ figure, whose very identity is questioned again and again in the novel. As an African slave, he has a story of inhuman suffrage. His tongue has been taken off, he has been uprooted at first from his motherland and then from the island of Crusoe, which was like his second home. These cause an anxiety and the colonization recreated his identity when he has been taken away from his mother. In the very first page of the novel Susan, as a castaway reaches the shore of Crusoe’ island, wakes up and mentions- “A dark shadow fell upon me” (Coetzee, 1986, P 1). She does not notice Friday as a human figure at first, but gives a figure of “dark shadow”. Here the colonial perspective of a colonizer has been made very clear, where the blacks are devoid of their identity. Susan again and again proves herself as a white mistress while she says- “Hitherto I had found Friday a shadowy creature and paid him little more attention than I would have given any horse-slave in Brazil” (Coetzee, 1986, P 24). The existence of Friday to her is at the verge of extinction, where she pays no heed. Although she has lost everything but she still thinks herself superior than him and it’ like a defamation to her at the same level to be with Friday- “Ah Friday! ...shipwreck is a great leveller, and so is destitution but we are not level enough yet” (Coetzee, 1986, P 70). Friday is treated while living with Susan, as her inseparable companion. He follows Susan like her shadow after moving to England, because England is not his motherland where he could find his real name- “Friday has grown to be my shadow. Do our shadows love us, for all that they are never parted from us?” (Coetzee, 1986, P 115) Here the theory of Bhabha’ ambivalence can be well applied where a colonizer i.e. Susan finds a tries to find a human relation with Friday, although with negligence (Bhabha 2004). As for Friday, staying for a long time with Crusoe and Susan, he somehow



wants to find his identity in their existence or the way of living. As Bhabha points- "Mimicry is thus the sign of a double articulation, a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline which appropriates the other as it visualizes power" (Bhabha, 2004). It could be a deep delved desire of Friday to be recognized as his own. Carl Jung is famously known for presenting the shadow as the part of our unconscious mind while Connie Zweig mentions in an interview in the proportion of Jung "...there are so many topics that were in the cultural shadow which are now out in the light...For example, domestic violence, childhood sexual abuse, alcoholism in epidemic proportions...These issues were in the collective shadow, they were taboo, forbidden topics, areas we didn't want to look at. In terms of individuals, anything that is unacceptable to us, anything that's hidden or denied — what we want to hide from, what we don't want to know about ourselves — that's the shadow" (Zweig, 2017). Now Coetzee has described Friday in such a subtle manner that his dark desires are to be observed through various depictions and moods in the novel. "Shadow" works as an alter ego for Friday, where his deep desires for lust, barbarism, self realizing made a stay. Susan says, "Friday's desires are not dark to me. He desires to be liberated, as I do" (Coetzee, 1986, P 148) Friday's desire to get freedom from the tyrant hands of the colonizers is not new for colonized. He has accepted the bondage of colonizer because he had prepared his mind for the labour and exploitation he has to face. In the "Introduction: Situating the Postcolonial" it is mentioned- "Attitudes such as Hegel's were used to justify colonization...At the same time, Africans and other colonial people were seen as mentally and physically adapted only for menial labour or routine clerical positions" (Hegel, 2007). But even the animals in the cage have the desire for freedom. As Susan says, "There is an urging that we feel, all of us, in our hearts to be free" (Coetzee, 1986, P 149). Friday's dance wearing the robes of Mr. Foe is significant because this is a clear picture of presenting his alter ego- "In the morning he dances in the kitchen, where the windows face East" (Coetzee, 1986, P 92). The sunrise gives birth to his shadow in the opposite direction, which could mean that he purifies his soul by facing the Sun. These all could mean that his unconscious mind provokes him to generate intentions of getting freedom. The dance could be seen as his native resistance where he refuses to listen to the colonizers. The dance by wearing the robes could also mean his hunger of an identity like the colonizers. He tries to mimic Crusoe, his master. This suggestion could also suggest that by dancing he wants to create a connection with the island because in England he feels alienated, chilled. The trauma of leaving his home could also create a double consciousness. As Tyson said, "Double consciousness often produced an

unstable sense of self, which has heightened by the forced migration colonialism frequently caused" (Tyson, 2006, P 420). Repressed sexual desire can also create a kind of distortion in his mind as it has mentioned before. As Susan said, "Surely desires kept banked for many years must have flamed up within you" (Coetzee, 1986, P 86). But as she has expected that the sexual urge would compel Friday to make a move towards Susan, has not happened. Thus, the figure of "shadow" can be interpreted in the context of identity, self-realization, suppression, a substance, the lower esteem, which has made its way in the lives of Friday as well as Susan.

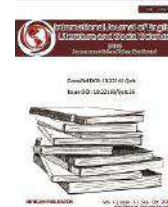
#### IV. CONCLUSION

The study yields some major problems of society and individuals, which has been mainly reflected by Friday and Susan. Their main problems that have been found are both psychological and social. They face a great difficulty in adapting themselves to a new place. Not only Susan and Friday but Crusoe also, who dies of agony only in the vision of leaving his self-made abode. The cause of their difficulty in living to a new place is mainly derived from the fear of being lost in the stream as they have been uprooted from their native place. Another problem that is mainly focused in this study, is that they constantly being referred to as the unsubstantial bodies, without any entities. They are failed to find their identities, mentally and physically. Susan remains stable in her world of memories of her past, which haunt her unscrupulously. As a female, the natural problem she faces is being unnoticed and disregarded. Friday's identity crisis is due to his race, who is colonized by the "Whites" but his urge to escape is prominent. *Foe* is naturally categorized as a postcolonial novel, where numerous problems regarding colonial issues can be found. In concluding it can definitely be said that the society needs serious development in their stereotypical mindset. Discrimination someone in the basis of caste, creed, race or gender should be restricted. The study needs to seek those refinements from the society. By hatching Friday's mental pain and Susan's harassments for being a woman can well define the stress and hardships of other people who are being maltreated. There are many other Fridays and Susans who also have their rights to live according to their own.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Bhabha, H.K. (2004). *Location of Culture*. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group. New York. USA.
- [2] Coetzee, J.M. (2000). *Disgrace*. Penguin Putnam Inc. USA.
- [3] Coetzee, J.M. (2010). *Foe*. Penguin Books Ltd. England.
- [4] Conrad, J. (2001). *Heart of Darkness*. Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi.

- [5] Freud, S. (1913). *Interpretation of Dreams*. The Macmillan Company. New York. USA.
- [6] Hegel, G.W.F. (2007). "Introduction to the Philosophy of History". *Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literature*. edited by C.L Innes. Cambridge University Press. England.
- [7] Hornby A.S. (2020). *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*. Oxford University Press. New Delhi.
- [8] Ibsen, H. (2015). *Ghosts*. Worldview Publications. New Delhi.
- [9] Neumann, B. (2008). "The Literary Representation of Memory". *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, edited by Astrid Erll & Ansgar Nunning, De Gruyter. Walter de GmbH & Co. KG. Germany.
- [10] Said, E. (1979). *Orientalism*. Vintage Books. New York.
- [11] Tyson, L. (2006). *Critical Theory Today*. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group. New York. USA.
- [12] Waugh, P. (2006). "Freud and Psychoanalysis". *Literary Theory and Criticism*. Oxford University Press. New Delhi.
- [13] Zweig, C. (2017). "Illuminating the Shadow: An Interview with Connie Zweig". Interview by Scott London.  
<https://scott.london/interviews/zweig.html>.



# The application of formative evaluation in middle school English teaching

Liu Yuxin

Received: 08 Jul 2023; Received in revised form: 08 Aug 2023; Accepted: 15 Aug 2023; Available online: 21 Aug 2023  
©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license  
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— *Formative evaluation has always been one of the hot topics of scholars' research. This paper mainly provides a brief overview of formative evaluation, principles of formative evaluation, different feedback strategies in formative evaluation, and interaction between students and teachers in formative evaluation.*

**Keywords**— *formative evaluation, self-evaluation, mutual evaluation*



## FOREWORD

According to the definition of formative evaluation in the English Curriculum Standards for Full-time Compulsory Education (2011 edition), teachers need to evaluate students' performance in the daily learning process, achievements, emotions, attitudes, strategies and other developments expressed.

## I. A SUMMARY OF THE FORMATIVE EVALUATION

Domestic scholars, such as Wang Qiang (2006:252), explained that formative evaluation is an evaluation with low anxiety and sustainability. It occurs in an open, friendly and relaxed environment. In addition to learning students' knowledge and skills, students' learning interest and attitude are also an important focus of formative evaluation. Other education experts in China also believe that formative evaluation means that in the process of teaching and learning activities, teachers and students judge students' learning status and the degree of achieving teaching objectives through the interaction between teachers and students and students. Xiao Lifang think: formative evaluation is to follow up the whole process of students learning, help students to effectively regulate their learning process, guide learning, let the students from passive evaluators into the subject of the evaluation and positive participants, teachers can through this way to record the progress of students, planned, step by step to

promote students' English ability, in order to achieve the expected teaching purpose.

Foreign scholars, such as Black & William (1998), define formative evaluation as "activities developed by all teachers and students and that can provide feedback to help improve teaching". Popham (2008:6) believes that it is not enough to only put forward feedback information, and the feedback information provided by formative evaluation should play a positive role in helping to improve students' academic performance and achieve the expected teaching effect. Sadler (1989) On the basis of Ramaprasad, the definition of feedback from the perspective of information difference. He pointed out that the so-called feedback is to use the information difference between the two parties to reduce the gap, otherwise it can not be called feedback. Beyond this, Black and Wiliam emphasized the importance of feedback in formative evaluation, arguing that any faculty evaluation that diagnoses students' learning difficulties and provides constructive feedback would have a significant impact on student learning.

Most researchers divide feedback into positive feedback and negative feedback, cognitive feedback and emotional feedback, etc. In the process of formative evaluation, feedback is dynamic and uninterrupted on this basis. In addition, the purpose of feedback is for the formative evaluation feedback is to maintain the students' learning motivation and participation, so that they do not feel lonely to give up the course, so this paper thinks that the teachers and students to keep the communication in the

feedback process, and interactive feedback important changes by the third party process, this record can be anonymous, so the feedback in the formative evaluation process reflects the student principle of subjectivity, continuity and improvement principle.

## II. PRINCIPLES OF FORMATIVE EVALUATION

### 1 Principle of subjectivity

Students are independent and the development of the individual, education teaching need to pay attention to students' subjectivity, so in the formative evaluation, not only to the students as evaluated, but also to the students self-evaluation space, in the process of self-evaluation, students need to plan the learning process, and learn to communicate with others, such as students can through consultation and classmates teacher make personal evaluation, combined with their own characteristics of diversification and various evaluation.

### 2 The principle of continuity

Formative evaluation is to follow up the whole process of students 'learning, in the process of continuous, teachers need to continue to pay attention to the students' learning status, sustainability refers to the students in different time and space learning state, comprehensive observation, so in English teaching, need to uninterrupted attention and improve students learning status of listening, speaking, reading and writing.

### 3 Improvement principle

In junior middle school English teaching, because students are still learning basic vocabulary and relatively simple discourse, so they need to make full use of the characteristics of students' learning, in the teaching process, they need to use audio-visual speaking, reading and other ways to help students to make certain progress on the basis of the original English learning.

## III. THE THEORETICAL BASIS OF FORMATIVE EVALUATION

### (1) Humanism study theory

Humanitarian learning theory emphasizes that in the learning process, in addition to students 'academic performance, but also pay attention to the cognitive development and emotional attitude of learners, protect students' self-esteem, and give students support in addition to book knowledge.

### (2) Constructivism theory

Constructivism theory attaches importance to people's subjective initiative and emphasizes the learning mode of meaning construction. This theory emphasizes creating a positive and relaxed learning environment for students, encourages students to communicate and discuss with each other, collects students' written and oral feedback, and cultivates students' ability of cooperation and independent learning in this way.

### (3) Multiple intelligence theory

According to Gardner's "(1983)" theory, the theory of multiple intelligences emphasizes that students have different abilities in language, mathematics, music, sports and other aspects. Because everyone is good at different skills, teachers need to stimulate students' different interest points in the teaching process to cultivate students' motivation to learn English.

## IV. THE STRATEGY OF FORMATIVE EVALUATION IN THE APPLICATION OF ENGLISH TEACHING

First, use of self-evaluation and mutual evaluation for teaching evaluation. In the course of the self-assessment, Students are able to design and expect teaching objectives by themselves and teachers, Conduct self-evaluation after class on the completion of homework; in addition, In the process of mutual evaluation, Due to the similar learning level of students in the same grade, Students can negotiate more consistent standards through interactive consultation, In order to facilitate students to evaluate each other in an appropriate way; At the end of the semester, both teachers and students can evaluate each other, A third party is anonymous to collect teachers 'feedback to students and students' evaluation of teachers, And then comprehensively analyze the teaching situation, So that both teachers and students can obtain the dynamic teaching and learning process. For example, in the teaching design of the unit of high school English Virtual choir, the learning task can be divided into three categories: 1. Encourage students to share and discuss their favorite music in the oral task through self-evaluation and mutual evaluation scales. 2. Ask the students to try to design the concert in groups to show the completion of the concert planning. 3. Let the students share their feelings after reading the speech in the book, and analyze the writing method of the speech. Through these constant interactive activities, students' learning activities and tasks can be better promoted.

Second, adopt a multi-directional evaluation method for teaching evaluation. Due to the result of individual



differences of students, formative evaluation needs evaluation through the perspective of students, such as in Chinese Writing this unit, teach students about the knowledge of Chinese characters, can by students 'calligraphy homework, students of calligraphy, students of Chinese calligraphy ideas and Suggestions on how to spread in the world to collect evaluation, can obtain students' various learning content. When evaluating students from various aspects, teachers can design evaluation scales according to their actual needs, and make an objective summary of students based on the evaluation of various aspects.

Third, to conduct teaching evaluation through different channels.1. Prepare some teaching materials for students through the Internet before class, and then ask brief questions about the teaching materials within the first 5 minutes of class to understand the students' preparation degree before class, but do not make too much evaluation.2. In class, students are encouraged to summarize what they have learned through discussion, writing and reading, so as to give students timely feedback.3. Students are encouraged to learn through online resources after class, and teachers can also give students feedback through real-time online modification.

Fourth, provide students with highly targeted descriptive evaluation, for example, in class, the teacher asks: What do you think of game shows? Student answer: It make me happy. The teacher may modify the students' language form errors in the feedback, prompting the students to use the third person singular here, but will not guide the students to continue to express why they are interested in the game exhibition. For this situation, teachers can create situation, show students often play games in class, and let the students discuss their favorite game brings them what kind of feeling, the students through the discussion, teachers can observe the performance of students and in the process of group discussion, to each group to give them some targeted evaluation, so can understand the students 'interests and exercise the students' oral communication ability.

Fifth, students should be evaluated consistently and comprehensively. For example, Gibbs & Simpson believes that teachers can better monitor and understand their learning process and progress when they continuously provide students with feedback at different stages.

For example, teachers pay attention to the development of vocabulary, reading, writing, oral English, and pay attention to students' communication ability, acceptance ability and the ability of improvisation to develop students in detail through electronic archives.

Sixth, for the formative evaluation of English teaching, in addition to students' knowledge and skills, students should also comprehensively evaluate the awareness of interactive participation, cooperation and cultural awareness in English class by paying attention to the number of language cooperation and communication strategies.

## V. THE APPLICATION OF FORMATIVE EVALUATION IN ENGLISH TEACHING

In the preparation stage before reading, teachers can design relevant learning tasks and choose corresponding after-class evaluation methods to judge whether students 'pre-reading preparation is sufficient. In this stage, students need to stimulate students' interest in reading and active learning attitude through discussion, watching relevant videos and other activities. In the reading stage, it is necessary to design various types of reading activities to cultivate students' reading ability, such as getting the general idea of the article through the title, understanding the details of the article by judging the mistakes and filling in the blanks. After reading stage to consolidate the extension stage, teachers through the design of deep text activities, such as for eighth grade second volume Unit 9 Have you ever been to the museum this unit, let the students discuss in different museum, the capable students, can also let them in the data contrast different museum, while improving the students use English about the ability of what happened in their life.

In listening teaching, before listening to teach students certain listening skills, when listening to listen to the general idea or details, pay attention to the key words in the listening materials, such as asking about the time, place, people, you need to pay special attention to these places. In addition, in the process of listening and reading, we need to pay attention to the students' understanding ability. Pay attention to students' vocabulary input, understanding and speculation ability. Specifically, in terms of listening, students can do a lot of dictation and silent reading, and in terms of reading, students can understand and speculate on the author's intention of the article after mastering the basic information of the article.

In writing teaching, students are given relevant supports, such as in Unit10 I've had this bike for three years. Writing exercises, give students to relevant language support, in the first paragraph tell students to write their favorite things, in the second paragraph tell students to talk about their favorite things why is very special, in the third paragraph tell the students to let them write a story or memories, and to provide students with corresponding sentence patterns and vocabulary support.

In oral teaching, we can give students a topic to try to communicate in various ways. In this process, we need to pay attention to the enthusiasm of students to participate in oral communication, the integrity of oral content expression, the nature of cohesion and transition, pay attention to the coherence of students' sentences, the correctness of grammar and so on.

Whether it is reading class, listening class, or writing class, teachers need to give students a certain space to study independently, and give play to and use students' various aspects of intelligence for English learning. By learning from English teaching in higher education, can try in the process of English group learning, around the teacher to the topic, let the imaginative students in the process of group learning topic, put forward new ideas for emotional students, let them around these ideas, for active students, let them regularly to group discussion topic, in group activities finally let strong logic students to summarize. For group activities, teachers can try to use some observation scales for evaluation. For students personally, due to the students' personality characteristics, teachers need to consider various factors to evaluate, such as to design a skills include English activities, so for students who are good at listening, encourage them to record what they hear the content and oral repetition, for good at reading students encourage students to different text reading content and try to write their understanding of the text, for students who are good at writing encourage them to think deeply about a topic and oral output. In short, listening, speaking, reading and writing in English teaching is a continuous process, which requires teachers to use more teaching wit and various resources to cultivate students' comprehensive ability.

## VI. MUTUAL EVALUATION BETWEEN TEACHERS AND STUDENTS IN THE FORMATIVE EVALUATION

The interaction between people refers to a life mode in which people understand and run in with each other in the process of living together. Generally speaking, formative evaluation is a continuous, continuous, dynamic evaluation process, in the process of teaching evaluation usually refers to a particular standard to evaluate whether students achieve a teaching goal, in the process of different types of students to diversified feedback, the feedback can be written or can be oral. Because students in the same grade have different learning styles and different learning methods, so teachers should teach students in accordance with their aptitude. According to the principle, for the field rely on types of students, because they rely more on the evaluation of others, they prefer to communicate with others to solve the problem of learning, and for independent students, they like more

according to their own way of learning and thinking, so don't like to communicate with others to solve the problem of learning. Therefore, students of field dependence type can be encouraged to gradually reduce their dependence on others and allow them to think more independently, while students of field dependence type can be encouraged to communicate more with others at an appropriate time.

According to Long's interaction theory hypothesis, the interaction between teachers and students has a long-term impact on students' learning progress. Due to the differences in students' personalities, it is necessary to encourage students to give timely feedback on their learning problems in oral or written form in different ways. Such as students in grade nine book Teenagers should be allowed to choose their own clothes, their ideas may pay more attention to their independence, and parents and teachers often preconceptions, when students and parents, teachers have different ideas, can use online anonymous way for teachers and students to mutual evaluation, this can protect students' self-esteem also can let the teacher understand each student and class as a whole, in order to adjust the subsequent teaching activities. The way teachers get along with students can also be further improved in the formative evaluation feedback. Generally speaking, the relationship between teachers and students can be authoritative, equal, relaxed, antagonistic and so on. Generally speaking, the equal and loose relationship between teachers and students is popular, so the above mentioned students can through anonymous evaluation on the basis of teachers can also according to different types of evaluation for students different anonymous response, so teachers can protect students' self-esteem at the same time as far as possible let the students get suitable for their learning methods. For example, for students with grades in the upper and middle reaches, they can be allowed to complete the basic test questions, but also let them conduct in-depth analysis of other articles they are interested in basic papers and extracurricular reading materials, so that students in the middle and lower reaches can complete the basic learning tasks such as dictation and sentence patterns.

To sum up, in the process of formative evaluation, teachers, students and parents can test the results of students' English learning through mutual cooperation and a long period of formative evaluation feedback in a semester or in a unit of years.

## REFERENCES

- [1] English Curriculum Standards for Full-time Compulsory Education (2017 edition)
- [2] Kang Lu. Strategy to optimizing formative evaluation of English teaching.[J], educational circles.2023.1

- [3] Zheng Mingda. Study on the organization strategy and method of process evaluation.[J] Audio-visual education in China.2010.9
- [4] Zhang Li. Review on the formative feedback study [J]. Overseas English, 2016, (12): 229-230.
- [5] Yue Yu, formative evaluation in university foreign language teaching [J] 2017
- [6] Pan Ying. Formative evaluation feedback strategy and its effective use [J] 2017
- [7] Research on the application of Huang Lixia's formative evaluation in English reading teaching in junior middle school.[J ]2019
- [8] Liu Qianqian. Application strategy of formative evaluation in oral English teaching in senior primary school [D] 2022 [9] Lu Xiaoyu. Case study on the implementation status of formative feedback for English teachers [D] 2022



# An Analysis of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* Through Terry Eagleton's Conception of Tragedy

Kaninika Singh

Department of English Literature, The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, India

Received: 05 Jul 2023; Received in revised form: 06 Aug 2023; Accepted: 15 Aug 2023; Available online: 22 Aug 2023  
©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license  
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— This paper offers a comprehensive analysis of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, employing Terry Eagleton's conception of tragedy from his book *Sweet Violence*. It examines how the play achieves excellence through wisdom, intellectual depth, and emotional maturity, exposing the sublimity of human effort in creating an enduring experience for the audience. The paper delves into the elements of sacrifice, the dilemma of the tragic hero, and the concept of tragedy as a genre with emotional impact, showcasing the influential nature of the play. Furthermore, it explores the intertwining of external accidents with the hero's struggles and the balance of universality and particularity in evoking sympathy and engagement within the audience. Additionally, it discusses Eagleton's notion of tragedy as a means to offer political hope and belief in justice and redemption, even in the darkest of times. The analysis examines *Hamlet*'s fit in both traditionalist and democratic perspectives and finally delves into the Greek concept of the *pharmakos*, highlighting why *Hamlet*'s suffering leads to emotional cleansing or *katharsis* for the audience.



**Keywords**— *Hamlet*, Eagleton, Tragedy, Tragic Hero, *Pharmakos*

“War, revolution, poverty, hunger; men reduced to objects and killed from lists; persecution and torture; the many kinds of contemporary martyrdom; however close and insistent the facts, we are not to be moved, in a context of tragedy. Tragedy, we know, is about something else.”

(Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy*)

## Tragedy Through Universality and Particularity

Known to be one of the greatest tragedies ever written by the Bard-of-Avon, William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* has stood the test of time and presented itself as the cornerstone of modern tragedies and literature. Ranging from its modern adaptations being staged in the most novel settings such as Caridad Svich's version which took place in a swimming pool in Brooklyn, to its utilization into the sciences of human behaviour and psyche, as seen in its scope of rendering human suffering, the play has been a vastly influential piece of English literature. The elements of the tragic that allowed it to have encompassed human mortality for over four centuries are as complex as its rendition.

Though critics like TS Eliot have taken jabs at the play, referring to it as an “artistic failure,” it is more often than not a misinterpretation or perhaps a misreading of the play. Terry Eagleton defends the idea of ‘tragedy’ as one that is anything but merely such, in contrast to Eliot who viewed the tragedy of *Hamlet* as a product of sheer accidents in the plot. According to Eliot, the play became secondary to its protagonist and the problematizing features of it, as a result, were mere elements of accidents. His idea that the character of Prince Hamlet was appealing to a “creative-minded individual” such that they saw themselves in his shoes was one that Eagleton does not necessarily agree with. Instead, in defence of tragedies, such as one like *Hamlet*, Eagleton reiterates its roots in specificity— the particularity of people and their suffering— which attain universality of meaning through their characters that are relatable and ordinary in their ordeals like any of us (*Sweet Violence* xvi). In such a sense, Prince Hamlet who embodies the tragic hero in his specificity and the “world-historical forces” in his universality becomes the perfect agent in creating a tragedy.



The debate over the nature of tragedies being controlled by predetermination or by accident which rises out of Eliot's critique of *Hamlet* is an important one and is discussed thoroughly by Eagleton in *Sweet Violence* (2002). He puts forth the idea of the 'classic' or the 'traditional' tragedies in comparison with those that Hegel refers to as 'modern.' Eagleton goes on to elaborate that the Hegelian viewpoint depends heavily on the idea of 'accident' as a catalyst of dramatic actions pertaining to tragedies yet the traditional perspective takes on the approach that relies on fate or 'predetermination' (SV 43). In the context of *Hamlet* which falls into the category of modern tragedies, the idea of "extraneous accidents" is what renders it a success in the genre. Unlike classical plays where the 'tragic' was immanent, *Hamlet* becomes the struggle of a man's particularity with the universal— as Kant would call it "overriding one's individual desires in the name of moral duty" (44). Thus, when Polonius points toward Hamlet's condition, he exclaims "Though this be madness, yet there is method in't" (*Hamlet* II.ii)— an expression indicating the tragic struggle of renouncing one's sense of specificity for something universal yet evidently methodical. In such a sense, Eagleton brings forth a vital element of modern tragedies— the idea of sacrifice. With the great power of being the prince of Denmark, a son to one of the most capable rulers, and a devout Christian for his people, Hamlet endured the powerlessness of being incapacitated in his personal life.

This is in contrast to characters who let go of the universal for the particular— such characters, unlike Hamlet, are not tragic heroes as they lack a higher ethical justification (SV 44). Eagleton demonstrates the argument by presenting Kierkegaard's story of Abraham, one of particularity, and personal motivation, that lacked any ethics pertaining to society. By allowing oneself to be enamoured by anything other than the universal or ethical obligation, the character loses its lustre of becoming a tragic hero. In the case of Hamlet, he struggles against the divine laws of his faith ('universal') to not succumb to his will to commit suicide ('particular') after having endured a series of painful revelations in the course of the play— such a hero subordinates himself and his desires for the "well-being of the whole" (SV 44). According to Eagleton, this is one of the significant elements that demonstrate the nature of tragedy, and it allows *Hamlet* to be revered as one of the best-written tragedies. Hence, the sacrificial attitude found in the hero's persistence and struggle against personal motivations for ones that are socially, morally and ethically justified are what elevate characters such as Hamlet to tragic heroes.

Even though Hamlet proves itself to be a great tragedy in the above-mentioned sense of Hegel, Eagleton

goes on to add nuances to the proposition. In his introduction to *Sweet Violence*, he delves into the idea of the specificity of tragedies— the particular nature of experiences such as the typical nature of Prince Hamlet finding himself in a series of events leading him to lament in his soliloquies:

O that this too solid flesh would melt,  
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!  
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd  
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God!  
O God!  
How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable  
Seem to me all the uses of this world!  
(*Hamlet* I.ii)

The particularity of people and their problems such as the precise dilemma of Hamlet seeking revenge or finding a personal escape through suicide are not comparable in their complete essence. However, the universality of his experiences in the form of 'suffering' is rooted in all communities and creates a "communality of meaning" (SV xvi). The elements of having been negated, hurt, powerless, injured, or divided are what bind Hamlet's sufferings with a consensus from the rest of us and produce a tragedy. In such a sense, Eagleton reiterates the common currency of 'suffering' across all phenomena that ought to pass as tragedies; the resignation and fatality associated with it become the dramatizing agents of the tragic play and produce ubiquitous responses across all audiences.

The idea that Eagleton presents tragedies being created through external events referred to as 'accidents' is a popular one. Despite his insistence that most modern tragedies like *Hamlet* are built upon the outcomes of extraneous variables, Eagleton does not deny the touch of fate in them. In agreement with Žižek, he does accord some credit to the logic of Fate yet steers clear from any reliance on it as the sole paddle to the boat of tragedy (SV 126). In such a context, the downfall of tragic heroes such as Hamlet is based on their victimization or perhaps a sense of deserving what comes to them. Thus, when we view Hamlet as a man suffering from the pains of witnessing his mother engaging "in th' incestuous pleasure of [Claudius'] bed" (II.iv), he becomes the tragic victim of his circumstances allowing the audience to sympathise with him in his weakest moments. However, Hamlet remains aware of the tussle between his condition propagated through external circumstances with that of fate: "Our wills and fates do so contrary run / That our devices still are overthrown. / Our thoughts are ours, their ends none of our own" (III.ii). Despite the somewhat predetermined lives, Hamlet does take into hand the agency to work towards his goals and kill

Claudius. Thus, when he pledges “By heaven, I’ll make a ghost of him that lets me” (I.iv) he not only takes fate into his hands but also proves what Eagleton attempts to say—though fate exists in some form, a tragedy renders itself only when there is a conscious struggle, a fighting spirit, and the power of the human spirit which can only be shown in taking reins over one’s own life. It is only when an extraneous variable such as misfortune acts that Hamlet’s persona can become the catalyst of tragedy; the existence of fate or destiny solely would not enamour any realization of an affinity with the hero on behalf of the audience.

### Tragedy Through Its Effects

The question that Eagleton poses often in his book is whether tragedies are a separate genre based on their impact on their viewers or if there exists a greater emphasis on factors pertaining to its contents which could justify its existence as a category set apart from any other in drama. To delve into the matter, it becomes necessary to examine how true tragedies are those which can indeed be equated with excellence (Koelb 72). These would include dramas that are classified as ‘fine writing,’ rich in the way they present wisdom, and include an intellectual depth as well as a maturity to understand. Though Eliot’s idea of tragedies was mocked by Eagleton as “tragic elitism” (SV 48), the impact of such plays is somewhat dependent on the audience’s reception. Unlike Eliot who saw the audience as ranging from lower to higher “*cognoscenti*,” Eagleton talks about it in general terms of emotional reception without bringing a class divide of intellect into it. Nevertheless, he saw it as a recurring practice for tragedies to be closer to softened blows instead of a blatant jab—in simpler words, the plays were usually shaped keeping the assumption that the public would not consume such woeful tales without hints of humour or “callous comic” elements (SV 23). This was perhaps why there were always comic reliefs in most plays by Shakespeare—especially using the characters of court jesters or ‘fools’ as in *King Lear* or *Othello*. However, *Hamlet* remains an intense and sombre tragedy with only a few moments of puns to spare the audience any comic relief. In such a sense, the tragedy of *Hamlet* attains its status through the pure macabre and depressing exchange of jokes that keep the dramatic mood of the play in place. It is indeed the wisdom in Hamlet’s self-reflection, the depth of his dilemma, and his maturity in fearing the Christian laws of the divine that enhance the drama into a tragedy par excellence. The sardonic humour used in the Gravedigger’s scene in Act V, Scene I was perhaps the only dedicated comic relief in the play and yet had the most macabre sense of poking fun at the idea of death. When the first Gravedigger poses a riddle “What is he that builds stronger than either the mason, the shipwright, or the carpenter?” and the other responds with “The gallows-maker, for that frame

outlives a thousand tenants,” it becomes apparent that even the most tension-easing moments of comedy were tragic in nature. This was why Coleridge commented on the use of impeccable comic scenes in such tragedies: “Shakespeare imitates life, mingled as we find it with joy and sorrow” (*Shakespeare’s Criticism* 200). His emphasis on the reinforcing potential through ironic contrast was what helped plays like *Hamlet* achieve the status of a well-written tragedy.

Drawing from the idea of Greek tragedies, the death of a tragic hero was a moment when the chorus danced and celebrated before leaving the stage. Eagleton views it as a significant part of the tragedy for he quotes Yeats claiming “In all the great tragedies, tragedy is a joy to the man who dies” thereby indicating why the Greek chorus would present the moment as one where it was necessary to emphasise the ecstasy of Aristotelian *katharsis* instead of painful agony (SV 24). For such an ecstatic experience, it becomes important for the play to justify the death of the tragic hero or else the emotional turmoil within the viewers might never dissipate. Taking the case of *Hamlet*, the death of Prince Hamlet had to be justified and Shakespeare was successful in doing so. The element of tragedy took place because his death was not just seemingly necessary for closure but also justified in its essence. Dorothea Krook claimed that in order for it to be called a tragedy, the play must not be “lacking a sense of redemption” (116) and Hamlet precisely did not fail in such a feat. He not only redeemed his father, the King, as a loyal son but also redeemed himself as a man of honour for his people. This was why raiders can observe a zeal of redemption taking over him when he says: “Haste me to know’t, that I, with wings as swift / As meditation or the thoughts of love, / May sweep to my revenge” (I.v).

In addition to him being able to avenge his father for moral and ethical violations, his expiation for committing the murders, whether indirectly, of most characters in the play, it was inevitable for him to escape death himself. Bowers warns about isolating characters in order to justify their tragic ends, for it ought to have a cause-effect relationship with the events and people in the tragedy (215). Thus, when Hamlet justified the murder of his uncle due to moral and ethical duties which he owed to the King, it became a cause for a further death—the murder of the ‘self.’ Eagleton claimed that as passive suffering was not what constituted a real tragedy, it was of ultimate importance that the death of the tragic hero, or Hamlet, was central to the plot and made dramatically significant while being saved for the end.

The impact of such a death was of further relevance to Eagleton who saw it as a means synonymous with Aristotle’s *katharsis*—the sense of being liberated

from burdensome feelings and finally being restored to normalcy after an emotionally wrecking experience. It stands for an ecstasy associated with the purging of one's feelings rendering a delicate balance of distress and empathy which sets it off. In Nietzsche's terms, it would be associated with a glimpse into the Dionysian and coming back to the state of the Apollonian—the pain associated with Hamlet's character when he loses his father to murder, his mother to Claudius' manipulation, his lover to suicide, and his sanity to a depressive-manic state stirs the audience's emotions; the redemption through Claudius' death and his own brings the audience back to emotional normalcy. The idea that there exists a paradox where tragedy would bring about satisfaction much like Nietzsche's Dionysian sense is proof that it is not the form that is tragic but its content. Thus, it is tragic for Hamlet to lose Ophelia but it is not melancholic simply because it ought to be a tragedy. Eagleton calls it a “negative utopia” where Hamlet's disintegration integrates our emotionality as the observers. It is a brief glimpse into one's primordial faculties to gauge ecstatic emotions, and in the process relish the “indestructibility and eternity of this joy” (Nietzsche 129). Hence, in Hamlet's despair, the audience finds its own outlet for satisfying such emotions rendering the play a tragedy.

Such an association of complex emotions with the plot of the play brings forth the significance of the “sublimity of human effort” (Raphael 27). There only exists the essence of tragedy because of the human value in dealing with the woes of life—something that Hamlet would refer to in his soliloquy as “The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” that “makes calamity of so long life” and by “opposing, end them” from existing (III.i). It is in his life to bear losses and witness the sacrifice of his sanity to bring an end to the bitterness of his life's circumstances. Thus, when Eagleton claims that tragedy is “released in the act of destruction” where the audience swivels in the pain of the protagonist, the sense of ruination associated with the human calamity makes the suffering of the tragic hero an ecstatic experience. In the madness of Hamlet lies the calm of the audience—heightened, exhilarating emotions evoking the essence of tragedy through its pained protagonist. Thus, when Claudius goes on to say “Madness in great ones must not unwatched go” (III.i) he not just refers to Hamlet's madness or his own but also to how the audience ought to respond to the suffering in the play.

Furthering his ideas about the implications of a play that render it a tragedy, Eagleton agrees with Hölderlin's claim that God is presented in a human incarnation and it is only through its annihilation that the tragic effect can take hold of the audience (SV 28). The incarnation is none other than that of the tragic hero himself

with his suffering steering the plot towards his death. Through such a principle, tragic heroes like Hamlet attain the stature of being suffering yet glamorous beings. The ecstatic energy around such characters like Hamlet elevated them to a higher pedestal—one where their death was not their defeat but their triumph in life. It comes together to make sense when even in his death Hamlet utters to Horatio, “Report me and my cause aright / To the unsatisfied” (V.ii). The ‘unsatisfied’ in such a sense does not merely pertain to Fortinbras or the people of Denmark who ought to know of him as an avenger to the King but also to the audience who will now become ‘satisfied’ with his cathartic death. Even at the end of his life, which should appear as one's most painful moment in life, he is regarded as a triumphant hero salvaging the audience's emotions.

As seen with Eagleton's observations, the belief that the tragic hero is a reincarnation created to be destroyed, the audience is invested in the resolution of the play, not necessarily the solution. In *Hamlet*, no apparent answer existed that could soothe the pain of losing both the parents—the King and the Queen—to Claudius' ploys. The only answer, if it existed at all, was weeding out the root cause by murdering the uncle. Such a crime was justified in the case of Hamlet for it was his princely duty to avenge his father, the King of Denmark, whom he described vividly:

See, what a grace was seated on this brow;  
Hyperion's curls; the front of Jove himself;  
An eye like Mars, to threaten and command;  
A station like the herald Mercury  
New-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill.  
A combination and a form indeed  
Where every god did seem to set his seal  
To give the world assurance of a man. (*Hamlet*  
III.iv)

From what Hamlet establishes the King as it becomes apparent that he was a mighty ruler and ought to be avenged for his murder. In order to find justice for such a heinous crime, Hamlet has no other option but to kill Claudius and reveal the truth to the world. Nevertheless, such a story is not uncommon which is why Eagleton insists that tragedies are those that exhibit “a political hope” where the audience is impacted to continue their lives with the belief that even in the “darkest historical moments” there ought to be faith (SV 27). This not only creates a spotlight for the tragic hero to be revered as an individual but also the universal, much like Hegel's perspective.

### The Dilemma of a Tragic Hero

Terry Eagleton discussed the idea of tragedy and what makes it so using the idea of the tragic hero, but what precisely is a tragic hero? He claims that there exist two perspectives in this regard— the traditionalist and the democratic. Interestingly for us, Hamlet fits well in both of them!

Starting from the traditionalist approach of classifying what makes a tragedy, Eagleton chooses Dorothea Krooks as an apt representative. She describes tragic heroes requiring to have an undying spirit to go on despite all odds, including their conditions as anything but pitiable and passive (SV 76). This would mean that the hero ought to have a sense of agency which would make the plot even more melancholic and hence, tragic. Looking at Hamlet in such a sense we find him at various stages demonstrating the existence of this agency even if he procrastinated in actually using it. For instance, when he found Claudius praying to be ridden of his sins, he saw the opportunity to slay him for he was unguarded and alone: “Now might I do it pat. Now he is a-praying. / And now I'll do't” (III.iii). This was a demonstration of the control he had over the situation which he, nevertheless, did not exercise till the very end of the play.

Hamlet also demonstrates his agency and the inherent will to not follow established societal rules at various points. Such emotions are shared by the audience and would briefly give us a glimpse into the Dionysian element of Nietzsche. Hamlet endeavours to get away from the definitions that society offers. He does not permit Polonius to affirm dominance or to characterize him. He cuts for himself each time: by sidestepping the proper definitions society lays on him, by slicing through expected conduct and moving toward Ophelia straightforwardly after the shock of the Ghost's declaration— he acts counter to the examples endorsed for him: his credible 'social' self, his feeling of himself and the manner in which others see him seem to be at odds.

Despite this, society could be seen forcing control on Hamlet's genuineness, requesting that, for instance, he give up his love for Ophelia, yet he does not succumb to it. For the audience, such a deed shows him relishing the breaking away from the imposition of any sort of definition— such behaviour is socially untrustworthy yet is an inherent desire shared by all of us akin. Thus, he exercises his agency actively, leading him to become a tragic hero. Even in the sense of procrastinating, Hamlet seems to practise his agency of neglecting social responsibilities temporarily. It becomes tragic for the audience— this is a shocking position since, despite the fact that extraneous circumstances attempt to hinder his path, it

becomes the only accessible way for a man to affirm himself as genuine, to typify and realize himself in the world.

Another element that Krooks maintained according to Eagleton was that of the status of the tragic hero. He should be an individual the audience could relate with such that he became a representation of each one of them yet at the same time was slightly higher in stature. This was, however, countered by the democratized point-of-view where Eagleton argues the contemporary sense of tragedies lies. He maintains that the assumption that “tragedy is one thing and ordinary life another is unwarranted” (SV 93). In this sense, each one of us has the potential to be a tragic hero or what he refers to as ‘tragic figures’ for the sake of democratizing it. The fates of characters like Hamlet become as important as any of ours— this would mean that Krook's argument of tragedies having a specially endowed tragic hero becomes meaningless. Eagleton supports this notion and goes on to comment on the former perspective as one that is ‘elitist.’ Going back to the beginning of this analysis, the quote of Raymond Williams must make sense now— “Tragedy is about something else”: it is truly about the “mandarin disdain for modernity and the common life” (SV 16). Hamlet, given his unabashed unapologetic sense of being a human, allows him to fall into the idea of democratized tragic characters as well. He is caught in the most awful moral tie: being sickened by what Gertrude has done, but unable to deny that she is his mother after all and that he's obliged to adore her— “No, by the rood, not so: / You are the queen, your husband's brother's wife; / And— would it were not so!—you are my mother” (III.iv). Moreover, he shares the human tenet of being one's own critic. Not only does he have bouts of hatred for himself for being unable to do as others can, but he also shares the emotions of shame and guilt associated with his flaws, making him relatable to the audience. He overthinks like any of us which was evident in his soliloquy “to be or not to be” (III.i) and is sometimes reckless, defiant, and anxious like how any human would be if they were in his shoes.

### The Pharmakos and Tragedy

Terry Eagleton goes on to criticise the ideas of the Left about the tragedy in his last chapter titled ‘*Thomas Mann's Hedgehog*.’ He comments that these Radicals view tragedy as one associating sacrifice through mythic, cultic, and religious notions. This would entail the idea that “suffering is an energizing, revitalizing part of human existence” and what is created by the Gods ought to go back to them. For this, a sacrifice is deemed necessary which would be “dismembered to be renewed” (SV 275). Thus, in a sense hinting at how we are earthly beings and will go back to being dirt, precisely conveyed in Adam's words: “For dust you are, and to dust you shall return” (*Genesis* 3:19).



Eagleton takes an intellectually stimulated stance, for he claims that sacrifice is a necessary aspect of tragedies yet it has to do with the realm of ethics, not the cult. It is important when something has to be destroyed or diminished for it to be remade with the added sense of replacing the idea of 'divinity' with 'community.' Hence, when we see Hamlet with the Gravediggers in Act V, Scene I, he seems to be pursuing the same idea claiming that one "returneth to dust, the dust is earth, of earth we make / loam" (9) when he picks up Yorick's skull and is amused by the cycle to diminishing in order to be renewed as he saw in the case of Alexander The Great.

Eagleton argues that sacrifice has remained an integral part of community life, not merely religious. He quotes the example of 'Yahweh' from the Old Testament who struggled to convince people he was the god of freedom and justice (SV 277) and that cults were perhaps secondary to such a liberation. This is also supported by the argument that there has been no proof to claim that Greek dramas were derived from religion. Moreover, Yahweh identified with the 'anawim' or the 'dispossessed' as mentioned in the Hebrew scriptures— quite literally the '*pharmakos*' or the 'scapegoats' which fit perfectly in the etymology of the word 'tragedy.' The *pharmakoi* were chosen from the "lowest of the low" and were the sacrificial scapegoat loaded with the sins, guilt, and burden of the entire community. In order to create such a powerful symbol of sacrifice, they were paraded and beaten in the streets to rid them of any identity. In a sense, there was no association between the *pharmakoi* and humanness for, now it became a mode of cleansing the community of all its sins— in a sense mimicking the idea of the tragedy itself.

The question now arises, how can Hamlet be viewed as a tragedy under the same lens? Eagleton paves the way for interpreting the play in two ways— one where he suggests a literal representation of a scapegoat in the drama and the other where the impact of the play is equated with the impact of a *pharmakos*. Taking the former way of interpreting, the character of Hamlet becomes the scapegoat of his story— he carries the guilt and burden of his community that has sinned by murdering, engaging in incest, and has been manipulative and deceitful. These sins are burdened upon Hamlet who is found to be tortured in the progression of the play by his intrusive thoughts and circumstances so much that when Claudius commands "Madness in great ones must not unwatch'd go" (III.i) it becomes a moment of spectacle to watch Hamlet spiral down to a space where he loses his sense of self. As Adrian Poole suggests, Hamlet as a scapegoat is a "double subject" (106) for he exists between the contradictions of divine law and personal law. He is characterized in a manner where he is different enough for the audience to loathe him given his

*hamartia* of procrastination and indecisiveness but is also at the same time a mirror-image of each one of us stuck between the nuances of morality. He is a living contradiction of the law and its transgressor where he ought to avenge his father's murder but become a murderer in doing so. Thus, as Eagleton suggests, the true redemption of such a *pharmakos* lies in becoming an "obscene disfigurement of humanity" whose justice lies in finally offering his tortured body and soul at the end of the play. He is the perfect symbol of sacrifice essential for a tragedy as he dwindles between the space of civility where he is often tortured into turning away from suicide, but also a space of turbulent powers that force him to reconsider this choice. His soliloquy of "to be or not to be" is his "death-in-life" having suffered the pains of carrying the secret of murder and incest taking place in his community so much so that his final passing becomes his "life-in-death" for having cleansed the community of such crimes.

Taking the latter perspective forward, the idea of the *pharmakos* taking the burden of sins of a community and dying with it produces a tragic effect. Eagleton demonstrates this using the idea that much like how the guilt-containing scapegoat would become the abject and further the unburdening of its people, similarly, a tragedy would have an impact on its audience similar to Aristotle's catharsis— and emotional cleanse, unburdening and riddance from negative emotions. While Eagleton compares the fear of such a *pharmakos* with the consolidation of the ideology that everything is well except for *one* problem that ought to be removed to renew the status quo of the community, on the other hand, pitying such a creature would mean establishing an identity with it where the guilt it carries becomes horrifying.

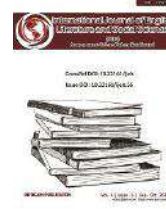
In the case of *Hamlet*, such an effect is achieved by allowing Prince Hamlet to be tortured throughout the play, allowing the audience to experience pity for him. Not only is the torture evident in his psychological deterioration where he suffers the "whips and scorns of time" (III.i) but also his emotional breakdown when he begs his mother to not sleep with his uncle having the consciousness that "Thus bad begins and worse remains behind" (III.iv). In pitying him, the audience sympathizes with his sufferings by identifying with them. Not only does it create horror in their minds but also demonstrates the "social order whose failure it signifies" (SV 279). In addition, the feeling of fear that emanates from establishing such a relationship helps each receiver to strengthen the desire to purge their feelings. This would imply that while pity would cause an upsurge in negative emotions, similar to how the *pharmakos* is loaded with the guilt of the community, fear becomes the trigger to release these emotions thereby depicting a cleansing effect.

In this process, Hamlet and his mortal being become the sacrifice for his community to be purged of their sins.

In conclusion, it can be claimed that the idea of sacrifice becomes significant in most, if not all, tragedies. As Walter Benjamin claims, "Sacrifice is an act of liberation: through the death of the hero, the community comes to consciousness of its subjection" (107). It is through such an act it becomes apparent that tragedy is not an idea limited to the great thinkers from Greece or the West but an experience that takes meaning when a community believes in it. As tragedy in itself symbolizes the macabre facet of death and pain, it automatically also contains the multitude of the release of these ideas. In doing so, tragedies such as Shakespeare's *Hamlet* become one of the imminent pieces of literature that have guided theories of tragedy for centuries to come.

### REFERENCES

- [1] Benjamin, Walter. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, London, 1977, pp. 107.
- [2] Bowers, Fredson. "Dramatic Structure and Criticism: Plot in Hamlet." *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 15, No. 2, Spring, 1964, pp. 207-218, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2867892>.
- [3] Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Coleridge's Shakespeare Criticism*, edited by Raysor Thomas Middleton, Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1930. pp. 200.
- [4] Eagleton, Terry. *Sweet Violence*, Blackwell Publishing, 2003.
- [5] Eliot, TS. "Hamlet and His Problems." *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1921.
- [6] Koelb, Clayton. "'Tragedy' as an Evaluative Term", *Comparative Literature Studies*, vol. 9, no. 1 (March, 1974), p. 72.
- [7] Krook, Dorothea. *Elements of Tragedy*, New Haven, CT and London, 1969, pp. 116.
- [8] Levy, Eric P. *Universal versus Particular: Hamlet and the Madness in Reason. Exemplaria*, 14(1), 2002, 99-125. doi:10.1179/exm.2002.14.1.99
- [9] Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth Of Tragedy Or Hellenism And Pessimism*, Project Gutenberg, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/51356/51356-h/51356-h.htm>
- [10] Poole, Adrian. *Shakespeare and the Greek Example*, Oxford, 1987, pp. 106.
- [11] Raphael, DD. *The Paradox of Tragedy*, London, 1960, pp. 27.
- [12] Shakespeare, William. *The Tragedy of Prince Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, Project Gutenberg, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1524/1524-h/1524-h.htm>
- [13] Weiner, Albert. "The Function of the Tragic Greek Chorus." *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 1980, pp. 205-212, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3207113>.
- [14] Yeats, William Butler (ed.), *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, Oxford, 1936, p. xxxiv.



# Indicting Frost for Androcentric Speciesism: An Ecofeminist Reading of Robert Frost's "The Most of It"

Hassan Musa Muhammad\*, Auwalu Umar Isah

Department of English and Literature, Federal University, Gusau, Zamfara State, Nigeria

\*Corresponding Author: [hasmumah@gmail.com](mailto:hasmumah@gmail.com)

*By climbing up into his head and shutting out every voice but his own, "Civilized Man" has gone deaf. He can't hear the wolf calling him brother—not Master, but brother. He can't hear the earth calling him child—not Father, but son. He hears only his own words making up the world. He can't hear the animals, they have nothing to say.*

—Ursula K. Le Guin

Received: 09 Jul 2023; Received in revised form: 07 Aug 2023; Accepted: 16 Aug 2023; Available online: 23 Aug 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— Using the critical framework of ecofeminism, this paper examines Robert Frost's attitudes towards both women and nature in his poem "The Most of It". Whether ecocritical or feminist, the mainstream readings of Robert Frost fall into two main axes: 1) Frost for Nature and/or Women Views argue that Frost's poetry is for nature and women (Srivastava, 2017; Shah, 2022); and 2) Frost for Ambiguity Views claim that Frost's poetic work is ambiguous—it could be for or against nature and women (Benin, n.d). This paper belongs to neither of the two. This study makes it unequivocally clear that Frost's view of nature, in "The Most of It", is androcentric as well as anthropomorphic. Ecofeminism is about making connections, on the one hand, between the earth and the entire forms of life on it, and on the other hand, between the patriarchal exploitation of nature and women's domination. This paper, too, attempts establishing many connections: between the poet's use of the male generic language and the oppression of nature and women; between the female's invisibility in the poem and women's domination in the Western patriarchal culture; and between Frost's fame as a poet and his advocacy (through his poetry) for the androcentric worldviews of the patriarchal American society of his time. The findings of this research reveal that "The Most of It" contains strata of male-centric, speciesist worldviews and, consequently, stress the need for more research into Frost's oeuvre using ecofeminist theory.

**Keywords**— *The Most of It*, ecofeminism, androcentrism, anthropomorphism, speciesism.



## I. INTRODUCTION

Robert Lee Frost (1874-1963) was a towering figure among the twentieth century English poets. Although Frost was born and brought up in America, he "wrote some of his best work while "in England [where] he made some important acquaintances, including Edward Thomas, T.E. Hulme, and Ezra Pound (poetandpoem, n.d: 6). The fact that Robert Frost published his first two poetry collections

*A Boy's Will* (1913) and *North of Boston* (1914) in the Great Britain could reveal the intercontinental influence of both Britain and American intellectual heritages upon him. Frost achieved great reputation during his life including many literary and national awards: "he is the only poet to win four Pulitzer Prizes for Poetry" and was adequately rewarded by the American polity. He was given the "Congressional Gold Medal in 1960; and named poet

laureate of Vermont" the next year (poetryverse, n.d: 1). Arguably, Robert Frost "was the most widely admired and highly honoured American poet of the 20th century" (Gerber, n.d).

The feminist ecocritical theory, which is alternatively called ecofeminism, combines the environmental advocacy and feminist activism in one movement (Gaard, 2017) just as the word ecofeminism itself is a portmanteau of ecology and feminism. The existential challenges faced by the environment, including the totality of the fauna and flora and the entire living organisms found on this planet, are the key concerns of environmentalism whilst the societal (mal)treatment and poor life conditions of all women across cultures in all societies form the crux of feminism. Nature and women are regarded as the two pillars upon which ecofeminist theory stands. However, the ecofeminist philosophy has a wider scope because ecofeminism is not only about nature and women; it "is about the convergence of different perspectives on relationality" (Vakoch & Mickey, 2018: xvii). In other words, the relational coexistence between the environment, i.e. the earth, and all other forms of life (human beings inclusive) is the central principle of ecofeminism. This peculiar feature of ecofeminism, relationality, i.e., the interdependent relationship existing among/between all forms of life and the earth, makes the feminist ecocritical theory a tempting intellectual endeavour, while its lofty goal of eliminating all kinds of oppression underlies its moral appeal. The latter also makes this theory an effective tool for political activism.

Ecofeminism embraces diversity, and it amalgamates a barrage of worldviews from various disciplines such as gender and religious studies, critical race and animal studies, literary theory and philosophy. It borrows analytical tools from numerous fields, adapts them and deploys them in order to examine the interconnectedness not only existing between humans and nature/animals, but also between the human beings themselves—between men and women or the Whites and the Blacks. The basic premise of ecofeminism is "that the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature" (Gaard, 1993: p.1). Ecofeminists insist on destroying the human/nature dichotomy as they consider it to be the foundation upon which the patriarchal cultures base their justification for women's domination and other forms of social injustice (Warren, 1997). A distinctive feature of this philosophy is that, "ecofeminism particularly includes the nonhuman nature in its discourse" (Vijayaraj, 2017: p.70). Feminist ecocritical theory should not be, as a matter of necessity, an exclusive practice of

the academia restricted within the walls of universities; it is a philosophy (a way of thinking) as well as a political activism (Bedford, 2018: p.197). By applying the ecofeminist theory on Robert Frost's poem "The Most of It", this paper hopes to establish an argument that Frost subscribes to the androcentric speciesism of his patriarchal Western society and that the poem can be used to illustrate how the works of literature have always been utilised in the perpetuation of the androcentric world views as well as justifying the patriarchal exploitation/oppression of both women and nature.

### ***The Most Of It***

*He thought he kept the universe alone;  
For all the voice in answer he could wake  
Was but the mocking echo of his own  
From some tree-hidden cliff across the lake.  
Some morning from the boulder-broken beach  
He would cry out on life, that what it wants  
Is not its own love back in copy speech,  
But counter-love, original response.  
And nothing ever came of what he cried  
Unless it was the embodiment that crashed  
In the cliff's talus on the other side,  
And then in the far distant water splashed,  
But after a time allowed for it to swim,  
Instead of proving human when it neared  
And someone else additional to him,  
As a great buck it powerfully appeared,  
Pushing the crumpled water up ahead,  
And landed pouring like a waterfall,  
And stumbled through the rocks with horny tread,  
And forced the underbrush—and that was all.*

## **II. MAIN DISCUSSION**

### **Sexist/Male Generic Language**

A sexist language discriminates against an individual or a group based on their sex. The male generic language is a form of sexist language which uses the word *man* and/or the masculine pronoun *he* to refer to both men and women—human beings generally. According to Ann Weatherall (2002), "many forms of sexist language have been identified, but feminist social psychologist Nancy Henley (1987) suggested that they might be classified into three types: language that ignores women; language that defines women narrowly; and language that depreciates

women" (p.13). Our concern here is the first category, the language that excludes women. The first line of the poem reads "He thought he kept the universe alone." Opening a poem with a masculine pronoun may not sound offensive/sexist for a layman reader or a non-feminist literary critic. However, for an ecofeminist critic, it is almost impossible for this opening not to have raised the alarm over what will follow in a poem that purports to be addressing a universal human experience of coming face to face with the biggest life puzzle, i.e., the question of existence. Since pondering over the wondrous phenomenon of the human existence or the human place in, and/or human's relation to the universe is not an intellectual venture exclusive to men, using the gender-specific pronoun (He) speaks volumes of the hidden patriarchal agenda the poem sets out to achieve. This is the "natural" way in which language is organised, and the masculine pronoun is normally used to refer to the human beings as a species. A counter argument like this is not uncommon to offer whenever feminist theorists voice out their discontent over how language itself has been twisted to serve the selfish interest of patriarchy in almost all cultures of the world from time immemorial. The use of the male generic language has been made to look natural due to the entrenched biases against women sanctioned by the male-centred cultures, religions and intellectual traditions such as philosophy and literature. This could explain why some feminist philosophers have invested considerable effort in unmasking the androcentric conspiracy entombed in the use of language. Karen J. Warren informs us that:

Many philosophers (e.g., Wittgenstein) have argued that the language we use mirrors and reflects our conception of ourselves and our world. When language is sexist, or naturist, it mirrors and reflects conceptions of women and nonhuman nature as inferior to, having less prestige or status than, that which is identified as male, masculine, or "human," i.e., male. (Warren, 1999: p.12)

It is the realization of this discriminatory, oppressive nature of the male sexist language, created and maintained by the patriarchal order that prompted some feminist theorists such as Luce Irigaray to go as far as proposing the creation of an especially feminist language *parole femme* or Helene Cixous's *écriture féminine*, which will cater for the peculiar needs of women, an exclusive feminine language that "evades males' monopoly, threatens patriarchy and allows novel creativity in women" (Handa, 2021: p.1).

Our language conveys not only our thoughts and ideas, but also our fears and prejudices. In "The Most of It," the persona's attitude seems as innocent as it is "normal" because the pronoun *he* was institutionalized as the most appropriate linguistic term that can "accurately" represent the humankind as a species. However, what cannot escape the fierce scrutiny of the ecofeminist critics are questions such as: why was *he* chosen in the first instance? Why it was not *she*? What are the consequences of the choice and the use of male generic *he* to represent the entire humanity in the poem?

Even though criticism of the male generic language began in the 1970's (Weatherall, 2002), a recently conducted research by Theresa Redl (2020) still finds out that the male bias is on the rise and that even in today's virtual/online interactions, the use of the male generic "personal pronoun 'he' [makes] both men and women show signs of a male bias to an equal extent" (Redl, 2020: 117, p.122). This simply shows how the patriarchal cultures succeed in linguistic personality cult surrounding the male-generic *he* to the extent that even women have been conditioned to view the *he* as an innocent term which represents the human species generally. The inevitable consequence of this anomaly creates a psychological condition in which both genders subconsciously approve that even in real life the female is inferior to the male and, women's voices need not to be heard. Women are "naturally" passive and therefore, they should be "protected" and represented. "Many ecofeminists insist that how we act toward the material world—rocks, forests, rivers, wolves—is influenced by and influences our language" (Legler, 1997: p.229) and therefore, as we shall see in the following paragraphs, there is a strong connection between the poet's employment of the male generic *he* and his treatment of women and nature, his overall attitude toward the universe in "The Most Of It".

If Frost was the most accomplished American poet in the 1920's (Academy of American Poets, 2004: 4) and the criticism of the male generic language began in the 1970's (Redl, 2020), then, it will not be wrong to argue that Frost achieved his fame at a time when the patriarchy's Machiavellian use of language as a tool for women's oppression was the norm. He is described as "[t]he author of searching, and often dark, meditations on universal themes, he is a quintessentially modern poet in his adherence to language as it is actually spoken" (American Literature: the Modernist Period: Frost, 2023). This simply means Frost's androcentrism is not a reflection of a poet's idiosyncrasy. It is a view, an opinion and a general philosophy prevailing in the Western society of his time. When (in 1960) the US Congress awarded



Frost the Congressional Gold Medal, they did so “in recognition of his poetry, which has enriched the culture of the United States and the philosophy of the world” (poetryverse, n.d: para.9). To say Frost’s poetry substantiated the cultural system of American patriarchy is a truism. Which worldview was being sold as “the philosophy of the world” in the above quote? For anybody conversant with the cultural heritage of the West, the answer comes in a single word: Patriarchy. Even after Frost’s death, the US of the late 1960’s and 1970’s was a society where women’s acquiescence and “the feminine habits of silence and docility” were the generally accepted social norms (Voss, 2017: p.1). The all-male US Supreme Court could only manage to admit its first female member in 1981, approximately 200 years after its establishment. “Out of 115 justices that have served on the court, only six have been women” (RepresentWomen, 2022). In the Western culture, women’s domination has always been presented as the *modus operandi* of nature, the most normal depiction of reality. Therefore, it can be accurately concluded that during the poet’s life time, male chauvinism was not an exception, it was the rule and, as evidenced by his employment of the male generic language not only in “The Most of It” but also in many of his other poems, Frost advocates for androcentric philosophy.

The biblical story of Adam and Eve is one of the “universal” themes referred above. Herbert Marks, a distinguished American critic writes: “The Most of It,” reads like a meditation on Adam’s life before Eve’s creation” (2003: 54). It does not require a deep thinking to realise why critics see parallels between “The Most of It” and the biblical story (Genesis) of man’s creation because the underlying message of the two is the same: man is the master and both women and nature must submit to him. The sole purpose of Eve’s creation was to solve Adam’s problem of feeling lonely! If woman was created to serve man, any attempt by women to question men’s authority will lead to dooms. It is counted as a rebellion against the Divine. In other words, the main lesson of the story could be summed up thus: whenever a man fails to use his authority to enforce obedience to God, the woman will act in disobedience and the result shall be a catastrophe. “The biblical narrative is by and large a narrative of patriarchy” (Matskevich, 2013) and, when critics establish homologues between “The Most of It” and the biblical story of Adam and Eve, it is because of the underlying thematic symmetries binding them together. The biblical story is still a pivot “in contemporary debates on animal rights, on the environment, on the relation between the sexes, on the status of women” (Almond, 1999: p.8). For a very good number of Christians, Adam and Eve’s story is

still used “to justify a subordinate position for women” (June, 2020: p.126).

Of course the poem resembles biblical story of Adam and Eve before the creation of the latter. From beginning to end, there is no feminine noun or pronoun. As a result of the perpetuity of the male generic language, the ‘default’ human gaze is codified as male, providing insidious justification for the erasure of women’s experiences and standpoints. Whether in the academic discourse or in their literatures and other intellectual discourses, patriarchal societies’ perennial employment of the male generic language has the same main agenda: silencing the women.

In order to conclude the discussion on how Frost had lent credence (via the use of the male generic language, which excludes women in “The Most of It”) to male chauvinism and androcentric speciesism, we ought to ponder over the implications of using such a language. The *Plaut v. Spendthrift Farm*, a US Supreme Court’s landmark case which culminated in securing the US judiciary from the interfering encroachment of the legislators will make a very good illustration here. Justice Antonin Scalia who announced the Supreme Court’s decision invoked Robert Frost’s poem “Mending Wall” to support the court’s judgment. “Judges and lawyers routinely seek to clarify their pronouncements and [support their] arguments about the law by resorting to metaphors and stories. They do so because law is inevitably a matter of language. The law can only be articulated in words” (Dolin, 2007: p.2). Although law and literature seem to be two disciplines completely detached from each other in terms of their ends, they both utilise the same means—language (narratives & rhetoric)—without which their highest goals can never be achieved. Both “law and literature structure reality through language” (Dolin, 2007: p.11). In his *A Critical Introduction to Law and Literature*, Kieran Dolin (2007: pp.1-16) gives a comprehensive summary of how Frost’s “Mending Wall” influenced the Supreme Court’s decision, and how two of the justices had even openly and clearly cited some lines of the poem in the course of expounding the judgment. This is a historical legal phenomenon that is invariably referred to daily in the American courts in order to support the doctrine of separation of powers between the three tiers of government. If language/poetry has such a governing power to influence sensitive, life-or-death professions such as law, then its (ab)use cannot be taken for granted.

### Thinking/Feeling Gender Bias

In addition to the sinister machination of imposing the male generic language by the male-centered cultures, the verse “He *thought* he kept the universe alone” (my

emphasis) also conveys a sexist worldview, which is both demeaning and unfair to women, and which might even be worse than the use of the male generic language. The universal human attribute of logical reasoning (the human cognitive ability) has been made a male exclusive trait by the verse while the use of nominalization, i.e., the use of a noun clause as the object of transitive verb "thought", creates an extra emphasis endowing man with not only the cognitive ability but also an additional motor ability, the ability to act—the ability to keep. The verb "to keep" connotes physical strength, dexterity, stamina among others. Therefore, it is not wrong to imply from the verse that both cognitive and motor abilities belong to men, they are men's qualities. The use of two masculine pronouns, both in the accusative position in the sentence (the doer, the actor and the source of the action) and the use of two transitive verbs *thought* and *kept* evidence this claim. The *he* is shown to be thoughtful and active. The mono-syllable nature of the verbs and their final sound /t/ emphasize the accumulation of those qualities in the man. The doubling of the action-oriented verbs and the repetition of the masculine pronoun *he* in one sentence "He thought he kept the universe alone" simply implies the combination of those essential human attributes in the man; whereas, the aptness and swiftness of breath when pronouncing a mono-syllable verb stress that those two qualities are found in one place. The letter "t" that concludes both the spellings and the pronunciations of the verbs (*thought* and *kept*) foregrounds that effect.

The sexist biases that women have a less cognitive ability; and "naturally," women are passive have been promoted so cleverly thus: in the poem, we have the male, present and thinking and acting; anticlockwise, the female is absent entirely. Inasmuch as her invisibility is successfully secured, *she* is automatically deprived of both the ability to think and the ability to act—the question of ontology precedes that of agency. A pioneer eco-feminist theorist, Greta Gaard writes: "Speaking is associated with power, knowledge, and dominance, while listening is associated with subordination" (2017: xxvii). That being the case, the fact that it is a man who speaks in the poem reveals the poet's misogynistic/androcentric bias toward both women and nature. The poem puts women out of sight by making a man the sole representative of humanity; it makes nature passive by putting the man in the position of authority. The man is the speaker as well as the master: the *he* is the active observer whilst the *she*/nature is the passive "object" being observed.

### Objectification of Nature

The man/*he* is the grammatical subject as well as the theoretical subject of the poem. The poem portrays the man in the wilderness as the owner of not just the particular place where he stands, not just the owner of the planet earth but the owner of the entire universe. The man possesses it and controls it and therefore, objectifies it. Through the man's objectification of nature, his insatiable greed for material things and his lust for power are both betrayed. In other words, the man's objectification of nature is fuelled by patriarchy's naked selfishness and sheer greed. This capitalist tendency of the man, which makes him objectifies nature and treats nature as his property, is traceable in many of Frost's poems such as "Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening" in which we read the lines below:

*Whose woods these are I think I know.*

*His house is in the village, though;*

*He will not see me stopping here*

*To watch his woods fill up with snow.*

The existing woods are given to a non-existing man as if the woods cannot have an existence of their own except for the sake of (the) man. The woods/trees are objectified, otherised and owned; they are incapable of being what they naturally are—an important natural partner of human beings on which human beings rely for supply of the oxygen, the source of safety (e.g., when used to built shelter) as well as food. The fact that all of the four lines of the quatrain (I: Whose; II: His; III: He; IV: His) carry some message about the man, betrays the inordinate greediness and androcentric mindset of the poet. It cannot be an accident that everything in the poem is owned either by the speaker or the man in the village who "owns" the woods (His woods, His house, My little horse). The horse too is male not a mare: "He gives his harness bells a shake" (l 9).

The last point above takes us back to "The Most of It" because there too, Frost's male chauvinism would not allow him to stage a female deer. A doe does not deserve such a lofty position to be an emissary (embodiment) of the universe. Thus, when the male human cries out and nature "responds", a male deer (a buck) appears: As a great buck it powerfully appeared / Pushing the crumpled water up ahead / And landed pouring like a waterfall / And stumbled through the rocks with horny tread / And forced the underbrush—and that was all (l 16-20). Frost's choice of a buck in the binary pair of *buck/doe* complements his choice of *man/he* in the *man/woman* and this is because

*the way in which women and nature  
have been conceptualized historically in*

*the Western intellectual tradition has resulted in devaluing whatever is associated with women, emotion, animals, nature, and the body, while simultaneously elevating in value those things associated with men, reason, humans, culture, and the mind.*" (Gaard, 1993: p.5)

In the same passion with how the poet ascribes to the man the cognitive ability to think and the motor ability to keep, he assigns some impressive qualities to this male animal such as the ability to move/swim and the ability to influence his environment. The buck is described as strong and active too, just as his male human counterpart, the *he*. The buck's actions go in line with that description: it "powerfully appeared" and "pushed" the waves to make its way towards the man and, reaching the bank, it "landed pouring like a waterfall / And stumbled through the rocks with horny tread / And forced the underbrush" before it disappears into the jungle (l 18-20). In addition to the use of these action-oriented verbs, which signifies power; the use of the conjunction "And" three times, in the beginning of the last three lines all of which tell us something done by the great buck, reveals the strength of this male animal and its ability to achieve so many things within a very short time frame... and, if a male animal possesses such an enormous prowess, what about his human counterpart, the "owner" of the universe? The mood of admiration pervades the concluding verses of the poem as the narrator's heart is filled up with happiness due to the impressive performance of the male character, the great buck.

However, despite all this impressive performance as well as the admiring tone used by the narrator in describing the buck, Frost did not allow the man *in* the poem to feel accomplished as being part of the environment because doing that would be tantamount to destroying his deeply ingrained speciesist self-concept, which always makes him look down on animals in particular and non-human nature in general. The man's protest continues and,

*And nothing ever came of what he cried  
Unless it was the embodiment that crashed  
In the cliff's talus on the other side,  
And then in the far distant water splashed,  
But after a time allowed for it to swim,  
Instead of proving human when it neared  
And someone else additional to him,  
As a great buck it powerfully appeared,*

The man's intellectual ineptitude results from his androcentric speciesism. He thinks himself superior to the fauna and flora found in the environment, he is a man of reason and authority. He does not merely transcend the planet earth, he owns the universe. He is a "rational" man, who detests nature's "irrationality" and consequently complains continuously; however, "nothing ever came of what he cried" except a manifestation, "Unless it was the embodiment that crashed / In the cliff's talus on the other side" (l 10-11). It seems now that a conversation opens up between the man and the universe. The embodiment is there to convey a message, to offer some sort of response to the man's queries.

Incidentally, the way the embodiment appears or arrives at the scene matters a lot. Most often a messenger's manner adds/subtracts value to/from the actual message s/he is sent to deliver. So, how did the representative of the universe arrive? It "crashed!" The Britannica Dictionary defines *crash* as an intransitive verb which means "to hit something hard enough to cause serious damage or destruction" (The Britannica [online] Dictionary). The word *crash* carries a barrage of negative connotations: nouns like collision and accident; adjectives such as damaged, demolished, destroyed, shattered and scattered among others. The embodiment crashed "In the cliff's talus on the other side" (l 11). Why *cliff* of all parts of the mountain? A cliff is a dangerous, slippery and usually sharp edge of a mountain/rock. This imagery evokes the sense of insecurity and vulnerability, and a never-ending fierce competition existing in nature even among the elements of the landscape that are neither animals nor humankind. A cliff signifies the eternal conflict between land and water, and is not always a safe place to be as seen in the poem when the buck falls off. The choice is deliberate for a different part of the mountain (i.e. a different word) such as the *peak* or the *base*, would have done a different job entirely. The next verse reads "And then in the far distant water splashed" (l 12). It does not require any elaboration that all life on this planet depends on water. Scientifically speaking, water is the source of life. But being a non-human component of nature, water is not considered as something close. It is distant, and it is far. Both adjectives create a wide breadth between water and man. The verb *splash* itself connotes some messy, noisy, unplanned and irregular activities just as when water splashes it rises and falls in an uneven way. By ignoring the verbs that signify calm, ordered and smooth movement of water such as *flow*, the poet chooses to emphasize that water too is chaotic. He prefers to draw readers' attention to the dangerous nature of water as it tries to get the buck drowned. After Frost succeeds in portraying the land (cliff), water, and the animals (the

embodiment that crashed) as cruel, dangerous—detached and distant, far away from humankind; subsequently, he uses the word *human* and follows it with the word *near* in the same line. The poet's androcentric speciesism is betrayed: in the verses where he mentions the non-human parts of nature, distance (and other negatives) prevails whilst in the verse where the word *human* occurs, proximity is the undertone. It is not that the man never sees, finds or hears anything during his encounter with the universe. What makes the narrator to say "nothing ever came of what he cried" is the fact that the man convinces himself internally that all he encounters is non-human and all non-human does not possess any inherent value.

When viewed as a whole, "The Most of It" is a masterpiece, but its message is not all-embracing, to say the least. Even though nature attempts to entertain the man and provide him with "answers" to his queries in her own sagacious and spontaneous way, he does not seem convinced or satisfied due to his androcentric arrogance. For example, rather than reflecting on the natural phenomenon of echo (e.g., how and why do echoes occur?), the man becomes angry and discards the echo as an insult. He thinks it was "but the mocking echo of his own" speech (l 3) not an "original response" (l 8). Likewise, when the deer approaches, displaying its unrivalled athletic skills and mastery of how to cope with life challenges and the ontological anxieties of being in time and space, the man does not get any relief because he was expecting a human being, "someone else additional to him" (l 15). A similar obsession with anthropomorphism could be found in "Choose Something Like a Star," another Frost's poem in which the speaker orders a star and/or the universe to employ the humans' language and communicate to him:

*Use language we can comprehend.*

*Tell us what elements you blend.*

*It gives us strangely little aid,*

*But does tell something in the end.*

Here too, the persona insists that nature behave in a human way else no communication can take place between the universe and human beings. For the universe to have any value, it has to be human or human-like. However, even if it were to employ the use of the human language, the poet has had his mind full of androcentric arrogance so whatever the star might have said, will be of tertiary importance to him, of "strangely little aid".

The man *in* the poem must not be confused with the narrator. Although the two may refer to a single entity (same "person" when the narrator uses the first person pronoun), in "The Most of It" they are not the same. This

distinction is necessary for us to grasp the contradictory stance that the narrator (whom I assume to be Frost) is pleased with the great buck, admires its impressive performance and describes both the buck and what it does in a colourful language using a gleeful tone and what is being elucidated here that the man *in* the poem is disappointed by the appearance of the buck as he is expecting a human, a fellow man. The fact that these are two different "persons" has been made plain by the use of the third person singular pronoun "he" and its possessive form "his" throughout the poem. Had it been the same person telling about an encounter he had had once, the pronouns would have been "I" and "my" not "he" and "his." Rather than softening the patriarchal bias, the difference between Frost/narrator and the man *in* poem hardens it as the narrator/Frost assumes the status of omniscient observer who, being not directly involved in the drama can pass a clear, objective judgment about what is going on. Should we accept what the narrator tells us (about the nonexistence of the female and/or their passivity; and the use of the male generic language) as an innocuous account of a natural law being passed to us by an objective observer? Have women suffered any oppression worse than making their subordination look as a natural phenomenon?

In androcentric cultures, "animals are seen as inferior to humans (men)," and this kind of thinking "reinforces and authorizes women's inferior status" (Warren, 1997: p.12). When the representative of nature (the embodiment) approaches, the man was ready to engage in a dialogue but under a pair of preconditions: 1) the message must be brought by a human being and 2) in human tongue. Consequently, when the buck/messenger appears, the man ignores it as well as the "message" it brought. The human exceptionalism of the man blinds him from seeing the stunning beauty of nature. In the poem, the man's inability to appreciate the intricate complexity of how the universe operates as a gigantic indivisible web (in which man is a tiny thread) is a byproduct of his androcentric speciesism. The man does not see himself as a member of the same primordial family of the earth and consequently, he feels dejected and depressed. While being within the embrace of the earth, which supplies him with everything for his survival; and despite being surrounded by his "kith and kin" in form of animals and plants; he feels lonely and deserted. He is unable to act accordingly due to frustration and disappointment. Worse still, the man fails to learn from the buck and fails to decode the message nature "sends" to him simply because the message was not brought by another human being. His breathtaking arrogance makes it impossible for him to learn from the buck. The man, who thinks he has the entire



universe and keeps it alone in the beginning of the poem, suddenly realizes he is poorer than a buck in the end. The buck has food to eat and water to drink; and it has a "home" (i.e., "the underbrush") to hide itself away from the stranger's gaze. The buck perfectly masters its environment and relates to it in a cordial, lively way. The same blessings (and probably more) nature offers to the man. However, due to his androcentric speciesism, the man cannot adapt to his environment; he neither acknowledges, nor appreciates the abundant gifts of nature that are scattered in the universe. He stoops there poleaxed, helpless and lost in evil thoughts: asking whether that is all the universe has to offer.

The man *in* the poem is none but Frost or, at least, his literary alter ego. In "Our Hold on the Planet", Frost laments that "There is much in nature against us. But we forget." He goes on and declares his faith in the human exceptionalism openly as follows:

Take nature altogether since time began,  
Including human nature, in peace and war,  
And it must be a little more in favor of man,  
Say a fraction of one per cent at the very least,  
Or our number living wouldn't be steadily more,  
Our hold on the planet wouldn't have so increased. (Bailey, 2014: p.245)

Frost first establishes nature as an enemy to man. He makes it beyond the realm of doubt that he is a devout speciesist and what is more interesting here, unlike in "The Most of It", he lays the foundation of his androcentric speciesism bare. In other words, here Frost tells us the "logical" basis of his belief in the human exceptionalism which is the steady increase of the human population, our vast number on the earth. To save both time and space, there is no need to analyse the argument above. A critical but innocent question will serve reason here: if the human exceptionalism is based on the reproductive ability of the human beings and the large size of the human population on the earth, then any creature(s), any organism(s) that has/have a larger number is/are superior to us. This is the logical consequence of Frost's claim in "Our Hold on the Planet," but accepting it will demolish the human exceptionalist worldview altogether since there are numerous organisms (don't say bacteria, just take the ants) that have higher in populations than mankind.

If we dig deeper in the poem once again, some salient points would be revealed. In the beginning of the poem, the man thinks selfishly: "He thought he kept the

universe alone." The man's selfishness begets an inordinate greediness which results into thinking that he is an absolute master, the owner of the whole universe. In the middle he acts foolishly: "Some morning from the boulder-broken beach / He would cry out on life, that what it wants / Is not its own love back in copy speech / But counter-love, original response" (l 8). He does not engage into any constructive endeavour, he only grumbles. He "cries out on life" trying to force the laws of nature to obey him and act according to his androcentric expectations. The claim establishes by the first line that the man possesses a high cognitive power falls flat entirely. The man does not ponder about the echo; he does not care to learn as to why or how it occurs or how it could be beneficial to him. Nor does he regard it as a form of natural response to his request. In the middle of the poem, as nature realizes the man is deaf, it uses another means to reply his request. An ambassador, a deer arrives. The deer does perfectly well in conveying the message practically. Yet, the man insists on seeing his fellow human or hearing a human voice talking to him. He dismisses every hint highlighted to him, and he cancels every cue conveyed to him. It is now very clear that androcentric human exceptionalism is the source of the man's alienation from his environment.

