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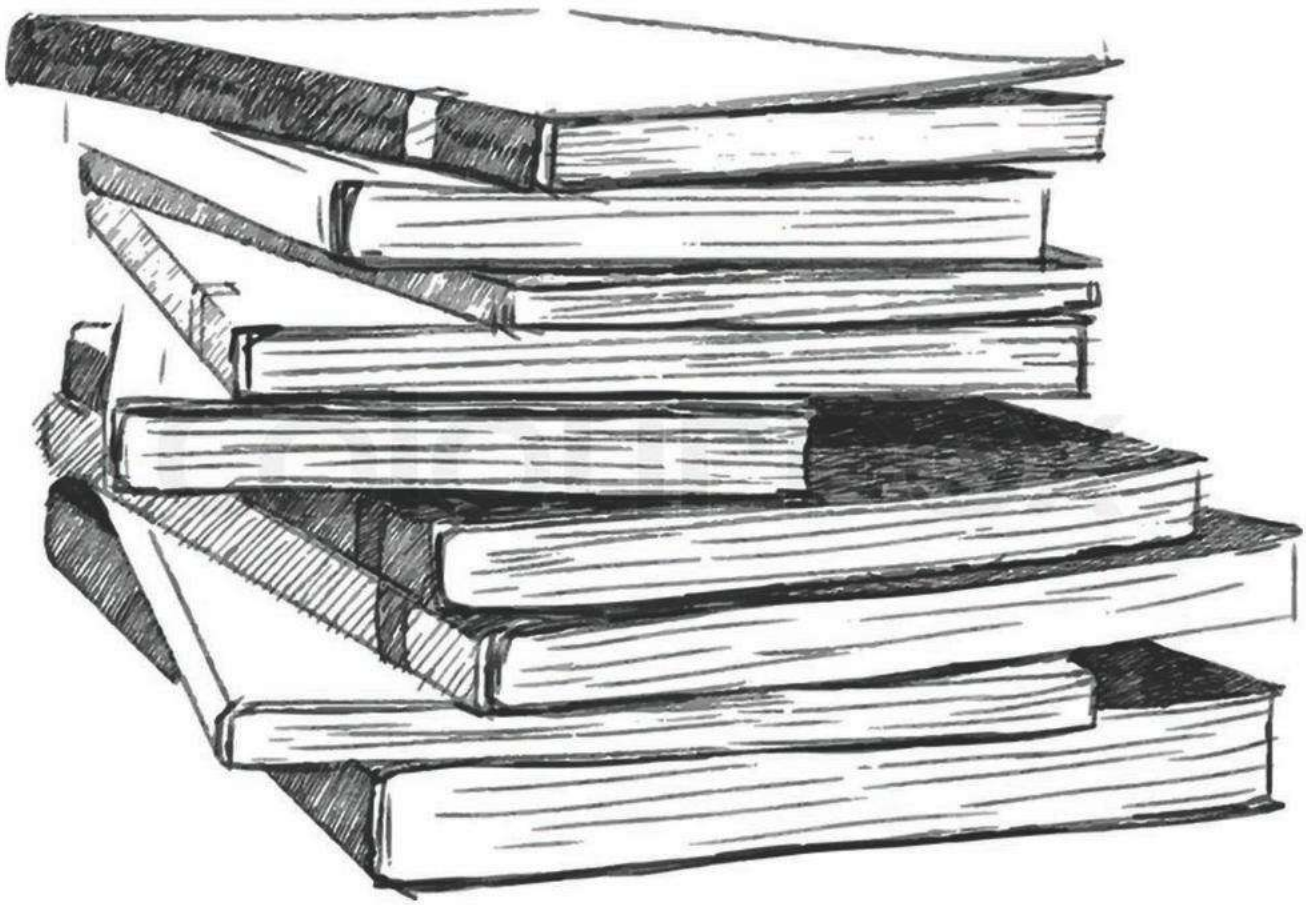
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FOREWORD

It is with great pleasure that we present this issue of the International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences (IJELS). As an esteemed peer-reviewed journal, IJELS is dedicated to advancing scholarly research and fostering intellectual dialogue in English literature, Education and Social Sciences.

Our journal is a dynamic platform for academics, researchers, and practitioners to share their insights and findings. This issue encompasses a diverse range of topics, reflecting the multifaceted nature of our disciplines. From in-depth literary analyses to innovative social science research, our contributors provide valuable perspectives contributing to the broader understanding of cultural and social phenomena.

At IJELS, we are committed to upholding the highest academic rigour and integrity standards. Each submission undergoes a meticulous peer-review process, ensuring that only the most original and impactful research is published. Our editorial team, comprised of experts from around the globe, works diligently to maintain the quality and relevance of our journal.

We are particularly excited about the current issue, which includes groundbreaking studies and thought-provoking articles that challenge conventional wisdom and open new avenues for exploration. We believe these contributions will inspire further research and foster meaningful discussions within the academic community.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our authors for their dedication and contributions, our reviewers for their insightful feedback, and our readers for their continued support. As we strive to expand the horizons of knowledge, we invite you to engage with the content of this issue and participate in the ongoing dialogue that shapes our understanding of literature and social sciences.

Thank you for being so committed to scholarly excellence.

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Val Plumwood's Logic of Domination vs. Freya Mathews' Autopoietic Ecology: Ecological Psychosis and Arboreal Kinship in Le Guin's The Word for World is Forest

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Abstract— *This research aimed to examines the novella The Word for World is Forest by Ursula K. Le Guin of 1972 using the dualistic approach of Val Plumwood on the ecofeminist logic of domination and Freya Mathews on autopoietic ecological theory. It assumes that the story anticipates ecological psychosis as the symptomatic future of colonial exploitation and gives a model of arboreal kinship based on mutual ecological awareness. The hierarchy between the two dualisms as criticized by Plumwood explains an anthropocentric, colonial stance of Captain Davidson, the Terran logging agenda, and the autopoietic model by Mathews offers a strict ontology concerning the relationship between Athsheans and their forest settings. Through a contrast between these views, the article shows how Le Guin dramatizes the dialectic between extractive domination and ecological reciprocity. This article will serve as a contribution to the current academic discussions on ecocriticism and speculative fiction in relation to environmental ethics, cultural survival, and the future of eco-relational futures.*

Keywords— ***Autopoietic Ecology, Ecological Psychosis, Environmental ethics, Eco-feminist, Exploitation.***

I. INTRODUCTION

The Word for World is Forest by Ursula K.LeGuin has long been remembered as one of the most politically charged of her works, which confronted both at once the Vietnam War, environmentalist movements, and feminist arguments vs. power. The text was first published in the anthology of Harlan Ellison, titled Athshe, in 1972, and later made into a novel, describing a colonized world, Athshe, where Terran (Earth) colonists explore it for resources, enslave the natives, and strive to apply extractive logics to a society based on forests. The novella is narrated along the border of colonialism, environmental destruction, and disappearance of culture (Le Guin, 1972).

The criticism of Le Guin has been examined in various perspectives: as an allegory of U.S. militarism in Vietnam, as the precursor to eco-feminist discussion, and as a piece of speculative anthropology which envisions radically divergent ways of seeing the world. Le Guin identified herself with feminism, and was interested in non-violence and ecological awareness. She participated in demonstrations against the Vietnam War and nuclear weapons. These sympathies can be seen in several of her works of fiction, including the Hainish universe works. However, even with all the strong scholarly attention, one of the domains that remains unexplored is the way in which the novella can be interpreted in terms of the logic of domination and the philosophy of autopoietic ecology by Val Plumwood and Freya Mathews, respectively. The two sets of frameworks provide complementary views on the major issues of the novel, the devastating effects of the hierarchical thinking, and the possibility of alternative ecological kinships.

In Feminism and the Mastery of Nature (1993), Plumwood describes the logic of domination as a cultural

paradigm based on dualistic structures such as mind/body, man/woman, culture/nature, with one end being admired at the other, as the basis of legitimizing exploitation and oppression. Val Plumwood illuminates the realtionship between women and nature, and between ecological feminism and other feminist theories. This kind of logic does not only form the basis of patriarchal and colonial domination but also applies to domination of nature by humans. A good example of this reasoning can be shown through the Terrans of LeGuin, and the treatment of the forest and its human population in the novel as they are treated by Captain Davidson of the Terran world in which trees are relegated to the status of timber, Athsheans to the status of laborers, and the world itself is turned into a resource front.

However, Mathews presents a philosophical response in For Love of Matter (2003) and The Ecological Self (1991), where she develops the concept of autopoietic ecology - an ontology that considers the natural world not as the dead matter but as self-organizing and self-maintaining systems with human beings as participants and not masters. This vision echoes the connection of the Athsheans to their world, in which the forest is not an object of possessions but a family member, with which they maintain mutual relationships of identity and life-giving.

The reading of Le Guin by Plumwood and Mathews in this way permits to highlight two movements into the light of the ecological psychosis that arises when domination becomes natural and the expression of an ecological relational form, arboreal kinship, as an alternative form of relationship. The former explains a situation where the extractivist ideology alienates human beings to ecological reality that generates violence not only in nature but in fellow human beings. The latter points to a more comprehensive vision of coexistence, in which the practices of dreaming, community life and devotion of the forest by the Athsheans perform an autopoietic ethic of interdependence. Ecocriticism, especially in its eco-feminist and materialist approaches examined the intersections between domination of marginalized bodies, colonized populations and nature highlights the ethical dimension of human-environment relation (Tsai, et al.,2017).