That in the end of the poem the man is no longer heard about arouses an enormous uncertainty because readers are not allowed to know the fate of the man. What is certain is that he is bitterly disappointed. Is he going to take his own life out of frustration? Instead of feeling disappointed, if it were a woman *in* the poem, she would have felt sorry for the buck (as it falls off the cliff and gets soaked up) because dozens of experiments conducted by psychologists have shown that women are more empathetic than men. A renowned American psychologist, David G. Myers captures this brilliantly: "When you want empathy and understanding, someone to whom you can disclose your joys and hurts, to whom do you turn? Most men and women usually turn to women. One explanation for this male-female empathy difference is that women tend to outperform men at reading others' emotions"(2013: pp.165). Because they engage with their environment more constructively, it is no surprise "that women are more supportive of animal movement causes across a range of cultural contexts" (Deckha, 2013: p.6). Greta Gaard tells us about some classic studies conducted by Nancy Chodorow's and Carol Gilligan's. She writes:

[the] studies have repeatedly shown, a sense of self as separate is more common in men, while an interconnected sense of self is more common in women. These conceptions



of self are also the foundation for two different ethical systems: the separate self often operates on the basis of an ethic of rights or justice, while the interconnected self makes moral decisions on the basis of an ethic of responsibilities or care. (Gaard, 1993: p.2)

Unlike a woman who would like to care and connect, the man is there to conquer and command. In the poem, the man's overall goal is to explore and exploit so he orders nature to obey him, answer his queries in the human way and when that does not happen, his heart breaks down. Even if the man did not die in the past, currently he is dying because *synecdoche* makes the man *in* the poem to stand for the all of us, the humanity, and as a result of men's androcentric speciesist worldview, the humanity is dying slowly but steadily and more painfully. The UN Womenwatch reports:

Detrimental effects of climate change can be felt in the short-term through natural hazards, such as landslides, floods and hurricanes; and in the long-term, through more gradual degradation of the environment. The adverse effects of these events are already felt in many areas, including in relation to, inter alia, agriculture and food security; biodiversity and ecosystems; water resources; human health; human settlements and migration patterns; and energy, transport and industry.

In many of these contexts, women are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change than men—primarily as they constitute the majority of the world's poor and are more dependent for their livelihood on natural resources that are threatened by climate change. (The UN Womenwatch Factsheet 2)

In a similar way with how the female is banished in the poem, in reality too women's voices are not given audience as they occupy the lower rung on the societal political ladder. "Women in 2011 were but 19 percent of the world's legislators (IPU, 2011)," (Myers, 2013: p.166). One of the pioneer ecofeminist theorists, Karen J. Warren encourages ecofeminist critics to be taking empirical data seriously and consequently it will not be wrong to ask: how can this yawning disparity ever be justified? While the males form 81% of the world's lawmakers, the females end up with 19%? This is despite that fact that the world's population of men and women is almost the same. "The

number of men [is] (50.4%) and [that of the] women [is] (49.6%)"(INED, 2020). Women have lesser influence even in making those decisions which exclusively pertain to them. The fact that women suffer the consequences of the debilitating side effects of male-initiated climate change more than men does not give them any say in designing governmental policies on how to tackle the challenges. Women had to fight, and still have to fight in order to get the policy makers' attention to behave responsibly and take care of the earth, the only home of the human species. The vast majority of the catastrophic natural disasters the world experiences are an inevitable result of the shortsighted human/nature dualism, a world view initiated by the androcentric speciesism and perpetuated through the patriarchal cultural practices such as literature.

### III. CONCLUSION

This paper began by analysing the diction of the poem and the language use, starting from the first line and the very first word of the poem. Through a critical examination of the male generic language of the poem, this paper raises and answers some vital questions such as why would a poem which purports to be addressing one of the most pressing philosophical questions (the question of existence) present only males (a man and buck) on the stage and employ only the male-centered narrative? Why use only a *he* to represent humanity as a species? The analysis of poem did reveal why the pervasive presence of the *he* is treacherous by scrutinizing the semantic as well as the syntactic aspects of the guilty pronoun (He), the pronoun that has been used to put countless generations of women into bondage without even allowing them to know they are being oppressed or exploited. The analysis brings Frost's male chauvinism to the limelight by explaining how the poet's banishment of the female from the grand theatre of the poem schemed to achieve a deceitful patriarchal agenda of concealing the women entirely, of forcing them to be out of sight so that they will be "represented" by the all-knowing men. It was made very clear that the poet's use of the male generic language is everything but innocuous.

The poem was shown to be propagating the thinking/feeling and the activeness/passivity gender biases. The paper logically argued that by assigning the thinking ability to the male exclusively, the poet had successfully assigned emotionality to the female; whereas, by making the man *in* the poem an active character, the poet perpetuates the sexist bias of viewing women as passive humans. After all, the fact that the poem does not feature a female character, whether animal or human, conveys the poet's unconscious belief that the female is not active.

Frost could not imagine a doe to have possessed those active and athletic qualities displayed by the buck in the poem. On the other hand, objectification of nature, which is the bedrock of nature's exploitation, was made clear too. Nature is treated as an object, the man's passive property which he owns and controls. Activeness is associated with speaking while passivity is associated with listening: in "The Most of It" it is the man who speaks and nature "listens", and even though nature "attends" to him, the man was neither convinced nor satisfied due to his androcentric/anthropomorphic arrogance. Rather than reflecting on the natural phenomenon of echo (e.g., how and why do echoes occur?), the man becomes angry and discards the echo as an insult. He thinks it was "but the mocking echo of his own" speech (l 3) not an "original response" (l 8). Likewise, when the deer approaches, displaying its unrivalled athletic skills and mastery of how to cope with the challenges and the anxieties of being, the man neither learns anything nor gets any relief because he was expecting a human being, "someone else additional to him" (l 15).

This paper demonstrated how Frost used poetry to reinforce the patriarchal agenda of women's subjugation which was exerting predominance across all spheres and aspects of the Western society during his time. Also, the covert connection existing between women's oppression and the exploitation of nature, as obtained in the poem "The Most of It", was made crystal clear by this study. The poet had no space for any female, be it an animal or a human being. That is an unmistakable evidence of his androcentric anthropomorphism. The world of the poem is exclusively male-dominated, so are both the diction and the language as it was evidently explained in the main part of this study. In the end, the last objective set and achieved by this study was exposing the manner in which the works of literature were (and still are) used as a tool for reinforcing the iniquitous culture of patriarchy and how the promoters of patriarchal propaganda (such as Frost, in the realm of literature) were/are handsomely rewarded by the Western society.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Academy of American Poets: Robert Frost. (n.d). <https://poets.org/poet/robert-frost>
- [2] Almond, Philip C. (1999). *Adam and Eve in Seventeenth-Century Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- [3] "Are There More Men or More Women in the World?" In *All About Population*. [https://www.ined.fr/en/everything\\_about\\_population/demo-graphic-facts-sheets/faq/more-men-or-women-in-the-world/#](https://www.ined.fr/en/everything_about_population/demo-graphic-facts-sheets/faq/more-men-or-women-in-the-world/#) Updated: 05/06/2020
- [4] Bailey, Thomas. (2014). "Reading Robert Frost Environmentally: Contexts Then and Now. In Mark Richardson (Ed.), *Robert Frost in Context*. New York: Cambridge UP.
- [5] Bedford, Anna. (2018). "Ecofeminist, Post-colonial, and Anti-Capitalist Possibilities in Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring*." In Vakoch, Douglas A., & Mickey, Sam. (Eds). *Ecofeminism in Dialogue*. 15–30. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- [6] Benin, Nikola. (n.d). "Robert Frost's Poetry." Unpublished. [https://www.academia.edu/42019111/Robert\\_Frost's\\_poetry](https://www.academia.edu/42019111/Robert_Frost's_poetry)
- [7] Deckha, Maneesha. (2013). Animal Advocacy, Feminism and Intersectionality. In *Deportate, Esuli, Profughe: Revista Telematica di Studi Sulla Memoria Femminile*. DEP Nov. 23, 2013. ISSN 1824 - 4483
- [8] Dolin, Kieran. (2007). *A Critical Introduction to Law and Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [9] Faggen, R. (2008). *The Cambridge Introduction to Robert Frost*. New York: Cambridge University Press
- [10] Gaard, Greta. (Ed). (1993). *Ecofeminism: Women, Animal, Nature*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- [11] Gaard, Greta. (2017). *Critical Ecofeminism*. Maryland: Lexington Books
- [12] Gastil, John. (1990). "Generic pronouns and Sexist Language: The Oxymoronic Character of Masculine Generics" *Sex Roles*, Vol. 23, Nos. 11/12, Plenum Publishing Corporations
- [13] Gerber, P. L. (2023, July 2). "Robert Frost". In *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Robert-Frost>. Last Updated: Jul 2, 2023
- [14] Handa, Gauri. (2021). "Parler Femme: Assessing Women's Writing through the Lens of Feminist Literary Theory". *Research Review International Journal of Multidisciplinary*, 2021; 6(5):162-167 ISSN: 2455-3085 <https://doi.org/10.31305/rrijm.2021.v06.i05.023>
- [15] June, Pamela B. (2020). *Solidarity with the Other Being on the Planet: Alice Walker, Ecofeminism, and Animals in Literature*. Illinois: Northwestern University Press
- [16] Le Guin, Ursula K. (1987). *Buffalo Gals and Other Animal Presences*. California: Capra Press
- [17] Legler, Gretchen T. (1997). *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism*. In Warren, Karen J. (Ed). *Women, Culture, Nature*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- [18] Marks, Herbert. (2003) The Counter-Intelligence of Robert Frost. In Bloom, H. (Ed.) *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Robert Frost*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers
- [19] Matskevich, Karalina. (February, 2013). "The Subject and the Other: Construction of Gender and Identity in Genesis" (Doctoral Thesis) A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy Department of Biblical Studies: University of Sheffield
- [20] Mies, M. & Shiva, V. (2014). *Ecofeminism*. London: Zed Books Ltd.
- [21] Myers, G. David. (2010). *Social Psychology* (11<sup>th</sup> edition). New York: The McGraw Hill Companies.
- [22] Poetryverse.com. (n.d). "Robert Frost." <https://www.poetryverse.com/robert-frost>

- [23] Poetandpoem. (n.d). *Biography: Robert Frost*.  
<https://poetandpoem.com/Robert-Frost>
- [24] PoemHunter. (2004). *Classic Poetry Series: Roberts Frost Poems*. PoemHunter.com/The World's Poetry Archive/  
<https://www.poemhunter.com/search/?q=Robert%20Frost>
- [25] Redl, Theresa. (January 21, 2021). "Masculine Generic Pronouns: Investigating the Processing of an Unintended Gender Cue" (Doctoral Thesis). Radboud University: The Netherlands.
- [26] Represent Women101. (n.d). "Women on the Supreme Court."  
[https://www.representwomen.org/women\\_supreme\\_court](https://www.representwomen.org/women_supreme_court)
- [27] Shah, Rutva N. (2022). "Eco - Feminist Perspective of Robert Frost Poem: Birches". In *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Modern Education*, Volume 8, Issue 1, Page Number 23-25, 2022.
- [28] Southern Adventist University Mckee Library. (2023). *American Literature: The Modernist Period: Frost*. Last Updated: July 13, 2023 5:15PM  
<https://southern.libguides.com/modernist/frost>
- [29] Srivastava, Varshika (2017) "Eco Feminism and Robert Frost's Poetry: A Critical Analysis". In *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Modern Education*, Volume 3, Issue 1, Page Number 526-529, 2017.
- [30] Taylor, Paul W. (2011). (Ed). *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics*. (25th Anniversary Edition). Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- [31] The Britannica Dictionary (n.d). "Crash". Retrieved July 15, 2023, from  
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Robert-Frost>
- [32] The Kennedy Center. (n.d). "Robert Frost Recites 4 of His Poems"  
<https://www.kennedy-center.org/video/center/other/2020/robert-frost/>
- [33] The United Nations WomenWatch. (n.d). Fact Sheet: Women, Gender Equality and Climate Change. In *The UN Internet Gateway on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women.*: <https://www.un.org/womenwatch>
- [34] Vakoch, Douglas A., & Mickey, Sam. (2018). (Eds). *Literature and Ecofeminism: Intersectional and International Voices*. Oxford: Routledge Taylor & Francis
- [35] Vijayaraj, Bhuvaneswari. (2017). "A Comprehensive Study of Ecofeminism." *Anthropologist*. Vol. 30(1): 68-75 (2017). Kamla Raj DOI: 10.31901/24566802.2017/30.01.08
- [36] Voss, K. Wilmot. (2017). *Women Politicking Politely: Advancing Feminism in the 1960s and 1970s*. London: Lexington Books
- [37] Warren, Karen J. (1997) *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- [38] Weatherall, Ann. (2002). *Gender, Language and Discourse*. London: Routledge Taylor & Francis



# The Challenges Experienced by Visually Impaired Students in Moroccan Universities

Halima Tahiri

Faculty of psychology and educational science, Kuleuven University, Belgium

Received: 03 Jul 2023; Received in revised form: 02 Aug 2023; Accepted: 09 Aug 2023; Available online: 23 Aug 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— *The current study aimed to investigate the challenges and barriers faced by visually impaired students in an educational environment, particularly in Moroccan universities. To identify these challenges and barriers, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 visually impaired students from the majority of Moroccan universities to explain the challenges these students experienced in their studies, mainly during the exam. Equally important, this research examines the impact of these challenges on the academic performance of this kind of population with disabilities in Morocco. The study found that visually impaired students experienced four main challenges in Moroccan Universities: administrative, academic, environmental, and social difficulties. Based on these findings, a set of recommendations to Moroccan policymakers was made to respond properly to the needs of persons with disabilities and deal with the challenges that visually impaired students face when learning and taking exams in higher education regularly. Indeed, this research will play a crucial role in raising the awareness of Moroccan universities about the meaning of inclusive education and the importance of creating an inclusive and diverse environment in which visually impaired students can learn equally as their non-visually impaired peers can.*



**Keywords**— *Visually impaired, inclusive education, discrimination, inequality, challenges.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

People with disabilities, mainly visually impaired students, are among the most excluded and discriminated against groups in our societies in general and in Moroccan society in particular. Visually impaired students in Morocco experience various forms of discrimination and inequality based on gender, social status, age, and place of residence. In many Moroccan universities, visually impaired students encounter several complexities that present a challenge for them to start or even pursue their education. The lack of the main facilities and materials to meet the needs and support students with special disabilities is one of the challenges that contributes to making visually impaired students unwilling to attend schools or universities (Allam & Martin, 2021).

Before embarking on the main issue of the challenges faced by visually impaired students in Moroccan universities, it is useful to provide some background

information about the history of teaching visually impaired students from 19 century onwards in Morocco.

From 19 century onwards in Morocco, visually impaired students were neglected, marginalized, and considered a burden on Moroccan society that must be escaped from; they were excluded from Moroccan society, which holds negative attitudes and misconceptions about blind people; at that time, no schools or curricula were designed for fully sighted students; those later did not even receive support services from vision support teachers, classmates, or interventional measures to help them overcome their visual limitations.

Visually impaired students were superheated by non-visually handicapped students, and they were fully prevented from education and participating in school as their normal peers (Kroum & Benmassoud, 2017). Schools were not able to accept them for several reasons, including lack of training, experience, and education on how to teach



visually impaired students; teachers did not know how to deal with and teach those kinds of handicapped students; and they lacked appropriate techniques and materials to support and teach these people as equally as their normal classmates.

A few years ago, the movement of inclusive education emerged in Morocco, which aimed to integrate and incorporate visually impaired students into schools equally as their normal peers. This movement emphasizes the need to produce and adopt new teaching materials, approaches, styles, and routines to adapt to and familiarize VI students with the classroom environment. Indeed, this movement reflects that inclusive education is the main solution to help change society's negative vision toward blind people; it is also a great opportunity to prepare visually impaired students for their future roles in Moroccan society and create a kind of social integration, as Anne (2004) stated in her book, *the Gambia: Department of State for basic and secondary education*, that inclusive education is beneficial not only to blind students but also to all other students in schools because it enhances social integration (Anne, 2004).

Although inclusive education was considered a new system that emerged many years ago, it has not yet been implemented in many Moroccan higher institutions. This can be observed by the decreasing number of visually impaired students in public universities in Morocco, where most visually impaired students attend educational institutions and are taught using the same materials, approaches, teaching style, and routine, and examined in the same manner and the same subject content as their non-visually impaired peers. Therefore, this situation makes these students face many challenges and difficulties in their studies that may negatively affect their academic achievements. This situation raises several questions: What kinds of challenges do visually impaired students encounter at Moroccan universities? Do these challenges have any effect? Another way to formulate this question is to determine the extent to which Moroccan university staff and professors are aware of the challenges experienced by the visually impaired students.

The general purpose of this study is to determine the challenges and barriers experienced by visually impaired students in Morocco universities, as this could help gain a better understanding of these challenges and work toward creating an inclusive environment where visually impaired students can learn equally as their non-visually impaired peers.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Several scholars have discussed the challenges and difficulties experienced by visually impaired students, including blind and low-vision students, in an educational environment. Alianda Bwire Maindi (2018) stated that one of the biggest challenges facing visually impaired students in the educational environment is the science educational environment, which is fully designed for fully sighted students and delivered through sight-related tasks (Bwire Maindi, 2018). However, designing an expanded core curriculum is essential for developing and enhancing the skills and senses of visually impaired students to access information effectively. The expanded core curriculum (ECC) is an essential curriculum that is considered foundational to preparing visually impaired students for success as adults. Indeed, the ECC was formalized by Dr. Philip Hatlen in 1996 Based on nine components: Compensatory access, sensory efficiency, assistive technology, orientation and mobility, social interaction, self-determination, independent living, recreation and leisure and career education ('The expanded core curriculum Incorporating the best learning approaches for your child with blindness or vision impairment')

Lack of learning materials, such as audio tape, braille, enlarged print assistive devices, technology, and other materials and resources that support the needs of visually impaired students, is another challenge experienced by visually impaired students. In their article, challenges and opportunities to implement inclusive education Wondwosen Mitiku, Yitayal Alemu, and Semahegn Mengistu (2014) indicated that the major challenge to the implementation of effective inclusive education was the lack of educational materials written in Braille and other supportive materials (Mitiku et al., 2014). Similarly, Etenesh (2000) suggested that the lack of materials and learning resources designed for visually impaired students is the main challenge in implementing inclusive education in Ethiopia (Etenesh, 2000). Drawing on the same dichotomy, Abebe Demisew (2014) stated that different factors destructively affect the implementation of inclusive education, including lack of awareness about disability, scarcity of resources, inappropriate curriculum, and shortage of trained and skilled teachers (Demisew, 2014).

The lack of trained and skilled teachers also hinders the learning development of visually impaired students. When teachers lack the competencies and skills to deal with and teach visually impaired students, they may encounter several challenges in their education. Baraka Michael Mwakyēja (2013) stated that teachers' incompetence and inefficiency play a major role in increasing the challenges and difficulties faced by visually impaired students

(Mwakyaja, 2013). In this regard, the Ministry of Education must provide training programs for teachers to train and educate them on how to use sign language, braille materials, hearing aids, tactile diagrams, maps, and so forth.

The lack of inclusive education policies also affects the learning processes of visually impaired students. Although inclusive education was mentioned in Moroccan's policies (Naciri, 2022), its application remains very weak in both public and private schools, as well as in universities. Inclusive education policies are underutilized by teachers and staff members because of insufficient teaching methods, materials, and training for teachers, inspectors, and apprentices to make them better equipped to support this category of students, based on a careful assessment of these children and their learning speed.

The lack of assistant staff in schools and universities constitutes a major obstacle and challenge for this category of students, particularly on the day of the exam. Many visually impaired students in Morocco encounter a difficult challenge on the day of the exam, as they cannot find anyone to help them write on exam paper. However, some of them ask their classmates to assist them, but those later may have exams during the same period, or they may lack commitment and accuracy. Therefore, both schools and universities must pay great attention to this particular problem and work hard to provide frameworks and assistants for this category of students to support them on the exam day.

The lack of time necessary to understand the courses may also be considered a barrier to the learning and educational processes of visually impaired students. Students who are visually impaired are slow in the learning and understanding process (Kapur, 2018); they need time to understand information and complete their tasks and duties effectively. This makes it difficult for both VI students and teachers, because these later need to ensure that visually impaired students understand, listen carefully, and pay adequate attention to their classmates. Indeed, it may be necessary for teachers to consider the amount of time allotted to visually impaired students and give them the necessary time to understand the information, as well as enough time to answer the questions, especially on the day of the exam.

The lack of services, special units, and committees to support disabled persons in universities and schools is another obstacle for visually impaired students (Amin et al., 2021, p.736). However, a unit of service needs to be established in both schools and universities to meet the needs of visually impaired students in a more organized and effective manner, as well as to consider their demands

and solve any issues or problems concerning their learning. These special committees and units should not only work as consultants but also as monitors to ensure that every college, department, faculty, and language centre provides the necessary facilities and supportive services for visually impaired students.

Lack of acceptance and a welcoming environment are some of the greatest challenges encountered by visually impaired students and their caregivers. Receiving refusal and adequate attention can make it more difficult for visually impaired students and their families to acquire accurate information, knowledge, and skills to prepare for a successful career job. As a result of this rejection, visually impaired students feel that they have become a heavy burden on their parents and society in general, which reflects negatively on their psychological conditions. In his Article on challenges encountered by students with visual impairments and teachers in an integrated school environment, Bornes Chepngetich Korir (2015) shed lights on several challenges that are experienced by visually impaired students, including the negative attitudes of the administration that consider visually impaired students as a burden to school; as a consequence, they do not meet their needs like providing the necessary learning materials even though they pay fees (Korir, 2015).

The lack of an inclusive environment at schools and universities also makes the learning of visually impaired students more challenging. Feeling neglected and unappreciated at schools and universities makes visually impaired students experience a kind of anxiety, lack of self-confidence, and isolation. When there is a lack of collaboration and interaction among students and teachers, visually impaired students feel isolated and alienated. Thus, it has a huge negative impact on their performance and skills in educational and learning processes (Sim, 2020).

Lack of parental support and participation also serves as a barrier to visually impaired students' development and learning processes. The majority of visually impaired students belong to low-income families and poor and marginalized families whose parents are often illiterate and do not possess the skills and abilities to reinforce learning and education among their visually impaired children. The income they receive is not enough for them to buy and provide their visually impaired children with the necessary assistive devices, technology, and other materials. Consequently, visually impaired student will not be able to achieve a kind of improvement and progress in their learning and educational process. Fauzia Khurshid and Sufiana Malik (2011) conducted a study on the perception

of visually impaired youth about familial, academic, and caregivers. They found that both visually impaired students males and females experienced a lack of social support from caregivers and visually impaired male students who stay long hours in hostels face more difficulties (Khurhid & Malik, 2013).

This is just a summary of the main challenges encountered by visually impaired students, as we cannot address all the difficulties in this short article, but rather this needs a broad study. However, researchers and scholars need to investigate other difficulties and challenges facing visually impaired students at the universities including administrative difficulties, academic difficulties, physical and environmental, and social difficulties.

This topic needs more attention to make society aware of the difficulties and challenges faced by this category of students and also to create an inclusive and diverse environment where people with or without visual disabilities come together and stimulating integration between them. To achieve such interaction it is necessary to eliminate as many thresholds as possible by providing initiatives that enlarge accessibility holds as possible.

### III. METHODOLOGY

Semi-structured interviews based on purposive sampling will be adopted to investigate the main challenges and barriers that encounter visually impaired students in the educational environment, particularly in Moroccan universities.

The semi-structured interview is considered and referred to as a conversation with a purpose (Burgess, 1984) it is a widely used technique and method in qualitative research, it focuses on conversational style to explore particular

themes, and to learn about the motivations behind people's choices and behaviours, their attitudes and beliefs. The semi-structured interview is a data collection method in which the interviewer does not follow a formalized lots of questions, but he or she asks participants a set of open-ended questions and follows them up to explore participants' thoughts and beliefs about a particular topic in more detail (Mashuri, Saepudin & Sarib, Muhammad & Alhabsyi, Firdiansyah & Syam, Hijrah & Ruslin, Ruslin, 2022). The advantage of the semi-structured interview is that:

*The researcher can critically scrutinize the conversation and varied initially superficial responses during the SSI to arrive at multi-layered conclusions. A researcher can further follow up most of the time, all verbal and non-verbal responses, such as hunches, laughter, and silence, to reveal hidden information that may turn out to be helpful in the final data analysis of different themes extracted from the conversation (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, as cited in Kakilla, 2021).*

The purposive sampling consisted of 15 students with visually impaired disabilities from different universities in Morocco. Purposive sampling is also known as judgment, selective or subjective sampling is a sampling technique by which the researcher uses his expertise and judgment to select a sample that is most useful to the purpose of the research. In his article, Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling, Etikan Ilker (2016) stated that the "researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by knowledge or experience" (Etikan, 2016, p.2).

Table 1:

| Participant's number | Gender | Age | Year of study | Status of visual impairment |
|----------------------|--------|-----|---------------|-----------------------------|
| 1                    | Female | 19  | 2021          | Blindness                   |
| 2                    | Female | 20  | 2021          | Blindness                   |
| 3                    | Female | 22  | 2019          | Blindness                   |
| 4                    | Male   | 19  | 2021          | Blindness                   |
| 5                    | Female | 18  | 2021          | Blindness                   |
| 6                    | Male   | 22  | 2019          | Severe visual impairment    |
| 7                    | Male   | 30  | 2012          | Blindness                   |
| 8                    | Male   | 24  | 2017          | Severe visual impairment    |
| 9                    | Male   | 19  | 2021          | Severe visual impairment    |
| 10                   | Female | 23  | 2020          | Blindness                   |
| 11                   | Female | 28  | 2014          | Blindness                   |

|    |        |    |      |                          |
|----|--------|----|------|--------------------------|
| 12 | Male   | 20 | 2018 | Severe visual impairment |
| 13 | Male   | 25 | 2017 | Blindness                |
| 14 | Female | 22 | 2019 | Severe visual impairment |
| 15 | Female | 26 | 2018 | Blindness                |

### 1- Objective of this research

In this research the main objectives was to investigate the main challenges that encounter visually impaired students at Moroccan universities, in order to raise the awareness of policy makers, administrators and professors to find out possible and effective solutions to these challenges and barriers that encounter visually impaired students in educational environment particularly in universities.

### 2- Data collection

In this research the semi structured interview incorporated nine main questions, each being supplemented by possible follow up questions to draw out more specific evidence and to deepen the responses to a question and also to increase the richness of the data being obtained about the candidate's asset. The main questions prepared for the interviews were as follow:

**Q 1** What are the administrative difficulties that you encounter in your university? Do you receive any kind of support and service from the administration? Do you find that the administration is able to meet all of your requirements?

**Q2** What are the academic difficulties that you encounter at the university?

**Q4** What are the most difficulties you encounter during the exam period?

**Q5** Do you find that the time that professors allocate in explaining their lessons is sufficient for you to absorb the lessons?

**Q6** As a visually impaired students, what are the environmental and physical difficulties that you encounter most?

**Q7** what are the social difficulties that you encounter as visually impaired students with your teaching and administrative staff?

**Q8** What are the social difficulties that you encounter with your peers of ordinary students?

**Q9** Are there any other difficulties that you want to talk about?

## IV. RESULTS

Concerning the administrative difficulties that face visually impaired students in universities, the majority of visually impaired students agreed that the administration does not take their needs and requirement seriously and this is due to the absence of the necessary means and facilities to respond to these challenges. Another difficulty that encounter visually impaired students are related to the absence of frameworks that are specialized in academic guidance, which makes them vulnerable to many social and psychological problems. At the beginning of each university year, visually impaired students need some kind of guidance and preparation to support them in their academic course. However, the absence of this guidance leads visually impaired students to feel alienated and surrounded by mixed feelings of fear and psychological instability.

Student (3) confirmed that:

*When I went to the administration office to complete the registration process or to ask for my papers, the administration takes a lot of time to meet students' requests, especially us" she adds " there is a lack of communication and guidance, which make us feel unequal as the administration does not definitely and seriously respond to our requirement.*

In relation to the academic difficulties that visually impaired students encounter, the majority of students agreed that the most prominent of those challenges are: the difficulty of competing with non-visually impaired students, the difficulty of taking exams, and the struggle of absorbing and understanding the educational material mainly those related to laboratories. However, these difficulties can be explained based on many direct or indirect factors, one of them is the loss of vision to perform well academically, the lack of commitment of some volunteer students or workers at the universities to support students on the day of the exam. Extra time allowance to completely understand the assignments, and integrate the information.

The lack of volunteers to write on the day of the exam is considered a big challenge and burden for students with visual impairment. Visually impaired students make a



great effort to find volunteer students to support them write on the day of the exam in addition to the lack of extra time allowance to complete their writing, students with low vision take a longer time to complete the dictation process. Therefore, the volunteer students' commitment and accuracy on the day of the exam play a great role in the writing process, especially in the English language, where students with visually disability are held responsible for the spelling errors committed by the volunteer students who are doing the writing process, which forces visually impaired students sometimes to spell some words for the students' writer, the things that lead to the expiration of the exam time.

Unlike European countries, visual impaired students in Morocco do not get any technical support like using computer to do exams with a headphone and software that can translate written questions into speech.

Student (7) claimed that

*I find it hard to find someone who can help me write on the day of the exam because at that time the majority of students have exams or are busy preparing for their exams, in most cases, when we find students who can help, we may encounter other difficulties represented in the writing process, especially in French and English language where we have to dictate each word separately, and this requires a lot of additional time and effort.*

Regarding the physical and environmental difficulties, the participants stated that the university facilities and buildings are not suitable for students with visual impairments, the learning environment is unpleasant for visually impaired students, and the classrooms are poorly equipped with appropriate equipment, materials, infrastructure, and facilities. Moreover, the university libraries lack the appropriate number of halls prepared for visually impaired students. Furthermore most disabled students rarely participate in the academic activities organized by the university because the building and facilities inside the university are not suited for their needs.

In our interview with student (15) who stated that

*the corridors in which there are stairs are considered dangerous for me to go up and down and for all disabled students like me, in addition to other obstacles that can be found on the university sidewalks and roads such as digging, three branches and water drains.*

Indeed, these challenges considered as a barrier to the freedom of movement of visually impaired students, a poorly built university environment would make education difficult for visually impaired students despite the effort made by the university administration and other parties to eliminate as much as possible these difficulties and reduce them, these difficulties are still existing in the majority of Moroccan universities.

As for the social difficulties that are represented in the relationship between visual impaired students and teaching and administrative staffs, the results indicated that the most important difficulty that encounter disability students is teacher's lack of skills and abilities to deal with visually impaired students, teachers are not educated and trained enough in the use of braille materials, preparation of hearing aids, tactile, diagrams, and maps and so forth, in addition to the administration's inappropriate treatment and lack of consideration of the circumstances and conditions of these students, and this may be due to the lack of sufficient experience of some faculty members and some administrative staffs in addition to the lack of knowledge of the impact of this kind of disability on students academically, psychologically and socially, also to the total absent of the necessary facilities that should be provided for a less restrictive environment including assistive devices, technology and other materials which stand as a barrier against teacher's desire to achieve inclusive teaching and the principle of equality for all students.

Student (4) claimed that

*A large number of employees within the university administration do not know how to deal with us in particular, as they do not take our requests and needs into consideration.*

About the social difficulties that are represented in the relationship between visually impaired students and their non-visually impaired peers, the study indicated that blinds students suffer from the negative attitudes and labelling of their non-disabled colleagues whether inside or outside the university, sometimes those later may use some inappropriate words while talking to these disabled students which indicate that university students do not have sufficient experience and awareness to deal appropriately with disabled students in general.

In our interview with student (6) indicated that

*I was tired of the look of pity and the labelling that I receive from students everyday like 'the poor boy' " penniless" and " miserable" because of this, I decided to drop out of university.*

As a result, visually impaired students find it hard to build a relationship with their non-disabled peers and due to these problems, they may develop negative attitudes towards educational institutions, subjects, materials, and institutional strategies. Due to negative attitudes, visually impaired students may even discontinue their education and drop out of university. Therefore, the misconceptions prevalent in society about people with disabilities and their needs and abilities represent a major obstacle to discovering the nature of how to deal with this category of students.

## V. CONCLUSION

This study examines the challenges and barriers faced by visually impaired students in Moroccan universities. According to the analysis of the current study, it is clear that visually impaired students suffer from many difficulties in Moroccan universities, which is evident from the answers we obtained during the interviews conducted with the participants. First, and most importantly, administrative difficulties are represented by the lack of administrative support, guidance, and appropriate procedures. Second, academic difficulties, which are represented in competition with non-disabled students, performance during the examination, and a lack of understanding of educational materials. Moreover, environmental difficulties are represented by the lack of adequate reading holes in the library and classrooms, lack of accessibility on sidewalks and roads, and inability to participate in activities prepared by the university. Finally, social difficulties are presented as teachers' lack of consideration and the negative attitudes of their non-disabled colleagues. Therefore, this study indicates that these challenges may negatively impact the academic performance of visually impaired students.

Based on the findings above, we can conclude that the challenges experienced by visually impaired students in Moroccan universities did not pave the way for implementing inclusive education and an inclusive environment where students with or without a disability can interact with each other, and are helpful and friendly toward each other. Consequently, Moroccan university staff, teachers, policymakers, and stakeholders should work hard to overcome the challenges experienced by visually impaired students and create a quality-inclusive and diverse educational environment where students with disabilities can receive free and appropriate education.

The belief in the right to education is a belief in inclusion, because education for all means education for everyone. Students have different needs and requirements; they need expert teachers and professors who hold all the keys to

work more inclusively and a learning environment that has the necessary resources and basic care with a universal design where every student has the opportunity to learn. Indeed, inclusive education is not education as we mean in general, but it is the education of any student who is in a vulnerable situation, not only students with a disability but also multilingual students, students who have different religions, or students who have a low socioeconomic status and so forth.

## VI. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the analysis, visually impaired students interviewed argued that these challenges greatly contributed to their poor performance in the university modules; they also claimed that due to these challenges, their performance was substantially worse than that of non-visually impaired students. Indeed, this poor performance stands as a burden and a stumbling block to the improvement and augmentation of learners' ambitions and professional aspirations. However, to eliminate the challenges faced by visually impaired students at universities, there are some recommendations that can be adopted to enhance their academic development, skills, and abilities, and to encourage them to pursue higher education like their non-disabled peers.

First, the university physical environment should be prepared and organized to suit visually impaired students in terms of corridors, sidewalks, stairways, bathrooms, walkways, elevators, toilets, slopes, and tactile blocks, based on universal design specifications. In addition, it reconsiders the problem of elevators and stairs and provides appropriate solutions to enable this category of students to move easily.

Second, preparing and equipping dedicated halls in university libraries to welcome visually impaired students to enable them to benefit from their facilities to continue their academic achievements.

Third, the number of social workers, counsellors, psychologists, and sign language interpreters in the student counselling department should be increased so that the psychological well-being of disabled students can be maintained and improved.

Fourth, they attract a group of supportive and volunteer students to support visually impaired students, and implement programs to educate and assist them.

Fifth, some cultural and social activities are suitable for students with disabilities, particularly visually impaired students, taking into consideration the location and nature of the disability.

Sharing awareness and understanding of the needs and rights of visually impaired students and providing a supportive and conducive environment.

Furthermore, setting up and establishing special units and committees that support the services and empowerment of visually impaired students in every public university is necessary so that their needs can be met in a more organized and effective manner.

Finally, some university laws and regulations were amended to suit the needs and requests of these categories of students.

Further research can be conducted in this field to investigate the perspectives of professors and administrators toward specific laws that can be amended to accommodate the needs of visually impaired students in universities, such as disability rights laws, digital accessibility, and assistive technology support.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Allam, F. C., & Martin, M. M. (2021). Issues and challenges in special education: A qualitative analysis from teacher's perspective. *Southeast Asia Early Childhood Journal*, 10(1), 37-49. <https://doi.org/10.37134/saecj.vol10.1.4.2021>
- [2] Amin, A. S., Sarnon, N., Akhir, N. M., Zakaria, S. M., & Badri, R. N. F. R. Z. (2021). Main Challenges of Students with Visual Impairment at Higher Education Institutions. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 10(1), 734-747.
- [3] Anne, N.M. (2004). The Gambia: Department of state for basic and secondary education. Special needs education.
- [4] Bwire Maindi, Alianda. (2018). Challenges faced by students with visual impairment when learning physics in regular secondary schools. *International journal of education, learning and development*. Vol 6, No 9, pp. 38-50.
- [5] Demisw, A. (2014). *Inclusive education practices of primary schools in Yeka Sub City*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa.
- [6] Etenesh, A. (2000). *Inclusion of children with disabilities (CWD): Situational analysis of Ethiopian*. Paper presented at 5<sup>th</sup> international special education congress, University of Manchester, UK.
- [7] Etikan, Ilker. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American journal of theoretical and applied statistics*.
- [8] Kakilla, Charles. (2021). Strengths and weaknesses of semi structured interviews in qualitative research: A critical essay. 10.20944/preprints202106.0491.v1.
- [9] Kapur, Radhika. (2018). Challenges Experienced by Visually Impaired Students in Education.
- [10] Korir, B. (2015). The perception of students and teachers on the integration programme of students with visual impairment in secondary schools: A case of Ainamoi sub country, Kericho County, Kenya. *Journal of education and practice*.
- [11] Khurshid, F., & Malik, S.K. (2011). Perception of visually impaired youth about familial, academic and caregivers support. *Global Journal of human Social Science*, 11(9): 55-61.
- [12] Kroum, Fatima Zohra, & Benmassoud, Jihane. (2017). *International journal on new trends in education and their implications*. Vol: 8, Issue : 2.
- [13] Lourens, H., & Swartz, L. (2016). Experiences of visually impaired students in higher education: Bodily perspectives on inclusive education. *Disability & society*, 31(2), 240-251. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2016.1158092>
- [14] Mashuri, Saepudin & Sarib, Muhammad & Alhabsyi, Firdiansyah & Syam, Hijrah & Ruslin, Ruslin. (2022). Semi-structured Interview: A Methodological Reflection on the Development of a Qualitative Research Instrument in Educational Studies.
- [15] Mitiku, W., Alemu, Y., & Mengsistu, S. (2014). Challenges and opportunities to implement inclusive education. *Asian Journal of Humanity , art and literature*, 1(2), 118-135.
- [16] Mwakyjeja, B. M. (2013). Teaching Students with visual impairment in inclusive Classrooms. A case study of one Secondary School in Tanzania. University of Oslo. Retrieved December 05, 2017 from <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Teaching-Students-with-Visual-Impairments-in-%3A-A-of-Mwakyjeja/c208057f95810762271e2734cfb9ff6e8308db8b>
- [17] Naciri, Fadel. (2022). Moroccan Legislation about Inclusiveeducation. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.12356.91522>.
- [18] 'The expanded core curriculum Incorporating the best learning approaches for your child with blindness or vision impairment'. Retrieved from [https://www.perkins.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ECC\\_Brochure\\_2021\\_digital.pdf](https://www.perkins.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ECC_Brochure_2021_digital.pdf)
- [19] Sim I. O. (2020). Analysis of the Coping Process among Visually Impaired Individuals, Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 17(8), 2819. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17082819>



# Moroccan EFL Teachers' Perceptions towards the Use of Authentic Materials to Improve Students' Reading Skill

Belouiza Ouafaa<sup>1</sup> and Bbani Koumachi<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>PhD candidate, English Department, Ibn Tofail University, Kenitra, Morocco

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, English Department, Ibn Tofail University, Kenitra, Morocco

Received: 05 Jul 2023; Received in revised form: 04 Aug 2023; Accepted: 12 Aug 2023; Available online: 23 Aug 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— *It has been well-documented that the use of authentic materials while teaching reading comprehension can be one of the keys to motivate students interacts with the reading texts. Moroccan ELT textbook sometimes go beyond learners' level and interest. For these reasons, it becomes very necessary for teachers to vary materials and strategies while teaching reading comprehension. This paper aimed to investigate the attitudes of Moroccan EFL teachers towards the use of authentic materials in teaching reading comprehension to senior high schools. Six English teachers took part in completing a survey questionnaire for the purpose of the study. The researcher, therefore, aims to find out whether the use authentic materials can motivate learners interact with the reading texts and voice out their opinions. The results obtained indicated most teachers agree that texts mentioned in the textbook go beyond the level of students' understanding because of the difficulty students face while dealing with texts in the textbook. Most teachers perceive the use of authentic materials as useful for motivating students to be engaged in the learning process. That is, English teachers have positive attitude towards the use of authentic materials.*



**Keywords**— *authentic materials, EFL teachers, reading comprehension.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Reading is crucial for completing some tasks as well as for improving language intuition and evaluating academic performance. Students must therefore possess strong reading abilities, especially those who are attended colleges. They should develop the skills necessary to be able to manage any reference they require with ease in order to complete any task that is assigned to them. Additionally, students can escape having to cope with completing academic paper writing, which ultimately required them to study numerous books and references. Reading proficiency is essential for students to develop (Apsari, 2014).

The usage of actual resources appears to help the pupils advance their reading abilities. That is, students are able to participate in reading enthusiastically when using authentic resources to engage in the reading process and show their interest in what they read. In order to motivate students to read for their needs and requirements, authentic materials

are beneficial in classrooms (Rao, 2019). According to Berardo (2006) as cited in Namaziandost et al. (2021), the use of authentic resources helps pupils learn real language that has been used in real contexts.

Using real materials encourages students to read more by providing them a sense of achievements when they comprehend what they have read. Day (1994) claimed that "One of the more complex tasks facing the English as a foreign language (EFL) reading teacher is the selection of appropriate reading passages" (P.20). This means that, educators need to select reading materials wisely and not randomly. To put it differently, if teachers select and pick up the appropriate texts that fit the students' needs, levels, and interest, the students will be more motivated and consider reading as an active, important, and interesting activity. It is the teachers' attitudes that contribute to the motivation of their students in the classroom. In addition to the teachers' attitudes, it is very crucial to know about the



students' attitudes and perceptions concerning the use of reading materials as a teaching and learning tool to know whether students have positive or negative attitudes towards the use of these materials.

The aim of this paper is to investigate the reasons behind the teachers' selection of suitable reading materials and try to figure out the weaknesses of EFL learners in performing well in the reading process. I intend to study this issue in Moroccan English classes to see whether EFL teachers depend on or deviate from the textbook. In fact, no one can deny the importance of textbooks since they add a supplement to the teacher's instruction on how to plan and teach lessons; however, sometimes, it becomes necessary for teachers to deviate from the textbook and select the right reading materials wisely to motivate their students perform well in the reading process.

## II. AUTHENTIC MATERIALS

### 2.1 DEFINITION

The notion of authentic resources in EFL classes is a topic of much debate. The following experts' perspectives on some of the popular definitions of the term are presented in this chapter.

Peacock (1997) defines authentic materials as *"materials that have been produced to fulfill some social purposes in the language community"* (p.23). Similar to what Peacock has mentioned, authentic materials would be used in the classroom by native English speakers, such as radio news report brought into the class (Widdowson, 1990).

Similarly, Nunan (1999) defines:

*Authentic materials as spoken or written language data that have been produced in the course of genuine communication, and not specifically written for purposes of language teaching. In fact, in his teaching he encourages his students to bring into the classroom their own samples of authentic language data from real-world contexts outside of the classroom. They practice listening to and reading genuine language drawn from many different sources, including TV and radio broadcasts, taped conversations, meetings, talks, and announcements. They also read magazine stories, hotel*

*brochures, airport notices, bank instructions, advertisements and a wide range*

*of other written messages from the real world in situations as they occur. (p. 43)*

There are other common definitions of authentic materials illustrated by some experts:

- According to Carter & Nunan (2001, p. 68) authentic materials are *"ordinary texts not produced specifically for language teaching purposes."*
- Jacobson et al (2003, p:1) claim authentic materials as *"printed materials which are used in classroom in the same way they would be used in real life"*.
- "Authentic learning" is a new pedagogical phrase proposed by Herrington and Oliver (2000). This term prepares students for dealing with circumstances they may encounter in the real world by being closely relevant to their everyday lives.
- According to Herod (2002), authentic learning resources and activities are created to mimic real-world situations.
- According to Jordan (1997), authentic texts are those that are not created with instructional goals in mind.

### 2.2 SOURCES OF AUTHENTIC MATERIALS

There are some examples of authentic materials that EFL teachers rely on and focus on while teaching reading comprehension (Gebhard, 1996). The first one is authentic listening viewing materials. They included in this are TV advertisements, quiz shows, cartoons, news clips, comedies, movies, soap operas, professionally audio-taped short stories and novels, radio commercials, songs, documentaries, and sales pitches. The second one is authentic visual materials. They are about slides, photos, paintings, drawings by children, stick figures, wordless street signs, silhouettes, magazine images, ink blots, postcard images, wordless picture books, stamps, and X-rays are examples of this. The third one is authentic printed materials as newspaper articles, movie ads, astrology columns, sports reports, obituary columns, advice columns, song lyrics, restaurant menus, street signs, cereal boxes, candy wrappers, tourist brochures, university catalogs, telephone books, maps, TV guides, comic books, greeting cards, grocery coupons, pins with messages, and bus schedules are all included in this. The last one is realia. This includes, among other things, coins and money, folded paper, wall clocks, phones, Halloween masks, dolls, and

puppets. Realia are frequently used in role-playing games or to visually illustrate ideas.

The Internet is constantly updated, offers a greater variety of visually appealing content, and is also interactive, encouraging readers to take a more active approach than a passive one (Berado, 2006). From a more realistic standpoint, the Internet is a reality of the modern age; most students use it, and teachers have easier access to an endless supply of material of all kinds. Even more practically and economically, trying to find authentic materials abroad can be very expensive; an English newspaper or magazine may cost up to three or four times as much as it usually does, and occasionally it may not even be very good.

Finding materials frequently takes no money and only a small amount of time thanks to unlimited access in the workplace. The kind of reading material that students will need and want to be able to read when they are traveling, studying abroad, or using the language in other situations outside of the classroom should be considered authentic. Instead of focusing on the form, learners can engage with real language and content when using authentic materials. Due to its use outside of the classroom, learners believe they are learning the target language. The goal should be to understand meaning rather than form when selecting materials from different sources, especially when using literary texts where the emphasis is on what is being said rather than necessarily on the form.

Nuttall (1996) lists three main considerations when selecting a text to be used in the classroom: readability, exploitability, and content suitability. The importance of the reading material should be determined by how well it meets the needs of the students and how much they enjoy it, making content suitability the most crucial of the three factors. The texts ought to inspire readers as well. Exploitability refers to the text's potential for enhancing students' reading skills. In the classroom, a text that cannot be used for teaching has no value. Just because something is written in English doesn't automatically make it useful. The term "readability" also refers to the combination of a text's structural and lexical difficulty.

### 2.3 THE ADVANTAGES OF USING AUTHENTIC MATERIALS

It is well worth the extra time spent by teachers planning to use authentic materials to enhance lessons. Utilizing genuine materials actually has a number of benefits. The direct connection between the language classroom and the outside world can be reinforced for students, according to Brinton (1991) (as cited in Hedge, 1991), through the use of authentic materials and media. According to Gebhard (1996), using authentic materials can help put language learning into context. Students frequently pay more

attention to content and meaning than the language itself when lessons are focused on understanding a menu or a TV weather report. It provides students with a valuable source of language input so they are not only exposed to the language presented in the text and the video.

Additionally, Melvin and Stout (1987) find that when students use authentic materials for the study of culture in the language classroom, they have an overall higher motivation to learn as well as a renewed interest in the subject. Students frequently travel to a city in a target culture by using planned, task-based activities and real-world resources. Students gain confidence in using language in real-world situations, appreciate authentic materials, learn about cultures, and practice skills outside the classroom.

There are a number of spoken language differences between authentic and non-authentic materials, according to Porter and Roberts (1981). For instance, conversations that are recorded for language texts frequently move at a slow pace, have specific structures that recur with obtrusive regularity, and have very distinct speaker turn-taking.

According to Hedge (1991, p. 29), using real language in the classroom is crucial because:

1. Language is natural when it is streamlined or changed for educational purposes as limiting structures and controlling vocabulary. These purposes make the task more challenging. Actually, it might remove meaning-related hints.
2. Students have the opportunity to work with a limited amount of authentic language that simultaneously contains complete and meaningful messages.
3. Students have the chance to use non-linguistic cues (layout, pictures, colors, symbols, the physical setting it occurs in) to aid in meaning discovery when using authentic printed materials.
4. Real-life material that is treated realistically makes the connection between what adults learn in the classroom and what they need to do outside of it obvious.

Nunan (1999) acknowledges that it is unfeasible for teachers to use only authentic materials in the classroom but argues that students should be exposed to as much authentic information as they can because, in the end, if they are only exposed to fabricated dialogues and listening texts, their learning task will be made more challenging. He continues by stating that it is crucial for students to read and listen to as many different types of authentic content as they can. In the sense that, when students realize they can follow the directions to complete a particular laboratory experiment,

for instance, they may feel a sense of accomplishment as a result of using authentic materials. This is a very encouraging fact because learning materials, whether they are authentic or published, should serve the process rather than the end goal (Kuo, 1993).

## 2.4 THE USE OF AUTHENTIC MATERIALS IN READING CLASSES

Materials are important in language teaching. It is the materials that make the complex text easier to understand. Teaching materials are those that assist a teacher in clarifying, interpreting, and mapping a subject's concept. It is important to the students. The teaching aids assist the teacher in carrying out his or her duties better, and they also assist students in focusing their attention on objects, actions, and situations events and circumstances that provide meaning and context for the words and sentences presented by the teacher in the classroom (Bitchener, 2006, p. 48).

In language teaching, authentic materials play a crucial role in the EFL classroom. They are considered an essential step to take into consideration for facilitating the task of teaching and learning. When teachers use supplementary materials, teaching aids, and materials in the classroom while teaching reading, they contribute to enhancing learning activities by providing entertainment, effectiveness, and interest. Common language teaching aids include chalkboards, flannel boards, magnet boards, pocket charts, realia, pictures, models, flash cards, pictures, songs, and games. These materials serve various functions and contribute significantly to language teaching.

Additionally, the use of authentic materials helps learners engage in the learning process as they motivate them to read and enjoy the materials they are reading as Nuttall (1996) declares that "authentic texts can be motivating because they are proof that the language is used for real-life purposes by real people" (p.172). Which means that, textbooks should be cater for encouraging real-life reading skills. Grant (1987) lists them as follows:

- Reading for gist: This means reading to get the main point of a text.
- Reading for information: This means that the reader reads selectively those parts of the text
- Reading for studying: It is necessary an any situation where students may have to study texts in order subjects in the English language.

If these skills are not handled in the book, then teacher should find a supplementary material that tackles all the mentioned skills. The alternative I to devise exercises which will motivate the students in the process of acquiring the reading skill. To elaborate more, extracting materials from a real text in a new/different language can be extremely

motivating, increasing students' motivation for learning by exposing them to real language (Guariento & Morley, 2001).

## 2.5 AT WHICH LEVEL CAN AUTHENTIC MATERIALS BE USED?

Although many experts advise using real materials when teaching a foreign language, we should consider whether it is suitable for all students at all levels. The level of the learners must be taken into consideration when employing real resources, which is an important factor. It is very crucial to use authentic materials in the classroom. In other words, if the materials are too difficult or advanced for the students, it may demotivate them and prevent them from learning the language (Huda, 2017). According to Kilickaya (2004), advanced and intermediate level students are the only ones who should use original resources. This is consistent with Larisa Lutskovskaia's findings. (2016) found that when adult professionals use AMs for their group and individual work, they are more engaged and demonstrate higher learning outcomes.

Another viewpoint is held by other researchers. They think that authentic resources can be used with students of all skill levels. Teachers need to be aware that using authentic resources will only be beneficial if it is done in the manner for which they were intended, which is the real world instead of in the classroom. By this way, a text can only have true authenticity in the setting in which it was written.

## III. PREVIOUS RESARCHERS ON TEACHERS' PERCEPIVE TOWARDS THE USE OF AUTHENTIC MATERIALS IN TEACHING ENGLISH IN EFL CONTEXT

The views of Iranian teachers about the use of authentic materials in EFL classes were investigated by Akbari & Razavi in 2015. The research was carried out in TED (Tabadkan English Department), one of Mashhad, Iran. Regardless of their nationality, level of teaching experience, or educational background, the results showed that all of the teachers had a favorable attitude toward incorporating authentic input into their classes. To enhance students' abilities and expose them to authentic English, such an attitude was adopted. Teachers also mentioned that reading classes would typically employ more real materials than listening classes. The outcomes also showed that the most popular channels for accessing real materials would be TV and the internet (Huda, 2017).

These results are in line with recent research, such as the Zhafarhandi study and the Soliman E. M. Soliman ones, which offered proof in support of teachers' favorable

opinions toward employing real materials in their classes. The teachers disagreed on the appropriate student level for giving such things, according to this study. The majority of the teachers held the opinion that the course objectives and the text's language level should serve as the primary determinants for choosing relevant texts. Finally, the majority of participants also expressed a need for further instruction in creating acceptable tasks when employing authentic resources. The findings of this study may serve as a springboard for further investigation into the application of real materials in EFL instruction (Huda, 2017).

In 2015, Wiji, Z.L., conducted a critical reading process in a public senior high school in Bandung, West Java, Indonesia. The goal of this study was to help the students develop their ability to read critically. The outcome demonstrates that the students' reading abilities can be enhanced by critical reading with the aid of authentic materials. Critical reading gives students a forum for debate, allows them to voice their opinions, and aids in their comprehension of the book. It also demonstrates that the teachers had a good attitude regarding the use of authentic materials in their classes, particularly when selecting texts for discussion topics that are hot-button issues that encourage students to be more engaged and interactive (Huda, 2017).

#### IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The theories that underlie the study have been expanded upon in this section. In general, the study follows Richard's (2006) model for investigating the use of authentic materials in communicative language teaching today. In particular, he argued that the push for authenticity for classroom activities, including the use of materials, is necessary because students are getting ready for real life, and language is used as a tool of communication in real life.

The study mentioned CLT in addition to the ideas of the efficient classroom learning tasks and exercises that give students the chance to negotiate meaning, increase their language resources, see how language is used, and engage in meaningful interpersonal exchange. Students are absorbing knowledge that is pertinent, useful, fascinating, and engaging as they communicate meaningfully (Huda, 2017).

Additionally, the study incorporates findings from earlier studies on the use of authentic materials in teaching English from the perspectives of teachers in Iran and Indonesia, as well as how those practices are carried out in those two nations, which both studies showed that teachers in those two nations had a favorable attitude toward the use of authentic materials in teaching English (Huda, 2017).

#### V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study is investigating teachers' attitudes or perceptions regarding the use of authentic materials in the Moroccan classrooms.

##### 5.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

According to McMillan & Schumacher (2010: 22), "*the research design describes how the study is conducted, and the purpose of a research design is to indicate a plan that will generate evidence that will be able to answer the research questions.*" This research is based on a qualitative research method using questionnaire to collect data.

##### 5.2 RESEARCH SAMPLE

This study was conducted in three high schools in Kenitra. The questionnaire had 6 English teachers as respondents. Due to two factors, I chose these three high schools. The first reason is that, since I have been teaching in these three schools, I have a strong desire to learn about the attitudes of English teachers about the use of real materials in Moroccan classrooms. The second reason is that I get along well with the English teachers and the administration. Teachers may be more willing to participate in my research in a more cooperative manner.

##### 5.2.1 PARTICIPANTS

Four males and two females' English teachers were purposefully chosen to take part in this study. They were chosen on purpose under the presumption that they have rich information regarding their attitudes toward the use of authentic materials in teaching English and they have been teaching for more than 10 years. Additionally, all of their academic training has been in English.

| Participants | Gender | Age | Education           | Teaching Experience |
|--------------|--------|-----|---------------------|---------------------|
| T1           | F      | 29  | Doctorate candidate | 10                  |
| T2           | F      | 35  | Bachelor            | 15                  |
| T3           | M      | 45  | Bachelor            | 20                  |
| T4           | M      | 29  | Master's            | 10                  |
| T5           | M      | 40  | Master's            | 15                  |
| T6           | M      | 38  | Doctorate candidate | 10                  |

##### 5.3 PROCEDURE AND INSTRUMENTS

The survey questionnaire was distributed to six English teachers via an online survey in order to identify teachers' perception and attitude towards using of authentic materials in teaching reading. Creswell (2012) claimed that "*surveys help identify important beliefs and attitudes of individuals*"



(p.6). Additionally, the questionnaire survey includes closed-ended questions. The first part of the questionnaire was about the participants' background information (their gender, age and teaching experience) and the second part was about the participants' attitude towards the use of authentic materials in the classroom. The participants had to return the survey questionnaire by the deadline and the findings were then analyzed in terms of frequencies and percentages.

#### 5.4 DATA ANALYSIS

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the survey questionnaire. Any notable findings, such as specific patterns in their response, have been focused and

investigated. By doing so, a better understanding can be explained.

#### VI. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The research related to English teachers' opinions toward the use of authentic materials in teaching English is presented in this part, along with discussion of the findings. The study hopes to answer the following questions:

1. What are Moroccan EFL teachers' perceptions about the use of authentic materials?
2. Do Moroccan teachers prefer to use authentic materials? Why?

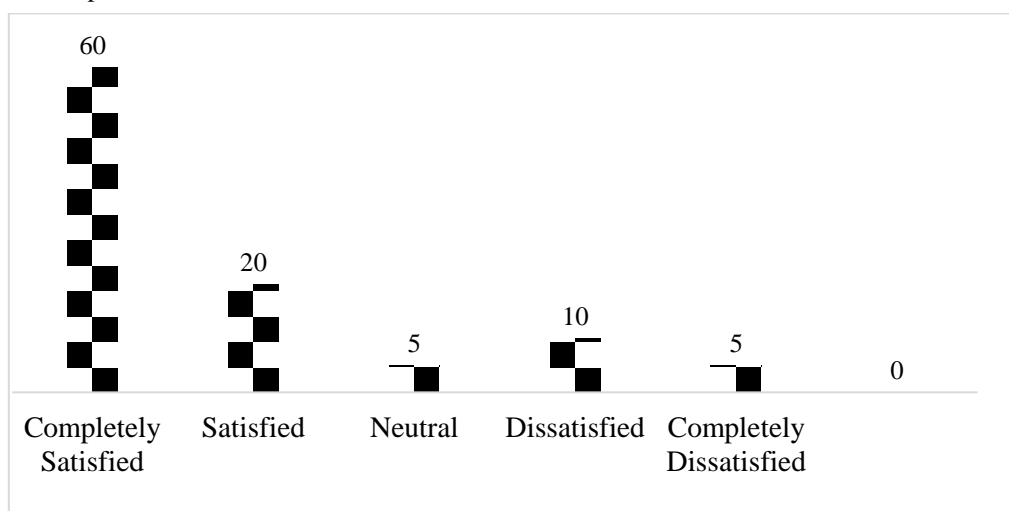


Fig.1: Moroccan EFL teachers' satisfaction with the textbook they use

The findings in the figure above indicate that Moroccan EFL teachers hold positive attitudes towards the textbook they use in the classroom. Relatedly, a large proportion of the participants are completely satisfied and/or satisfied (60% and 20% respectively). Additionally, only a negligible

proportion (5%) of the study's participants are completely dissatisfied with the textbook used. We can, therefore, argue with complete confidence that Moroccan EFL teachers are highly satisfied with the textbooks used in Morocco.

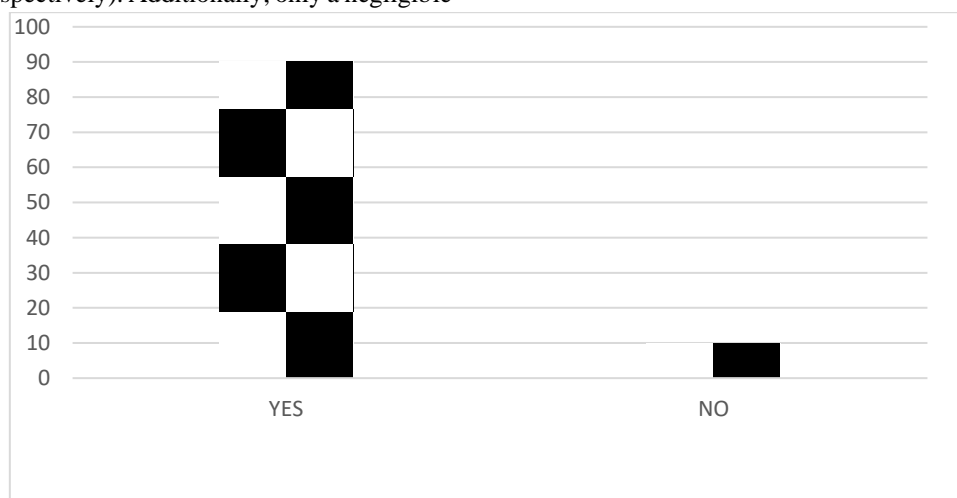


Fig.2: Moroccan EFL Teachers' use of authentic materials

The figure above illustrates that Moroccan teachers have positive attitude towards the use of authentic materials (95%) and only 5% of teachers who do not use authentic materials. So, what is striking about this figure is that the

use of authentic materials is widely used by Moroccan EFL teachers while teaching reading; Which means that, teachers agree that the use of authentic materials have positive effect on students' language skill and performance.

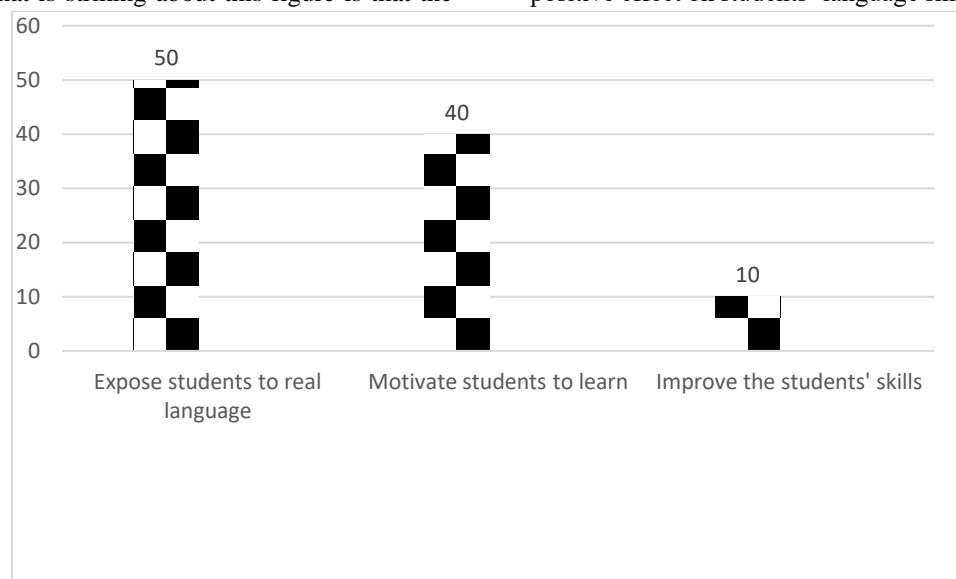


Fig.3: The reasons for using authentic materials

Based on the chart above, it is obvious that the reasons that push Moroccan EFL teachers to use authentic materials in the reading lessons is that they expose students to real language (50%); this indicates that teachers recognize the importance of providing students with authentic materials that reflect their real life and real world. Undeniably, this exposure paves the way for students to engage in the learning and become able to prompt a deeper understanding of what they read in the class. On the other hand, other teachers believe that the motivation of students accounts for 40 %; which means, the respondents believe that the use of authentic materials play a crucial role in enhancing student motivation. To put it differently, when students read enthusiastically, this means that teachers foster an engaging and stimulating leaning environment that leads students to motivation and participation. Finally, improving students' skills represents 10%. This means that authentic materials play an important factor in enhancing language skills, including reading, writing, speaking, and listening. To sum up, Moroccan EFL teachers prefer to use authentic materials because they expose students to real life and language, motivate the students to be engaged in the learning process, and improve their language skills.

The graph clearly shows the sources that Moroccan EFL teachers to obtain authentic materials for their reading lessons are as follows: newspapers and magazines account for 16,7%; TV and videos as well as radios account for 0%; whereas, internet accounts for 83,3%. This means that the majority of teachers rely on internet as a primary source for

obtaining their authentic materials. This finding illustrates internet becomes an easy source for teachers to provide huge sources of authentic materials.

## VII. CONCLUSION

This study explores teachers' perception regarding the use of authentic materials in Moroccan EFL classrooms. The results reveal interesting insights about the use of authentic materials. That is, the majority of teachers are aware of the importance of authentic materials and its positive impact on students' performance. To put it differently, teachers who use authentic materials in the classroom, they transmit their enthusiasm to their students to be exposed to real English language and to motivate them to learn English enthusiastically. Furthermore, the results show that the internet is one of the primary sources that teachers use to obtain authentic materials. These results are consistent with recent research, which, according to Akbari & Razavi (2016)'s investigation, showed a clear evidence about teachers' perceptions about the use of authentic materials in their reading lessons. Most teachers hold positive attitude towards using authentic materials and agree that the course objectives and the text's language level serve as the primary concepts for selecting texts that suit students' level and interest. The findings of this study could be used as a springboard for further investigation into the application of real materials in EFL classrooms.

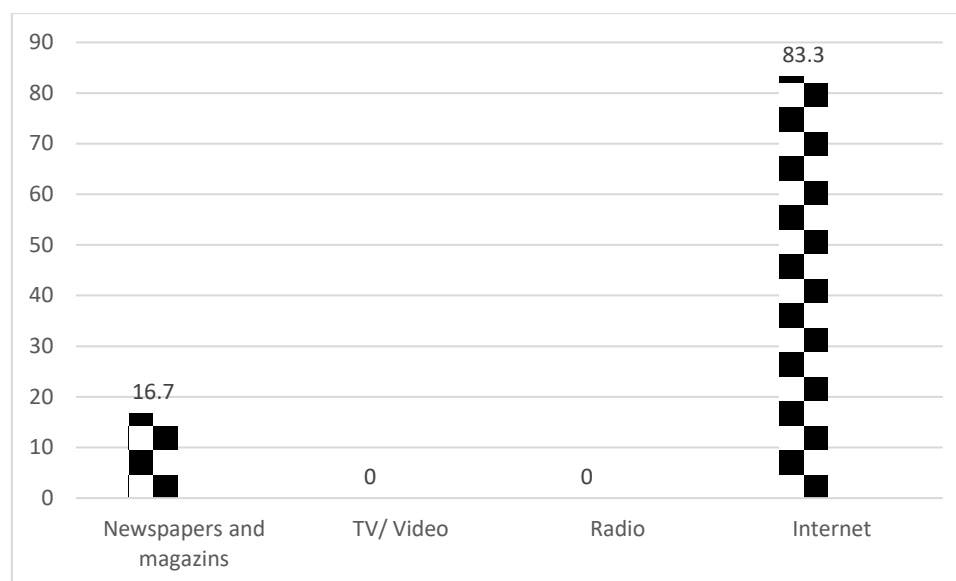


Fig.4: The sources that Moroccan EFL teachers to obtain authentic materials

## REFERENCES

- [1] Akbari, O., & Razavi, A. (2015). Using authentic materials in the foreign language classrooms: Teachers' perspectives in EFL classes. *International Journal of Research Studies in Education*, 4(5). <https://doi.org/10.5861/ijrse.2015.1189>
- [2] Apsari, Y. (2014). The use of authentic materials in teaching reading comprehension. *ELTIN Journal*, 2(II), 2014.
- [3] Bacon, S. M., & Finneman, M. (1990). A Study of Attitudes, Motives, and Strategies of University Foreign Language Students and their Disposition to Authentic Oral and Written Input. *Modern Language Journal*, 74(4), 459-73.
- [4] Berardo, S. A. (2006). The Use of Authentic Materials in the Teaching of Reading. *The Reading Matrix*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 60-69
- [5] Bitchener, J., Young, S., & Cameron, D. (2005). The Effect of Different Types of Corrective Feedback on ESL Student Writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 14, 191-205. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2005.08.001>
- [6] Bitchener, J (2010). Writing and applied linguistics thesis or dissertation. Palgrave: Macmillian
- [7] Day, G.S. (1994) The Capabilities of Market-Driven Organizations. *Journal of Marketing*, 58, 37-52. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1251915>
- [8] Guariento, W. and J. Morely. (2001). Text and task authenticity in the EFL classroom *Journal*, 55 (4), 347-353. doi:10.1093/ELT/55.4.347
- [9] Hapsari & Ratri. (2014). Extensive Listening: Let Students Experience Learning by Optimizing the Use of Authentic Materials. *Bahasa & Sastra*, Vol. 14, No.2. <http://id.portalgaruda.org>
- [10] Hedge, T. (1991). Teaching and learning in language classroom. Oxford: University Press
- [11] Herod, L. (2002). Adult learning from theory to practice. Heinle and Heinle Publishers. Heinemann.
- [12] Jacobson et al. (2003; 188:1065-73), *The Journal of Infectious Diseases*, Volume 188, Issue 9, 1 November 2003, Page 1404, <https://doi.org/10.1086/380621>
- [13] Jordan, R. (1997). *English for Academic Purposes: A Guide and Resource for Teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- [14] Kilickaya, Ferit. (2004). Authentic Materials and Cultural Content in EFL Classrooms, it was Retrieved on 5th April from <http://www.metu.edu.tr.kilickay/>
- [15] Kuo, C. (1993). "Problematic issues in EST materials development". *English for Specific Purposes*, 12, pp. 171-181.
- [16] McMillan, J. H., & Schumacher, S. (2010). *Research in Education: Evidence-Based Inquiry*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.
- [17] Melvin, B.S. and Stout, D.S. (1987). Motivating language learners through authentic materials. In W. Rivers (ed.) *Interactive Language Teaching*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 44-56.
- [18] Nassaji, H. (2015). Qualitative and descriptive research: Data type versus data analysis. *Language Teaching Research*, 129-132
- [19] Nunan, D. (1999). *Second language teaching and learning*. Boston: Heinle and Heinle Publishers.
- [20] Nunan, D. (2001). *Second language teaching and learning*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
- [21] Nuttall, C. (1996). *Teaching reading skills in a foreign language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- [22] Peacock, M. (1997) The Effect of Authentic Materials on the Motivation of EFL Learners in English Language Teaching *Journal* 51, pp 2
- [23] Porter, D. and Roberts, J. (1981). Authentic listening activities. *English Language Teaching Journal*, 36 (1), 37-47.
- [24] Richards, J., & Rodgers, T. (2001). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* (p. 204). New York: Cambridge University Press.

- [25] Rodgers, T. (2001:248), mention the main advantages of using authentic materials
- [26] Romdanih, R., & Yuningsih, E. (2021). Integrating Fairy Tales into Reading Class: Do They Catch Young Learners' Reading Interest? *Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan (JIP) STKIP Kusuma Negara Jakarta*, 12, 132-138. <https://doi.org/10.37640/jip.v12i2.857>
- [27] Senior, R (2005) *Authentic Responses to Authentic Materials in English Teaching Professional* 38, pp71
- [28] Widdowson, H.G. (1990) *Aspects of Language Teaching* Oxford, O.U.P.
- [29] Wiji, Z.L. (2015). The Teaching of Critical Reading in an EFL Classroom. (2016). *PEOPLE: International Journal of Social Sciences Special Issue Vol.1 Issue 1*, pp. 519-530.





# Brief Glimpses of Raskhan and his Visions of Lord Krishna in Sujaan

Vivek Chauhan<sup>1</sup>, Kabir Debnath<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of English, Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, Bengaluru, India

<sup>2</sup>B. Com, Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, Bengaluru, India

Received: 11 Jul 2023; Received in revised form: 10 Aug 2023; Accepted: 19 Aug 2023; Available online: 27 Aug 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— The present study is about Raskhan the hindi poet Saint who flourished in the 16th century and composed his verses in Braj Bhasha, the dialect of Western Uttar Pradesh. The first part of the study confines itself to the brief but catchy and informative descriptions of Raskhan as they appear in traditional stories passed on from generation to generation and the subsequent paper will deal with select verses of Sujaan composed by Raskhan. The study will focus mainly on the author's own translations and interpretations of such verses that deal with the visions that Raskhan had of his Beloved Lord Krishna

**Keywords**—Raskhan, Sujaan, Visions, Krishna, Lord, Vrindavan, Mathura.

## INTRODUCTION

The name of Raskhan is well known among the students, teachers, connoisseurs and critics of hindi poetry. That Raskhan, though a muslim, was devoted heart and soul to the worship of Lord Krishna is evident from most of his work that consists of spontaneous utterances in verse that appear to be revelations or visions that the pure heart of Raskhan was a witness to. Raskhan, having given up all worldly aspirations, took to the austere path of spirituality without prior thought or calculation.

## RASKHAN THE PROPHET OF UNITY AMONG RELIGIONS

Saint Raskhan's remarkable journey transcended the boundaries of religion as he embraced the divine with an open heart. Born into a varied cultural background, he sought to understand the nature of spirituality beyond the confines of his religion. Reading through the teachings of various religions, he recognized the common thread of love and compassion that connected all paths to the divine. With unwavering commitment, Saint Raskhan has focused on promoting unity and tolerance, fostering interfaith dialogue and promoting harmonious coexistence among believers of different faiths. His deep belief in the goodness of

humanity and the omnipresence of God inspired countless souls to follow a similar path of transcendence, showing that the purest form of devotion is that which unites religions and embraces the divine universal nature.

## LOVING THE LORD IS PARAMOUNT

Raskhan was a true lover of the Lord. He wanted humanity to rise above age old ritualistic practices to realize Divinity. He believed that the vision of the Lord was possible only through true love of the Lord. This is what he says in Sujaan about his love for Lord Krishna:

एक सुतीरथ डोलत है इक बार हजार पुरान बके हैं।

एक लगे जप में तप में इक सिद्ध समाधन में अटके हैं।

चेत जु देखत हौ रसखान सु मूढ़ महा सिंगरे भटके हैं।

साँच हि वे जन आपुनपौ यह स्याम गुपाल पै वारी दके हैं।<sup>23</sup> (Sujaan, p.6, verse 23)

One goes around performing pilgrimages, another one is engrossed in the recital of a thousand puranas, yet another person is engaged in telling of the beads and performing austerities. You observe yet another one lost in meditation. O Raskhan, all of these people have actually gone astray. Only those people are the truthful ones who have lost their minds in the constant love for Krishna.

## RASKHAN - A PART AND PARCEL OF INDIAN CULTURE AND SPIRITUALLY

This is what Saba Naqvi says in her book *In Good Faith* supporting the idea that many prominent muslims who rose to eminence in India in their own field never appeared as exclusive foreign entities from other muslim nations. That through years of toil in this country they became a part and parcel of it inasmuch as it is impossible to separate them from this intricate fabric of Hindu culture and civilization. This is particularly true of Raskhan and this is what is nicely put across to readers in the book by Saba Naqvi :

For instance, take the sixteenth-century poet Raskhan who became a Krishna devotee and is considered one of the masters of Braj Bhasha, which has had a rich literary tradition before Hindi. The pen name 'rasa', is described by one scholar as a Braj Bhasha pun, meaning 'mine of rasa'. Born Saiyad Ibrahim, the son of a minor jagirdar, he moved to Vrindavan after becoming a Krishna bhakt. He composed a rich body of devotional poems describing the beauty of Krishna and his love for Radha. His leelas or devotional songs on Krishna are still popular and anyone who follows the evolution of Braj and Hindi, is familiar with his works, still available most commonly as Raskhan Rachnavali. His grave at Mahavan in Mathura, is a popular pilgrimage spot. (Naqvi 145-146)

### THE STORY OF RASKHAN

A popular story goes thus - One fine day, Raskhan Pathan, a young man in teens and the heir to a rich merchant in Delhi, was observed standing before a Paan Shop in Old Delhi. He had ordered for the preparation of the betel leaves and was thus waiting at the shop. In the meanwhile his gaze wandered to a picture that was displayed just behind the Paan shop owner. The picture showed the infant Krishna, all smiles, standing naked and barefoot. Unknowingly, Raskhan felt drawn to the smile of the blue infant Krishna and ventured to ask the Paanwala, "Brother ! Who is this sweet child ? Why is he naked and barefoot in such inclement weather ? Is there nobody to take pity on him ?" To which innocent query the Paanwala replied , "Babuji ! Don't you know ? He is the infant Krishna whom we hindus worship as Kanha." Raskhan's curiosity was not at rest and so he further asked the shopkeeper, "Where is he to be found ? I am going to buy him clothes and slippers." The Paanwala replied that if Raskhan was serious in finding out the whereabouts of Krishna and giving him clothes and footwear he should surely go to Vrindavan and enquire of the people there.

Raskhan, therefore, made up his mind to find out the whereabouts of Krishna. Procuring expensive garments and dainty footwear for the infant Krishna the enthusiastic Pathan set out on horseback towards Vrindavan. The idea

is beautifully stated in the Book 252 Vaishnavan Ki Varta. " रसखान ने वो चित्र ले लियो और मन में ऐसो संकल्प कर्यो जो ऐसो स्वरूप देखनो जब अन्न खानो उहाँसु घोडा पर बैठके एकरात्र में वृन्दावन आयो " ( Ramdas 433 )

Even though a muslim, Raskhan's first love was hindi poetry and his composition 'Sujaan' is of surpassing beauty, both as poetry and as a spiritual offering of his to Lord Krishna whom he worshipped and envisioned till his last breath.

### RASKHAN'S INTENSE LONGING FOR KRISHNA AND BRAJBHUMI

The very first verse of Sujaan is proof of the intense devotion that Raskhan had for his beloved Lord Krishna:

मानुष हौं तो वही रसखानि बसौ ब्रज गोकुल गांव के खारना  
जो पसु हौं तो कहा बसु मेरो चरौं नित नंद की धेनु मँझारना  
पाहन हौं तो वही गिरि को जो धर्यो कर छत्र पुरंदर धारना  
जो खग हौं बसेरो करौं मिल कालिंदी कूल कदंब की डारना॥1॥

The translation of the foregoing verses goes as follows:

If Raskhan were to be born as a human again, he would prefer to be born among the cowherds of Gokul in Braj. On the other hand, if he was destined to take birth as a cow, he would prefer to graze among the cows of Nand. If a stone, he would prefer to be a stone on the mountain that Gopal held as an umbrella to protect the people of Vrindavan from the wrath of Indra. If by chance he was born a bird, he would like to make his nest in the kadamba tree on the banks of Kalindi (Yamuna).

### RASKHAN'S DEPICTION OF LORD KRISHNA AS THE STEALER OF HEARTS

Francesca Orsini has beautifully translated one of the verses from Sujaan in a beautiful and insightful manner. The verse goes as follows:

बेनु बजावत गोधन गावत ग्वालन सङ्ग गली मधी आयो I बान्सुरी मे उनी मेरोइ नाव  
सुखालिनी के मिस टेरी सुनाओ II ए सजनी सुनि सास के त्रासनि नंद के पास उसास न  
आयो। कैसी करौ रसखानि नहिं हित चैनन ही चितचो चुरायो॥174॥

Playing his flute and singing a herding song

He comes with his cowherds amidst the cows.