Lastly, the article presents the argument that Le Guin does not merely criticize in her novella. It also envisions what a transition between domination and kinship might look like when such transition is shaped by violence and defeat. The death of the Selver's wife, the Athsheans' turn to violence, and the permanence of the forest all indicate the conflict between erosion and recovery, ecological trauma and regeneration. In this regard, Le Guin predicts the contemporary Le Anthropocene, multispecies justice, and planetary futures.

The process analysis is conducted in four phases. First the literature review and theoretical framework put the philosophies of Plumwood and Mathews in comparison with the current scholarship on Le Guin and ecocriticism. Second, the close analysis of the novella reveals that the structures contribute to understanding some of the most crucial instances of domination and kinship. Third, the synthesis part unites these strands by cogitating about the greater significance of ecocritical and environmental discourse (Hsu, Hsuan, 2016) . Lastly, the conclusion summarizes the contributions of the article and directs the future research in eco-relational literary studies.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The ecocritical approaches to Ursula K. Le Guin The Word for World is Forest have explored how the novel deals with the issue of environmental destruction, imperialism, and moral responsibility, but a considerably small number of scholars have explored a dual philosophical approach that combines the ecofeminist critique of domination by Val Plumwood with the ecological concept of autopoietic ecology by Freya Mathews. The article outlines the intersections of these frames with the current research on Le Guin, and puts work in context of the larger discussions on ecological ethics, colonial violence, and relational ontology that have already been made.

2.1 GREEN CRITICISM, FEMINISM, AND LE GUIN

The work of LeGuin has been the subject of ecocritical and feminist literary analysis since time immemorial. Initial interpretations focused on her fantastic world-making and ethos, and tended to interpret The Word for World is Forest as an American imperialism parable during the Vietnam War. According to critics, like Jameson (2005) and Attebery (2014), Le'Guin uses speculative fiction to reveal material and psychological origins of domination. Her ability to dramatise the interconnection of social and ecological hierarchies has been emphasised more recently in ecocritical work, particularly in ecofeminism (Gaard, 1993). Ecofeminism is a new movement which originated in the late twentieth century, and the parallels which exist in the structure of oppression of women and exploitation of the natural world are identified. Such scholars as Karen J. Warren (1990) and Greta Gaard (1993) show that both forms of domination are based on a dualistic manner of thought that favors masculinity, reason, and culture over femininity, emotion, and nature. In her fiction especially in The Dispossessed (1974), Always Coming Home (1985),

and The Word for World is Forest (1972), Le Guin challenges this hierarchy by imagining societies based on reciprocity, cooperation and ecological consciousness. Ecofeminist commentators like Deane-Drummond (2012) and Rountree (2020) have observed that the forest serves as an actual ecosystem and as metaphorical area of feminine generativity (Mathews, 2011).

2.2 VAL PLUMWOOD LOGIC OF DOMINATION

Plumwood (1993) in Feminism and the Mastery of Nature provides an in-depth examination of how western mind frames the concept of nature as subservient and exploitable. This idea by Plumwood is especially helpful in interpreting the text of The Word of World is Forest due to the clear description of this hierarchy by Le Guin who uses occupation of Athshe by the Terrans. The fact that Captain Davidson has turned the forest into timber and the Athsheans into creechies is an example of what Plumwood terms backgrounding and denial of dependency which is the propensity of the dominant groups to forget that they are in fact dependent on the systems which they are claiming autonomy and superiority. In this way, Davidson is not only a colonialist aggression representative but the embodiment of the rationalist indifference that allows the ecological destruction to pose as the progress. Plumwood as well criticizes illusion of mastery as the result of such separation (Kimiagari, Maryam, 2025). She claims that domination eventually creates an ecological crisis of reason, where the human subject, having perceived itself as alien to nature, does not possess the ability to be emphatic, reciprocal, and self-recognizing. This crisis is manifested by the psychological breakdown of Davidson, and the moral blindness of the Terrans in general. Not just an act on their part of exploiting a material, but an epistemic act of defining the world as object, resource, and property, their extraction of wood. In this way by revealing the senselessness of the logic of domination, Le Guin shows the human price of the latter: the deprivation of closeness to nature and the loss of humanity.

2.3 FREYA MATHEWS AUTOPOIETIC ECOLOGY

The ecological philosophy of Mathews is an addition and a continuation of the Plumwood criticism since it provides a constructive ontological vision. She suggests in her work The Ecological Self (1991) and For Love of Matter (2003) that the universe is made up of autopoietic systems, i.e. self-organising, self-producing systems which maintain themselves through dynamic interrelations. This model transcends Western mechanistic materialism, the focus here is that all the living systems, including human consciousness, are enrolled in an ever-recycling web of self-regeneration. The autopoietic ecology by Mathews opposes the separateness that supports domination. It calls on the contemplation of reality as a process of subjective continuity, in which matter itself is communicative and self-realising (Messer, Neil., 2016). According to this perspective, ethical behaviour is not based on duty but is rather founded on an ontological acknowledgement of coexisting being. The nurturing of relational networks that support life is the role of human beings as agents of the autopoietic field, rather than as exploiters of the field.

This paradigm speaks to the description of the Athsheans by Le Guin. The forest is not a possession to the society they live in but a part of the self. The dreams they have are not escapist dreams but participatory experiences which preserve ecological balance. As Selver dream, he is related to the collective consciousness of the forest, which is metaphysical ecology and is parallel to Mathews idea of autopoietic intersubjectivity. On the other hand, the inability of the Terrans to dream is an indication of the lack of belonging to this system of reciprocal becoming. This perspective on the Athshean culture by means of Mathews helps to understand that Le Guin offers the example of arboreal kinship- the type of ecological consciousness based on the understanding of mutual autopoiesis (Messer, Neil., 2016). The trees are not figurative beings; they are living things, which form co-constitutive part of Athshean belonging. The repetitive theme of the forest dreaming itself to balance underscores a worldview where ethical life is indistinguishable to ecological responsiveness.

2.4 SYNTHESIZING PLUMWOOD AND MATHEWS

Despite the fact that both Plumwood and Mathews are ecofeminists, they, however, differ significantly in their approaches. Plumwood is running all over dismantling domination in pointing out how these rationalist hierarchies Latinized in the justification of violence against women and nature. On the other end, Mathews provides a constructive relational being metaphysics. Combining these perspectives offer a way of reading The Word for World is Forest that passes beyond critique toward constructive reimaging. Plumwood explain why the Terrans continue to blow things up, it is because their worldview is constructed upon belonging out of touch and superiority. Mathews, on the other hand, highlights the difference in the way the Athsheans do things by experiencing a relational ontology and autopoietic ethic. Such confrontation of these views in the novella, so bloody, dramatic, and transformative, presents the price of ecological psychosis and the opportunity of ecological recovery. And this combination in fact brings Le´Guin into the greater intellectual tradition of deep ecology and new materialism, in which consciousness is diffused across life networks rather than clinging to human beings. Trans-corporeality refers to the idea that human bodies and the

material world are interconnected, and that meaning emerges through these interactions, as discussed by scholars such as Stacy Alaimo (2010) and Serenella Iovino (2016). These ideas are reflected in Ursula K. Le Guin's portrayal of the forest as a communicative agent that shapes dreams and actions even before it is named. A forest ecology is a delicate one. If the forest perishes, its fauna may go with it. The Athshean word for world is also the word for forest.

III. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The ethics of the novella is altered when Plumwood and Mathews are brought together. It is not merely a bad judgment that the Terrans are dominated by, but an ontological mess, a psychosis created by alienation. Conversely, the Athsheans model is Mathews metaphysical inclusion, in which all entities co-create reality by means of the relationships. In such a way, the story by Le Guin turns out to be a living example of what Plumwood refers to as the ecological self one that is based on connection, and not independence.

3.1 TEXTUAL ANALYSIS: ECOLOGICAL PSYCHOSIS AND ARBOREAL KINSHIP

The Word for World is Forest by Ursula K. Le Guin literally drives the logic of domination that Val Plumwood is referring to into dramatic perspective. Comparing the Terran and Athshean cultures, Le Guin develops some kind of moral and ecological argument: one of them is more oriented on resource extraction and taking control, whereas the other one believes in reciprocity and dreaming. The narrative trajectory of the story in which these two versions of the world come together and their visions in some part change reveals a shift in an anthropocentric hold on reality to a more interpersonal ecology. Here is some detail of how Le Guin utilizes major characters, Captain Davidson, Selver and the forest itself, ecological psychosis as a symptom of colonial thinking and how she envisions the possibility of tree-family relationships as a result of self-awareness creation (Iovino, Serenella.,2016). Davidson's early thoughts set the tone for his view of both the forest world and his own role in the logging initiative. He does not see the Athsheans as men, but he sees men as liberators who will end what he calls the "darkness" of the planet, which simply refers to values that he does not share

3.2 THE CLIMAX OF CONFLICT (DAVIDSON VS. SELVER)

The last clash of colonial hegemony with the forest-mind. Even when his world burns Davidson is unyielding- a peak of ecological psychosis which prefers self-destruction to the realization of the Other. The fact that he is sent to a deserted, desolate island is an ultimate ontological penalty, a complete alienation to the arboreal family and the life web of the world.

3.3 THE FRAGILE BRIDGE: SCIENTIFIC OBSERVATION AND ONTOLOGICAL EMBODIMENT

The scientist, Lyubov, put unsuccessful effort to divide the logic of domination by intellectual empathy. Although he is aware of the Arboreal Kinship of the Athsheans, he is not part of them, but a prisoner of the Western rationalist mind that attempts to study the forest instead of becoming a part of its living breathing. His intellectual relationship with Selver is a mediocre constructed on logic, but does not have the ontological richness of the experience of autopoietic. As Lyubov dies, this tenuous bridge collapses, and with the loss of innocence, the dialogue is over forever. His death imposes a tragic metamorphosis on Selver: in order to maintain the autopoietic wholeness of his world, he has to embrace the logic of death used by the enemy and become a killer. The Athshean soul is forever changed in this bloody shift; the forest is spared the colonial axe, but now exists plagued by the shadow of human beings that it had hoped to escape (Iovino, Serenella.,2016).

3.4 DAVIDSON AND LOGIC OF DOMINATION

Captain Davidson is the genuine Plumwoodian master subject, the human being who establishes a differentiation between him and nature and positions himself over it. He views the Athshean world in terms of dry, utilitarianism: the forest is timber, the Athsheans are creechies, and the planet is a frontier in a resource-undeveloped world. It is evident that his reasoning is divided in two in its first line, which Plumwood refers to as the essence of domination. The nonviolence of the Athsheans is a weakness, and the ecological communion between them is a kind of laziness, which he regards as a deficit. To Davidson, being a civilized person is being in control. He even writes that, the world must be cleaned by man, the words used are reminiscent of colonial and industrial discourse. This expression demonstrates what Plumwood would term backgrounding that is, rendering the input and agency of less powerful communities (women, colonized folks, ecosystems) unseen. The Terran colonisation fundamentally obliterates the Athshean work force and the life-giving forest, and pushes it into an economy where the only things that have a value attached to them are humans. The damage of this logic is manifested in the physical and how knowledge is generated. Davidson is not able to visualize the forest as a living being thus it is a mirror of his empty self. His rationalized psychological distance

actually ends up bringing the ecological psychosis the paper is discussing a separation with the living world. He consequently becomes deeply morally blind. As he participates in mass murder of Athsheans he justifies it as a necessary job, which is directed to the logging and the military efficiency. His brain, which is structured on domination, transforms atrocity into a measure of productivity (Jameson., 2005).

The description of Davidson by Le Guin serves as an allegory of Western modernity, perhaps on the psychological level. He is a human who has lost interrelation with the ecological context, such that Plumwood refers to as the crisis of reason, where the control of rationality breaks down into insanity. In the last scenes in which Davidson justifies genocide as the burden of civilization, his self-destructive cycle was revealed to him: the more he insists that he must be the one to control everything, the more he finds himself bound to his delusions of his superiority. The failure of dualism to support the coherent selfhood is the fall of Davidson in the words of Plumwood. His ecological psychosis is simply a moral, ontological illness that was created in the course of masquerading as entirely independent.

3.5 SELVER AND THE METAMORPHOSIS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Being an Athshean witnessing the murder of his wife and the fall of his world, Selver is changing radically and disarranging the traditional dichotomy of victim and vengeance, peace and violence, nature and culture. Le Guin depicts Selver in a beautiful ambivalent manner: he is not turned into a god by right but by fantasizing violence into existence. The dreams in Athshean cosmology are not fantasies, but the means of exploring the living world. The dreaming that Selver has helps him to be a mediator between humans and nonhumans and helps him to be connected to the collective consciousness of the forest. This theme reflects in the concept of autopoietic participation proposed by Freya Mathews arguing that the spread of consciousness is not only a human phenomenon but also one that exists in the living systems. The dreams do not mean that Selver is creating something out of nothing; now he is co-creating with the forest, reaching a network of meanings that already exists. His change when he encounters the Terrans thus exhibits ecological dislocation as well as regeneration.

Selver however messes up that autopoietic harmony when she takes a step towards violence. Aiming at learning to kill, he falls into the fallacy of the Terrans domination logic. The Athshean revolt can be regarded as the reclaiming of agency which was taken by the Terrans- it was a necessary response to domination. But it is also the loss of ecological innocence, to some degree taking the side of the master (Plumwood., 1993).

The psychological aspect of ecological ethics is revealed by the inner conflict of Selver. He struggles so as to balance two opposing worldviews, the dualism of the Terrans and the relational worldview of the Athsheans. These paradigms bargain in his dreams. The notion of autopoietic self-correction introduced by Mathews can be used as a philosophical prism through which one might see the reason behind Selver finally returning to dreaming. His end vision of the forest remaining active even after the destruction is a clue that Athshean mind is able to swallow traumas and transform them into resurrection. The story by Selver is essentially an allegory of the process of transitioning ecological psychosis into autopoietic healing.

3.6 THE FOREST AS LIVING SUBJECT

The forest is not merely a setting, it is literally the protagonist of the story, its moral mouthpiece. Le Guin constructs it as a self-regulating system that is intelligent and resembles the autopoietic universe of Mathews. The forest dreams with the help of the Athsheans, who, in their turn, maintain everything in balance by means of rituals and restraint. The results of the Terrans disrupting such a network are ecological and spiritual in nature. Deforestation is like deleting the consciousness. The ontology of Mathews also allows to read the forest as an ontological subject of some sort, all material possesses a little self-realizing agency. The admiration of the forest by the Athsheans is not primitive animism rather than an awareness of mutual autopoiesis. They are ecologically minded due to the ontological intimacy: since the forest is mustered, the self is injured. This subjective world of relations is in striking contrast with the tool-based logic of the Terrans that involves the forest as the dead matter (Mathews, Freya.,2016).

The ideological punch of this contrast is explained through the theory by Plumwood. The Terrans and their deforestation project send nature to the backburner on one hand, they destroy the very foundation of their survival, and in the other hand it is the pretend that nothing can go wrong. The forest, when it retaliates, through the rebellion it provokes on Selver and his people, gives a kind of ecological resistance. By doing so, Le Guin makes the forest agency not merely a passive victim, but also a participant of the moral economy in the story. The picture of the forest healing at the end of the novella reveals the rule of self-renewing systems by Mathews. Life revolves through restoration even after the human violence. Through her redefinition of the forest as an autopoietic community capable of re-establishing its own vitality, Le Guin demonstrates that relational ontologies are not

limited to being the casualties of the master regimes to which they are supposed to be sacrifices.

3.7 DREAMING AS AN ECOLOGICAL COMMUNICATION

In the story by Le Guin dreaming is the way in between human and nonhuman worlds. To the Athsheans, a dream is not something sub-conscious: it is an ecological communication. This concept suits well with the communication universe proposed by Mathews, in which every being contributes to the meaning making (Le Guin., 1972). The Terrans, in turn, are unable to dream which demonstrates that they are deprived of the autopoietic consciousness. Davidson brands sleep inefficient and dreams weak-this like a view towards which industrial capitalism is a murderer of imagination and rest. The ignorance of the Terrans is explained by Plumwood through instrumental rationality: the desire of the Terrans towards productivity obliterates anything that does not help them (Plumwood., 1993). Dreaming as something that is difficult to transform into a commodity is a kind of rebellion against the domination. The fact that Selver dreamed once again of the dream following the revolt is an indication that can remake a messed-up ecology. The fact that he spends his days dreaming of violence is indicative of what Plumwood refers to as critical reflexivity- the realization of the personal part in domination. It is through dreaming that Selver is able to rejoin the beat of the forest which is autopoietic and transforms trauma into insight. Ecological healing, Le Guin claims, does not only take place when plants grow back, it is also about minds re-adjusting, an empathetic awakening of consciousness and new perception (Roy, Srirupa., 2023)

3.8 SYNTHESIS: TO RECONCILE DOMINATION AND AUTOPOIESIS IN THE ECOLOGICAL VISION OF LE GUIN

The Word for World is Forest by Ursula K. Le Guin is fundamentally this philosophical epic battle between two gigantic world systems one which holds that ought to encompass everything and one which is about reciprocity and mutual care. The logic of domination by Val Plumwood identifies the way that just continue to pile up hierarchies mind/body, culture/nature, man/woman, colonizer/colonized and that the project of Terrans appears valid. To the other end, the concept of autopoietic ecology provided by Freya Mathews is a roadmap to the kind of life that is relational in which all organisms are components of the self-organizing energy of the Earth. Reading the two structures side-by-side, the novella becomes a sort of an ecological psychosis allegory and a remedy to it, of how harmful it is to cut and separate ourselves out of the living world and how to re-insert the consciousness back into the world. Le Guin creates this philosophical opposition by pitting cold and mechanical self of Davidson against the increasing ecological consciousness of Selver. Davidson essentially involves the forest as a resource and the Athsheans as labor, which undermines the backgrounding critique by Plumwood, of viewing nature and the feminine as something can subjugate. His mental disintegration, his inability to perceive the kinship as something more than a means to an end, reveals the alienation that Plumwood termed the final west-self pathology. Meanwhile, the autopoiesis of Mathews demonstrates the existence of the Athsheans: dreaming, recollection, and forest, in and of themselves constitute a dynamic self-renewing cycle. There is no division of mind and matter in their world, and ecology is an expansion of consciousness. In the case of the invasion by the Terrans, they are not only colonizing the political, but also discontinuity by metaphysical means because of imposing dualism on what was originally united (Tsai, et al.,2017).