Through his flute he sounded my own name on

a pretext of calling the cowherd boys . O friend, hearing it , for fear of my mother-in-law, even

with my sister-in-law nearby I could not catch my breath;How should I act Raskhan, I who have no well-being, No peace have I, for the stealer of hearts has stolen it. ( Orsini 173)

### RASKHAN'S DEPICTION OF LORD KRISHNA'S CHILDHOOD

धूरि भरे अति सोभित श्यामजू तैसी बनी सिर सुंदर चोटी।

खेलत खात फिरै अंगना पग पैजनी बाजति पीरी कछोटि।

वा छवि को रसखानि बिलोक्त वारत काम कला निधि कोटी।

काग के भाग बड़े सजनी हरि-हाथ सों लै गयो माखन-रोटी॥ (Bhati 138)

Some Gopi describing the beauty of Lord Krishna to her companion says that the young Lord Krishna looks beautiful with his dust-besmeared body. His hair gathered together in a knot looked absolutely beautiful. He was wandering in front of his house playing and eating butter and roti. As Krishna walked the anklets tied to his feet sounded sweet. He was wearing a yellow lower garment. Seeing his beauty even cupid felt ashamed and started to admire him. O Companion ! That crow was lucky who took away the butter and roti from the hands of Krishna and flew away.

### RASKHAN'S DEPICTION OF THE ETERNAL LOVE OF THE GOPIKAS TOWARDS SHYAM

In one of his rare compositions in the Sujaan, Raskhan says the following about the condition of a Gopika who has fallen in love with Lord Krishna:

जा दिन ते निरख्यो नंदनंदन कानी तजी कर बंधन टूट्यो।

चारु बिलोकिन कीनी सुमार सम्हार गई मन मोर ने लूट्यो।

सागर कों सलिला जिमि धावे न रोकी रुकै कुलको पुल टूट्यो।

मत्त भयो मन संग फिरै रसखानी सरूप सुधारस घुट्यो॥56॥

The gopika who has fallen in love with Lord Krishna says to her companion, "O friend! From the very day I saw Shyam, I seem to have abandoned all family honour and the loyalty. The soft glances of Shyam have stolen my heart. The Love of Shyam, like the limitless ocean, has so inundated my heart that the waves of this love have broken the bonds of family relationship. My mind is now totally intoxicated with His Love as though I had drunk all the ambrosia given to the gods.

जा दिन तें मुस्कान चुभी चित ता दिन तें निकसी न निकारी।

कुंडल लोल कपोल महा छवि कुंजन तें निकस्यो सुखकारी॥

हौ सखी आवत ही दगरे पग पैड़ तजी रिझई बनवारी।

रसखानी परी मुस्कानी के पाननी कौन गनै कुलकानी विचारी॥79॥

The above beautiful lines of Raskhan could be translated as follows:

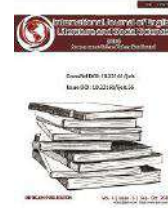
From the day Shyam's smile has pierced my heart - from that very day I am unable to forget that smile as he emerged from the lanes of Vrindavan, his ear rings ornamenting his beautiful cheeks, his very presence so pleasing to my heart. As he came closer, I lost control of myself and started to follow him to gain his favour. Just to gain that Divine smile of Shyam I have even neglected my family.

### CONCLUSION

Raskhan's unparalleled composition "Sujaan" is undoubtedly a treasure trove of the mystical visions and close encounters that Raskhan had with his Sweet Lord Krishna. To delve deep into this magical composition is to try to fathom the intellect of Raskhan that was ever diffused with the Ambrosia of the Devotion to the Supreme Lord Krishna who ever dwells in the hearts of men who sing his glory night and day.

### REFERENCES

- [1] Raskhan. Sujaan.p.6,verse23 Retrieved from 44books.com.
- [2] Naqvi,Saba.In Good Faith.Rainlight Publishers,2012
- [3] Ramdas. 252 Vaishnavan Ki Varta. Mumbai, Khemraj Shri Krishnadas Prakashan, 2018
- [4] Orsini, Francesca . Before the Divide. Hyderabad, Orient Blackswan Private Limited, 2010
- [5] Bhati,Deshraj Singh.Raskhan Granthavali Satik. Delhi, Ashok Prakashan,1966.



# Love in Eileen Chang's works: Distinctive and ideological

Nguyen Ngoc Khai Linh

High School for the Gifted, Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Received: 09 Jul 2023; Received in revised form: 12 Aug 2023; Accepted: 20 Aug 2023; Available online: 27 Aug 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— *In the realm of literature, the exploration of love has perpetually fascinated both creators and readers, serving as a dynamic mirror reflecting shifts in societal norms, cultural undercurrents, and ideological tides. Across the epochs, the portrayal of love within literary works has undergone a profound evolution. In the tapestry of classical Chinese literature, characterized by draconian dogmas and entrenched male chauvinism during the feudal era, women were often relegated to subordinate roles, their experiences of love marred by silent endurance. However, a literary luminary emerged who infused new vitality into the depiction of affection – Eileen Chang. Her narratives transcended conventions, empowering individuals of all genders to articulate their emotions boldly, resist societal constraints, and challenge the forces that dictated their fates. Within the intricate weave of her prose, love ceased to be a mere sentiment; instead, it emerged as an indomitable force of defiance and liberation. This research article delves meticulously into the exquisite tapestry of love woven by Eileen Chang, casting a spotlight on its enduring essence and providing a contemporary evaluation that harmonizes with modern perspectives.*



**Keywords**— *Chinese literature, Contemporary literature, Eileen Chang, Feminism, Love*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Eileen Chang (also known as Zhang Ailing 张爱玲) stands as an illustrious figure in the realm of Chinese contemporary literature. Despite her prolific literary output from a young age, it wasn't until the publication of "Chenxiang Xie – Diyi Luxiang" 沉香屑 第一炉香 (Aloe Ashes – The First Burning) in the esteemed Shanghai magazine "Zilanlou" 紫罗兰 (Violet) in 1943 that she garnered significant recognition within literary circles. Subsequent years witnessed a succession of captivating and widely acclaimed narratives, including "The Golden Cangue" 金鎖記, "Love in a Fallen City" 傾城之戀, "Red Rose, White Rose" 紅玫瑰與白玫瑰 and "Lust, Caution" 色戒. Yet, amid the tumultuous backdrop of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, political forces cast a shadow on scholarly explorations of Eileen Chang and her literary opus. Despite these vicissitudes, scholars have resoundingly affirmed that Chang's indelible legacy and

literary contributions remain indispensable keystones within Chinese literary discourse.

However, the current landscape evinces a relative scarcity in scholarly endeavors dedicated to Eileen Chang and her literary corpus. A discernible decline in research output and analytical essays has emerged, marking a departure from prior epochs. However, literature itself is an embodiment of life, adapting to the ever-evolving societal tapestry. Over the passage of time, societal transformations invariably reshape the lens through which literary research is undertaken. While antecedent investigations often gravitated towards theoretical underpinnings and Chang's mastery of the written word, such as in "A Theoretical Study of Zhang Ailing's Short Story Collection" (Lin Wei-Hsin) and "The Construction of Eileen Chang's Image in Different Periods" (Yaqi Zhao, Guicheng Zhuang) and "Eileen Chang's Feminine Chinese Modernity: Dysfunctional Marriages, Hysterical Women, and the Primordial Eugenic Threat" (Rachel Leng) - this research, in the year 2023, endeavors to delve into the intricacies of love within Eileen Chang's narratives - a thematic terrain



both familiar and yet relatively uncharted within her works. Through this lens, a panoramic view of Eileen Chang's conception of love at the juncture of her creative output shall be unveiled, juxtaposed against the backdrop of contemporary ideological vistas emerging in the era of modern technology.

The ascent of Eileen Chang's prominence within the literary firmament can be attributed to myriad factors. Foremost among these is her distinct and singular perspective, which stood in stark contrast to the prevailing norms concerning women during her era. In a milieu characterized by tumultuous political upheavals, societal corrosion, and the deluge of war, many of her contemporaries gravitated towards themes of resolute determination, moral rectitude, and patriotic fervor. Consequently, the realm of literature largely relegated love to a peripheral role, overshadowed by weightier concerns. However, Eileen Chang charted a different trajectory. In an era where the emergence of female writers was an exceptional rarity, her unique voice shone resplendently. Focusing her gaze intently upon the intricacies of human relationships, she once remarked, "I choose to capture the minutiae of interactions between men and women. My narratives eschew the theatrics of wars and revolutions, preferring instead to illuminate the nuanced terrain of amorous entanglements." Even when political currents made fleeting appearances, as exemplified in "Lust, Caution" they assumed auxiliary roles, mere silhouettes on the periphery of her central narrative tapestry. Love, in the expanse of Eileen Chang's literary canvases, emerges as an unmistakably salient and recurrent motif. However, this love is far from a vacuous or inert sentiment; rather, it unfurls as a vibrant, soul-stirring, and ardently passionate tapestry of emotions. In so doing, Eileen Chang adroitly crafts a mosaic that encompasses her own introspections, philosophical musings on the human condition, and intricate worldviews - each infused with an unwavering commitment to dismantling feudal norms and resounding echoes of feminist defiance.

## II. LOVE IN EILEEN CHANG'S WORKS: HUMAN CONDITIONS

### 1. Women

The female protagonists in Eileen Chang's novels and short stories predominantly hail from the middle-class echelons of Shanghai and Hong Kong, navigating the turbulent waters of their respective eras. These women are enveloped in a complex interplay of love, desire, power, and wealth, set against the backdrop of a patriarchal society and the turmoil of the wartime upheavals. Their narratives often unfold against a tapestry of adversity,

marked by fates shadowed with widowhood, premature maturity, familial abandonment (as evidenced in Bai Liusu - "Love in a Fallen City"), espionage, exploitative circumstances (as exemplified in Wang Chia-chih - "Lust, Caution"), the challenges of nurturing under duress, marital neglect (as depicted in "Steamed Osmanthus Flower: Ah Xiao's Unhappy Autumn" 桂花蒸·阿小悲秋), concubinage, and daily struggles with envy (as portrayed in Chunyu Dunfeng - "Traces of Love" 留情). Yet, these female protagonists seldom bask in contentment. They embody the ebb and flow of the human condition, grappling with life's vicissitudes and emotional tempests. Consequently, when entangled in the complexities of men's affections, their engagement is often restrained. Their approach to love is marked not by superficiality but by deliberation, intrigue, intentionality, and at times, pragmatic motives. Despite their multifaceted nature and mischievous tendencies, Eileen Chang preserves their innate femininity, rendering them susceptible to the allure of love. Amid the labyrinth of trials, anxieties, calculations, and intrigues, these women ultimately unveil their capacity for profound and genuine love.

Eileen Chang's female protagonists defy the traditional constraints of feudal women, transcending the boundaries of archaic norms. No longer beholden to rigid dogmas, they cast off the veils of timidity, shedding the vestiges of virginity and age-related expectations. Eileen Chang deftly forges an entirely novel archetype of women, intricately woven into the fabric of everyday life and the complex societal dynamics of that era. In this endeavor, she injects her narratives with a resounding feminism, setting herself apart from her literary precursors in both poetry and storytelling.

In essence, Eileen Chang's female characters encapsulate the internal contradictions that women navigate as they traverse the realms of fame, fortune, and love, while juggling collective and personal aspirations. These characters emerge as emblematic figures of a transitional epoch, embodying the struggle of reconciling Confucian traditions with the audacity to articulate individual thoughts. Eileen Chang's masterful portrayal of women in love stands as a testament, carving a distinctive niche that marries unwavering strength with a gentle tenderness, a portrayal rarely equaled in the literary realm.

### 2. Men

In stark contrast to the harrowing circumstances faced by the women in Eileen Chang's narratives, her male characters emerge as figures of affluence, influence, and privilege. Among them, one encounters the likes of prosperous sheriffs who wield dominion over life and death, exemplified by the enigmatic Mr. Yee in "Lust,

Caution". Fan Liuyan in "Love in a Fallen City" embodies the scion of a prosperous lineage, while Mi Raozheng in "Traces of Love" personifies a dignified and well-mannered businessman. The suave intellectual and heartthrob Tong Zhenbao from "Red Rose, White Rose" commands respect, yet paradoxically, these men are ensnared in a web of solitude, suspicion, and latent anxieties, unspoken and concealed.

Even Mr. Yee, an unflinching figure responsible for countless lives, navigates existence in a state of perpetual isolation and doubt. Similarly, Mr. Gerda from "Steamed Osmanthus Flower: Ah Xiao's Unhappy Autumn" yearns for adoration yet remains skeptical of love, restrained by his own lack of courage to surrender to its capricious embrace. The once ardent Tong Zhenbao, too, surrenders his infatuation as "Liu Xia Hui" 柳下惠. Meanwhile, Fan Liuyan, entangled in the web of societal judgment, bears the weight of unfounded accusations, unfairly tarnishing his family's legacy.

While the female personas in Eileen Chang's stories bear the heavy yoke of destitution and dire destinies, their male counterparts bask in opulence, wealth, reputation, authority, and knowledge, yet remain deprived of the solace of love. Amid their ranks, some have forsaken belief in the bonds between genders, while others view love as a restorative tonic. Certain men, bound by the fear of its inevitable dissolution, endeavor to stifle their emotions, straitjacketed by societal expectations.

Amidst the Confucian tenets and draconian doctrines that often stifle such expressions, conventional writers rarely allow male characters to unveil such fragile and solitary sentiments, entrenched as they are in the feudal paradigm dictating that men must stoically provide for their female counterparts. Eileen Chang, however, defies these conventions, challenging the norms with an unwavering feminism that remains tempered with compassion and empathy towards men. Her male characters embody their humanity, openly revealing vulnerabilities and grappling with solitude. Within her narratives, these men find themselves liberated to voice their innermost desires, all while retaining the dignity and decorum befitting their gender - a delicate equilibrium of impassioned love balanced by reason.

### III. EMBRACING IDEOLOGICAL MESSAGES: LOVE AS A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

In the pursuit of literary immortality, a work must transcend its pages to embody profound ideological values. Eileen Chang's oeuvre exemplifies this principle. Central to her narrative tapestry is an unwavering feminist voice, a

rarity within the confines of traditional Chinese feudal literature and its underlying conceptions. Within her tales, readers are confronted with poignant moments where a concubine dares to articulate her inner turmoil, her heartache stemming from a love that remains solitary and unfulfilled. Take, for instance, Chunyu Dunfeng in "Traces of Love", who unabashedly airs her grievances, highlighting her husband's unwavering devotion to his first wife. Equally compelling is Wang Chia-chih in "Lust, Caution", whose bold embrace of personal love unveils a secret conspiracy, culminating in a failed mission. And then there is the indomitable Bai Liusu in "Love in a Fallen City", a widow who, despite societal expectations, steadfastly charts a course towards her own happiness. These narrative instances stand as eloquent testaments to Eileen Chang's unyielding anti-feudal stance, cementing her legacy as one of the most exceptional and pioneering female authors of her era.

Furthermore, within the intricacies of Eileen Chang's prose, both male and female characters emanate an ethos of liberation and progression. Their romantic bonds defy ephemeral societal norms - whether constrained by suitable alliances, age-imposed limitations, the specter of chastity, or the ceaseless whispers of societal judgment. These unions germinate from the convergence of kindred souls, seeking solace and completion in each other's presence. Men, driven by an unwavering resolve, unabashedly embrace love for widows, transcending conventions and persisting despite the weight of unfair advantages. In parallel, women cast aside the shackles of feudal Confucian norms, embarking on their personal journeys towards happiness, unabashedly voicing their affections, and fearlessly spotlighting the injustices that punctuate their daily lives.

Eileen Chang's portrayal of love transcends the conventional; it rejects facile categorization and surmounts patriarchal paradigms. Within this intricate web of emotions, men and women stand as equals, bound neither by artificial divides nor societal expectations. Wives engage in candid conversations with husbands, as poignantly depicted in "Traces of Love" and "Steamed Osmanthus Flower: Ah Xiao's Unhappy Autumn". Similarly, women boldly partake in intimate tête-à-tête dialogues with men, exemplified in "Love in a Fallen City". The feminism and anti-feudal spirit woven into Eileen Chang's characters' relationships, whether in specific instances or within the broader narrative scope, ardently strive for authentic equality - among individuals and across the vast fabric of human existence.

#### IV. EILEEN CHANG'S PENMANSHIP: ELEGANCE IN EXPRESSION

A significant segment of the populace categorizes Eileen Chang's literary creations as "yán qíng" 言情 or romantic novels. However, her depiction of love transcends this classification. Firstly, the love she artfully constructs serves as a conduit for conveying timeless ideological insights, defying myriad feudal constraints. Secondly, Eileen Chang's mastery of penmanship attains a pinnacle of refinement in style.

In Eileen Chang's narratives, expressions of love - including flirtatious exchanges and matters of sexual nature - are executed not with vulgarity, but with a remarkable finesse and subtlety. Even when addressing sexual desire, she portrays it as an ordinary facet of daily existence, devoid of hesitancy or shame. Employing terminology that departs from rigid feudal conventions - words such as "nipples" or "armpit" - Eileen Chang seamlessly maintains her signature gentle and decorous narrative tone. Readers of her works traverse the gamut of emotions within a context of normalcy and tasteful literary ambiance. Consequently, Eileen Chang's creations have never been relegated to the realm of erotic literature. Throughout history, love and sexual desire have walked hand in hand, yet many writers have avoided these subjects due to their perceived sensitivity. Eileen Chang, however, boldly diverges from this norm, treating sexual matters as integral to the human experience, conveyed with a natural and vibrant penmanship devoid of gratuitous prurience.

Eileen Chang adeptly brings internal conflicts to a crescendo when her characters grapple with paradoxical moments. A striking illustration of this occurs in her depiction of Wang Chia-chih's tumultuous emotional state in "Lust, Caution," where she is compelled to orchestrate the demise of her beloved. Presented with the heart-wrenching choice between executing the man who bestowed upon her a sense of cherished love and loyalty, or succumbing to her own yearnings and betraying a revolutionary cause, Wang Chia-chih embodies profound internal turmoil. Eileen Chang's portrayal of these inner struggles is far from pedantic or ponderous; it resounds with an authentic depiction of the complex *mélange* of emotions coursing through a woman's psyche.

Furthermore, Eileen Chang's narrative craftsmanship imbues her works with a lingering sense of poignant yearning. Her stories frequently conclude with a melancholic aura, characterized by unresolved endings. Every word and phrase etches indelible reflections within the reader's psyche. While Eileen Chang generally veers away from weaving overt political threads, choosing instead to tangentially allude to such factors, her stories

predominantly revolve around the theme of love. Love in her works ultimately thrives within the crucible of wartime turmoil, amidst an era that interweaves the influences of the Occident and the Orient, and during a transitional phase in history. In the face of sweeping societal transformations, Eileen Chang's distinct perspectives and emotions imbue her narratives with a spectrum of highs and lows. Her characters are ensnared within the throes of sorrowful human conditions, while her penmanship attains an exquisite refinement - much like the love that pervades the majority of her tales.

#### V. EVOLVING LEGACY: LOVE IN EILEEN CHANG'S WORKS THROUGH MODERN EYES

The portrayal of love in Eileen Chang's literary works transcends time and defies conventional thoughts and ideological paradigms of her era. It encompasses a profound and equitable connection between men and women - an unwavering bond that dares to challenge norms, fight for personal and shared happiness, and shrug off the weight of critical prejudices propagated by both society and the Confucian feudal system. Although Eileen Chang's stories were penned and published in the mid-1940s, they brim with innovative nuances that exude a striking modernity, prefiguring a love that resonates harmoniously with contemporary sensibilities.

In the present day, Eileen Chang stands as a quintessential figure representing feminist literature, amplifying the voices of countless women entrapped by antiquated and misleading conventions. Her legacy resides in her ability to forge an entirely novel image of love within the realm of Chinese contemporary literature. Love, as depicted in her works, emancipates itself from the straitjacket of Confucian rituals and feudal norms. Within this narrative domain, individuals from all strata of society, irrespective of their circumstances, yearn ardently to be cherished, understood, and authentically connected, unshackled from societal constraints that traditionally suppress their emotions. Eileen Chang's rendition of love is marked by its abruptness and inevitability, enabling male and female characters alike to tangibly experience the profound depth of their emotions.

Furthermore, despite being a prominent advocate of feminist literature, Eileen Chang's stories remain refreshingly devoid of weighty didacticism. The feminist spirit within her works isn't relegated to trite slogans; rather, it is masterfully woven into nuanced details. Women emerge as unflinching advocates for their happiness, unwaveringly voicing their desires and resolutely seeking fulfillment. However, within the realm of love, an intriguing equilibrium emerges where men and

women are cast on an equal footing. They converse openly, express their emotions unabashedly, and navigate their feelings as if no societal barriers exist - a testament to the underlying essence of two souls intermingling, unburdened by artificial hierarchies. This symmetrical portrayal of love, emerging amidst the backdrop of tumultuous times and entrenched male-centric societies, encapsulates Eileen Chang's aspirational vision - a realm where love transcends societal divides and flourishes as a sublime, egalitarian force.

This nuanced exploration of love in Eileen Chang's literary creations stands as a pivotal contribution to the realms of both literature and gender dynamics, fostering a profound impact that resonates across temporal boundaries.

## VI. CONCLUSION

In summation, the portrayal of love within Eileen Chang's literary tapestry stands out as a unique and distinctive departure from the narratives and verses of preceding Chinese literary traditions. This representation of love is refracted through the prism of a woman's perspective, yet it radiates with an intensity and profundity that sets it apart. The resonance of Eileen Chang's works, which garnered widespread attention and acclaim, owes much to this paradoxically familiar and exceptional thematic exploration.

Love, as depicted in Eileen Chang's narratives, is imbued with the complexities of unique human circumstances, interwoven with intricate conspiracies, and illuminated by the radiance of solitary souls. The internal conflicts that her male and female characters grapple with not only illuminate love's existence amidst tumultuous eras but also offer reflections on the enduring essence of love within the tranquil embrace of the present day. Moreover, these portrayals candidly chronicle the various stages of love that persist across the annals of human experience, seamlessly bridging the divides between temporal epochs.

Eileen Chang's literary finesse lies in her ability to unravel the multifaceted facets of love, revealing its diverse expressions and manifestations. Her narratives encapsulate love's resilience and tenacity, thriving within the crucible of adversity, and blossoming amid the serenity of contemporary life. Through her masterful penmanship, love is not merely confined to a singular narrative; rather, it emerges as a timeless and universal force, seamlessly threading its way through the intricate fabric of human existence.

In this manner, Eileen Chang's exploration of love not only constitutes a literary triumph but also a profound testament to the enduring human condition. Her distinctive

perspective, juxtaposed against the backdrop of shifting eras, paints a vibrant tableau of love's perpetual presence and unwavering significance - a poignant reminder that the tapestry of love is one that transcends time, tradition, and circumstance.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Hsin. L. W. (2007). *A Theoretical Study of Zhang Ailing's Short Story Collection* (Doctor's thesis, University of London, London)
- [2] Yaqi. Z & Guicheng. Z. (2022). The Construction of Eileen Chang's Image in Different Periods. *Atlantis Press*, 652, 303-309.
- [3] Rachel. L. (2014). Eileen Chang's Feminine Chinese Modernity: Dysfunctional Marriages, Hysterical Women, and the Primordial Eugenic Threat. *Quarterly Journal of Chinese Studies*, 13-34.
- [4] Alzheeva. M. M, Shorvaeva. N. V, Mushaeva. O. K, Turdumatova. E. B, Chalbanova. K. V, Menkenova. K. V. (2021). Tragedy of a Women's Fate in the Works of Eileen Chang. *European Proceedings of Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 56-61. DOI: 10.15405/epsbs.2021.05.8
- [5] Yue. W. (2021). *Eileen Chang in Letters: A Chinese American Writer in Disapora, 1955-1995* (Master's thesis, McGill University, Montreal)
- [6] Linh. N. T. D. (2020). *Truong Ai Linh người tình của Thượng Hải*. HNUE Faculty of Philosophy. Retrieved May 11, 2023, from: <http://nguivan.hnue.edu.vn/Nghiên-cứu/Văn-h%E1%BB%8Dc-nước-ngoài/p/truong-ai-linh-nguoi-tinh-cua-thuong-hai-1429>
- [7] Phuong. N. T. L. (2011). *Đặc trưng bút pháp Trương Ái Linh* (Master's thesis, VNU University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Ho Chi Minh City).





# Need for an Aligned ESP Writing Course for Engineering Students

Prem Raj Kharbanda

Department of Business Communication, Eastern Institute for Integrated Learning in Management, Kolkata, India

Received: 13 Jul 2023; Received in revised form: 11 Aug 2023; Accepted: 18 Aug 2023; Available online: 28 Aug 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— *The English writing skills of engineering students in India is a tricky proposition. The term- end university exams majorly test their writing ability but the students focus more on oral communication skills to do well in group discussions and interviews to get placed. To add to this, the pressure of domain subjects and a lack of awareness about the real need of writing skills at the workplace and in higher education contribute both to a neglect and poor standard of writing. University courses are not updated frequently and proper needs analysis is not done. India produces the largest number of engineers annually. The paper argues for a mechanism to continuously update English writing course for engineering students by aligning the views of all stakeholders. It also recommends granting autonomy and flexibility to ESP teachers to draft a new or modify the existing writing course which will be updated as per the academic and workplace needs.*

**Keywords**— *aligned, ESP, engineering students, writing course*



## I. INTRODUCTION

“One cannot travel far these days without being struck by the pervasiveness of English as the world’s second language.” (Crystal, 2012, p.1). English is spoken in 101 countries and it is the connecting language in “international businesses, worldwide diplomacy, and science.” (Thierry, 2018). The language plays the function of a bond between the countries, whether cultural or educational. As per Nordquist (2019), there are roughly 500 million speakers whose mother tongue is English and around 510 whose mother tongue is not English. Stevens (1980) pointed out that we needed to use English depending on the kind of culture we wished to inherit. It is a language which literally and metaphorically moves and shakes the world. The English language competence is strongly demanded in research, work prospects, and career growth. “It is a contact language, a lingua franca, and a language in flux.” (Rose, et al, 2021, p.158).

### 1.1 English in the National Context

When the British left in 1947, “the constitution of the new Republic had to be written in English.” (Chaudhary, 2002, p.39). English continues to play an essential role in modern India's transformation- social, cultural, and

political. If a language links people in India, it is English. Gujarat and Karnataka or Kerala have little contact without English, for example. The language of national unity is English.

Though Mookerjee (1944) was critical of the British education policy because it did not cater to sociocultural realities and was focused on creating civil servants for the government, the current role of English in our country is summed up quite rationally, “The position of English in Indian multilingualism has changed from being the symbol of colonial power and exploitation to be the symbol of economic and technological power for the progress of the country and the individuals.” (Annamalai, 2006, p.613).

**1.1.1 National Education Policy, 2020:** The new education policy seeks to promote multilingualism and as for the existing three-language formula, it seeks to bring at least two out of three in the classroom from among the native languages in India. Till class V, the students are to be taught in their mother tongue/regional language/local language. It strongly argues in favour of Indian languages. It points out that English education has brought in elitism and marginalization of large sections of society. Even if the argument is considered infallible, unless higher education is accessible in regional languages, the students

do not have options beyond English. The aspirational value of learning English is not addressed in the policy statement. In keeping with the current times, a lot of emphasis has been laid to incorporate technology in all the sections of education, be it primary, secondary, tertiary. Recognizing the need for highly qualified manpower, the policy proposes a closer connection between industry and higher education institutions.

### 1.3 Development of ESP in India

Chaudhury (2002) argues that as there were Bengali-English, and Urdu-English glossaries even in the eighteenth century; the roots of ESP in India could be traced to that time. As per Tasildar (2013), the findings of the Study Group (1971), Curriculum Development Centre (1989), and the various projects of the British Council in the 80s were mainly responsible for the spread of ESP education in India in the previous century. The recommendation of the Study Group (1971) to consider "English as a library language" initiated the official journey of ESP in India. It also suggested "a course on commercial English". Similarly, CDC (1989) proposed courses like "Business Communication" and "English for advertising and copywriting". The British Council's collaboration with the Indian Institute of Mines resulted in "English for science and technology." Similarly, its project in Kolkata with the Teachers' Training Institute gave birth to "Communication in English for technical students" in 1984. (Tasildar, 2013, p.4). Though Upadhyay (2018) shows how ESP courses have flourished in the UK with the option of doing masters in it in some universities and also the fact that ESP has a dedicated international journal, Tasildar (2013) rightly points out that beyond a few specialized certificate courses offered by a few universities, only two courses "Technical English", "Business English" satisfying the workplace needs of the budding engineers and business management students in India respectively have dominated. So, there are immense possibilities in ESP teaching/ learning, including designing courses, in India.

## II. JUSTIFICATION OF TEACHING WRITING TO ENGINEERING STUDENTS

Clement and Murugavel (2018) have identified gaps between the teacher's methodology and engineering students' confidence levels. Tickoo (2003) sums up our problem well: "It is common knowledge that many of those who speak fluently and intelligibly often fail when it comes to writing for well-defined, job-related or academic purposes". (p.56). The English that students learnt at school does not adequately prepare them for higher studies and workplace needs (Hyland, 2022, p.1).

Academic, professional, and personal are the three major reasons why writing needs to be taught.

### 2.1 Academic justification:

Today, India produces the largest number of engineers in the world annually. As per Thakur and Mantha (2021) one million engineers graduate in India every year from "3500 engineering colleges, 3400 polytechnics, and 200 schools of planning and architecture."

### 2.2 Professional or Occupational Justification

According to Trevalyan (2009), a novice engineer spends 60% of his/her time interacting with others. As per Tenopir and King (2004), 28% of the above-mentioned time goes into writing and the remaining 32% in oral communication skills.

### 2.3 Personal Purposes

English can be helpful to an ordinary person in correspondence with foreign associates, heads of organizations, colleagues, governments, etc. A written complaint to either the shopping centre or the shopping web platform would also need English.

## III. WRITING AS A SKILL

Writing is a productive language skill. Hyland (2013) signifies the importance of writing thus, "Not only is it hard to imagine modern academic and corporate life without essays, commercial letters, emails, medical reports and minutes of meetings, but writing is also a key feature of every student's experience." (p. 95). Hyland (2003) points out that writing skill is the toughest challenge to the teachers. A second language learner must acquire extensive linguistic competence to be able to write successfully. Teachers need to use controlled activities, authentic tasks and real-life experience to improve the writing of the learners. (Swales & Feak, 2004). A mother tongue and second language are most unlikely to have the same patterning of arrangement and outlining to present ideas and opinions and the earlier experiences of the learners at home or in school do not make them properly attuned to academic and workplace writing needs. (Hyland, 2013, p.96).

As per Thaiss & Zawacki (2006), academic writing entails dominantly a prose register that lays more emphasis on reason than on emotion or sensual perception. (p.5-7). However, stylistic variations across various disciplines are the norms rather than exceptions. Swales (1990) tried to analyze these differences across various disciplines and called this theory "discourse communities". Biber & Gray (2016) pointed out quite clearly how academic writing in humanities differed from its counterpart in the sciences. They were of the view that humanities relied more on

structural elaboration while sciences relied more on structural compression.

#### IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of Živković (2015) illustrated the value of students' language skills in the engineering sector. The study's findings demonstrated a fondness for career-oriented pedagogy. Altalib (2019) investigated motivation of learners in specific and general language contexts using the models of Dörnyei. The learners in the specific language category had higher motivation levels and more positive attitudes than General English course learners. Kannan (2013) wrote in *The Hindu* that potential engineers were not trained to compose decent plans, papers, or ideas. Kumari's (2016) findings in the classroom on teaching writing showed that most students had inferior writing skills. Deshmukh (2015) highlighted in her story that in polytechnics and engineering colleges, English was taught in compulsory form because a strong understanding of the English language allowed students to get work. It was reported that most students did not learn the requisite skills of written and spoken English even after completing their studies in college. The study of Rus (2015) introduced the characteristics and methodology that the ESP linguist could follow to construct and strengthen engineering students' writing skills and develop the most common written technical communications models in a step-by-step process. Robinson and Blair (1995) taught writing skills to the first-year students at Edinburgh University in a professional engineering module. The researchers concluded that structured input was an indicator that helped students build and sustain a professional growth curriculum to increase their abilities in writing to the degree that fitted their profession's needs. In the study of Changpueng and Pattanapichet (2015) regarding the importance of genres in professional life, there were some areas of misalignment between students, teachers, operational engineers and managerial engineers. Du (2019) showed the various problems that Chinese engineers faced in California while writing in English. Phoung (2018) showed the mismatch between an ESP curriculum and workplace communication needs in a Vietnamese context. In fact, her study showed that workplace genres were different from those taught in the ESP course.

#### V. DISCUSSION

The first globalization and liberalization of our economy have led to more emphasis on specialization and along with it higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) like synthesizing, analyzing, reasoning, comprehending application, and evaluation. To facilitate workplace

linguistic skills like writing emails, negotiating with the clients and colleagues, presenting information and product, writing a product manual or a technical report, and so on have become indispensable for a successful career.

Post second world war heralded the domination of technology and commerce. As a corollary to this, people wanted English to survive and grow instead of the common reason of "pleasure or prestige." (Hutchinson & Waters, 2009, p.6). At around the same time, development in linguistics changed the way we perceive language. From the primal grammar intensive learning, all kinds of language learning moved to the realization that the key to language learning was going beyond the realm of grammar. Canale and Swain (1980) argued in favor of three sub-competences to communicate effectively:

- a) fluency and accuracy in usage and grammar
- b) interactions as per the requirement of the context or discourse community
- c) strategic ability to overcome communication-related problems.

Canale (2014) added another 'discourse' competence to this list which implied cohesion and coherence in utterances. These competences together resulted in what is commonly called 'communicative competence.' For short-term and result-oriented communicative competence which aims at fully specified results, we need an ESP course for professionals as against a general English course. (Ghafournia & Sabet, 2014). In the words of Hutchinson & Waters (1987): "if language varies from one situation of use to another, it should be possible to determine the features of specific situations and then make these features the basis of the learners' course." (p.7).

As ESP is a highly 'learning -centered approach' (Hutchinson & Waters, 2009, p.14), the needs, which include psychological needs and preferences of the adult learner, are multi-dimensional and hence the teacher needs to go beyond the classroom not only to find out those but to align those with the requirements of the workplace. (Ghafournia & Sabet, 2014). Thus, working engineers should also be included in ESP writing course design. Without needs analysis, no modern ESP course has been or can be designed. As Widodo (2017) points out "It provides the basis for lesson planning, syllabus design, materials evaluation and development, and instructional design and assessment development." (p.127).

Engineers need to write both for their operation and business roles. To add to this, many engineers, with or without work experience, specialize in business through an immensely popular business course MBA (Master of Business Administration). As Sigmar and Hynes (2012) argue strongly: "If students at the university level lack the

skills to write an effective business message, then educators must provide them additional writing instruction, practice, motivation, and feedback until they can produce an acceptable document.” (p.141). So, what is required is the development of a course in English writing seeking to enhance the writing ability of the engineers so that it would meet their academic and employment needs.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The English writing skills of engineering students in India, including are not upto the expected level as shown in various research studies. Most of the courses designed by various authorities, including the universities and AICTE are not frequently updated.

A single English course for engineers lasts for many years. The students need English both in their workplace and in academic settings. Most studies in India have considered the needs and views of either the teachers or students. In order to assess the use of genres and digital tools in order to develop the writing skills, only students were selected as respondents. (Freddi & Tlukova, 2022, p.36) whereas Hamdani and Ouahmiche (2022, p.681) chose only engineers with experience. Jacob (2015) surveyed both students and teachers to design an ESP writing course for engineers. In each, one or more stakeholders are left out. The research on writing genres exposed this mismatch “between both the students’ perceptions of what was needed and what the professional engineers wrote at their workplace.” (Kharbanda, 2023, p.67). We need to align all- the students, the teachers, and professional engineers- because each is a vital and indispensable cog in the wheel. Hence there remains a gap between what is perceived to be needed and what is needed. Many engineers work in the services sector, for example and the use of English writing skills in that sector can be safely assumed to differ from what is required in other sectors. So, a comprehensive writing course is needed which could be useful for all kinds of engineers in all sectors. Further, many engineers handle managerial or business profiles with or without a business course like MBA. Their requirements are likely to be different from those who handle engineering or operational profiles. So, the course also needs to cater to these kinds of engineers. Thus, the ESP writing course should be designed and implemented by taking a holistic view of the needs of all the important stakeholders- the students, the professional engineers (operational and managerial), and of course, the teachers. Technology is getting updated rapidly and so is the writing skill requirement. It takes time for these changes to percolate to the academic world. It is also a commonly accepted fact that university syllabuses change after a prolonged period for obvious reasons. Such delays may add to inadequate

learning of the students. Freddi and Tlukova (2022, p.46) prescribe a “close cooperation between ESP teachers and engineering specialists to develop an L2 English writing module in the engineering curriculum.” The gap between the classroom and the workplace, if any, will have to be bridged by this aligned course. The NEP (2020) also lays stress on this aspect as it proposes “closer collaborations between industry and higher education institutions to drive innovation and research in these fields” (p.50).

## REFERENCES

- [1] Altalib, A. N. (2019). L2 motivation in ESP and EGP courses: An investigation of L2 motivational selves among learners of English in Saudi Arabia. *Australian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 2(1), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.29140/ajal.v2n1.113>
- [2] Annamalai, E (2006). India: Language Situation. (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). In Keith Brown (Ed.). *Encyclopedia of Language & Linguistics*, 5, 610-613. Elsevier.
- [3] Biber, D. & Gray, B. (2016). *Grammatical complexity in academic English (Studies in the English Language)*. Cambridge.
- [4] Bommanaboina, R. D., & Guduru, R. (2021). Self-assessment of engineering learners’ perception of usefulness of pre-writing strategies. *Canadian Journal of Language and Literature Studies*, 1(3). <https://doi.org/10.53103/cjlls.v1i3.18>
- [5] Canale, M. and Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics* 1 (1), 1-47.
- [6] Canale, M. (2014). From communicative competence to communicative language pedagogy. In J. C. Richards & R. Schmidt (Eds.), *Language and communication*, 2-14. Routledge.
- [7] Changpueng, P. & Pattanapichet, F. (2015). An Analysis of English in the Workplace: The Needs of Engineers in Writing in English. *Journal of Social Sciences, Humanities, and Arts*, 15(3), 151-176. <https://thaiscience.info/Journals/Article/SUIJ/10981856.pdf>
- [8] Chaudhary, S. (2002). The sociolinguistic context of English language teaching in India. In S. Kudchedkar (Ed.), *Readings in English language teaching in India*. Orient Blackswan.
- [9] Clement, A., & Murugavel, T. (2018). English for the workplace: The importance of English language skills for effective performance. *The English Classroom*, 20(1), 41-50.
- [10] Crystal, D. (2012). *English as a global language*. Cambridge University Press.
- [11] Deshmukh, K.N. (2015). Proficiency of English among polytechnic and engineering *Research in Humanities & Soc. Sciences*, 3 (7). [http://www.rajmr.com/ijrhrs/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/IJRHS\\_2015\\_vol03\\_issue\\_07\\_01.pdf](http://www.rajmr.com/ijrhrs/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/IJRHS_2015_vol03_issue_07_01.pdf)
- [12] Du, J. (2019). *Non-native English-speaking engineers’ writing at the workplace*. Springer Nature.



- [13] Freddi, M., & Tlukova, J. (2022). Writing for architecture and civil engineering: Comparing Czech and Italian students' needs in ESP. *Journal of Academic Writing*, 12(1), 34-49. <https://doi.org/10.18552/joaw.v12i1.815>
- [14] Ghafournia, N., & Sabet, S. A. (2014). The most prominent roles of an ESP teacher. *International Education Studies*, 7(11). <https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v7n11p1>
- [15] Govt. of India. Ministry of education and youth services. (1971). *Study group on teaching of English: Report*. Manager of Publications.
- [16] Govt. of India. (2020). *National Education Policy*. [https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/NEP\\_Final\\_English\\_0.pdf](https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf)
- [17] Hamdani, I. & Ouahmiche G. (2022). Identifying the English Language Needs of Hydraulics Engineers: Bridging the Gap between ESP Academic Studies and Professional Needs. *International Online Journal of Education and Teaching (IOJET)*, 9(2). 677-689.
- [18] Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (2009). *English for specific purposes: A learning-centered approach*. (24<sup>th</sup> ed.) Cambridge University Press.
- [19] Hyland, K. (2003). *Second language writing*. Cambridge University Press.
- [20] Hyland, K. (2013). ESP and writing. In B. Paltridge & S. Starfield (Eds.), *Handbook of English for Specific Purposes* (pp. 95-114). Wiley- Blackwell.
- [21] Hyland, K. (2018). *Metadiscourse: Exploring interaction in writing*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- [22] Hyland, K. (2022). English for specific purposes: What is it and where is it taking us? *ESP Today*, 10(2), 202-220. <https://doi.org/10.18485/esptoday.2022.10.2.1>
- [23] Jacob, A. (2015). Designing an English for specific purposes ESP writing course for engineering students [Doctoral dissertation, Anna University]. Shodhganga <http://hdl.handle.net/10603/141026>
- [24] Kannan, A. (2013, January 31) Technical writing fails to impress as a career. *The Hindu*. <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-tamilnadu/technical-writing-fails-to-impress-as-a-career/article4363534.ece>.
- [25] Kharbanda, P. R. (2023). Use of genres: Classroom teaching frequency and usefulness in the workplace. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation*, 6(8), 45-72. <https://doi.org/10.32996/ijllt.2023.6.8.6>
- [26] Kumari, B. K. (2016). The role of information literacy competency and higher order thinking skills to develop academic writing in science and engineering students. *Higher Learning Research Communications*, 6(4), n4. <https://doi.org/10.18870/hlrc.v6i4.356>
- [27] Mookerjee, S. P. (1944). Education in British India. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 233(1), 30-38. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000271624423300107>
- [28] Nordquist, R. (2019, February 3). English as a global language. *ThoughtCo*. <https://www.thoughtco.com/english-as-a-global-language-1692652>
- [29] Phuong, L. L. (2018). *Alignment between a Vietnamese ESP curriculum and workplace communication needs*. In *The International Conference on English Language Teaching ICALT 2018- ELT for Innovation and Integration*. <http://thuvinienso.bvu.edu.vn/bitstream/TVDHBRVT/19302/1/Alignment-between-a-Vietnamese.pdf>
- [30] Robinson, C. M., & Blair, G. M. (1995). Writing skills training for engineering students in large classes. *Higher Education*, 30(1), 99-114. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01384055>
- [31] Rus, D. (2015). Developing technical writing skills for engineering students. *Procedia Technology*, 19, 1109-1114.
- [32] Sigmar, L. S., & Hynes, G. E. (2012). Major difference: An examination of student writing performance by major and its implications for business communication. *Administrative Issues Journal: Education, Practice, and Research*, 2(1), 133-146. <https://doi.org/10.5929/2011.21.6>
- [33] Singh, D., & Kaur, G. (2019). Professional communication skills in English for non-native English-speaking engineers: challenges and a proposed teaching framework. *International Journal of Recent Technology and Engineering (IJRTE)*.8(2S10). <https://www.ijrte.org/wp-content/uploads/papers/v8i2S10/B11070982S1019.pdf>
- [34] Strevens, P. (1980). *Teaching English as an International Language*. Pergamon Press Ltd.
- [35] Swales, J. (1990). *The concept of discourse community. Genre analysis: English in academic and research settings*. Cambridge
- [36] Swales, J. M., & Feak, C. B. (2004). *Academic writing for graduate students: Essential tasks and skills: A course for non-native speakers of English*. University of Michigan Press ELT.
- [37] Tasildar, R. B. (2013). ESP in India: A brief historical and current overview. *English for Specific Purposes World*, 38(14), 1-18. [http://esp-world.info/Articles\\_38/ESP\\_in\\_India\\_Ravindra\\_Tasildar.pdf](http://esp-world.info/Articles_38/ESP_in_India_Ravindra_Tasildar.pdf)
- [38] Tenopir, C., & King, D. W. (2004). *Communication patterns of engineers*. IEEE Publications.
- [39] Thaiss, C. & Zawacki, T.M. (2006). *Engaged Writers and Dynamic Disciplines: Research on the Academic Writing Life*. Boynton/Cook.
- [40] Thakur, A., & Mantha, S. S. (2021, February 3). Modi Govt's HEC can't just be UGC with a new label. Engineering still needs its regulator. *The Print*. <https://theprint.in/opinion/modi-govts-hec-cant-just-be-ugc-with-new-label-engineering-still-needs-its-own-regulator/597847/>
- [41] Thierry, G. (2018, April 3). The English language is the world's Achilles heel. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/the-english-language-is-the-worlds-achilles-heel-93817>
- [42] Tickoo, M.L. (2003). *Teaching and learning English*. Orient Longman Private Limited.
- [43] Trevelyan. (2009, July). *Steps toward a better model of engineering practice*. In *Research in Engineering Education Symposium* [Symposium], Queensland. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/255649975\\_Steps\\_Toward\\_a\\_Better\\_Model\\_of\\_Engineering\\_Practice](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/255649975_Steps_Toward_a_Better_Model_of_Engineering_Practice)

- [44] University Grants Commission (1989). *Report of Curriculum Development Centre for English*. [http://14.139.60.153/bitstream/123456789/1855/1/UGC-REPORT%20OF%20THE%20CURRICULUM%20DEVELOPMENT%20CENTRE%20IN%20EDUCATION-1990\\_D-8018.pdf](http://14.139.60.153/bitstream/123456789/1855/1/UGC-REPORT%20OF%20THE%20CURRICULUM%20DEVELOPMENT%20CENTRE%20IN%20EDUCATION-1990_D-8018.pdf)
- [45] Upadhyay, O. (2018). A comparative study of English for specific purposes (ESP) and English as a second language (ESL) programs for hotel management students. *International Journal on Arts, Management and Humanities*, 7(1), 27-32.
- [46] Widodo, H. P. (2017). Approaches to needs analysis in ESP curriculum development. *The European Journal of Applied Linguistics and TEFL*, 6 (1), 127-146.
- [47] Živković, S. (2015). Language skills among students in the field of engineering. *European Journal of Language and Literature*, 3(1), 83-90.  
<https://doi.org/10.26417/ejls.v3i1.p83-90>

**infogain.ijels@gmail.com**



# EFL Adult Learners' Perception of Learning English Vocabulary through Pictures at a Private English Center

Nguyen Thi Thu Hang<sup>1</sup>, Le Thi Thuy Nhung<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology (HUTECH) – Vietnam

<sup>2</sup>Banking University of Ho Chi Minh City– Vietnam

Received: 17 May 2023; Received in revised form: 17 Jun 2023; Accepted: 26 Jun 2023; Available online: 05 Jul 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— Nowadays, there has been a significant increase in the establishment of language centers due to the growing demand from learners. Many job opportunities require strong language skills, particularly proficiency in English. Vocabulary plays a crucial role in effective English communication, and the techniques employed for teaching vocabulary hold considerable importance in language instruction. Different methods yield varying outcomes, and students' perceptions of these methods can differ. This study aimed to explore the perception of adult students regarding learning English vocabulary through pictures. To gather data, a mixed-method design was utilized, comprising a questionnaire survey involving 100 learners and semi-structured interviews conducted with 10 learners. The study findings revealed that, according to the majority of students, learning vocabulary through pictures brings benefits such as increased motivation, improved vocabulary acquisition, and enhanced memory. However, the study also identified challenges associated with learning vocabulary through pictures, including issues related to image quality, difficulties in pronunciation, and struggles in distinguishing between concrete and abstract words.

**Keywords**— perception, EFL adult students, benefits, challenges, visual aids, picture.



## I. INTRODUCTION

English has become a key to the globe as a result of globalization, which indicates that mastering English is necessary to internationalize a nation (Rintaningrum, 2018). People seek to get a better job based on their speciality or age. However, in order to find a better job and compete with other candidates, or to keep a current job, a person should learn a second language as an advantage (Raewf & Mahmood, 2021); since many businesses and organizations want to be global in business, which appears to demand multilingual employees (Stein-Smith, 2017). In any language, vocabulary is one of the most important aspects of being able to communicate; having a wide vocabulary makes it easier to acquire abilities such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Susanto, 2017). The use of effective methods to transmit knowledge to students has become increasingly important (Tamura, 2006). According to Porter and Margaret (1992), the using pictures of teaching vocabulary help students to easily absorb and commit

knowledge to long-term memory.

(Wileman, 1993) asserts that humans have the ability to sense and absorb a lot of information through visual cues like pictures. Since it encourages student learning, the use of visual aids in the classroom, such as pictures or real objects, is a desirable and advantageous strategy. Therefore, teachers teach vocabulary through pictures make students absorb easily. However, some students have negative views regarding learning language using pictures because they find it difficult (Lai Thi Dao, 2021). While numerous research on students' perceptions at high schools, colleges, and universities have been conducted and the participants are primary or secondary students. It is acknowledged that there is a lack of research on the same topic with adult students generally at private English centers. Therefore, the aim of the study was to explore the adult students' perceptions of pictures being used as visual aids in their English classes at a private English center. The study aimed to investigate the following

research question:

What are adult students' perception of the benefits and challenges of learning English vocabulary through pictures in the English class at private center?

## II. A BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW

According to McShane and Glinnow (2005), one of the key elements of psychology was perception since it allows us to understand the many types of phenomena that exist in our surroundings. Individuals perceive things differently. There were both positive and negative effects. The process of acquiring information about and making sense of the world around us was known as perception. It is said that someone would get information from their environment throughout the perceiving process. The individual would then interpret the information obtained. As a result, perception gives us the ability to grasp and interpret the information that is around us. Vocabulary was one of the linguistic factors considered important for language competence. According to Aqahtani (2015), as languages are built on words, teaching vocabulary is essential to learning a language. Without words, it is practically impossible to acquire a language; even human communication is founded on words. Visual aids are defined as "items that serve to clarify or make a lesson simpler to comprehend and remember (pictures, models, charts, maps, films, slides, real objects, etc.). To put it another way, visual aids are various things that individuals may apply for learning purposes in order to understand or learn something. Visual aids, on the other hand, are regarded as representations used to grasp or improve a subject, giving pupils direct experiences. One of these useful tools is the picture (Hill 1990). In addition to providing images of reality, pictures may also provide some humor to the classroom. It is sometimes unexpected how much additional activities using graphics might influence a lesson. Pictures may be used in a variety of ways for teaching foreign languages, including expanding one's vocabulary.

Wright (1990) pointed out, using pictures in teaching vocabulary language help motivating and drawing learner's attention. They convey a clear sense of the language's context and a particular reference point or stimulus. Without motivation, the teaching-learning process will not be successful. It suggests that employing visual aids to engage pupils in the learning process is more successful. It can have a positive impact on their performance, particularly in terms of vocabulary. One form of media that might assist the teacher in engaging the students and boosting their enthusiasm is pictures. Hidayanti (2022) conducted a study to investigate students' perceptions of learning vocabulary via lists of tables with images and to

learn about the growth of students' vocabulary in learning vocabulary through lists of tables with pictures. The outcomes of learning vocabulary through a list of tables with images were quite helpful in improving their vocabulary, and they also believed that there is no problem in learning. According to Koren (1997), learning foreign words with visuals might be simpler and more remembered than words without pictures. As a result, many teachers in English language schools utilized pictures to help students develop their vocabulary and speaking abilities.

Afianti (2009) carried out research with the goals of this final project being to explain the use of pictures in teaching vocabulary to the fifth grade of SDN 01 Bolon, to highlight the difficulties of the use of pictures, and to present the solutions for the problems. The challenges include the size and clarity of the images, the time constraints, and the lack of adequate instructional aids. A study was conducted by Nurmala and Suryaman (2022) to investigate students' perceptions of flashcards as a medium for assisting their vocabulary knowledge in junior high school. This descriptive qualitative research method employs a narrative inquiry methodology. Three grade 9 junior high school students from one of East Jakarta's schools participated in the study. According to the findings of this study, students had good attitudes toward utilizing flashcards as learning material, including reasons, techniques, and advantages and downsides. Most students responded positively to the use of flashcards as a medium to assist them in studying vocabulary; students felt joyful, and useful by utilizing flashcards as a learning companion, successful in using them, and supportive of students' metacognitive growth. However, the usage of flashcards experienced various challenges, such as pupils having difficulties pronouncing what was written on the card, necessitating continued monitoring of the continuous learning process. Nelson and Schreiber (1992) indicated that concrete words are more easily remembered than abstract ones. The embodied method, along with dual coding theory (Paivio, 1986), proposed that concrete words (representing actual things) were more involved with physical associations based on the visual receptors, whereas abstract words (representing concepts and ideas) were more involved with emotional associations based on affective experiences (Vigliocco et al., 2014).

## III. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1. Research site and participants

The data were collected at a private English center. It is an English center dedicated to teaching communication. The total number of students was 100 students, including 50 beginner level students and 50



elementary level students.. The students were EFL adult students ranging in age from 18 to 40. The survey had 100 students, 38 of whom were male, accounting for 38% of the total. The other 62 students were all female, accounting for 62% of the total. There were 34 students below 25 years old, which accounted for 34% of the total students. 55 students aged from 25 to 35, which accounted for 55% of total. The remaining 11% (11 students) were over 35 years old. More than a third (33 students, equivalent to 33%) had studied English for fewer than 3 years. 18 students (18%) had studied English for a period between 3 and 5 years. Furthermore, 49 students (49% of the total number) had been studying English for more than 5 years. In terms of the duration of learning English at the English center, the periods were divided into three categories: Fewer than 3 months, 3-6 months, and over 6 months. 54 students (or 54% of the total), had studied communicative English for fewer than 3 months. The other two groups, comprising 23% each, include those who have been studying for a duration between 3 to 6 months and those who have been studying at the center for over 6 months, respectively.

### 3.2. Research instrument

The study employed a mixed-method approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative elements. Two tools, namely a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview, were used to gather data. To ensure the accuracy and consistency of the data, an expert in the field of English language studies reviewed the questionnaire and interview questions prior to their distribution among the study students. The questionnaire has two parts. Part I included 7 questions elicited background information of the students, including their age, occupation, time period of learning English and gender. Part II included 21 questionnaire items. The questions asked the students' perception of the benefits and challenges of vocabulary learning using pictures. The questionnaire used a 5-point Likert scale, including Strongly disagree (SD); Disagree (D); Neutral (N); Agree (A), and Strongly agree (SA). The measurement of Cronbach's Alpha yielded a score of .87, indicating the reliability of the question items. Additionally, an interview was conducted to validate the responses provided in the questionnaire.

### 3.3. Procedures for data collection and analysis

In terms of data collection procedures, it was crucial to ensure that the questionnaires were understandable and valid. Therefore, it was necessary to assess, review, and modify them before they were given to the students. . The students spent roughly ten minutes reading and responding to the questions. Based on the

feedback received, various aspects of the questionnaire, such as unclear language, grammatical errors, and typographical errors, were modified. 100 students participated in the survey and 10 students volunteered to join the semi-structured interview. It took the students around 15 minutes to complete the final version of the questionnaire and 10 minutes to answer the final interview questions. A total of 100 students took part in the survey, while 10 students willingly participated in the semi-structured interview. The students required approximately 15 minutes to complete the final version of the questionnaire and 10 minutes to respond to the interview questions. To analyze the questionnaire data, the researchers utilized "descriptive statistics" using SPSS Statistics version 22, calculating mean scores and standard deviation. The mean scores were used to interpret the students' level of utilizing strategies for language acquisition development as follows:  $M = 1.00-1.80$  (strongly disagree);  $M = 1.81-2.60$  (disagree);  $M = 2.61-3.40$  (neutral);  $M = 3.41-4.20$  (agree);  $M = 4.21-5.00$  (strongly agree). For the analysis of interview data, "content analysis" was employed. The interviewees were assigned codes B1, B2, B3, B4, B5, E1, E2, E3, E4, and E5. The researchers encoded the interviewees' responses using these codes and categorized them into broader themes.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Results

This section presents both qualitative and quantitative data collected to address the research question. The presentation starts with the quantitative data followed by the qualitative data. Table 1 provides an overview of the six categories of benefits and challenges identified by the students in learning English vocabulary through pictures. These categories were found to be moderately utilized, with mean scores ranging from 3.18 to 4.45. Among the benefits, the category of "increasing motivation" received the highest mean score ( $M = 4.45$ ,  $SD = .469$ ). The categories of "enhancing vocabulary acquisition" and "supporting memorization" obtained slightly lower mean scores with  $M =$

4.31 and 4.30, and  $SD = .656$  and  $.687$ , respectively. As for the challenges, the category of "Poor quality of picture design" received the highest mean score ( $M = 4.23$ ,  $SD = .733$ ). The remaining categories, namely "difficulty with pronunciation" and "difficulty in differentiating abstract versus concrete vocabulary," obtained lower mean scores of  $M = 3.31$  and  $3.18$ , with  $SD = 1.288$  and  $1.411$ , respectively.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of benefits and challenges of learning English vocabulary through pictures.

| N=100 |   |      |                |                |
|-------|---|------|----------------|----------------|
| No.   | The benefits and challenges of learning English vocabulary through pictures |      |                | Level (extent) |
|       |   | Mean | Std. Deviation |                |
| 1     | Increasing motivation (IM)  | 4.45 | .469           | Moderate       |
| 2     | Enhancing vocabulary acquisition (EA)                                       | 4.31 | .656           | Moderate       |
| 3     | Supporting memorization (SM)  | 4.30 | .687           | Moderate       |
| 4     | Poor quality of picture design (PD)   | 4.23 | .733           | Moderate       |
| 5     | Difficulty with pronunciation (DP)  | 3.31 | 1.288          | Moderate       |
| 6     | Difficulty in differentiating abstract versus concrete vocabulary (DV)      | 3.18 | 1.411          | Moderate       |
| Total |   | 3.96 | 0.874          | Moderate       |

Regarding "increasing motivation" feature perceived by adult students. The two items including "Using pictures make classes more interesting" and "Using pictures in lessons increase my interest in learning vocabulary" received the highest mean scores ( $M = 4.55$ ,  $SD = .52$ ) and ( $M = 4.51$ ,  $SD = .50$ ) respectively. The remaining items "The use of pictures draws my attention to learning vocabulary", "The use of pictures encourages me to take part in learning vocabulary activities", "When I learn vocabulary through pictures, I feel motivated", "The use of pictures strongly encourages me to interact with teachers" received a high mean score ( $M = 4.46$ ,  $SD = .64$ ), ( $M = 4.42$ ,  $SD = .65$ ), ( $M = 4.40$ ,  $SD = .58$ ) and ( $M = 4.41$ ,  $SD = .66$ ), respectively. It indicates that the majority of students strongly believed that using pictures to teach was beneficial in increasing motivation. In addition, qualitative data from the interviews revealed students' similar opinions as follows: "I wish that the teacher taught vocabulary through pictures when I was a primary student, I would like English more. Learning English with pictures is very interesting and lively, making me more focused on the lesson." (E4). "When learning vocabulary with pictures, I feel less bored, feel more engaged in the lesson, increase my motivation to learn vocabulary, I really enjoy participating in class activities." (E3). "The visuals stimulate my senses, make me feel more excited when learning vocabulary, promote participation in classroom games as well as interaction with teachers." (B3).

Regarding "Enhancing vocabulary acquisition" feature, all three items were utilized moderately, with the item "Pictures make me better understand the meaning of words" receiving the highest mean score ( $M = 4.35$ ,  $SD = .744$ ). The remaining items, "When I look at the picture I can guess the meaning of vocabulary easily" and "The pictures displayed could support my imagination," obtained high

mean scores of  $M = 4.27$  ( $SD = .790$ ) and  $M = 4.32$  ( $SD = .750$ ) respectively. It indicates that the majority of students strongly believed that using pictures to teach was beneficial enhanced acquisition. The qualitative data from the interviews provided further support for the quantitative data, as follows: "Learning vocabulary through pictures helps me understand words more clearly and not be confused when naming the same thing but with slightly different characteristics. For example tables and desks. Pictures that clearly show the characteristics of that difference help me understand the word better." (B5) E2, E3, and E4 students agreed that using pictures when learning vocabulary made it easier for them to associate words with pictures, stimulated their imagination, and aided them in understanding the meaning of words. "When looking at pictures, my brain feels more interested, increases association, the brain is forced to work to understand the meaning of words, I can find a connection between the picture and the teacher's explanation. the word member understands the meaning of the word." (E3)

Regarding the "Supporting memorization" aspect, all five items were moderately utilized, with the item "Using pictures helps me recognize the meaning of words" receiving the highest mean score ( $M = 4.39$ ,  $SD = .863$ ). The remaining items, "Working with pictures helps me retrieve vocabulary easily" and "I can read the words faster when teachers use pictures to review vocabulary," obtained similar high mean scores of  $M = 4.29$  and  $SD = .832$ ,  $.880$ , respectively. This indicates that the majority of students strongly believed that using pictures to teach vocabulary was beneficial in supporting memorization. The qualitative data from the interviews further supported this notion. For instance, B5 expressed, "I feel that my vocabulary has significantly improved by learning words through pictures."

Moreover, using pictures for vocabulary learning helped students recognize words more quickly and apply them in real-life situations. B3 explained, "I can recognize words faster when the teacher shows pictures, and my response time significantly increases when learning and reviewing vocabulary through picture-based games." Similarly, E1 and E3 students agreed that pictures were particularly useful for learning abstract vocabulary, which can otherwise be challenging to remember. One student, E3, stated, "Pictures stimulate my brain and help me remember abstract words for a longer period."

In relation to the "quality of picture design" aspect, both items were moderately utilized, with the item "I find it challenging to perceive when pictures are not clear" obtaining the highest mean score ( $M = 4.27$ ,  $SD = .763$ ). The other item, "It becomes difficult to observe the pictures when they are small in size," received a high mean score of  $M$

$= 4.19$  and  $SD = .813$ , indicating that most students strongly agreed that using pictures for teaching purposes becomes challenging when the quality of picture design is poor. The qualitative data from the interviews provided further support for this observation. For instance, B3 mentioned, "When I am seated far away from the teacher, I cannot clearly see the picture, which makes it difficult for me to guess the meaning of words and identify them." E3 also added, "I lose interest when the picture is blurry and unattractive, which makes it uninviting to learn vocabulary."

In relation to the "Difficulty with pronunciation" aspect, all three items were moderately utilized. The item "I struggle with pronouncing vocabulary without the support of teachers" received the highest mean score ( $M = 3.46$ ,  $SD = 1.473$ ). The other items, "I find it challenging to pronounce the words correctly" and "I tend to mispronounce words when learning vocabulary through pictures," obtained high mean scores of ( $M = 3.28$ ,  $SD = 1.408$ ) and ( $M = 3.20$ ,  $SD = 1.385$ ) respectively, indicating that most students strongly agreed that using pictures for teaching faced challenges in pronunciation. The qualitative data from the interviews further supported this finding. For example, E5 mentioned, "When the teacher presents the words with pictures and pronounces them, I am able to pronounce them correctly. However, if the teacher shows the same picture to review the word the next day, there is a high chance that I will pronounce it incorrectly." However, some students reported that using pictures to learn vocabulary helps them remember the words and the correct pronunciation. B1 mentioned, "I find it easier to pronounce words when the teacher uses pictures to teach vocabulary, as the teacher's pronunciation leaves a better impression on me."

Regarding the "Difficulty with abstract and

concrete words" aspect, both items were moderately utilized. The item "Understanding abstract vocabulary through pictures is challenging" obtained the highest mean score ( $M = 3.22$ ,  $SD = 1.501$ ). The other item, "Visualizing abstract vocabulary through pictures is difficult," received a high mean score of  $M = 3.15$  and  $SD = 1.445$ , indicating that students found it challenging to use pictures for teaching abstract and concrete words. The qualitative data from the interviews further supported this finding. For example, E1 mentioned, "I can easily recognize specific words like table, chair, red, blue, etc. However, for abstract words such as goal, dedication, grace, etc., it is difficult for me to understand the meaning of words through pictures without the teacher's explanation." Similarly, student B1 also agreed with this idea: "I can easily grasp the meaning of words through pictures. Using pictures stimulates my imagination, so I enjoy learning vocabulary through pictures."

#### 4.2 Discussion

The following section provides a discussion of the study findings. The results indicated that when it comes to learning vocabulary through pictures, students perceived several benefits. These benefits included increased motivation, improved vocabulary acquisition, and enhanced memory. However, there were also challenges encountered in vocabulary learning through pictures, such as low image quality, difficulties in pronunciation, and the struggle to differentiate between concrete and abstract words. These findings align partially with a previous study conducted by Nurmala and Suryaman (2022). In their research, Nurmala and Suryaman emphasized the positive attitudes of students towards using flashcards as a learning tool, highlighting the reasons, approaches, benefits, and limitations. Students expressed positive opinions about flashcards, finding them enjoyable, helpful, effective, and supportive of their metacognitive development. Nevertheless, challenges were also identified, including pronunciation difficulties and the need for consistent monitoring of the learning process.

Regarding adults' motivation, research shows that students felt more motivated, engaged in lessons, and more interested in participating in classroom activities when learning vocabulary with pictures. These findings are in line with the study conducted by Wright (1990), which emphasized that pictures provide a clear understanding of the language context and serve as a reference point or stimulus. Without motivation, the effectiveness of the learning process is greatly compromised. Therefore, incorporating visual aids to actively engage students in the learning process proves to be a more successful approach. Pictures have a positive impact on students' vocabulary performance. Lai Thi Dao (2021) further supported this notion by asserting that the use of pictures enhances student

motivation. The integration of pictures fosters increased student motivation, as evidenced by their active participation in the lesson, including answering questions and responding to the teacher's explanations.

In terms of vocabulary acquisition, the students expressed a strong consensus that they were able to absorb vocabulary more effectively when using pictures. The visual element facilitated their imagination and enabled them to quickly infer the meaning of words. This aligns with the findings presented by Hidayanti (2022) in their article, where they emphasized that utilizing pictures as a learning tool for vocabulary not only enhanced enjoyment but also resulted in faster comprehension and retention compared to other methods. The immediate connection established between the vocabulary and the accompanying pictures, especially when presented by the teacher, proved to be particularly impactful for the students.

In relation to the influence of pictures on memory, the majority of students concurred that pictures played a significant role in enhancing their ability to remember words for a longer duration and retrieve them more effectively. These findings are consistent with the research conducted by Armstrong (2000), Hashemi and Pourgharib (2013), and Nait Chabane and Lounis (2017), which have demonstrated the positive impact of pictures on improving word memorization.

In terms of the challenges encountered, the findings indicate that using pictures to teach vocabulary presents certain difficulties, such as poor image quality, pronunciation issues, and the ability to differentiate between concrete and abstract words. Specifically, when it comes to adults' perception of poor quality design, the students agreed that small and blurry pictures made it challenging for them to observe, recognize, and internalize the vocabulary. These findings align with the research conducted by Afianti (2009), which also highlights challenges related to image size, clarity, time constraints, and the availability of appropriate instructional aids.

In terms of pronunciation, the students expressed agreement that they faced difficulties in pronouncing words accurately when relying solely on pictures. This finding is supported by the research conducted by Muliati, Islamiah, and Aprizani (2020), who also concluded that using visuals for vocabulary acquisition poses challenges in achieving correct pronunciation. Additionally, Nurmala and Suryaman (2022) highlighted that the use of flashcards presented various challenges, including difficulties in pronouncing the words depicted on the cards.

Another challenge observed in vocabulary learning through pictures is the struggle to distinguish between abstract and concrete words. The students acknowledged

that it was more challenging for them to recognize and understand abstract words compared to concrete ones when presented in picture form. This finding aligns with the results obtained by Bates and Son (2021), who discovered that students tend to have better recall of concrete words than abstract words. Furthermore, De Groot and Keizjer (2000) found that abstract words are more easily forgotten compared to concrete words.

Similar to the survey findings, the results obtained from the interviews revealed that the majority of students agreed on the numerous benefits of using pictures for vocabulary learning. These benefits encompass increased motivation, enhanced word acquisition, and improved memory retention. The students expressed that learning vocabulary through pictures stimulated their motivation, captured their attention, and facilitated longer-term word recall. These findings align with prior research conducted by Dao Ra Ta Na and Nguyen Huynh Trang (2022) and Ta Thanh Nam and Lap Quan Trinh (2012). Dao Ra Ta Na and Nguyen Huynh Trang (2022) emphasized the positive influence of visuals on vocabulary retention and student motivation, while Ta Thanh Nam and Lap Quan Trinh (2012) underscored how visual aids contribute to better comprehension, classroom engagement, and student interest.

However, the students also identified several challenges associated with vocabulary learning through pictures. These challenges encompassed issues related to low image quality, difficulties in pronunciation, and struggles in understanding the meaning of abstract words. The students found it challenging to learn vocabulary through pictures when the images were small, blurry, and when differentiating between abstract and concrete words was difficult. These findings align with previous research conducted by De Groot and Keizjer (2000), Muliati and Aprizani (2020), and Afianti (2009). De Groot and Keizjer (2000) discovered that students tend to encounter more difficulty in remembering abstract words compared to concrete words. Muliati and Aprizani (2020) emphasized the challenge of accurately pronouncing words when utilizing visuals for vocabulary acquisition. Afianti (2009) identified additional challenges, including image size and clarity, time constraints, and a lack of adequate instructional aids when learning vocabulary through pictures.

## V. CONCLUSION

The current study aimed to examine the perception of adult learners regarding the acquisition of English vocabulary through the use of pictures, as well as to investigate whether there are any variations in this perception among learners with different levels of English



proficiency. The researcher focused on two key aspects: the advantages and challenges associated with learning vocabulary through pictures. The benefits of utilizing pictures include increased motivation to learn vocabulary, improved acquisition of vocabulary, and enhanced memory retention. On the other hand, the challenges identified encompass issues related to the quality of pictures, difficulties in pronunciation, and struggles in recognizing abstract words.

The study's findings have several implications for both students and teachers. For students, it is important to address the difficulties they encounter when learning vocabulary through pictures, such as pronunciation challenges and difficulties in understanding word meanings. To alleviate these difficulties, students should focus on the teacher's pronunciation during vocabulary instruction, engage in regular memorization and revision exercises to improve pronunciation accuracy. Furthermore, students can enhance their learning experience by previewing the topics they will be studying, facilitating better connections between words and pictures, and facilitating easier identification of word meanings. For teachers, it is crucial to ensure clear pronunciation when introducing vocabulary and to create activities that provide ample opportunities for students to practice and remember words. Incorporating the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) on the pictures can also be beneficial in assisting students with pronunciation. Careful preparation of pictures, including using clear colors and drawings, and ensuring they are large enough for students to easily see and comprehend, can further enhance the effectiveness of visual aids in vocabulary learning. To address the challenges experienced by students, it is essential for learning material designers to actively gather feedback from both teachers and students. This feedback can provide valuable insights into the obstacles faced by learners, such as unfamiliar or complex topics, and unclear or unengaging pictures that impede the learning process. By actively seeking and incorporating feedback, designers can make necessary modifications, replacements, or removals of content that is deemed unintelligible. Additionally, they can introduce more suitable and relevant learning materials that effectively support vocabulary acquisition through pictures.

Given the constraints of time and resources, it is important to acknowledge that the survey conducted for this study had limitations. The sample size was limited to only 100 students from a single campus, which may not fully represent the broader population of adult students at the private English Center. Therefore, it is necessary to exercise caution when generalizing the characteristics observed in this sample to adult students on a larger scale. The findings of this study may have limited applicability and further research involving a more diverse and representative sample

is recommended to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the topic.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Armstrong, T. (2000). Multiple intelligences in the classroom. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- [2] Afianti, I. (2009). The use of pictures in teaching vocabulary to the fifth grade of SDN 01 Bolon Colomadu. Alqahtani, (2015). The importance of vocabulary in language learning and how to be taught. International Journal of Teaching and Education, III(3), pp. 21 - 34.
- [3] Bates, J., & Son, J. B. (2020). English Vocabulary Learning with Simplified Pictures. TESL-EJ, 24(3), n3.
- [4] De Groot, A. M. B., & Keijzer, R. (2000). What is hard to learn is easy to forget: The roles of word concreteness, cognate status, and word frequency in foreign- language vocabulary learning and forgetting. Language Learning, 50(1), 1-56.
- [5] Hill, D. A. (1990). Visual Impact: Creative language learning through pictures. Essex: Longman Group UK Limited
- [6] Hidayanti, A. (2022). The students' perception in learning vocabulary through list of table with pictures (Doctoral dissertation, Universitas Islam Kalimantan MAB).
- [7] Hashemi, M., & Pourgharib, B. (2013). The effect of visual instruction on new vocabularies learning.
- [8] Koren, S. (1997). Quality versus convenience: Comparison of modern dictionaries from the researcher's, teacher's and learner's points of view. TESL-EJ, 2(3), 1- 16.
- [9] Lai Dao Thi (2021). A study on benefits of using illustrations (pictures, real object, etc.) in learning English vocabulary of non-English major students at Ho Chi Minh City University of Food Industry (HUFI)
- [10] McShane, S. L., & Glinow, M. A. V. (2005) Organizational behavior 3e. New York: McGraw-Hill Companies Inc.
- [11] Muliati, M., Islamiah, N., & Aprizani, Y. (2020). The perception of using pictures to encourage students in comprehending vocabulary at the seven grade of Negeri 27 Banjarmasin. Proceeding: Islamic University of Kalimantan, 1(1).
- [12] Na, D. R. T., & Trang, N. H. (2022). The Effects of using Pictures on EFL Learners' Vocabulary Retention. International Journal of Emerging Trends in Social Sciences, 13(1), 1-13.
- [13] Nam, T. T., & Trinh, L. Q. (2012). Powerpoint as a Potential Tool to Learners' Vocabulary Retention: Empirical Evidences from a Vietnamese Secondary Education Setting. Journal on English Language Teaching, 2(4), 15-22.
- [14] Nurmala, Y., & Suryaman, M. (2022). Students' Perception Towards Flashcards as Media to Assist Their Vocabulary Mastery in Junior School. Jurnal Ilmiah Wahana Pendidikan, 8(17), 549-559.
- [15] Nelson, D. L., Schrijver, T. A., & Meevoo, C. L. (1992). Processing implicit and explicit representations. Psychological Review, 99, in press.
- [16] Porter, P., Margaret, G. (1992). Communicating Effectively in English: Oral Communication for Non-native Speakers. 2nd ed. Boston: Heinle Publishers.

- [17] Paivio, A. (1986). *Mental representations: A dual coding approach*. Oxford University Press.
- Rintaningrum, R. (2018). Investigating Reasons Why Listening in English is Difficult: Voice from Foreign. *Asian EFL Journal*, 20(11).
- [18] Raewf, M. B., & Mahmood, Y. N. (2021). The Cultural Diversity in the Workplace. *Cihan University-Erbil Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 5(1), 1-6.
- [19] Stein-Smith, K. (2017). Foreign Language: A World of Possibilities. *International Journal of Language and Linguistics*, 4(4), 1-10.
- [20] Susanto, A. (2017). The teaching of vocabulary: A perspective. *Jurnal Kata: Penelitian Tentang Ilmu Bahasa Dan Sastra*, 1(2), 182-191.
- [21] Tamura, E. T. (2006). Concepts on the methodology of teaching English. *The Economic Journal of Takasaki City University of Economics*, 48(3), 169-188.
- [22] Vigliocco, G., Kousta, S. T., Della Rosa, P. A., Vinson, D. P., Tettamanti, M., Devlin, J. T., & Cappa, S. F. (2014). The neural representation of abstract words: The role of emotion. *Cerebral Cortex*, 24(7), 1767-1777. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cercor/bht025>
- [23] Wileman, R. E. (1993). *Visual communicating*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Educational Technology.
- [24] Wright, A. (1990). *Pictures for Language Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN 0-521-35800-0



# Violence and Brutality in *Chronicle Of A Death Foretold*

Ishita Prasher

Post Graduate Student, University of Delhi, New Delhi, India

Received: 19 May 2023; Received in revised form: 21 Jun 2023; Accepted: 28 Jun 2023; Available online: 05 Jul 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— Acts of violence in any society are predominantly seen as disruptions in the ordinary ebb of everyday existence- as deviations from the norm. This essay, however, argues that violence often emanates from the structures of society and it is only through the alteration of these structures that we can truly and effectively counter the various violences and brutalities we see around us. To this end, this paper shall look at Gabriel Garcia Marquez's 1981 novella *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* to delineate on Marquez's attempt to show violence and brutality as intrinsic elements of Colombian society. Marquez shows how violence has been internalised and institutionalised in the novella's town by highlighting the fault lines of the novella's society which is deeply entrenched in brutality, patriarchal codes of machismo and honour and a cult of violence. The essay also looks at the tragic dramatic mode called *pundonor* which is central to understanding the vitiated codes of honour germane to the Colombian national psyche. The article ultimately concludes by looking at how in the overwhelming existence of violence and brutality, relations of and sustenance provide by love are splintered.



**Keywords**— Gender, Honour, Pundonor, Social codes, Violence.

"...we, the inventors of tales..., feel entitled to believe ... in the creation of the opposite utopia. A new and sweeping utopia of life, where no one will be able to decide for others how they die, where love prove true and happiness be possible, and where the races condemned to one hundred years of solitude will have at last and forever, a second opportunity on earth."

Garcia Marquez's 1982 Nobel Prize acceptance speech, *The Solitude of Latin America*

*Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, a novella written by Colombian writer Gabriel Garcia Marquez was published in 1981. Drawing inspiration from a highly reported real-life incident in Colombia, the novella, set in an unnamed town, revolves around the bizarre and preventable murder of Santiago Nasar. The murder of Nasar, revisited 27 years later by a journalist- narrator, highlights the fault lines of the novella's society which is deeply entrenched in brutality, patriarchal codes of machismo and honour and a cult of violence. Through a searing and economical use of language, a reworking of the

conventional crime mystery, a jarring narration that absolves no character or institution of their culpability in the crime, Marquez shows how violence has been internalised and institutionalised in the novella's town. A heterogeneous society, Colombia, has had a bloodied history leading to a culture of everyday violence. In fact, the period corresponding to the 10 year long civil war between 1948-1958 is called '*La Violencia*' given its extremely violent nature.

An interesting inroad into understanding the vitiated codes of honour germane to the Colombian national psyche is the tragic dramatic mode called *pundonor*. A form of Spanish drama, *pundonor* prescribes that once the perpetrator(s) of an honour crime are named, they *must* be killed. The fatalist revenge code of *pundonor* is based on a privileging of the cult of machismo, class determined ideas of female chastity that translate into familial honour and hypocritically gendered sexual norms. Driven by the dictates of *pundonor* and its psychological inescapability the Vicario twins find themselves dutybound to avenge the dishonouring of their sister, Angela, by killing Santiago

Nasar, a friend with whom they shared drinks the previous night. These misplaced codes of honour are valorised by their society, as Pablo Vicario's fiancée announces with pride, "*I didn't only agree, I never would have married him if he hadn't done what a man should do*" [Marquez, 1981, 1996]. Reflected in Prudencia's understanding of 'what a man should do', this culture, like all other patriarchal societies, makes men the custodian and defender of a woman's 'honour' and sanctions and justifies the violence contingent upon these codes. This is evident in the society's justification of their inaction by consoling "*themselves with the pretext that affairs of honour are sacred monopolies with access only for those who are part of the drama*" [Marquez, 1981, 1996].