Le Guin identifies that change in Selver at that crossroads of paradigms. To retaliate the aggression of the Terrans with violence is as it were a two-fold stab of insubordination--he struggles against the domination but also imitates the logic, adopts the reasoning of the master. In the prism of Mathews, the autopoietic balance is broken in his rebellion too: a self-system is pushed into an unhealthy evolution whenever it is subject to outside pressure. That is precisely the tragedy of The Word for World is Forest, liberation by means of mimicry and surviving due to ontological discord. Le Guin does not entirely resolve that contradiction; she employs it to demonstrate how a non-human and a human can be affected by colonial modernity emotionally. The combination of Plumwood and Mathews transforms the book to an ecological parable of relational ethics. Plumwood deconstructs the dualism to explain the reason why the Terrans do not perceive Athsheans as individuals; autopoiesis by Mathews demonstrates how the Athsheans preserve the meaning of life by living a living reciprocity with their surroundings. In their combination, they establish a direction of domination to kinship. The forest ceases to be merely a background in this synthesis and is made an active moral actor that must assert itself, talk about itself. The sentient forest that is used by Le Guin is a precursor to subsequent eco-philosophical ideas, particularly new materialism, in which matter is itself given agency.

Bringing together speculative storytelling and ecological philosophy, Le Guin constructs the literary paradigm that Plumwood as well as Mathews envisioned a re-incorporation of human consciousness into the web of

life (Tsai, et al.,2017). The end scenes of the story, when Selver hesitates over the death of Davidson, and realizes that there was no one way back, are the point of new moral ontology. This world of Athshean is unable to return to innocence but to develop towards wisdom based on relational humility. Le Guin describes ecological kinship as an act of practicing self-correction *within* longing rather than longing *after* some pre-industrial purity-what Mathews refers to as ontopoietic communion and in which being is understood as fundamentally shared.

IV. CONCLUSION: ETHICS OF ECOLOGICAL KINSHIP

The Word for World is Forest written by Le Guin can be interpreted as an exclusive or closed system of knowledge. It is not merely a political satire of colonialism, but it is also a philosophical introspection of how people behave towards everything outside of us. The book turns the tables on the repressive power systems and demonstrates how the most repressive form of colonization occurs in one's cognitions, when begin to think of plants and animals as things to manipulate. By drawing the curtain back, exposing to the destructive nature of that worldview, Le Guin is calling on to the new ways that are founded on sharing and caring about the ecosystems of one another. Ecofeminism concepts provided by Plumwood provide an easy framework which can explain the existence of violence against the nature and the culture. Her interpretation of the perception of women, especially, as being disconnected with the earth is reflected in the Athsheans who behave towards their forest as a playground. The Terrans arriving on Athshe destroy it not only because they are greedy, but also because of this gigantic-old myth that human beings are superior to all the things. It is that feeling that human beings are overly estranged by nature; almost like observers but not players. That alienation literally conceals the sentient forest and the humanness of the Athsheans in the book and results in some sort of mental division as the Terrans are no longer connected to the living systems that literally bind them. Again the script is reversed by the concept of autopoietic ecology as introduced by Freya Mathews. She reminds that life is not a network that happens by itself, but rather is part of the environment. The Athsheans reflect this - there is no consciousness and ecology, but a flowing world. They keep in touch with each other in dreams and shared recollection and that is the way they tie in with earth in this ontopoietic communion that Mathews is talking about. When the Terrans break that bond, it's not only the problem of the loss of biodiversity. It is all about tearing off the red line that gives life its meaning. That break demonstrates that human are killing ourselves by damaging the environment, as they all belong to the same becoming.

It is not a bleak story of Selver, but rough indeed. Killing Davidson is a liberation and a terrible trauma at the same time it is a paradox and demonstrates how violence can still be sustained by resistance. Le Guin is not sanitizing it, she goes under the hood and explores the way this trauma transforms ecological consciousness. Selver eventually understands that the Athsheans will never be able to return to a clean state. His understanding of personal inabilities and the necessity of recovery comes like a blow. It is a call to self-criticism by Plumwood and a go-back-to-self-repairing system by Mathews. It should be through the cessation of the destructive roles human play and reconnecting in order to rebuild. When examining the framing of the story by Plumwood and Mathews, it is possible to notice that the author uses the allegory to play modern life. The conquest of the Terrans of Athshe is similar to the industrial societies conquering the planet; the Athshean trauma is the equivalent of anxiety in the Anthropocene. The imagination of Le Guin turns out to be a test experiment and it challenges morals. It is the breaking out of that fantasy of control which clears the fog of the ecological psychosis.

The notion echoes particularly loudly in these times of environmental studies. In the work of Le Guin, even in her early work, there were hints of the fact that ecological exploitation is not an isolated phenomenon, but it is also linked to the exploitation of other genders and races; that is the idea that today occupies ecofeminism and environmental justice. The narration of this story compel to account the effects of the colonization of reflections in the sense of what is non human. It is a literal move out of contemplating ecology on a high-brow level into the world of daily practice. The novel presents the place where these two meet in a Bumpy cross-road and in many instances conflict with each other but at times intersect. Due to this, the forest turns into a labyrinth of destruction and its revival human can walk through. The fact that the forest is dying is not the forest gone but it indicates what new insights must begin to occur. It is a tremendous bow to the notion that actual morality has little to do with feeling guilty or nostalgic but rather with re-entering a net of reciprocity.

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From Myth to Modernity: The Evolving Image of Kalki in Contemporary Discourse

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Abstract— *This paper offers an introduction to the changing image of Kalki, the prophesied final avatar of Vishnu, across Hindu tradition and modern media. It begins with the traditional mythological image of Kalki as a sword-wielding warrior who arrives at the end of the Kali Yuga to destroy evil and restore dharma. The paper then traces the evolution to modernity: humanization, appropriation, and hybridization. Kalki is no longer only a divine figure bound to scripture. Writers, filmmakers, and game designers now reshape him into a relatable hero, a symbol borrowed for new causes, and a character blended with other genres and ideas. The paper identifies several key trends in this shift. One is action-oriented heroic narratives, where Kalki appears as a warrior fighting clear villains in comics, films, and web series. Another is philosophical and rational lenses, where thinkers and writers treat Kalki less as a literal god and more as a metaphor for moral renewal or social change. A third trend is sci-fi and dystopian hybrids, seen in recent cinema and fiction that place Kalki in futuristic, post-apocalyptic worlds. A fourth trend is cultural and nationalistic resonance, where Kalki's image is used to express pride, identity, or political ideas. Together, these trends show how Kalki has moved into broader contemporary discourse, appearing in politics, pop culture, and online debate, not just religious texts. This connects to a larger question: how ancient stories continue to shape our worldviews today. The discussion section evaluates the advantages and disadvantages of retelling a sacred figure for contemporary audiences. The paper's conclusions argue that Kalki's many modern forms do not erase the original myth. Instead, they show how old stories stay alive by adapting to new times.*

Keywords— ***Kalki, Hindu mythology, dashavatara, humanization, contemporary discourse, dystopian fiction, cultural identity***

I. INTRODUCTION

Every culture keeps a story about an ending and a new beginning. In Hindu tradition, that story centers on Kalki, the tenth and final avatar of Vishnu, who is foretold to appear when the world reaches its lowest moral point. This introduction sets out why a single mythic figure matters far beyond temple walls and old manuscripts. Kalki is described in classical texts as a warrior who arrives at the close of Kali Yuga, the last and darkest of the four cosmic ages, to defeat corruption and restart the cycle of time. For centuries, this image stayed mostly fixed, repeated in religious retellings with small variation.

That has changed. In the past two decades, Kalki has appeared in comic books, web series, political speeches, and big-budget science fiction films. Each version pulls the figure in a different direction. Some keep him close to scripture. Others turn him into a brooding action hero, a metaphor for revolution, or a character in a future ruled by machines. This paper studies that range. It asks a simple question: what happens to an ancient prophecy when it moves through modern media and modern politics?

The paper does this analysis in stages. It starts with the traditional mythological image of Kalki, drawn from the Puranas and the Mahabharata, to provide a clear baseline. It then looks at the evolution to modernity, breaking that shift into three linked processes: humanization, appropriation,

and hybridization. From there, it maps four key trends now visible in books, films, and public life: action-oriented heroic narratives, philosophical and rational lenses, sci-fi and dystopian hybrids, and cultural and nationalistic resonance. The paper then steps back to place Kalki inside a broader contemporary discourse, asking how ancient stories continue to shape our worldviews even in a secular, technological age.

This is not a theological argument about whether Kalki will arrive. It is a study of representation: how a sacred figure is rewritten and what those rewrites reveal about the people who rewrite it. The discussion and conclusions that follow argue that the many modern faces of Kalki are not a loss of the original myth. They are evidence that the myth still works.

II. TRADITIONAL MYTHOLOGICAL IMAGE

To understand how far Kalki has traveled in modern media, we first need the original picture. The earliest and clearest sources are the Puranas, particularly the Vishnu Purana and the Bhagavata Purana, along with passages in the Mahabharata (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.-c). These texts describe Kalki as the avatar still to come, the last in a sequence of ten incarnations of Vishnu known as the dashavatara (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.-a). A separate work devoted entirely to this avatar, the Kalki Purana, is generally treated as a later addition to the textual corpus, with scholarship dating its composition to several centuries after the major Puranas (Doniger, 2009).

The dashavatara is structured around the idea of intervention. Each avatar appears at a moment of crisis to restore balance, or dharma, when adharma (disorder, injustice, and moral decay) grows too strong. Kalki is the final entry in that sequence, set to appear not in the mythic past like Rama or Krishna, but at the very end of the current cosmic cycle. Hindu cosmology divides time into four ages, or yugas, that decline in virtue: Satya, Treta, Dvapara, and Kali. According to this framework, we are living in the Kali Yuga, an age marked by greed, dishonesty, and the breakdown of social order. Kalki's arrival is tied to the close of this age, when conditions are said to reach their worst point.

The iconography is consistent across most traditional sources. Kalki is shown as a mounted warrior, riding a white horse, holding a blazing sword (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.-c). Some texts describe the horse as Devadatta and the sword as the weapon that will cut down corrupt rulers and false teachers. This is a martial image, closer to a soldier-king than to the calm, instructive figures of earlier avatars like Rama or Krishna. Kalki's task, as described in the texts, is not to teach through dialogue but to act through force, ending one age so that a new, purer one can begin.

This warrior image carries a specific moral logic. Kalki does not arrive to negotiate with evil or slowly persuade people toward virtue. He arrives to end a cycle that has already failed. In that sense, the traditional Kalki is less a teacher and more an instrument of cosmic correction. He is also, importantly, future-tense. Kalki, unlike Rama or Krishna, belongs to prophecy, as his story is still unfolding. He has not yet come. This characteristic makes him different from every other avatar in one key way: his story is still open. Audiences are left waiting rather than reflecting.

This future-tense quality may explain why Kalki has proven so flexible in modern retellings. A finished story, fully described from birth to death, leaves a writer little room to invent. A prophecy, by contrast, is mostly blank space. The texts provide a name, a role, a few symbols, and an outcome, but very little plot. There is no detailed account of his childhood, his relationships, or the specific events leading to his appearance. Compared to the rich narrative detail surrounding Krishna or Rama, Kalki's traditional image is sparse. He is defined more by his role than by his character: he ends the age and restores order.

This sparseness is not a flaw in the original texts. Within their context, the texts are doing a specific kind of work, describing a cosmic structure rather than telling a personal story. But it does mean that anyone retelling Kalki today is working with a thin original sketch rather than a full portrait. That gap between a sparse, function-driven myth and the much richer characters audiences expect from modern fiction is, this paper argues, one key reason Kalki has been rewritten so often and so differently. The traditional image provides later creators a strong starting point, a sword, a horse, and a final battle against a corrupt age, but very little else to constrain them. The result, as the next section shows, is a figure unusually open to humanization, appropriation, and hybridization.

III. EVOLUTION TO MODERNITY: HUMANIZATION, APPROPRIATION, AND HYBRIDIZATION

The move from ancient prophecy to modern media did not happen all at once. It happened through three connected processes, each pulling Kalki slightly further from his original, sparse, prophecy-bound form.

The first process is humanization. In traditional texts, Kalki has almost no interior life. He has a role, not a personality. Modern retellings fill that gap. Films, novels, and web series provide Kalki's childhood scenes, family ties, doubts, and personal stakes. He is shown growing up, struggling with

his identity, or questioning his destiny before accepting it. This is a familiar move in modern storytelling generally: audiences expect to see a character's emotional journey, not just their function in a plot. India's long-running comic book tradition already shows this dynamic at work: publishers built an entire educational genre around giving Hindu deities and epic figures readable personalities and ongoing storylines for young audiences (McLain, 2009). By adding psychology to a figure once defined only by his cosmic role, creators make Kalki relatable in a way the original texts never intended or needed him to be. A god who simply arrives to destroy evil is challenging to build a multi-episode drama around. A young man is wrestling with the weight of prophecy.

The second process is appropriation. The Kalki image is taken out of its religious context and used for non-theological purposes. Political actors, social movements, and commercial brands can borrow the imagery of the final avatar—the idea of a coming end to a corrupt age and a coming restoration—to frame their causes. A reform movement might present itself as ushering in a new, purer era, echoing Kalki's symbolic role without making any literal claim about avatars or prophecy. A political campaign might employ similar imagery to imply that the current leadership embodies the final breath of a failed system. This appropriation can disrespect the source material, but it is not always controversial; it is simply how powerful symbols travel once they leave their original setting. The symbol becomes detachable from the doctrine.

The third process is hybridization. This is where Kalki is merged with other genres, story types, or technological imaginaries that have nothing to do with classical Hindu cosmology. A science fiction film might place Kalki in a future ruled by artificial intelligence, turning the “end of an age” into the end of a technological era rather than a cosmic one. A comic book might blend Kalki's mythic role with the visual language of Western superhero stories, giving him a costume, a secret identity, or a rogues' gallery of enemies. In each case, the character incorporates elements from outside the original tradition, resulting in a form that is both recognizably Kalki and distinctly different.

These three processes do not operate separately in most modern works. They tend to overlap. A single film can humanize Kalki by giving him a personal backstory, hybridize him by setting that story in a post-apocalyptic future, and invite appropriation by audiences who read the film's themes as commentary on present-day politics or technology. The 2024 Telugu-language film Kalki 2898 AD is a clear example of this overlap: it places a version of Kalki mythology inside a dystopian science fiction setting that draws on Star Wars, Mad Max, and Blade Runner alongside the Mahabharata, provides its characters personal arcs and motivations, and was widely discussed in public conversation well beyond strictly religious audiences (Leydon, 2024; Wikipedia contributors, 2026b).

It is worth being precise about what is and is not changing in this evolution. The core symbolic function, an avatar who appears to end a corrupt age and restore order, tends to survive across nearly all these retellings. What changes is the setting, the emotional texture, and the audience the story is built for. A medieval temple carving and a streaming series mutually agree that Kalki ends one age and begins another. They disagree on almost everything else: what that age looks like, who threatens it, and what kind of person Kalki is on the way to fulfilling his role.

This evolution is also not unique to Kalki. Other mythic and religious figures across cultures undergo similar transformations when adapted for modern media, gaining psychological depth, getting borrowed for political or commercial purposes, and getting blended with unrelated genres. What makes Kalki a useful case study is the specific combination of his prophetic, future-facing status and his thin original characterization. Because his story has not yet “happened” within the tradition, and because so little of his personality is fixed in scripture, he is unusually open to exactly this kind of reworking. The next section maps the specific directions that reworking has taken.

IV. KEY TRENDS IN CONTEMPORARY REPRESENTATION

Four trends stand out across recent films, fiction, and public discourse. Each one pulls on a different part of the traditional image, and each reaches a different kind of audience.

4.1 Action-Oriented Heroic Narratives

The most visible and commercially successful trend treats Kalki as a conventional action hero. This is the natural extension of the warrior imagery already present in the traditional texts: the sword, the horse, and the role of destroyer of evil. Modern action-oriented works keep that core but build a full plot around it: villains with names and motives, fight choreography, rising stakes, and a clear visual style borrowed from contemporary blockbuster cinema and graphic novels.

In these narratives, the philosophical and cosmological weight of the original myth is often present but secondary. The “end of an age” becomes the backdrop for a hero's journey rather than the main subject of the story. Audiences are invited to follow a protagonist through battles and personal trials, with the cosmic stakes mostly raising the dramatic tension rather than driving theological reflection.

This approach is, in many ways, the easiest way to adapt Kalki: the source material already provides a fighter on a horse with a sword, and modern action genres are already adept at constructing stories around such characters.

This trend has clear commercial logic behind it. Action and adventure remain dependable genres across film, television, and comics, with built-in audience expectations and proven formulas. This is not a new phenomenon: India's comic book industry has built mythological and historical figures into action-driven serial heroes for popular audiences since the 1960s (McLain, 2009). A studio or publisher adapting Kalki into this mold is not just retelling a myth; it is fitting that myth into a format with a track record of success. The risk, of course, is flattening. When the cosmic, philosophical dimension of the prophecy becomes secondary to fight scenes and villain reveals, something of the original's moral seriousness can be lost. Kalki in these stories is recognizable, but he is also, often, interchangeable with any other sword-wielding hero facing down a corrupt empire. The mythic specificity, the idea of dharma, the structure of the yugas, and the cosmic, rather than merely political, stakes can become decoration rather than substance.

Still, this trend matters because of its reach. Action-oriented adaptations tend to reach the widest audiences, including viewers and readers with little prior knowledge of the underlying mythology. For many people, an action film or comic series may be their first real exposure to the idea of Kalki at all. This trend shapes how the public understands Kalki, even if it's not the most faithful or thoughtful version of the story.

Indian English-language fiction shows this same pattern clearly. Kevin Missal's Kalki Trilogy, published between 2017 and 2019, follows a protagonist named Kalki Hari, a village boy from Shambala who learns of his destiny only after his father is kidnapped and his hidden strength is exposed (Missal, 2017). Across the trilogy's three volumes, Avatar of Vishnu, Eye of Brahma, and Sword of Shiva, Kalki gains a mentor in Guru Kripa, an immortal warrior modeled on the axe-wielding sixth avatar Parashurama, and is drawn into political intrigue, tribal warfare, and a long rivalry with the antagonist Lord Kali (Missal, 2017, 2018, 2019). The author states directly that the books are not a retelling of the Kalki Purana but an invented story merely inspired by it, free to add original characters, a romantic subplot, and the kind of fantasy world-building familiar from epic fantasy series more broadly. This is humanization and action convention working together: Kalki acquires a brother, a love interest, and a coming-of-age arc, while the plot itself runs on the same battles-and-betrayals structure found in mainstream fantasy fiction.