Prudencia's comments and the social acceptance of the 'necessity' to avenge may be understood better by viewing the family as the site of reproduction of these bigoted codes of honour and male pride. Nasar takes on his father's footsteps to believe it his right to sexually exploit Divina, the cook's daughter. The exploitation of the working-class women brings to the fore entwined relation between the codes of honour and class. While Angela's loss of virginity triggers a murderous retribution, the harassment of the servant girl is almost seen like a mechanical duty of the upper-class master- a necessary *taming*<sup>1</sup>. Thus, violence is shown in the novel to be the mode of existence even in the domestic set up, accentuated by detailed description of the possession of fire arms by Nasar and the violent butchering of the rabbits by Guzman which foreshadows Nasar butchering. However, while men are trained to be libidinous so as to be masculine, women are taught to be masochistic and self-sacrificing in order to be good wives. The narrator's mother says of Angela and her sisters "*any man will be happy with them because they've been raised to suffer*" [Marquez, 1981, 1996]. The narrative bears out this suffering in explicit violent terms as Angela is returned on her wedding night with her satin dress in shreds, obviously due to beating at the hands of Bayardo. She is then mercilessly beaten by her mother as well<sup>2</sup>.

The novel's generic affinity to a crime mystery and Marquez's artful deviations from and reworking of the genre highlights the idea that violence and brutality are inherent part of the social fabric of the novella's society. It does so by denying any apocalyptic moment(s) of revelation that make clear the distinctions between the guilty and the innocent. Santiago, while a victim of the violent culture of

machismo is also its participant-beneficiary. Thereby, the cause and effect of the murder is shown to be enmeshed in the social codes and ideas that the community accepts as normative. By making Nasar's culpability in Angela's loss of virginity unclear and immaterial, the narrative is able to suggest that the murder isn't a culmination of individual deeds or misdeeds. The answer to why Nasar had to be killed, must be sought in the culture of unquestioned toxic patriarchy.

Such a complex scrutiny of the social structure is provided through the description and unwillingness of the Vicario twins to carry out the murder. The twins are not presented as hardened criminals but as anxious and worn-out men, unwilling to kill. Their beliefs and actions are not shown to be a disruption in the natural flow of the society, but as a continuum of the beliefs and values of the society. Thus, there 'ordinariness' puts the blame on the entire society. They also repeatedly announce their intention and plan to murder Nasar, in the hope to be spared "*the horrible duty that's fallen on them*" [Marquez, 1981, 1996]. Even though before the murder almost everyone in the town was aware of the twins' intentions nobody prevents it- "the publicly demonstrated intention combined with a forcible restraint would have provided a necessary fiction and saved the twins from the need for its (the ritual of killing's) literal enactment. [Bell, 1993]". Far from preventing violence the townspeople first become spectators of the murder and later become part of the second mutilation of Nasar through the "*inclement autopsy*" which was "*a massacre performed at the public school with the help of the druggist, who took notes, and a first-year medical student who was here on vacation*" [Marquez, 1981, 1996]. The unwillingness, notwithstanding, the twins remain proud of their act, despite physical manifestations of their guilt: urge to constantly wash hands, sleeplessness, uncontrolled bladders. Instead of reflecting on their actions they salvage their sufferings by blaming the immediately 'othered' Arabs.

The society's failure to prevent the murder is expounded by the collapsing institutions of Church and State-both fail to provide any moral framework to contain the violence. The codes of honour in being embedded so deeply in the psychology of the townspeople immunise themselves against the idiom of law. Apart from the overt failure of the mayor and the bishop to prevent the murder, the dilapidated state of the 'Palace of Justice' also suggests that this is a world at the brink of collapse. The judicial

<sup>1</sup> This double standard that determines which woman's honour is 'worthy' of being guarded is accentuated by the references to Maria Alejandria Cervantes to whom an entire generation of men lost their virginity.

<sup>2</sup> "*The only thing I 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.*" [Marquez, 1981]



system is not only inefficient to tackle the situation and provide answers but also complicit with the norms as the twins are let off after 3 years in prison. The Catholic Church too which is most starkly represented through the fleeting passing of the bishop provides no relief. In fact, the Bishop with a Spanish retinue at the background only reminds of colonial exploitation as it mechanically displays religiosity and is interested only in the spoils- roosters.

The narrative also highlights how in the overwhelming existence of violence and brutality, relations of and sustenance provide by love are splintered. This is evidenced by the ruin that the love house of the widower Xius falls into and the forced separation of Nasar and Maria Cervantes. This society views love as causing the unaffordable male vulnerability and *disorder*. Even the text's epigraph shows that in this culture love has been infected by violence and is seen in terms of hunt and violent control:

*"the hunt for love*

*is haughty falconry"* [Marquez, 1981, 1996].

Thus, Marquez pens down a novel that in elucidating the inherent violence of the culture and the refusal to revisit and disband the vitiated codes provides us a structure to question our accepted beliefs and practices. The importance of such questioning is rooted in its ability to propel a countering of the cycles of violence. The necessity of the self-reflection prompted by Marquez's succinct work can not be overstated in our contemporary times infested by myriad forms of violences and brutalities.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Marquez, Gabriel Garcia. (1996). *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* (Gregory Rabassa, Trans). Penguin Books. (Original work published 1981)
- [2] Michael Bell. (1993). *Gabriel García Márquez: Solitude and Solidarity*.



# “But, human is all I am”: Exploration of Posthuman Feminism and (Dis) embodiment in the Short Story of Vandana Singh

Sifatun Noor

Independent Researcher

Received: 21 May 2023; Received in revised form: 20 Jun 2023; Accepted: 27 Jun 2023; Available online: 06 Jul 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— *The aim of this study is to explore the notion of ‘human’ identity in reference to the spectrum of posthumanism. The study will highlight how the idea of posthumanism challenges and widens the borders of the category of ‘human’, allowing the traditionally excluded categories, such as ‘women’ to be considered as humans. The study will analyze the issue in reference to the story, “With Fate Conspire” by Vandana Singh where the author blurs the line between past and present. The story includes three interconnected women who with the help of a machine renegotiate the identity of women and move forward from the traditional concept of ‘human’.*

**Keywords**— *Human, Identity, Machine, Posthumanism, Women.*



## I. INTRODUCTION

Posthumanism is a theory that renegotiates traditional humanism along with contrasting the ideas of anthropocentrism. As Braidotti (2017) asserts, feminism along with other minority, postcolonial, and animal studies form a group that falls outside the traditional ideas of humanity, which forces the pre-conceived ideas of a ‘human’ under severe scrutiny. The humanist ideals that were born during the Renaissance period provide a restricted version of humans, where an able-bodied, white, male person is considered the perfect embodiment of the human race. One of the examples of this ideology is the portrait of the “Vitruvian Man”, painted by Leonardo da Vinci in the 15th century and it is safe to say that we have internalized the definition of humans by looking at this portrait of a nude man for more than 500 years (Braidotti, 2013). The portrait is considered to be the ideal representation of man (human), which excludes women, Blacks, the disabled, and many other people who are considered inferior or ‘other’. Where humanism excludes them, posthumanism is a discipline that is inclusive and

pushes the boundaries of the ideals of humanism. Posthumanism advocates for a post-anthropocentric world, where neither Anthropos lies at the center of the universe, nor ‘man’ is considered the universal measure of all things. The case for the emancipation and inclusion of women as a group is thus argued and fought along the lines of equality that posthumanism promotes (Koistinen & Karkulehto, 2018). The point where feminism and other minority studies meet posthumanism stems from the inequality that they have endured and the resistance towards a hierarchical conceptualization of the term, ‘human’. Posthumanism is also a post-dualism theory that resists the binaries of man and woman, animal and human, human and machine, White and Black, heterosexual and homosexual and integrates and analyses them together and equally. Many contemporary fiction writers have been inspired and influenced by this inclusive theory and incorporate them in their works. One of these writers is Vandana Singh who is an Indian science fiction writer and a physicist. One of her most popular books that include the posthuman ideals of resistance and amalgamation is

*Ambiguity Machines and other stories*, published in 2018. This article will use one of the short stories, published in this anthology, named “With Fate Conspire” to examine and analyze it in reference to the notion of posthuman feminism. In her work, Singh explores the posthuman ideals of embodiment, association, negotiation of identity, relationships with machines, and the place of women in a posthuman world.

## II. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Posthumanism is used by feminist scholars as a tool to navigate, resist, and reinvent the set notions of the human. Following the arguments of Braidotti (2013), posthumanism can help in not only re-thinking the references related to the term ‘human’, but also exploring the relationships between non-human subjects and objects. Non-human subjects and objects both refer to living and non-living mechanisms. Humanism has not only set a standard model for humans but also for the world. Humans are expected to adhere to the rules of society, follow laws, and lead a civilized society and it is hard to say whether humans are the ones who make the rules of civilization or the opposite. However, outside this civilized world, there lies a world where human standards are expected without giving the designation. For example, people expect animals to show humane qualities, which include patience, understanding, intellect, and empathy without considering them as their equals. Humans believe themselves to be the superior species both to animals and machines, but they also expect humanity from them (Haslam et al., 2008). Most contemporary science fiction follows this principle as well, where machines are either friends of humans or rise up against them. In both scenarios, they are attributed with both positive and negative qualities associated with humans. This humanization is more easily understandable through the way people have created an Oedipalized relationship with a few selected species, namely cats and dogs (Braidotti, 2013). The Oedipalized relationship is based on the anthropocentric ideals of humans that negotiate the identity and existence of these animals only in relation and reference to humans. This blurs the lines between humans, animals, and machines, allowing the later identities to become inevitably associated with the former. This association is understood and taken by people through different perspectives as they often lead to contrasting revelations. For example, the bond between animals and machines can either be fruitful for both, for none, or for one of them. Since women have always been categorized as ‘other’ for example, as highlighted by Simone de Beauvoir in her revolutionary book, *The Second Sex*, they sometimes form a greater bond with animals and machines (non-humans). Since posthuman

ideas stretch the boundaries of the ‘human’, it presents the categories of traditional ‘others’ with an opportunity to amalgamate and associate themselves with the notion of ‘human’. This association allows women to re-negotiate their identity in society and challenge humanist ideals.

It can also be argued that replacing humans as the center of the world or rapid technological enhancement can also bring many negative changes and complicate the animal-human-machine dynamics. This threat and easily changeable identity of humans has been called, “ex-man” by Massumi (1998, p. 59), according to whom, this ‘ex-man’ is born out of the torn enlightenment man who has been “deterritorialized and bifurcated”. This event is not only significant in the history of post-anthropocentrism but also in post-humanism. The posthuman world with technological enhancement and ideas of deconstruction have met with both hostility and criticism on the one hand, and hope and anticipation on the other. Thus, the position of women can also be analyzed in a positive and a negative way as explored by different science-fiction authors. For example, on the one hand, fiction books like *Frankissstein* (2019) by Jeanette Winterson highlight how women can get replaced or even dominated by the emergence of the machine. The book talks about sexbots that can manage to not only satisfy the sexual needs of a man but can also become their ultimate and perfect companions (Winterson, 2019). A real-life example of the same phenomenon can be Sophia, the humanoid robot who became the first robot to receive legal personhood in any country. She received the citizenship of Saudi Arabia in 2017, a country where biological women were not even allowed to drive cars during that time. This unique issue of replacement thus problematizes the relationship between women and machines. However, the positive sides are also explored by many novelists, including Vandana Singh. In the story, “With Fate Conspire”, the machine helps Gargi to connect with the other women and learn about them. It works as a catalyst that forwards the story but stays in the background. In contrast to the other science-fiction works, here the machine is not an all-compassing and primary entity, rather it is a secondary character. Thus, it shows that women can find their voice and share their narrative in the posthuman world which is a privilege that they never had in the old world.

## III. ANALYSIS OF THE STORY, “WITH FATE CONSPIRE”

“With Fate Conspire” centers around a female protagonist, named Gargi who lives in a post-apocalyptic world and is adorned with a special ability that allows her to communicate with the past through machines. The story

begins with a dream sequence where Gargi dreams about a man who was dreaming too. The first sequence thus brings up the question about dream embodiments, which allows Gargi to experience something real, but at the same time fails to communicate the perspective and the information clearly. As Ferrando (2020) mentions in her book, *Philosophical Posthumanism*, every perspective is embodied, but the embodiments do not necessarily have to be physical. This allows the dream of Gargi to be a perceived reality and an embodiment through which she can receive knowledge through a dualistic state of mind of being both awake and asleep. The story moves forward and allows the reader to know that Gargi is part of a scientific experiment where the scientists are trying to visit the past to learn about a poet named, Wajid Ali Shah as they believed it could have averted the world-ending catastrophe that they faced. In her dream, Gargi has also talked about a delta, which is later described in the story as "made by a river of time, not water" (Singh, 2018, p. 9). The idea of time and river is very closely associated in the story because the scientists that Gargi is working with (or rather for) are trying to change the future and avoid catastrophe by changing some interconnected events in the past. The theme of changing the future through changing the past itself shows its deep connection with each other, where, for example, the state and condition of women are also changeable. Since, the story highlights that "history and time control each other" and time is not a linear idea, the posthuman ideals of the contemporary world can actually affect the events of the past (Singh, 2018, p. 13). Now, in reality, it is not possible to change history, but the way historical events and the way history judges a category, such as 'humans' or 'women' can be changed and altered through the discussion in the present. So, in a sense, posthuman ideals allow us to stretch the borders and analyze history through the present. This can help in understanding the character of Rassundari and her association and relationship with Gargi because even if they belong from different times, they intricately share each other's lives and influence each other. The story, in fact, includes three women, namely Gargi, Kajori (Dr. Mitra), and Rassundari who assimilate with each other and influence the works and lives of each other at every step. This hints at the idea of feminist solidarity which is a significant concept while discussing the concept of inclusivity in posthumanism.

While discussing and addressing the issues of posthumanism, the story also highlights the past notions of 'human' through the treatment of women. As the paper already mentioned, following the assertions of Rosi Braidotti that she included in her book, *The Posthuman* (2013) that women among other minorities were excluded

from the notion of 'human' and were categorized as the 'other'. In this story, most of the characters are women who not only highlight the position of women in the present contemporary age but also in the past. The analysis of both the times and their trajectory can thus help in locating and positioning the concept of 'human' in reference to the posthuman world. The representative of the old, traditional world, Rassundari entails and emphasizes the inequalities and oppression that women faced in 19th-century Bangladesh. Rassundari's struggle to satisfy her own family while trying to educate herself is a significant example of the way she is positioned in the lower stratum of society. Education, equality, and agency are basic human rights that are denied to her, through which society excludes her from the category of 'human' and upholds its traditional definition. However, the fact that she was eventually able to write her autobiography at the age of 60, called "Amar Jiban" allows a ray of hope to future generations that widening the borders of the 'human' category is not only possible but also worthy. It is worthy because 250 years later, maybe a woman like Gargi will be encouraged to educate herself through the book. The autobiography of Rassundari in fact stands in contrast to the song that Gargi mentions, named "Babul Mora" which talks about a woman "leaving her childhood home with her newlywed husband, looking back from the cart for the last time. Father mine, my home slips away from me" (Singh, 2018, p. 4). The song "Babul Mora" is written by Wajid Ali Shah and talks about the experience of a woman, which brings out the question of how much the perspective of a man can accurately describe the experiences of a woman. Thus, while the autobiography of Rassundari is an example of a work that pushes the boundaries of the 'human' category, the song adheres to the tradition of the old world and upholds the categorization of women as the 'other' who are incapable of and/or denied the opportunity to control and voice their narratives.

The oppression and the treatment that Rassundari faced in the 19th century also resonates through the experience of Gargi. Gargi is an uneducated woman who is only a subject of interest to scientists because she is one of the few people who can connect with the machine and witness the events of the past. Even this crucial role comes with its own bondage and problems, as Gargi refers to the scientist as her 'captors'. She feels trapped in the building and feel forced to spy on Wajid Ali Shah, while her own interest lies in Rassundari. Similar to Rassundari, she is also uneducated, trapped, and at the mercy of others. Thus, similar to Rassundari, Gargi can also be categorized as the 'other'. Gargi is different, not only because she can connect with the machine, but also because influencing



and changing the past and the future lies in her own hands. She can change the future (specifically the catastrophe) by changing the past, through Wajid Ali, but she chooses to spend time with Rassundari. This implies that interacting with Rassundari may have changed her future and may have also influenced the trajectory of the catastrophe, allowing her a power that the traditional category of 'human' denies her. When Gargi mentions that "all my hauntings have been of people who are hurt, or grieving, or otherwise in distress", it enables the reader to associate her position with all the people who came before her, and were categorized as 'others' (Singh, 2018, p. 4). She associates herself with not only Rassundari in particular, or all women in general, but also emphasizes the pain of everyone that she feels. For example, in the mentioned sentence, she is talking about a tired old man who used to creep into her mind, whom she later refers to as Rahman Khan. This man is also a representative of the 'other' because, in the story, he is a fragment of the imagination and memory of Gargi from whom she adopted the language of poetry and "a vision of freedom" (Singh, 2018, p. 5). Gargi is the posthuman embodiment in the story who can also be referred to as a 'trans-specific being'. Trans-specific beings as highlighted by De Castro (1998) and later mentioned by Ferrando in her book, *Philosophical Posthumanism* (2020) are beings who can transcend their species-specific borders. Gargi thus becomes a trans-specific being when she overcomes the limitations and borders of human beings and connects with a machine or the people from the past.

The association between humans and machines is also highlighted in the story where the only reason that Gargi has any control, agency, and power in her life is due to her connection with the machine that can connect someone to the past. Through this connection with the machine, Gargi is able to connect with Rassundari and enter the lives of the dead man and Kajori. Since the machine makes everything possible, it can be considered the enabler of the story and the center of their connected lives. The three interconnected women in the story, namely Kajori, Gargi, and Rassundari come together to save the world with the help of the machine and while they think they are using the machine, it is the machine that manages to influence all their lives significantly. For example, Gargi meets Rassundari through the machine, and the relationship that grows between them, which although can be categorized as one-sided, highlights the importance of the machine in a relationship between two women. The association of Gargi with the dead man, who thinks of her as Kajori is also due to the machine that allows them to talk to each other through dreams. Thus, the connection and the solidarity between women that develops during the narrative owe

much to the inhuman presence. In addition, the relationship of the machine with men and women is portrayed differently in the story. While it helps Gargi in multiple ways, it brings death to the man who has a painful and negative relationship with the machine. The machine thus becomes an agency that allows the women, in general, and Gargi, in particular, with power and control over their own lives and the narrative.

There are three major female characters present in the story who not only manage to connect with each other but also influence each other significantly. One of the most easily recognizable influences in the story is what Rassundari has over Gargi. She not only influences her to restart her educational journey but also made her question her own life and state. When Gargi started reading the autobiography of Rassundari, she felt that it was written in a more peaceful tone than she expected, considering the injustices and problems Rassundari faced in her life. It allowed Gargi to realize that holding onto the past and allowing yourself to be defined by others is a choice, which Rassundari rejected. Thus, the influence of Rassundari on Gargi is clear, but the question is whether Rassundari was ever influenced by Gargi or not. She used to look up towards the ceiling and she could feel the presence so maybe she was touched by it. Gargi talks to her from the ceiling, although Rassundari cannot probably hear her or see her, but, since Gargi mentions the book of Rassundari to her, maybe she senses it, and this is what inspired her to write the book. So, past and present can both influence each other, to change the future. In this sense, the notion of humanity that we have today, or we had, for example during the time of the Renaissance can help each other to develop a more all-encompassing and inclusive notion of humanity, which will not be oppressive towards anyone. In addition, both Gargi and Rassundari complicate the plan of Dr. Mitra to change the course of the future by changing the past. They not only play a part in the death of the lover of Dr. Mitra but also manipulated and sabotaged the experiment that Dr. Mitra was doing. Thus, the dynamics of the relationship between the women characters highlight the theme of the story and the notion of humanity.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be said that the story, "With Fate Conspire" by Vandana Singh locates and analyses significant elements of posthumanism and forces the readers to question and examine the relationship between women and machines. The categorization of women and machines in the same sentence refers to the notion of 'others' which both groups are categorized as, in the

spectrum of 'humanism'. They share the struggle to be accepted in the category of human, and while the question is more straightforward for women, it is more complicated for machines. However, in this story, it is not the aim of the author to highlight machines as 'human', but rather to allow machines and the notion of posthumanism to help and enable women to widen the boundaries of the category of 'human' and find a place for themselves within it. The story is therefore significant in exploring the posthuman world and the unique relationships it carries.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Braidotti, R. (2013). *The Posthuman*. Polity Press.
- [2] Braidotti, R. (2017). "Four theses on posthuman feminism". *Anthropocene Feminism*. University of Minnesota Press.
- [3] Brian, Massumi. (1998). Requiem for our Prospective Dead. In Kaufman, E., & Heller, K. J. (Eds.), *Deleuze & Guattari: New mappings in politics, philosophy, and culture*. University of Minnesota Press.
- [4] De Beauvoir, S. (2011). *The Second Sex*. Vintage eBooks.
- [5] De Castro, E. V. (1998). Cosmological deixis and Amerindian perspectivism. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 469-488.
- [6] Ferrando, F. (2020). *Philosophical posthumanism*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- [7] Haslam, N., Loughnan, S., Kashima, Y., & Bain, P. (2008). Attributing and denying humanness to others. *European review of social psychology*, 19(1), 55-85. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10463280801981645>
- [8] Koistinen, A. K., & Karkulehto, S. (2018). "Feminism". *Critical Posthumanism: Genealogy of the Posthuman*.
- [9] Singh, V. (2018). "With Fate Conspire". *Ambiguity Machines: and Other stories*. Small Beer Press.
- [10] Winterson, J. (2019). *Frankissstein*. Random House.



# Dynamics of Academic Writing and its Impact on Professional Growth

Dr. P. Prasantham

Associate Professor of English, Aditya Institute of Technology and Management, Srikakulam, Andhra Pradesh, India

Received: 29 May 2023; Received in revised form: 25 Jun 2023; Accepted: 03 Jul 2023; Available online: 11 Jul 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— Individuals involved in academia are well aware that they are required to write various types of academic documents, including research papers, review articles, conference papers, book chapters, books, book reviews, theses / dissertations, grant proposals and PowerPoint Presentations for their professional growth. Teachers at the school level, lecturers at the intermediate / degree level, and assistant professors / associate professors / professors at the university level consistently find themselves in need of drafting some sort of academic document for publication. When we write something, we have various aims in mind, such as describing, explaining, instructing, specifying, evaluating, persuading, conceding and apologizing, protesting, rejecting, and more. Academic writing necessitates conducting research, evaluating information, organizing thoughts, presenting arguments, responding to others' arguments, analyzing data, and expressing ideas clearly and effectively through writing. When preparing any academic document for publication, one needs to consider the essential elements that must be met. In this paper, I aim to discuss the fundamental aspects of academic writing.



**Keywords**— academic writing, research paper, book chapter, book, thesis, grant proposal

## I. RESEARCH PAPER

Writing a research paper requires meticulous efforts. Prior to beginning the writing process, it is essential to familiarize oneself with the chosen topic. The topic selection can be based on personal choice or assigned by an instructor, but it should be manageable within one's capabilities. Before commencing the paper, a thorough understanding of existing knowledge on the topic must be acquired by consulting various sources such as books, academic journals, and websites. This aids in identifying research gaps and narrowing down the focus. The structure of the paper should consist of an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion. It is crucial to make the introduction engaging and include a clear thesis statement. A boring introduction may deter readers from continuing further. Background information can be provided in the introduction to provide context to the reader. The body paragraphs should present arguments, findings, and analyses objectively, utilizing tables, graphs, and charts when necessary. Transitioning smoothly between

paragraphs is important. The conclusion should be as captivating as the introduction, leaving the reader intrigued for further study. It is advisable to avoid introducing new information in the conclusion. References or a bibliography should be cited at the end of the paper. Extensive proofreading should be conducted to identify errors and inconsistencies. Seeking feedback from an expert in the field before publication can provide valuable suggestions for improvement and correction.

## II. REVIEW ARTICLE

Though research paper writing and review article writing may appear similar, they have distinct differences and serve different purposes. Research papers aim to present *original* research findings, methodology, and analysis, with the goal of contributing new knowledge or insights to a specific field or addressing a particular research question. On the other hand, review articles provide a comprehensive overview and critical analysis of *existing* research and

literature on a specific topic. They synthesize and evaluate previously published studies, identifying trends, controversies, and knowledge gaps. In terms of structure, both research papers and review articles share common components such as an introduction, body paragraphs, conclusion, and citations. However, there are specific differences in how these components are approached in each type of writing. Research papers typically include sections such as the abstract, literature review, methodology, results, discussion, and conclusion. These sections are designed to present the research process, findings, and their interpretation. In contrast, review articles generally have an abstract, introduction, main body, and conclusion. The main body of a review article may be organized thematically or chronologically, depending on the nature of the topic being discussed. It is also worth noting that proofreading is an important aspect of both research paper and review article writing. It ensures that the content is free of errors and adheres to the conventions of academic writing. Additionally, citations play a crucial role in both types of writing to acknowledge and provide references for the sources consulted. In summary, while research papers and review articles share certain structural elements, they differ in their purpose and approach. Research papers focus on presenting *original* research findings and methodology, while review articles provide an overview and critical analysis of *existing* research and literature. Understanding these distinctions is essential for effectively writing and reviewing these types of academic papers.

### III. CONFERENCE PAPER

Writing a conference paper involves succinctly presenting your research findings or ideas to a specific audience within a limited timeframe. Familiarize yourself with the conference guidelines, including the theme, submission requirements, formatting guidelines, word count limitations, and submission deadline. Ensure your paper aligns with the conference theme or topic. Typically, conference paper includes an introduction, background or related work, methodology or approach, results or findings, discussion or analysis, and conclusion. Present your research findings or results in a clear and concise manner. Use tables, graphs, or visual aids to effectively communicate your data or outcomes. Focus on the most significant or relevant findings that directly address your research question or objective. Summarize the main points of your paper and restate your key findings or ideas. Follow the required formatting style (e.g., APA, MLA) and citation guidelines provided by the conference. Use proper in-text citations and create a bibliography or reference list of all the

sources you have cited. If your conference paper requires an oral presentation, create slides or visuals to support your presentation. Practice your presentation to ensure that you stay within the allotted time and effectively convey your key points. Prepare the final version of your paper according to the required format and submit it before the deadline.

### IV. BOOK CHAPTER

Begin the chapter with an engaging introduction that grabs the readers' attention and provides an overview of what will be covered. Clearly state the chapter's objectives and set the context for the content that follows. Present your ideas, arguments, or information in a clear and organized manner. Each section or subsection should address a specific point or theme. Provide supporting evidence, examples, or anecdotes to illustrate and reinforce your main points. Ensure that your chapter has a clear and coherent structure. Use a conversational and engaging writing style that is appropriate for the target audience. At the end of each section or subsection, provide a summary or conclusion that reinforces the main points and highlights their significance. Edit the final version of the chapter paying attention to details, such as grammar, spelling, punctuation, and formatting.

### V. BOOK

Writing a book can be a rewarding and fulfilling process. Authors may have their own style of writing books. Here are some steps that may be followed by a novice book writer. Begin by brainstorming ideas for your book. Consider your interests, experiences, and what you are passionate about. Develop a compelling concept or storyline that will engage readers. Create an outline to organize your thoughts and structure the book. This can include chapters, key plot points, character development, and any other important elements you want to include. The outline acts as a roadmap for your writing process. If your book requires research, gather the necessary information. This might involve reading books, conducting interviews, or exploring online resources. Make sure to fact-check and verify the accuracy of your information. Establish a writing schedule that works for you. Determine how much time you can dedicate to writing each day or week. Consistency is key, so try to stick to your schedule to maintain momentum. Begin writing the first draft of your book. Don't worry about perfection at this stage; focus on getting your ideas onto paper. Let your creativity flow and avoid excessive self-editing. Find a writing process that suits you. Some authors prefer to write from beginning to end, while others jump between different sections. Experiment with different approaches until you find what works best for you. Once



you complete the first draft, set it aside for a while to gain some distance. Then, return to your manuscript and begin the revision and editing process. This involves refining your writing, improving clarity, checking for grammatical errors, and enhancing the overall structure. Seek feedback from trusted individuals, such as fellow writers. They can provide valuable insights and suggestions for improvement. Consider joining writing groups or workshops to connect with other authors and receive constructive criticism. Use the feedback you received to revise and improve your manuscript. Repeat the revision and editing process until you are satisfied with the overall quality and coherence of your work. Consider hiring a professional editor to review your manuscript. They can provide a fresh perspective, identify any lingering issues, and polish your writing further. Once your book is in its final stages, conduct a thorough proofreading to catch any remaining errors, typos, or inconsistencies. Decide on your publishing route—traditional publishing or self-publishing. Create an eye-catching book cover that aligns with your book's genre and attracts readers. Format your manuscript according to the requirements of your chosen publishing route. Follow the necessary steps to publish your book. This may involve submitting your manuscript to publishers or uploading it to self-publishing platforms. Explore both digital and print options for wider distribution. Develop a marketing strategy to promote your book. This can include creating an author website, utilizing social media platforms, reaching out to book bloggers and reviewers, organizing book signings or virtual events, and seeking media coverage. Remember, writing a book takes time, dedication, and persistence.

## VI. BOOK REVIEW

Writing a book review allows you to share your thoughts and opinions about a book while providing valuable feedback to potential readers. Below procedure may help you to review a book. Read the book thoroughly. Take notes as you read to help you remember important details, characters, and plot points. Begin your review with a brief introduction that includes the book's title, author, genre, and any relevant background information. Provide a concise summary of the book's plot without giving away major spoilers. Highlight the main characters and their motivations, and touch on the central conflict or theme of the story. Share your evaluation of the book. Discuss what you liked and didn't like about it. Consider the following elements: Writing Style, Characters, Plot, Themes and Messages, Setting, Emotional Impact, Genre Expectations etc. Support your evaluation with specific examples from the book. This helps illustrate your points and allows readers to understand your perspective. If you think it's

relevant, you can compare the book to others in the same genre or by the same author. Highlight similarities or differences and explain why they matter. Summarize your overall opinion of the book in a concise manner. Before publishing or sharing your review, take the time to edit and proofread it. Ensure that your thoughts are clear, your sentences are well-structured, and there are no spelling or grammar errors. Remember, a book review reflects your personal opinion, so be honest and respectful in your critique. It's also helpful to consider the target audience of the book and frame your review accordingly.

## VII. THESIS / DISSERTATION

Writing a thesis or dissertation is a significant undertaking that requires careful planning, organization, and attention to detail. Familiarize yourself with the guidelines and requirements provided by your university or academic institution. Understand the specific formatting, structure, and word count guidelines for your thesis or dissertation. Select a topic that aligns with your research interests and contributes to your field of study. Ensure that the topic is feasible and can be adequately addressed within the scope of your project. Review existing literature and research related to your topic. Identify gaps in knowledge or areas that require further investigation. Develop research questions or hypotheses that will guide your study. Create a detailed plan that outlines the various stages of your research, including data collection, analysis, and writing. Break down the tasks into manageable segments with specific timelines. Write a proposal that outlines the objectives, methodology, and expected outcomes of your research. Present your proposal to your advisor or committee for feedback and approval before proceeding. Collect the necessary data using appropriate research methods and tools. Analyze your data using suitable statistical or qualitative analysis techniques. Ensure that your analysis is rigorous and aligns with your research questions. Develop an outline for your thesis or dissertation that includes the major sections and subsections. Common sections include an introduction, literature review, methodology, results, discussion, and conclusion. Tailor the structure to fit your specific research project. Begin writing the individual chapters based on your outline. Start with the introduction, where you provide background information, state your research questions, and outline the significance of your study. Move on to the literature review, methodology, results, discussion, and conclusion chapters. Write each chapter in a clear, concise, and logical manner. Review and revise your work for clarity, coherence, and logical flow. Ensure that each chapter contributes to your overall research objectives. Edit your writing for grammar, spelling, and

punctuation errors. Pay attention to formatting and citation style requirements. Share your work with your advisor, committee members, or peers for feedback. Incorporate their suggestions and make revisions as needed. Seek input on the clarity of your arguments, the strength of your analysis, and the overall coherence of your document. Write a concise abstract that summarizes your research question, methodology, and key findings. Craft an engaging introduction that captures the reader's interest and provides a clear overview of your research objectives and significance. Incorporate all the revisions and feedback received. Ensure that your document adheres to the prescribed formatting guidelines. Include all necessary sections, such as acknowledgments, table of contents, list of figures or tables, and references. Carefully proofread your entire document for errors. Check the formatting, page numbering, and consistency in headings, fonts, and spacing. Ensure that all citations and references are accurate and properly formatted according to the required citation style. Submit your thesis or dissertation to your academic institution according to the specified guidelines and deadlines. Prepare for your defense or viva voce examination by rehearsing your presentation and being prepared to answer questions from your committee.

### VIII. GRANT PROPOSAL

Writing a grant proposal involves presenting a compelling case to secure funding for a specific project or research endeavour. Thoroughly review the grant guidelines, eligibility criteria, funding priorities, and deadlines. Clearly articulate the goals, objectives, and significance of your project. Ensure that your project aligns with the mission and priorities of the funding agency. Create a detailed project plan that outlines the activities, timeline, and resources required to achieve your objectives. Describe the methodology, research design, or implementation strategies you will employ. Consider potential challenges and how you will mitigate them. Clearly demonstrate the need for your project and the potential impact it will have. Use data, statistics, or evidence to support your claims. Explain how your project is innovative, unique, or fills a gap in existing research or services. Develop a comprehensive budget that details the resources and funds needed to carry out your project. Ensure that your budget aligns with the funding agency's guidelines and clearly justifies the requested funds. Include personnel, equipment, supplies, travel costs, and any other relevant expenses. Structure your proposal into sections, including an executive summary, introduction, problem statement, objectives, methodology, evaluation plan, budget, and timeline. Include any required attachments or supporting documents, such as letters of

support from collaborators or stakeholders, curriculum vitae (CVs) of key personnel, organizational charts, or additional project materials. Ensure that the proposal is free from typographical errors and that the formatting adheres to the grant guidelines. Submit your proposal according to the specified guidelines and deadlines. Pay attention to the submission method, whether it is through an online portal, email, or mail. Make sure to include all required documents and confirm receipt of your submission. If the funding agency allows, follow up with the contact person or program officer to inquire about the proposal review process. Maintain open and timely communication with the funding agency throughout the evaluation period.

India has several funding agencies that support research projects across various disciplines.

1. Department of Science and Technology (DST)
2. Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)
3. Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR)
4. Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR)
5. Department of Biotechnology (DBT)
6. University Grants Commission (UGC)
7. Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)
8. Science and Engineering Research Board (SERB)
9. Technology Development Board (TDB)
10. Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)
11. Wellcome Trust/DBT India Alliance
12. Indo-U.S. Science and Technology Forum (IUSSTF)

These are some of the prominent funding agencies in India for research projects. It's important to explore specific funding programs, eligibility criteria, and application processes of each agency to identify the most suitable opportunities for your research area and project scope.

### IX. POWERPOINT PRESENTATION

Preparing a PowerPoint presentation involves several steps to ensure an effective and engaging visual aid for your audience. First of all, clearly define the purpose and objective of your presentation. Determine the key message or main points you want to convey to your audience. Understanding your objective will guide the content and structure of your presentation. Create an outline of the main topics and subtopics you want to cover in your presentation. Organize your ideas in a logical and coherent manner. Each

Slide should represent a distinct concept or idea that contributes to the overall flow of your presentation. Select an appropriate design theme for your PowerPoint presentation. Choose a visually appealing and professional design that complements your content. Use consistent colors, fonts, and visual elements throughout the presentation for a cohesive look. Keep your content concise and to the point. Avoid overcrowding slides with excessive text. Use bullet points, keywords, or brief phrases to convey information. Your slides should serve as visual aids that support your verbal presentation, rather than duplicating every word you say. Use relevant visuals such as images, charts, graphs, or diagrams to enhance understanding and engagement. Visuals can make complex information more accessible and memorable. Ensure that visuals are high quality, properly formatted, and visually appealing. Limit the amount of text on each slide to promote readability and prevent information overload. Aim for a balance between visuals and text. Use bullet points, subheadings, or numbered lists to present information in a structured and digestible format. Choose appropriate slide layouts for different types of content. Use title slides for introducing topics, content slides for presenting information, and summary or conclusion slides to wrap up your presentation. Make use of section headers, transition slides, and slide dividers to create a clear and organized structure. Ensure consistency in design elements, fonts, and formatting throughout your presentation. Use consistent alignment, font sizes, and colour schemes. This helps create a polished and professional look. Incorporate animations and slide transitions sparingly and purposefully. Use them to highlight key points or guide the audience's attention. Avoid excessive or distracting animations that may detract from your content. Practice your presentation multiple times to become familiar with the content and flow. Rehearse your delivery to ensure a smooth and confident presentation. Time yourself to ensure that your presentation fits within the allocated time frame. Before presenting, proofread your slides for any spelling, grammar, or formatting errors. Review the content for clarity and accuracy. Check that all visuals and multimedia elements are working correctly. Remember, PowerPoint is a visual aid to support your presentation, so use it effectively to enhance your message and engage your audience. Keep your slides clear, concise, and visually appealing to create an impactful presentation experience.

## X. CONCLUSION

Academic documents such as research papers, review articles, conference papers, book chapters, books, book reviews, theses / dissertations, grant proposals and

PowerPoint Presentations are regularly attempted by the faculty involved in teaching at all levels for their professional growth. With the advent of digitalization, new kinds of documentation have emerged, taking advantage of technological advancements and the shift towards digital formats. We need to update ourselves time to time to compete with others in this competitive world.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Gerard, Philip. *Art of Creative Research – A Field Guide for Writers*. University of Chicago Press, 2017.
- [2] Gibaldi, Joseph. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. Modern Language Association of America, 2003.
- [3] Murray, Rowena. *How to Write a Thesis*. Open University Press, 2006.
- [4] Silvia, Paul J. *How to Write a Lot: A Practical Guide to Productive Academic Writing*. APA LifeTools, 2018.
- [5] Sword, Helen. *Stylish Academic Writing*. Harvard University Press, 2012.



# The Inimitable Sociologist: Revisiting Georg Simmel's Seminal Texts

Kevin George

Department of English, K.E College, MG University, Kottayam, Kerala, India

Received: 05 Jun 2023; Received in revised form: 02 Jul 2023; Accepted: 08 Jul 2023; Available online: 13 Jul 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— In 1858, Georg Simmel was born in Berlin. The conflicts of Germany's unique road to modernity were best exemplified by that metropolis. Financial speculation and rapid urbanisation fueled Berlin's ascent to global prominence. While a young proletariat (Georg Simmel) fought the government and the bourgeoisie for political and economic rights, an avant-garde cultural elite coexisted uncomfortably with the central European aristocracy. The landed Prussian Junker aristocracy, the cornerstone of Bismarck's unified German Reich, was eroded because of the proliferation of modern technologies that created power and riches. The Hohenzollern dynasty, one of the oldest in Europe, ruled over a tumultuous realm while being enamoured with the most contemporary concepts.



**Keywords**— Simmel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Money, Marxism, Lukács

## I. INTRODUCTION

Simmel received his schooling at the University of Berlin, which was rife with the critical, historicist attitude of neo-Kantianism. However, Simmel found it challenging to follow.

Simmel received his schooling at the University of Berlin, which was rife with neo-Kantianism's critical, historicist attitude. Simmel struggled to fit into Germany's stuffy academic society, though. Because it was "speculative, aphoristic, and stylistically careless," his first dissertation on ethnomusicology was rejected. Although he received his PhD and habilitation in 1881 and 1885, his examiners may have had a point when they noted that many of his published writings lacked references and rejected scholarly narrowness. Simmel's contemporary, Gustav von Schmoller, described his manner as preferring to "provide more caviar than black bread" and "illuminate with a firework rather than a study lamp."

Simmel was primarily an essayist and was uncomfortable writing in the treatise, taxonomy, or monograph form. The essay form, in the words of his fellow German academic Theodor Adorno, "does not let its domain be prescribed for

it," The essay does not adhere to established scientific and theoretical principles. Essays often have a stronger impact when they make light gestures towards hidden dimensions and the interconnectedness of events rather than formulating a thorough system. The perception is of a briefly illuminated entire that quickly dims, leaving one with the sensation that more could be found with the help of another burst of brilliance.

Take the opening lines of Simmel's essay 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' (1903):

"The deepest problems of modern life derive from the claim of the individual to preserve the autonomy and individuality of his existence in the face of overwhelming social forces, historical heritage, external culture, and technique of life."

Simmel sets up a thorough investigational framework with ease. In addition to this, we hear from this specific person as well, who battled for survival in a terrible environment. Simmel cherished his world, nevertheless. Later, he thought, "Perhaps I could have accomplished something equally valuable in another city, but this particular achievement, that I have realised over these decades, is



unquestionably bound up with the Berlin milieu." Berlin's self-consciousness can therefore be detected in his articles.

Money and the city are the two intertwined social forms at the focus of the analysis in "The Metropolis and Mental Life." As they gain power, they weaken established social norms and natural production cycles. The fact that money doesn't care about birthrights and just cares about what everyone has in common—the trade value—is liberating. The cost of money, however, is that it turns something that is particularly valued into a number, a price. Fine handcrafted items are equivalent to mass-produced rubbish when the ratio is right. Since nothing that can be purchased is unique, this devalues commodities while driving the hunt for anything truly unique and extraordinarily precious.

The city accelerates the calculable logic of money, encroaching even on our experience of time.

As Simmel wrote:

"If all clocks and watches in Berlin would suddenly go wrong in different ways, even if only by one hour, all economic life and communication in the city would be disrupted for a long time."

Seasons and celestial bodies no longer control time; rather, it is abstracted and measured. Additionally, the city condenses both social and geographical space. Diverse linguistic groups, cultural groups, social classes, and occupations are brought together. The metropolis threatened to engulf Friedrich Nietzsche's magnificent individualism in a mass, which is why, as Simmel noted, he preached furiously against it.

Simmel read Nietzsche extensively and shared his romantic fascination with "an endless succession of contrasts," but he kept his distance from the latter's aristocratic radicalism. Simmel didn't find the extremes he was looking for in the Sils Maria mountains, but rather in the urban multitude, where one might experience the peculiarly contemporary loneliness of passing a thousand faces without identifying a friend. Noble heights and deplorable depths were formed by Nietzsche's peaks and valleys. Instead, Simmel's city fostered blasé citizens who, out of fear of being absorbed, set themselves apart with an outward air of cold indifference.

Simmel claimed that blasé people look for quality in their final refuge - individuality - after becoming disillusioned by advertising and overstimulation:

"Man is tempted to adopt the most tendentious peculiarities, that is, the specifically metropolitan extravagances of mannerism, caprice, preciousness ... the meaning of these extravagances ... [lies] in its form of

'being different', of standing out strikingly and thereby attracting attention."

The symbolist poet Stefan George and author, psychiatrist, and former Nietzsche favourite Lou Andreas-Salomé were guests of Simmel. Simmel provided this cultural elite with a mirror in exchange for their financial support. The brightest of central Europe's intelligentsia attended his much-praised public talks. Before the First World War, people as disparate as Leon Trotsky, Siegfried Kracauer, Karl Mannheim, Georg Lukács, Karl Jaspers, and Emil Lask knelt at Simmel's lectures for a brief period.

He found an audience in Chicago as early as the 1890s, and his global impact was easily comparable to that of Simmel's colleagues Émile Durkheim and Max Weber. But he consistently lost out on academic promotion. Simmel was given a guardian because his father had passed away when he was still a little child and had left him a sizeable income to support his intellectual endeavours. Simmel remained a Privatdozent, a lecturer whose compensation is based on their ability to draw pupils, from 1885 to 1900. Simmel did not discriminate because of his wealth, and in defiance of social norms, he invited women to his lectures.

Simmel associated with socialist groups in the 1890s and even contributed to their newspaper, *Vorwärts*, despite antisocialist legislation from the Bismarck era. The fact that he mixed with the wrong crowd and drew the wrong students created further obstacles to academic success.

Finally, in 1898, he was elevated to the exceptional title of "professor without a chair," *Ausserordentlicher Professor*, which was paid at half the rate. Simmel was also prohibited from hiring PhD students because of this. He may have believed that his masterpiece, *The Philosophy of Money* (1900), would conclusively prove his qualifications for a full professorship.

One year after the publication of the updated edition of *The Philosophy of Money*, a 100-mark Reichsbanknote from 1908 that is closely examined reveals a lot. The '100' is the first thing that catches the attention, followed by the crimson serial numbers and the Reichsbankdirektorium seal. The value of the note is once again stated in elegant blackletter form between these signatures, which are also accompanied by promises of authenticity and the date the note was issued. The design alludes to Germany's romantically tinged nationalism and is significantly distinct from the Enlightenment elements found on French or American banknotes. On the reverse, a woman representing Imperial Germany rests among symbols of art, science, and industry while being well-armed but at peace.

An old oak that represents Donar, the German name for Thor, stands behind her, while in the distance, a procession of coal-powered battleships passes.

These aesthetics blend the abstract with the concrete: a numerical number is on one pole, images of a country's wealth and virtues are on the other, and in between are meaningless, borderline mystical legal assurances. All of this is appropriate. Money is a special kind of social object that is meaningless on its own but is given power by a government-run bank and is historically backed by gold. Money can be used to represent real commodities as diverse as healthcare, commerce, or even the cultural pleasure (and sub-Dionysian revelry) one could anticipate for the cost of a Bayreuth Ring Cycle ticket.

Money is nothing, but it flows everywhere and mediates everything. In keeping with this mysterious quasi-transcendental status, Simmel's method combined aesthetics and philosophy.

The "great advantage of art over philosophy", he explained:

"is that it sets itself a single, narrowly defined problem every time: a person, a landscape, a mood. Every extension of one of these to the general, every addition of bold touches of feeling for the world is made to appear as an enrichment, a gift, an undeserved benefit."

The 'infinite reciprocity' of the reason is what philosophy, on the other hand, demands this aesthetic heuristic surrender to. As a result, a critical money philosophy is produced, which is honest about its subjective, aesthetic basis and necessary incompleteness.

The central premise of Simmel's work is the conceptualization of exchange, which he defines as a "third term, an ideal concept which enters into the duality but is not exhausted by it," or an act between two persons that produces value. Value can take on a life of its own in the form of money because of this irreducibility, which Simmel calls "the reification of exchange among people, the embodiment of pure function." No one ever promised that trade would always be equitable; as bandits and health insurance providers know, people will do anything to survive. However, as exchanges increase, prices and currencies rationalise and standardise value.

Like Heraclitus' river, money always moves while being unchanged. Money is a non-economic value because it has no purpose other than to circulate. However, as the market expands, the 'teleological chain' of transactions grows longer, pushing nonmonetary goals further away and increasing their value. Consider love as an example. Love, which seeks to bridge the gap between the self and the loved one, flourishes as we become more nameless and

removed from one another. According to Simmel, "Love is the true human condition for man, who is always striving, never satisfied, and always becoming." This is also the reason that, as he points out in his essay on prostitution, money may buy sex but not love.

Money fosters a need for quality time by turning time into a quantifiable amount, like an hourly income. This could be a night out, a vacation, or a period during which time passes quickly or during which one simply loses track of time. An adventurer is someone who designs his life around qualitative time, as Simmel contends in his article "The Adventure." Although it could seem like the explorer has talent, all he does is aestheticize the blind, careless chance that makes such a life possible. Therefore, failure or retirement—which are essentially the same—marks the end of every experience. The true escape for the adventurer is romance, which promises to make everyday life wonderful.

Simmel didn't glorify the monetary economy. Not only did he link it with disenchantment, but he was also aware of its victims: with the extension of the economy, a 'larger proportion of civilised man remains forever enslaved, in every sense of the word, in the interest in technics'. In such passages, we can see Karl Marx's influence on Simmel, and Simmel's on both Lukács and Martin Heidegger. While Simmel avoided the radical politics associated with these two, his character types become more radical. For instance, Simmel speaks of the modern cynic, who is intoxicated by the awareness that money can reduce the highest and the lowest qualities to the same basic form:

The nurseries of cynicism are therefore those places with huge turnovers, exemplified in stock exchange dealings, where money is available in huge quantities and changes owners easily.

Cynics, who are spiritually worn down, have persuaded themselves that only base commerce and consumption are true.

Every cynic is a lover who was dumped. The individual with a blasé attitude, on the other hand, is aware that it is preferable to have loved and lost. The blasé are one step away from letting go of their apathy and becoming the sanguine enthusiast, the cynic's antithesis, the moment that love seems feasible once more.

Simmel argues for absolute relativism in *The Philosophy of Money*. This was in line with widespread neo-Kantian sensibilities, which were scorched by the failure of Hegelian absolute idealism in the middle of the 19th century and now focused on the reliability of specific, constrained facts. One correct statement does, however, presuppose several dependent meanings, assumptions, and

assertions, whereas one swallow might not make it to spring.

It would be necessary to fully understand this endless chain of truth, which is an object that is too large to comprehend or to start at the beginning, with the most basic truths from which all others flow, albeit doing so runs the risk of reductionism. Simmel disapproved of both tactics.

Instead, he concluded that "truth is valid, precisely on account of its relativity, not despite it." Simmel predicted that the individual's search for the truth would ultimately fall short and turn out to be just as viciously cyclical as the flow of money. Relativism, a concept of perpetual change, was therefore the only workable absolute. The expropriator will now be expropriated, as Marx writes of a process that is comparable in form, and nothing left except the relativistic breakdown of objects into relations and processes, according to Simmel, who saw this as liberating. There is a tragic component to this, though, because loving the truth means loving something we feel compelled to pursue even though it is constantly out of reach. Like Herman Hesse's protagonist in *Steppenwolf* (1927), Simmel chased an elusive absolute.

Consider a tree that has been raised over many years from wild stock to produce lots of wonderful fruit. Now contrast it with the mast of a ship that was made from the same tree. The latter has undergone a thorough transformation. It results from instrumental reasoning. The fruit tree, on the other hand, was created by human invention, but its result "ultimately springs from the tree's motive forces and only fulfils the possibilities which are sketched out in its tendencies," according to the author. The fruit tree is grown by a type of reason capable of appreciating nature as precious in and of itself, whereas the mast is formed by destroying a tree for an external purpose.

Simmel's essay, "The Concept and Tragedy of Culture," centres on this metaphor. He holds an Aristotelian perspective on culture, saying that humans are like trees in that they require tending to develop. As our tree matures, our fruit gets smaller, less plentiful, harder to get, and less nutritive. However, as Simmel observes, culture expands, it crystallises and becomes fragmented, specialised, and unsuited to cultivation. Culture runs the risk of dying if it can't feed us spiritually. Only because we develop it and are nourished by it does culture exist.

Simmel abandoned his prior relativism in favour of a philosophy of life in his final book, *The View of Life* (1918). Life gave me a fresh, more complex heuristic. In the metaphysical conflict between subject and object as well as between the past and the present, both money and

culture shine. However, as the financial crisis plunged Europe into a clash of cultures, it became obvious that nihilism lay beneath the relativism of money and culture. Instead, Simmel argued that all transcendent values originate from life itself. Boundaries are created by life—whether it be human, animal, or plant—and are constantly crossed by growth, consumption, reproduction, and death. Boundaries are created between oneself and others, here and there, and this and that. It's true, money and culture both bridge between past and future in their ways – but, by themselves, they can't guarantee a rich existence. Instead, Simmel writes:

"Life is the unique mode of existence for whose actuality this separation [between past and future] does not hold ... Time is real only for life alone."

Instead of the sanguine dogmatist who hides finitude behind a brittle absolute and the cynical absolute relativist, Simmel came to understand that the truth must be finite to be true, and in realizing this, we grasp the infinite as our own. This is a fantastic accomplishment. Both the sanguine enthusiast and the cynic find their purpose outside of their own lives. Simmel's theory of life contends that we possess the truth not despite but rather because of our limitations. We overcome these boundaries as soon as we acknowledge them: "By our highest, self-transcending consciousness at any given moment, we are the absolute above our relativity."

Simmel de-sublimates religious ideas that locate the ultimate significance outside of this world by revealing their foundation in existence. For instance, we are continually experiencing the transmigration of souls, which is a concept found in Buddhist cosmology; each soul mixes change and permanence at every moment of life. Similar to this, Christian zeal for moral perfection is a confession of goodness' existence in this world and an aloof cry of mourning for a fallen world. When viewed in this light, dogmatic systems of valuation might shed their detached form and discover their true meaning in our finite world. By taking part in the polyrhythmic harmony of social life, we can influence whether life is an etude, nocturne, or mazurka, opening a way to tangible spiritual freedom.

Simmel's life was spent vacillating between familiarity and distance. It also helped him focus his thoughts and efforts since he approached it with unwavering intellectual integrity. Since sociology is historically bound by place and time, yet has a large reach, his ideas spill over the rim of the cup. He described his legacy in his book of aphorisms with the same humility he was known for:

"I am aware that I will not leave any spiritual successors behind, which is ideal. My bequest is split among numerous heirs like a sum of money."

However, Simmel made a mistake here. At the very least, interest in his legacy has grown. Simmel's philosophical sociology is more relevant than ever in our day of uncontrolled financialization and surging nationalism. His philosophy of life is urgent given the dangers of catastrophic climate change and pandemics.

In Schopenhauer and Nietzsche (1907), Simmel wrote:

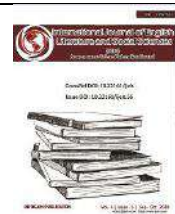
"Being and becoming are the most general, formal, and inclusive formulations of the basic dualism that patterns all human beings: all great philosophy is engaged in founding a new reconciliation between them, or a new way of giving decisive primacy to one over the other."

Simmel himself is partly accountable for this. He eventually found a way of life, that of the philosopher, that could bring his uniqueness and the universe together by exposing his soul to these extremes. By doing this, he made a philosophical contribution to our society that enriches and broadens our understanding as well as improves our quality of life.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Simmel, G. (2017). Culture's Inevitable Loss: 'On the Concept and Tragedy of Culture' (1911). In *Classical Readings on Culture and Civilization* (pp. 115-129). Routledge.
- [2] Simmel, G. (1991). *Schopenhauer and Nietzsche* (Vol. 22). University of Illinois Press.
- [3] Simmel, G. (2012). The metropolis and mental life. In *The urban sociology reader* (pp. 37-45). Routledge
- [4] Simmel, G. (2004). *The philosophy of money*. Psychology Press.
- [5] Simmel, G. (2010). *The view of life: Four metaphysical essays with journal aphorisms*. University of Chicago Press.





# Translation errors: A taxonomic approach and their contribution to translator training

Evanthia Saridaki

Lecturer in Translation Studies, University of Thessaly, Department of Language and Intercultural Studies, Greece

Received: 02 Jun 2023; Received in revised form: 28 Jun 2023; Accepted: 05 Jul 2023; Available online: 13 Jul 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— One of the issues addressed in translation teaching concerns translation errors and their contribution to translator training. Since the terms used to describe the range of translation errors lack commonly agreed distinctions or fixed points of reference, it is quite difficult to adopt a holistic approach to translation errors by simply providing a pure definition. This has a great deal to do with the tendency to consider as error any performance which falls short of the “ideal” (Pym, 1992: 2). Within this context, there has been an attempt in the present paper to approach errors in a taxonomic manner on the basis of how they actually appear in translated texts where elements of different text types are perpetually mixed. We will also briefly refer to a diverse variety of reasons that errors may be ascribed to, ranging from lack of comprehension to misuse of register, factors that may be located to a variety of levels such as language, pragmatics and cultural level. Finally, we will describe a positive approach toward translation errors and their contribution to translator training by offering to students the insights and experiences they need in order to become competent translators.



**Keywords**— translator training, errors in the process of translation, taxonomic approach to translation errors, translation competence development.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In foreign language didactics, errors are usually defined as a deviation from a system of norms and rules related to the structure of the foreign language. Respectively, in a generalized approach, a translation error could be considered as a deviation of a norm in a certain language communication situation. In particular, Wills (1982) describes a translation error as an offence against a norm in a linguistic context situation. According to Baker (1992), errors in translation mostly result from the non-equivalence between the source and target languages indicating the quality of a translation. Moreover, they can reveal what is going on in the translator's thinking process (Séguinot, 1990). In addition, Sigrid Kupsch-Losereit (Nord, 1997: 73) defines errors as an offence against: a. the function of the translation, b. the coherence of the text, c. the text type or text form, d. linguistic conventions, e. Culture and situation-specific conventions and conditions, and f. the language

system. Pym (1992) relates the term translation competence to translation errors by stating that a translation error may be defined “as a manifestation of a defect in any of the factors entering into the above skills” (1992: 280). However, he stresses that the feature of “simple negation” of translation errors does not shed light to this very confused field of translation training that are attributed to various causes such as lack of comprehension or misuse of time and located to various levels such as the language, pragmatics and cultural level. The above definitions of translation errors certainly demonstrate their complexity of nature and the difficulties we might encounter in approaching them in a holistic manner since there are many different aspects involved in the cognitive area of translation errors.

### 1. Classification of errors in translation

#### 1.1. The distinction between language, translation and functional errors

According to the main theoretical approach to errors in translation (Delisle et al., 1999/2008, Nord, 1997/2014), they are distinguished into three types: language, translation and functional errors.

### 1.1.1. Language errors

Language errors are the result of inadequate knowledge of the target text and they concern breaking of morphosyntactic, semantic, lexicological, stylistic or pragmatics rules and norms.

The most important language errors are:

- Inappropriate expression: a semantic error resulting when an inappropriate meaning is given to a word or an expression which deviates from the language prototype.
- Barbarism: a morphological error that is due to the erroneous use of a word inappropriately coined or unintentionally corrupted.
- Solecism: a syntactic error that results from producing a syntactic structure that does not correspond to the grammatical conventions of the target language.
- Repetition: the recurrence of the same word, expression or syntactic structure in a sentence or paragraph. Repetition can also be used as a rhetoric device in which case it is not considered as error but a special way of expression.

### 1.1.2. Translation errors

Translation errors are those that occur in the translated text resulting from a failure to apply translation principles, rules and techniques as well as from misinterpretation of a source text segment. They could be summarized as follows:

- Nonsense: it results by the translator's misinterpretation of the sense of a word or statement in the source text or by a methodological error which leads to an illogical formulation in the target text. This type of error is the most serious error that a trainee translator is likely to make in the translation process.
- Misinterpretation: this error results when the translator attributes to a word or segment of a source text entirely erroneous sense from that intended by the author that is caused by misunderstanding of the text or lack of general cultural knowledge.
- Incorrect meaning: it occurs when a nuance in meaning is attributed to a word or segment in the source text which is not attributed to the corresponding word or segment in the target text without, however, producing misinterpretation. This is not considered to be so serious a translation

error as nonsense is since it does not prevent entirely understanding of the paragraph in which the incorrect meaning is produced. The distinction between incorrect meaning and misinterpretation is difficult to make since incorrect meanings can easily enter the vocabulary of a language through frequent use.

- Omission: it results from the translator's failure to render to the translated text a necessary piece of information of the source text. Omission should not be confused with the technique of implicitation that involves the justified exclusion of a source text element from the translated text.
- Undertranslation: it results from omission in the target text of any additional words and amplification required in order to produce a translation that conforms to the conventions of the target language and the expressive forms that are used by its users.
- Addition: this error results when the translator introduces to the translated text superfluous information or stylistic elements absent in the source text. Addition should not be confused with neither the technique of explicitation which is a justified translation decision aiming to clarify an element of the original text nor the technique of compensation which intends to maintain the style of the original text.
- Overtranslation: it results from unjustified introduction to the translated text of source text elements that should be cut off since they are implied.
- Barbarism: it arises when the translator uses unsuccessfully a loan word or the technique of literal translation which does not sound natural in the target text. Barbarism as a translation error may be a temporary characterization since with time passing by arises a sort of familiarization with terms and words that initially come as loans.
- Word for word translation: this is literal translation that results from transferring the elements of the source text without changing the word order. It can cause distortion of sense and intelligibility of the source text. Word for word translation is not always very productive, especially, when dealing with figurative meaning.
- Inappropriate paraphrase: this error results from inappropriate length of a target text segment in translating a source text segment.
- False friend: it results from the use of a word of the source text whose form resembles to a word in the

target text but whose meaning or one of its senses are different.

### 1.1.3. Functional errors

According to functional theories (Reiss 1971/2000, Vermeer 1987, Nord 1997/2014), the concept of functional error must be defined according to the purpose of the translation process and it is basically related to the function of the translated text. In other words, a translation is not judged to be inadequate by itself but in relation to the expected communicative function. Nord (1997) defines translation error as breaching of:

- The function of the text
- The consistency of the text
- The text -type or the form of the text
- The language conventions
- The specific conventions and conditions that are related to different civilizations and circumstances

Within this framework, Nord (1997/2014) considers that the translation error is defined as a failure to carry out the instructions implied in the translation brief, that is, failure to achieve the communicative purpose of the translation. She classifies them to four categories (Nord, 1997: 75):

- Pragmatic translation errors, caused by inadequate solutions to pragmatic translation problems such as a lack of receiver orientations.
- Cultural translation errors: they result from an inadequate decision with regard to reproduction or adaptation of culture-specific conventions.
- Text-specific translation errors, that are related to a text-specific translation problem. In such cases the translator has to act creatively since the solutions provided in specific translation problems cannot be generalized and applied to similar cases.

Nord also uses a hierarchical scale in order to evaluate the degree of significance of translation errors for the translation result. According to her hierarchical scale, the consequences of pragmatic translation errors are serious, since the recipients tend not to realize that the piece of information they receive is wrong. In this respect, pragmatic errors are classified among the most serious ones that a translator can make in the translation process. The significance of cultural and language translation errors depends on whether or not they influence the function of the target-text. If the purpose of a translation work is to check language skills in the context of language teaching, then language errors are definitely more serious than cultural

errors. On the contrary, if the purpose of a translation work is to check cultural skills, then cultural translation errors will be considered more serious, even in comparison to pragmatic errors. Furthermore, the seriousness of cultural errors depends on the extent to which cultural conventions of the source text are adjusted to the stereotypes of the target-culture.

### 1.2. Pym's approach

Pym (1992) suggests that the identification and analysis of translation errors requires a strong conceptual framework and, most importantly, requires "the issues to be addressed to be very specific and sufficiently problematic to warrant considerable intellectual work". His approach is based on his own concept of translation competence that avoids reference to linguistics and can be defined as the union of two skills: "a. the ability to generate a target-text series of more than one viable term for the source text and b. the ability to select only one target text from this series, quickly and with justified confidence, and to propose this target text as a replacement of the source text for a specified purpose and readers.

Based on his definition of translation competence, translation errors are defined as a manifestation of a defect in any of the factors entering into the above skills. However, Pym stresses that such a definition makes things more complex basically because errors may be attributed to numerous causes and located on various levels such as the language, pragmatics and the cultural level. In addition, he observes that although it is quite easy to classify odd translation errors by finding relevant examples, it is quite difficult to classify them as they actually appear in translated texts where elements of different translation types are mixed making it hard to distinguish one from another.

According to his approach, translation errors should all have the same form: they should all involve selection from a potential target-text series of more than one viable term, calling this "non-binarism" of translation errors. On the other hand, there is the "binarism" of translation errors that opposes a wrong answer to the right answer. Non-binarism requires that the target text actually selected be opposed to at least one further target-text which could also have been selected, and then to possible wrong answers. For binarism, there is only one right and wrong; for non-binarism there are at least two right answers and then the wrong ones.

Another basic difference between binary and non-binary errors is that the first should be subject to very quick punctual correction whereas the time used for non-binary errors correction should extend for as long as important differences remain, terminating quickly at the point of diminishing returns. Since the binary level can be treated more quickly than non-binary errors, any impediment to

teaching can come not from the total number of errors but from the total time required to correct them. He adds that the proportion of non-binary errors does not increase smoothly, but at some point, undergoes a rapid increase revealing that translation is not simply a matter of literalist fidelity. Finally, the problem with non-binary errors is that there is not a readily available authority for their immediate correction. Quine (Pym, 1992: 286) suggests that even if translators could systematically be brought into the classroom, equally authoritative translators will give equally correct but different translations. Pym adds that correction on the non-binary level cannot be authoritative but should be based on the principles of discussion and negotiations, that could finally lead, if not to full agreement but at least to "agreements to disagree". To conclude, in developing a scheme for the analysis of errors, Pym builds on the assumption implied of his definition of translation competence: a translation error must be non-binary which implies that a wrong answer is not opposed to a right answer but that the choice be made may be seen also alongside at least one further choice that could also have been taken up but was not, and alongside an endless number of possible wrong answers.

### 1.3. Errors in the process of the analysis of the source text

One of the major steps in the translating process is the fact that the translator has to read the original analytically and interpret it in the target language. A translator is prone to errors at this stage due to his weak reading and analytical ability. According to Suksaeresup and Tipa Thep-Ackrapong (2009), errors found at this stage can be divided into the following categories:

1. Miscue: this is a term coined by Goodman (1969) referring to an incorrect guess made by a reader when reading a text. Usually, such errors are done by beginners but as they further practice translation such errors are usually avoided. In translation, translation students with poor reading skills tend to transfer the miscues into their translated text.
2. The translator's wrong assumption of some background encyclopedic knowledge affect negatively the translated result. Hatim & Mason (1990: 106-107) suggest that a translator must be always inquisitive and critical by searching for general encyclopedic knowledge in order to be able to interpret correctly the source text without making embarrassing for the target readers errors.
3. Errors in propositional meaning: The propositional meaning refers to the relationship between a word and what it refers to or describes as conceived by the speakers as true or false (Baker, 1992). An example of such an error is the wrong alternate meaning of a word. Consequently, the

translators will have to practice in reading a text carefully and learning at the same time how to use a dictionary effectively.

2. Errors in translating expressive meaning: another aspect of lexical meaning is expressive meaning. Baker (1992) defines expressive meaning as a word that cannot be evaluated as true or false because the word in question has to do with the speaker's feelings and experiences. Therefore, expressive meaning can become the source of producing errors in the translation process. Errors in this respect are further classified into wrong translation of idiomatic expressions and of terms of address:

- Translating idiomatic expressions after their propositional meaning. To address the problem of misinterpreting idiomatic expressions, again, the translators are recommended to read and write in English extensively. Fiction such as novels, plays, TV series and movies usually has a lot of idioms. These genres certainly will familiarize the translators with a great variety of idiomatic expressions. Therefore, a competent translator has to constantly keep up with new idioms.
- Translating terms of address after their propositional meanings. In certain cases, terms of address are wrongly translated.

## II. CAUSES OF ERRORS IN THE PROCESS OF TRANSLATION

As previously mentioned translation error may be defined as any discrepancy, wanted or unwanted, of pragmatic, cultural, linguistic or textual nature, between the target and source texts. made during the translation process. Within this context, the causes of translation errors are diverse among which the human factor is one of the most neglected and less recognized since any intellectual activity such as translation leads to physical exhaustion which materializes in low level of concentration and distraction. More specifically, factors such as self-concentration, speed of work, efficiency, analytical thinking and high resistance to stress as well as deadlines imposed on the assigned work or pressure on behalf of client certainly restrict the translator's capabilities.

Lack of general encyclopedic knowledge can be another serious source of translation errors since the translator is definitely not an expert specialized and proficient in all narrow domains. It is suggested that the translator develop his research skills in order to extract general background information on various different subject areas and also



consult his colleagues and other experts on relevant subject areas he is not familiar with.

Moreover, defective analysis and understanding of the source text may cause translation errors, probably the most dangerous ones, since it provokes diversion of meaning, misinterpretation and incorrect message.

In addition, omission or insufficiency of the revision stage in the translation process may as well cause serious translation mistakes that could be avoided if the translator conducted a detailed revision and proofreading in the assigned work in various levels such as the lexical, grammatical, cultural and syntactical level.

Finally, the use of machine translation without revising the finite product of translation can be a source of errors and finally lead to mistranslation. It is generally noticed that there is too much reliability on behalf of students on machine translation without being aware of the restrictions it poses to the act of translating.

### III. A POSITIVE APPROACH TOWARD TRANSLATION ERRORS IN ASSESSING STUDENT PERFORMANCE

Translation errors could be used in a constructive and positive manner in the learning process that would help students develop the various subcompetences deemed to be necessary for the translator's profession. A positive approach toward translation mistakes has been proposed by Hewson (1997) who relates linguistic errors to translation problems. Within this context, Hewson suggests that any student assessment process in translation should not just penalize linguistic errors but should give students credit for identifying and solving translation problems. He further proposes a double marking scale; negative for errors and failure to identify translation errors and positive for identifying and solving translation problems. This is also recommended by Nord (1997) whose proposed system of assessment requires the identification of translation problems prior to students being involved in the act of translating.

Similarly, Séguinot (1990) criticizes the prescriptive approach to translation errors that considers them as a simple violation of translation norms and rules by proposing instead a non-prescriptive approach identifying errors as "carriers of meaning" helping to investigate in depth the process of translating and even predict in her words: "better predictions about what kind of errors are likely to occur in translation, where they are likely to occur, and under what conditions" (Séguinot 1990: 74). She also points out that the errors conducted by translation students make up an indication that essential learning is taking place that helps

students to improve the various aspects of translation competence: "attending to specific aspects of translation may be a way of learning to improve, and the errors that result from this focusing of attention are not necessarily a reflection of overall competence" (Séguinot, 1990: 79). Finally, she characterizes translation errors as "windows into the translating process" observing that the assessment of translation errors is a less interesting activity than the interpretation of the source of errors.

### IV. PROPOSALS

A translator training model is proposed that emphasizes the analysis of both intratextual and intertextual parameters involved in the translation process. In order to motivate trainees and prevent them from potential failures, it is important that they receive a holistic theoretical and methodological training on certain notions of translation such as function and purpose of the text to be translated, text-type that the source text belongs to, the communicative circumstances of the assigned text, the determination of the target readership it is addressed to and, finally, the cultural aspect of translation.

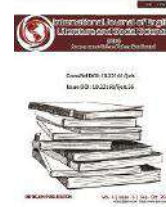
In the process of translator training where trainees do not possess excellent command both of the source and the target language, the functional definition of translation errors can have many advantages. Language is always used in a particular communicative circumstance. According to Nord (1997), trainees tend to make less language errors when they are aware of the function and the communicative situation for which they translate; on the contrary, if they cannot assume to whom they address to and for which purpose, they tend to attach to the superficial structure of the source-text. Trainees need to be aware that determining the purpose for which the original text was written is of primary importance in the process of translation and that translation errors arise when they fail to achieve the purpose for which the text was written and the function it aims to serve. A functionally adequate translation can be achieved by the person who takes into account the communicative circumstance the translation is placed as well as the existing communicative conventions in the target-culture.

In addition, the role of an in-depth analysis of the source-text should not be degraded in avoiding translation errors since it functions as a point of reference for providing the necessary information from the source text. Indeed, the analysis of the source-text directs the translation process as a basis for decision-taking related to the following matters: which units of the text are related to its function and which translation methodology could lead to a target-text that would correspond to the purpose of the original text.

Within this framework, it is recommended an approach that would combine both the prescriptive and non-prescriptive notion of translation errors where errors (Pym, 1992: 2) by themselves are not the only criterion to translation quality but one of the main factors in judging translation quality together with other important criteria such as the extent to which the purpose and function of the source text has been achieved successfully in the target text. Translation errors could also function as a source of potential information regarding student progress as well as the process of translation learning. As Pym suggests (1992: 287) difficult texts could cause serious errors that could finally lead to “moments of revelation or a sudden awareness that translation is not simply a matter of literalist fidelity” offering to translation students useful experiences on their way to developing their translation competence.

### REFERENCES

- [1] Baker, Mona. 1992. *In other words: A Coursebook on Translation*. London and New York: Routledge.
- [2] Delisle & al. 1999/2008. *Translation Terminology*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia. John Benjamins.
- [3] Goodman, Kenneth. 1969. Analysis of Oral Reading Miscues: Applied Psycholinguistics. In *International Literacy Association* 5 (1), pp. 9-30.
- [4] Hewson, Lance. 1995. Detecting Cultural Shifts: Some Notes on Translation Assessment. In I. Mason & C. Pagnouille (eds). *Cross-words, Issues and Debates in Literary and Non-literary Translating*. Liège Language and Literature, pp. 101-108.
- [5] Nord, Christiane. 1997. *Text Analysis in Translation*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- [6] Pym, Anthony. 1992. Translation Error Analysis and the Interface with Language Teaching, In C. Dollerup & A. LODDEGAARD, eds. *Teaching Translation and Interpreting. Training, Talent and Experience. Papers from the First Language International Conference, Elsinore, Denmark, 31 May 2 June, 1991*. Amsterdam: Benjamins, PP. 279-288.
- [7] Sêguinot, Candace. 1990. Understanding Why Translators Make Mistakes. In *TTR (Traduction, Terminologie, Rédaction)* 2 (2), pp.73-102.
- [8] Wills, Wolfram. 1982. *The Science of Translation: Problems and Methods*. Tübingen: Gunter



# Traditional and Contemporary English Literature Teaching Methods in a Lebanese EFL academic context: A quasi-experimental study

Liza DerKhachadourian

Associate Professor, Chairperson of the English Department at AUT, Department of English Language and Literature, American University of Technology, Lebanon

Received: 28 May 2023; Received in revised form: 22 Jun 2023; Accepted: 01 Jul 2023; Available online: 14 Jul 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— Many university instructors face challenges in literature classes. Students get bored of long hours of teacher-centred lectures, so they sign-in to the on-line class but neither participate actively nor interact. They rarely read the assigned literary texts; instead, they resort to open access study guides and summaries available online. The aim of this study is to examine the impact of integrating Traditional and Contemporary Methods of teaching English literature on the students' critical thinking skills, academic literary analysis, EFL communicative skills, digital literacy and their attitude to value English Literature. A quasi-experimental research is conducted on two sophomore literature classes ( $n=30$ ) at a Lebanese university. The adopted theoretical framework is based on: the constructivist cognitive apprenticeship, critical thinking skills, literature teaching methods, and digital literacy skills. Data collection instruments employed in this study are: (a) the students' formative assessment scores pre, mid and post intervention, (b) the perception of the students (post intervention) and (c) the participation level of the students. Research findings reveal that the students' formative assessment mean scores shifted from  $M = 61.8$  and  $SD = 9.3$  to  $M=72.4$  and  $SD = 6.89$  post intervention; their (post intervention) perceptions were positive, and their participation level markedly improved. Recommendations and implications for further research are discussed.

**Keywords**— The constructivist cognitive apprenticeship, critical thinking skills, teaching literature models, digital literacy



## I. INTRODUCTION

Many studies have been conducted in the field of instructing literature to examine the impact of conventional approaches on EFL enhancement through literature classes. However, few have tackled integrating traditional literature instruction strategies with contemporary ones. This study integrated cognitive apprenticeship, critical thinking skills, traditional teacher-centered and contemporary student-centered literature teaching methods, and finally digital literacy. Various learning management platforms were employed: Zoom for Meetings, Moodle to post learning material, assignments, and quizzes, and instructor-student WhatsApp groups (See the screenshot of the 3 platforms in Appendix

A). Formative assessments were held on-line (See the screenshot of student samples in Appendix B & C). However, the summative assessment was held physically on campus to measure students' development at the end of the course. For the sake of validity, a student sample is attached at the end of this study (See Appendix D).

The aim of this study is to examine the impact of this integration strategy on the improvement of students' higher order thinking, academic literary analysis, EFL communicative skills, digital literacy and their attitude to value English Literature. A quasi-experimental research was designed because of its high internal validity as well as

the impracticality of randomness. So all the participants received the same treatment.

The aforementioned strategies were integrated in three phases.

In Phase 1, the researcher shared some important tools that help students recognize, identify, interpret and analyze literary texts before tackling the assigned novel itself. The teacher-centered on-line sessions focused on content-based and language-based approach.

In Phase 2, the researcher coached and scaffolded the students' on-line discussions related to the analysis of the themes, the common literary devices and the language of the assigned texts. Throughout these sessions, the researcher triggered the students' higher-order thinking; she raised intriguing questions to help them become independent thinkers, and filled in their gaps, misinterpretations and omissions.

In Phase 3, when the students had already acquired the needed tools (the background and the language-based knowledge), the researcher adopted the student-centered approach. She made them reflect on their performance and articulate their knowledge. She divided the students into groups to work collaboratively in pairs and assigned each group a chapter to read, and take the instructor's role in analyzing the literary texts in the on-line classes.

The students were given a formative assessment at the beginning, at the end of phase 2, and a third at the end of phase 3 (See student samples in the Appendices). It was revealed that their mean scores shifted from  $M = 61.8$  and  $SD = 9.3$  to  $M = 72.4$  and  $SD = 6.89$  post intervention which is significant. The post intervention perception of the students was positive; and their participation level markedly improved.

In a nutshell, the significance of this study lies in integrating cognitive, traditional and contemporary strategies to enhance the development of the students' higher order thinking, academic literary analysis skills, EFL communicative skills, digital literacy, and improve their attitude to value English Literature.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study tested the effect of integrating the following multidimensional strategies: cognitive apprenticeship model, critical thinking skills, literature teaching models (content-based approach, language-based approach, reader-response approach), digital literacy, which are thoroughly discussed next.

*The Cognitive apprenticeship model*

Many scholars have expanded upon Vygotsky's social learning theory, which emphasized the significance of social interaction and cooperative learning to help construct cognitive and emotional knowledge (Brown, 2007). Specifically, the cognitive apprenticeship model that includes: modeling, coaching, scaffolding, reflection, and articulation to develop the cognitive skills for complex professional practice (Dennen, 2004, p. 814). *Modeling* is a form of demonstration of the temporal process of thinking, followed by imitation to help the learner progress through the zone of proximal development (ZPD). To Dennen (2004), modeling is the most efficient way "to generate desired student performance across classes, specially, in an on-line forum" (pp. 816-817). Moreover, Hernández (2003) considered it important to demonstrate how writers employ literary devices such as: "figures of speech, similes, idiomatic expressions, and metaphors" (p.127). So, the teacher assumes the role of a mentor who facilitates expert knowledge for beginners, and makes the implicit knowledge become more explicit (Dennen, 2004). *Coaching* is another approach where the teacher monitors classroom activities and assists and supports learners where necessary. Next comes *Scaffolding* to support students so that they can cope with the task situation. This strategy also entails the gradual withdrawal of the teachers from the process when the students are ready to independently work. Last but not least is the *Reflection* takes place when the learners assess and analyze their self-performance. Finally, it is the *Articulation* approach which integrates the results of *reflection* into verbal form (Dennen, 2004).