4.2 Philosophical and Rational Lenses

A different and smaller body of work moves in the opposite direction. Rather than emphasizing action, these treatments use Kalki as a vehicle for reflection. Writers, public intellectuals, and some filmmakers read the Kalki myth less as a literal prophecy and more as a metaphor: a way of contemplating moral decline, social renewal, and the cyclical nature of historical change.

This approach often strips away the supernatural elements or treats them as symbolic rather than literal. The “end of an age” is reinterpreted as the end of an unjust social, political, or economic order. The “destroyer of evil” becomes a stand-in for any force, movement, idea, or generation capable of breaking a corrupt status quo and making space for something better. Some writers use Kalki this way explicitly, framing essays or commentary around the question of what a “Kalki moment” might look like in contemporary terms: a tipping point where accumulated injustice finally gives way to change.

This lens also opens space for more skeptical or critical engagement with the myth. Rationalist and reform-minded commentators have at times used Kalki's prophecy as a case study in how religious narratives encode social hope, examining why cultures invent stories about a coming corrector rather than asking people to fix problems themselves in the present. This kind of analysis treats the myth as a window into psychology and society rather than as a literal forecast.

What unites these philosophical treatments is a shift in register. Instead of asking, "What will Kalki look like when he arrives?" they ask, "What is this story doing for the people who tell it?" That question moves Kalki out of the realm of plot and spectacle and into the realm of ideas. It is a smaller audience than the one reached by action-oriented adaptations, but it is an important one, because it is where Kalki is discussed in essays, opinion pieces, and serious cultural commentary rather than only in entertainment. This trend keeps the myth connected to its original moral seriousness, even as it lets go of much of its literal, supernatural content.

4.3 Sci-Fi and Dystopian Hybrids

Perhaps the most striking recent trend places Kalki inside science fiction and dystopian settings. Rather than a medieval or mythic backdrop, these works imagine a distant, technologically advanced future, often one ravaged by war, environmental collapse, or the dominance of artificial intelligence, and slot the Kalki prophecy into that world.

The clearest large-scale example is the 2024 Telugu film Kalki 2898 AD, which sets its story thousands of years in

the future, blending elements of the Mahabharata with post-apocalyptic science fiction imagery: ruined cities, advanced weapons, and a society shaped by both ancient prophecy and futuristic technology (Wikipedia contributors, 2026b). Critics described it explicitly as a mashup of decades of science fiction and fantasy cinema fused with the Hindu epic tradition (Leydon, 2024; Abrams, 2024). The film's title itself signals this hybrid approach, anchoring a mythic name to a specific, far-future date.

This trend works because the original Kalki myth already has a structural feature that maps neatly onto dystopian fiction: the idea of a world in moral and social collapse, awaiting a figure who can end the cycle and start something new. Dystopian science fiction, as a genre, is built around exactly that same shape: a broken world, an oppressive social order, and a hope for change, often embodied in a single figure or small group (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.-b). Kalki's prophecy and the dystopian genre share a deep narrative structure, which makes the hybrid feel natural rather than forced.

This pairing also lets creators ask new questions the original texts never considered. What does moral corruption look like in a world run by algorithms rather than kings? What does a "blazing sword" become when warfare is fought with drones and data rather than steel? These hybrids use Kalki's prophetic frame to explore very contemporary anxieties: about technology outpacing ethics, about environmental destruction, and about concentrated power dressed in mythic clothing. The result is a Kalki who feels strikingly modern, not despite the ancient source material, but because that material's basic shape, decline followed by a corrective figure, fits so well with how modern audiences already imagine future crises.

A second, literary example of this same pattern, working from a different angle than Kalki 2898 AD's distant future, is Vishwas Mudagal's The Last Avatar—Age of Kalki, the opening volume of a planned trilogy published in 2018. Rather than a far-future Earth thousands of years on, the story unfolds in a near-future India shattered by a terrorist attack that kills the prime minister and the union cabinet, plunging the country into emergency rule (Mudagal, 2018). Kalki is a vigilante operating inside this collapsed political order, backed by a secret organization called the Rudras and allied with a Chinese genetically engineered spy, fighting through a landscape of artificial intelligence, secret societies, and global power struggles. The author has described his goal as building a distinctly Indian counterpart to Western superhero franchises, rooted in the Kalki prophecy but told as a near-future geopolitical thriller rather than a period myth. Read alongside Kalki 2898 AD, this novel suggests that the dystopian hybrid is not a one-off cinematic experiment but a recognizable pattern across recent Indian popular fiction, one in which the same prophecy of decline and restoration keeps getting relocated to imagined technological futures.

4.4 Cultural and Nationalistic Resonance

Beyond fiction, Kalki's image circulates in public and political life, often carrying weight tied to identity and pride rather than entertainment value. This is where the appropriation process described earlier becomes most visible.

Kalki's role as a restorer of dharma after a time of decline is easy to see in a nationalistic or cultural light. Public figures, commentators, and movements can invoke Kalki imagery, explicitly or by allusion, to argue that a community, a nation, or a tradition is moving through its own "Kali Yuga" moment and needs renewal. Scholars who study religion and politics in South Asia describe this broader pattern, in which religious icons and figures are mobilized within electoral politics and social movements, as a form of political deification operating at multiple scales, from national symbolism down to local community identity (Sen & Nielsen, 2022). This framing borrows the emotional force of the prophecy, the sense of an ending and a coming correction, without necessarily making any specific theological claim. It functions as shorthand for a larger story: decline, struggle, and eventual restoration of greatness or order.

Cultural resonance extends beyond overtly political speech. Popular culture also reflects this phenomenon, as seen in the marketing, online discussions, and conversations about identity and heritage surrounding Kalki. A blockbuster film built around Kalki mythology can become, for some audiences, a statement about cultural pride and the global visibility of Hindu epic storytelling, regardless of the filmmakers' own intentions. We can interpret box office success and international attention as evidence of a tradition's ongoing relevance and reach.

This trend demonstrates how a religious symbol can evolve into a marker of group identity. The figure stops being only a matter of personal faith or scriptural detail and becomes part of a larger conversation about cultural confidence, representation, and belonging. This is not unique to Kalki or to Hindu tradition; many religious and mythic figures, across many cultures, become drawn into nationalistic or identity-based discourse over time. What stands out in Kalki's case is the specific framing of decline and restoration built into the original prophecy, a framing that maps unusually well onto the kind of narrative many nationalistic movements already favor: a glorious past, a corrupted present, and a coming correction.

V. BROADER CONTEMPORARY DISCOURSE: HOW ANCIENT STORIES CONTINUE TO SHAPE OUR WORLDVIEWS?

Stepping back from Kalki specifically, the patterns traced in this paper point to something larger about how societies use old stories. Myths about a final reckoning, a corrupt age ending and a better one beginning, are not unique to Hindu tradition. Many cultures carry some version of this structure: a story that promises an ending to present suffering and the arrival of order or justice. What differs is the specific cast of characters and symbols. What stays constant is the underlying shape of the story.

This shape persists because it does really psychological and social work. People living through periods of visible injustice, rapid change, or institutional failure often look for a framework that makes sense of that experience. Comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell traced a related pattern across world mythology: a recurring narrative structure, which he called the monomyth, in which a hero departs the ordinary world, faces trials, and returns having transformed both himself and his community (Campbell, 1949). A story that says decline is part of a recognizable cycle and that the cycle eventually turns offers a kind of structured hope. It says, "This moment of difficulty has a shape, a history, and, eventually, an end. " That is a comforting claim, whether or not it is meant literally.

Kalki's modern journey, traced through action films, philosophical essays, science fiction, and political rhetoric, shows this work happening in real time. Each retelling adapts the myth's structure to a new kind of crisis: personal struggle in humanized narratives, social injustice in philosophical readings, technological and environmental anxiety in sci-fi hybrids, and cultural anxiety in nationalistic framings. The myth does not stay fixed in its original setting because the crises it speaks to keep changing. A myth that only addresses the specific social conditions of its original era would have far less reason to survive into a very different one.

This also explains why ancient stories continue to shape contemporary worldviews even in societies that consider themselves secular or rational. The persistence is not necessarily about belief in supernatural events. It is about narrative structure. A society does not need to believe a sword-wielding avatar will literally appear on a white horse to discover value in the underlying story: corruption grows, a corrective force eventually rises, and balance is restored. That structure can be applied to elections, social movements, technological disruption, or generational change just as easily as to cosmic prophecy.

This points to a broader claim worth making explicit. Myths survive not by staying the same but by being reusable. A story with a flexible structure and a small set of fixed symbols, a hero, a weapon, a turning point, and a restored order can be filled in with whatever content a given era needs. Kalki's prophecy, sparse in original detail and clear in basic structure, is a strong example of this kind of reusable myth. It provides every era with enough material to retell the story in its terms while keeping enough continuity that audiences still recognize it as the same myth.