### *Critical thinking skills*

Leading students to critical thinking that falls into the higher-order thinking category tops the list of skills students need for success. Critical thinking involves analysis, inference, synthesis, and evaluation (Bloom, 1956). Some examples of problem-solving activities are: intriguing questions, multiple interpretations or answers, supporting ideas by evidence from the text. Evidently, in collaborative discussions, participants share the evidence that can support their ideas. Discussing an interpretive question as a group brings thoughtful and considered answers about more than having students work upon individually. Follow-up questions that clarify, elaborate, and explain difficult concepts trigger students' higher-order thinking (Crowley, 2015). Another example on the effectiveness of questioning is using inventory questions implicitly and explicitly into discussions and student writing prompts as a framework for pre- and post-reading activities, and as prompts for reading responses, formal writing, and journaling (Harris, 2019). Training students to analyze, infer, synthesize and evaluate literary texts can also help them activate their logical reasoning, evaluative comprehension, draw inferences, as



well as help them develop their ability to express their opinion supported with examples, argue their case, initiate and sum up ideas (<http://orelt.col.org/>). This study engaged the participants in higher-order thinking activities that involve intriguing questions, logical reasoning, multiple interpretations, supporting ideas, synthesizing evidence from the text drawing inferences, explaining cause-and-effect relationships, comparing facts and evaluating the information in the texts.

#### *Theories on literature teaching models*

Reading literary texts can develop students' language skills, imagination, cultural awareness, and encourage critical thinking about plots, themes, and characters (Van, 2009). But which approach is the most favorable to Literature Teaching? Is it the traditional teacher-centered or the contemporary student-centered? Below are the most frequently discussed Literature Teaching models.

*Content-Based Approach* is the most traditional approach to teaching literature where learners explore and interpret historical context, literary theories, theory of genres of a specific text, and the biography of the authors. According to this approach, reading literary texts is just to obtain information (Carter & Long, 1991). Hall (2005) considered this approach a lecture-based or a teacher-centered where students depend on their teachers and on established sources to interpret texts; consequently, it leads to the participation of few students' in the class activities (p.50). However, it's important that students be conscious of how texts relate to issues of identity, culture, political power, gender, ethnicity, class, and religion. It facilitates students' critical awareness about the role of language in producing, maintaining, and changing social relations and power, and it is considered a means for developing the perception about the relationship between language and society (Fairclough, 1995).

*Language-Based Approach* comprises of stylistic approach and language approach, *The Stylistic approach* is the study of literary discourse from a linguistics perspective, where attention is paid to semantics, syntax, and figurative language, specially, what is said and how is said to facilitate the interpretation of the text and highlight the aesthetic value of literature (Carter and Long, 1997). Similarly, Stockwell (2006) considers stylistic knowledge important because it is "the central discipline of literary study, against which all other current approaches are partial or interdisciplinary" (p.742), which is so true. Whereas, *the Language approach* involves language instruction activities, such as: summarizing plots, predictions, rewriting the ends of fictions, vocabulary and comprehension, and discussions. Meanwhile, teachers clarify technical terms, offer appropriate classroom procedures, intervene to

provide stimuli and prompts, support and guide them in the learning process (Carter, Long, 1991).

*Reader-Response approach* is an act of reading a literary text in foreign language that "aims at something beyond what it actually says" according to Iser (1974) and then drawing on one's background knowledge, personal feelings, and opinions, to interpret it (p. 278). However, instructors should guide students linguistically (Van, 2009) because there are numerous gaps, omissions, and indeterminacies in those texts that students need to be aware of and interpret (Parkinson & Thomas, 2000, p. 7). Educators of new methods prefer: active reading, emotional and intellectual participation in the text, over the traditional mode of reading aloud, learning by heart, and translating. Construction of meaning and elicitation of responses are major aspects of literature discussions. Advocates of reader-response approach encourage active reading for **content** comprehension, and being involved in amusing and prediction activities (Mart, 2019) to increase the **intrinsic motivation of the students**.

At the end, the interplay of the three approaches, the Content-Based, the Language-Based (teacher-centered), and the Reader-Response (student-centered) and the live student discussions and presentations were employed in this study. So, the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach that integrates Reading, Writing and Speaking activities are automatically enhanced (University of Louisiana, 2021).

#### *Digital Literacy*

Digital-literacy is "the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills."

(Loewus, 2016). The learning process can be more interactive and effective when students are engaged with and use digital tools. They can even refine their literary literacies when they search for unfamiliar expressions and certain patterns in texts using relevant search engines

(online.uwa.edu). Digital-literacy related to Zoom, Moodle, and WhatsApp is helpful to both students and instructors. Moreover, video conferencing on Zoom platform is designed to be highly collaborative and interactive environment; it gives the attendees the ability to use audio and video, share their screen, and write in the text box. Students can engage directly with the content being shared and with each other. Those living in remote or rural areas find Zoom conferences a blessing. In addition, Moodle supports a range of media to present or link to learning materials. Furthermore, benefits of WhatsApp in education are establishing instant student-teacher communication as well as sending/getting reminders and push notifications.

Add to this that knowing how to surf the Internet can enrich students with an unlimited source of knowledge, and empower them to learn new things. As such, students develop their fundamental skills of reading, interpreting, and criticizing literary texts.

Moreover, on-line live discussions, electronic communication can provide a more relaxed atmosphere where social conventions are less important, and this encourages positive interaction among students (Manzollilo, 2016). Specially, in this study the researcher made use of 3 Learning Management platforms: Meetings on Zoom, Moodle to post learning material and assignments, and WhatsApp groups for instant messages.

In a nutshell, the researcher employed the cognitive apprenticeship model that includes: modeling, coaching, scaffolding, reflection, and articulation to develop the cognitive skills of the participants in the study. She engaged the participants in **higher-order thinking** activities that involve intriguing questions, logical reasoning, multiple interpretations, supporting ideas, synthesizing evidence from the text drawing inferences, explaining cause-and-effect relationships, comparing facts and evaluating the information in the texts.

This study adopted the *Literature teaching models*, the Content-Based, the Language-Based (teacher-centered), and the Reader-Response (student-centered) employing the CLT approach.

11  
SEP

### III. METHODOLOGY

A quasi-experimental research was conducted on 2 sophomore literature classes (n=30) at a Lebanese university. because the 2 classes should've received the same treatment and shared the same independent variables, randomness was impractical. The theoretical framework was based on: the constructivist cognitive apprenticeship, critical thinking skills, Literature

teaching models, the Content-Based, the Language-Based (teacher-centered), and the Reader-Response (student-centered) employing the CLT approach, and digital literacy. The independent variables were the following: change in student approach/participation, change in student scores post intervention, and change in student perception.

#### 1.The participants

The participants were the students of 2 sophomore English literature classes (n=30) at a Lebanese university. The course "The Age of Modernism" and "The 20<sup>th</sup> C. American Novel" were administered over 12 weeks, bi-weekly, each session lasted for 75 minutes. For ethical purposes the names of the participants were unrevealed.

#### 2.Research instruments

The instruments used to collect data for the study are described next.

For Quantitative analysis: The students' pre and post intervention formative/summative assessment scores were collected and analyzed employing Microsoft Excel. The students' evaluation scores posted on the university site. The aim of selecting these data was to compare how the students developed at the post-intervention stage

For Qualitative analysis: Instructor's evaluation of student participation, motivation, on-line live discussions, literary analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

#### 3.Research Procedures

The Quasi-experimental research – cause-and-effect relationship, generally high in internal validity, tested the effect of the following 4 independent variables on the dependent variable, the final assessment scores and students' attitude:

The constructivist cognitive apprenticeship (modeling, coaching, scaffolding, reflection, articulation, and exploration), critical thinking skills, traditional and contemporary literature teaching methods (Content-based, Language-based and Reader-Response approach), and digital literacy were adopted in methods of instructing Literature.

#### Phase 1: modeling

The researcher shared some important tools that help students recognize, identify, interpret and analyze literary texts before tackling the assigned novel itself. The teacher-centered on-line session was based on *content-based* and *language-based* approach.

First, she discussed the historical context of the Age of Modernism employing "the shared screen" feature on Zoom, and highlighted some prominent themes (e.g. war, death, despair, rejection of social/religious norms) and their link to the themes in *Farewell to Arms*. Then, she lectured on the biography of the author, Ernest Hemingway, to make students better understand how the novel is entwined with the life experience of the author.

Then, adopting the language-based approach, she lectured on a whole range of features as a decoding strategy. First, she shared the stylistic elements, such as:

Literary devices (e.g., allusion, allegory, foreshadowing, imagery, irony, juxtaposition, metaphor/simile, personification, symbolism)

Literary elements (e.g., character, setting, plot, theme, frame, exposition, motif, titling, narrative point of view).

Style: way an author uses language to convey his or her ideas and purpose in writing. author's diction (the selection

of words), syntax (sentence structure: simple or complex), phonological patterns, tone, characters, and other narrative techniques, as the genre or mode of writing the author adopts, such as the organizational features (chapters, acts, scenes, stanzas).

Second, she shared some language improving skills, such as: paraphrasing, **summarizing and** using reporting verbs (in phase 2, students were supposed to summarize the important parts of the plot and analyze the text).

Sharing all these tools at the modeling stage is important; it can establish sources that enable students to interpret the meaning of a text that goes beyond what's on the page and avoid dependency on secondary unreliable sources.

### Phase 2: Coaching, scaffolding

At this stage, the students were supposed to read the assigned chapters, and discuss: the themes (global coherence) in relation to the Age, the common literary devices of the text as symbolism (e.g. the use of colors – grey associated with loss or depression), repetitive motifs (e.g. snow: frozen feelings, falling leaves: inevitability of human death, dust: foreshadowing death) and the language, in the direct supervision of the instructor, who can fill in their gaps, misinterpretations and omissions.

Throughout the lecture, the researcher triggered the students' higher-order thinking. She raised intriguing questions, just to check their overall knowledge of the basic plot, as well as their ability to identify the literary devices and interpret the purpose of using them. Some of the questions were:

“Why did the author choose certain words, expressions, images, syntax, or punctuation?”

“How does the theme relate to the age?”

“Are there any similarities or differences between these 2 characters?”

“How would you behave in a similar situation?”

To her surprise, the students were not actively interacting at the beginning. They didn't read the assigned chapters, being inexperienced, they encountered new incomprehensible terminology that frustrated them. Instead, they read some open access online summaries available on the web, which were insufficient to support the needed evidence from the text.

Throughout the on-line class, she modelled how to surf the web using reliable sources to scaffold their problem-solving strategies. For example, she performed live searching for the denotation of particular expressions, images, motifs, used by the author that fits best in the context.

For example, in Hemingway's, A Farewell to Arms, Ch. 28, when Lieutenant Henry was falling asleep in the cab of the

ambulance, he recited to himself a jumbled version of a poem:

Blow, blow, ye western wind Well, it  
blew and it wasn't the small **rain** but the  
big **rain** down that **rained**. It **rained** all  
night. You knew it **rained** down that  
**rained**. Look at it. Christ, that my love  
were in my arms and I in my bed again.  
That my love Catherine. That my sweet  
love Catherine down might **rain**. Blow  
her again to me (Hemingway, A  
Farewell... p.263).

She modelled using the “inverted comma” feature to search the web for a similar version of the above poem, which turned out to be an adapted version of an existing poem (see below) of an unknown writer from the sixteenth century, as well as how to search repetitive expressions in the text and infer their relevance.

The original lines from this poem are as follows:

O Western wind, when wilt thou blow,  
That the small rain down can rain?  
Christ, that my love were in my arms  
And I in my bed again! (Unidentified

Author, 16th C.).

Furthermore, she modeled searching for the pattern of the word *rain* using the “find” feature on Microsoft Word to analyze the significance of the repetitive rain imagery foreshadowing death. Other literary device in this jumbled poem included stream-of-consciousness. The language is described as short sentences, lack of clarity, emphasis on nouns and verbs.

A formative assessment followed teacher-centered modeling sessions after 4 weeks. The **assessments** were performed via Zoom, but for the sake of validity, their cameras were turned on.

### Phase 3: Reflection, Articulation

At this stage, the students had already acquired the needed tools (the background and the stylistic knowledge) for the ease of text interpretation. So, the researcher adopted the student-centered *Reader-Response approach*. She divided students into groups to work collaboratively in pairs and assigned each group a chapter to read, summarize the plot, identify and interpret literary devices and elements, analyze the linguistic features, infer the theme, and finally articulate and present their work on the on-line/Zoom class platform. Zoom classes were being recorded on the iCloud, and students had access to the link to re-watch the session. This makes them Reflect on, assess and analyze their self-performance while presenting their assignment.

## Digital Literacy

Particularly, in this study the researcher made use of 3 Learning Management platforms: Meetings on Zoom, Moodle to post learning material and assignments, and WhatsApp groups for the different classes to help students find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, using technical and cognitive skills. Lectures, discussions, presentations were all performed on Zoom, which were being recorded on the iCloud, and students had access to the link to re-watch the session and take notes “note-taking of ideas discussed in class promoted students’ independent use of the language”. She modeled how to search using the “find” feature in Microsoft Word, how to search the web taking into consideration reliable and unreliable sources.

### 4. The findings, Interpretation and Discussion

#### Quantitative Results

##### Pre/post intervention scores

The pre/post-intervention class performance scores were analyzed employing Microsoft Excel and displayed in charts. The aim of selecting these instruments was to compare how the students developed in linguistic literary analysis at the post-intervention stage.

-The mean score of pre-intervention formative assessment of the students was  $62/100 = P$ ; whereas, the mean score of post-intervention was  $72/100 = G$ . the intervention was effective.

-The students were asked to evaluate the course/instructor on Google form, and the scores were posted on the university site.

Research findings revealed that the students’ formative assessment mean scores shifted from  $M = 61.8$  and  $SD = 9.3$  to  $M = 72.4$  and  $SD = 6.89$  post intervention; their (post intervention) perceptions were positive; and their participation level markedly improved.

#### Qualitative Results

-Instructor’s evaluation of student participation, motivation, on-line live discussions and literary “analysis, synthesis, and evaluation” reflected noticeable improvement. Their reading, writing and speaking skills were enhanced. ‘collaborative discussion’ motivated the students to give their own opinions. Students’ intimidation and fear of public speaking was diminished. They were highly motivated and wanted to be the next presenters in class.

As a result of engaging the students in higher-order thinking activities (e.g. intriguing questions, logical reasoning, multiple interpretations, supporting ideas, synthesizing evidence from the text drawing inferences, explaining cause-and-effect relationships, comparing facts and evaluating the information in the texts), the researcher observed a remarkable improvement.

## V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the results validate the hypothesis that integration of the traditional and contemporary methods of teaching English literature that include the constructivist cognitive apprenticeship, critical thinking skills, Literature teaching models: the Content-Based, the Language-Based (teacher-centered), and the Reader-Response (student-centered) employing the CLT approach, and digital literacy, developed the Lebanese university learners’: higher order thinking skills, academic literary analysis, EFL communicative skills, digital literacy and their attitude to value English Literature.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Bloom, B. (1956). Taxonomy of educational objectives: The classification of educational goals, by a committee of college and university examiners. (1<sup>st</sup> ed.) (Vol.1). New York: Longmans, Green.
- [2] Brown, H.D. (2007). *Principles Of Language Learning And Teaching* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). San Francisco State University: Pearson Longman (ISBN: 0-13-199128-0)
- [3] Carter, R & Long, M. (1991). *Teaching Literature*. Essex: Longman
- [4] Carter, R & Long, M. (1997): *Teaching Literature*. Addison Wesley Longman Limited
- [5] Crowley, Sh. (2015). Critical Thinking with Literature: It’s Problem-Solving. Retrieved Jan. 3, 2021, from: <https://www.greatbooks.org/critical-thinking-with-literature-its-problem-solving/>
- [6] Dennen. V. P. (2004). Cognitive apprenticeship in educational practice: Research on scaffolding, modeling, mentoring, and coaching as instructional strategies. In Jonassen, D. (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Educational Communications and Technology* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 813-828). Mahwah, NJ, US: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers. xiv, 1210 pp.
- [7] Fairclough, N. (1995). *Media Discourse*, London: Arnold.
- [8] Hall, G. (2005) *Literature in Language Education*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan
- [9] Harris, K. (2019). How to Lead Students to Engage in Higher Order Thinking. Retrieved Jan. 3, 2021, from: <https://www.edutopia.org/article/how-lead-students-engage-higher-order-thinking>
- [10] Hemingway, E. (1957). *A farewell to arms*. New York: Scribner. Hernández, A. (2003). Making content instruction accessible for English language learners. In Garcia, G. (Ed.), *English Learners: Reaching the Highest Level of English Literacy* (pp. 125-149). Newark, Del.: Int’l Reading Association. Retrieved March 3, 2014, from: [www.learner.org/workshops/teachreading35/.../content\\_instruct\\_for\\_ell](http://www.learner.org/workshops/teachreading35/.../content_instruct_for_ell)
- [11] Iser, W. (1974). *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose from Bunyan to Beckett*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press.



- [12] Loewus, L. (2016). Digital Literacy: An Evolving Definition. Retrieved Jan. 3, 2022, from: <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/what-is-digital-literacy/2016/11>
- [13] Manzollilo, M. (2016) Teaching Literature through Online Discussion in Theory and Practice. *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 18.2 <<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.3139>>
- [14] Mart, C.T. (2019). Reflections on discussions of literature: A language learning environment to promote speaking skills. *The Journal of Social Sciences Research*, 5(4), 846–850. Doi: 10.32861/jssr.54.846.850
- [15] Parkinson, B., & Thomas, H. R. (2000). *Teaching Literature in a Second Language*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- [16] Probst, R.E. (1994). Reader-response theory and the English curriculum. *English Journal*, 83, 37-44. Retrieved Jan. 3, 2021, from: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2444&context=grp>
- [17] Simpson, P. (2005). *STYLISTICS*. Routledge. ISBN 0-415-28105-9 (pbk)
- [18] Stockwell, P. (2006). *Language and Literature: Stylistics* 745
- [19] Thunnithet, P. (2011). Approaches to criticality development in English literature education: a second language case study in a Thai university (Doctoral dissertation) University of Southampton.
- [20] University of Louisiana. (2021). The Communicative Language Approach in ESL Education. Retrieved Jan. 3, 2021, from: <https://online.ulm.edu/articles/education/communicative-language-approach-in-esl.aspx>
- [21] Van, T. T. M. (2009). The relevance of literary analysis to teaching literature in the EFL classroom. *English Teaching Forum*, 47(3), 2-9. Retrieved Jan. 30, 2021, from: <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ923454>
- [22] Facilitating Critical Thinking through Literature. Retrieved Jan. 3, 2021, from: <http://orelt.col.org/module/unit/5-facilitating-critical-thinking-through-literature>
- [23] Unidentified Author. (16th C.). Retrieved Jan. 30, 2021, from: [https://www.lieder.net/lieder/get\\_text.html?TextId=106278](https://www.lieder.net/lieder/get_text.html?TextId=106278)
- [24] Underscoring the importance of digital literacy in education (2020). Retrieved Jan. 3, 2021, from: <https://online.uwa.edu/news/importance-of-digital-literacy-in-education/>
- [25] Wolfgang I. 1974. *The Act of Reading: A Theory Of Aesthetic Response*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Appendix A: A screen shot from AUT's Moodle page displaying the Digital platforms

American University of Technology



## Appendix B: Student sample from pre- intervention phase

## American University of Technology

## The Age of Modernism - Test 1

Fall 2021-2022

Instructor: Dr. Liza Derkhachadourian

Duration: 50min

Student Name: SABRINE KHAZEM ENG 455 Grade: 58/100

1. There are many literary devices in "A Farewell to Arms":

\*Foreshadowing: Using colors to hint for something such as (blue in the channels, green branches, small gray motor cars..)

Commented [MOU1]: To hint to what?

Using symbols to symbolized for allude to death such as (gray color, in the dark, fall of leaves, winter, mists over the river and clouds..)

\*Irony: (In the dark it was like summer lighting, There was fighting for mountains too..)

Commented [MOU2]: It is not irony rather simile

\*metaphor: (In the bed of river..)


\*Stoicism: (But it was checked and in the end only seven thousands died of it in the army.) The writer used this device to make fun of something that it is WW1 is horrible and killed this number of people.

Henry's use of the word "only" to describe 7,000 dead shows his **stoicism**\* and his need to escape the horrors of war by making light of them. It also communicates just how horrible World War 1 is. If 7,000 dead can be called "only," then how many total must have died?

The writer of "A Farewell to Arms" used the imagery here from nature to show the danger of the mountains and the rain that is unknown.

2. The main themes of A Farewell to Arms are war, love verses war, and individualism. So, the narrator's attitude toward the theme in this story, especially in this passage is that the writer used illusion by talking about reality vs fantasy. The trunks of the trees were dusty, there were big guns too, in the fall when rains came the leaves fell... Also, the story criticizes the individualism to show the characters as they manage. The short first chapter, in which Frederic Henry describes his situation on the war front, is one of the most famous descriptive passages in American literature. The main theme is the war the narrator's attitude toward war is unsupportive. The novel shows various moods but the most haunting is tragic and ironic.

## Appendix C: Student sample from mid- intervention phase

|  |               |                             |
|--|---------------|-----------------------------|
| <br><b>AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY</b><br><b>Midterm Exam</b> |               |                             |
| Faculty: <b>FAH</b>  |               | Campus: <b>Halat</b>        |
| Academic Year: 2021-2022   |               | Semester: Fall 2021-2022    |
| Instructor Name:<br>Dr.Liza Derkhachadourian   |               | Date: NOV. 24, 2021         |
| <b>Course Information:</b>   |               |                             |
| CRN.   | Course Code   | Course Title                |
| <b>10128</b>   | <b>ENG455</b> | <b>The Age of Modernism</b> |

**M i d t e r m**

Fall 2021-2022

Duration: 1h15min

Grade **70** /100

Duration: 1h15min

No Booklets – Closed Book Exam- References are not allowed -**Mobile Phones are Forbidden**

ID#: Last Name: Middle Name: First Name:

20200215 Badalian Yeghish Nathalie

An excerpt from Hemingway's "A Farewell to Arms"

I ducked down, pushed between two men, and ran for the river, my head down. I tripped at the edge and went in with a splash. The water was very cold and I stayed under as long as I could.

I could feel the current swirl me and I stayed under until I thought I could never come up. The minute I came up I took a breath and went down again... There was much wood in the stream. The water was very cold. We passed the brush of an island above the water. I held onto the timber with both hands and let it take me along. The shore was out of sight now... I took off my trousers and wrung them too, then my shirt and under clothing. I slapped and rubbed myself and then dressed again. I had lost my cap. Before I put on my coat, I cut the cloth stars off my sleeves and put them in the inside pocket with my money. My money was wet but was all right. I counted it. There were three thousand and some lire. My clothes felt wet and clammy and I slapped my arms to keep the circulation going. I had woven underwear and I did not think I would catch cold if I kept moving.

(13) You do not know how long you are in a river when the current moves swiftly. It seems a long time and it may be very short. The water was cold and in flood and many things passed that had been floated off the banks when the river rose. I was lucky to have a heavy timber to hold on to, and I lay in the icy water with my chin on the wood, holding as easily as I could with both hands. I was afraid of cramps and I hoped we would move toward the shore. We went down the river in a long curve. It was beginning to be light enough so I could see the bushes along the shore-line. There was a brush island ahead and the current moved toward the shore. I wondered if I should take off my boots and clothes and try to swim ashore, but decided not to. I had never thought of anything but that I would reach the shore some way, and I would be in a bad position if I landed barefoot. I had to get to Mestre some way.

Remembering Catherine, Henry says, If there were no war we would probably all be in bed. In bed I lay me down my head. Bed and board. Stiff as a board in bed. Catherine was in bed now between two sheets, over her and under her. Which side did she sleep on? Maybe she wasn't asleep. Maybe she was lying thinking about me. Blow, blow, ye western wind. Well, it blew and it wasn't the small rain but the big rain down that rained. It rained all night. You knew it rained down that rained. Look at it. Christ, that my love were in my arms and I in my bed again. That my love Catherine. That my sweet love Catherine down might rain. Blow her again to me. Well, we were in it...

1. Depict 3 Literary Devices employed in this excerpt - Hemingway's "A Farewell to Arms". (12 pts.)

2. How is Frederic's leap into the river to escape the battle police a symbolic demarcation in the novel? (10 pts.)

3. In your opinion, how do the novel's protagonists Henry and Catherine reflect the age of modernism? Discuss at least 3 features supported by examples from the novel! (10 pts.)

4. Could Henry immortalize his love to Catherine? How? (8 pts.)

5. Linguistically speaking, what is the significance of Ernest Hemingway's writing style? (10 pts.)

1. The literary devices in Hemingway's "Farewell to Arms" are:

- Foreshadowing: which means using symbols such as colors, places, and weather to hint to something else. Here, Hemingway foreshadows death while using words, such as: "rain, war, wind, love". Delving into the novel, we now realize that love has an intimate relationship with pain. When Catherine dies, Henry's love to her becomes his own pain, and suffering.



-Motifs: the weather is vastly talked about in this excerpt where the big rain that fell all night. The wind was also blowing "Blow, blow, ye western wind". This ~~foreboding forebodes us readers about the bad things that will occur.~~

-Imagery Example: "I cut the cloth stars off my sleeves". Henry unattached himself from his old life that consisted of his duties to the Italian army. He is now a free man both in terms of duty and life. 8

2. Henry's scene in the river represents rebirth. He is baptizing himself in the water. It is like he is leaving his old life and re-entering a new life, alienating himself from his past. He seeks for a new clean life with Catherine away from war, his duties, the conventional norms, and tries to flee through this river. However, he remains uncertain of the upbringings of the future.

Henry makes a "separate peace," as he later calls it, with the war—the farewell to arms that gives the novel its title.8

We later understand why Henry has this fear, as his escape from war (right here in the river, and right now) is nothing but an illusion. Death and war will follow all throughout his life, no matter how far this river takes him.

3. Catherine and Henry reflected the age of modernism in Hemingway's "Farewell to Arms". Hemingway portrayed Henry and the men of this novel (Rinaldi, Dr. Valentini, the priest) as domineering characters dominating the paternal society. They reflected manhood, which was a dominant theme during this age, by drinking, and getting intoxicated, by going to pubs (Rinaldi was a womanizer). They were competent characters. Most of the time they were seen as people of lust, and sexual desire.

Moreover, rejecting social norms is a major theme that is tackled in Hemingway's novel. Both Henry and Catherine abandoned religion (nihilism), rejected faith, and did not believe, nor trust God. "You understand but you do not love God" (page 144).

In addition, Henry abandons war, his country, his friends and leaves to Milan to join the Italian army. He wasn't even fighting for his mother land.

Henry escaped war because he wanted to preserve his life for Catherine and for love. He had reasons to live. "That my love Catherine" (from excerpt), "I am so in love with you" (page 494).

And this leads us to Catherine's unconventional beliefs. She did not need Henry for anything but love, which makes her a complex woman and her complexity is a big factor for Henry's attraction to her. Catherine's views on marriage are one good example of the good complexity. It demonstrates her conflict between not following social norms, and conforming to such conventions because doing so will make her life much easier.

Lastly, Henry's and Catherine's relationship is a fantasy in reality. This is a controversial issue. They escaped the war, and its brutality (reality) to live their romance somewhere else (fantasy). They chose to alienated from reality. Their relationship was an illusion, and their declaration of love was transparent. "Now if you aren't with me I haven't a thing in the world" (page 494). Catherine told him many times that she does not wish to be married. She

Commented [MOU1]: Imagery is a literary device that evokes a sensory experience or create a picture with words for a reader. By utilizing effective descriptive language and figures of speech, e.g. I came inside because the house smells like a chocolate brownie. This device is Symbolism.

has already been in a relationship with a man who died and out of selfishness she did not want to tie herself with another man, again. **despair**

9

4. We saw in the novel that Catherine shared love with her fiancée long before meeting Henry. However, Henry didn't love anyone other than Catherine. She was the only person he expressed his love to in the entire novel. After her death, Catherine's earthly body may be dead and gone; however, her spirit and her memory remain living in Henry's imagination. We have seen them grow with each other, and love each other in the novel, and I came to the conclusion that they both become one in the same. "*Because there is only us two and in the world there's all the rest of them.*" (page 273).

And it is ironic how their love actually bore feelings of pain and suffering. The outcomes of war (casualties, suffering, death ...) were equivalent to the outcomes of the love (hemorrhage, baby's and Catherine's death) they shared. Happiness is transitory, and temporary in war, and this knowledge was startling. Looking at the environment that was surrounding Henry, he was doomed. Death and pain was all around him and he couldn't possibly escape the atrocities of war. They diverted their thoughts about what is haunting them. Their love became the source of suffering, in which, Henry needed diversion once again.?

5. Linguistically speaking, Hemingway's writing style is significant with the following:

-Sentence construction: **the shift from the 1st person** to the second person to bring the audience to his side and include them and make them live the events with him (line 13): "You do not know how long you are in a river when **the current moves swift**".

-He has a **limited word palette** and didn't use lots of vocabulary. He wasn't rich with vocabulary and frequently repeated the same vocabulary in his writing: "**the shore, rain, love**".

-He chose **short sentences** rather than complex and long sentences. Also, his writings lacked clarity between one sentence and the other. They were short and unclear. Evidence: "You knew it **rained** down that rained. Look at it." "I had lost my cap." "I counted it."

10

Appendix D: Student sample from post-intervention phase

**AUT**  
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

**EXAMINATION BOOKLET**

(2)  
Excellent!  
98

Name: [REDACTED] Course Title: 20<sup>th</sup> century American Novel  
I.D. No.: [REDACTED] Course No.: Section:  
Instructor: Semester: 3<sup>rd</sup> Date: 21/1/2022

(Begin here and write on both sides)

5- Both Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* reflect the age of post-modernism with their characters. Sylvia Plath's female protagonist <sup>Esther</sup> demonstrated a prototype of the post-modernism era. Esther is a mad woman who does not know how to differentiate between the real life and her fantasies. She is driven by her sexual fantasy on a quest to find a man who is worth taking away her virginity. She expects to become satisfied with the new feeling, to fulfill her fantasy of being in a relationship with a man outside of marriage <sup>(purity & impunity)</sup>. However, she becomes quickly disappointed when she realizes that her sexual experience wasn't actually enjoyable, but rather painful. Esther loses a lot of blood and is hospitalized because of the severity of her state. She couldn't face the reality of her failed fantasy and dodge her friend's questions about the blood, claiming she is on her period. Esther is also alienated from her mind and body. The two don't seem to connect when Esther is in time of danger. When she flies over the mountain while skiing, she does not realize that she has injured her foot right until she returns back to her room. The state of ecstasy and euphoria that she was experiencing while jumping demonstrate her body's alienation from her mind. Moreover, the mirror scenes where Esther loses the ability to recognize herself also allude to the alienation. Additionally, Esther prefers to defy social expectations of women instead of abiding to them. She refuses marriage because it brainwashes women, and limits their abilities as independent individuals. Once they become married,



they are labeled submissive housewives. For a post-modernism era. Esther was the perfect representation of <sup>how</sup> a lady acts like in society. Discussing the themes of purity vs impurity, body vs mind, women versus social expectations, and reality versus fantasy proves that Sylvia Plath's success into bringing the characteristic of this age into words.

As for Ralph Ellison's invisible character, the narrator is a great candidate that represented the post-modernism era with Ellison's themes. The story of Invisible Man revolves around social discrimination and inequality between the black people and the white people <sup>implicitly</sup> and talks about the narrator's individual invisibility <sup>explicitly</sup>.

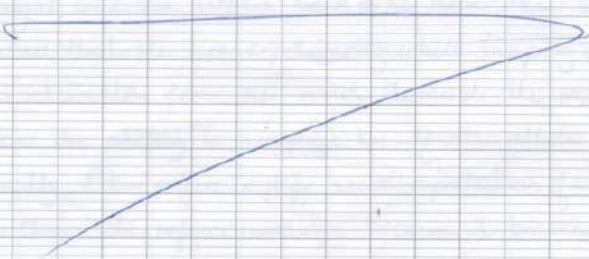
The themes that are related to this age are racism, illusion, vague future, and loss of identity.

Because of the narrator's invisibility is comes from the unacceptance of his existence by the white community. Because of his dark skin, the narrator is discriminated <sup>and</sup> manipulated by the people around him. His existence does not matter, and so does his race. When he joins the Brotherhood, Brother Jack takes advantage of him joining and manipulates him into thinking that he is helping with the cause, when in reality he was adding to the detrimental effects that will later occur once the riot erupts. The Brotherhood aim claimed to aim for justice and equality for the black community. However in reality, it is nothing but a corrupt system that aimed to take advantage of the black people by blaming them for the riot, while Mr. Norton and ~~the white~~ (the white man who created the Brotherhood) and his white community benefit off of them financially. This event highlights the racism that dominated the post-modernism age.

Moreover, because of the narrator's invisibility, he loses his identity in society. Being invisible means that a person is non-existent. He ~~poss~~ is in no possession of an identity. This is why, the narrator begins his journey in the society with an aim to find his identity while studying in the university, working in the paint factory, then joining the



Brotherhood however, he becomes disappointed with reality's harshness and unforgiving factors that demolishes his illusion of fulfilling his grandfather's legacy. His grandfather wanted him to possess two identities: one of the submissive person, and the other of the revolting person. He The narrator tried to abide to this legacy and conquer the white community with it, but to no avail. The narrator becomes, himself, a hypocrite like all the other characters that wronged him. Eliot draws a parallel structure between the narrator and Mr. Norton, Dr. Blaisdel and Brother Jack who all claimed to help the black community but ended up sacrificing it for their own personal benefits. The narrator actually becomes unaffected by the poor black people in need while he was passing by them on the ground. He becomes yet another character who valued his own profit over the lives of the black people. His illusions drove him to the wrong path. Later on, the narrator realizes that remaining invisible has more benefits to him that will secure him a better life. The story opens up with the narrator in a dark hole and ends up in <sup>the same</sup> another dark hole that he created to live his life. He lives off of stealing electricity from the company, he goes on with his day unmotivated by other people in the street. His future is blurry. It is vague and unpredictable like all the other people that lived in the post modernism era. Ralph Eliot succeeded into projecting the important themes of post-modernism such as illusion, racism, the loss of identity, and the vagueness of the future in his novel *Invisible Man*.





# Corruption and Environmental Pollution: A Critique of Gabriel Okara's *The Voice*

Chukwuyem Othniel Omijie\*, Cynthia Chinenye Nwokolo

<sup>1</sup>Department of English and Literature, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria.

[omijieothniel@gmail.com](mailto:omijieothniel@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Department of English Literary Studies, Dennis Osadebay University, Asaba, Nigeria.

[Cynthia.nwokolo@dou.edu.ng](mailto:Cynthia.nwokolo@dou.edu.ng)

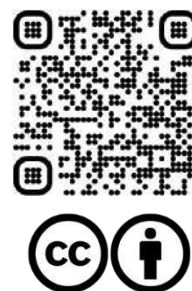
\*Corresponding Author

Received: 02 Jun 2023; Received in revised form: 01 Jul 2023; Accepted: 08 Jul 2023; Available online: 15 Jul 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— Many African authors have consistently embraced topics related to land concerns and the environment that are crucial to local, cultural, and societal development. This essay analyzes Gabriel Okara's *The Voice* for the depiction of environmental deterioration brought on by corrupt leadership, and the blatant display of power to silent those who speak against injustice. While corruption is a recurrent issue in Nigeria Delta literature, the theme of environmental degradation shows the disastrous effects of oil exploration and exploitation on the Niger Delta area. The paper examines the degree of corruption and pollution in the text under investigation and their repercussions on the ecology of the host communities, which are mostly farmers and fishermen, using Eco-Criticism and Post-Colonial Literary Theories as its theoretical framework. The article makes a connection between these crimes and the West's insensitivity to the misery of the people as a result of its drive for possession. This causes nature to stagnate and the environment to deteriorate. To assess Okara's depiction of power struggles and excessive desire in the midst of abundance through his characters and the community's setting, the paper chooses quotes from the book. It develops the connection between the author and his community as the voice of Africa's oppressed people.



**Keywords**— Degradation, Eco-criticism, Environmental pollution, Disillusionment, Oil Spill

## I. INTRODUCTION

Due to its detrimental effects on society, corruption has grown to be a major problem. One of the biggest barriers to growth in Africa and other developing nations worldwide is this. African society has been deeply impacted by corruption, which has caused incalculable pain for the populace. Corruption may be seen in practically every area of society, whether it be minor or large. According to Morris (1991), corruption is the dishonest or fraudulent behavior of persons in positions of authority, frequently involving bribes. It is the improper exercise of authority for a personal gain. In actuality, corruption serves to keep the wealthy, wealthy and the poor impoverished. Powerful people utilize it for their own personal gain, to conceal the truth, and to distort reality

(Morris, 1991). Nigeria in particular, as well as other African nations generally, continue to struggle with corruption, which poses significant social, political, and economic challenges. Where there is no discipline or firm moral norms to control it, it spreads. Political and societal corruption may take on many different shapes and manifests itself either via bribery or embezzlement. In a fictitious scenario that is similar to Nigeria, the two novels included complete examples of corruption, a failing social structure, and environmental degradation.

A lot of African literature is devoted; at first, it served as a way to honour Africa and her environmental blessings. Later, it was used to fight against colonialism. It is currently being used as a true weapon to portray the postcolonial disenchantment in African countries. Because

they have continued to pay special attention to the African environment in their many literary works, many African authors today are environmentalists. They predict that Western actions and those of its supporters in Africa will lead to a decline in the natural environment of the African continent. For Africans, land and rivers are valuable resources that cannot be manipulated. The environment is seen as a significant entity. The majority of Africans are farmers and fisherman who depend on the land and rivers that make up their environment for their livelihood. Given that they are mostly farmers and fisherman, respectively, land is related to the people's culture, spiritual heritage, and physical legacy in traditional African civilization among the Niger Delta people of Nigeria. One of the most vibrant and pressing topics of our day is the environment. Due to the extent of the destruction caused by human activity, the environment is in crisis on a worldwide scale. One of the most common topics in Niger Delta literature is environmental damage. The Niger Delta is home to Nigeria's oil and gas sector, which has severely affected the ecology. The land, water, and air have been poisoned by oil spills, gas flare-ups, and other operations, destroying local ecosystems and robbing residents of their means of survival. The effects of environmental destruction have been extensively discussed in literature. For instance, Ken Saro-Wiwa (1985) explores the effects of oil drilling on the Niger Delta's ecology and the indigenous populace in *Sozaboy: A Novel in Rotten English*. Similar to this, the 2010 novel *Oil on Water* by Helon Habila is a fictitious account of the search for a kidnapped oil executive's wife in the Niger Delta. The narrative explains how fights over resources have caused murder in the region and how the oil industry has ruined the ecology. The negative impacts of corrupt human behavior on the environment have been made more widely known by writers.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

*The Voice* by Okara has drawn a variety of criticisms. Studies on Gabriel Okara's *The Voice*, including a review in *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, support the idea that the book is a captivating and inventive work of literature distinguished by the clarity of its narrative structure and language. The story's seeming simplicity is deceptive; rather than stemming from the author's frailty, it is the consequence of meticulous writing. Additionally, in 1968, Canadian author Margaret Laurence stated in her book on *Nigerian literature: Long Drums and Cannons*, that Okara's work *The Voice* was "unquestionably one of the most memorable novels produced in Nigeria." Even though many research have been done, they are still insufficient since they do not fully understand how

thorough *The Voice* by Gabriel Okara is. Therefore, the purpose of this essay is to evaluate how the novel portrays corruption and environmental devastation. Since Okara's groundbreaking work, further local authors have emerged, covering a range of subjects and methodologies. In his plays *Basi* and *Company* and the novel *Sozaboy*, Saro-Wiwa tackles issues including societal inequality, governmental corruption, and the struggle for human rights. Ifowodo, a poet and scholar from Nigeria, claims that the literature of the Niger Delta is 'distinct from other forms of Nigerian literature in its preoccupation with the degradation of the environment, the exploitation of oil resources, the struggle for social justice, and the quest for identity and cultural authenticity' (Ifowodo: 2004).

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Several scholarly frameworks have been used to study the growing thematic preoccupations in Niger Delta literature. One of the most well-known theories, known as postcolonial theory, focuses on how literature responds to and reflects the legacy of colonialism and empire. Postcolonial theorists believe that literature has the power to challenge conventional narratives and promote social change. Ecocriticism, which examines the connection between literature and the natural world, is another academic framework used to analyze this essay. This suggests how people and nature interact. Thus, ecocriticism addresses ecology, environmental deterioration, and the exploitation of the environment and other living things. This is due to the fact that the effects of human behavior are harming the planet's fundamental life support system and hence the ecosystem. This theory offers a deeper understanding of the plight of the Niger Delta people when applied to Gabriel Okara's *The Voice*. According to ecologists, literature may encourage environmental activism and environmental consciousness by shedding light on how humans interact with nature, Okoye, (2013). Due to the corrupt actions of the authorities and the resulting damage to the environment and the populations living nearby, corruption and environmental concerns have emerged as prominent themes in the majority of African literary works in the past ten years. The necessity to protect and conserve the natural world, including endangered species, has been argued for in order to maintain the ecosystemic chain. Before now, a lot of African authors were more focused on the immediate socio-political effects of colonialism and have now realized the need of focusing on environmental challenges that have continued to overshadow Africa in the neo-colonial age. An example of how ecocriticism is used to analyze Niger Delta literature is seen in Christopher Anyokwu's essay 'The Poetry of Tanure Ojaide: An Ecocritical Perspective'. Anyokwu (2015) argues in this



article that because Ojaide's poetry illustrates the catastrophic impacts of environmental contamination on the ecology, it promotes environmental action and awareness.

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study entails a close analysis and critical study of the primary text in order to arrive at the different instances in and various aspects of the text that might substantiate the argument, apart from the primary text, various secondary sources like articles, research papers and journals were instrumental in analyzing the text and in forming and sustaining the argument. Also, the Post-Colonial Theory' has been used in this paper to project the ways in which corruption and post-colonial disillusionment and the resultant effects can be seen in the text.

### IV. DISCUSSION

#### Depiction of Corruption in Gabriel Okara's *The Voice*

*The Voice* by Okara is a novel that examines post-independence disillusionment while imagining a society transitioning from a traditional economy to modernity. As such, it can be interpreted as belonging to 'oxymoronic literatures', or African 'literatures expressive of the novel', in which the protagonist, Okolo, questions the lack of moral values in his society. Although the educated Okolo does not specify what he means by 'it' throughout the story, the reader may infer that 'it' refers to moral principles and social consciousness. Thus, those who are interested in a conservative hold on power view Okolo's quest as a threat. It suggests a look within and the elimination of corruption and selfishness. Okolo is troubled by the community leaders' and their followers' abandonment of moral principles. He questions the elders and Chief Izongo, challenging them to prove their mettle. They then demand that he quit seeking for 'it' or suffer the repercussions. Chief Izongo orders Okolo to be tortured and exiled from the community for refusing to call an end to his quest. When Okolo moves to Sologa, he discovers that the city lacks 'it' as well. He finds himself in a home filled with human remains when he first arrives in this town. Later, he runs into a police officer and tells him about the bones. The policeman remarks that the owner of the home is a 'bigman' who is impervious to difficulties. The policeman takes leave to look into Okolo's accusation after the naive Okolo demands that he act. He walks some distance, hides in a phone booth, and then slips inside a pub. Okolo keeps meandering across the city after futilely waiting for the constable. But everywhere he goes, people advise him to give up on his search for 'it'. When Okolo

makes the decision to go back to Amatu, he discovers that everyone is having a party to mark his leaving. Chief Izongo is infuriated about Okolo's return and orders that he be tied to a canoe and drowned in the river.

As Okara portrayed in his book, bribery was widespread in Amatu and Sologa in *The Voice*. The mundane and commercial activities get shadier and more false. Okolo had a prize on his head, and anyone who apprehended him would receive a reward, according to Chief Izongo. A mother instructed her son to go find Okolo, one of the major actors in the resistance, in the novel in order to accuse him and receive compensation. 'Nothing can be done freely in Sologa', her son retorted. The son fumbles with words. He muttered, 'I have no money to find him'. 'Money? Will you spend money to discover him'? His mother questioned, doubting. 'Money is inside everything in Sologa; without it, I can't find him'. (Okara: 8) In actuality, this is more of a simple assumption about the position bribery occupies in society as a method of problem-solving.

The rise of bribery as a societal plague in *The Voice* also contaminates the area of justice and fairness. Regardless of socio-economic standing, everyone is complicit in this immoral behavior. Starting with the police officers, the Prime Minister appointed Chief Izongo. The average Amatu or Sologa resident is not excluded. In this book, Okaramade reference to a police officer who told Okolo that one way to become rich quickly is by bribery:

His insides were moved by the words this man spoke, Okolo. He stirred them inside of him and then stared. This man claimed to have brought bags of cash home and was heading back to Sologa. Being a police officer was the finest job there is, in his opinion, especially if one has a lucky head. If you're fortunate enough to catch a wealthy merchant robbing a sizable Whiteman's shop, you'll be up on your knees in cash (p.104).

The reality of societal oppression and brutality is given a lot of emphasis in Okara's writing. Warnings and fear were no longer sufficient to quell the opposition to the established order. Chief Izongo's attempt to win Okolo around to his cause by using gentle and loving methods was unsuccessful. As a result, they realized that utilizing violence against them was necessary to eradicate the causes of the conflict and dissent. When it came to Okolo or anybody else who disagreed with the established order, Chief Izongo and his supporters showed neither tolerance nor pity. In the novel, when it comes to criticizing the



system, everyone who is suspected must be detained and jailed, which is a clear example of the misuse of authority. The Amatu residents who support the system and Izongo's messengers have injured and abused Okolo personally:

Like ravenous wolves gnawing at bones, the crowd began to snap at him. They carried him in silently, much like ants carrying a piece of fish or yam. After that, they pushed and dragged him past thatched houses that in the dark resembled pigs with their snouts in the ground, past mud walls with pitying eyes, past concrete walls with concrete eyes, and along the water's edge like soldier ants with their prisoner (p. 38–39).

When Chief Izongo's attempt to bribe Okolo fails, he is forced to resort to violence and societal tyranny. As a result, Chief Izongo set out to discredit Okolo by attributing to him crazy; by referring to him as a madman, his statements will have no meaning and will never be taken seriously. Okolo is almost immediately shown as an aberrant individual in the first words of the book: 'So the town of Amatu talked and whispered; so the world talked and whispered. Okolo, they said, lacked a chest. He lacked a powerful chest and a shadow. In this world, everything that tarnished a man's reputation was said about him'. (Okara: 23)

Okara emphasized the abuse of social oppression as a means of demoralizing critics of the status quo. Demoralizing opponents is one of the ways individuals in authority practice social tyranny. As he brags in front of his people, saying, 'It was a great task I performed, my people'. Okolo is exiled from his home village in *The Voice* because Chief Izongo sees him as a danger to his authority, a fantastic job at removing him. It was a risky assignment, but it had to be completed for the benefit of everyone' (Okara: 72).

Okara said that it was essential to establish an anti-system that would combat both societal oppression and the corrupt behaviour of authorities. Okara demonstrated this attraction by causing his characters' conscious selves to rebel against the system. Okolo is stronger than he was before his banishment when he returns to Amatu. He no longer has any fears and is prepared to face Izongo in front of the entire town. In truth, Okolo returned to announce his voice, which he has retained for a long time:

Yes I am going to meet him!

Don't go. They say they will send you away for ever and ever if you come back

They cannot a thing do to me. The town is there gathered and I want to face him before their eyes.

I want the people to hear my voice. My inside just now is like a whirlpool and I am dizzy.

I know not what to think (p.116)

Okolo did not conceal his disagreement to Izongo's actions or exhibit any reluctance or fear to oppose his regime. When Tuere and Ukule attempted to prevent him from approaching Izongo, he reaffirmed this. 'Am I here to hide like a criminal, then? Do I have to flee? No, the honest words never flee from the dishonest ones. I am going' (116). He began by going from village to hamlet and asking them if they had it. His mission was to increase people's awareness of their surroundings through this journey. Half of his battle to save society from the corrupt practices of the leaders and those in the corridors of power is represented by his hunt for answers. Okolo is a rebel in the sense that he wants to make Amatu and Sologa's morale, discipline, and social order normal again. Okolo has a strong will and a brave heart, which enable him to fight for as long as the battle lasts since he can't hold back his feelings of rage and disappointment for very long. The corruption and disappointment in post-independence Nigeria in particular and the African continent in general are reflected in Okara's *The Voice*.

Disillusionment and corruption are interwoven to such an extent that, wherever corruption exists, individuals who surrender to it or endure its effects eventually become overwhelmed by feelings of disillusionment, despair, and disappointment. Chief Izongo is viewed as a figure of disappointment because of his dishonest, avaricious, and self-centered behaviour. Chief Izongo always refers to their own progress when he uses the word 'progress'. Since they are just concerned with their own interests and not the well-being of the nation. Politics had a purpose other than the sake of the nation for avaricious and self-centered leaders like Izongo. For him, gaining personal wealth through corruption and bribery is a simple path to power.

In *The Voice*, Okara emphasizes how his characters were frustrated by the actions of their leader yet were unable to do anything about it. In one of his assertions, Ukule disputes even the reality of masculinity in his culture; according to him, men can only achieve manhood after they pass away. 'If in this world we could recreate ourselves, I would become a man', he says. 'I'll come back to life when I pass away as a man; I'll still be a man, but I won't be disabled. There is nothing I alone or you and I can do to change their insides' (115). Tebowei

further proclaimed to Okolo in the following words 'These happening things make my inside bitter, perhaps more bitter than yours' (48). 'If the globe turns this way, I'll take it; if it turns another way, I'll take it, says one of the messengers. I take the world with both hands, no matter what happens. I don't worry about it since I enjoy to sleep with my wife and my son' (25). People choose to be sycophants, hypocrites, and passive as the sole means of protecting themselves and the people they care about even when they are aware of the corrupt behaviors that are common in their culture. Unlike many male characters, Tuere, a female character who supports Okolo and holds the same opinion about the corrupt political system, is not hesitant to express her opinion on Izongo's actions in an open manner. She seriously proclaimed 'Amatu is lost, yes, Amatu is lost', yet at the same time, like practically all the characters, she was overcome with a sense of disappointment' (114).

### Environmental Degradation in Gabriel Okara's *The Voice*

The Niger-Delta environmental disaster is shown in *The Voice* while it is in transition. Although the work does not explicitly state itself in this manner, the language used, the way the characters are presented, and the riverine environment all make this point quite evident. The novel's clever usage of Ijaw English in the text's representation has drawn a lot of criticism. The focus on the river is another indicator that the work is set in the Niger Delta. In the book, rivers stand out as a means of travel and a location for disposing of trash. After being exiled by Chief Izongo, Okolo journeys to Sologa using the river as a route. A little earlier in the book, we observe peasants using the river to get back to the settlement at dusk: 'And, on the river, canoes were crawling home with bent backs and tired hands, paddling. A girl paddled, driving her paddle into the sweet-tasting river while wearing nothing but a towel tied around her waist and the half-ripe mango breasts' (26). The paddlers appear to be returning from a hard day's work because of their tiredness. More specifically, the returnees' 'bent backs' and 'tired hands' imply that they are non-mechanized farmers. These farmers must work with their backs closer to the earth and rely heavily on their hands. The metaphorical language used to depict the expanding breasts is also agricultural. The fact that the river is essential to Amatu's village's transportation system is of the utmost importance in this context. The last scene of the book, in which both Okolo and Tuere are floating on the river, illustrates the novel's predominance of the river:

The next morning, as dawn dawned, it did so while a canoe was drifting aimlessly down the river. Okolo and

Tuere were also in the boat, their feet tied to the seats and they were seated back to back. They were swept downstream by the water like trash from one bank of the river to the other. The canoe was then sucked into a whirlpool. It continued to spin while being gradually dragged into the centre, eventually dissipating. And as if nothing had happened, the water just rolled over the top and the river continued to flow (*The Voice*: 127).

The method used by Chief Izongo to murder Okolo and Tuere is noteworthy for promoting the notion that the water is a landfill. Susan Signe Morrison correctly notes in *Waste Aesthetics: Form as Restitution* that once something has lost its function and becomes garbage, it is convenient to ship it to underdeveloped regions of the world, and then those regions of the world also turn into rubbish (Morrison: 2015). Although the dumping of rubbish into poor African countries by Western countries is the background of Morrison's work, the insight of her work is applicable here. It's crucial to comprehend the river after Chief Izongo decided to dump human waste in it that she came to the conclusion that the dump site also becomes garbage. The water and the creatures that live in it are also discarded along with the humans. This dumping is noteworthy because it foreshadows the eventual dumping of garbage from oil exploration in the waterways. Chief Izongo's choice to drown his opponents and the disposal of oil production effluent in these rivers have remarkable similarities. Aside from the pollution that both of these activities produce, it is notable that Chief Izongo views people as 'waste' because they get in the way of his excessive ambition to amass riches and power. They drifted like garbage, as stated in the excerpt above. According to the definition of debris in the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, 'the remains of anything broken down or destroyed; ruins, wreck', the parallel is likely intended to emphasize how similar the bodies are to the wreckage left behind by Chief Izongo's travels. As we will see in the books, the hazardous waste from oil exploration has little impact on the firms' efforts to maximize their profits. The corporations' decision to dump the garbage in the water rather than discover more costly but more effective ecologically responsible disposal options is another sign of an unrestrained pursuit of money. To put it another way, the drowning of Okolo and Tuere prepares us for the effects of oil exploration on the seas as witnessed in modern Delta novels like *Tides* by Okpewho and *The Activist* by Ojaide. Several times throughout the book, the actual countryside is mentioned.

In the beginning of the book, Okolo glances out the window and provides the first and only in-depth description:

Okolo was standing by a window as the day was coming to a close. Okolo stood and saw the sun setting behind the descending tree tops. The river was flowing and reflecting the setting light like a memory that was fading away. It resembled the face of an idol, with the back hidden from view. Okolo observed the palm trees. They appeared to be possessed ladies with downy hair who were dancing. Egrets were making their way home as they drifted lazily across the river like white flower petals. Additionally, boats were paddling their way home down the river with bowed backs and worn-out hands. A girl paddled, pushing her paddle into the river with a sweet within, wearing just a towel tied around her waist and the half-ripe mango breasts (*The Voice*: 26).

One cannot ignore the features of the terrestrial and aquatic components of the ecosystem described here given the representation of the damaged environment in more contemporary books set in the Delta. The river appears to represent an evening scene with sunset, 'reflecting the finishing sun'. The word 'possessed' used to describe the trees' dance alludes to their ferocious swaying in the wind. Egrets and other aquatic animals are described as being flawlessly white and brilliant. We also saw worn-out bodies coming back from the farm. The sentence accurately depicts the inhabitants of this habitat, both people and non-humans. It is amazing that the narrator is unable to understand the aggression that these bodies represent against the river. In actuality, the boat 'spun round and round, was slowly drawn into the core, and at last disappeared', according to the narrator. And as if nothing had occurred, the water just rolled over the top and the river continued to flow (127). According to the text, the violence Nixon speaks to 'disappeared', or was out of sight, from the boats with the victims. The water that covers it further supports the disappearance. The river 'flowed smoothly over' the boats once more, the narrator says. The line makes note of the representational difficulty in depicting premeditated violence. Given that the drowning has no immediate, spectacular result and that the bodies disappear from view quickly, it is simple to downplay the violence it represents and discourage the examination of the immediate and long-term ecological repercussions.

## V. CONCLUSION

An essential instrument in the development of a country's awareness is literature. However, the particular historical circumstances that shape a writer's response to such events vary from one location to another. The ruling class, who are the immediate historical forces influencing these occurrences, are consequently the target of the author's response and complaints. As a result, the author acts as the voice of Africa's oppressed people. Salman Rushdie's claim that 'writers and politicians are natural rivals' is supported by this critique of the political establishment. Both factions compete for the same area while attempting to remake the world in their own image. The book also challenges the mainstream political narrative of reality. (1991: 14). This research paper has demonstrated how Okara's *The Voice* explores the themes of corruption and environmental destruction. Through the same main sub-titles of bribery, brutality, social oppression, and anti-system resistance, Okara produced corruption.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Anyokwu, C. (2015). 'The Poetry of TanureOjaide: An Eco-critical Perspective'. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Research*, 5(1), 1-12.
- [2] Gikandi, S. (1999). 'Reading Ken Saro-Wiwa'. *Africa Today*, 46(3), 93-106.
- [3] Ifowodo, O. (2004). 'Poetry and politics: The case of the Niger Delta'. *Wasafiri*, 20(1), 64-73
- [4] Okara, Gabriel (1964). *The Voice*. London: Heinemann.
- [5] Okoye, C. (2013). 'Oil, hegemony, and the language of resistance in Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy*'. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 49(2), 171-18
- [6] Hornby, A.S. et al., editors. (2013). *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of Current English*. ed 8th. Oxford UP.
- [7] Margaret, Laurence. (1968). *Long Drums and Canons: Nigerian Dramatists and Novelists 1952-1966*. Michigan: University of Michigan.
- [8] Rushdie, Salman. (1991). *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticisms 1981-1991*. London: Granta Books.
- [9] Stephen D. Morris. (1991). *Corruption and Politics in Contemporary Mexico*. London: The University of Alabama Press,



# Women and the Praxis of Intra-Gender Conflicts in Ogba Song-Poetry

Dr. Ben-Fred Ohia

Department of English and Literary Studies, Rivers State University, Nkpolu-Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria

Received: 06 Jun 2023; Received in revised form: 03 Jul 2023; Accepted: 13 Jul 2023; Available online: 20 Jul 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— *Women and children for the African people are the greatest family achievements. In Ogba, the women and children, in addition form the nucleus of the family called ImOgba. This paper examines the roles of women either as co-wives or co-participants in patriarchal society in inflicting pains and other cruel acts upon one another in selected Ogba songs. The paper shows that in some of the songs, women are portrayed as caring mothers and helpers to their husbands. But in many others, they are displayed as vengeful, envious, mean and antagonistic, especially with regard to jealous co-wives. In these songs, female intra-gender conflicts are artistically recreated to explore the notion of sisterhood that has eluded the female in contemporary society. The study draws inspiration from the feminist literary theory in the explication of the intra-gender conflicts that are foregrounded in the songs. The paper reveals that the stories and comments in many of the selected oral songs interrogate, in a subtle manner, aspects of intra-gender conflicts that are inimical to societal progress. It advocates for the women to use the songs for the betterment of womanhood in Ogba traditional setting and not to fanned embers of conflict that will disunite them.*



**Keywords**— *Women, Intra-Gender, Conflicts, Ogba, Song-Poetry, Feminism.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Song-poetry has over the years played significant role in the cultural life of the African people and indeed the Ogba. It serves both unilateral and commercial functions. Many of the songs in African societies act as the communal medium of censure and celebration; they confront in flamboyant manner the mighty and low in the society. In fact, everyone dreaded the satiric butts of the oral artist in traditional societies. When one is caught in acts that fall short of societal standard, he/she is shamed and vilified publicly in songs. "In Ogba as it is in other areas, the wider implications are speculations in the role of song and singing in establishing textual effectiveness in other cultures" (Ohia 2017, p.53). Also, when one's action brings fame to the community, he/she is celebrated openly in songs. This is how society regulated itself before colonialism sets its foot on the African continent.

Wang (1965) tells us that in traditional societies, "Ridicule is one of the means of protesting against certain disgusting

practices and getting rid of things undesirable..." (Pp.313). Nwoga (1981) examines the social function of satires in traditional societies in his "The Igbo poet and satires" and believes that they... "served as a means of social control" (p.130). According to him,

Homogeneous, kindred societies depended on the sense of full human dignity being shared by all members. To find oneself regarded as in any way below the standard, to become the object of ridicule, or of children pointing fingers at one and sniggering, was punishment of great dimension. Satire was the verbal equivalent of actions like tying a stolen object around the neck of the thief and parading him through the village (Nwoga 1981, p.130).

This idea is also well expressed by Ojaide (2003) when he explains, with regard to the Udje dance-song tradition of



the Urhobo, that “excesses are checked since there are sanctions against falsehoods as well as lampoons against natural defects”. Continuing, he notes, the “songs maintain a delicate balance between the general good of the society whose ethos must be upheld and respected for the law-abiding individuals” (p.5). Darah (2005), on his own part, tells us that the “spirit that animates satire is that of criticism, a criticism vigorous enough to make culpable actions and injustices appear reprehensible and repulsive” (p.21).

In a similar vein, satirical songs are composed in Ogba to ridicule perpetrator of immorality in the society.

Songs and dances in this division perform a veritable traditional function to checkmate the vices committed by people of all classes in the society. Instances abound where names of people who committed crime of theft, fraud, incest, patricide and matricide are used in the composition to ridicule them and members of their families respectively (Ohia and Onyedibia, 2003, p.116).

Avorgbedor (1990) argues that man is ontologically and expressive being, and both actions and reactions consequently permeate our medes of life and living. The song mode is just one of the innumerable artistic avenues through which our latent response energies are released (p.208).

In the Ogba society, many of the songs are devoted to gender and family themes. Such songs reflect the social relationship that exists between the male and female, among the women folks in the larger society, within the family setting and the lives of the children in polygamous homes. The themes and metaphors in these songs are articulated in clear gender focus that addresses, with human face, various gender conflicts that tread to distort societal equilibrium. The issues are stretched from domestic tussles, co-wives politics, to sexual as well as psychological struggles.

### **Feminism and Intra-Gender Conflict among Women**

One of the basic tenets of feminist criticism is the issue that borders on the portrayal of women in literary texts. It examines the masculine roles given to male characters that stand in contrast to the dormant and distorted portraiture of female characters in literature. Its focus, Olubukola (2016) argues, “Is the liberation and emancipation of women (p.14). A “preliminary definition” is provided in which feminism entails:

The recognition that virtually across time and place, men and women unequal

in the power they have, either in society or over their own lives, and the corollary belief that men and women should be equal; The belief that knowledge has been written about, and for men and the corollary belief that all schools of knowledge must be re-examined and understood to reveal the extent to which they ignore or distort gender (Arneil 1999, Pp.3-4).

It is often the argument of many feminist critics that men have sustained and perpetuated their century-long patriarchal position in the society by creating stereotypes with which they deliberately subjugate women. They therefore examine issues in the work of arts that create social and cultural imbalances between the sexes by proposing a deliberate re-assessment of those cultural structures that discriminate against women. In other words, feminist critics want, in literary texts, strong and dominant female characters who should stand at par with their male counterparts. They are weary of the wickedness that constitutes the representation of women in many literary works by male writers. Klarer (1999) adumbrates this fact when she avers that “feminist literary theory starts with the assumption that “gender difference” is an aspect which has been neglected in traditional literary criticism and theatre [and]... have to be re-examined, from a gender-oriented perspective” (p.92).

### **Notion of inter and intra-gender conflicts**

Feminist criticism, in recent times, has advanced different responses to the question of gender equality. It pursues goals that have the potentials to pit women against men in its bid to identify and remedy the distorted image of the woman in the society. It seeks to react against every social and cultural structure that assign the female to marginal positions in the society as well as place at her disposal, the power of liberty and freedom. In the *second sex*, it is noted, “While art, literature and philosophy are essentially “attempts to found the world anew on a human liberty, that of the individual creator”, women are moulded and indoctrinated by tradition that they are prevented from assuming the status of being with liberty” (Blamires 1991, p.374).

The motion of feminism in whatever ramification, however, should not reduce the cultural realities of the African society. This is because literature is a cultural production which must reflect the social reality of a given society. It is against this backdrop that Olubukola (2016) avers that another “way of understanding feminist criticism and the African woman is by taking a proper look at the role of the African women in life and literature”.

According to him, “it is obvious that treatment that the African woman gets in life would obviously be reflected in the literature from the continent” (p.19). Davies (2007) supports this view when she affirms that any analysis of “a text without some consideration of the world with which it has a material relationship is of little social value” (p.566). However, to cure the inter-gender conflict between male and female, we should adopt Wasson (1977) Marxist’s ideology by “cherishing literature as it contains values which lead to repression of men and women, classes, and races. Dominant modes of criticism make us forget that writers are concerned with class, race, and sexism, and the recovery of that awareness... (Pp.170-171).

The notion of “intra-gender”, in the context of this paper, is the relationship that exists among a particular gender/sex – the female gender. It presupposes the fact that aside the universal dichotomy that exists between the male and female gender in society, there also exists a conflict that derives from the strained and adverse relationship among women. Emecheta (2008) attests to this fact when she informs us in an interview with Adeola James that “half of the problem rests with women, they are busy bitching about one another (p.36). As shall be shown later in this paper, women are contributors to much of the oppression as well as the negative stereotypes against themselves in gender-based societies. The women in many African societies are never conscious of societal expectations on them and thus develop somewhat inferior complexes that have pitted them against themselves. Mohammed (2010) acknowledges this point when she notes that “the inferior positions of women can be linked to the activities of other women who continue to accept the inferior positions through their oppressive activities (p.465).

In her assessment of intra-gender conflict in Tess Onwuemes’s play, *Tell it to women* against the backdrop of feminist ideology, Enajite Ojaruega expresses the idea that although feminist literature tends to highlight some of the “imbalances in social structure, which constrain the rights of women” by proposing “a reassessment of those issues that discriminate against women by virtue of their gender, women oftentimes, “are their own worst enemies” (Pp.199-200). According to her, “some of the causes of intra-gender conflicts that threaten the harmonious co-existence of the female gender especially in the various bids for self-actualisation and empowerment are hampered by women themselves” (p.200). Her assessment of the ideological moorings of radical feminism as recreated in the characters of Daisy and Ruth in the play, objectifies the notion. Ojaruega tells us that;

As proponents of radical’s feminist ideal and in their bid to assert their rights and upturn what they perceive as gender imbalances in social relations, they exhibit behavioural patterns that appear extreme within the existing standards in Africa... the two female friends are quite hostile to and intolerant of their fellow women as seen in the treatment meted out to Yemoja and other rural women.... Their hypocrisy and shadow-mindedness are revealed in the fact that while they fight for parity with the opposite sex, they create a class hurdle between themselves and their fellow women from the rural areas... (p.201).

This paper, thus examines how the metaphors which derive from intra-gender issues have sloped the artistic thoughts of Ogba oral artists/musicians. The paper addresses the matters from three perspectives: the roles of women as good and caring mothers, co-wives rivalries and the critical conditioning of children as victims in the family crisis and finally, women in cultural politics. The analytical materials for the paper are sourced from the musical albums of Ogba popular artists/musicians such as Late. Hezekiah Okwuku Nworgu and Late Matthew Ogbu aka Pop Ogbu. Some song texts which are not from the repertoire of the above musicians are also used; they are deployed strictly for emphasis.

Women and children play significant roles in the life of every African man. They constitute not only the measure of a man’s success but also the barometre for assessing a good and accommodating family. People often tend to recommend a home/family with well-behaved women for their children and relatives to go in search of wives for marriage. In fact, women are the embodiment of what is good in the African and indeed the Ogba society. Besides, among the Ogbas, the women group, Nwnuyeobu (women married into the family/community) is one of the most powerful institutions in the society. They possess the capacity to bring down any authoritarian leadership in the community. This is because they are the mothers of everyone in the community. Another institution is the Umuadna/nde-adnane (sisters in the family/community) that wields authority in the homes of their brothers, wives and children.

Women as mothers, represent the continuities of every society. They are the ones who create, preserve and transmit oral traditions from one generation to another. While the men are abroad seeking means of livelihood to feed the home, it is the women who remain at home to

keep the family intact. This is why Nwapa (1981) explains that, the “woman’s role in Africa is crucial for the survival and progress of the race”. She notes that it is, “true of all women across the globe, be they black or white” (p.527). In traditional societies, it is the mother who gathers the children together at the fireside, under the moonlit evenings, to tell them stories about the origin of the community; about heroes and heroines, stories that help to build the moral development of the young ones. In this way, the mothers in traditional societies made the children, at an early age, to conform to societal norms. In fact, it is on the fact of the mothers that children see the world. It is

against this backdrop that Ngeobo (2008) tells us that, “the ideal wife is defined through her relationship with her husband and children” (p.538). In other words, women and children are priceless components of the society, and because of the premium placed on children in the African society, polygamy becomes a model for family development and community progress.

Pop Ogbu Jnr. in one of his songs, “*Oyne wnurno nne lesi nne eyina*” eulogises good mothers in the Ogba society who are embodiments of care and good upbringing to their children and homes. He tells us in the song thus:

|    |   |  |
|----|---|--|
| 1. | Oyne wnurno nne lesi nne enya<br>Nne di uko, nne la bu ndnu ka umu<br>Nne la bu ikne ka okpoknu la eznlaulo           | A child should take care of his/her mother<br>Mother is scarce, she is the life of her children<br>Mother is the strength of the home/family.          |
| 2. | Oyne la emeni mu ka nne murumuyni?<br>Nne bu nne<br>Nne bu oyne eyina nkpo, obu nne<br>Nne bu oyne ukwu nkwa, obu nne | Who will protect me like my mother?<br>Mother is mother<br>If mother is blind she is mother.<br>If mother is deformed in the leg, she is mother.       |
| 3. | Ngozni ka nne a nigaga nwana<br>Nne kwachni ni ga nwana<br>Nne adiwo la igbade nwana ka, la egbochni ni nsogbu        | Blessing is the lot of a mother<br>Mother stands for her children<br>A good mother does not leave her child unprotected.                               |
| 4. | Nne nigaga nwana osa whne ownurno<br>Ngozni ka nne anigaga nwana<br>Ownno oyne eme megide nwana la ihni ka nne a      | Mother gives her child all that she has<br>Blessing is the lot of a mother<br>Enemies cannot pounce and kill a child in the presence of his/her mother |

Inherent in this song is the recurrent theme of mother as the protector or guardian angel of the child. A true African mother will do all that is within her powers to protect her child from the preying eyes of the enemies – people who do not wish her well. In traditional society, the mother is always at the receiving end whenever a misfortune or death befalls her child. She, in most cases, is branded a witch who takes pleasure in eating her offspring. Hence a good mother must protect her children with all that is within her. Oreame, the witch grandmother of Ozidi Junior in J.P. Clark’s *The Ozidi Saga*, is a good example of the length a mother could go in protecting her offspring.

On the other hand, a mother who is careless and reckless is ridiculed in the songs. This is because the Ogba people have cherished and acceptable norms and traditions which they hold dear and whoever goes contrary to such traditions is regarded as a deviant whose aim is to distort the laid-down communal ethos. Such a person is either corrected physically or ridiculed in songs. Through such satirical attack, the victim of such antisocial behaviour is

presented for public scrutiny and he/she is shamed. By this, everyone tries to conform to the acceptable traditions of society. In the song “*Salomey ogbu di*”, from the repertoire of Hezekiah Okwuku Nwaogu, the artist lampoons the habit of young housewives leaving their matrimonial home to be with their lovers and ending up in killing their husbands to cover their sin of adultery. There is a similar song “*Ned oyne uhie*” by Matthew Ogbu aka Pop Ogbu, in this song, the artist’s persona is a married woman who falls in love with her father-in-law (Ned), prefers the company of her father-in-law, lover to her husband’s and family’s. The duo stubbornly refuses to listen to the reprimands from the community and their friends. Whenever she is confronted with the story of her illicit affair with her father-in-law, she will deny ever doing that with him. Even when she suffers the loss of her children as a result of her infidelity, she still refuses to disengage from her unholy act. The song goes like this:

|    |   |  |
|----|---|--|
| 1. | “Salomey, ogbu di, ogbula gbilaga<br>Salomey oje okno, ogbula gbilaga<br>Salomey ogwo ogwu, ogbula gbilaga”                                     | “Salomey, husband killer, she killed and ran away<br>Salomey, the adulteress, she killed and ran away<br>Salomey, sorcery woman, she killed and ran away”  |
| 2. | Ned oyne uhie<br>Ojnia nwnuye nwna<br>Mma ka nwnuynenwna Ned gbajurua eyina<br>Abia jnia la ele eyina la aznu<br>Ego obula ichiro, emem nigi ya | Ned a criminal<br>He slept with daughter-in-law<br>The beauty of Ned’s daughter-in-law hypnotised him<br>He slept with her, not minding the consequence<br>The money you requested I shall give it to you. |

This song may capture the fancy of radical feminists. Salomey is bold and fearless. She cares less of what society stipulates as the cultural standard of the woman. If a married man can cheat on his wife without reprimands from society, the woman should also have similar right. In such instance, there will be less intra-gender conflict because women now have rights to cheat on their husbands. In other words, a woman whose husband takes new wives without recourse to her feelings could also have the privilege of going out to meet with her lover. For Ohia (2023), the Ogba practice of men having the permission by society to marry more than one wife without consideration to the women’s rights is “part of patriarchal constructs maintained by men to serve their self-interests while it initiates and perpetuates female competition, oppression and divisiveness” (p.445).

To the artists: Hezekiah and Ogbu, however, Salomey’s and Ned’s actions are anti-social and anti-social vices such

as extra-marital affairs end up destroying family ties. Literature is culture-based and should not be judged through the garb of Western epistemologies. Davies (2007) differentiates between Western and African feminism is among others, that which “examines African societies for institutions which are of value to women and rejects those which work to their detriment and does not simply import western agendas” (p.563). Frank (1984) supports this idea and goes further to explain that “feminism is an individualist ideology which is in contrast to the communal nature of African society” (p.17). Thus, Salomey realises her follies only when all she was promised by the lover turns out to be a mirage coupled with losses due to her infidelity – she has been scammed, at which point, it is already too late for her to count her losses. The artists thus universalise the song’s ideal in the chorus by admonishing men to be wary of any woman who dresses seductively like Salomey.

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Odi ka ownurno nwnayna<br>Yi akira (agbari) la ukwnu<br>Salomey, la onynea nwnanem<br>Nwnokno. | If there is ever a woman<br>A woman who adorns waist bead<br>The one who dresses seductively<br>Salomey is who I compared her with, brother. |
|--|--|

The message from the oral artist exposes the fact that the Ogba people and indeed the African people use their song as a strong cultural tool to interrogate and evaluate both positive and negative attitudes in the society. The aim is to extol positive attitudes and condemn negative ones, essentially, to strengthen the culture of the people. This is because culture constitutes the life spring that holds the people in every society together which must be passed from one generation to another. Ohia (2018) describes a people’s culture as the “social heritage, or tradition, that is passed on from one generation to another, across many generations. The people’s culture is rooted in time honoured and oral traditions” (p.131)

Aside the above thematic, Ogba oral artists have also used their songs to confront issues that border on intra-gender

conflicts in the Ogba kingdom. In this way, they artistically contribute to the denunciation of anti-social vices that distort the social equilibrium of the society. In the song “*Iynewna ibne mu emiremu la unu kini – oweiya* – the female artist explores the intra-gender conflicts that pitted co-wives (*wnuynedi la wnuyeobu*) against themselves. In this song, a young man marries a wife who bears two children, two girls for him. Both of them lived and prospered together. However, after some years, the wife becomes restless. She wants her children to have *nwnane* (half-siblings) – that is, children born to her husband by another woman. Any woman whose children do not have *nwnane nwokno* – male brothers is ridiculed by her co-women as being possessive and greedy; a woman who does not want to share her man with another woman (*ekwe-nwnuynedi*). In fact, narratives have been



woven around such “wicked” and “possessive” wives. For instance, Alice Ajie, a renowned Ogba female artist reflects in one of the songs, “*Iyewna ibne mu emiremu la*

*unu kini*” and lampoons on her co-wife who refuses her breathing space in the matrimonial home. A segment of the song goes thus:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Iyewna ibne mu, emre mu la unu kini, oweiya | My fellow women please leave me alone   |
| Ka unu bu mu ejerije, oweiya                | What did I do that you gossip me        |
| Ibu mu ejerije la emeremu la kini, oweiya   | What did I do to you that you gossip me |
| Eje wnuynedi biko la ko samu eka, oweiya    | Evil co-wife, please leave me alone.    |

Songs like this only foreground the people’s social attitude towards the salient truths that define their cultural background. Davies notes that an African feminism,

Sees utility in the positive aspects of the extended family and polygamy with respect to child care and the sharing of household responsibility, traditions which are compatible with modern working woman’s live and the problems of child care but which were distorted with colonialism and continue to be distorted in the urban environment (p.563).

Here the artist becomes, in his songs, the carrier of the unwritten laws of the community. Agwonorobo (2002) confirms this point when he tells us that “All poets in their works depict experiential realities that uncover, explore and interpret salient truths – these truths synchronise the inherent contraries that define man, his endeavours and the world” (p.17). The wife, in the above song, already aware of these societal expectations, decides to persuade her husband to marry another wife, not minding the negative consequence, so that her children can also have male siblings those of others.

The husband accepts her demand and brings in a young wife who eventually masterminded intra-gender conflict in the home.

|                                      |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Solo:</b> Dim bia ka ye kpari uka | My husband, the wife calls her husband    |
| Biko nodi odnu                       | “My husband, please sit down”             |
| Umu la bu ni mmu mrnu                | “The two children I bore you”             |
| Achom ka wo wno nwnane nwokno        | I want the children to have half siblings |
| Biko, je alupia nwnayna ozo          | “Go and marry another wife as my mate”    |
| Ka obu nwnuyne dim                   |   |

The new wife is well received into the family that few years later, she bore two new children, a male and a female unlike her senior mate who had two female children. However, as years went by, the new wife becomes a schemer. She wants everything to herself – husband and property. First, she diabolically displaces the senior wife and makes her to leave the marriage with her two children. The new wife is happy. She is the sole possessor of the husband. On a particular day, as she sits down to reckon her achievements, she realises how huge her gain is. The senior wife plans a reprisal to eliminate the male children in the house because she realises that the junior wife is the one who has the husband’s wealth and other inheritances. “No. This cannot happen to me. The junior wife’s son must be eliminated, she said in a segment of the song. This time, she plans to bring her mate’s son back into her custody so that she can destroy him through any means necessary.

The senior wife is happy with her plans to eliminate the boy. This time, she goes to a medicine man and asks him to give her charm that can kill without remedy. She goes home and prepares a meal with it. In the morning, she calls her children into her room and warns them not to eat from the food on the table when they return from school. The food she informs them, belongs to their half-brother. The food under the table belongs to them. She warns them brazenly and left. In the afternoon, her children returned from school famished only to find out that their dog has eaten the food under the table. The food on the table is still intact and their half-brother is yet to return from school. The innocent children ate the food and start manifesting strange behaviours. The neighbours rush in to find them dying. They sent words to their mother who returns to chase them away thinking it is her mate’s son that is dying. But when she realises it is her own children she becomes hysteria. She rushes to her medicine man who informs her

that there is no reversal of the charm, in her depressed state, she goes mad.

The senior wife is depicted in the song as greedy, vicious, self-centered and insensitive. She is so blinded by her greed that she fails to care about the consequences of her actions. Her tragic end thus results from her greed and hatred of her innocent mate.

In the Ogba society from where the song derives, it is not out of place for the senior wife to ask her husband to marry another wife that would give her children and it is equally not a crime for the junior wife to come into the home. This is because it is the acceptable practice of the Ogba people; like other peoples of the world, for a man to marry more than one wife. Ngeobo (2008) informs us that “polygamy is almost universal in Africa” (p.356). Emecheta (2008) gives a detail illustration of the benefit of polygamy to the African woman as she avers that:

In many cases polygamy can be liberating to the woman, rather than inhibiting her, especially if she is educated. The husband has no reason for stopping her from attending international conferences like this one, from going back to university and updating her career or even getting another degree. Polygamy encourages her to value herself as a person and look outside her family for friends. It gives her freedom from having to worry about her husband most of the time he comes to her, he has to be sure that he is in good mood and that he is washed, and clean and ready for the wife, because the wife has now become so sophisticated herself that she has no time for a dirty, moody husband. And this in a strange way, makes them enjoy each other (p.555).

It should be well stressed here that the literary flavour and metaphors in a work of art derives essentially from the cultural background that birthed it. Wa Thiong’o (1972) expresses this idea when he tells us that: “literature does not grow or develop in a vacuum; it is given impetus, shape, and direction and of concern by the social, poetical and economic focus in a particular society” (p.xii).

The cultural practice *nwnane-nwokno* may not be universal in Africa but it is a practice in Ogba culture, resulting from patriarchy, that in most communities it is a norm. It is against this back-drop that Ohia (2018) explains that “African cultures have regional characteristics that have been greatly influenced by the physical environments in which they were developed” (p.204). Thus in the song, it is

the senior wife who tries to distort the societal norms with her evil intentions that instigated an intra-gender conflict that destroyed her. Hence when she returns the kind gesture of her co-wife with greed and evil, she is summarily disgraced by providence and her stakes (children) in the man’s life are destroyed.

Radical feminists often locate the various shades of cultural inquiries against African women on the men and society. They, however, gloss over such issues of intra-gender conflicts that pitted women against themselves. In African oral poetic forms, there abound songs by female artists with female intra-gender themes. Many of the songs question why women have not deemed it fit to come together, as co-wives, as market women, and as mothers to bring the men to conform to the equality standard that they sought. One must acknowledge the fact that there are certain patriarchal huddles against women in society. However, women have, overtime while working with men, used their position to oppress fellow women. This can be illustrated with a song by all-female musical ensemble. One would have thought that the thematic preoccupations of female oral artists in African should explore feminist issues and advocate for equality between men and women in the society. Rather, African female singers have also added their voices to the intra-gender conflict among women in the society, many of the songs adumbrate socio-political issues that pitted women against themselves in intra-gender tussles. The portrayals of women, in many of these songs, are only meant to redirect the women’s focus on themselves. Frank (1984) avers that “...women must spun patriarchy in all its guises and create a safe, sane, supportive world of women; a world of mothers and daughters, sisters and friends” (p.15).

In the song “*oyne iwe hasi mu eka ka mu biri*” for instance, Lady Adira Eluozo and her all female musical group artistically presents a socio-political theme that revolves around female intra-gender conflict. Her entrant into the foray of the male dominated popular music tradition of Ogba sparks off a new consciousness into the aesthetic taste of the people. She is bold and her brand of song bears testament to the older form of Ogba classical satirical form. Thus in the song, she interrogates the attitude of women in powers and how such powers are used against their fellow women. The woman referred to in the song join hands with other hegemonic groups to oppress their fellow women because of their status.

What the artist has done in this song is to expose the iniquities that abound in many societies in which individuals or groups sought means to undo their fellow humans just because they are jealous of their progress in life. However, what interests us most in this song is the

brazen wickedness of the women ridiculed in the song against her fellow women.

Children are a blessing from God but we find that women are jealous of themselves even in matters that concern childbearing. How has a mother with more female children pose a threat to other women? “*Iynewna Ibemu*” (fellow women) in the song as depicted in the song as those who are troubled, those low self-esteem and a high degree of complex in what Ogundipe-Leslie (1984) would call the African women’s “self-perception”. This is why she believes that:

Women are shackled by their own suggestive self-image, by centuries of the interiorization of the ideologies of patriarchy and gender hierarchy. Her

own reactions to objective problems therefore are often self-defeating and self-crippling. She reacts with fear dependency complexes and attitudes to please and cajole where more self-assertive actions are needed... (p.162)

This is juxtaposed with a song by another female artist about Janet who was jealous by her senior co-wife because of their husband’s love for her. The husband buys all manner of cloth for the junior wife because her submission to him to the chagrin of the senior wife – Hence the female artist developed the song: “*osi la agwa mu kpani di* (it is because of my character to husband). This song goes like this:

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| Dim zunim ukrna       | My husband buys wrapper for me           |
| Osi la agwa mu muo    | It is because of my character            |
| Osi la agwa mu kpania | It is because of my character to him     |
| Dim zunim holandis    | My husband buys expensive Holandis cloth |
| Osi la agwa mu kpania | It is because of my character to him     |
| Osi agwa mu kpania    | My husband buys car for me               |
| Dim zunim ugbo-ali    | It is because of my character to him     |
| Osi agwa mu kpania    |  |

The artist speaks in the song that the actions/character of the junior wife is pleasant to their husband hence he buys things for her as a reward. The decision of the husband is absolute. In this regard, every woman is advised to be submissive to her husband in order to reap the gains of marriage to create equilibrium in marriage for women and more for women in polygamous marriage.

The song exposes the intra-gender conflict in polygamy that constitutes much of female engagements in many societies, women are against themselves. This why Olubokola (2016) believes that “intra-gender relations of the female characters in texts... by women exposes a conflict capable of negating the smooth sail of the (feminist) movement in African” (p.23).

## II. CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, the feminist discourse that places all the challenges that women fall in the society on men only shy away from the series of intra-gender conflicts that exist among women. It is the position of this paper that women need to put their house in order first before confronting the issues of patriarchy and women subjugation that constitute the fulcrum of feminist movement in Africa. Things like co-wives rivalry, mother-

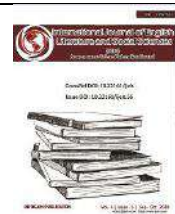
in-law syndrome, rivalry between mother and daughter and daughter or co-wives and general animosity expressed by women towards other women though not inherent, can hamper the success of womanism or feminism in Africa (Olubokola 2016, p.23). The paper, therefore, exposes the fact that many of the conflicts that pitted women against themselves are instigated by the women and the analysed songs have shown that intra-gender conflicts among the female folks are based on trivial issues which often times made the children victims. The fact is that women can live happily with, and among themselves, if they develop the spirits of sisterhood which are the inherent indices of African social construct.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Arniel, B. (1999). *Politics and Formalism*. Washington, D.C: Blackwell.
- [2] Avorgbedor, D. (1990). “The Preservation, Transmission and Realization of Song Texts: A Psycho-Musical Approach” *The Oral Performance in Africa*. Okpewho Isidore (ed). Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd.
- [3] Blamires, H. (1991). *A history of Literary Criticism*. London: Macmillan.
- [4] Darah, G. G. (2005). *Battlesy songs: Udje tradition of the Urhobo*. Lagos: Malthouse Press Ltd.

- [5] Davies, C. B. (2007) "Some notes on African feminism". *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*; Tejumola, O. and A. Quayson (eds.) Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, Pp.161-169.
- [6] Emecheta, B. (2008). "Feminism with a small 'f'". *African literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*. Tejumola, O. and A. Quayson (eds.) Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, Pp.551-557.
- [7] Erubetina, A. (2002). *Poetic Existence: A personal and social imperative*. Inaugural Hectare, Lagos: University of Lagos Press.
- [8] Frank, K. (1984). "Women Without Men: The feminist novel in Africa". *African Literature Today*. Eldred, D. J. (ed). 14, London: Heinemann.
- [9] James, A. (1990). *In their own voices*. London: James Curry.
- [10] Klarer, M. (1999). *An Introduction in Literary Studies*. London: Routledge.
- [11] Mohammed, R.T. (2010). "Maternal oppression of the Girl-child in selected novels by Buchi Emecheta" *African Research Review: An International Multi- Disciplinary Journal* 4(2). Ethiopia Pp.470-562.
- [12] Ngeobo, L. (2008). "African Motherhood-Myth and Reality". *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*. Tejumola, O. and Quayson, A. (eds) Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Pp.533-541.
- [13] Nwapa, F. (2008). "Women and Creative Writing in Africa". *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*. Tejumola, O. and Quayson, A. (eds). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Pp.526-531.
- [14] Nwoga, I. D. (1981). "The Igbo Poet and Satire" *Oral Poetry in Nigeria*. Uchegbulam et al (eds). Lagos: Nigeria Magazine, Pp.230-243.
- [15] Ogunipe-Leslie, O. (1984). "African Women, Culture and another Development". *Journal of African women Marxists* 5, Pp.231-246.
- [16] Ohia, B. F. (2017). *Content, Style and Aesthetics of Ogba Funeral Songs*. Ibadan: Abbey-Tech Printing Press Service.
- [17] Ohia, B. F. (2018). *Ogba, World Mythologies, Myths and Legends*. Ibadan: Abbey-Tech Printing Press Service.
- [18] Ohia, B. F. and H. O. Onyedibia (2003). *The Ogba Nation 1460-2003* (1). Port Harcourt. Charlesworth Nigeria Ltd.
- [19] Ohia, B. F. (2023). "Patriarchy as Cultural Inhibition to Women Participation in Political and Religious Leadership". *Christianity and Society: Essays in Honour of Archbishop Margret Idahosa @ 80*. Esimaje, A., F. E. B. Idahosa and S. Guobadia (eds). Glienicke, Germany: Galda Verlag Pp.392-399.
- [20] Ojaide, T. (2003). *Poetry, Performance and Art: Udje Dance Songs of the Urhobo People*. Durham: Carolina Academic Press.
- [21] Olubukola, K. N. (2016). "Feminism and Intra-Gender Relations in African: A Theoretical and Conceptual Framework". *International Journal of Language, Literature and Gender Studies (LALIGENS)* 5(1), Serial No 11, Pp.13-23.
- [22] Wang, B. (1965). "Folksongs as Regulators of Politics" *The Study of Folklore*. Alan Dundes (ed.) Eaglewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall Inc., Pp.308 – 313
- [23] Wasson, R. (1972). "New Marxist Criticism: Introduction". *College English* 34(2). London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- [24] Wa Thiong'o, N. (1972). *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics*. London: Heinemann.





# Dalit Consciousness and Imitative Cultural Symbolism in *Coming Out as Dalit* by Yashica Dutt

Dr Vibha Bhoot

Assistant Professor, Dept. of English, JNV University, Jodhpur, India

Received: 05 Jun 2023; Received in revised form: 09 Jul 2023; Accepted: 18 Jul 2023; Available online: 26 Jul 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— *The social context of traumatic incidents defines, conditions, and propagates socio-cultural prescribed responses to certain types of experience often trying to regulate the strictures of forfeiture, memory, and grieving. Since traumatic events focus the fissures and gaps of the societal oppressive conditions, as well as the expansive limit of demonstrating experiences and incidents of fringes, they give birth to the politics of mourning, which is impelled by the societal prerequisite to surround, domesticate, and regulate any dynamism disturbing its recognized order. She elucidates several modern institutions that foster caste hierarchy in society. The article focuses on how Yashica Dutt's writing aims to create the concept of caste in the Indian socio-cultural aspect. Finally, the article makes the case that imitative cultural symbolism is a part of one's identity and can be seen as a component of response towards inferiority and identity crisis. The article continues by pointing out how similar synergies are developed with racial discourses.*

**Keywords**— *Culture, Dalit, Memoir, Trauma, Women.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Yashica Dutt delineates the issues, which Dalit community often faces in society. In *Coming Out as Dalit*, a memoir, she unravels how she hides her caste during academic education and depicts a hitherto concealed identity. Dutt examines the caste stratum and feels afraid to accept this social hierarchy which discriminated against her all her life. In this text she often illustrates her mother's struggle to face domestic violence, poverty and helplessness. She provides a modern insight of understating caste through factual incidents and detailed account of Dr Ambedkar's legacy, his struggle and his fight for Dalit people. She traces back the hardship of Dalit people where her ancestors lacked the fundamental rights in society. In this memoir she covers several aspects that affect humanity i.e. caste politics, colour bias, Dalit patriarchy, domestic violence, poverty and everyday circumstances of Dalit families. In ethnic studies philosophy and other types of cultural research, there is a need to work towards the development of shared criteria for establishing key cultural symbols. This has gained weight as academics use the idea of symbolic change more frequently in their research on various cultural groups

and identities. Symbols are viewed in these studies as mental representations of cultural concepts, items, or reality. In this context, core symbols are those that stand for a cultural group's fundamental ideas, regardless of race, ethnicity, or other factors.

## II. DISCUSSION

The portrayal of Shashi's character, in the book is the key which is an instance of a modern - struggling mother who tries to create balance in life while handling multiple responsibilities. Through specific structures like marriage, society avails the concept of motherhood (a symbol) but Dutt breaks all these superfluous ideas. Shashi faces criticism from her in-laws because they criticize her modern way of living. Dutt frankly condemns her father's character as a drunkard who often beat her mother and created conflict. His abusive behaviour affected his personal life and he lost his job. His alcoholic behaviour created obstacles in Shashi's life as well where she struggled to manage household expenses. The vulnerability of Shashi, who forgot about her own identity in making her children's,

is yet another aspect of poverty and patriarchy striking like a double hammer on a woman's existence.

The socially constructed familial structures and the normalization of institutional practices continue to position mother as the epitome of women hood. These kinds of structures seize their (women's) choices. In this context Amrita Nandy, a research scholar argues about motherhood and its structures. She asserts, "motherhood needs to be historicized to understand how its prose litigation practice and understanding get naturalized in women's lives" (Nandy, 53). Nandy emphasizes how the regulation and normalization of social structures are ingrained in females. Shashi wanted to pursue her education but soon she realized that she is the victim of patriarchy which put her in a role to be a perfect wife or mother. This assumption of an ideal wife and a good mother seize her dream of becoming an IPS officer. Although she was aware that her father took a decision of her marriage at her early age, she remained silent and subdued against her choice. The universality and essential beliefs of motherhood pushed women to the backdrop of vulnerability.

In the silence of victimization Shashi lost her identity and her dreams of being an IPS officer shattered off. According to the feminists, women's subjugation is established and justified through conglomeration of social and biological motherhood where society associates both social and biological motherhood with nature and the idealization of mother's labour is termed as love and natural also leads to subordination of woman in society. Extending the idea, the social and biological motherhood is directive and it is essential to separate both concepts and understand the notion of motherhood which enables woman's suppression in this context. She loses her dream job and gets tangled in a structural hierarchy that suppresses Shashi in several ways. Focusing on women issues, critics highlight specific factors which affect women's liberation i.e. social, political and financial equality of gender.

Rege focused on power dimensions of class, caste and ethnicity. These power relations constructed groups in society which affected Dalit women. Rege addresses the sense of defencelessness of Dalit women where she contends the historical subjugation of these women. She questions the invisibility of Dalit women in Dalit and Savarna organizations and interrogates that all women assume to be Savarna women and every Dalit supposed to be masculine where, Dalit women were suppressed under this structural discrimination. Rege contemplates both movements (Savarna and Dalit manhood) which neglected the structural oppression and paid scant attention to their intersecting identities such as caste and gender. As a strong proponent of women's empowerment Babasaheb

introduced the concept of family planning to the legislative assembly. The purpose of this idea was to liberate women from conservative shackles. He encouraged women to participate in movements such as Satyagrahas and Dalit women's organizations. At that time three hundred women participated in Mahad Satyagraha. The open involvement of women in meetings and organizations is an excellent instance of the efforts towards eradication of women subjugation

Karl Marx highlighted the interconnection of caste and class strata through his writing *The Future Results of British Rule in India*. He condemns the division of labour. He considers social hierarchy as "the most decisive impediment to India's progress and power" (Marx, 2). Marx considers that the division of labour put people into different segments and created inequities. This division of labour theory divided people into four specific segments as Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishyas and Shudras. In ancient India people were divided according to their labour. However, eventually only all Shudras used to do lower jobs i.e. cleaning, manual scavenging etc. During colonial times the exploitation of Shudras came into light. At that time Dalits were denied access to all socio-political and economic rights. She analyses the dilemmas of being oppressed; one where she accentuated how her grandfather dropped his last name "nadaniya" (Dutt, 12) after an incident. He was dragged down off the horse during his wedding ceremony by upper caste people who humiliated him by accusing him of following upper caste cultural traits by climbing a horse during the wedding. Caste is an untangled and unchanged social system of Indian society. Dutt reflects the modern elements of caste hierarchy during the colonial period. In contemporary phenomenon the expansion of caste is considered with the historical interaction between Indian and British colonial rule. American author Nicholas Dirks wrote a book on the caste system entitled *Caste of Mind: Colonialism and The Making of Modern India* in which, Dirks argued that under colonial rule caste became the only concept to organize and systematize India's social identities and organizational structures. In rural India caste is the major form of identity. In ancient times this system was an essential tool for socio-political mobilization of people but in modern times it is a result of colonial rule. British rule formulated the principle of demarcation of Indians.

British originated the inferiority complex among upper and lower caste people by legalization of this hierarchy. In this context Dutt quotes Rudyard Kipling, who believed the British to be a dominant and supreme species that would eventually rule the world, saying that it was "the 'more civilized' white man's duty to imperialize (and civilize) non-white peoples" (Dutt, 28). Kipling's statement is an evident instance of white supremacy and the

implementation of racism on Indian civilization. His statement defends racism and British colonialism. Nicholas Dirks in *Caste of Mind* expresses, "Under colonialism, caste was thus made out to be far more—far more pervasive, far more totalizing, and far more uniform—than it had ever been before, at the same time that it was defined as a fundamentally religious social order" (Dirks, 13). The visible emergence of caste groups encouraged them to rule Indian society easily. In this memoir Dutt introduces us with the concept of Reservation. During colonial times the caste system came into light as a social evil which discriminated against certain groups of people.

In the era of kings, Indian society was divided in four sections i.e. Brahmin, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. Among above all castes, Shudras were considered untouchables and the lower social class in the society. Earlier untouchables were not allowed to interact with other social groups. They were prohibited from education and social contribution. According to the Indian Constitution Article 14 demonstrates the "Right to equality" (Sharma, 1) which restricts discrimination of people based on gender, race, caste and religion etc. Initially this policy was made available for only ten years. After that legislators realized the need to retain the system of reservation in place to address decades of social discrimination of untouchables. Dutt explains how she faced humiliation because of her lower caste and the use of reservation. She elucidates piteous incidents of caste humiliation and emphasized how she used to hide her caste as to whenever someone asked her of her caste. Dutt unravels the stigmatization of social strata where she used to compel her caste in front of society. Every day she lied to people, even herself. She argues that this shame of being an untouchable she faced because of her use of reservation was quite suppressive. Dutt says and elaborates the idea of how Reservation holds importance in their lives. She asserts that in competitive exams reservation plays a vital role in improving their circumstances.

Dutt highlight the issue of women in society well, be it either Dalit or upper caste. The author reflects true incidents and shocking practices of sexual harassment of women at work place and even at home. She chronicles several incidents of sexual harassment and rape of Dalit women. She accentuates the rape case of Mathura, a teenager who was raped by two policemen in Maharashtra. In this context Vibhuda Patel in his research article Campaign Against Rape by Women's Movement In India upholds the view regarding role of authorities, specially police, "More broadly, demonstrators have called for compulsory courses on gender sensitization for all personnel employed and engaged by the state in its various institutions, including the police. Demonstrators have also demanded that the police do their duty to ensure that public spaces are free from

harassment, molestation and assault. This means the police force itself has to stop sexually assaulting women who come to make complaints" (Patel, 2). Patel raises the concern of gender sensitization. He emphasizes that to protect and support women and girls, the government must ensure that the safety of all citizens is taken seriously with proper implementation of laws and policies as well as accountability for their enforcement.

Apart from societal structures Dutt highlights the issue of Indian society's obsession with fairness (symbolic of the west). The idea of fairness and colour bias comes from Western cultures. In India the concept of colour connotation mainly emerged with British arrival to the country as the East India company. British used to practice racism amongst Black Africans. Social structures of colour bias perpetuate prejudice against dark skin and in patriarchal structures women are more likely to experience its negative effects. Dutt explicates the belief that fairness will bring social acceptance and better marriage prospects remains deeply entrenched in Indian society. Yashica explains how this colourism comes to India. She condemns the ingrained psyche of Indians with colourism where ubtan plays a vital role for glowing skin and even for brides. "The haldi ceremony in Hindu weddings intends to deliver a 'bridal glow'. Beyond ceremonies, these ubtan recipes have circulated for years, passed down from mother to daughter and, more recently, in the beauty columns of magazines. The letters grown women and teenagers write to these columns seeking advice to 'make them fair' are a heart-breaking reminder of how women are mistreated in our society, especially the arranged marriage market, because of their skin colour" (Dutt, 29-30). Dutt also goes on to condemn the wedding ritual of haldi ceremony (symbolic) which intends to provide bridal glow and asserts how it has been shared through generations.

Stacy Ghansah in a research article "Colourism and Hair Text Bias", states that "Indian Matchmaking" reveals the sad truth about colourism in Indian culture. "Mentioned casually but frequently throughout the eight episodes the idea that candidates should be "fair," or in other words, have light skin" (Ghansah, 9). Ghansah also attacked on the digitalization of colour bias in social media apps i.e. Instagram filters etc. Further he says that "Colourism has been brought to light because of the lack of validation towards the dark-skin community. Specifically, with filters, during an experiment "When asked what she thought of her filtered image, she replied, "Ew. This is completely white-washed. The colours of my lipstick and dress are much muted, and I look entirely too bright. If someone didn't know me, they could mistake me for being much fairer skinned than I am. I don't like it" (Ghansah, 12).

Her mother's obsession with colour is the consequence of the way our society is structured. Her mother uses ubtan on a regular basis to bathe and nourish her body. She includes a variety of herbs, spices, oils and natural ingredients which they could afford. Dutt says "I was born a light-skinned child who grew up to be progressively darker, until my skin tone was the same as Mum's. This became a constant source of anxiety for her. Before I was old enough to remember or protest, she started bathing me with ubtan—something about which I had no choice" (Dutt, 30). Dutt explores her childhood experiences and shares how her mother always worried about her dark shade as compared to her younger sister who is much paler than her.

Further, Dutt argues "I hated ubtan, especially the part where I had to sit on a tiny plastic stool waiting for the thick, cold paste to dry. I often tried to outsmart Mum by applying small patches on my arms or legs. Mum quickly caught on, and would come into the bathroom to rub it on me in big, cold goops" (Dutt, 30). Dutt remembers how her mother forced her to use Ubtan. She fascinates the reader through exploring her experiences. She unravels that sometimes in haste to go to school she often forgot to clean some difficult to reach areas such as behind the ears and elbows and that thick paste dried after a certain time and fell down to her notebook in small pieces. This humiliates her in front of colleagues, "I hated my classmates' cruel jokes even more than the ubtan. Even if on some confused level I understood that I needed to be fair to be accepted, and not 'Dalit-looking', there was no way I could explain that to them. So I'd quickly and wordlessly scrub it off when someone noticed that I still had some of my 'Dalitness' sticking to me" (Dutt, 30). In this statement Dutt uses the word Dalitness, where she condemns the social hierarchy of colour bias and makes a concern about her acceptance as a Dalit.

Social and cultural psychology also helps to identify and explain individual differences in thoughts, feelings and behaviour that occur in societal situations. It also helps to understand why people act in certain ways. Here socio-economic circumstances play a major role in developing people's thoughts. Psychologists did research on various societal tendencies and have developed an insight of people's societal circumstance and assert that psychological health depends on their societal identities. They focus on real world issues such as systematic discriminations, class division, exclusion of people, psychological trauma and traditional beliefs etc. Political theory signifies that Brahmins want to rule the society. Radhika Kapur in a research article "Theories of Caste System" opines "caste is the Brahmanical child of the Indo-Aryan culture cradled in the land of the Ganges and transferred to other parts of the country. In the Brahmin period, there are a number of

factors that led to an increase in their status" (Kapur, 2). This theory ensures that upper-castes retain their privileges through power relations; here we can relate this theory to Foucault's power relation theory.

Foucault maintains that the dynamics of power works everywhere where people actively seek and strive to maintain it. His understanding of power is not limited to control or domination but he also includes the concept of productive power, which can be seen as a means of creating knowledge and structuring social norms. Foucault's theory contends that power is inherent in all societal relationships including families, governmental organizations and social structures etc. He discovered the underlying power structures where some people are labelled as criminals, insane and lower class so that specific authorities could keep an eye on them and monitor them. Foucault further asserts that this supervision is the way of constructing control. Through this discourse some groups were placed in a position of power while others were made vulnerable to be manipulated and controlled.

According to Foucault this surveillance of power resulted in hierarchical social relations where specific language permits some people to be vocal and forbid others from the same resulting in their absolute silence. He emphasizes that the relationship between knowledge and power works in both ways. First knowledge reinforces the power of authorities while at the same time those in power can use knowledge to exercise control. In this context we can take an instance of upper caste people who exercise control over lower caste people through knowledge. Traditionally they were kings, preachers and warriors and created specific structures to obtain power over Shudras. At that time Shudras usually did lowly considered manual jobs i.e. cleaning etc. Upper caste authorities were expert in gaining knowledge through their established structures where they were skilled in businesses, preaching and agriculture etc. These skills provided power to them which they reinforced over Shudras. Thus fulfilling Foucault's claim "power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (Foucault, 93).

Similarly, Dutt elucidates how these structures worked in society; she relates to it with how her mother was always afraid about her being a Dalit. Shashi (her mother) who tried to take steps to maintain the upper-class status. Her social identity as a Dalit bothered her every time. Through societal establishment upper caste people maintained this caste hierarchy over generations. The life long struggle of Dalits depicts how the upper caste maintained the power structure. In this context Dutt proclaims, "Even when a Brahmin has no money, he or she almost always has education, a poor Bania nearly always knows how to run a business and has



the financial acumen to multiply wealth, and an economically challenged Kshatriya will likely have management skills and political know-how.” (Dutt, 90).

Dutt explains how through knowledge and skills upper caste people maintain this hierarchy. Upper caste people have specific codes of language, financial stability and social networks where they stand out from lower caste. She cites, “French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu defined cultural capital as dispositions, attitudes, values and behaviours that parents can pass on to their children. Upper castes have had access to cultural capital for centuries, from which they continue to benefit and from which Dalits are excluded” (Dutt, 90-91). The author speaks about how the chains of power circulate among people where the upper caste’s access to cultural wealth authorizes them to rule oppressed classes. Dutt examines her mother’s futile attempt to adopt upper caste habits and work where mostly she failed to meet her own expectations by her comment “These skills, as well as access to most institutions that are run by people of their caste or other upper castes together create upper-caste privilege. It is so deeply embedded into our society that it’s almost invisible. And it is this invisibility that makes upper-caste privilege even stronger and harder to tear down” (Dutt, 91).

Dutt asserts how power structure operates in society where upper caste people are more likely to be hired for higher paying jobs and a better access to opportunities which makes it easy for them to climb the ladder of success. However, Foucault argues that power is everywhere but it is only operated through societal establishments not by individuals. Further, “power is not . . . one individual’s domination over others or that of one group or class over others. Rather power must be analysed as something which circulates.... which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never in anybody’s hands” (Foucault, 98). He demonstrates that power is not the dominance of one person over another and also not the dominance of one class over another. Instead it (power) needs to be examined as something that propagates or circulates.

Dutt’s mother strives to adopt upper caste cultural habits which she is not able to afford however it gives her a kind of satisfaction which she seeks for her social acceptance. Shashi made all possible attempts to look like a higher class lady. Apart from various habits she brings a cow to her home to learn Brahminical traits, “Mum got Laali—a brick red cow she thought would help bring us prosperity and good luck that we so badly needed. It was another one of her attempts to adopt upper caste, particularly Brahmin, habits” (Dutt, 39). To maintain upper caste status her mother learns about milking and how to take care of a domestic animal. Although Dutt’s entire family opposed her

mother’s extravagances for social acceptance, she struggled to maintain her higher class status. The psyche of Shashi is rooted in the stereotypical societal structure of society. During her admission at Sophia, Boarding school, before her interview her mother advised her to mimic mannerisms of the upper caste students. Her mother said that if they ask your caste then your answer should be “Parashar Brahmin” (Dutt, 35). Her mother advised her on how to behave to blend in with the other students and presented her daughter as a member of the upper caste.

Apart from her mother’s concern, Dutt also tries to hide her caste and pretends to be upper-caste. Pretension is cultural symbolism as one pretends to be the symbol of something that he/she is not. The inferiorities and ambivalence in identities is explicit. From childhood to college days, she lied to her classmates and colleagues about her caste because of the psychological development of the socio-cultural environment where she observed the caste hierarchy. Her understanding of caste left the imprint of inferiority on her psychology where her social-identity bothered her every time. She feels inferior, less capable and deprived in front of her colleagues. These class structures created inequalities in society. The class structures came out of the work divided and were established as a cultural aspect. It also contributed to the increase of the superiority and inferiority complexes. Superiority defines that a person or a particular class is holding power but interiority indicates a particular class’s suppression in society. Prof. M.N. Srinivas, a well-known Indian sociologist, was the first to introduce the term “Sanskritization.” In his book “Religion and Society Among the Coorgs of South India,” the author used the term “sanskritization” to describe how the old caste system of Indian social structure. He discovered via his research of the Mysore coorgs that the lower castes were seeking to advance in the caste system by emulating some Brahmin cultural ideas. Because of this, they abandoned parts of their principles, which the Brahmins view as impure. Srinivas used the word “Brahminization” to describe this movement process. Later, he began to refer to it generally as “Sanskritization.”

The occupational theory of the caste system states that in ancient India people were divided according to the division of labour. Indian people are divided among Varna which created four segments of the caste system, where each section has different occupations. At that time Brahmins preached, Kshatriyas served as warriors and Vaishya led agriculture and businesses. However, Shudras did manual scavenging and cleaning etc. This occupational theory subordinates Dalits over generations. Gopal Guru in his research article titled, “How Egalitarian Over the Social Sciences in India” examines that innovative elements do exist in skilled work where knowledge is created through

the labour practices. He agrees that these labour practices generate opportunities for individuals but claims that the process should be interesting, innovative and imaginative which can lead to greater productivity. However, in Dalits context the entire process is different. Guru argues “Generation after generation, they were pushed into occupations that were completely devoid of any possibility of innovation and imagination and hence were not impregnated with any possibility of knowledge. For example, they were pushed regularly into occupations like scavenging, sanitation and other types of manual labour which had inherent limitations in prompting them to do anything extraordinary in terms of creating knowledge” (Guru, 5004). Guru condemns the idea of occupation and argues that these restrictions of knowledge creation are imposed by the elite class to keep them trapped in a cycle of poverty and deprivation.

On an average, a Dalit male manual scavenger earns less than ₹6,700 a month for entering six or seven clogged sewer manholes daily. Often, they don’t get paid on time or at all” (Dutt, 44). Guru’s concept of T.T.B provides a lens for the analysis of Foucault’s power relation which can help to understand the discourse that produces unequal social hierarchies. Further Guru questions the societal structures and its presumption by saying “some are born with a theoretical spoon in their mouth and the vast majority with the empirical pot around their neck” (Guru, 5003). Guru points out the metaphors, the spoon and pot and uses symbolic approach to emphasise the power of discrimination and inequality which is firmly embedded in Indian social hierarchy. Here pot is also the symbol to the untouchables of the nineteenth century. At that time, they were forced to tie the pot around their neck so that they could spit into it and not pollute other places. This leads to a state of silencing their own thoughts and ideas where their voices are not being heard. Dutt elucidates the helplessness of Dalit women and insecurity they face in society. She highlights the fact that as a woman and from lower caste and class they face triple marginalization. The economic exploitation of Dalit women pushes them to face hardships of life. Dutt delineates that this unfair treatment of these women deprived them in a vicious manner. Dutt condemns that in our society women’s labour is undervalued.

Upper caste men consider themselves privileged and authoritative to control their (Dalit women) sexuality. There are multiple factors including structural forces, institutional policies and societal norms which create and sustain stratified social context. Gopal Guru in “Dalit Women Talk Differently” explicates that it is impossible to understand rape as a concern in terms of criminal behaviour, class strata and psychological abnormality. Instead of these societal factors he focuses on caste as a rigid hierarchy to suppress

Dalit women. Guru remarks “caste factor also has to be taken into account which makes sexual violence against Dalit or tribal women much more severe in terms of intensity and magnitude” (Guru, 2548). He argues that this is largely due to the existing caste based power structure in which Dalit and tribal women are considered to be more vulnerable and deprived. These incidents highlight the unequal relations between upper and lower caste people where Dalit women are victim of these socio-economic inequalities. It also occurs that these women lack the resources to fight against sexual harassment and exploitation.

Despite of shouldering the responsibility of reducing abuse against Dalit and tribal women, police have also been involved in such shocking instances. In 1972, Mathura, a tribal teenage girl was raped by two policemen. Such incidents are a stark example of the violence and subjugation of Adivasi and Dalit women that they have endured for generations. Dutt documents several reports that shed light on the plight of these women who suffered police brutality in Bastar and Haryana. She seeks to challenge the societal oppression of these women by highlighting the issues related to sexual violence. She states “In Bastar, Dalit women have complained that policemen squeezed women’s breasts to confirm if they were lactating mothers” (Dutt, 144). She unravels shocking incidents of police brutality in Bastar where they objectify women as a sexual object to prove their masculinity. Dalit women are mere tool of pleasure for upper caste and treated as commodities, the same goes for their male counterparts. The word object is synonymous with Dalits for them. The consideration of Dalits as mere objects shows that they are non – human things for the upper caste. For instance, Elizabeth R. Eames in a research article *Sexism and Women As Sex Object* reclaims “object is non – human things” (Eames, 141). Elizabeth argues that objectification of women is non-human.

### III. CONCLUSION

To conclude, Dutt uses the term *Coming Out* in the book's title, which unravels her unusual journey as a growing Dalit child in upper-caste Indian society. The title is a witness to her long bearing of Dalitness and humiliation. She demonstrates how this sense of not belonging is complex for her, where she faces emotional sensation, mental draining, enmity and marginalization. However, she comes out of the abuse and accepts her identity. The rippling prose of this memoir is clear and concise. This memoir attempts to bring the underlying issue of caste hierarchy to the surface. Dutt highlights how marginalization affects the mental and physical health of these people. Dutt's personal

story of self-discovery, struggle and success as a Dalit woman inspires many. Her book serves to represent the collective stories of Dalits who continue to battle against the oppressive structures of social hierarchy. It is an eye-opening account of a deeply entrenched and rigid caste system and how it pervades all aspects of life with its invisible arms. Dutt's exploration of her roots, her upbringing and the environment in which she was raised helps us to contextualize the unique challenges that accompany growing up as a Dalit girl. The theme of recognizing the evils of casteism runs throughout her work, emphasizing the roots of the problem that can lead to inequality. Dutt touches upon a range of topics, i.e. from Dalit culture, caste politics, historical representation, etc. Striving to make a difference, Dutt shares stories of marginalized people and provides a deeper understanding of societal evils.

## REFERENCES

- [1] "Emancipation of Women." Oxford Reference. Accessed 13 Dec 2022. Web: <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803124525950>
- [2] Dirks, Nicholas B. "Castes of mind." *Representations* 37 (1992): 56-78. Web: [https://www.goodreads.com/en/book/show/663956.Castes\\_of\\_Mind](https://www.goodreads.com/en/book/show/663956.Castes_of_Mind)
- [3] Dutt, Yashica. *COMING OUT AS DALIT*. Aleph Book Company, 2019. Web: <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/59082412-coming-out-as-dalit>
- [4] Eames, Elizabeth R. "SEXISM AND WOMAN AS SEX OBJECT." *Journal of Thought*, vol. 11, no. 2, 1976, pp. 140–43. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42588556>. Accessed 12 Dec. 2022.
- [5] Foucault, Mitchell. "The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction" Goodreads. Published, January 01, 1990. Accessed, Dec. 16, 2022. Web: [https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/1875.The\\_History\\_of\\_Sexuality\\_Volume\\_1](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/1875.The_History_of_Sexuality_Volume_1)
- [6] Ghansah, Stacy. "Colourism and hair text bias." (2022). Web: <https://digitalcommons.cortland.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1019&context=corslides>
- [7] Gopal Guru. "How Egalitarian Are the Social Sciences in India?" *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 37, no. 50, 2002, pp. 5003–09. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4412959>. Accessed 11 Dec. 2022.
- [8] Marx, Karl. "The Future Results of British Rule in India." *New-York Daily Tribune*, August. 8, 1853. Web: <https://marxists.architexturez.net/archive/marx/works/1853/07/22.htm>
- [9] "Mathura rape case." Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, Accessed 10 Dec. 2022. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mathura\\_rape\\_case](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mathura_rape_case)
- [10] NANDY, AMRITA. "Outliers of Motherhood: Incomplete Women or Fuller Humans?" *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 48, no. 44, 2013, pp. 53–59. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23528807>. Accessed 16 Dec. 2022.
- [11] Patel, Vibhuti. "Campaign against rape by women's movement in India." *Deportate, Esuli, Profughe: Rivista Telematica di Studi Sulla Memoria Femminile* 24 (2014): 36-47. Web: [https://www.unive.it/pag/fileadmin/user\\_upload/dipartimento/i/DSLCC/documenti/DEP/numeri/n24/Dep\\_03\\_Patel.pdf](https://www.unive.it/pag/fileadmin/user_upload/dipartimento/i/DSLCC/documenti/DEP/numeri/n24/Dep_03_Patel.pdf)
- [12] Rege, Sharmila. "A Dalit feminist standpoint." *SEMINAR-NEW DELHI-*. MALYIKA SINGH, 1998. Web: <http://164.100.47.193/fileupload/current/113573.pdf>
- [13] Sharma, Diksha. "What is the history of Reservation in India?." *Law Insider*, June. 23, 2021. Web: <https://www.lawinsider.in/columns/what-is-the-history-of-reservation-in-india>
- [14] "Theories of Caste System." ResearchGate, December 16, 2022. Web: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/359972680\\_Theories\\_of\\_Caste\\_System](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/359972680_Theories_of_Caste_System)
- [15] "Two lectures by Foucault in 1976." Accessed, Dec. 16, 2022. Web: <http://jeesusjalutasallveelaeval.blogspot.com/2013/01/two-lectures-by-foucault-in-1976.html>
- [16] Vandana. "Dalit girls and sexual harassment in the university." *Indian Journal of Gender Studies* 27.1 (2020): 33-54. Web: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0971521519891478#fn1-0971521519891478>
- [17] Vinutha, G. "Domestic violence against Dalit women: A critical review." *Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies* 2.10 (2014): 1-7. Web: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/229673691.pdf>



# Christian's struggle and Quest for Spiritualism in John Bunyan's Pilgrims' Progress

R. Velu

Assistant Professor of English, D.R.B.C.C.C Hindu College, Pattabiram, Chennai, India

Received: 06 Jun 2023; Received in revised form: 11 Jul 2023; Accepted: 19 Jul 2023; Available online: 26 Jul 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— John Bunyan was longing for Religion. Author makes the use of Allegory as a literary device which gives him more space to explore his Didactic aims. This religious fiction has given as an autobiographical element. Christian is protagonist. Knowledge is gained through travel by portraying Christian and his companions learning from their mistakes. Whenever Christian puts up with problems and difficult, he prays God Christian carries load on his back. He goes the place where is fenced on both side with wall which is called 'Salvation'. Christian's Wife Christiana also struggles in the second part. Not only Christian in his life struggles to attain salvation, but also his wife comes across problems like her husband. She thinks that Christian goes over the river. Christiana tells to her four children about her father and his struggle. Children fall into tears. Christiana prepares to follow her husband. The life of Christian and his struggle is to attain salvation. Though he comes across many problem, he is stubborn his religious goal. He comes across many struggles. It powerfully expresses the truth that the present life is a kind of Pilgrimage. Jesus Christ liberates a sinner from the power of sin when a man shows life time faith and devotion to him. The path of the Christian life is riddled with many problems hurdles and Obstacles. Christian fights against evil powers and gets victory.

**Keywords**— Christian allegory, Sermons, Cherubim and Seraphim.

## INTRODUCTION

John Bunyan was born in 1628. His education was the most primitive. He was Puritan preacher. He was rent by inner conflicts which he experienced as conflicts between the powers of good and evil- between God and the Devil. He was longing for Religion. He went to church yet, his problem and struggle with the evil and of his own imagined sinfulness.

Puritanism, a religious reform movement in the late 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries that sought to "Purify" the Church of England of remnants of the Roman Catholics "Popery" that the Puritans claimed had been retained after the religious settlement reached early in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. Shaival Thakkar (2009) Pilgrims' progress has been translated into more than 200 languages. This has also been adopted into a Radio drama, films a T.V Serial, a graphic Novel. Puritan followed an extreme form of

Christianity. Author makes the use of Allegory as a literary device which gives him more space to explore his Didactic aims. The allegory of Christian and Christiana's Pilgrimage signify the conversion of an ordinary person into very religious person

This religious fiction has given as an autobiographical element. Christian is protagonist. Knowledge is gained through travel by portraying Christian and his companions learning from their mistakes. The main theme of this book is salvation, temptation. In this Research, Christian's struggle and Quest for Spiritualism has been discussed here. Krishna Boobala (2018) wrote in his Research Article "As I walked through the Wilderness of this world, I came upon a certain place where there was a den; and I lay down in that place to sleep and as I slept I dreamed a dream" with these lines, Bunyan starts his novel to elucidate his social and political background. It is almost changing period of England so he said England is a world



of Wilderness. The interest in Science began to grow; hence the faith in God began to disappear.

The Hebrew Christian cultural tradition is one of the Cultural foundations of English Literature. The British Writers grew up on the soil of Christian civilization unknowingly drew the materials from Christian culture. Christian culture refers to the Ideological value system with the Christian faith as the core as well as the social survival structure. Christianity originated from the Jewish religion of Israel.

The Characteristics of Christian culture is that it is a system of religious beliefs that believes in the existence of God and believes that Jesus Christ saves all human beings, that is, which believes that God is the true God of the Holy Trinity, namely, the father, the son, and the Holy Spirit, and has a set of meticulous theological system. The Bible is the core content of Christianity, on this basis Pilgrim's Progress was written. Religion and Literature belong to two different categories in essence religion is faith; Literature is to satisfy our aesthetic level. The Bible phenomena can be seen in *Paradise Lost* also which is written by John Milton.

Pilgrim's Progress is influenced by Conflicts sects of Protestantism. Christian is willing to abandon his family to achieve the ultimate goal of Salvation.

### **Quest and Struggle for Spiritualism:**

John Bunyan dreamed Christian and his quest for knowledge reading book. He has burden, here author refers to Psalm 38:4 "My Iniquities overwhelm me, a burden to heavy for me. He walks solitary in the fields, and reading, praying. Now he is distressed in mind". Judgment is important in Christianity. Evangelist is one of the prominent role, points at Wicket Gate. Wicket Gate is here referred to from Matthew 7: 13, 14 from the holy Bible. Spiritualism guides to walk towards narrow gate. The Trouble comes from Obdurate, who is against Christian, who orders Christian to go back. The evil drives away Spiritualism from human being. Christian's ambition to attain salvation and to reach Heaven. There is no crying or sorrow, tears will be wiped. Cherubim and Seraphim are pivotal role in bible. Cherubim and Seraphim believe in the use of water and oil. Water has a type of healing power, because of the strength of baptism and the spirit of God that dwells within it. Christian says to Pliable about loving and holy. Christian not only struggles in spiritualism but also tumbles in slough of Despond alone yet, he endeavours. Help, is one of the allegorical characters, helps Christian from slough of Despond. Christian crosses and sees a man name is Mr. Worldly Wiseman, who is from Carnal Policy. Mr. Worldly Wiseman sees Christian's laborious going by observing his sighs and groans. Christian utters Evangelist frequently who is his mentor and guide. Pliable, who is his neighbor,

discourages him. Christian reaches the house of the Interpreter.

Interpreter: "... He can beget Children (I Cor.iv.15), travail in birth with Children (Gal.iv.19) and nurse them he when there is born...."

"..Said the Interpreter. I have showed thee this picture first, because the man whose picture this is the only man whom he lord of the place whither thou art going, hath authorized to be thy guide in all difficult places..."

Christian carries load on his back. He goes the place where is fenced on both side with wall which is called Salvation. He starts up to top of hill. He meets two men: Timorous and Mistrust. Timorous says that both are going to City of Zion which is difficult place. Though City of Zion is difficult place, Christian struggles because of spiritualism. Mistrust threatens Christian but Christian is stubborn to reach City of Zion.

"....to go back is nothing but death...."

"....I will yet go forward...."

Christian keeps on going and enters narrow passage. He sees Lion. He is afraid. Christian moves tumbling for fear of Lions but good heed to the directions of Porter. Charity asks Christian about his family, Christian says about family-wife and four children. His family averse pilgrimage. But yet, he struggles on his pilgrimage.

Next struggle of Christian is down to the foot of the hill. He goes forward with the help of Discretion, piety, Charity and Prudence. Now Christian is in valley of Humiliation, he is hard. He meets two men who are in the valley of the shadow of death. Men share the experience of the valley. They see the hobgoblins, satyrs and dragons of the pit. Christian wants to reach the valley. He goes on and comes across the flames reaches him, hears doleful voices, and rushing to and fro. Christian travels in disconsolate condition; he can hear voice of a man before him. He sees all the dangers.

Beelzebub is one of the prime characters in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Christian comes across Wind-tide. They are for hazarding all for God. God sends rain and sun shines. Author sees in his dream river which is rough. Pilgrims are discouraged because of rough way. Christian falls into a deep pit .whenever Christian puts up with problems and difficult, he prays God. He begs to hopeful for forgiveness. Christian adventures to go back. It is so dark and flood is high. He lies from Wednesday Morning till Saturday night---without breath, drink or light. His life is miserable. He begins to pray continuously. Christian asks about the way to the Celestial city. A shepherd says that the way is safe. Shepherd takes Christian upon the mountains and they reach to the top of a hill called Error which is steep. Again, they go to another mountain called 'Caution' next

hill is 'Clear'. Christian enters into very dark lane along with Hopeful into a very dark lane. Christian begins to tremble. Atheist confesses Christian that there is no place as you say. Though Hopeful travels with Christian, Christian struggles in his pilgrimage. Hopeful accompanies till last. After many struggle, Christian enters into the joy of Lord.

In the second part, John Bunyan shares that Christian's journey towards the Celestial country is dangerous sagacity wonders about Christian.

"...I also heard of the molestations, troubles, wars, captivities, cries, groans, frights and fears that he met with and had in his journey"

Christian's wife Christiana also struggles in the second part. Not only Christian in his life struggles to attain salvation, but also he comes across problems like her husband. She thinks that Christian goes over the river. Christiana tells to her four children about her father and his struggle. Children fall into tears. Christiana prepares to follow her husband. Like Christian, Christiana has companion such as Mercy. When she reaches to the slough of Despond, she says about her husband how he struggled. Christian's falling into the Slough of Despond symbolizes the religious doubts in the Restoration Period. Obstinate, one of the allegorical characters, did not like to be lenient and he gets back and pliable tries and goes back to home. At the Home of Pliable, Neighbours visit him and mocks Christian denoting his journey would be vain, through which Bunyan portrays the People's mind set towards a good deed. Christian goes to Hill where there is a heavy lightning. In the Hill Difficulty, he meets Formalist and Hypocrisy who come from the shortcut and could not attain their aim. The Hill difficulty symbolizes the spiritual struggle. After facing many troubles, Christian gets into Heaven and poor boy called Ignorance could not provide his certificate and locked up and taken to hell by Angels.

#### **Important Characters:**

Faithful, Hopeful, Evangelist, Worldly Wiseman, Mr. Talkative, By-Ends, Money-Love, Flatterer, Atheist, the Monster Apollyon and Giant Despair, The Pilgrim's Progress depicts the Progress of the Protagonist from life of sin to his resolve to attain the eternal life, then to his Victories over various kinds of temptation, and his final triumph marked by his arrival in the Celestial City.

#### **Compare Christian with the Pilgrims in the Canterbury Tales:**

There are in all Twenty-Nine Pilgrims in the Canterbury Tales. The poet and the host also join the company and therefore the number comes to thirty two. John Bunyan, in his dream, narrates story of Christian. Chaucer narrates Pilgrims, in the Canterbury Tales, how they pass the night.

Their journey is to Canterbury. Christian journey is to the Celestial City. Chaucer and Bunyan are the narrators on their works.

I have discussed about the life of Christian and his struggle to attain salvation. Though he comes across many problem, he is stubborn his religious goal. He comes across many struggles. Obstinate orders him to go back but his determination over pilgrimage is stern. He tumbles in slough of Despond alone though no one helps

#### **Some References from the Holy Bible:**

John Bunyan approaches various Biblical texts and he simplifies the meaning so that their message has been difficult for the common folk to decipher, is easier to understand. Some chapters from The Holy Bible: Isaiah.Ixiv.6, Luke xiv.33, PS.xxxviii.4, Hebrews.ix 27, Job xvi 21, Ezek xxii 14, Matt iii 7, Gen xix 17, Tit I 2, Rev vii 16,17, Tit i 2, Rev vii 16,17, John xii 25, Mark viii 34, 35, John xii 25, Rom vi 23, Exod I 22, Jer xxxi 21, Job vii 15, Eccles x 15, Prov xiii 4, Zech iii 7

#### **CONCLUSION**

A close reading of the work suggests that the Author was probably using his literary works in order to express their views, either purely religious or somewhat politically minded but I have talked about the struggle and Obstacles in his journey. It powerfully expresses the truth that the present life is a kind of Pilgrimage. Jesus Christ liberates a sinner from the power of sin when a man shows life time faith and devotion to him. The path of the Christian life is riddled with many problems hurdles and Obstacles. Christian fights against evil powers and gets victory.

#### **REFERENCES**

- [1] <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Puritanism/>.
- [2] <https://en.m.wikipedia.org>
- [3] <https://www.sparknotes.com>
- [4] Shaival Thakkar (Saugata Bhaduri instructor) November - 2009
- [5] Yan, Zhou, 2018, International Conference on Culture, Literature, Arts and Humanities (ICCLAH)
- [6] Boobala, Krishnan, 2008, IJELLH
- [7] Heather-Ann Wickers, The Pilgrim's Progress and The Canterbury Tales (English Literature Essays), London School of Journalism



# Theorising Environmentalism and Caregiving: A Critique of Ecofeminism

Athira Shaji

EFLU, Hyderabad, India

Received: 09 Jun 2023; Received in revised form: 12 Jul 2023; Accepted: 18 Jul 2023; Available online: 26 Jul 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— The paper focuses on the conceptualization of care giving during ecological disasters from a gender perspective. There has not been adequate research on care from a socio cultural context (T. Revenson, 7). The cultural context of care is important as it helps to understand the different dimensions of caregiving and the experience of caregivers. The research documented by Heller and Rowitz in 1997 shows that majority of the caregivers are women especially mothers. In a cultural setting of home, it is normative for women to invest themselves in the role as a caregiver. Caregiving is perceived as a self sacrificing role that women are expected to undertake because of moral responsibility (Lefley, 443). The ethic of care is an important part of the ecofeminist practice. Women's role as a caregiver also positions them as natural environmental carers. With reference to the socio-cultural background in the selected eco-narratives, the study intends to make a critical appraisal of the ecofeminist theory in order to understand its relation between women and nature. The study further examines how such a relationship reinforces the gendered nature of care and its impact on women at a cultural level.

**Keywords**— Care, culture, ecofeminism, gender studies, nature.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The term "Ecofeminism" was put forth by Francoise d'Eaubonne in 1974, as she sees parallels in the oppression faced by both women and nature and attempts to liberate them from unjust discriminations. This parallel connection arises from the notion of a metaphorical connection between woman and nature based on the assumption that women are essentially or biologically closer to nature. Ecofeminists argue that feminine traits such as care and nurturing should be a part of an ecofeminist environmental ethics as it perpetuates the claim that women are most qualified to be in charge of preserving nature – thus, fulfilling the traditional role as nurturing mothers (Archambault, 21). Sherry Ortner (1974) brings in the nature/culture debate and argues that women are symbolically tied to nature while men are associated with culture. There is no logical explanation behind attributing activities closer to nature as feminine or activities in the public sphere as masculine. The nature/culture bifurcation is not applicable to all cultures and therefore, is not

universal (p.71). Even then, several ecofeminists in the West assume women's connection to nature stemming from their biology. For instance, Agarwal notes that ecofeminists like Ariel Salleh connect women's consciousness to nature based on their biological capabilities. Salleh argues "Women's monthly fertility cycle, the tiring symbiosis of pregnancy, the wrench of childbirth and the pleasure of suckling an infant, these things already ground women's consciousness in the knowledge of being coterminous with nature" (121). However, according to Carolyn Merchant, the connection between women and nature posits an ambivalent imagery. This divergent imagery identifies nature as a nurturing mother on one hand; on the other hand, nature is juxtaposed as a wild and uncontrollable woman. The arguments put forward by western feminists are problematic in several ways. First, they generalize the oppression faced by woman as a unified group without differentiating them by class, race or ethnicity. Second, many ecofeminists talk about the domination of women in

ideological terms without elucidating the actual issues. Third, they do not take into consideration the real life experiences of women but only describe what they have conceptualized from it (123).

The paper intends to focus on the Ecofeminist theory in the context of India and tries to explore whether the functioning of an Ecofeminist principle in a regional context work towards promoting the gendered notion of care in a domestic household.

## II. SELECTED TEXTS AS GENDER NARRATIVES OF STRUGGLE AND RESILIENCE

The autobiographical narratives of women activists in Kerala like Mayilamma and Leelakumari Amma have made significant contribution to the discourse of environmental justice. Leelakumari Amma of Peria Village is an environmental activist who struggled against the spraying of Endosulfan pesticide on the cashew plantations in Kasaragod district, which was causing serious health problems and birth malformations in the local population. Mayilamma is a tribal activist in Plachimada whose anti-Cola campaign against the Coca-Cola Company created a global resistance against environmental pollution. Through their stories, the study tries to understand if the struggles of these women activists are rooted in the patriarchal construction of a special connection between women and nature that reinforce the ideologies of mothering and caregiving. The paper does not intend to criticize the Ecofeminist theory but highlights the major elements of Ecofeminism that essentialise women based on gendered assumptions. Some of the principles of Ecofeminism tend to impose a 'compulsory altruism', a term that defines caregiving as a normative expectation imposed upon women by oppressed ideologies. Women in Kerala are considered to be the major agents of caregiving. The burden of caregiving is shared equally among men and women but in a gendered manner. The public sphere is mostly male dominated. Men are only expected to provide financial stability for care to take place while women are directed into the private space of domesticity and household; mothers are the prime agents of caregiving in families (Devika, 756). This 'compulsory altruism' framed by oppressive structures could be characterized as an internalized altruism embodied by women; the locus of selflessness stems from the socially constructed notion that women have a natural inclination towards care (Chakravarti, 18).

Many prominent Ecofeminists embrace the natural disposition of women to caregiving in a positive manner and claim that it helps women to develop a

nurturing attitude towards the environment. They attempt to empower women by emphasizing the connection between "mothering and earth care" (Devika, 762). Ecofeminists like Vandana Shiva believes that the caregiving practiced by non western rural women or grassroot women are less likely to be "contaminated than that practiced by the modernized housewife" (p.759). She foregrounds her ideology based on the fact that caregiving practiced by rural women is pure and ideal as it is closer to nature. In her book *Staying Alive*, Shiva tries to link the sacred connection between women and nature by illustrating the worship of Tulsi plants in Indian households. Tulsi is the symbol of cosmos and by watering the plant, women renew their relationship with the cosmos and with nature (56). Rural women naturally acquire knowledge of nature because their identity with nature is authentic and organic (7). The lines, "nature herself is an experiment and "women are traditional natural scientists" (58) support this statement. However, there is no logical evidence that suggest a connection between these women and nature as pure, feminine, or maternal (Devika, 763). The insights that women acquire from nature are passed down by generations in female line and not stemming from women's way of knowing or any unique experiences. This so called 'unique experiences' are part of women's daily routine and domestic life and emerge from the burden of being the major caregivers of the family; projecting them as pure, unique or feminine is unsubstantiated (Devika, 763). For instance, the character of Pappammayi in Mayilamma's narrative is a midwife who has assisted the childbirth of many girls in the colony. She disapproved of going to the hospital and instead, preferred the use of medicinal plants like pepper. She was familiar with many medicinal herbs in the forest. Mayilamma recollects how when someone caught a cold or fever, she would put castor leaves in steam water and make them inhale it. These insights of Pappammayi were acquired from years of being a midwife and the knowledge she gained from the time spent working in the forests to make a livelihood. Mayilamma was coerced to drop out of school and work in the forest at a young age. She recounts how her parents sent her to the forest to graze cattle and cut grass. Cutting the grass consisted of hardwork that required a lot of practice (27). She remembers how they used to catch crabs and fish in the forest. "Catching crabs is an interesting art. When we put our hands into their holes, the crabs would pinch us. After getting two or three pinches, we would grab them in a single smart lunge" (30). Mayilamma narrates how crabs can be used for medicinal purposes too. Crabs mixed with coconut milk helps to remove mucus from chest (31). Such instances show how the knowledge of the forest was not naturally acquired but generated from



years of experience in the forest. Ecofeminists like Shiva, purposefully ignore the knowledge and contributions of rural men (Dechamma, 102). In Mayilamma's narrative, the lines "It was not just women, but men were also familiar with the ways of the forest" (Pariyadath, 26), suggest that most rural men and women who lived in the vicinity of the forests had ecological knowledge of nature and its processes. The lines, "Our grandfathers, great grandfathers and grandmothers knew the names of a lot of medicinal herbs" (27), also suggest the same. The lines, "It was during the time of Pappammayi's parents that the ways of the forest came to be replaced by the ways of the city" (16), expresses Mayilamma's concern that people no longer prefer traditional methods but rely on modern medicines. This concern does not evoke a special connection towards nature, but rather arises out of her familiarity with herbal medicines. Leelakumari Amma narrates the experiences during her childhood that helped her gain more insights on nature and farming. Her mother was in charge of looking after the farm. She followed traditional methods of farming that she inherited from her family and now passed down to her children. It did not require the use of fertilizers but only cow dung and other natural manure. Their experiences were part of their daily labor in the farm.

While the strategy of Ecofeminists to romanticize women environmental activists as 'earthcarers', a term used by Carolyn Merchant (1995) or 'grassroots women' might evoke a connection between woman and nature, such a connection does not politicize caregiving or empower women in any way but rather coerces women to take up environmental caring in addition to the list of domestic chores (Devika, 764). Women enter the environmental struggle because their livelihoods were affected and not because of any special connection to nature (763). For instance, women like Mayilamma and Leelakumari Amma lived in close vicinity of the corporation and were personally affected by the disaster. In Mayilamma's narrative, there is an instance where many mothers gathered in front of the local anganwadi when their children started falling sick. It was women who took their children to school and prepared food for them. Naturally, they were the first to notice the issue of contaminated water in the anganwadi when their children got sick (Madhavan, 9). Mayilamma along with other women in the colony struggled to supply water to the anganwadi everyday so that the care centre would remain open and the children's education wouldn't be affected. The womenfolk made sure that rice gruel and uppuma were distributed and that the children received immediate vaccination shots (Pariyadath, 25). Mayilamma's struggle against the company and her decision to act as a caregiver

to the community does not link her to Earth care; it is merely a role that was imposed upon her by the oppressive patriarchal structures. Devika argues that even though women enter the political struggle, they still have many patriarchal obligations; they are still obliged to fulfill domestic chores and caregiving duties. (14)

In Mayilamma's narrative for instance, majority of the people in the protest pandal were women, the men of the village had to leave the settlement to work in the rice paddy fields. Mayilamma recalls that women had to do multiple tasks while protesting in the pandal. A kitchen was set up in the corner where women cooked lentils and rice. They also had to bring their children to the protests and look after them as their husbands were out in the fields. Pariyadath, 61; Ferman, 32) In Mayilamma's words, "Palana's girl Bhagyam, is preoccupied in removing the leaves from the drumstick stalks. Her little son Aneesh would run out on the road the moment we took our eyes off him. Two people were needed to keep a constant eye on the children coming to the pandal" (Pariyadath, 33)

Women in poor rural households are the major victims of environmental degeneration, in gender specific ways. This is because women are more prone to illness than men due to exposure from water contamination in wells and ponds with pesticides or fertilizers due to the gendered nature of their work. Women have to fetch water from ponds and canals for various domestic purposes such as cooking, cleaning, feeding cattle or washing clothes (Bina Agarwal, 144). Mayilamma narrates how the impact of the contaminated water from the Coca Cola Company is reflected more on women in rural households than men. This is because women mostly stay indoors while their men folk worked outside the settlements. She says that the drinking water in their wells was contaminated by the dirty water that came out of the Coca Cola Company. Many women complained that their fingers burned and itched when they used water to clean the vessels. Hence, water could not be used for cooking or cleaning purposes. Due to the issue of the contaminated water, the womenfolk of Plachimada colony had to travel two and a half kilometers everyday to fetch water. Because of this, they were not able to go for work and earn their daily income. The burden of providing food and caregiving of children and elderly is another task conventionally entrusted among women (Agarwal, 14; Chakravarti, 15; Gillian Dalley, p; Madhavan and Narayana et. al, 9 ).

Women are more affected by disasters due to their role as caregivers. They are confined to their households as public space is mostly male dominated. While women's access to public spaces is limited and dependent on their social need, men actively engaged in

social activities. It was mostly men who organized groups and participated in protests while women had to undertake the responsibility of care giving for affected children (A.K Jayashree, 6). Women are associated with nature as “something is lacking in females” (Ortner, 25), while men are identified with culture. Culture is regarded as superior to nature; this makes women inferior to men in their position in the society. The claim that women are associated with nature ensues from their physiological differences regarding pregnancy and child birth which places them closer to nature. This limits woman’s access to the public space and associates her to the subordinate domestic household context (Ortner, 38). If culture is considered as superior to nature, the identification of woman to nature seems contradictory as it concurs to the argument that the social role of a woman indeed lies in caregiving (Merchant, 14).

Govind Kelkar and Dev Nathan (1991), in their study of the tribes in the Jharkhand region in Central part of India, notes that the distribution of labour between men and women is determined by cultural factors rather than biological factors. The division of labour is not a voluntary action but a law forced upon as a social norm. It could be the identification of women’s role as child bearers and caregivers that ensued in their gender being confined to the domestic space (14). Through their study they point out that in the earlier period, both men and women participated in hunting activities. While the task of childcare and preparation of food was solely the responsibility of women, men also take part in gathering of food and fodder (35). There is a further division of labor in the gathering of forest produce. In the case of collecting fruits, flowers and seeds from trees, the role of men is to shake the trees while women and children gather them. Gathering of firewood and leaves is the responsibility of women (57). Generally, the burden of work is more on women than men as men get more leisure time in the evening to relax and engage in politics or other activities while women are pressured to engage in domestic household work (59).

For instance, the lines “Women in the huts would bear children every year” (Pariyadath, 26), delineates how the task of providing caregiving to the younger children falls naturally upon older girl children. Mayilamma was forced to discontinue her education as she had to look after her younger siblings as her mother had to work in the fields to feed her family. The narrative exposes the deep rooted patriarchal notions ingrained among men and women. Mayilamma’s desire to study was disapproved by her father who trivialized it with the simple question, “why do girls need to study?” (27). She says that girls were not allowed to swim in the lake. Her father made her collect the river water in a vessel and take bath. As a result, most

women did not know how to swim. There are other instances in the narrative that point to the conventional notions internalized among women. For example, Mayilamma talks about the various games that she and her friends played during her childhood days. Some of the games they played such as pounding rice, making rice and curry, etc resembled their daily chores (32).

### III. CONCLUSION

The selected primary texts take an ethnographic perspective and looks into the cultural constructions of environment that directed women’s domestic role as a caregiver. The maternal archetype is a culturally constructed image in the Ecofeminist discourse that aligns women with the notion of ‘care’ based on the symbolic connection between the fertile woman and the fertility of the land. This connection is based on the affirmation that both women and nature are life givers. By establishing an interconnection between the feminine principle and environmentalism, the Ecofeminist paradigm tends to depict nature as maternal. This depiction of nature as a maternal presence and further attribution of inherent qualities such as benevolence and nurturing capabilities parallels to the patriarchal expectations that society attribute to an Indian woman. In a traditional Indian society, women are expected to be perpetual caregivers; they have to constantly cater to the needs of their husband, children and other family members. Thus the Ecofeminist conception of the nature-woman affinity results in the glorification of archetypal motherhood trope---an image of a self sacrificing, enduring and devoted Indian woman (Swanson, 36).

### REFERENCES

- [1] Jyothibai Pariyadathu, Rangarajan, S., & Varma, S. (2018). *Mayilamma: the life of a tribal eco-warrior*. Orient Blackswan.
- [2] Leelakumariamamma and T. Ajeesh. (2011). *Jeevadaayini*. D.C Books.
- [3] Archambault, Anne. (1993). *A Critique of Ecofeminism*, Canadian Woman Studies.
- [4] Salleh, Ariel. (2017). *Ecofeminism as Politics. Nature, Marx and the Postmodern*. Rev. Ed, Zed Books. London.
- [5] Adams, Carol J. (2007). *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*. Continuum.
- [6] Griffin, Susan. (2016). *Woman and Nature: The Roaring inside Her*. Counterpoint, Berkeley, CA.
- [7] Merchant, Carolyn. (1996). *Earthcare: Women and the Environment*, Routledge. New York.



# Utilization, Effectiveness and Challenges of EFL Online Teaching in China during Covid-19

Liu Jiao

Graduate School, Lyceum of the Philippines University, Philippines

Received: 13 Jun 2023; Received in revised form: 14 Jul 2023; Accepted: 20 Jul 2023; Available online: 27 Jul 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted a global shift to online education, including English as a Foreign Language (EFL) courses in Chinese higher education. However, strategies to improve EFL online teaching in China are unexplored. This dissertation investigates the use, effectiveness, and challenges of EFL online courses in China during the pandemic. A descriptive correlational method was used to study the relationship among three variables, with data collected from 383 college English teachers in China. The results showed that EFL teachers are generally skilled at using online courses and find online EFL teaching effective. The main challenges identified were technological issues and reduced interaction. Age and teaching experience significantly impact online teaching utilization, effectiveness, and the ability to overcome these challenges. The study found a positive correlation between the extent of online teaching use and its effectiveness, and a negative correlation between use and challenges faced. As online teaching is used more and its effectiveness is increased, fewer challenges are faced. The dissertation suggests an interactive EFL online teaching model to optimize effectiveness and minimize challenges, offering a guide for delivering highly interactive and effective EFL online courses.

**Keywords**— EFL Online Course, Online Course Challenges, Teaching Effectiveness, Online Course Utilization

## I. INTRODUCTION

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic has led to monumental shifts in education, with an abrupt transition from traditional classroom instruction to online learning. Particularly in China, where English as a Foreign Language (EFL) courses play a pivotal role in higher education, this transition presents unique challenges and opportunities for exploration.

Previous research has focused on the students' perspective, but few attentions has been given to the teachers' perspectives, thereby creating a significant gap in our understanding of EFL online teaching. Additionally, effective strategies to enhance EFL online teaching within the unique context of China are yet to be fully comprehended and standardized.

This paper aims to address these gaps by examining the utilization, effectiveness and challenges of EFL online courses in China during the pandemic. It investigates how EFL teachers incorporate and navigate online platforms (utilization), assesses the impact and outcomes of online teaching on student learning (effectiveness), and explores the obstacles encountered in implementing EFL online courses (challenges).

Online learning, as defined by Allen and Seaman (2016), is primarily or exclusively delivered online. Adebo (2018) and others (Gonzalez and Louis, 2018; Abbas et al., 2021) describe it as education delivered over the internet, accessible anytime and anywhere through electronic devices. Mohamed Ally (2020) further emphasizes that online learning involves accessing learning materials, interacting with content, instructors, and other learners, and receiving support during the learning process.

The study of EFL online course utilization has developed over time, with research exploring various aspects of online teaching and learning. From the early stages of computer-mediated communication to the recent impacts of online technology integration, online learning has transitioned from a novelty to a mainstream educational delivery method (Wu, 2021). The teacher's perspective on the use of EFL online courses includes aspects such as technology readiness, use of online tools, teaching strategies, and interaction modes, which are the primary research areas in this study.

There is no universal definition of effective teaching in higher education, but it emphasizes the importance of high-quality teaching as a significant factor in enhancing student achievement (Devlin & Samarawickrema, 2010). In the context of online education, teaching effectiveness involves guiding, facilitating, and supporting students to achieve academic goals, encompassing skills to direct the learning process, create an engaging environment, and provide necessary support (Gorsky & Blau, 2009). The TPACK model (technological pedagogical content knowledge) has emerged as a crucial framework for understanding effective online teaching, integrating technology, and promoting higher-order thinking skills (Koehler et al., 2013; Wang, Y. A., 2022). Additionally, Hubbard's eight principles offer guidelines for technology integration, highlighting learning efficiency, effectiveness, access, convenience, motivation, teaching efficiency, teaching effectiveness, and institutional efficiency (Hubbard, 2019). The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) can be employed to evaluate teaching effectiveness by assessing teachers' acceptance of technology, based on perceived usefulness and ease of use (Charness & Boot, 2016). Positive attitudes lead to behavioral intentions and actual technology adoption and usage (Davis et al., 1989).

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) online can be challenging. EFL teachers must navigate technology integration, promote interactivity, address language barriers, provide individualized support, manage time effectively, design assessments, and be sensitive to cultural differences. The lack of face-to-face interaction adds another layer of complexity. Ko and Rossen (2017) highlight that teaching a course entirely online can be a challenging task, especially for those who are new to online teaching. The rapid shift to online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic exposed many teachers to new technologies, leading to challenges such as unstable internet connections, lack of access to necessary hardware, and the need to familiarize themselves with various online teaching platforms and tools (Hodges et al., 2020). In this study, challenges in EFL online teaching are examined,

encompassing technology, instruction, students, interaction, and students' macro and micro skills.

The interconnection of these three variables is crucial. High utilization of appropriate tools can enhance the effectiveness of online teaching, while inadequate utilization may increase challenges. Effectiveness is influenced by teachers' ability to overcome these challenges, and addressing these challenges can enhance both utilization and effectiveness.

The potential contributions of this research are manifold: extending understanding of EFL online teaching utilization in China; identifying challenges faced by teachers and suggesting strategies to mitigate them; and investigating the effectiveness of online teaching strategies to enhance student learning outcomes. The findings could serve as a valuable resource for EFL instructors, helping them develop effective online teaching strategies.

## II. RESEARCH DESIGN

The study employed a descriptive research design with a quantitative approach to examine the utilization, effectiveness, and challenges of EFL online teaching in Chinese universities.

### 2.1 Participants

A total of 387 English college teachers participated in the online questionnaire, with 383 responses considered valid for analysis. The questionnaire contained 87 close-ended questions and utilized a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 4. Participants were asked to provide demographic information, and a bilingual version of the questionnaire was used to ensure accuracy and avoid language barriers.

### 2.2 Instruments

The questionnaire designs used in this study were adapted from various sources related to EFL online teaching. The Utilization of English Online Teaching Questionnaire was based on studies by Yaqiong Cui (2021), Ghazi Algethami (2022), and Daniel Bailey (2021), which explored students' experience, interaction mode, and learner interactions in online EFL courses during the COVID-19 pandemic. The EFL Online Teaching Effectiveness Questionnaire was derived from a study by Bin Zou, Lulu Huang, Wulin Ma, and Yuqing Qiu (2021), focusing on the effectiveness of technology in EFL online teaching from the teachers' perspective. The EFL Online Teaching Challenges Questionnaire drew inspiration from works by Mona M. Hamad, Alrafeea S. Dafaallah, Abdulbasit A. Alhaj (2021), and Abdulhameed Abdulhadi Alhuwaydi (2021), which addressed challenges faced by EFL instructors in online teaching. To assess the reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot test was conducted.



The Cronbach Alpha coefficient for the entire questionnaire reached 0.810, indicating a satisfactory level of internal consistency for the overall questionnaire (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010).

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Distribution of the Respondents Profile

This study comprised a sample of 383 English teachers from both public and private universities in China, making it a well-representative population to yield reliable outcomes and comprehensively grasp the viewpoints of college English teachers in Chinese higher education institutions.

*Table 1. Percentage Distribution of the Respondents Profile*

| Sex                            | Frequency | Percentage % |
|--------------------------------|-----------|--------------|
| Male                           | 152       | 39.7         |
| Female                         | 231       | 60.3         |
| Age                            |           |              |
| 25 years old and below         | 27        | 7.0          |
| 26-34 years old                | 109       | 28.5         |
| 36-45 years old                | 181       | 47.3         |
| 46 years old and above         | 66        | 17.2         |
| English teaching experience    |           |              |
| Less than 5 year               | 125       | 32.6         |
| 6-10 years                     | 94        | 24.5         |
| 11 years and above             | 164       | 42.8         |
| Highest Academic Qualification |           |              |
| Bachelor degree                | 43        | 11.2         |
| Master degree                  | 305       | 79.6         |
| PhD                            | 35        | 9.1          |
| Type of University             |           |              |
| Public                         | 225       | 58.7         |
| Private                        | 158       | 41.3         |

Table 1 shows the respondents profile in terms of sex, age, English teaching experience, highest academic qualification and type of university. The study included respondents who were predominantly female English teachers (60.3%), reflecting a higher proportion of female teachers in the EFL context, which aligns with existing research on Chinese EFL teachers (Yu, 2015; Chen, 2013;

Dai & Zhang, 2004). The participants' age distribution was concentrated in the mid-career age group (36-45 years old, 47.3%), followed by the 26-34 age group (28.5%), with the age group of 30-44 being the main force among university teachers in China (Dara-Tafazoli et al., 2019; Chinese Ministry of Education, 2021). Teaching experience was distributed in a typical pattern, with younger participants having less experience (32.6% with less than 5 years) and older participants having more (42.8% with 11 years and above). Most participants held a Master's degree (79.6%), which is consistent with the improvement in educational qualifications among Chinese college teachers (Zhao & Wang, 2017; Wang, 2018). Public universities constituted 58.7% of the respondents, slightly higher than private universities (41.3%), reflecting the distribution of higher education institutions in China (Ministry of Education, 2021). The participants' educational background aligns with research showing that a teacher's educational degree correlates with their effectiveness as a teacher and student achievement (Goldhaber, 2016; Clotfelter et al., 2007).

#### 3.2 EFL Online teaching Utilization

The survey questionnaire reveals some of the key factors in the context of EFL online teaching utilization. The availability of reliable Internet access, computers, and audio-visual devices is essential for effective delivery of online education. EFL teachers heavily rely on screen-sharing as a tool to display teaching materials, photos, audio clips, and videos, emphasizing the significance of using proper English language skills in online courses. Clear communication is a priority for teachers to ensure that students can understand instructions, explanations, and course content accurately. Additionally, educators find great value in peer feedback during live sessions. These practices reflect the efforts of EFL teachers to optimize online teaching and enhance student learning outcomes.

*Table 2 Summary Table on EFL Online Teaching Utilization*

| Indicators                           | Weighted Mean | Verbal Interpretation | Rank |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------|------|
| 1. Technology Readiness              | 2.99          | Agree                 | 4    |
| 2. Level of online tools utilization | 3.10          | Agree                 | 1    |
| 3. Teaching Strategies               | 3.09          | Agree                 | 2    |
| 4. Interaction Mode                  | 3.08          | Agree                 | 3    |
| Composite Mean                       | 3.07          | Agree                 |      |

*Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 – 1.49 = Strongly Disagree*

The result shows that English teachers generally show a positive perception and overall agreement regarding the utilization of online teaching practices, with a composite mean of 3.07 (see Table 2), indicating agreement on the importance of technology readiness, online tool utilization, teaching strategies, and interaction modes in their online teaching. The summary table rankings emphasize the significance of online tool utilization, appropriate teaching strategies, meaningful interaction, and technology readiness in a sequential manner for effective implementation of online teaching. Teachers' commitment to using online tools, employing effective strategies, and promoting interaction creates a conducive online learning environment and enhances the overall teaching and learning experience.

### 3.3 EFL Online Teaching Effectiveness

In terms of EFL online teaching effectiveness, the survey questionnaire results demonstrate that the respondents are skilled at integrating teaching content, teaching methods, and technology, such as the Internet and digital media, into their online teaching practices. This integration enhances the convenience and efficiency of learning as students can easily and quickly download course materials. The respondents' acceptance of technology is reflected in their perceived ease of use, which is a significant factor influencing their positive attitude towards online teaching technology. Moreover, the ease with which the respondents conduct real-time online English lessons indicates a high level of comfort and acceptance of technology in their teaching methods. These findings suggest that effective integration of technology positively impacts EFL online teaching outcomes and enhances the overall learning experience for students.

*Table 3 Summary Table on EFL Online Teaching Effectiveness*

| Indicators                    | Weighted Mean | Verbal Interpretation | Rank |
|-------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------|------|
| 1. TPACK Model                | 2.97          | Agree                 | 1    |
| 2. Hubbard's Eight Principles | 2.81          | Agree                 | 3    |
| 3. TAM                        | 2.93          | Agree                 | 2    |
| Composite Mean                | 2.90          | Agree                 |      |

*Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 – 1.49 = Strongly Disagree*

Table 3 presents a ranking of teachers' perception of the effectiveness of EFL online teaching using three theoretical frameworks. The overall composite mean of 2.90 indicates a general agreement among the respondents on the effectiveness of online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic in China. The top-ranked framework is TPACK, with a weighted mean of 2.97, emphasizing the importance of integrating technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge for effective teaching. The second-ranked framework is TAM, with a weighted mean of 2.93, highlighting the significance of perceived usefulness and ease of use of technology in teachers' acceptance and utilization. The third-ranked framework is Hubbard's Eight Principles, with a weighted mean of 2.81, providing guidelines for integrating technology in language teaching. Overall, the results indicate agreement with all three frameworks, with TPACK slightly leading the others in evaluating the effectiveness of EFL online teaching.

### 3.4 EFL Online Teaching Challenges

The survey questionnaire results demonstrate that the most pressing challenge in EFL online teaching is technical problems. Additionally, the respondents find the home environment to be a significant challenge that can affect concentration and engagement. Another major challenge is the over-dependence on online translation tools for Chinese students in English online courses, limiting essential oral practice. Furthermore, the shift in communication modes in the online environment may impact speaking skill assessment, highlighting the significance of visibility in evaluating language proficiency.

*Table 4 Summary Table on EFL Online Teaching Challenges*

| Indicators                          | Weighted Mean | Verbal Interpretation | Rank |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------|------|
| 1. using technology                 | 3.12          | Agree                 | 1    |
| 2. EFL instruction                  | 2.93          | Agree                 | 5    |
| 3. students                         | 3.02          | Agree                 | 3.5  |
| 4. interaction                      | 3.06          | Agree                 | 2    |
| 5. students' macro and micro skills | 3.02          | Agree                 | 3.5  |
| Composite Mean                      | 3.03          | Agree                 |      |

*Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 – 1.49 = Strongly Disagree*

Table 4 provides an overview of the challenges in EFL online teaching, grouped into five main areas: technology use, online instruction, student interaction, language skills, and general student challenges. The Composite Mean is 3.03, indicating that teachers generally agree that these challenges are significant. The top-ranking challenge is associated with technology use, encompassing issues like costs, technical problems, and lack of training. The second-ranked challenge pertains to online course interactions, including the lack of interactivity and difficulty in reading body language. Challenges related to student access to technology and language skills are tied for third place. Challenges with instructional aspects rank fifth, covering issues like external distractions and creating meaningful activities. Overall, technology usage and interaction are identified as the primary challenges in EFL online teaching.