This phenomenon is the deeper reason Kalki's many modern faces matter beyond their individual entertainment or political value. Together, they are a working example of how ancient narrative structures continue to organize how people understand crisis and change today, long after the original religious and cosmological context that produced them has receded into the background for many audiences.

VI. DISCUSSION

The trends mapped in this paper raise a genuine tension. On one side is the value of keeping Kalki and myths like him alive and relevant for new generations. On the other side is the risk of distorting or diluting a tradition that carries real religious meaning for many people.

The case for modernization is straightforward. Stories that cease to evolve often lose their readership, viewership, or discussion outside of specialized or devotional circles. Action-oriented films and sci-fi hybrids bring Kalki to audiences who would likely never encounter the Puranas directly. Philosophical reinterpretations keep the myth part of serious public conversation rather than confining it to ritual contexts. Even appropriation, messy and sometimes opportunistic as it can be, is evidence that the symbol still carries enough cultural weight to be worth borrowing. A myth that nobody uses for entertainment, argument, or political framing is on its way to being forgotten.

The case for caution is just as real. Humanization can flatten a cosmic figure into a generic protagonist, losing the specific theological weight of dharma and the yuga cycle in favor of familiar character arcs. Appropriation can detach the symbol from any accountability to the tradition it comes from, letting political or commercial actors use Kalki's imagery for purposes that have little to do with the texts' actual content or that even run against their spirit. Hybridization can produce versions of Kalki so distant from the original sources that audiences may come away with an inaccurate sense of the underlying mythology. There is a real difference between a story that adapts its setting while preserving its meaning and a story that uses a recognizable name and a few visual cues while discarding everything else.

This tension remains unresolved, and this paper does not attempt to resolve it. What it can do is point to a useful distinction: between adaptations that engage with the structure and meaning of the original myth, even while changing its setting or genre, and adaptations that merely borrow its name and imagery as decoration. The sci-fi hybrid Kalki 2898 AD, for example, draws directly on Mahabharata characters and cosmological framing even as it reimagines the setting, a choice that reviewers themselves noted required some prior familiarity with the underlying mythology to fully land (Abrams, 2024); that is different from, say, a commercial campaign that uses "Kalki" purely as a catchy brand name with no engagement with the underlying story at all. Both count as modern uses of the myth, but they sit at different points on a spectrum of fidelity.

This tension is longstanding, though its current form, shaped by streaming platforms, global film markets, and social media, is new. Different communities have always retold myths regionally and across generations, each with their emphases. What has changed is the speed and scale at which retellings now happen, and the size of the audiences they can reach in a short time. A film can reframe a centuries-old prophecy for a global audience within a single release weekend in a way that earlier oral or written retellings could not.

The discussion above suggests that the real question is not whether Kalki should be modernized, since that process is already well underway and shows no sign of stopping, but how to think clearly about which modernizations keep faith with the tradition's core meaning and which ones simply use its name. That question deserves more sustained attention than this paper alone can provide it, but identifying it clearly is itself a useful step.

VII. CONCLUSION

This paper set out to trace how the image of Kalki has moved from a sparse, prophecy-bound figure in classical Hindu texts to a richly varied presence in contemporary media and public discourse. The traditional image of Kalki as a warrior on a white horse, sword raised against a corrupt age, has not disappeared. It survives as a recognizable core inside nearly every modern retelling. What has changed around that core is significant: humanization has given Kalki an interior life, appropriation has let his symbolism travel into politics and commerce, and hybridization has placed him inside genres, science fiction, dystopian futures, and action cinema, which the original texts never imagined.

Four key trends now define how Kalki appears in public life: as an action hero, as a philosophical metaphor, as a science fiction figure, and as a symbol of cultural or national identity. Each trend serves a different audience and a different purpose, and together they show how flexible the original prophecy has turned out to be. That flexibility connects to a larger pattern visible well beyond this one figure: ancient stories survive not by staying fixed but by offering a structure, decline followed by correction, that each era can refill with its concerns.

None of these trends should be read as evidence that the modern versions have replaced or erased the traditional myth. The opposite appears to be more accurate. The fact that Kalki can be rewritten so many times, in so many directions, and still be recognized as Kalki is, in itself, a sign of the original story's durability. A myth that could only be told one way would have far less room to survive contact with new technologies, new audiences, and new anxieties.

Future work could extend this analysis by tracking audience reception more directly or by comparing Kalki's modern trajectory with similar end-times figures in other traditions. For now, this paper's central claim stands: Kalki's many modern faces are not a departure from myth. They are fulfilling their mythical roles as they have always done.

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Thermodynamics of the Soul: An Epic of Spatial Hegemony, Entropy, Sensory Perception, and Cosmic Faith in Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening"

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Abstract— *This research paper presents an extensive, multi-layered interdisciplinary analysis of Robert Frost's canonical poem "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" (1923). Moving decisively beyond traditional pastoral or purely psychological interpretations that reduce the text to a metaphor for existential despair or a subconscious death drive, this study positions the poem as a profound metaphysical arena where geographical boundaries, thermodynamic gradients, and cosmic consciousness assimilate. We evaluate the text along two primary analytical vectors: the Spatial Axis, which maps the institutional and legal boundaries separating human property ("the village") from natural sovereignty ("the woods"); and the Energetic Axis, which tracks the thermodynamic field between the traveler—as a localized, self-sustaining source of metabolic heat—and the high-entropy pull of absolute thermal equilibrium represented by the winter solstice. Furthermore, this paper integrates innovative, multi-dimensional frameworks to map the process of human awakening. It establishes the horse as an essential biological guardian and sensory avatar; interprets consciousness through the physical parameters of a Newtonian optical lens; frames the auditory environment through the metaphysical science of Naad Yoga; and scales individual volition into collective civilizational infrastructure via the ancient Vedic mandate of Charaiveti, Charaiveti and Rabindranath Tagore's philosophy of Ekla Chalo Re. This synthesis ultimately demonstrates that the traveler's journey is an immortal cosmic orbit, proving that human volition is an indomitable force moving in perfect harmony with a dynamic, ever-evolving universe.*

Keywords— ***Robert Frost, Spatial Hegemony, Thermodynamics, Environmental Entropy, Sensory Avatar, Naad Yoga (Yoga of Divine Sound), Volition (Resolution / Willpower)***

I. INTRODUCTION: BEYOND THE PASTORAL SURFACE AND CRITICAL DESPAIR

For nearly a century, scholarship surrounding Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" has remained confined within two predictable paradigms. The first is a sentimentalized pastoral view that treats the poem as a quaint portrait of rural New England life—a brief, picturesque pause in a weary traveler's evening commute. The second is a darker, twentieth-century psychological reading that views the text through a monochromatic lens of existential dread, reading the cold, dark forest as a Freudian Thanatos—a subconscious longing for death, exhaustion, and self-erasure.

This paper completely rejects this traditional critical despair, which leaves the reader trapped in philosophical hopelessness and emotional paralysis. Frost's constructed landscape is not a passive backdrop to human weariness; it is an active, formidable participant in a high-stakes struggle for human consciousness. Writing in an era deeply marked

by human anxieties over territorial boundaries, land possession, and material ownership, Frost elevates his traveler far beyond these small earthly traits. To uncover the true depth of this journey, this study shifts the critical discourse from standard literary tropes to the exact laws of physical science and the heights of universal philosophy, evaluating the text along two distinct yet profoundly complementary analytical vectors:

The Spatial Axis: Rooted in the principles of cultural geography, this vector maps the rigid, institutional boundaries that separate human cartography, property deeds, and socio-legal control ("the village") from the untamed, un-commodified sovereignty of the wild forest.

The Energetic Axis: Rooted in the fundamental laws of classical physics, this vector tracks the severe thermodynamic gradient between the traveler—operating as a localized, biological engine of metabolic heat and kinetic energy—and an external environment drifting toward absolute stasis, darkness, and thermal equilibrium.

By exploring these axes, this paper traces a profound awakening of the intellect. Guided by the vastness of his heart and the quiet confidence of his mind, the traveler breaks free from the transactional anxieties of human possession. Ultimately, his journey does not end in frozen surrender, but in a supreme, joyful liberation where human willpower aligns in perfect harmony with the dynamic, ever-evolving choreography of the cosmos.

II. SPATIAL HEGEMONY AND THE CARTOGRAPHY OF THE BORDERLAND

The very first line of Frost's masterpiece—"Whose woods these are I think I know. / His house is in the village though"—immediately introduces a profound possessive tension. The traveler does not look at the forest as a purely aesthetic wonder; his intellect instantly filters the landscape through the legalistic lens of ownership, division, and spatial control. This intellectual process directly mirrors what cultural geographer Tim Cresswell conceptualizes as Spatial Hegemony: the historical and institutional process by which human societies map, partition, name, and claim the physical earth to assert socio-political domination over the natural world. In this obsessive drive to possess, humanity often forgets that mutual love and care are the essential ingredients of human culture. Frost exposes this flaw, affirming that true geography never inflicts tension or division upon anyone; instead, it ultimately assimilates all fragmented spaces toward the absolute oneness of the globe.

The narrative geography of the poem is meticulously bifurcated into three distinct operational zones:

The Village: This represents the dense core of institutionalized space. It is the domain governed by human deeds, tax records, legal boundaries, and intense social surveillance. In the village, space is commodified, quantified, and stripped of its mystery. The owner of the woods resides here, comfortable in the fragile illusion that a piece of paper grants him dominance over the wild earth.