### 3.5 Difference of Responses When Grouped According to Profile

The results revealed that age and experience play significant roles in online EFL teaching. Specifically, individuals aged 46 and above, as well as those with over 11 years of English teaching experience, demonstrate proficiency in utilizing online tools, employing effective teaching strategies, and being prepared for technology use. Notably, male respondents aged 46 or older, with more than 11 years of teaching experience, holding a PhD, and affiliated with private schools, receive higher assessments in online EFL teaching. On the other hand, males face greater challenges with students' skills, while individuals aged 25 and below encounter diverse challenges in online EFL instruction. Moreover, teachers with less than 5 years of experience show distinct differences in technology readiness concerning challenges with online EFL instruction and students' skills. These findings underscore the importance of considering demographics and experience in effectively utilizing technology and overcoming challenges in online EFL teaching.

### 3.6 Correlations among Utilization, Effectiveness, and Challenges

Based on the survey results, the correlations among the utilization of online teaching tools, teaching effectiveness, and the challenges faced in online EFL teaching are summarized in Figure 1.

The study reveals a significant and consistent correlation between online teaching utilization and EFL online teaching effectiveness, as assessed through various models. Integrating technology, employing effective teaching strategies, and fostering interactive environments

are crucial for enhancing EFL online teaching. Additionally, higher technology readiness, increased use of online tools, effective teaching strategies, and optimized interaction modes lead to fewer challenges in online EFL teaching. This underscores the importance of these factors in creating a more efficient and effective online EFL teaching environment. Moreover, as EFL online teaching becomes more effective, the challenges faced decrease, highlighting the pivotal role of technology integration and pedagogical expertise in improving EFL online teaching effectiveness and reducing associated challenges.

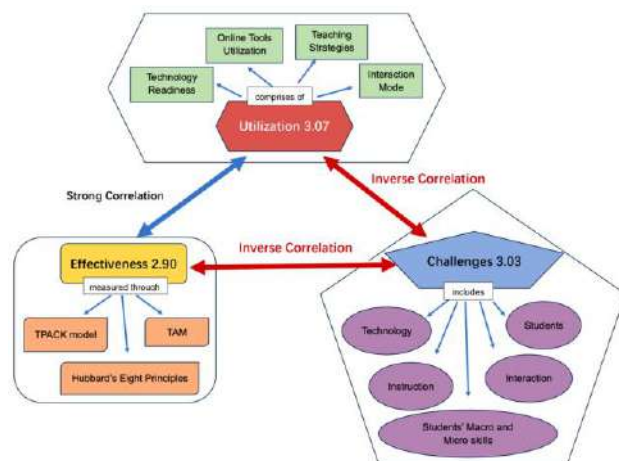


Fig.1: Correlation among Utilization, Effectiveness, and Challenges

Figure 2 illustrates the interrelationships among the 12 sub-dimensions under the variables of EFL online teaching utilization, effectiveness, and challenges. The arrows represent the most significant correlations between sub-dimensions across variables. Notably, technology readiness and interaction mode are ranked lower in the utilization of English online courses. Hubbard's eight principles rank lowest in evaluating EFL online course teaching effectiveness, as shown in Figure 2. Notably, "challenges with instruction" in EFL online courses exhibit the closest relationship with other sub-dimensions. The inverse relations indicate that by improving online tools utilization, teaching strategies, interaction modes, and technology readiness, the challenges with instruction can be effectively reduced. However, challenges related to technology and interaction require more attention for future improvements in EFL online teaching strategies. Addressing technical issues is crucial to ensure a smoother teaching process. By addressing these factors in their teaching strategies, EFL teachers can improve the overall effectiveness of their teaching.

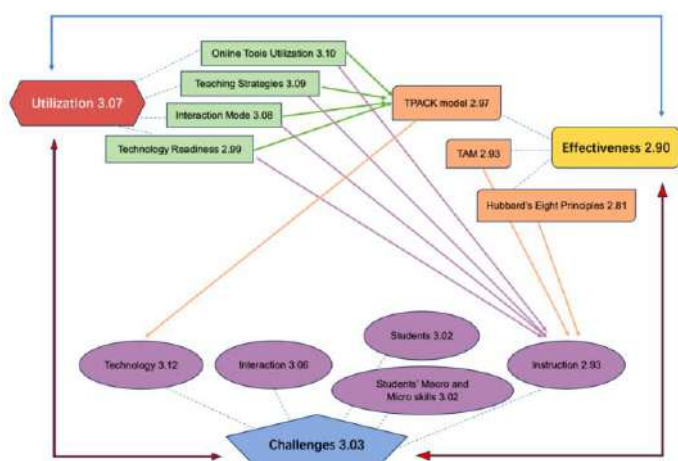


Fig.2: Correlation among 12 sub-dimensions

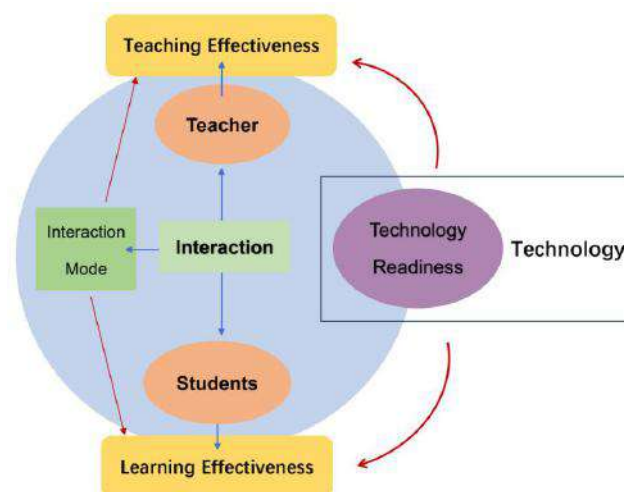


Fig.3: Interactive Online Teaching Model

#### IV. INTERACTIVE ONLINE TEACHING MODEL

Based on the analysis of the results, Figure 3 presents the relationships between the dimensions as an interactive model for online teaching. The model indicates that enhancing the effectiveness of teaching and learning in an EFL online course is closely linked to improving technology readiness and interaction modes. When teachers are well-prepared technologically, they can deliver lessons more effectively and achieve better learning outcomes. This involves being proficient with various online teaching tools and platforms and resolving technical issues that may arise during classes. Similarly, the mode of interaction is crucial for online teaching effectiveness. Active student participation through strategies like peer feedback, real-time discussions, and group activities can significantly enhance learning outcomes, promoting communication skills and critical thinking while fostering collaboration among students. As technology readiness and interaction mode improve, the challenges related to technology utilization and classroom interactions decrease, as teachers become more skilled at managing technical aspects and facilitating engaging and interactive lessons. Therefore, in the context of EFL online teaching, institutions should provide necessary technical support and training to teachers and encourage the use of interactive teaching strategies that promote active student participation.

#### V. CONCLUSION

Based on the results derived from the data collected, the following conclusions can be drawn. The profile data shows a higher proportion of female teachers, with most respondents falling within the middle-aged category and holding Master's degrees. There is a general consensus among English teachers in favor of utilizing online teaching practices, acknowledging the significance of technology readiness, online tool application, teaching strategies, and interactive modes in online teaching. The integration of technology, pedagogy, and content (TPACK) is perceived as most effective in EFL online courses, followed by the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and then Hubbard's Eight Principles. Challenges in EFL online courses mainly revolve around technology use and interaction dynamics, while difficulties related to students' skills are of slightly lesser concern. Older and more experienced teachers exhibit higher proficiency in online teaching utilization. Increased utilization of online teaching positively correlates with the effectiveness of EFL online courses and reduces challenges faced during instruction. An interactive EFL online teaching model is proposed to enhance engagement and effectiveness while mitigating challenges related to technology and interaction.

To enhance EFL online learning, students may actively engage in interactive activities, group discussions, and utilize multimodal content and exercises to improve English skills. Regular assessment and feedback collection are crucial for monitoring progress and fostering continuous learning and community building. Institutions can support EFL teachers by offering professional development to improve technological readiness, providing technical assistance to overcome challenges, and



ensuring a diverse range of instructional materials suitable for online teaching. EFL teachers should regularly evaluate their online teaching practices, seeking feedback from both teachers and students to identify areas for improvement and adapt their interactive teaching strategy accordingly. Future researchers can develop flexible frameworks to assess the effectiveness of online teaching, considering diverse contexts and specific strategies and interaction modes for various digital platforms. The proposed interactive teaching model can be evaluated and implemented in a blended teaching context post-pandemic, redefining the role of technology to enhance in-person teaching and fostering a sense of community, with continuous monitoring and adjustments for optimal effectiveness.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all who contributed to this dissertation. Firstly, I extend my thanks to Dr. Beverly Caiga, my advisor, for her invaluable guidance and support. Special thanks to Dr. Precy Guerra for her advice during the writing process, and Dr. Analie Patena for her expertise in statistical analysis. Lastly, I am deeply grateful to my family, friends, and coworkers for their encouragement and support.

### REFERENCES

- [1] Abbas, A., Hosseini, S., Núñez, J. L. M., and Sastre-Merino, S. (2021). Emerging technologies in the education for innovative pedagogies and competency development. *Australas. J. Educ. Technol.* 37, 1–5. doi: 10.14742/ajet.7680
- [2] Adebo, P. (2018). Online Teaching and Learning. *International Journal of Advanced Research in Computer Science and Software Engineering*, 8(2), 73. <https://doi.org/10.23956/ijarcsse.v8i2.549>
- [3] Algethami, G. (2022). Teachers' Perspectives towards Teaching English Online at the Tertiary Level in Saudi Arabia. *Arab World English Journal*, 2, 317–328. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/covid2.21>
- [4] Allen, I. E., & Seaman, J. (2016). Online report card: Tracking online education in the United States. Massachusetts: Babson Survey. *Research Group*.
- [5] Mohamed, Ally. (2022). "Foundations of Educational Theory for Online Learning," in *Theory and Practice of Online Learning*, ed. Terry Anderson (Edmonton, Alberta: Athabasca University Press, (2004), 15–44.
- [6] Bailey, D. (2021). Interactivity during Covid-19: mediation of learner interactions on social presence and expected learning outcome within videoconference EFL courses. *Journal of Computers in Education*, 9(2), 291–313. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40692-021-00204-w>
- [7] Charness, Neil. & Boot, R. Walter. (2016). *Handbook of the Psychology of Aging (Eighth Edition)*. Academic Press, p. 389–407.
- [8] Chen, L. (2013). Analysis of the Current Situation of Faculty in Comprehensive College English Education Majors. *Journal of Chifeng University (Natural Science Edition)*, 09, 210–212. doi: 10.13398/j.cnki.issn1673-260x.2013.09.096.
- [9] Cui, Y. (2021). Perceived Learning Outcomes and Interaction Mode Matter: Students' Experience of Taking Online EFL Courses During COVID-19. *English Language Teaching*, 14(6), 84. <https://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ELT.V14N6P84>
- [10] Dara-Tafazoli, M., Parra, E. G., & Abril, C. A. H. (2019). Attitude towards Computer-Assisted Language Learning: Do Gender, Age and Educational Level Matter? *Teaching English with Technology*, 19(3), 22–39.
- [11] Dornyei, Z., & Taguchi, T. (2010). Questionnaires in Second Language Research Construction, Administration and Processing (2nd ed.). New York Routledge. *Scientific Research Publishing*. (n.d.).
- [12] Algethami, G. (2022). Teachers' Perspectives towards Teaching English Online at the Tertiary Level in Saudi Arabia. *Arab World English Journal*, 2, 317–328. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/covid2.21>
- [13] Clotfelter, Charles T. & Ladd, Helen F. & Vigdor, Jacob L. (2007). Teacher credentials and student achievement: Longitudinal analysis with student fixed effects. *Economics of Education Review*, Elsevier. vol. 26(6). p 673–682. December.
- [14] Dai, M., & Zhang, X. (2004). A Sampling Survey on the Quality of College English Teachers. *Journal of PLA Foreign Languages Institute*, 02, 42–46. doi: CNKI:SUN:JFJW.0.2004-02-009.
- [15] Devlin, M. & Samarawickrema, G. (2010, April). The criteria of effective teaching in a changing higher education context. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 29(2), 111–124
- [16] Goldhaber, D. (2016). In Schools, Teacher Quality Matters Most: Today's research reinforces Coleman's findings. *Education Next*, 16(2), 56–62.
- [17] Gonzalez, D., & Louis, R. St. (2018). Online Learning. *The TESOL Encyclopedia of English Language Teaching*, 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118784235.eelt0423>
- [18] Gorsky, P., & Blau, I. (2009). *Online Teaching Effectiveness : A Tale of Two Instructors*. 10(3), 1–27.
- [19] Hamad, M. M., Dafaallah, A. B., & Alhaj, A. A. (2021). The Challenges of Online English Language Teaching From EFL Instructors' Point of View in KKU, Tehama Campus During COVID 19 Period. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 12(4), 543–556.
- [20] Hodges, C., Moore, S., Lockee, B., Trust, T., & Bond, A. (2020). The difference between emergency remote teaching and online learning. *Educause Review*, 27.
- [21] Huang, X., Liu, X., Hu, Y., & Liu, Q. (2021). The Effect of Online Collaborative Prewriting via DingTalk Group on EFL Learners' Writing Anxiety and Writing Performance.

- Springer eBooks, 48–60. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92836-0\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92836-0_5)
- [22] Hubbard, P. (2019). Five Keys from the Past to the Future of CALL. *International Journal of Computer-assisted Language Learning and Teaching*, 9(3), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.4018/ijcallt.2019070101>
- [23] Ko, S., & Rossen, S. (2017). *Teaching online: A practical guide (4th ed.)*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- [24] Koehler, M. J., Mishra, P., & Cain, W. (2013). What is technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK)? *Journal of Education*, 193(3), 13–19.
- [25] Education Statistics for 2021. (2021). *Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China*. Retrieved from [http://m.moe.gov.cn/jyb\\_sjzl/moe\\_560/2021/](http://m.moe.gov.cn/jyb_sjzl/moe_560/2021/)
- [26] Wang, Yan. (2018). Changes in academic structure of full-time teachers in regional universities. *Journal of Architectural Education in Institutions of Higher Learning*. 2018(04). Page:151-159.
- [27] Wang, Y. A. (2022). A two-dimensional TPACK scale for English as a foreign language teachers. *Education and Information Technologies*, 27(1), 1-23.
- [28] Wu, S. Y. (2021). How Teachers Conduct Online Teaching During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Case Study of Taiwan. *Frontiers in Education*, 6(May), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2021.675434>
- [29] Yu, S. (2015). Analysis of the Gender Imbalance Phenomenon in English Education Majors in Higher Education Institutions: A Case Study of the Education College of N University. *Overseas English*, 15, 242-244. doi: CNKI:SUN:HWYY.0.2015-15-107.
- [30] Zhao, Y., & Wang, J. (2017). Analysis of Changes in Educational Background of Full-time University Teachers in China in the Past Two Decades. *Research in Higher Education of China*, (1), 4.



# Reading Strategies, Motivation, and Self-efficacy of Chinese EFL College Students

Yao Haiyan

Graduate School, Lyceum of the Philippines University, Philippines

Received: 15 Jun 2023; Received in revised form: 12 Jul 2023; Accepted: 19 Jul 2023; Available online: 27 Jul 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— English teaching emphasizes refining students' reading skills, particularly evident in China's education system where the value of reading is consistently highlighted throughout various stages and exams. However, the existing pedagogical methods aimed at improving reading aptitude have not yielded the expected results. Graduates often fail to meet the professional reading standards required by employers, indicating a significant research gap that needs attention. This study aimed to address this gap by investigating how reading strategies, motivation, and self-efficacy impact English comprehension among college students. Using a descriptive correlational approach, data was collected from 468 non-English major Chinese college students through a survey. The findings revealed that female participants and those with over a decade of experience employed more effective reading strategies and demonstrated higher reading motivation. Additionally, students from the Computer Studies department and those with more than ten years of experience exhibited stronger self-belief. The study showed a highly significant correlation between these three variables, indicating that improved reading tactics are associated with increased reading motivation and self-belief. Moreover, higher motivation levels among students were linked to enhanced self-confidence. In conclusion, the study recommends a reading program to enhance the reading comprehension of college students learning English as a foreign language.

**Keywords**— College English, Motivation, Reading Comprehension, Reading Strategies, Self-efficacy

## I. INTRODUCTION

Reading, an essential skill in English language acquisition, is a significant focus of the Chinese education system, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Assessments ranging from school entrance exams to the College English Test for Band 4 and Band 6 attest to its importance (Wang & Guan, 2020). However, despite this emphasis, there seems to be a disconnect between the desired outcomes and the reality. Recent employer surveys revealed that a significant percentage of certificate holders, specifically only 39.9%, were deemed proficient in reading professional English literature (Li & Wang, 2021). This deficiency signals that current pedagogical approaches might not be effectively developing reading abilities, particularly for non-English

major students, thereby necessitating an exploration of effective reading strategies.

In response, the educational research community has invested considerable effort into understanding reading processes, especially strategies that enhance comprehension. Research has focused on identifying and analyzing the reading techniques used by successful readers, contrasting successful and unsuccessful readers, and evaluating the tangible impacts of reading strategies on reading scores. Such studies have provided valuable insights into effective pedagogical interventions and how structured instruction in reading strategies can influence learners' comprehension (Li & Zhang, 2020; Wu & Wang, 2021; Hu, 2017).

However, a considerable research gap persists

regarding how reading strategies intertwine with motivation and self-efficacy, particularly in EFL contexts where language and cultural barriers are additional hurdles. Reading strategies, motivation, and self-efficacy are distinct yet interconnected components that affect EFL reading comprehension. For example, reading strategies, such as skimming, scanning, and contextual analysis, guide learners through complex texts, making reading more engaging and less strenuous (Chen, 2021). Motivation acts as the catalyst for students to engage with a text persistently, even when faced with challenging sections (Wang, 2019). Self-efficacy, on the other hand, reflects a student's confidence in their reading abilities, influencing their approach to texts, their use of reading strategies, and ultimately, their comprehension outcomes (Zhou, 2020).

This study aims to examine the relationship between these three components among Chinese EFL college students, a demographic facing significant demands for English reading competence. It is critical to understand these relationships to foster competent readers and promote effective reading instruction. Previous studies suggest that reading comprehension success is anchored on the synergistic interaction of reading strategies, motivation, and self-efficacy (Wu, 2023; Zhang & Li, 2022).

Despite the high importance accorded to reading in key examinations, the gap between expected outcomes and actual abilities of students is concerning. Thus, this research, by focusing on reading strategies, motivation, and self-efficacy, assumes significant importance. The study seeks to illuminate the combined influence of these variables on reading comprehension. The insights could guide the creation of effective interventions aimed at enhancing reading skills among Chinese EFL college students, impacting instructional practices, curriculum design, and policy decisions.

In summary, the emphasis on reading skills in the Chinese EFL context is substantial. However, the mismatch between the high importance placed on reading in examinations and the dissatisfaction voiced by employers suggests that current instructional methods may not be effectively fostering these skills. This study aims to bridge this gap by delving into the intricate dynamics of reading strategies, motivation, and self-efficacy among Chinese EFL college students. In doing so, it hopes to inform instructional practices and assessment design, thereby assisting students in developing the reading proficiency needed for future success.

## II. METHODS

### 2.1 Participants

This research selected its participants via an online questionnaire, specifically designed for college students taking the College English course at a university located in Shaanxi province, China. The participants comprised both first-year and second-year students, ensuring a range of experiences and perspectives to enrich the research. Notably, the participants hailed from four different departments within the university: the School of Accounting, School of Humanities and Education, School of Computer Science, and School of Business. This diversity in academic disciplines offered an interesting perspective to analyze the intersection between English language learning and various fields of study.

Several factors were considered to decide the appropriate sample size for this study, including a margin of error of 4.5%, a confidence level of 95.5%, and an anticipated response distribution of 50%. Additionally, the Admissions Office of Xijing University estimated that the total number of first and second-year students from the four schools was around 8,000. Using the Raosoft calculator, the study found that the ideal sample size would be 468 participants. This size was deemed adequate to yield a representative sample, capable of delivering reliable findings.

The participants in this study were not newcomers to English language learning. They had already received formal EFL instruction for a period of twelve to fourteen years. This implies that they already had a substantial base in English, as they had been engaged with the language throughout their primary and secondary education. The diversity in English language learning exposure also created an opportunity to investigate the relationship between the length of language learning, proficiency levels, and learning strategies among college students.

### 2.2 Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative analysis method to explore the factors affecting the comprehension level of Chinese EFL college students. The investigation focuses on three primary variables: reading strategies, reading motivation, and self-efficacy. Initially, personal information of the students is collected to assess how demographic factors and background characteristics influence reading comprehension levels.

Three distinct instruments are used to evaluate the variables in this study. Firstly, the Survey of Reading Strategies Questionnaire is employed to measure reading strategies. Additionally, the Reading Motivation Questionnaire, adapted from Wang and Guthrie (2004), assesses students' motivation to read. Moreover, the



English Self-efficacy Questionnaire, developed by Raven Richardson Piercey (2013), serves as the basis for the reading self-efficacy questionnaire.

The reliability of the instruments is tested using the Cronbach Alpha coefficient. As a result, all variables show Cronbach's Alpha values within the "Acceptable" to "Excellent" range, indicating reasonably to highly reliable measurements.

To ensure reliability and validity, the questionnaire is translated into Chinese and a pilot study is conducted. Following this, the final version of the questionnaire is distributed to the participants, and data collection takes place using the Questionnaire Star platform and other online methods.

Data from the questionnaire are organized into tables and assessed using weighted mean and verbal interpretations of the Likert scale. Furthermore, Spearman Correlation Analysis is utilized to evaluate relationships among reading strategies, reading motivation, and self-efficacy. Additionally, the t-test is used to examine significant differences between and among the variables. Consequently, the results are analyzed, interpreted, and conclusions are drawn based on the analysis. Ultimately, recommendations for future research are provided.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Summary of Reading Strategies, Motivation and Self-efficacy

Table 1 Summary Table on Reading Strategies

| Indicators                    | Weighted Mean | Verbal Interpretation | Rank |
|-------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------|------|
| 1. Global Reading Strategies  | 3.00          | Agree                 | 3    |
| 2. Problem Solving Strategies | 3.05          | Agree                 | 1    |
| 3. Support Reading Strategies | 3.02          | Agree                 | 2    |
| <b>Composite Mean</b>         | <b>3.02</b>   | <b>Agree</b>          |      |

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 – 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

Table 1 summarizes survey results and assessment scores collected on different reading strategies, using a Likert scale to measure participants' agreement or disagreement towards a set of statements on a symmetric scale. The

average scores for all three types of strategies are around 3, falling within the "Agree" range. This suggests that respondents generally find these strategies effective and useful.

Problem-solving strategies received the highest rating with a weighted mean of 3.05. These tactics help readers overcome comprehension challenges by revisiting difficult passages, looking up unfamiliar words, or proceeding with the text and returning to problematic areas later. The top ranking highlights the perceived value of problem-solving strategies in promoting understanding.

Support reading strategies closely follow with a weighted mean of 3.02. These strategies enhance comprehension and memory of the text through activities like note-taking, highlighting key parts, summarizing, and engaging in discussions. The second-place ranking emphasizes their importance in consolidating understanding.

Global reading strategies rank third with a weighted mean of 3.00. These encompass broader tactics such as setting reading goals, previewing the text, and relating it to pre-existing knowledge. While ranked lower, they remain significant for reading comprehension.

Effective reading strategies play a crucial role in successful comprehension. Various comprehension methods, from basic to advanced, have been identified, and research shows a positive relationship between metacognitive reading strategies and comprehension. A study by Manh & Phan (2021) on Vietnamese undergraduates learning a second language found increased awareness of these strategies led to better comprehension of reading content.

Table 2 Summary Table on Motivation

| Indicators              | Weighted Mean | Verbal Interpretation | Rank |
|-------------------------|---------------|-----------------------|------|
| 1. Intrinsic Motivation | 2.94          | Agree                 | 2    |
| 2. Extrinsic Motivation | 3.06          | Agree                 | 1    |
| <b>Composite Mean</b>   | <b>3.00</b>   | <b>Agree</b>          |      |

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 – 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

Table 2 presents a summary of reading motivation, focusing on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as primary indicators. The composite mean value of 3.00 indicates that participants generally agree that both forms of motivation significantly affect their reading habits.

Intrinsic motivation, with a weighted mean of 2.94, represents internal urges or enthusiasm for reading, driven by personal gratification, intellectual curiosity, and the pleasure of gaining knowledge. Participants concur that intrinsic motivation plays a significant role in their reading behavior, although it ranks second in importance.

Extrinsic motivation, with a weighted mean of 3.06, encompasses external factors like incentives, acknowledgments, and avoiding adverse outcomes, and notably influences reading practices. This form of motivation occupies the top spot, suggesting it may have a somewhat stronger effect on reading motivation compared to intrinsic factors in this research.

Existing research highlights the importance of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations in shaping reading behaviors, with intrinsic motivation strongly associated with academics, self-confidence, and cognitive engagement (Soemer & Schiefele, 2018). It positively predicts reading achievement and correlates with diverse reading strategies (Wang et al., 2020). On the other hand, extrinsic motivation shows lower correlations with academic, self-confidence, and cognitive engagement and may have varied effects on reading achievement (Soemer & Schiefele, 2018; Wang et al., 2020). The impact of extrinsic motivation on the use of reading strategies remains unclear.

In conclusion, both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations play pivotal roles in driving reading behaviors, with intrinsic motivation having a slightly greater influence. Nevertheless, the relationship between these motivations and reading behavior is complex, influenced by various additional factors. The significance of extrinsic motivation, particularly the use of incentives, remains a topic of ongoing investigation (MSEd, 2022).

*Table 3 Summary Table on Self-efficacy*

| Indicators               | Weighted Mean | Verbal Interpretation | Rank |
|--------------------------|---------------|-----------------------|------|
| 1. Mastery Experiences   | 2.76          | Agree                 | 2    |
| 2. Social Persuasions    | 2.68          | Agree                 | 3.5  |
| 3. Vicarious Experiences | 2.92          | Agree                 | 1    |
| 4. Physiological States  | 2.68          | Agree                 | 3.5  |
| <b>Composite Mean</b>    | <b>2.76</b>   | <b>Agree</b>          |      |

*Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 – 1.49 = Strongly Disagree*

Table 3 presents a summary of self-efficacy, featuring four key indicators: mastery experiences, social persuasions, vicarious experiences, and physiological states. The composite mean of 2.76 indicates that respondents widely agree that all four indicators significantly influence their self-efficacy, highlighting the importance of personal accomplishments, observed experiences, social feedback, and emotional responses in building confidence in their abilities.

Vicarious experiences rank highest with a weighted mean of 2.92, demonstrating their significant impact on self-efficacy. Observing others succeed or being told about their mastery plays a vital role in shaping self-efficacy beliefs, as supported by various studies, including those by Meade (2019) and Sc (2017).

Mastery experiences rank second with a weighted mean of 2.76, indicating that personal achievements are crucial in shaping self-efficacy beliefs.

In the third position, both social persuasions and physiological states share a weighted mean of 2.68. Respondents agree that receiving positive feedback from others and experiencing emotional reactions contribute similarly to their self-efficacy.

Overall, the participants display a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of self-efficacy. They recognize the significance of personal achievements, lessons learned from observing others, and the impact of social feedback and emotional responses on self-efficacy. These elements synergistically boost their confidence in performing tasks effectively and reaching their goals, enriching their perception of self-efficacy. Notably, studies by Unrau et al. (2017) and Alharbi (2021) also highlight the positive relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and reading performance, emphasizing the importance of fostering self-efficacy to improve outcomes.

### 3.2 Profile-based Reading Strategies, Motivation and Self-efficacy

Among the total respondents, 295 individuals were females, while 173 were males, indicating a majority of female participants. The School of Computer Science had the most respondents, comprising 30.1 percent of the total, largely due to its higher student enrollment. As for English learning experience, 51.3 percent reported having studied for over 10 years, while 38.0 percent had 6-10 years of experience.

Significant differences were observed when grouping respondents according to sex and English learning experience. Females and those with more than 10 years of experience demonstrated superior reading strategies compared to others. Similarly, when grouped based on sex (except for extrinsic motivation) and English

learning experience, females and those with more than 10 years of experience displayed higher levels of motivation in reading.

Additionally, significant differences were observed when considering the respondents' school (except for vicarious experiences) and English learning experience (except for physiological states). Specifically, those enrolled in the School of Computer Science and those with more than 10 years of experience exhibited greater self-efficacy.

Overall, the study highlights the influence of sex, school, and English learning experience on profile-based reading strategies, motivation, and self-efficacy. The findings emphasize the importance of considering these factors when assessing and addressing reading-related outcomes in the context of language learning.

### 3.3 Relationship among Reading Strategy, Motivation and Self-efficacy

Table 4 Relationship Between Reading Strategies and Motivation

| Global Reading Strategies         | r-value | p-value | Interpretation     |
|-----------------------------------|---------|---------|--------------------|
| Intrinsic Motivation              | .605**  | 0.000   | Highly Significant |
| Extrinsic Motivation              | .647**  | 0.000   | Highly Significant |
| <b>Problem Solving Strategies</b> |         |         |                    |
| Intrinsic Motivation              | .661**  | 0.000   | Highly Significant |
| Extrinsic Motivation              | .706**  | 0.000   | Highly Significant |
| <b>Support Reading Strategies</b> |         |         |                    |
| Intrinsic Motivation              | .760**  | 0.000   | Highly Significant |
| Extrinsic Motivation              | .735**  | 0.000   | Highly Significant |

Legend: Significant at  $p$ -value < 0.01

In Table 4, noteworthy findings reveal a robust correlation between reading strategies, including global, problem-solving, and support strategies, and motivation, encompassing both intrinsic and extrinsic aspects. The statistical analysis confirmed the significance of these relationships, as indicated by the low  $p$ -values, underscoring the substantial and meaningful connections between all strategies and both forms of motivation. These

findings emphasize the importance of considering how different reading strategies can significantly impact and interact with students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivations to read effectively.

Among the various strategies, support reading demonstrated the strongest correlation with reading motivation, indicating high levels of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Additionally, both global and problem-solving strategies showed significant correlations with both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, suggesting that these strategies are associated with heightened motivation for reading among the participants.

Studies by Roomy and Alhawsawi (2019) and Wang et al. (2020) support these findings, showing that employing various reading strategies enhances reading habits and motivation. Additionally, McRae and Guthrie (2013) suggest that providing challenging tasks can further boost motivation for reading.

Table 5 Relationship Between Reading Motivation and Self-efficacy

| Intrinsic Motivation        | r-value | p-value | Interpretation     |
|-----------------------------|---------|---------|--------------------|
| Mastery Experiences         | .718**  | 0.000   | Highly Significant |
| Social Persuasions          | .650**  | 0.000   | Highly Significant |
| Vicarious Experiences       | .699**  | 0.000   | Highly Significant |
| Physiological States        | .302**  | 0.000   | Highly Significant |
| <b>Extrinsic Motivation</b> |         |         |                    |
| Mastery Experiences         | .689**  | 0.000   | Highly Significant |
| Social Persuasions          | .597**  | 0.000   | Highly Significant |
| Vicarious Experiences       | .719**  | 0.000   | Highly Significant |
| Physiological States        | .296**  | 0.000   | Highly Significant |

Legend: Significant at  $p$ -value < 0.01

Table 5 reveals a moderate direct correlation between reading strategies and self-efficacy, supported by significant  $p$ -values. Worldwide reading strategies show highly significant correlations with all four self-efficacy components, with vicarious experiences displaying the most substantial correlation.

Problem-solving and support reading strategies exhibit meaningful correlations with all four components of self-efficacy, highlighting their significance in shaping learners' confidence. Among the self-efficacy components, vicarious experiences demonstrate the strongest correlation, emphasizing the substantial impact of observing others' successes on one's self-belief. On the other hand, physiological states exhibit the lowest correlation, indicating that learners' emotional responses and physiological states may have a comparatively weaker influence on their self-efficacy beliefs.

Recent studies by Naseri (2012), Almohammadi (2023), Mohammed (2022), and Altumigah and Alkhaleefah (2022) contribute valuable insights to the field by providing empirical evidence that supports the positive association between reading strategies and self-efficacy among learners. These findings affirm that learners who actively engage in a diverse range of reading strategies tend to cultivate stronger self-efficacy beliefs.

*Table 6 Relationship between Motivation and Self-efficacy*

| <b>Intrinsic Motivation</b> | <b>r-value</b> | <b>p-value</b> | <b>Interpretation</b> |
|-----------------------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| Mastery Experiences         | .718**         | 0.000          | Highly Significant    |
| Social Persuasions          | .650**         | 0.000          | Highly Significant    |
| Vicarious Experiences       | .699**         | 0.000          | Highly Significant    |
| Physiological States        | .302**         | 0.000          | Highly Significant    |
| <b>Extrinsic Motivation</b> |                |                |                       |
| Mastery Experiences         | .689**         | 0.000          | Highly Significant    |
| Social Persuasions          | .597**         | 0.000          | Highly Significant    |
| Vicarious Experiences       | .719**         | 0.000          | Highly Significant    |
| Physiological States        | .296**         | 0.000          | Highly Significant    |

*Legend: Significant at p-value < 0.01*

Table 6 presents the correlation between reading motivation and self-efficacy. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation factors are significantly related to self-efficacy, particularly mastery experiences, social persuasions, and vicarious experiences, showing strong relationships.

For intrinsic motivation, mastery experiences, social persuasions and vicarious experiences exhibit robust

positive relationships with self-efficacy, while physiological states maintain a statistically significant connection. In the case of extrinsic motivation, mastery experiences, social persuasions, and vicarious experiences also show strong positive correlations.

Numerous studies have found a positive correlation between self-efficacy and motivation. Sener and Erol (2017) identified a significant connection between self-efficacy and motivation among EFL learners. Ma et al. (2018) emphasized the influence of self-efficacy on intrinsic motivation and language proficiency.

#### IV. PROPOSED OUTPUT

A reading program to improve EFL college students' comprehension has been proposed, targeting reading strategies, motivation, and self-efficacy. It consists of nine Key Result Areas, addressing problem-solving strategies, support reading, global reading, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, vicarious experiences, mastery experiences, social persuasions, and physiological states.

To achieve its objectives, the program outlines strategies tailored for each area. For instance, problem-solving activities, discussion-based learning, real-world scenarios, and guided reading sessions are employed to enhance problem-solving strategies. Relaxation exercises, stress management techniques, and self-care practices are utilized to address physiological states.

Clear success indicators are defined for each area, such as improved ability to solve complex reading comprehension problems or reduced stress and anxiety levels. The implementation of the program is a collaborative effort, involving reading teachers, peers, and parents, working together to ensure its success.

The ultimate goal is not only to develop proficient readers with enhanced reading comprehension skills but also to elevate their motivation and self-efficacy levels. By instilling faith in their abilities to conquer learning tasks, the program aims to empower students and foster a deeper sense of mastery and confidence.

#### V. CONCLUSION

The study showed a majority of female respondents with over ten years of English learning experience, with the School of Computer Science highly represented. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations played essential roles in motivating reading behaviors, with a slight preference for extrinsic factors, suggesting potential benefits of incorporating external rewards and recognition to enhance reading habits.

The respondents showed a comprehensive



understanding of self-efficacy, recognizing the significance of personal achievements, learning from others, social feedback, and emotional responses in building confidence. Females and those with over ten years of experience demonstrated better reading strategies and higher reading motivation. Moreover, students from the School of Computer Science and those with more than ten years of experience had better self-efficacy. The study found strong correlations between the three variables, indicating that improved strategies positively influenced reading motivation and self-efficacy.

The proposed EFL reading program includes holistic reading strategies, intrinsic motivation, and fostering self-confidence through discussions. Higher education English educators may benefit from incorporating real-world scenarios and problem-solving techniques. University administrations could consider adopting and testing these strategies to improve academic comprehension.

Future researchers can expand the study by exploring educators' perspectives, introducing new variables, analyzing participant attributes, and using qualitative research methods. To enhance the reading program, incorporating regular assessments, contextual learning, culturally relevant materials, personalized learning plans, and critical thinking skill development are recommended. Adequate training for educators in EFL teaching strategies and core program elements is vital for successful implementation.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research would not have been possible without the sustained support of numerous individuals. The researcher expresses heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Eleonor Magadia for invaluable professional guidance, Dr. Beverly Caiga for insightful counsel on the dissertation title, Dr. Precy Guerra for discerning suggestions and meticulous feedback on the manuscript, and Dr. Analie Pateña for addressing the statistical data. The researcher expresses deep gratitude to her family and friends for their unwavering support and encouragement throughout this journey. Each contribution was essential, and the researcher recognizes the privilege of being surrounded by such an inspiring community.

### REFERENCES

- [1] Alharbi, M.A. (2021). Self-efficacy sources and reading comprehension of L2 undergraduate learners. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17(2), 924-940. <https://doi.org/10.52462/jlls.64>
- [2] Almohammadi, M. M. (2023). A Decade of EFL Self-Efficacy Research: Empirical Status and Future Directions. *English Language Teaching*, 16(7).
- [3] Altumigah, E. S., & Alkhaleefah, T. A. (2022). The Relationship Between Reading Self-Efficacy and Perceived Use of Reading Strategies Among Saudi EFL Students. *International Journal of Linguistics*, 14(6). <https://dx.doi.org/10.5296/ijl.v14i6.20037>
- [4] Chen, H. (2021). Exploring EFL Reading Strategies Among Chinese College Students. *International Journal of English Learning*, 11(1), 12-22.
- [5] Hu, R. (2017). Impact of Formal Training on Reading Strategy Usage. *Journal of Language and Education*, 3(4), 30-45.
- [6] Khodadad, M., & Kaur, J. (2016). Causal relationships between integrative motivation, self-efficacy, strategy use and English language achievement. *Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 22(3), 111-125. <https://doi.org/10.17576/3L-2016-2203-08>
- [7] Li, J., & Zhang, X. (2020). Reading Strategy Usage Among Successful and Unsuccessful EFL Readers. *English Language Teaching Journal*, 17(2), 15-28.
- [8] Li, Q., & Wang, L. (2021). Assessing the Reading Skills of Chinese College Students. *Journal of Educational Research in China*, 22(4), 55-65.
- [9] Ma, L., Du, X., & Liu, J. (2018). Intrinsic and extrinsic value for English learning: Mediation effects of self-efficacy in Chinese EFL context. *Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics (De Gruyter)*, 41(2), 150-168.
- [10] Manh, H., DO, & Phan, H. L. T. (2021). Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies on Second Language Vietnamese Undergraduates. *Arab World English Journal*, 12(1), 90-112. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol12no1.7>
- [11] McRae, A., & Guthrie, J. T. (2013). *Teacher Practices that Impact Reading Motivation*. Reading Rockets. <https://www.readingrockets.org/article/teacher-practices-impact-reading-motivation>
- [12] Meade, Nicola A. (2019). "An Experimental Study of Research Self-Efficacy In Master's Students" Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), Dissertation, Counseling & Human Services, Old Dominion University, DOI: 10.25777/mj2a-f919 [https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/chs\\_etds/26](https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/chs_etds/26)
- [13] MSED, K. C. (2022). *Extrinsic vs. Intrinsic Motivation: What's the Difference?* Very well Mind. <https://www.verywellmind.com/differences-between-extrinsic-and-intrinsic-motivation-2795384>
- [14] Naseri, M. (2012). The Relationship Between Reading Self-efficacy Beliefs, Reading Strategy Use and Reading Comprehension Level Of Iranian EFL Learners. *World Journal of Education*, 2(2).
- [15] Piercey, Raven Richardson. (2013). *Reading Self-Efficacy in Early Adolescence: Which Measure Works Best?* Theses and Dissertations--Educational, School, and Counseling Psychology. 10.
- [16] Roomy, M. A., & Alhawsawi, S. (2019). Understanding Reading Strategies of EFL Saudi Students. *English Language Teaching*, 12(6), 33.
- [17] Sc, D. (2017). *A Phenomenological Study of One-to-One Paraeducators' Self-Efficacy in Self-Contained Special Education Programs*. Liberty University.
- [18] Sener, S., & Erol, I. K. (2017). Motivational orientations and self-efficacy beliefs of Turkish students towards EFL

- learning. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, 67, 251-267. <https://doi.org/10.14689/ejer.2017.67.15>
- [19] Soemer, A., & Schiefele, U. (2018). Reading amount as a mediator between intrinsic reading motivation and reading comprehension in the early elementary grades. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 67, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2018.06.006>
- [20] Unrau, N. J., Rueda, R., Son, E., Polanin, J. R., Lundeen, R. J., & Muraszewski, A. K. (2017). Can Reading Self-Efficacy Be Modified? A Meta-Analysis of the Impact of Interventions on Reading Self-Efficacy. *Review of Educational Research*, 88(2), 167–204. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654317743199>
- [21] Wang, B., & Guan, X. (2020). Emphasizing Reading Skills in China's English Education. *China Education Review*, 19(1), 1-14.
- [22] Wang, D. (2019). Reading Motivation Among Chinese College Students. *Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 21(2), 22-36.
- [23] Wang, J. H., & Guthrie, J. T. (2004). Modeling the effects of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, amount of reading, and past reading achievement on text comprehension between U.S and Chinese students. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 39 (2), 162–186.
- [24] Wang, X., Jia, L., & Jin, Y. (2020). Reading Amount and Reading Strategy as Mediators of the Effects of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Reading Motivation on Reading Achievement. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11.
- [25] Wu, Y., & Wang, L. (2021). Comparative Study of Reading Strategies Among Successful and Unsuccessful Readers. *Journal of English Language Learning*, 16(3), 5-18.
- [26] Wu, Z. (2023). The Interplay of Reading Strategies, Motivation, and Self-efficacy in Reading Comprehension. *Language Learning Journal*, 31(1), 1-17.
- [27] Zhang, L., & Li, Y. (2022). A Holistic Approach to Reading Instruction: Strategy Use, Motivation, and Self-efficacy. *Journal of Language and Literature Education*, 10(1), 1-18.
- [28] Zhou, Y. (2020). Self-efficacy in Reading Among Chinese EFL Learners. *Language Learning in Higher Education*, 10(2), 1-15.



# Writing Motivation, Strategy Use, and Proficiency of Chinese Non-English Majors

Zhang Jingya

Graduate School, Lyceum of the Philippines University, Philippines

Received: 13 Jun 2023; Received in revised form: 14 Jul 2023; Accepted: 20 Jul 2023; Available online: 27 Jul 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— This study investigates the interplay of English language motivation, writing strategies, and proficiency among non-English major Chinese university students. A mixed-methods approach reveals a moderate positive correlation between these factors, with both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations and translation strategies standing out as particularly impactful. The study further uncovers distinctive motivational, strategic, and proficiency patterns among different student groups, including sex, school type, academic year, and major divisions. Based on these findings, the Motivation-Strategy-Proficiency-based Writing Enhancement Program (MSP-WEP) is proposed to holistically improve academic writing skills. This research contributes to the understanding of factors affecting English academic writing proficiency in non-English major students and provides a practical program for educators, with a call for future research into the program's efficacy in diverse learning contexts.

**Keywords**— Non-English majors, MSP-WEP, Writing Motivation, Writing Strategies, Writing Proficiency.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The continuous surge of globalization and international trade has underlined the necessity of English proficiency for students around the globe. China, with its rapid economic development, is no exception. English instruction in China's universities is of paramount importance, aiming to equip students with communicative competence for diverse settings, from the workplace to social interactions. Despite these lofty objectives, a significant problem persists: the existing educational paradigm overlooks the critical role of English writing.

As stated in the College English Curriculum Requirements (for Trial Implementation) issued by the China Education Ministry in 2004, the focus of English instruction should encompass both written and spoken English. However, the emphasis on written English is waning. Such a predicament is especially pronounced in College English classes, a mandatory course for non-English major students, where the curriculum design is

dictated by the requirements of the College English Test Band 4 examination (CET-4).

The examination itself, while aiming to holistically evaluate the English competency of students, allocates a disproportionate emphasis on reading and listening skills, assigning them 35 percent each of the total score, while translation and writing account for a mere 15 percent each. This skewed focus manifests in the classroom as well, where writing tasks are perceived more as a test-taking strategy rather than a means to foster creative thinking and articulate expression of ideas. This perpetuates a cycle of diminished motivation and stagnated growth in English learning, further exacerbating the existing problems.

Previous research in English writing has examined the intricate nature of this complex language skill from various dimensions. There have been studies focusing on individual language aspects like vocabulary, grammar, and style, acknowledging writing as a culmination of these elements that reveal information about language rather

than mere meaning creation (Hyland, 2016; Li, 2023). Studies have also underscored the influence of cognitive abilities, and individual's writing environment on shaping their writing proficiency (Li, 2023). Moreover, research has illuminated the challenges of developing writing proficiency in a second language, emphasizing the need for thoughtful translation of thoughts and abstract thinking (Zhang, 2013; Li, 2023). Furthermore, research has also brought to light the importance of source use and citation competence in academic writing, emphasizing the need for explicit instruction in these areas (Gui, Ma & Huang, 2016; Xu, 2016). Lastly, several studies have explored common errors, the impact of gender, the influence of information technology, and the relationship between L1 and L2 on writing proficiency. Together, these studies provide a comprehensive overview of English writing from various perspectives.

However, most of these studies often investigate these elements in isolation, limiting our understanding of their interrelationship and the collective influence they have on writing proficiency. The current research, by studying motivation, strategy use, and proficiency collectively, aims to address this gap in the literature.

While previous research has individually illuminated the significance of these three aspects, a comprehensive study synthesizing these elements can provide more nuanced insights into the writing process. This research would analyze how motivation fuels the use of learning strategies and how such strategies can effectively enhance proficiency. By doing this, it would contribute to a better understanding of the holistic process of English writing, thereby shedding light on the factors influencing non-English majors' writing proficiency levels and possible ways to enhance them. Furthermore, the research seeks to provide practical insights for curriculum design, teaching materials development, and classroom instruction to facilitate effective English writing. The outcomes of this study will be beneficial for EFL teachers, language education policymakers, and researchers working in the field of EFL education. The proposed Motivation-Strategy-Proficiency-based English Writing Program (MSP-WEP) will serve as a valuable resource for devising more efficient teaching strategies and educational policies, contributing to improved outcomes in English writing.

## II. METHODS

This research employs a descriptive research method. Data was collected using the corresponding questionnaires pertaining to writing motivation, strategy, and proficiency. As part of the descriptive correlational method, the

correlation between two variables or multiple variables within the same subject group was analyzed.

### 2.1 Participants

In this study, a robust sample of 404 EFL non-English majors was carefully chosen from four categories of Chinese universities, namely the C9 League, Project 211 and 985, and government public and private schools. This representative sample size was determined using a Raosoft sample size calculator, factoring in an error margin of 5 percent, a 95 percent level of confidence, and a response distribution of 50 percent, with reference to the total student enrollment in these universities. The selected participants are a diverse cohort, majoring in areas ranging from liberal arts, science, engineering, medicine, to arts, business, and laws. All participants share a similar linguistic profile, having studied English as a foreign language for at least ten years and taken or are preparing for various English proficiency examinations. However, they lack firsthand experience with English-speaking cultures, with no exposure to studying abroad or intimate interaction with native English speakers.

### 2.2 Research Design

The study implemented a questionnaire-based approach, subdivided into three sections on Writing Motivation, Writing Strategy Use, and Writing Proficiency. The questionnaire, provided in both English and Chinese, contained 82 items for an extensive understanding of the respondents' profiles, capturing their sex, school type, year level, and major. Each section was built upon proven designs and scales from previous studies and authoritative international benchmarking frameworks. The Writing Motivation Questionnaire was developed with inspiration from a validated motivation questionnaire by Graham et al. (2022). Drawing from Aluemalai and Maniam's (2020) work, the design of the Writing Strategy Use Questionnaire collected information about planning strategies, writing strategies, and revising strategies. To assess the writing proficiency of the respondents, the Writing Proficiency Questionnaire was developed following the guidelines of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2018), an esteemed international benchmark for language assessment and teaching.

The responses, rated on a four-point Likert scale, were used to measure and categorize the three principal variables of the study. To ensure reliability, a pilot study was conducted, yielding acceptable Cronbach Alpha coefficients. The questionnaire was disseminated via Questionnaire Star to the participants, and upon data collection, statistical analysis was performed using SPSS 27.0. The data analysis process employed the weighted



mean, Spearman correlation analysis, and t-tests to examine the relationships between writing motivation, writing strategy use, and writing proficiency, ultimately leading to valuable conclusions and recommendations.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Writing Motivation, Strategy Use and Proficiency

Table 1 delineates the participant agreement with two types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic, in English writing. Intrinsic motivation, with a higher weighted mean of 2.69, suggests that participants enjoy writing for its inherent satisfaction or pleasure. Conversely, extrinsic motivation, having a lower weighted mean of 2.54, indicates writing behavior driven by external rewards or recognitions, like grades or approval. Although both forms of motivation are recognized by participants, intrinsic motivation shows a slightly higher impact on writing behavior.

*Table 1 Summary Table on English Writing Motivation*

| Indicators              | Weighted Mean | Verbal Interpretation | Rank |
|-------------------------|---------------|-----------------------|------|
| 1. Intrinsic Motivation | 2.69          | Agree                 | 1    |
| 2. Extrinsic Motivation | 2.54          | Agree                 | 2    |
| <b>Composite Mean</b>   | <b>2.62</b>   | <b>Agree</b>          |      |

*Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 – 1.49 = Strongly Disagree*

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, critical in contexts such as job satisfaction and learning, have distinct roles in writing, with intrinsic motivation typically being more significant. Studies such as Kirchhoff (2016) emphasize these motivational concepts in fostering student writing motivation, while Mursidi and Maulan (2020), using Self-Determination Theory (SDT), highlight the importance of intrinsic motivation, driven by personal interest and values. Similarly, De Smedt et al. (2020) verify the interconnectedness of reading and writing motives in their research. Hence, while both motivations are integral to writing, the personal enjoyment and interest associated with intrinsic motivation often dominate.

Table 2 ranks the three strategies of cognitive process theory of writing - translating, planning, and reviewing - based on their weighted mean scores. Translating, securing the highest score of 2.71, emerges as

the most crucial strategy, as it encapsulates the manifestation of ideas into comprehensible forms. Planning, following closely with a score of 2.70, serves as a preparatory stage that guides the writing process but does not exclusively determine the quality of a written piece. Reviewing, with a slightly lower score of 2.69, is a refining process considered less immediate but integral in enhancing the quality of writing.

While these three strategies are fundamental to writing, their relative importance differs. Translating is perceived as the most critical, stemming from its immediate impact on communication. Planning, although essential, often takes a backseat due to the contingent nature of its contribution. Lastly, reviewing, though an essential refining process, is less preferred due to its indirect impact on the overall quality and its inability to fix fundamental content or structural issues originating from translating and planning stages. Thus, these strategies, while interconnected, bear distinct roles and levels of significance in the writing process.

*Table 2 Summary Table on English Writing Strategies*

| Indicators            | Weighted Mean | Verbal Interpretation | Rank |
|-----------------------|---------------|-----------------------|------|
| 1. Planning           | 2.70          | Agree                 | 2    |
| 2. Translating        | 2.71          | Agree                 | 1    |
| 3. Reviewing          | 2.69          | Agree                 | 3    |
| <b>Composite Mean</b> | <b>2.70</b>   | <b>Agree</b>          |      |

*Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 – 1.49 = Strongly Disagree*

Table 3 showcases six facets of writing proficiency based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) standards, with propositional precision ranking first, implying that participants perform best in expressing propositions or arguments accurately.

This proficiency could be attributed to an emphasis on argumentative writing in their education and proficiency tests, fostering good critical thinking skills, logical reasoning, or effective instruction in academic writing. The second rank is shared by overall written production, vocabulary control, and coherence, indicating balanced competencies in producing comprehensive writing, employing effective vocabulary, and ensuring logical flow. However, these areas might still encounter occasional challenges in crafting comprehensive texts,

employing diverse vocabulary, or ensuring coherence. Lastly, vocabulary range and grammatical accuracy are areas that need further improvement. Despite these aspects being prioritized in Chinese English education, the lack of exposure to authentic English language input and the complexities of English grammar rules contribute to these challenges. While participants excel in clarity of ideas, attention should be directed towards expanding vocabulary and honing grammatical accuracy for a more rounded writing proficiency.

Table 3 Summary Table on English Writing Proficiency

| Indicators                    | Weighted Mean | Verbal Interpretation | Rank |
|-------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------|------|
| 1. Overall Written Production | 2.69          | Agree                 | 3    |
| 2. Vocabulary Range           | 2.62          | Agree                 | 5.5  |
| 3. Grammatical Accuracy       | 2.62          | Agree                 | 5.5  |
| 4. Vocabulary Control         | 2.69          | Agree                 | 3    |
| 5. Coherence                  | 2.69          | Agree                 | 3    |
| 6. Propositional Precision    | 2.74          | Agree                 | 1    |
| <b>Composite Mean</b>         | <b>2.68</b>   | <b>Agree</b>          |      |

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 – 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

### 3.2 Profile-based Differences in Writing Motivation, Strategy and Proficiency

Differences in English writing motivation were segmented by Sex, School Type, Academic Year, and Major. Significant gender differences exist, with males showing higher motivation levels in both aspects, potentially due to their preference for independent and competitive learning environments. It could be due to their different learning styles (Moneva, Arnado & Buot, 2020). School type also significantly influences motivation, with students from C9 Universities, a group of elite Chinese universities, exhibiting greater motivation likely due to access to high-quality resources, superior teaching strategies, and highly skilled teachers (Chiu, 2021). When considering the Academic Year, intrinsic motivation significantly increases as students progress, possibly due to a deeper understanding of the importance of English writing for

future careers or personal growth, while extrinsic motivation remains relatively constant (Tsao et al., 2021). Lastly, the study found significant differences in intrinsic motivation across various majors, potentially resulting from the varying importance of English writing in their respective fields. However, extrinsic motivation remains relatively consistent, given the general academic and potential career value of English writing skills.

Writing strategies such as planning, translating, and reviewing were also influenced significantly by these factors. Men showed better planning strategies compared to women, potentially due to inherent gender-based differences in goal-oriented task approaches (Lieberman 2016). School type significantly influenced all writing strategies, suggesting the learning environment's crucial role in shaping these skills, especially among students from elite C9 League institutions who have access to robust resources and a culture of academic excellence (Mo, 2012; Rose et al., 2020). Academic year also played a significant role, with freshmen needing time to adapt to complex writing tasks and develop their strategies (Kim et al., 2021). Lastly, the participant's major significantly impacted their writing strategies, with Liberal Arts majors leading due to their emphasis on critical and creative thinking, which are vital for effective writing. These results emphasize that while broad writing strategies can be taught, individual factors can shape how they are applied, and educators must consider these variables in their teaching approach.

Furthermore, this study demonstrated significant variations in English writing proficiency. Males exhibited better grammatical accuracy, while students from top-tier C9 universities displayed superior skills due to access to better resources. As students progressed through academic years, proficiency improved, except in vocabulary range. Science students showed more proficiency in overall written production, coherence, and propositional precision, likely due to rigorous writing requirements in their field (Sağlamel and Kayaoğlu, 2015). Besides, both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations were correlated with effective writing strategies, highlighting the role of motivation in language learning.

In summary, the study identified significant variations in English writing motivation, strategy, and proficiency based on participants' sex, school type, academic year, and major. Males demonstrated higher motivation and better grammatical accuracy, while students from elite C9 Universities exhibited greater motivation and superior writing skills, likely due to their access to superior resources and teaching. Freshmen and non-Liberal Arts majors struggled more with developing effective writing strategies, whereas Science students

excelled in overall written production, coherence, and precision due to rigorous discipline-specific writing demands. As students advanced, proficiency generally improved, except in vocabulary range. The importance of motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, was emphasized, as it significantly correlated with effective strategy usage. These findings underscore the need for personalized teaching approaches considering these influential individual and institutional factors.

### 3.3 Correlation Between Writing Motivation, Strategy and Proficiency

This research presents a compelling correlation between English language motivation, strategy usage, and writing proficiency, especially within the context of non-English majors in China. Fig. 1 visually represents this correlation, illustrating how heightened motivation leads to the more effective application of writing strategies, which in turn enhances overall writing proficiency. This cause-and-effect chain showcases that motivated students, driven by intrinsic or extrinsic factors, are likely to endure the challenges of academic writing, and invest the necessary time and effort.

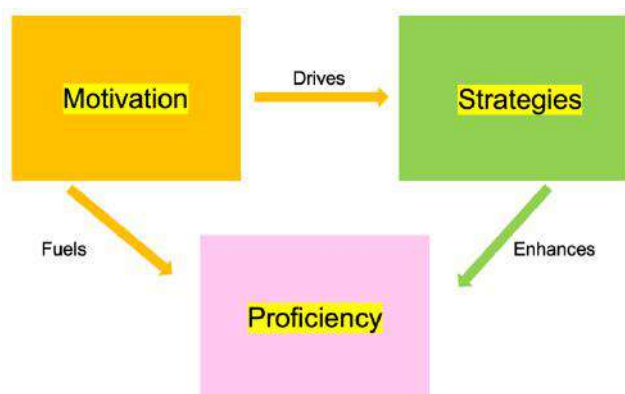


Fig.1. Correlation Among Three Variables

Moreover, as motivation amplifies, students engage more profoundly with the English language. This deepened engagement promotes enhanced vocabulary, improved grammar, and the ability to think critically and analytically. The coupling of this motivation and strategic learning - particularly planning, translating, and reviewing - significantly bolsters writing proficiency. Fig. 2 delves deeper into this relationship, breaking down these core aspects into 11 sub-dimensions. This dissection highlights the strongest correlations, such as the significant impact of intrinsic motivation on the translating process and overall written production.

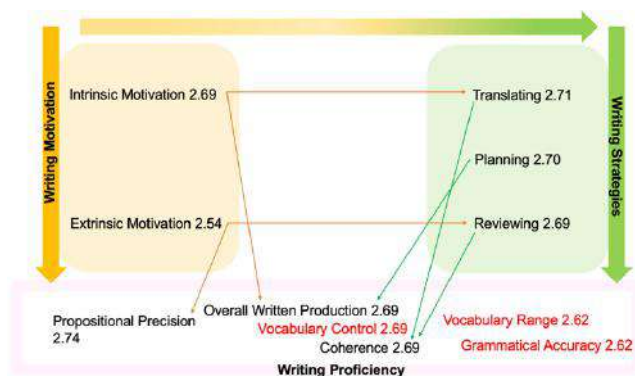


Fig.2. Correlation Among Sub-dimensions

The correlations uncovered in this study not only shed light on the interconnectedness of motivation, strategy, and proficiency, but also help identify potential roadblocks in enhancing writing proficiency. Fig. 3 portrays this academic writing growth pattern for non-English majors, emphasizing lower-ranked dimensions like extrinsic motivation, and the planning and reviewing processes, as areas requiring particular attention. Instructors, therefore, should prioritize stimulating student curiosity and interest, aligning assignments with tangible rewards, teaching effective writing strategies, and implementing specific methodologies to enhance various aspects of writing proficiency.

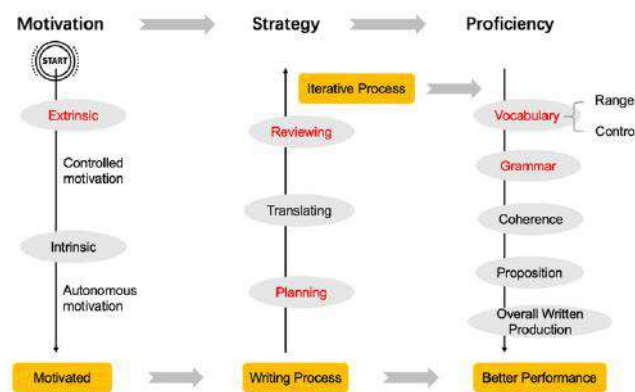


Fig.3. MSP-based Writing Process

Overall, the evidence captured in these figures underscores the importance of a holistic approach to teaching English writing to non-English majors in China, emphasizing the intertwined roles of motivation, strategy, and proficiency.

## IV. PROPOSED MSP-WEP

Consequently, this research culminated in the development of the Motivation-Strategy-Proficiency Based Writing Enhancement Program (MSP-WEP). This program is

designed to enhance the academic writing skills of non-English majors, considering the integrated roles of motivation, strategy, and proficiency in the writing process. Thus, it provides a comprehensive and tailored program to improving the English writing proficiency of non-English majors.

To enhance intrinsic motivation, the program advocates for lessons promoting personal interests, challenging topics, and goal-setting activities. Success in this area can be measured by an increase in self-reported motivation, engagement, and the frequency of independent writing tasks. On the other hand, to boost extrinsic motivation, the program suggests implementing a reward system including grades, academic recognition, and performance incentives. The effectiveness of this approach can be quantified through an increase in assignment completion and noticeable improvement in writing assignment quality.

Further, the program seeks to cultivate proficient pre-writing skills through workshops on effective brainstorming, outlining, and structuring methods, and to enhance the translation of cognitive processes into textual output through tasks that require active engagement with vocabulary, grammar rules, and sentence structures. Development of self-regulatory skills in revision is also targeted, with the introduction of self and peer-review activities guided by checklists and rubrics. Successful implementation of these strategies can be measured through improved logical flow and structure, decreased pre-writing time, nuanced vocabulary usage, and decreased surface-level errors in written works.

Finally, the program aims to improve overall writing proficiency across several dimensions including overall written production, propositional precision, vocabulary range, vocabulary control, coherence, and grammatical accuracy. This is achieved through a progression of complex writing tasks, activities promoting precision in language use, vocabulary-building activities, focused vocabulary lessons, tasks promoting the use of transition phrases, and targeted grammar lessons. Success indicators include improved grades on writing assignments, increased clarity and precision in writing samples, increased variety and sophistication of vocabulary, fewer inappropriate or inaccurate vocabulary uses, and fewer grammatical errors. The responsibilities for implementing this program lie with instructors, curriculum developers, school administrators, writing coaches, language specialists, peer reviewers, and external evaluators.

## V. CONCLUSION

The study underscores the impact of both intrinsic and

extrinsic motivations on English writing proficiency among non-English major students in China, with intrinsic motivation slightly more prevalent. The importance of writing strategies was affirmed, with “translating” ranking first, followed by “planning”, and “reviewing”. As per proficiency, respondents reported highest proficiency in propositional precision, while they faced challenges in executing complex language tasks or maintaining a consistently high vocabulary range. Significant differences were observed in grammatical accuracy based on sex, and in overall written production, coherence, and propositional precision based on the major. The study discovered a moderate positive correlation between English language motivation, application of writing strategies, and enhanced English proficiency. The study also introduced an MSP (Motivation-Strategy-Proficiency) Writing Enhancement Program, designed to aid non-English majors in improving their academic writing proficiency.

The study suggests non-English major students may actively engage in language learning activities that foster both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, apply effective writing strategies, and maintain consistent writing practice to enhance proficiency in critical aspects of academic writing. Educators may adapt teaching methods to meet student needs, introduce activities targeted at improving writing skills, and cultivate a learning environment that nurtures motivations by offering intellectually stimulating tasks and external rewards. Schools may strive to cultivate an environment that is engaging and relevant to students’ interests, promotes independent learning, and incorporates a system of rewards. Simultaneously, they may offer support to educators to incorporate efficient writing strategies in their instructional techniques. Future research may delve deeper into academic writing strategies and motivation among diverse student groups, and test and refine the proposed MSP-WEP across different educational settings.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply grateful to my adviser, Dr. Precy I. Guerra, whose guidance, expertise, and encouragement have been instrumental in the realization of this paper. I also extend my appreciation to Dr. Arnie Christian D. Villena, Dr. Beverly T. Caiga, Dr. Chona D. Andal, Dr. Dolores D. Borrás and Dr. Analie Pateña. I remain deeply appreciative of their collective wisdom and steadfast support. My heartfelt gratitude goes to my family, especially my parents, for their steadfast support and sacrifices, as well as to my friends, colleagues, and classmates, whose encouragement and advice greatly enriched my academic journey. The unwavering belief and ceaseless support of



all have been pivotal in navigating this challenging process.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Aluemalai, K., & Maniam, M. (2020). Writing Strategies Utilized by Successful and Unsuccessful ESL Undergraduate Students in Writing Classroom. *Journal of English Language and Culture*. <https://doi.org/10.30813/jelc.v10i2.2140>
- [2] Chambi, M. (2019). *Motivational Strategies: Students' and Teachers' Perspectives*. [https://www.academia.edu/40660211/Motivational\\_Strategies\\_Students\\_and\\_Teachers\\_Perspectives](https://www.academia.edu/40660211/Motivational_Strategies_Students_and_Teachers_Perspectives)
- [3] Chiu, C. (2021). Project 211, Project 985, C9 League, and Double First Class. *China Admissions*.
- [4] Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. (2018). *The TESOL Encyclopedia of English Language Teaching*, 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118784235.eelt0114>
- [5] De Smedt, F., Rogiers, A., Heirweg, S., Merchie, E., & Van Keer, H. (2020). Assessing and Mapping Reading and Writing Motivation in Third to Eight Graders: A Self-Determination Theory Perspective. *Frontiers in Psychology*. <https://dx.doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01678>
- [6] Graham, S., Harbaugh-Schattenkirk, A. G., Aitken, A. A., Harris, K. R., Ng, C., Ray, A. B., Wilson, J., & Wdowin, J. (2022). Writing motivation questionnaire: validation and application as a formative assessment. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 29(2), 238–261. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0969594x.2022.2080178>
- [7] Gui, M., Ma, W. C. & Huang, Y. (2016). University students' ability to identify and attitudes towards plagiarism in academic writing. *Foreign Language Teaching* (05), 57–61. doi:10.16362/j.cnki.cn61-1023/h.2016.05.013
- [8] Hussain, I. Z. (2021). Correlation Between English Skills and Stem Success. *Talentnook*. <https://talentnook.com/blog/correlation-between-english-skills-and-stem-success>
- [9] Hyland, K. (2016). *Teaching and Researching Writing* (3rd ed). Routledge.
- [10] Kayaalp, F., Meral, E., & Namli, Z. (2022). An Analysis of the Effect of Writing-to-Learn Activities Regarding Students' Academic Achievement and Self-Regulation Skills in Writing. *Participatory Educational Research*, 9(1), 324–348. <https://doi.org/10.17275/per.22.18.9.1>
- [11] Kim, S., Yang, J., Lim, J., Lee, S., Ihm, J., & Park, J. (2021). The impact of writing on academic performance for medical students. *BMC Medical Education*, 21(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-021-02485-2>
- [12] Kirchhoff, L. (2016). Motivation in the Writing Centre: A Peer Tutor's Experience. *Journal of Academic Writing*. <https://doi.org/10.18552/joaw.v6i1.282>
- [13] Li, X. (2023). A Multi-Dimensional Analysis of English Writings by Chinese EFL Learners. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 14(1), 37–47. <https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1401.05>
- [14] Lieberman, S. (2016). *Gender Communication Differences and Practical Strategies - Simma Lieberman*. Simma Lieberman. <https://simmalieberman.com/gender-communication-differences-and-strategies/>
- [15] Mo, H. (2012). A Study of the Teaching of ESL Writing in Colleges in China. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 2(1). <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v2n1p118>
- [16] Moneva, J. C., Arnado, J. M., & Buot, I. N. (2020). Students' Learning Styles and Self-Motivation. *International Journal of Social Science Research*, 8(2), 16. <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijssr.v8i2.16733>
- [17] Murphy, H. (2021). The Impact of Writing Strategies on Student Proficiency and Confidence Levels in an Advanced Placement Human Geography Course. Retrieved from Sophia, the St. Catherine University repository website: <https://sophia.stkate.edu/maed/416>
- [18] Mursidi, A., & Maulan, S. (2020). Qualitative Study in Identifying Reason that Motivate Malaysian Muslims in Writing Wasiyyah. *JMIFR*, 44–60. <https://doi.org/10.33102/jmifr.v17i2.293>
- [19] Nguyen, C., Trinh, T., Le, D., & Nguyen, T. (2021). Cooperative Learning in English Language Classrooms: Teachers' Perceptions and Actions. *Anatolian Journal of Education*, 6(2), 89–108. <https://doi.org/10.29333/aje.2021.628a>
- [20] Rafafie, I. N. (2021). THE IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH IN BUSINESS AS A BUSINESS MANAGEMENT STUDENT. *ResearchGate*.
- [21] Rose, H., Mckinley, J., Xu, X., & Zhou, S. (2020). Investigating policy and implementation of English-medium instruction in higher education institutions in China. *ResearchGate*.
- [22] Sağlamel, H., & Kayaoğlu, M. N. (2015). English Major Students' Perceptions of Academic Writing: A Struggle between Writing to Learn and Learning to Write. *Tarih Kültür Ve Sanat Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 4(3), 37. <https://doi.org/10.7596/taksad.v4i3.477>
- [23] Shafina, A. (2020). *Exploring gender differences in selection of subjects at higher education levels in the Maldives*. 19(2).
- [24] Tsao, J., Tseng, W., Hsiao, T., Wang, C., & Gao, X. (2021). Toward a Motivation-Regulated Learner Engagement WCF Model of L2 Writing Performance. *SAGE Open*, 11(2), 215824402110231. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211023172>
- [25] Villines, Z. (2023). *What to know about extrinsic motivation*. <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/extrinsic-motivation>
- [26] Wang, B. (2020). *The Goals, Strategies and Insights of C9 Universities' Construction of World-class Universities and Disciplines*. 334(Hsmet 2019), 379–383.
- [27] Xu, F. (2016). The citation ability and developmental characteristics of second language academic writing: cross-sectional and longitudinal evidence. *Journal of Shanghai International Studies University* (03), 73–82.
- [28] Zhang, H. P. (2013). *A Corpus-Based Study of Conceptual Transfer in Chinese Learners' English*. [Unpublished PhD dissertation]. Northeast Normal University.



# Reading Dysfluency in Indian Classrooms: An Insight

Bhawani Balasubramaniam

Associate Professor, CVR College of Engineering, Hyderabad, India

Received: 15 Jun 2023; Received in revised form: 16 Jul 2023; Accepted: 22 Jul 2023; Available online: 29 Jul 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— Reading text in English is an important skill for students of higher education in India, as their understanding of their core subjects is specific and the world of information in general is based upon this skill. The ability to read English fluently, increases their job prospects also, as real time job environments use English as the official medium of communication and require that students read English with ease. Technical students who engage primarily with numerical data, diagrams and other non-textual content in their core subjects, have an especially hard time coping with tasks which involve reading textual English. There are several problems that lead to lack of fluency and thus lack of understanding of the content. This paper will study reading “dysfluency” problems technical students face, when reading English like word recognition difficulties, inability to read in sense groups, problems to do with accuracy, automaticity and expression. This paper will attempt to offer strategies to overcome this problem like Loud reading, Echo reading and Choral reading and some unconventional reading practices that can help solve this very common but important skill gap.

**Keywords**— reading dysfluency, recognition, automaticity, accuracy, strategies, innovative, learning graph.



“The Limits of my language are the limits of my world”.

Ludwig Wittgenstein

English reading fluency has suddenly become a very important requirement in most recruitment drives across all colleges in India, after having been neglected for many decades in our education system. Up until the 1980's, most school education had some component of marks in an examination, allocated to reading and recitation, in most Central and State Boards of education. However, in the last two decades with the focus of education in India shifting to pure or applied sciences & technology, leading to development of skills to deal with numbers and numerical data, reading in any language, more so English has become a rare skill to find indeed. Even students who have had their education in English medium institutions throughout their lives, struggle to read in English, right up to their undergraduate courses and beyond.

Cambridge Dictionary defines fluency as “the ability to speak or write a language easily, well, and quickly”. In other words, fluency means to read at an appropriate pace,

with precision, with the correct aspect and air. To realize and know what they are reading, learners must be able to read fluently, both when they are reading audibly or soundlessly. Why is fluency in English so poor among students in our classrooms? Several reasons can be ascribed for this. The first among them is the way “fluency” has been defined to us, and secondly the methods we use to build fluency among our students. Many a times, reading fast has been understood to be “fluency”, not taking into account the accuracy of the reading at all. Accuracy is a very important part of fluency and cannot be separated from it.

So, let us first understand fluency and what it comprises of. Martin Galway in his article “A field Guide to Reading Fluency: A Reader's Digest of Our Work to Date”, identifies three specific criteria for reading to be considered fluent.

- Automaticity (rapid word reading without conscious decoding)
- Accuracy (words read accurately, typically measured as a percentage)
- Intonation (expressive, phrased reading)

### **Automaticity**

Automaticity means the ability to read without having to decode a sentence word by word. This is an important skill because if the student's energies are simply engaged in decoding a word by its spelling, he loses focus on other aspects of reading such as comprehension, analysis, elaboration, and deeper understanding. As students grow older and start silent reading, teachers completely lose their influence over the student's English reading skills and this skill gap just remains with them all their lives.

### **Accuracy**

Accuracy is the ability to recognise a word and read the text with the correct comprehension of its meaning. Accuracy should not be misconceived as merely 'speed'. Adequate pace without accuracy in deciphering meaning cannot be recognised as 'fluency'. Decoding errors, omissions of words and replacing words in the text with other words while reading, impact comprehension. Fluency includes comprehension and therefore accuracy goes hand in hand with automaticity.

### **Intonation**

Cambridge dictionary defines 'prosody' as 'the rhythm and intonation (the way a speaker's voice rises and falls) of language'. Intonation has an important role to play in the comprehension of a spoken word. Meaning is derived not only from the words chosen but also from the tone a speaker uses, while he reads words aloud. Intonation not only improves peripheral or textual understanding of the intent of the text, but also contributes to a deeper and more holistic understanding of the authorial intent. Tone of voice carries information about emotion, intention, emphasis and beyond. So, intonation bridges the gap between word recognition and its meaning.

If this is what fluency essentially is, let us look at what causes English dysfluency among students in our classrooms in India and then look at what practises and remedies can be followed to correct this problem.

The relevant problems leading to dysfluency in reading English in our classrooms are:

- For most students, English is not their mother tongue.
- They do not have sufficient exposure to the English language, for them to gain an instinctive or intuitive rapport with it.
- Most students study the language to clear examinations and not to learn the language.
- Most of the earlier institutions they studied in, did not offer them conducive or encouraging environments to learn the language.
- Most students do not realize the importance of English until they appear for interviews or plan to go abroad for higher studies.
- Many of them do not have confidence, have learning disabilities or are just slow learners.
- Since most of the English that is taught in our classrooms is through the 'Grammar Translation Method', most students do not develop mastery of the language's idiom and phraseology and lack a flair for it.
- Most of the students have such a low exposure to the English language, socially, outside of the classroom that they have poor vocabulary.

Due to a combination of this lackadaisical approach of the students and the erroneous teaching methodology adopted by the academia, students find it challenging to read or express themselves in English. They are not sufficiently conversant with proper pronunciation or grammar rules. Problems with quick recognition and accuracy often reveal themselves as dysfluent word reading or as reading without understanding it. Beth Villani, Reading Specialist, describes some of the behavioural manifestations of dysfluency as:

- slow and laboured reading
- frequently hesitating at new words
- lacking appropriate expression which conveys the correct emotion/feeling.
- inaccurate decoding of unfamiliar words
- replacing words in the text with those of their own
- inability to memorize words that have been cognised and practiced earlier
- quick recognition of very small number of words
- poor comprehension even at a superficial level.

Apart from these, problems with phonological skills/phonics lead to inefficient and tedious decoding and this in turn leads to difficulty in the development of spontaneous recognition of words. Inadequate time to practice, reading connected text with specificity is also another major reason for dysfluency. Moats and Tolman call it 'A core problem with processing speed/orthographic processing which affects speed and accuracy of printed word recognition'.

### **Remedies.**

Reading dysfluency in Indian classrooms appears to be a ubiquitous problem. However, the impact of this problem is enormous. As the famous American linguist, Benjamin Lee Whorf puts it "Language shapes the way we think, and

determines what we can think about". Reading dysfluency not only negatively impacts development of other skills in the LSRW spectrum of language learning, it also reduces a student's ideating process and limits his vision and world significantly. Therefore, it becomes quite clear that the problem of dysfluency needs to be paid heed to, and remedial action should be taken as early as is possible, during the language learning process. Certain basic remedials that can be undertaken early in the process of language acquisition are:

1. Tracking the words with a finger as the teacher reads in the classroom. Then the student reads it.
2. Having the teacher read aloud. Then, the student matches voice with the teacher.
3. Have the student read his favourite books multiple times, till his reading gathers automaticity, accuracy, and expression.
4. Evaluate the student to check if decoding or word recognition is at the root of the difficulty. If it is, then decoding will need to be addressed as an independent problem, independent of speed or expression.
5. Give the student an age-appropriate text that he can practice repeatedly. Get the student to read aloud and time him. Calculate words-correct-per-minute regularly. Discuss this analysis/data with the student, so that he can evolve his own improvement strategy.
6. Ask the student to record his reading. Ask him to play it back and identify his automaticity and specificity errors. Ask him to work on his errors.
7. Have the teacher read aloud in class and ask the student to read it back to him.
8. Instruct the student to read a passage with a definite emotion, such as sadness or excitement, to drive home the importance of intonation and expression.
9. The teacher needs to include timed practice reading sessions into his instructional repertoire.

While these practises can and do help learners to tide over English Reading Dysfluency in the initial stages, more organized and formal strategies need to be employed to help older students struggling with reading dysfluency. Some of them strategies discussed by Martin Galway in his article "A field guide to reading fluency: a Reader's Digest of Our Work to Date", are:

#### 1. Loud Reading

Loud reading and silent reading have advantages of their own. While loud reading in the classroom helps the learner

to maintain his focus on the text and enhances his rapid reading and pronunciation skills, silent reading, on the other hand, is the most suitable method for reading in crowded places and helps improve comprehension skills. Loud reading is generally slower than silent reading, however it is a better way to focus attention on the students' automaticity, accuracy and pronunciation.

#### 2. Choral Reading

Choral reading is reading aloud in unison with a whole class or group of students. Choral reading helps build students' fluency, self-confidence, and motivation. As students are reading aloud together, students who may ordinarily feel self-conscious or nervous about reading aloud, have built-in support. There are various types of choral reading. Some of them are:

- Antiphonal: Antiphonal reading involves dividing the class into smaller groups. Each group is given a different part of the text to read. Students are given time to practise reading before all the teams are brought in to read the text, one after the other.
- Role Play: In role plays, each group is given different speaking parts that contribute to make one role play. One team can play the narrator while the other groups play different characters.
- Cumulative Choral Reading: In this method, the number of students reading, keeps increasing as the reading progresses. One group or one student can begin reading and another group joins in with him/them. The number of students who are reading, keeps increasing up until the end, when the entire class is reading together.
- Extempore Choral Reading: One student begins reading the text and other students join in or fade out whenever they choose. Students can choose/plan their reading parts before the actual reading begins.

#### 3. Beginning with Smaller Texts

Students can begin dealing with their dysfluency by reading small texts, instead of lengthy ones. The small amount of decoding, accuracy and tonal needs will result in fewer errors. This will lead to an increase in confidence and motivate and prepare them for longer text reading exercises.

#### 4. Repeated Reading

Repeated reading is frequently used to improve vocal reading fluency. Repeated reading can be used by students who have started on some amount of initial word reading skills but display insufficient reading fluency for their grade or age level. The idea of repeated reading emerged in the late 1970's as a result of the writings of Jay Samuels, Director of the Minnesota Reading and Research Project (1979) and Carol Chomsky, Harvard University (1978). They found, in two independent studies, that engaging kids



in repeatedly reading texts aloud improved their reading ability.

Scientific studies have shown the importance of “automaticity” to reading. Being able to decode without thinking about it consciously, is very essential to fluent reading. There is only a limited amount of brain space to think. The more a student uses this space for cognition or figuring out words, the less this space is available to comprehend the text's meaning. Jay Samuel believes, that repeated reading could help readers acquire an instinct for words. He believes that it helps readers become proficient in the art of reading words exactly and with sufficient speed.

#### 4. Poetry Recitation and Performing Scripted Skits

Poetry and performing in skits and plays can also be used to improve dysfluency among students. Poetry has an inherent melody, rhythm, pace, expressions and ideas that helps students retain words in their memory, expanding their base vocabulary that in turn supports building fluency. Memorising dialogues for a skit does the same. The context, ideas, dialogue delivery with a certain emotion and coordinating with other actors help in recognising words, their comprehension and builds up a felicity in using them.

#### 5. Text Marking for Phrasing

‘Marking the Text’ is a reading plan that requires students to critique their own reading”. While reading the text, the student analyzes ideas, evaluates ideas, and circles and underlines essential information to own and personalizes his own reading. There are three different types of marking in this strategy: numbering paragraphs, circling, sense grouping (putting words together like in normal speech, pausing properly between phrases, clauses, and sentences etc).

#### 6. Echo Reading

In this strategy, the facilitator usually reads a text line by line or sentence by sentence, demonstrating appropriate fluency. After reading each line, the students echo the reading of the line with the same rate and intonation. Echo reading is an easy-to-use reading tool for helping struggling readers develop fluency, expression, and reading at an appropriate pace. This strategy can also help them learn about using punctuation marks while reading. This strategy is often called re-reading, but technically these are two different things. Teachers can train students to use this methodology at home too. It can help struggling students to improve their confidence, comprehension, ability to identify unknown words, improve their listening skills, phrasing and vocabulary.

#### 7. Paired Reading

Paired reading is a research-based fluency building tool. In this approach, students read aloud to each other. When pairing students, fluent readers can be paired with less fluent readers, or two students who are at the same level can be

paired to re-read a story they have already read and practiced.

Paired reading helps students to work together, encourages collaboration among them and provides a platform for peer-assisted learning. It allows them to take turns at reading and provide feedback to each other, as a way to gauge comprehension. By reading together with a reading helper, a student's reading experience is modelled and supported, without their errors being held up for scrutiny and making them nervous.

#### 8. Supported Reading

Audio-assisted reading is an individual or group reading activity where students read along, in their books as they follow a fluent reader, reading the book on an audio recording (audiotape, audio book, or iPod).

### **CONCLUSION**

Dysfluency in the perusal of English texts in Indian classrooms continues to be a challenge for most teachers of English in India. While social and academic issues contribute to its existence, the teachers need to meet this challenge by thinking of different ways of making the text accessible to a struggling student and create out of the box solutions. Ultimately, the teacher has to ensure that the students lose their dependency on teachers and their peers and become independent readers, who can read fluently and comprehend their own reading as well.

The teacher needs to adopt a ‘problem solving approach’, while dealing with this problem. The teachers can also ‘think aloud’ about what to do when they encounter this problem and encourage students to come up with their own strategies. This not only helps the students handle the text, but also helps them think about creative classroom strategies that can help mitigate the problem of dysfluency.

To conclude, it is evident that, in spite of concerns around reading English in classrooms, it continues to challenge the teacher and his pedagogy. It is important to be attentive to it from the early years or whenever it is encountered and use tried and tested and sometimes innovative techniques to help students gain fluency in reading. This is necessary to make sure, that their other learning skills are not impacted adversely and their learning abilities remain independent and strong all through their learning years and through their long term learning curve.

### **REFERENCES**

- [1] Villani, beth. “1. Automaticity and Fluency- Evidence Based Early Literacy.” *Dese*, 20 Nov. 2020, [www.doe.mass.edu/massliteracy/reading-difficulties/automaticity-fluency.html](http://www.doe.mass.edu/massliteracy/reading-difficulties/automaticity-fluency.html).

- [2] Moats, louisa, and carol Tolman. "The Development of Phonological Skills." *Reading Rockets*, 12 Sept. 2019, [www.readingrockets.org/article/development-phonological-skills](http://www.readingrockets.org/article/development-phonological-skills).
- [3] Galway, Martin. "A Field Guide to Reading Fluency: A Reader's Digest of Our Work to Date." *HFL Education*, 29 June 2021, [www.hfleducation.org/blog/a-field-guide-to-reading-fluency](http://www.hfleducation.org/blog/a-field-guide-to-reading-fluency).
- [4] Truelove, tina. "What Are Three Major Problems in Reading Fluency?" *The Classroom*, [www.theclassroom.com/three-major-problems-reading-fluency-7227551.html](http://www.theclassroom.com/three-major-problems-reading-fluency-7227551.html). Accessed 25 May 2023.
- [5] Salman, Dina Mohammed. "Intonation and Learning English Language during Corona Virus Pandemic." *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.71.31>.
- [6] Shanahan, Timothy. "Everything You Wanted to Know about Repeated Reading." *Reading Rockets*, 4 Aug. 2017, <https://www.readingrockets.org/blogs/shanahan-literacy/everything-you-wanted-know-about-repeated-reading>. Accessed 14 Apr. 2023.
- [7] Hoa, Le Huong. "Team -Teaching as a Tool for Professional Development." *International Journal of Language, Literature and Culture*. AI Publications, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.22161/ijllc.2.3.3>.
- [8] Saud, Mahesh Singh. "My Students Do Not Get Engaged in Speaking Activities in the Classroom." *International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL)*, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.22161/ijeel.2.2.3>.
- [9] Sinha, Shobha. "Reading Without Meaning : The Dilemma of Indian Classrooms." *Language and Language Teaching*, Vol 1, no. Number 1, Jan. 2012, pp. 22–26.
- [10] Akbaraliyevna, Abdullayeva Shahnoza. "Studies on Fluency and Interaction in Developing the Students' Speaking Skill." *International Journal of Teaching, Learning and Education*, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.22161/ijtle.2.1.3>.
- [11] Cicerchia, Meredith. "10 Fluency Strategies for Struggling Readers." *Readandspell.Com*, <https://www.readandspell.com/fluency-strategies-for-struggling-readers>. Accessed 16 July 2023.



# Quest of Agency and Identity: A Feminist Reading of Kate Chopin's "A Respectable Woman"

Bhabes Kumar Labh

Lecturer of English, Saraswati Multiple Campus, Thamel, Kathmandu, Nepal

Received: 16 Jun 2023; Received in revised form: 18 Jul 2023; Accepted: 25 Jul 2023; Available online: 31 Jul 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— *The present paper critically examines how Kate Chopin's short story, "A Respectable Woman" encapsulates women's aspiration for their unconditional agency, distinct personal identity, and the subsequent existential authenticity. It focuses the female protagonist Mrs. Baroda's mental restrictions caused by social norms and her struggle to overcome them. By applying Simon de Beauvoir's notions of transcendence and immanence, it analyses how Mrs. Baroda strives to affirm unconditional and unproblematic agency as an individual as a part of her attempts to negotiate her sexuality, freedom and identity. The paper posits that Chopin defies the contemporary patriarchal codes of the 19<sup>th</sup> century American society as she reveals women's awareness of their precarious situation, desire for freedom and emancipation from societal constraints that seek to strip them of their independent agency and identity.*



**Keywords**— *Kate Chopin, "A Respectable Woman," Simon de Beauvoir, women's agency, identity, immanence, transcendence*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Women have been struggling against patriarchal norms, values and beliefs that tend to deny them distinct identity and unconditional agency. The 19<sup>th</sup> century American society exercised varied ideals to control dreams and desires of women, especially middle- and upper-class white women. The then "Cult of True Womanhood" defined "piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity" as their cardinal virtues (Welter 152). It was, in fact, a patriarchal ideology rather than a cult that subjugated women with nearly no chances of advancement in their life. With their chances severely limited to marriage and motherhood, their life was plagued with "domestic dependency" – dependency on their husbands for security, survival and social recognition. The "Cult of True Womanhood" evolved into New Woman movement in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when Kate Chopin emerged as a strong feminist voice on the literary horizon of America. The ideals of New Woman movement "focused primarily on entirely "emancipating" women from the social expectations and conventions forced upon them by tradition" (Cruea 198). Inspired by the New Woman movement, Kate Chopin focused on crafting powerful

feminist texts exploring women's so far subdued aspirations for freedom, dignity and identity in the male-dominant society.

An unconventional woman writer from 19<sup>th</sup> century America, Chopin belongs to the feminist school of authors who have lent voice to women for their freedom and identity. Born as Katherine O'Flaherty in St. Louis in 1851, Chopin is regarded as a pioneer of feminist writers. "Feminism" did not even exist in its usual sense when she wrote (Cruea 187). She did not openly advocate for feminist ideals, but her oeuvre is strongly marked by feminist voice. She defied the then social conventions and taboos in her life and literary work as well. She struggled to have some of her short stories and novels published as she wrote on women's sexuality and desire for freedom from societal constraints through portrayal of strong female characters. Female sexuality is a common theme in her oeuvre as in her short story, "A Respectable Woman." Published in the *Vogue* magazine in 1894, this story is one of her most anthologized stories with ambiguous ending that have drawn varied interpretations and critical analyses.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Steele focused on the female protagonist's dilemma and lack of her clear stance on her approach to her husband's friend in the story. She applied reader's response theory in her analysis of the story and concluded that readers can "find and create their own meaning from the text" (1). Dyer focused on the theme of sexual passion, suggesting that Mrs. Baroda's infatuation with Gouvernail is matched by the latter's sensuous fascination with her, but his passion is "tempered by a natural respect for women, a sensitivity to Mrs. Baroda's position, and patient self-control" (49). Gurung offered a postmodern feminist critique of the story, underscoring the absence of "biologically located essentialism and male dystopian depiction" and presence of "the co-existence between male and female" (8). Xin Liu in his feminist analysis of the story focused on the theme of women's oppression caused by "the patriarchal ideology, traditional moral and gendered division of labor" (556). Pujimahanani et al. stressed on the female protagonist's conventional subservient identity. They claim Mrs. Baroda's "resolution to step back, to think, and to return to her husband is her approach to define her identity" (93). The current research paper makes a remarkable departure from the studies conducted so far on this particular story as it seeks to examine the issue of women's unproblematic and unconditional agency. It also focuses on Mrs. Baroda's fight against patriarchal values and the burden of social expectation while negotiating her identity.

## III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Simon de Beauvoir's feminist-phenomenological notions of transcendence and immanence delineated in her magnum opus, *The Second Sex* have served as the theoretical framework for this study. De Beauvoir introduced the concept of transcendence as a dynamic realm that contains exercise of freedom, power, and opportunities of advancement. It imbues one with privileges enabling one to act voluntarily, pursue creative goals, realise their full potentials, and transcend themselves. On the contrary, immanence represents the closed-off realm that contains curtailed freedom, limited opportunities, and all sorts of repressions especially that of sexuality. It signifies "the bodily/physical and the involuntary...material existence in general, its perpetuation, and the maintenance of the status quo" (Strickling 36). De Beauvoir argues that social norms, values and beliefs grant men transcendence but consign women in continual state of immanence. However, both transcendence and immanence are necessary for us. "In truth, all human existence is transcendence and immanence at the same time; to go beyond itself, it must maintain itself; to thrust itself toward the future, it must integrate the past

into itself," states De Beauvoir (443). Exercising one's transcendence is far more significant than exercising one's immanence.

## IV. ANALYSIS

Women's self-identity in a patriarchal society has been a major feminist concern that Chopin deftly projects at the beginning of "A Respectable Woman" when she introduces the protagonist – Mrs. Baroda. She is the central figure of the story, but her first name is never mentioned. She is always referred to by her married name in a way that her husband Gaston is not. Our name is an indispensable part of our personal identity; it is what people call us by. The woman protagonist's husband does not mention her name either; he calls her "ma belle" (my beautiful) and "chereamie" (dear friend). Meaning lies in her husband's addressing her as something else but not her name. Chopin has denied the protagonist personal name as a part of her narrative strategy to suggest her society takes her only as Mr. Gaston Baroda's wife who has no personal identity.

The central conflict in the story lies in the protagonist's mind as her internalized social norms and values clash with her private desire. Unlike radical feminist texts, "A Respectable Woman" does not pit husband against wife or male against female. Both male characters of the story—Gaston and Gouvernail—are kind and compassionate towards Mrs. Baroda. She receives proper attention, affection and care from each of them. The antagonizing force, in fact, stems from patriarchal values that she believes in as they seek to stop her from realizing her full potentialities.

Mrs. Baroda's chances are seriously limited to marriage. She is living as a housewife with her husband Gaston, a sugar planter, on his plantation. When the story begins, we find her looking forward to "a period of unbroken rest" and "undisturbed tete-a-tete with her husband" (Chopin 141). She feels "provoked" to learn from Gaston that his college friend Gouvernail is about to come and live on their plantation for one or two weeks, which is certain to spoil her plan. Like a typical Victorian housewife, Mrs. Baroda seeks her husband's company for relaxation and enjoyment, but Gaston, on the other hand, is looking forward to enjoy his friend's company. Gaston's chances are not limited only to marriage as it is in the case of his wife. Unlike Gaston, Mrs. Baroda is stuck in domestic sphere in which she relies on her husband for fulfillment. De Beauvoir notes:

A man marries to anchor himself in immanence but not to confine himself in it; he wants a home but also to remain free to escape from it; he settles down, but he often remains a vagabond in his



heart; he does not scorn happiness, but he does not make it an end in itself; repetition bores him; he seeks novelty, risk, resistance to overcome, camaraderie, friendships that wrest him from the solitude of the couple. (550)

Subjected to domestic dependency, Mrs. Baroda relies on her husband not only for enjoyment and relaxation but also her social recognition. Her situation corroborates what de Beauvoir calls immanence, a closed-off domain in which she is bound to suppress her desire for the sake of her duty as a housewife.

Gouvernail's arrival stirs novel feelings within Mrs. Baroda. Despite her negative presumption of him, she happens to like him when he presents himself on the Barodas' sugar plantation. She seeks her agency as a woman for the first time in disliking Gouvernail though she has never seen him. She fancies him to be a cynical and impractical intellectual with hands in pockets, glasses and a worn out figure. This could be her first line of defense, a psychological effort to ensure she does not defy the virtue of "True Woman" by getting tempted to any other male as it could disturb her self-conception of being a respectable woman as well. The ideals of the 19<sup>th</sup> century "Cult of True Womanhood" – purity and faithfulness to husband – seem to be working well upon her mind at this point in the story. She is trying to maintain the patriarchal values imposed by the male-dominant society.

Mrs. Baroda's fascination with Gouvernail complicates her situation. She tries to comprehend her feeling for him but fails. He sits "mute and receptive before her chatty eagerness" (Chopin 141). He behaves with her in courteous and respectful way, but shows no clear sign of reciprocal affection that she might have expected – "His manner was as courteous toward her as the most exacting woman could require; but he made no direct appeal to her approval or even esteem" (Chopin 141). Then, she imposes her company on him to break his reticence, and her failure in doing so results in annoyance to her. She cannot comprehend why she likes him and what she expects from him. "She had never known her thoughts or her intentions to be so confused" (Chopin 142). The first conspicuous instance of Mrs. Baroda's seeking her agency is her decision to quit her home, leaving her husband and guest on their own. She grumbles to Gaston that his friend is boring, and declares she is going to the city to live with her aunt until Gouvernail is gone from their home. She felt "a distinct necessity to quit her home in the morning" (Chopin 142). Mrs. Baroda's bold assertion of her agency as a woman is not, however, unproblematic because she is apparently seeking to avoid Gouvernail or her feelings for him. The night before she leaves her home, she feels strong sexual

attraction towards Gouvernail while sitting with him on a bench beneath an oak tree.

Her physical being was for the moment predominant. She was not thinking of his words, only drinking in the tones of his voice. She wanted to reach out her hand in the darkness and touch him with the sensitive tips of her fingers upon the face or the lips. She wanted to draw close to him and whisper against his cheek—she did not care what—as she might have done if she had not been a respectable woman. (Chopin 143)

She suppresses her sexual urge in her efforts to maintain the virtues of "True Woman" such as sexual purity and faithfulness without which she could not be a respectable woman. "In Victorian England and America, moreover, the repression of sexuality could mean security...autonomy and social respectability" (Rosenberg 149). Patriarchy tends to treat women's bodies as sexual object solely meant for husbands. They are expected to maintain the "priceless virtue" of preserving their virginity for husbands without which they would become a "fallen woman." Welter notes:

A "fallen woman" was a "fallen angel," unworthy of the celestial company of her sex....The marriage night was the single great event of a woman's life, when she bestowed her greatest treasure upon her husband, and from that time on was completely dependent upon him, an empty vessel, without legal or emotional existence of her own (154-155).

Mrs. Baroda thinks she is a respectable woman for whom it would be inappropriate and adulterous to have sexual contact with some other male. "The stronger the impulse grew to bring herself near him, the further, in fact, did she draw away from him" (Chopin 143). Thus, she asserts her agency in suppressing her natural desire that is a part of her individuality.

Simon de Beauvoir claims, "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (330). She argues gender is rather a cultural construct that imposes traditional gender roles on women and expects them to behave in particular way conforming to the social norms and values. Mrs. Baroda behaves more like a typical 19<sup>th</sup> century American woman than an independent individual. She has learnt from her patriarchal society that she is a "woman" who is expected to compromise and sacrifice to conform to her social norms.

Mrs. Baroda shows some glimpses of transformation when she decides not to tell her husband Gaston about her sexual temptation for Gouvernail. She controls another temptation; that is, the temptation of seeking her husband's assistance in resolving her mental conflict. "Besides being a respectable woman she was a very sensible one; and she knew there are some battles in

life which a human being must fight alone" (Chopin 143-144). She determines to fight her battle on her own, and thus, asserts her independence and individuality for the first time in the story. This is the first indication in the story that Mrs. Baroda seeks to cast off the ideals of "True Womanhood", and act as a conscious independent individual. However, the mental conflict still persists within her; she is caught between societal expectation and her personal desire for Gouvernail outside her marital boundary.

Mrs. Baroda comes back home from the city only after Gouvernail's departure from their plantation. Next summer, Gaston wants to invite Gouvernail again but is enforced to give up his plan after strenuous opposition from her. Her mental conflict is not resolved yet. Disturbed with her extramarital sexual fascination with Gouvernail, she seeks to avoid him. But before the end of the year, She proposes Gouvernail be invited to their plantation. With her mental conflict resolved, she seems to be ready to acknowledge her private desire as a distinct part of her being, and hence, she is ready to face Gouvernail. Pleased with her proposal, Gaston remarks she has overcome her dislike for his friend. Mrs. Baroda responds in ambiguous manner; she says, "I have overcome everything! You will see. This time I shall be very nice to him" (Chopin 144). In fact, Mrs. Baroda does not have the feeling of dislike for Gouvernail. So, it certainly is not dislike that she has overcome. She might be referring to her mental restrictions that stopped her from affirming her own natural private desire. Mrs. Baroda's ambiguous response that she has overcome "everything" and her willingness to be "very nice" to Gaston can have varied interpretations but one thing is clear that unlike other strong female characters in Chopin's oeuvre, Mrs. Baroda is unable to openly defy the patriarchal ideals to fulfill her extramarital sexual desire and thereby assert her agency as an independent person.

## V. CONCLUSION

Freedom of choice is an innate part of human nature that contributes to the sense of distinct personal identity and existential authenticity. Patriarchal ideologies and their impact ingrained in the mind of women at their young age, however, function to deny them. Mrs. Baroda struggles to make choice as she tries to uphold the 19<sup>th</sup> century ideals of "True Woman". She gets caught between societal expectation and her natural private desire. Casting off conventional patriarchal ideals of womanhood that stifle her individuality, she seeks unproblematic and unconditional agency as a conscious independent human being. Being aware of her predicament and awakening consciousness, she seems to wish for control over her body,

needs, and life-condition, and thus, negotiates her personal identity.

In the beginning, she seeks agency as a married woman, which is problematic as it helps to further strengthen her allegiance to patriarchal norms, and thus consolidates her immanent state. But she appears confident and clear in her mind with her mental conflict resolved at the end of the story when she proposes Gouvernail be invited and declares to have "overcome everything" and to be "very nice" to him. She seems to have shaken off the burden of societal expectation, and is ready to acknowledge her natural private desire and act upon it that can give her the sense of freedom and individuality. This is how she seeks to affirm her identity and agency as a free individual. Through her portrayal, Chopin shows women's aspiration to come out of their immanent realm and assert transcendence. Her ambiguous statement, however, suggests she lacks enough courage and boldness to defy the patriarchal barriers; her "long tender kiss" upon her husband's lips reveals her intention of maintaining her marital status. Thus, Mrs. Baroda, stuck in *ménage à trois*, remains down to her varying and volatile mood, drawn and driven to the prospects of immanence.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany Chevallier. New York: Vintage, 2011.
- [2] Cahyaningsih, Pujimahanani et al. "Gender Performativity as Asserted on Kate Chopin's "A Respectable Woman"." *Anaphora: Journal of Language, Literary, and Cultural Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2022, pp. 92-103. ResearchGate, doi.org/10.30996/anaphora.v5i1.6423
- [3] Chopin, Kate. "A Respectable Woman." *The Awakening and Selected Short Stories*. A Penn State Electronic Classics Series Publication, 2008, pp. 141-44. <https://cdnsm5ss3.sharpschool.com/UserFiles/Servers/Server4204286/Image/Grade12%20TheAwakening.pdf>.
- [4] Cruea, Susan M. "Changing Ideals of Womanhood During the Nineteenth-Century Woman Movement." *University Writing Program Faculty Publications*, 2005. [https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/gsw\\_pub/1](https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/gsw_pub/1)
- [5] Dyer, Joyce. "Gouvernail, Kate Chopin's Sensitive Bachelor." *The Southern Literary Journal*, vol. 14, no. 1, 1981, pp. 46-55. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20067777>
- [6] Gurung, Netra Bahadur. *Undoing Gender Boundaries: A Post Modern Feminist Critique of Kate Chopin's Selected Stories*. 2021. Tribhuvan University, MA Thesis. <https://elibrary.tucl.edu.np/bitstream/123456789/11623/1/Fu11%20Thesis.pdf>
- [7] Liu, Xin. "A Short Analysis of Kate Chopin's "A Respectable Woman" from a Feminist Perspective." *5th International Conference on Education, Language, Art and Inter-cultural Communication, Xianning, China, 2018*. vol. 289, 2018, pp.

- 556-69. <https://www.atlantis-press.com/proceedings/icelaic-18/55910375>
- [8] Rosenberg, Charles E. "Sexuality, Class and Role in 19th-Century America." *American Quarterly*, vol. 25, no. 2, 1973, pp. 131-153. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2711594>
- [9] Ahmed, Tanzir. "The Contrast between the Public and the Private Good: The Robbing of Feminine Identity and Dignity in Alice Walker's 'The Abortion.'" *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.55.51>.
- [10] Huang, Chih-Hsuan, Li Li, Cuiyun Liu, Jingyi Yao, and Xiumei Li. "Research on the Application of Online and Offline Mixed Teaching Mode of Marketing Course Based on the BOPPPS Model." *Journal of Humanities and Education Development*. AI Publications, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.22161/jhed.5.1.2>.
- [11] Steele, Beverly. "The Confusion of Predictability: A Reader-Response Approach of 'A Respectable Woman.'" *Hog Creek Review: A Literary Journal of The Ohio State University at Lima*, 2016. <https://kb.osu.edu/handle/1811/79048>
- [12] Strickling, Bonnelle Lewis. "Simone de Beauvoir and the Value of Immanence." *Atlantis*, vol. 13, no. 2, 1988. <https://journals.msvu.ca/index.php/atlantis/article/download/4318/3558/5730>
- [13] Welter, Barbara. "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860." *American Quarterly*, vol. 18, no. 2, 1966, pp. 151-174. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2711179>



# Depiction of Caste Annihilation and Class Abrogation in Mulk Raj Anand's UNTOUCHABLE and COOLIE

Dr. Purnima Bharadwaj<sup>1</sup>, Mr. Dilkes<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor in English Govt. P. G. College Bisalpur, Pilibhit (MJPRU, Bareilly), India

<sup>2</sup>Scholar, Krishna Institute of Management, Meerut, India

Received: 17 Jun 2023; Received in revised form: 16 Jul 2023; Accepted: 24 Jul 2023; Available online: 31 Jul 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— Since civilization has started caste system based on profession not by birth. Later on it turns into a power game and the whole human society were divided into four varnas. Manusmriti, widely regarded to be the important and authoritative book on Hindu law and dating back to at least 1000 years before Christ was born “acknowledges and justifies the caste system as the basis of order and regularity of society.” (Web) The caste divides Hindu into four main categories – Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. Many believe that the groups originated from Brahma, The Hindu God of Creation. They are classified according to occupation and determine access to wealth, power and privilege. In recent years Violence has become a common phenomenon in India. It has engulfed the entire political, social, economic, cultural and even our personal lives. Violence of social justice and caste discriminations of complex characters have added additional burden to our society whereas we Indians have been specially advised to practice “non-violence”. The growing trend in violence thus provokes us to talk about non-violence and identify the roots of violence in India. Caste Violence is perhaps one of the most hazardous forms of violence in India. It often intermingles with the most political, social, cultural, and class atrocity. So caste discriminations and atrocities against the socially weaker sections with age-old traditional and unconventional norms deserve a careful historical investigation. Indian Caste system is the most widely discussed subject all over the world. Caste system is a social evil in which the higher caste people exploits and persecutes the lower caste people and forced them to live sub-human lives like beasts. This paper is based on caste and vulgarism of ‘Untouchable’ and ‘Coolie’ poignantly portrayed by M R Anand. It is an attempt to explore its origin, nature, gravity, and deprivation.



**Keywords**— Instinct, slaying, ferocity, hazardous, atrocities.

## I. INTRODUCTION

“You cannot build anything on the foundation of caste. You cannot build up a nation. You cannot build up a morality.”

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar

From the time immemorial caste annihilation and class conflict have become the subject of the great concern of the world. Since ages the soil of India has also been provoked caste violence as a trend. The canvas of Indian fabric is stained by the acts of misdemeanor towards the poor and the down trodden. Mulk Raj Anand is the first Indo- Anglian novelist to depict the tragic plight of the underdogs of Indian

Society writes realistically in his fiction about the doomed lines of the down- trodden and oppressed such as sweepers, a coolie, a peasant, subalterns and female subalterns etc. Who are all agonised victims of capitalistic exploitation, poverty, class- caste hatred, race hatred, and inhuman cruelty. India is known for its rich culture and heritage but the social evil of untouchability has destroyed the unity among the people Anand has a deep and sympathetic condition of Indian females and caste – class system. India is a hierarchical society. Society hierarchy is evident in caste groups, among individuals and in family. The ills of



Indian Society stem from the very essence of Hinduism and its traditions, principally the deplorable condition, treatment of females and of untouchables. Generally, high status is associated with purity and low status with pollution.

Untouchable(1935) is the first novel of MulkRajAnand, which explicates realistically a day in the life of Bakha, a sweeper boy, the son of Lakha and brings out the impact on him of the various events which take place by giving us his "stream of consciousness."The novel gives a vivid picture of the caste system that exists in our country. It opens with the out caste colon's descriptions.If we observe the lower caste males perspective of discrimination they have a perennial conflict against the caste system. Bakha in Untouchable and Munno in Coolie struggle throughout their life to survive in the class centered society. The novel clearly foregrounds the trials and tribulations of the lives of untouchables in pre-independence Indian society which was marked by caste consciousness among people. It traces the inhuman treatment out to the marginalized by the upper dominating castes. They don't have access even to the basic amenities of life. The scavengers, the lowest of the lowly castes, are the worst sufferers as they are considered most polluted and have to announce their arrival by shouting, 'Posh, posh, sweeper coming'(Untouchable, 55) lest they should accidentally touch any upper- caste Hindu and pollute him. The oppression of the rural poor and the use of the state power have been exceedingly highlighted by the novelist. The novel traces how the master discourse of the upper castes does not allow the untouchables any room for resistance and how under the panoptic an gaze of the dominating discourse the marginalized untouchables are forced to internalize the dominating ideology. Thus, Anand lays bare the evils of the caste-system in Hindu dominated society. The line, '*They think we are mere dirt because we clean their dirt*' (untouchable, p.39) sums up the novelist's understanding of the grim realities of India's social life. Untouchable shows the evils of caste system a long with a panacea for its social malaise.

Mulk Raj Anand's '*Coolie*' (1936), deals with labour problem of textile mills and pitiable conditions of the domestic servants. Coolie portrays the class distinction between the rich and the poor .It depicts the sad life of Munoo. To Anand coolie is the symbol of human degradation. Munoo is a universal figure, larger than life, symbolizing the suffering and misery of the down-trodden and exploited masses of India. The worst thing that Munoo suffers from is rebuking nature of Bibiji, the wife of Babu Natho Ram. He is continually abused, warned and threatened with a copious flow of words. munoo is humiliated with a series of words like 'you eater of your masters' 'shameless brute' 'dog' 'vulgar stupid hill boy' 'an utter brute' 'a savage' 'son of bitch' 'unveiled brute'

'monkey' 'owl' ect. Munno is continually abused as Bakha in Untouchable. Bakha is illtreated due to his marginalized caste being an untouchable where Munno receives subhuman treatment due to his marginalized class. The class conflict is seen when Prabha pleases Sir Todal Mal with his free gifts where the capitalist or the higher class always stood at the privileges and the lower strata of the society remains poor and helpless. However, it is also evident in the novel where Munoo travels to Bombay. Munoo suffered in the place Shimla. He was taken by Mrs. Mainwaring and she slaps him and tortured him. It is evident in the discrimination where Munoo is treated as a subhuman being by Mrs. Mainwaring. Since Munoo belongs to the lowest strata of the society, he is treated as subhuman and exploited that reflects the caste conflict and bias in the society. The novelist depicts the turn down and upturns in the life of Munoo through his story of repression. Munoo is deprived of happiness. He is disgraced for relieving outside the wall and abuse is showered on him. Munoo bears physical and psychological torture and this represents repression in the form of child labour. He is thoroughly disappointed at the first contact with actuality. "*The bigger a city is, the more cruel it is to the sons of Adam. You have to pay even for the breath that you breathe*". (Coolie, 13) Munoo becomes very upset when he sees a coolie lying huddled at the corner of a footpath in Bombay: "*pillowing his head on his arm, shrinking into himself, as if he were afraid to occupy too much space*" (Coolie, 14)Munno, in the novel, more or less at each stage he comes crossway merely tenderness and unkindness which make his life a painful story of agony. He is forced to become a sort of an aimless vagabond with apparently no control on his fate. Munoo's troubles and travails are sharp pointers to man's cruel enjoyment in torturing child domestics. Munoo represents those countless children whose childhood is lost in continuous physical labour in the swamp of caste and class dispute. Due to the caste system in Indian society, not only males are exploited, but women have to undergo double marginalization. They are exploited by the system and patriarchy. Sohini, sister of Bakha was also a victim of Untouchability. When she smiles, that even irritates a washewoman Gulabo and she explodes as, "*You annoy me with your silence. Eater of dung and drinker of urine. Bitch of a sweeper woman. I will show you how to insult one old enough to be your mother*". They are considered as a sin and if they have touched them by mistake then they need to sanctify. He says- "*.....All of them Abused , Abused , Abused why we always Abused? The sanitary inspector that day abused my father. They always abused us. Because we are sweepers, because we touch. They hate dung. I hate it to. That's why, I came here. I.....that's why they do not touch us.*" (

Untouchable , P.no. 58-59) When Pandit Kali Nath tries to molest her, she screams to protest, but when the priest accuses her for polluting him she remains wonder struck. This molestation episode shows a remarkable sense of integrity of her character and moral loftiness. This novel deals with subaltern's voices that are marginalization and casteism, exploitation of weaker sex, hypocrisy and poverty in India. PanditKali Nath says: **"You people have only been Polluted by a distance ..... I have been defiled by contact ."**( Anand , P. no . 53 )Sohini has to face a series of humiliations, because she is an outcaste and submissive female .The hypocritical priest , Pandit Kali Nath , is fascinated by her beauty and filling up her pitcher first at the well . The incident at the well tells us how the untouchables have to wait on the mercy of a high caste Hindu even for a pot of water . The outcaste were not allowed to draw water from the well . As we see here :**"The outcaste were not allowed to mount the platform surrounding the well , because if they were ever to draw water from it , the Hindus of the three upper castes would consider the water polluted. Nor were they allowed access to the near –by brook as their use of it would contaminate the stream ....."**(Untouchable , page no 33 )Both Bakha and Sohini are treated by society because of their caste and societal status . Sohini always tortured under the patriarchal pressure. She has been a victims of various discrimination and abuses. **"Bitch, why do not you speak ! Prostitute why do not you answer me?....."**(Untouchable , page no. 25 ) The Dalits remain to be the most oppressed section of social order in India .Sohini could speak a little bit against Pandit Kali Nath when he molest her: **"He –e just teased me .....and then when I was bending down to work ,he came and held me by my breasts .** (Untouchable ,page no 54-55). Marginalization is a chain of events taking place in a society to create certain restrictions for few and power for the gender ,caste , class are further divided into layers , creating a stratified structure where power dynamics moulds and produces identities ,not for recognition but for submissiveness , oppression. when the temple incident happens , we can see how woman and particularly her bodily identities is victim of our hypocrite, caste –based society: **"A thumping crowd of worshippers rushed out of the temple and stoodarrayed as in the grand final of an opera show .The lanky priest stood with upraised hands ,a few steps below him. His sister Sohini .....lingered modestly in the courtyard ."**(Untouchable ,page no. 52-) Anand, in his works, deals with the ritual and religious basis of caste and class discrimination in Indian society. He reveals the essential dignity of the underdogs of India society. According to Prof.P.P.Mehta : **" Dr.Anand in all his novels**

**emphasizes the fact that nobility and dignity are not the monopoly of the rich. The poor have their greatness ,honour as well as the richness. Mute inglorious Miltons and Cromwellsare not uncommon in the ranks of the poor."**(Untouchable ,A critical study P. no . 45 )

## II. CONCLUSION

The Indian caste system is a complex of social structure where in social roles like one's profession become hereditary resulting in restricted social mobility and fixed status hierarchies. High caste norms are associated with moral values while the lower caste norms are associated with immorality. The India society is divided into various sects and classes. This is because of the caste system prevalent in the country. The roots of the caste system go back to the ancient Vedas dividing people on the basis of occupation. Many villages and town are separated by caste and they may not cross the line dividing them from the higher castes. One of the most common social problems of the caste system was the discrimination of low caste members. Indian society is a caste based group where the upper caste exploits the lower caste.

## REFERENCES

- [1] AnandMulkRaj , Coolie , SahityaBhandar , Meerut(2000),
- [2] AnandMulkRaj , Untouchable , New Delhi Penguin Books2001.
- [3] AnandMulkRaj , Untouchable , Agra -3 , Shivam's Publication.print
- [4] Naik, M.K. 'A History of Indian English Literature'. New Delhi: Sahitya Academy,1982.
- [5] Sabitaliyevna, Mamadaliyeva Burayma. "The Role of Teacher-Student and Student-Student Talk in Teaching Target Language." International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL), 2023. <https://doi.org/10.22161/ijeel.2.1.5>.
- [6] Fisher, A.O., S.A. Oludemi, and W.T. Ojo. "Decolonisation: African Political Thought." International Journal of Teaching, Learning and Education, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.22161/ijtle.2.2.4>.
- [7] Areche, Franklin Ore. "Students Learning Behaviour: Factors Influencing Students Learning Behavior." International Journal of Language, Literature and Culture, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.22161/ijllc.2.3.1>.
- [8] .From The History Of The Caste System .<http://www.google.co.in.search.com>
- [9] Anand MulkRaj; Untouchable: A Critical Study , Prakash Book Depot, Bareilly, p. 9.
- [10] Unissa, Iftekhhar. "A Case Study of Empowerment of Muslim Women through Education in India." International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.3.2.14>.
- [11] U, Roopashree. "Self-Revival through Food in Geetha Hariharan's 'Remains of the Feast.'" International Journal of

English Literature and Social Sciences, 2021.  
<https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.65.41>.

- [12] A. Hofileña, Eliafie, and Francis Jose D. Bearneza.  
“Reconstructed Learning Activity Sheets (LAS): Its Effect on  
Students’ Performance in Mathematics.” *Journal of  
Humanities and Education Development*, 2023.  
<https://doi.org/10.22161/jhed.5.1.5>.



# Hybridity and Blurred Boundaries- Studying the Cosmopolitan Spirit in Individuals in the Three Texts of The Woman Warrior, My Beautiful Laundrette and The In-Between World of Vikram Lall

Tiyasha Saha

Postgraduate Programme in Management, Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, India

Received: 25 Jun 2023; Received in revised form: 19 Jul 2023; Accepted: 27 Jul 2023; Available online: 02 Aug 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— This paper aims to understand what being cosmopolitan entails by delving into three texts- *The Woman Warrior*, *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*. Each text will discover different aspects of national identity and the contrast it presents to the modern understanding of the term cosmopolitan. The paper will raise questions on what nationalism means in modern society and what outlines nationalist identities and the space it needs to fit in the global landscape.

**Keywords**— *Diaspora, Displacement, Globalization, Modernity, Nation*



## INTRODUCTION

From the existence of Pangaea to a gradual brokenness in the supercontinent that gave rise to multiple small continents, human spirit has come to become fragmented, constricted by the boundaries of the nation they call their 'home'. However, through the crevices of these boundaries, we see a light of commonality and a cosmopolitan spirit shining bright to celebrate the spirit of universal indivisibility. This paper aims to analyze diverse texts that have characters with varying temperaments to understand the idea of blurred boundaries which will seek to appreciate the cosmopolitan spirit that is inherent in every individual. The three texts that will be examined in the paper are- *The Woman Warrior* by Maxine Hong Kingston, *My Beautiful Laundrette* by Hanif Kureishi and *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* by M.G.Vassanji. Concerns of nationalism, independence and multicultural background will be delved into, to make sense of individuals' identities as a combination of several factors that is not limited by a nation's boundary but transcend every created division in a functioning society.

Nations are demarcated, restricted severely by boundaries, guarded zealously by several institutions established to continue the legacy of each nation. Despite their allegiance to an institutionalized polity, the indomitable spirit of people rises above this, to be a part of the 'third-space' characterized by a blend of hybridity and finding nativity within. The texts that this paper will examine will show how identity is malleable and unlike the conventional understanding where national identity supersedes any other kinds, individuals with multiple ethnic and cultural backgrounds have narratives that find home in the entire map of the globe.

*The Woman Warrior*, subtitled *Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*, the first text to be analyzed to understand the cosmopolitan spirit in individuals was written by Kingston in 1975, an outstanding creation that tells the story of a Chinese-America woman through five separate narratives woven beautifully together that influenced the identity of the writer. In the novel, the psyche of the narrator will be understood from her multicultural background and conflicting traditions between new world America and the heritage brought from China. In the



narrator readers see a need to rise above the boundaries of both the nation to create a new identity, an identity that is a blend of features that call to the narrator.

Hanif Kureishi's *My Beautiful Laundrette* is another tale of diaspora about Asian citizens living in South London as they navigate Thatcher's new economic rules and conditions. This text offers a different perspective to understand how people are beyond boundaries, cosmopolitan even in their economic dealings, struggling towards assimilating the lucrative facets of both, to create a working world that while not having close affinity to traditions doesn't shun them completely. The complexity arises when the two extremes of modernity and tradition spar to define the identity of the characters.

*The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* by M. G. Vassanji as the name aptly puts talks of the 'in-between' world, a world far beyond the limits of any national boundaries with people uniting to become one in the face of warring ideologies and national heritage. Published in the year 2003, traversing through the rough times of Kenya's independence struggle, it brings to light characters that negotiate spatial differences across continents while imbibing different traditions from different nations, having some commonality in their struggles but being worlds apart despite that. Themes of identity, nationhood and belongingness are inherently present in the novel all under the shadows of multiculturalism and an interconnected world.

In the past, several studies have been undertaken to understand this spirit in individuals/ characters to be cosmopolitan, to be a part of a space where boundaries are blurred and nation-state divisions are not starkly apparent. The three subject texts of the paper have been reviewed time and again by several authors and critics who have come to appreciate the essence of individuals to lean towards being global citizens, in terms of language, traditions, loyalties and principles. As has been suggested by Sangeeta Jhaharia and Mamta Beniwal in their paper titled 'Braving out in the Face of Constraints: The Woman Warrior', in the second part of the novel called the "White Tigers", the Chinese mythology of an avenging female figure that formed a part of Kingston's identity, having travelled oceans became 'new, American' influencing the author in a new way 'through the competing discourses of the emigrant's "invisible world" and "solid America."' Dr. Milon Franz in one of his essays says 'women's memories, like the collective memories of the nation state and of the ethnic or diasporic community, are heterogeneous', not rigidly defined by boundaries which Kingston uses in her novel as a tool to present her identity as she understands it. As Fatima Mujcinovic says in her

paper aptly titled: 'Self-Expression and World-Expression: Critical Multicultural Literacy in Maxine Hong Kingston and Sandra Cisneros',

'Initially disoriented by the tension between her Western education and her rearing in a Chinese household, the young protagonist learns to reconcile these different forms of cultural knowledge while remaining aware that her self-definition will always be complex, fluid and at times contradictory.'

In the screen play for 'My Beautiful Laundrette', Kureishi creates a world of characters within London that is away from its reality finding home in South Asia while maintaining an ever-present link with the Britain of that time. As editor, Adil Bhat puts it, the narrative is 'laced with the complexities of postcolonial racial identity that travels through the borders.' Defined as a 'cosmopolitan film', Kureishi in his work has created characters that are a blend of different cultures, trying to negotiate a home for themselves by navigating other factors like sexuality, race and economic perspectives.

As Jairus Omuteche says 'The nature of diasporic identities and belonging that M. G. Vassanji represents in his novel, *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*, are informed by the impacts of the planetary movements and displacements that were a direct result of this European imperialism.' Planetary movements present a picture where the world is one whole and people are an integral part of it, changing and creating dynamic identities for themselves. As a bildungsroman, the novel follows the trajectory of the lives of many characters as they conciliate their familial expectations with the modern country of Kenya just having attained independence. As James Orao from the University of Nairobi says in his paper which has been titled- 'Nationalism, Subversive History and Citizenship: The Quest for Identity in the Postcolonial Nation in M.G. Vassanji's *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*,' "an individual speaker's utterance is not just coming from an isolated, decontextualized voice' but rather manifests various cultures and discourses in which it participates'. Identities of characters are shown to be a consequential creation of various factors coming together, an appropriation of cosmopolitan attitude in people which is intrinsically present.

By studying the texts in this context, one can understand how nation is an imagined creation and people in reality can't be held by it. Humans have an innate spirit of oneness that is manifested later through their actions and words despite being bound by the rules of various independent nations that consider themselves the sole

power in a position to dictate the actions of its citizens. Due to an ever present sense of being cosmopolitan, individuals try to associate with people from all over, learning and acquiring varied traditions blending it with the legacy they are born with. Exploring this aspect helps in empathizing with the way people of a diaspora behave, their ways of associating with people, engaging in cross border relationships and creating an environment where there is space for new identities that are not dedicated to a nation to evolve and thrive. Reading the texts from a cosmopolitan perspective helps in questioning the ideas of nationalism and a person's supposed loyalty, whether it should be to the country they are born in, the country their family originates from or an altogether new space that is an amalgamation of the two as a part of the identity of the individual.

In *The Woman Warrior*, there are several instances that depict how characters are cosmopolitan despite the rigidity of the boundaries surrounding them. The subtitle of the novel has 'Ghosts' in it, a term that could be understood to represent the transcendental spirit of these unidentified individuals, similar to the spirit of the narrator that can't be bound either by the ancient Chinese traditions or the American dream that is always forward looking. Like ghosts that meander past boundaries, the narrator's spirit traverses different eras and nations to establish uniqueness for itself. In the first story called –'No Name Woman', Kingston says 'Those of us in the first American generations have had to figure out how the invisible world the emigrants built around our childhoods fits in solid America.' This is the beginning of a 'double consciousness' that is a new space characterized by multiculturalism that is a key factor responsible for the critical growth of the narrator. In her mother's story of her aunt, she believes that her mother is taking away her freedom of speech by imposing their Chinese customs – 'a ready tongue is an evil'. Language is an important aspect of her growing up in a background of dual cultures. In the last story called 'A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe', language is used as a motif to represent conflict between nations which coincide in individuals to co-exist. While initially, the narrator attributes her weakness of English speech to her Chinese tradition, she gradually realizes the import of it in her life, and how it has helped her retain her individuality in a significantly different reality. In her self-fashioning, hybridity finds a meaning where Chinese culture and American modernity combine to create a space where as a woman she can use her own voice. In the story 'White Tigers', she narrates the tale of an avenging Chinese woman who takes up the role of a warrior, otherwise limited to the men of the society. In presenting this tale of infinite courage, the narrator presents a new

mix, one that is modernized but that of an ancient myth. The very act of writing the novel can be seen as a symbol of hybridity and a study in the ever expanding cosmopolitan attitude wherein the writer talks of Chinese folklores and traditions from a different time in a foreign language, that of English far removed from the stories it has set to narrate. The stories are thus not limited to the country where it originated but through the spirit of the writer and her work becomes absorbed in the literature of the world.

A complex novel, *The Woman Warrior* seeks to represent the marginalization of women in any space and their incessant struggle to carve a space for themselves and thereby a common spirit that links women from all over, regardless of their nation. The story 'At the Western Palace' ends with a promise 'Brave Orchid's daughters decided fiercely that they would never let men be unfaithful to them', a promise that is common amongst women and daughters all over the world. The indomitable spirit of these women know no nation and these characters find themselves placed in the same context which they try to overcome all over the world.

In *My Beautiful Laundrette*, the laundrette that Omar and Johnny set to run in South London is in itself a cosmopolitan space, a place where London and Pakistan become one without inhibitions. In the text, readers encounter a scene where 'Omar and Johnny are making love vigorously', two distinct identities conjoining as a result of their inner spirit calling to the other individual. Throughout the entire script, readers are struck by how it is only people having Pakistani origin who succeed in this highly capitalized society run by the principles of Thatcher. In one of his statement, Nasser, Omar's uncle says 'In this damn country which we hate and love, you can get anything you want.' Despite his traditional values which he exercises at home, he shows the capacity of being adept at using the opportunities the new country has to offer. This shows how individuals can thrive in unfamiliar situations, just by virtue of their cosmopolitan spirit that compels them to succeed in the new environment that tests their identities. The two strands of Pakistani and English culture become one in Omar, in an increasingly hybrid London where multiple ethnicities reside. Johnny, despite being surrounded by white middle-class people, finds his affinity to Omar, a person of Pakistani origin showing how people and their relationships can be across countries and penetrate the constructed and defined boundaries of nations, including those of the colonized and colonizing nation. In their relationship, Omar and Johnny are intimately aligning to the supposed 'other', an act showing the all-encompassing

nature that is found in humans to be a part of the entire whole of existence. A source of tension in the text is Johnny's past and his transitioning as an accepting youth. Papa says 'The boy who came here one day dressed as a fascist with a quarter inch of hair?' a stereotypical representation of Johnny as an English boy against the Pakistani immigrants. However, he grows up to be an individual different from his friends, establishing a relationship with a boy from Pakistan, their relationship a testament to the world coalescing into one small space in their characters.

The title of the third text *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* has a very important key phrase which is 'in-between', a space that is neither here nor there. The space is a representation of the internal spirit of the characters that are created in the novel. The book has in its opening passages the straightforward line –'I simply crave to tell my story' being an active agent who is not relegated to the fringes of the political discourse between the colonialists and the Africans and yearns to narrate as an active self and not object, a self that has seen several countries. Immediately following the incident of the narrator's whirlwind relationship with Sophia, readers are introduced to a traditional Punjabi girl whom he is expected to marry and he follows through with the decision. While with one of them he experiences passion, with the latter he experiences a companionable friendship. These two contrasting characters and their relationship with the narrator show how his spirit is cosmopolitan in its very essence, surpassing the stereotypical expectations associated with him and emerging as a global being. This is similar for Deepa, Lall's sister who has a passionate relationship with Njoroge but is forced under familial pressure to marry Dilip with whom she leads an overtly satisfactory life. The Mau Mau oath that the narrator takes with Njoroge- 'You must take an oath. I will take an oath.' shows how as an individual he goes beyond the traditions of the nation his family comes from to actually be a part of Kenya and provides his support for their independence in his child-like manner, a step that is taken more strongly by the politically-inclined Mahesh Uncle, having agency of his own as an adult. All the cities of Kenya, Pakistan and the new world of Canada seem to find a representation in the narrator and his thoughts, his writings with no inclination towards representing any higher than the other. Another aspect is that of language which is used to represent relationships. The Javeris, who 'branched out across five continents' are a representation of the spirit of the characters, spread across continents to reach an individual's ultimate peak. Terms like 'dadaji' 'bhaiya' all take the characters back to their Asian roots as do their excited exclamations like 'Badmaash'. While they have

adopted the new language, the language of a new land where they find themselves based, the characters often go back to their roots to express their true emotions or to reach out to people they share an emotional bond with showing how people are indeed global beings.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the three texts show how nationalism and national loyalty while important aspects of an individual's identity don't limit the innate spirit in people to surpass any national boundary and become cosmopolitan beings in the true sense of the term. Identities are formed as a result of several factors that come into play but deep down individuals show a spirit that brings all humanity into one common space, a global arena, undivided by politics, boundaries or ideologies. The boundaries are not only blurred but also receding in these characters. The act of storytelling thus becomes so compelling because the characters know no bounds and present their struggles as a part of the global phenomenon. With globalization becoming a reality in the current world, this idea is becoming more dominant, of people becoming one and the power of restrictive society becoming limited to curb the cosmopolitan spirit in individuals. While global citizenry seems a far off situation, the world is showing a gradual and consistent move towards becoming one home for all to create a feeling of belongingness for everyone. The three texts are works of wonderful creation, showing far away narratives which are yet linked in their aim to create home in the multiplicity of people and nations. Therefore in art, just like people, the world all comes to be one, cosmopolitan and cutting across boundaries.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Kingston, Maxine Hong. *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*. April, 1989. Vintage International Edition.
- [2] Kureishi, Hanif. *My Beautiful Laundrette*. 2014. Ebook Edition.
- [3] Vassanji, M.G. *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*. Doubleday Canada.
- [4] Jhajharia, Sangeeta and Beniwal, Mamta. 'Braving out in the Face of Constraints: *The Woman Warrior*'. May, 2012. International Journal of Social Science and Humanity, Vol. 2.
- [5] Franz, Milon. 'Encountering the Gendered Transnational Identity: A Study of *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts*'. Sep, 2015. International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities.
- [6] Mujcinovic, Fatima. *Self-Expression and World-Expression: Critical Multicultural Literacy in Maxine Hong Kingston and Sandra Cisneros*. 2014. The John Hopkins University Press.

- [7] Romdhani, Mourad. 'The Metaphor of "Ghosts" in Maxine H. Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Motifs and Motives*'. 2017. *Research Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies* Vol. 3 No.1
- [8] Struzik, Hayley. '*The Woman Warrior: The Silent Creation of a Third Space*'. 2015. *The Oswald Review: An International Journal of Undergraduate Research and Criticism in the Discipline of English*
- [9] Bhat, Adil. 'Identity, Alienation, and Sexuality in Hanif Kureishi's *My Beautiful Laundrette*'. Sep, 2016.
- [10] Tagata, William Mineo. 'Hybrid Identities i "*My Beautiful Laundrette*"
- [11] Wood, Jorge Berastegui. 'The Analysis of Hybridity in *My Beautiful Laundrette*'.
- [12] Pascual, Monica. 'My Beautiful Laundrette: Hybrid "Identity", or the Paradox of Conflicting Identifications in "Third Space" Asian-British Cinema of the 1980s.' Jan, 2002.
- [13] Omuteche, Jairus. 'Rootedness and Globalisation: Identity and Belonging in M. G. Vassanji's *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*'. Apr, 2012. Brill.
- [14] Orao, James. 'Nationalism, Subversive History and Citizenship: The Quest for Identity in the Postcolonial Nation I M.G. Vassanji' *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*'. Jan, 2021.
- [15] Primorac, Antonija. "Not this, not that": In-between Identities in *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* by M.G. Vassanji'.
- [16] Chepkosgei, Seraphine. 'Reading M.G. Vassanji's the in – between world of Vikram Lall as an allegory of the nation'. 2014. *International Journal of Literature and Arts*.





# Foreign Language Enjoyment and Engagement Among EFL Students in Selected Chinese Universities

Liang Liang

College of Education, Arts and Sciences, Lyceum of the Philippines University-Batangas, Philippines

Email: sisuyxg@gmail.com

Received: 19 Jun 2023; Received in revised form: 21 Jul 2023; Accepted: 28 Jul 2023; Available online: 06 Aug 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**—This study explores the levels of foreign language enjoyment and English learning engagement among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) college students in selected Chinese universities and examine the relationship between these two factors. A survey was conducted among 552 non-English major students from five different universities in four provinces of China. Respondents generally agreed with indicators of FLE, including FLE-Private, FLE-Teacher, and FLE-Atmosphere dimensions, but their sense of accomplishment, satisfaction, and interest in EFL learning was relatively weak. The participants demonstrated active participation and enthusiasm in different aspects of English learning engagement, encompassing behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social dimensions. This underscores the significance of considering and addressing multiple facets of engagement during the process of learning the English language. The study highlighted significant relationships between FLE and English learning engagement.

**Keywords**—Foreign Language Enjoyment, English learning engagement, EFL students in Chinese universities



## I. INTRODUCTION

In our increasingly interconnected world, proficiency in foreign languages has become a valuable asset, offering numerous advantages in personal, academic, and professional spheres. English as a foreign language (EFL) learning has become particularly important, given its status as a global lingua franca. For students studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Chinese universities, mastering the English language holds significant importance, given access to a wider range of opportunities and resources, such as academic publications, job markets, and cultural exchange programs. In addition, English proficiency is often a requirement for admission to universities and employment in multinational companies.

An essential aspect of successful language learning lies in the experiences of enjoyment and engagement during the learning process. Foreign language enjoyment refers to the positive emotions and satisfaction that students associate with language learning activities, while engagement

encompasses their active and motivated involvement in language-related tasks (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Reeve, 2012).

Understanding the levels of foreign language enjoyment and engagement among EFL students is crucial for several reasons.

On the one hand, when students experience enjoyment, they are more likely to be motivated, persistent, and dedicated to improving their language skills, which ultimately leads to enhanced learning outcomes (Li, 2022).

The concept of Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) has received significant attention, especially with the growing focus on positive psychology in the field of psychology. Scholars now approach the study of emotions in foreign language (FL) and second language (L2) learning from a positive psychology perspective (Macintyre et al., 2019). Enjoyment is considered a vital positive emotion in FL/L2 learning, as it fulfills learners' psychological needs,

motivating them to overcome challenges and achieve success (Vadivel et al., 2022). The presence of enjoyment in FL/L2 learning has notable implications for learners' academic performance and overall language learning outcomes (Dalton-Puffer et al., 2019).

Creating a positive classroom atmosphere is essential for fostering FLE, as it boosts students' engagement, motivation, and academic achievement (Palalić et al., 2021). Researchers advocate for student-centered and equitable teaching approaches to establish inclusive and supportive classroom environments (Biondi, 2021).

FLE plays a critical role in FL/L2 learning by motivating learners and influencing their success. Researchers are actively exploring the intricate relationship between FLE and its influencing factors to enhance language learning experiences. Understanding these connections is crucial for establishing supportive and enjoyable language learning environments, ultimately optimizing language education practices.

On the other hand, engaged learners actively participate in classroom interactions and activities, creating a dynamic and stimulating learning environment that facilitates language proficiency (Shernoff et al., 2017). Learning engagement is vital for evaluating educational effectiveness and teaching reforms as it reflects students' active involvement and enthusiasm during the learning process, especially in student-centered education and high-quality talent training (Hofkens & Ruzek, 2019).

Scholars approach learning engagement from different angles, with definitions ranging from enthusiasm and positive attitudes to emotional involvement and ongoing positivity (Reeve 2012; Schaufeli, 2013). This multifaceted construct can be categorized into behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social engagement (Philp & Duchesne, 2016).

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, positive teacher-student relationships and a supportive classroom environment significantly impact learning engagement (Engels et al., 2016; Nguyen et al., 2018). Learning engagement is closely linked to Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE), where positive emotional experiences in language learning lead to heightened engagement among students (Guo, 2021).

The objective of this study is to explore the levels of foreign language enjoyment and engagement among EFL students in selected Chinese universities and examine the relationship between these two factors. By investigating the significance of foreign language enjoyment and engagement in language learning experiences, we aim to gain insights into how they jointly contribute to students' language learning journey.

The study employs surveys as a primary data collection method to gather information on EFL students' attitudes and experiences related to learning English as a foreign language. By analyzing the survey data and drawing upon existing literature on language motivation and affective factors, we seek to deepen our understanding of the interplay between enjoyment and engagement in language education.

Through this research, we hope to provide practical implications for language educators and policymakers in designing effective language learning environments that enhance students' language learning potential. Ultimately, we aspire to contribute to the fostering of greater foreign language enjoyment and engagement among EFL students in Chinese universities, thereby nurturing their language proficiency and overall language learning outcomes.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a quantitative descriptive research design, employing a questionnaire survey to assess Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) and English learning engagement.

### 2.1 Participants

Participants are non-English major students randomly selected from five universities in different regions of China. A total of 552 Chinese EFL learners take part in the study.

### 2.2 Instruments

This study designed items to collect demographic information from the participants, including gender, type of university, and English language proficiency. Extensively reviewing existing literature and adapting established scales, two questionnaires were modified: the *Foreign Language Enjoyment Questionnaire*, and the *English Learning Engagement Questionnaire*. The *Foreign Language Enjoyment Questionnaire* includes three subscales: FLE-Private, FLE-Teacher, and FLE-Atmosphere, comprising a total of 21 statements. The *English Learning Engagement Questionnaire* consists of four subscales: Behavioral Engagement, Emotional Engagement, Cognitive Engagement, and Social Engagement, with a total of 36 statements. These questionnaires serve as precise and comprehensive measuring instruments to gather data, which was efficiently collected online through the "Questionnaire Star" platform.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Foreign Language Enjoyment

The questionnaire yielded valuable insights into various aspects of foreign language enjoyment. Understanding the factors that influence the pleasure of learning a foreign language is vital for language educators in creating a more engaging and enjoyable language learning environment. By cultivating positive teacher-student interactions, fostering a supportive classroom atmosphere, and recognizing the value of personally relevant language learning, educators can enhance student motivation, engagement, and overall satisfaction in the language learning process.

*Table 1 Summary Table on Foreign Language Enjoyment*

| Indicators     | Weighted Mean | Verbal Interpretation | Rank |
|----------------|---------------|-----------------------|------|
| FLE-Private    | 3.21          | Agree                 | 3    |
| FLE-Teacher    | 3.36          | Agree                 | 1    |
| FLE-Atmosphere | 3.31          | Agree                 | 2    |
| Composite Mean | 3.30          | Agree                 |      |

*Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 - 1.49 = Strongly Disagree*

The composite mean of 3.30 indicates that a majority of respondents enjoy learning a second or foreign language and find it enjoyable in different teacher and learner-related situations. Notably, the “teacher” indicator received the highest average score of 3.36, highlighting that most participants consider their language teachers as crucial sources of enjoyment in their foreign language learning journey. Additionally, respondents expressed great enjoyment in their interactions with their second/foreign language teachers. Jiang and Dewaele (2019) conducted a study among first-year undergraduates in Beijing, China, and their findings underscored the significant impact of teacher-related factors on foreign language acquisition.

Positive teacher-student relationships are pivotal for students’ language learning experience. When students feel encouraged, supported, and respected by their teachers, they are more likely to feel motivated, engaged, and satisfied with their language learning journey. According to the survey, students perceived their language

teachers as encouraging, supportive, and adept at guiding their language learning process, fostering a lively and engaging learning atmosphere that helped students enjoy and motivate themselves.

Teachers who cultivate a positive and supportive learning environment can profoundly influence their students’ language learning experiences. By promoting students’ sense of autonomy and competence, teachers can enhance enjoyment and intrinsic motivation. Furthermore, teachers’ enthusiasm, passion for teaching, and ability to cater to individual learning needs contribute to a more enjoyable language learning experience (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2020).

#### 3.2 English Learning Engagement

This study delves into the crucial aspect of English learning engagement among students, investigating their active involvement and enthusiasm throughout the language learning process. By examining multiple dimensions of engagement, including behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social aspects, the study aims to gain insights into students’ overall agreement and prioritization of these elements in their English language learning experiences. Understanding and fostering learning engagement are essential for educators, as it directly influences students’ motivation, persistence, and academic achievement. This introduction sets the stage for a comprehensive analysis that reveals the significance of each engagement dimension and its impact on creating a meaningful and successful English language learning environment for students.

Table 2 presents the results of English learning engagement with a composite mean of 3.30, indicating an overall agreement, or “Agree” level, among respondents in all dimensions - behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social. Respondents showed active involvement and enthusiasm in various engagement dimensions, emphasizing the importance of addressing multiple aspects of engagement in English language learning. The highest mean, 3.32, was obtained in the “behavioral engagement” dimension, indicating that the majority of respondents actively participated in language learning activities, showcasing dedication and responsibility for their learning.

Table 2 Summary Table on English Learning Engagement

| Indicators            | Weighted Mean | Verbal Interpretation | Rank |
|-----------------------|---------------|-----------------------|------|
| Behavioral Engagement | 3.32          | Agree                 | 1    |
| Emotional Engagement  | 3.29          | Agree                 | 4    |
| Cognitive Engagement  | 3.31          | Agree                 | 2.5  |
| Social Engagement     | 3.31          | Agree                 | 2.5  |
| Composite Mean        | 3.30          | Agree                 |      |

*Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 – 1.49 = Strongly Disagree*

The “emotional engagement” dimension obtained a mean of 3.29, still within the “Agree” level, but relatively lower compared to other dimensions. This dimension reflects the emotional component of language learning, encompassing feelings, motivation, and personal connections. Emotionally engaged students demonstrate positive attitudes and joy in learning, contributing to a conducive learning environment and increased motivation. However, the somewhat lower score suggests variations in emotional involvement during the English learning journey.

The “cognitive engagement” and “social engagement” dimensions both received a mean of 3.31, indicating comparable levels of agreement. “Cognitive engagement” relates to students' intellectual involvement and active thinking in their language studies, emphasizing the application of knowledge and metacognitive awareness for deeper learning and problem-solving skills. On the other hand, “social engagement” pertains to interactions with peers and teachers in the English language class, highlighting the significance of social connections for a sense of belongingness, motivation, and improved learning outcomes.

For educators, understanding students' engagement levels in these four dimensions can inform instructional strategies and interventions. By promoting behavioral engagement through active learning tasks, nurturing emotional engagement through positive emotions, encouraging cognitive engagement through critical thinking activities, and facilitating social engagement through collaboration, a holistic and meaningful English language learning experience can be created for students.

### 3.3 Relationship Between Foreign Language Enjoyment and English Learning Engagement

Understanding the factors that influence student engagement in foreign language learning is of paramount importance for educators and researchers alike. In this context, the present study examines the relationship between Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) and English learning engagement among university students in China. Through a detailed analysis of various dimensions within FLE and different dimensions of English learning engagement, the study sheds light on the significant connections that exist. The findings not only underscore the crucial role of student-related, teacher-related, and learning environment factors in fostering engagement but also align with prior research in this domain. By delving into the interplay of these factors, this study contributes to the broader understanding of how educators can create a conducive atmosphere that bolsters students' motivation and active participation in their English language learning journey.

In this study, Table 3 presents the relationship between Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) and English learning engagement, with various dimensions within each construct. FLE is divided into three dimensions: “FLE-Private” (related to students), “FLE-Teacher” (related to teachers), and “FLE-Atmosphere” (related to the learning environment). English learning engagement includes four dimensions: “behavioral engagement”, “emotional engagement”, “cognitive engagement”, and “social engagement”, representing different aspects of students' involvement in English learning.

The statistical analysis reveals a strong and significant association between FLE and English learning engagement, with all p-values being lower than the alpha level of significance ( $p < 0.001$ ). The “FLE-Private” dimension of FLE shows substantial connections with all aspects of English learning engagement, indicating that personal experiences, interests, and satisfaction significantly influence students' behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social engagement in English language learning.

Similarly, the “FLE-Teacher” dimension of FLE exhibits significant relationships with all dimensions of English learning engagement, suggesting that teaching style, supportiveness, and passion have a considerable impact on students' levels of engagement.

Furthermore, the “FLE-Atmosphere” dimension of FLE demonstrates significant connections with all aspects of English learning engagement, highlighting the influence of classroom atmosphere, teacher-student interactions, and peer relationships on student engagement.



Table 3 Relationship Between Foreign Language Enjoyment and English Learning Engagement

| FLE-Private           | $\lambda_{2c} / U$ | p-value | Interpretation     |
|-----------------------|--------------------|---------|--------------------|
| Behavioral Engagement | .597**             | <.001   | Highly Significant |
| Emotional Engagement  | .614**             | <.001   | Highly Significant |
| Cognitive Engagement  | .597**             | <.001   | Highly Significant |
| Social Engagement     | .577**             | <.001   | Highly Significant |
| <b>FLE-Teacher</b>    |                    |         |                    |
| Behavioral Engagement | .550**             | <.001   | Highly Significant |
| Emotional Engagement  | .537**             | <.001   | Highly Significant |
| Cognitive Engagement  | .487**             | <.001   | Highly Significant |
| Social Engagement     | .539**             | <.001   | Highly Significant |
| <b>FLE-Atmosphere</b> |                    |         |                    |
| Behavioral Engagement | .520**             | <.001   | Highly Significant |
| Emotional Engagement  | .603**             | <.001   | Highly Significant |
| Cognitive Engagement  | .500**             | <.001   | Highly Significant |
| Social Engagement     | .552**             | <.001   | Highly Significant |

Legend: Significant at  $p\text{-value} < 0.01$

Overall, the study indicates a substantial association between FLE and English learning engagement, indicating that higher FLE evaluation corresponds to increased student engagement.

Guo (2021) conducted a study, confirming a positive association between FLE and Language Engagement (LE). The analysis revealed that teacher-related factors had the most significant impact on FLE, followed by FLE-private. Chinese EFL learners preferred emotional, behavioral, and cognitive interactions with their English studies.

Mercer and Dörnyei (2020) conducted a comprehensive study on learner engagement, including FLE findings. They found that creating positive feelings in students

through teacher-student rapport, healthy peer interactions, and engaging activities with appropriate challenges was crucial for enhancing student engagement.

Li, Jiang, and Deweale (2018) found that teachers could influence learners' engagement by creating a positive learning environment that encourages peer interaction and provides ample foreign language input.

These findings align with the current study, emphasizing the importance of considering student-related, teacher-related, and learning environment factors to promote active and meaningful student participation in English learning. By addressing these factors effectively, teachers may enhance students' motivation, satisfaction, and overall engagement in English learning.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

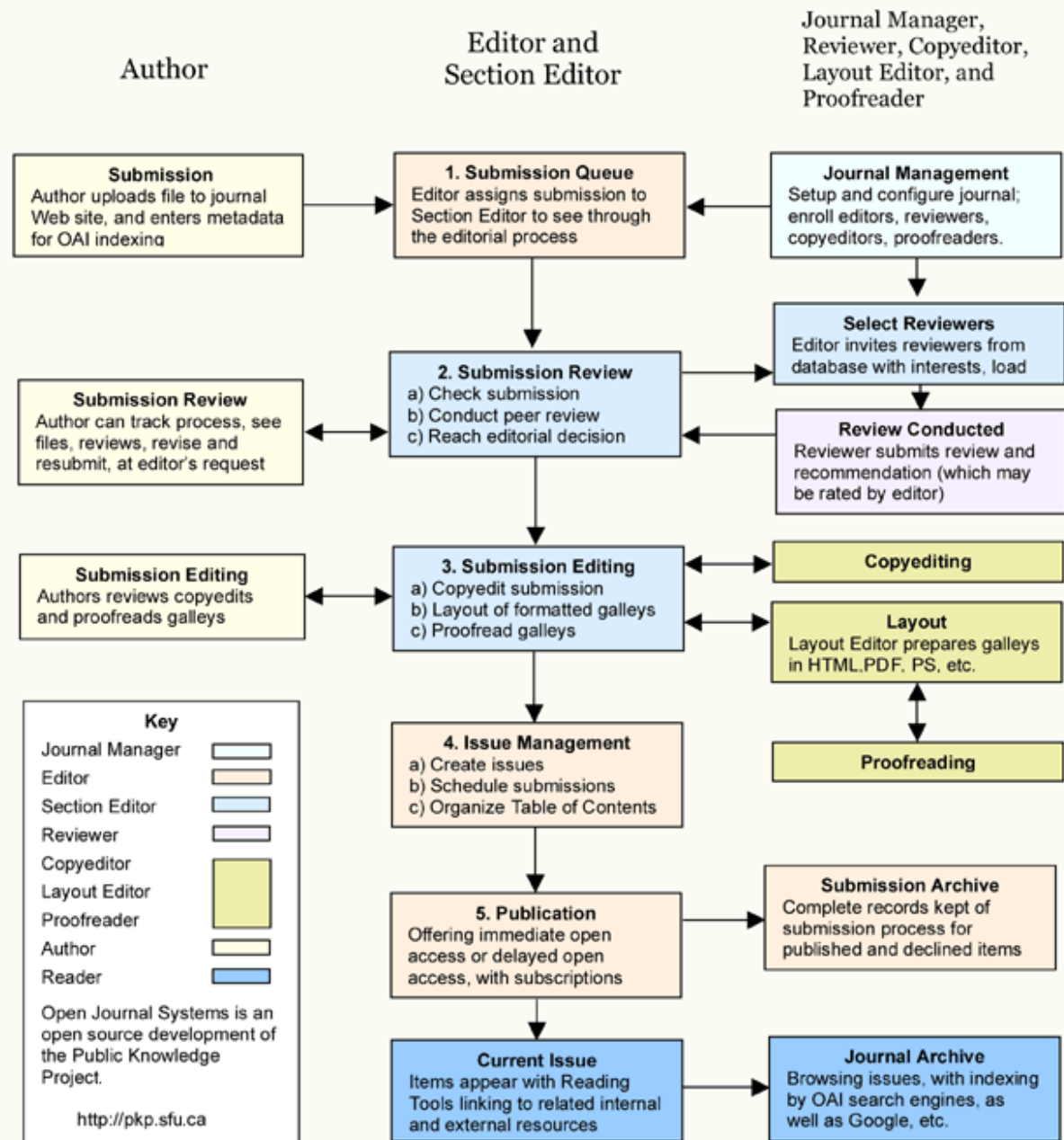
This study explored the crucial aspects of Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) and English Learning Engagement among university students in China. The study highlighted the significance of cultivating positive teacher-student interactions, a supportive classroom atmosphere, and personally relevant language learning experiences to enhance student motivation, engagement, and overall satisfaction in language learning. The findings indicated that the majority of respondents enjoyed learning a foreign language and valued their language teachers as essential sources of enjoyment. Moreover, students' active involvement and enthusiasm were evident in various dimensions of English learning engagement, including behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social aspects. The study also revealed a strong and significant association between FLE and English learning engagement, emphasizing the impact of student-related, teacher-related, and learning environment factors on students' language learning experiences. Overall, these findings contribute to our understanding of how educators can create a conducive and meaningful language learning environment that fosters students' motivation and active participation in their English language learning journey.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Biondi, M. (2021). Teaching for Equity and Inclusion in the Community College World Language Classroom. *NECTFL Review*, 87, 27-43.
- [2] Dalton-Puffer, C., Boeckmann, K. B., & Hinger, B. (2019). Research in language teaching and learning in Austria (2011–2017). *Language Teaching*, 52(2), 201-230. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S026144481900003X>
- [3] Dewaele, J. M., & Dewaele, L. (2020). Are foreign language learners' enjoyment and anxiety specific to the teacher? An investigation into the dynamics of learners' classroom emotions. *Studies in Second Language Learning and*

- Teaching, 10(1), 45-65.  
<https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2020.10.1.3>
- [4] Dewaele, J.-M., & MacIntyre, P. D. (2014). The two faces of Janus? Anxiety and enjoyment in the foreign language classroom. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 4(2), 237-274.  
<https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2014.4.2.5>
- [5] Engels, M. C., Colpin, H., Van Leeuwen, K., Bijttebier, P., Van Den Noortgate, W., Claes, S., ... & Verschueren, K. (2016). Behavioral engagement, peer status, and teacher-student relationships in adolescence: A longitudinal study on reciprocal influences. *Journal of youth and adolescence*, 45, 1192-1207. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-016-0414-5>
- [6] Guo, Y. (2021). Exploring the dynamic interplay between foreign language enjoyment and learner engagement with regard to EFL achievement and absenteeism: a sequential mixed methods study. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 766058. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.766058>
- [7] Hofkens, T. L., & Ruzek, E. (2019). Measuring student engagement to inform effective interventions in schools. In *Handbook of student engagement interventions* (pp. 309-324). Academic Press. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-813413-9.00021-8>
- [8] Jiang, Y., & Dewaele, J. M. (2019). How unique is the foreign language classroom enjoyment and anxiety of Chinese EFL learners?. *System*, 82, 13-25. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2019.02.017>
- [9] Li, C. (2022). Foreign language learning boredom and enjoyment: The effects of learner variables and teacher variables. *Language Teaching Research*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168822109032>.
- [10] Li, C., Jiang, G., & Dewaele, J. M. (2018). Understanding Chinese high school students' Foreign Language Enjoyment: Validation of the Chinese version of the Foreign Language Enjoyment scale. *System*, 76, 183-196. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2018.06.004>
- [11] MacIntyre, P. D., Gregersen, T., & Mercer, S. (2019). Setting an Agenda for Positive Psychology in SLA: Theory, Practice, and Research. *Modern Language Journal*, 103(1), 262-274. <https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12544>
- [12] Mercer, S., & Dörnyei, Z. (2020). *Engaging language learners in contemporary classrooms*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009024563>
- [13] Nguyen, T. D., Cannata, M., & Miller, J. (2018). Understanding student behavioral engagement: Importance of student interaction with peers and teachers. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 111(2), 163-174. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220671.2016.1220359>
- [14] Palalić, R., Ramadani, V., Welsh, D. H., Dizdarević, A., & Đilović, A. (2021). Impact of networking and business environment on student leadership styles. *International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal*, 17, 447-475. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11365-019-00610-8>
- [15] Philp, J., & Duchesne, S. (2016). Exploring engagement in tasks in the language classroom. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 36, 50-72. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190515000094>
- [16] Reeve, J. (2012). A self-determination theory perspective on student engagement. In *Handbook of research on student engagement* (pp. 149-172). Boston, MA: Springer US. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-2018-7\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-2018-7_7)
- [17] Schaufeli, W. B. (2013). What is engagement?. In *Employee engagement in theory and practice* (pp. 29-49). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203076965-10>
- [18] Shernoff, D. J., Ruzek, E. A., & Sinha, S. (2017). The influence of the high school classroom environment on learning as mediated by student engagement. *School psychology international*, 38(2), 201-218. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0143034316666413>
- [19] Vadivel, B., Khalil, N. R., Tilwani, S. A., & Mandal, G. (2022). The educational and psychological need for learning the English language and understanding the different anxieties. *Education Research International*, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/4679788>

## OJS Editorial and Publishing Process



~OJS Workflow~

## Important links:

### Paper Submission Link:

#### OJS:

<https://ijels.com/ojs/index.php/ijels/about/submissions>

<https://ijels.com/submit-paper/>

#### Editorial Team:

<https://ijels.com/editorial-board/>

### Peer Review Process:

<https://ijels.com/peer-review-process/>

### Publication Ethics:

<https://ijels.com/publication-policies-and-ethics/>

### Author Guidelines:

<https://ijels.com/author-guidelines/>

### Join Us a Reviewer:

<https://ijels.com/join-us/>

---

## Journal Indexed and Abstracted in:

- Qualis-CAPES -Brazil
- Normatiza (Under Review)
- Bielefeld Academic Search Engine(BASE)
- Aalborg University Library (Denmark)
- WorldCat: The World's Largest Library Catalog
- Semantic Scholar
- J-Gate
- Open J-Gate
- CORE-The world's largest collection of open access research papers
- JURN
- Microsoft Academic Search
- Google Scholar
- Kopernio - powered by Web of Science
- Pol-Index
- PBN(Polish Scholarly Bibliography)Nauka Polska
- Scilit, MDPI AG (Basel, Switzerland)
- Tyndale University College & Seminary
- indiana Library WorldCat
- CrossRef DOI-10.22161/ijeab
- Neliti - Indonesia's Research Repository
- Journal TOC
- Dimensions.ai: Re-imagining discovery and access to research
- Citeseerx
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology (USA)
- Simpson University (USA)
- University of Louisville (USA)
- Biola University (USA)
- IE Library (Spain)
- Mount Saint Vincent University Library (Halifax, Nova Scotia Canada)
- University Of Arizona (USA)
- INDIANA UNIVERSITY-PURDUE UNIVERSITY INDIANAPOLIS (USA)
- Roderic Bowen Library and Archives (United Kingdom)
- University Library of Skövde (Sweden)
- Indiana University East (campuslibrary (USA))
- Tilburg University (The Netherlands)
- Williams College (USA)
- University of Connecticut (USA)
- Brandeis University (USA)
- Tufts University (USA)
- Boston University (USA)
- McGill University (Canada)
- Northeastern University (USA)
- BibSonomy-The blue social bookmark and publication sharing system
- Slide Share
- Academia
- Archive
- Scribd
- SJIF-InnoSpace
- ISSUU
- Research Bib
- DRJI
- journal-repository



Platform &  
workflow by  
**OJS / PKP**

Infogain Publication

International Journal of English, Literature and Social Science (IJELS)