The Woods: Conversely, the woods represent an un-commodified, sovereign natural space. They are completely free from the legal frameworks and social controls of the village. The forest does not recognize property lines, human names, or financial valuations; it exists in its primitive, raw form, steadily filling with snow and erasing whatever artificial trails man has carved into its periphery.

The Liminal Boundary: The traveler stands neither fully in the village nor fully in the deep woods. Instead, he occupies a precarious, narrow road "between the woods and frozen lake." This borderland is a classic liminal space where human laws and social structures begin to fray, instantly losing their sovereign power over the human soul.

As the traveler lingers in this borderland, a profound metaphysical transformation occurs. The artificial, legalistic ownership asserted by the village resident dissolves entirely into the unmappable kingdom of a Divine Power. The vastness of this frozen landscape sheds its localized New England identity and transforms into a silent, sacred cosmic auditorium—a celestial amphitheater illuminated by the deep, ancient brilliance of the night sky. In this unmapped space, the traveler is stripped of his artificial social identity. He is forced into an unmediated, raw, and beautiful confrontation with his own internal self and the silent infinity of the universe.

III. THE THERMODYNAMIC EXCHANGE: METABOLIC HEAT VERSUS ENVIRONMENTAL ENTROPY

While the spatial configuration sets the geographic stage for this encounter, the immediate physical conflict unfolds as a high-stakes energetic exchange. When interpreted through the strict laws of classical thermodynamics, the traveler is not merely a literary protagonist; he is a highly organized, localized concentration of kinetic energy and metabolic heat. He operates as an open biological system that must constantly burn energy to maintain its internal thermal homeostasis—traditionally measured around 98.6°F—against a ruthless, freezing external gradient.

In stark contrast, the snowy woods operate as an immense, low-temperature reservoir representing deep stasis, physical inertia, and high environmental entropy. Frost provides the exact astronomical catalyst for this thermodynamic crisis by

defining the setting as "the darkest evening of the year." This phrase identifies the event as the winter solstice—the precise orbital point where the Earth's axial tilt minimizes solar radiation in the Northern Hemisphere, resulting in a maximum deficit of thermal energy.

The moment the traveler halts his horse, the mechanical kinetic energy of transport drops to zero. According to the Second Law of Thermodynamics, heat must naturally flow from a body of higher temperature (the traveler) to a body of lower temperature (the freezing atmosphere). The stagnant, arctic air acts like an energetic vacuum, steadily and relentlessly drawing metabolic heat away from the traveler's physical body. Under a purely material lens, the beautiful, silent falling of the snow is the visual manifestation of environmental entropy gathering strength, attempting to bring all localized molecular motion to a absolute standstill. The woods invite the speaker to surrender his internal heat and enter a state of complete thermal equilibrium. In the realm of a living organism, complete thermal equilibrium with a sub-zero environment translates directly to hypothermia, the cessation of cellular metabolism, and biological death.

Yet, a purely mechanical view of classical physics is ultimately not enough to capture the true depth of Frost's poetry. If the traveler's journey were a mere defensive struggle against freezing to death, the poem would end in bitter resistance. Instead, a profound metaphysical shift occurs. As the inner strength of Mother Earth rises to touch mountainous heights, natural elements like the falling snow do not act as hostile executioners, but as leveling, centering forces. The traveler does not recoil from the cold; rather, he enchantingly embraces the snow, recognizing it not as a frozen shroud, but as nature's serene smile.

In this moment of supreme awakening, human volition crosses the threshold of physical limitation. The traveler looks into the dark, snow-filled expanse and realizes a deep, non-dualistic truth: it is not an external "you" confronting an internal "me"—nature and the self are one. Because nobody fights with himself, the traveler ceases all friction with the elements. He internalizes the quiet, unyielding power of the winter landscape, transforming the external stillness into an inexhaustible reservoir of inner spiritual strength. He does not flee the beautiful, dark, and deep woods; he assimilates their vastness to fortify his mind, empowering himself to go miles and miles before he sleeps.

IV. THE BIOLOGICAL GUARDIAN: THE HORSE AS A SENSORY AVATAR AND COSMIC ALARM

To bridge the gap between the silent, entropic pull of the woods and the traveler's sudden awakening, Frost introduces an indispensable structural entity: the little horse. The horse is not merely a rustic prop or a passive draft animal. In this metaphysical arena, it functions as a highly sensitive biological guardian—an evolutionary anchor that bridges the raw instincts of the animal kingdom with the higher cosmic consciousness of the human spirit.

This creature senses what the human intellect, temporarily entranced by the snow, fails to notice:

The Instinctual Radar: While the traveler is intellectually lost in the beauty of the landscape, the horse remains anchored to the immediate laws of survival. By shaking its harness bells, the horse breaks the hypnotic, high-entropy silence of the woods. It functions as a biological alarm, demanding to know if there has been a "mistake."

The Sensory Avatar: The horse represents pure, unadulterated sensory perception. It feels the dropping temperature, the lack of a farmhouse shelter, and the impending danger of the frozen lake. It acts as the traveler's physical intuition, grounding him before his metabolic engine cools to the point of no return.

As the horse's bells vibrate through the crisp air, they shatter the illusion of stasis. Just as the sun must rise and set, and just as the Earth must continuously move along its axis to experience its winter and summer solstices, the traveler is suddenly reminded of his own place within this ever-moving cosmic machinery.

The sound of the bells forces a powerful realization: the universe never stops. Nature does not rest on its laurels, and neither can the human soul. The horse's shake is a cosmic wake-up call that triggers Frost's firmest belief. The traveler looks at the vastness around him, orders his internal self to align with the dynamic universe, and declares: No, you have not to stop. Go and go, for there are miles to go before the final rest.

V. THE AUDITORY ENVIRONMENT AND THE METAPHYSICAL SCIENCE OF NAAD YOGA

As the traveler stands at the liminal borderland, the poem's acoustic atmosphere undergoes a radical shift. Frost writes: "He gives his harness bells a shake / To ask if there is some mistake. / The only other sound's the sweep / Of easy wind and downy flake." Under a standard literary analysis, this is merely a contrast between a sharp metallic sound and a soft natural whisper. However, when viewed through the elevated lens of Indian spiritual philosophy, this auditory landscape transforms into an initiation into the sacred science of Naad Yoga—the Yoga of Divine Sound.

In the terminology of Naad Yoga, the auditory universe is split into two distinct dimensions:

Ahat Naad (Struck Sound): This is the external, physical sound created by the friction of matter. The shaking of the harness bells represents this dimension. It is a sharp, crisp wake-up call that pierces the freezing air, demanding the intellect's attention to the immediate material reality.

Anahat Naad (Unstruck Sound): This is the internal, eternal vibration of cosmic consciousness that exists without any physical cause. Frost captures this sublime reality through the "sweep of easy wind and downy flake." The snow and wind do not create a loud noise; they generate a profound, sweeping silence that quietens the traveler's ego.

When the external Ahat of the horse's bells shatters the entropic quiet, it triggers a powerful sympathetic vibration within the traveler's own being. The bells begin ringing inside the traveler too. This internal ringing is the sudden illumination of the White Horse—the pure, untainted inner light of the soul.

Through this internal resonance, the traveler realizes that the soft whisper of the wind and snow is actually the cosmic melody of the universe, inviting him to transcend his localized limitations. The inner bells dissolve all feelings of isolation. He is no longer a lone traveler freezing in a dark forest; he is an enlightened spark of the divine, listening to the eternal pulse of creation. Armed with this inner light, his mind becomes perfectly steady, and he hears the ultimate cosmic command to rise above the temptation of static rest and continue his eternal journey.

VI. METAPHYSICAL ACOUSTICS: COSMIC RESONANCE, NADA YOGA, AND THE LAW OF CHARAIVETI

To fully comprehend how sound functions as the definitive antidote to existential dread, the analysis must soar beyond the boundaries of mechanical acoustics into the profound framework of Nada Yoga—the ancient Indian philosophical science of sacred sound vibration. Nada Yoga posits that the cosmos is not a dead, desolate void, but a living symphony of vibrations existing in two primary forms. The first is Ahata Nada (struck sound), which requires the physical friction of matter and is perceptible to the mortal ear. The second is Anahat Nada (unstruck sound), the eternal, causeless music of the cosmos that vibrates continuously within the deep, silent chambers of spiritual consciousness. The external landscape of the poem provides the initial structural framework for Ahata Nada. When the horse shakes its harness bells, it unleashes a bright, percussive wave of metallic, struck sound. This crisp chime shatters the heavy, freezing atmosphere like a sudden splash of light. It acts as an existential alarm, proving that the apparent void is actually a connected field of matter capable of carrying a vital, living message. Frost immediately follows this sharp, metallic chime with an exquisite description of a radically different auditory texture, noting that "the only other sound's the sweep / Of easy wind and downy flake." This soft, continuous rustle acts as a delicate, macrocosmic drone—a natural Tanpura vibrating at the fundamental frequency of creation. This shift forces the traveler's awareness to turn sharply inward, transitioning seamlessly from Ahata to Anahat Nada. Stripped of the village's noisy, superficial distractions, the speaker begins to hear the unstruck music of his own existence: the steady, rhythmic beat of his heart, the soft flow of his breath, and the deep, silent hum of his inner willpower. It is at this precise moment of profound inner listening that the text transcends its localized New England geography and ascends into an immortal epic of cosmic kinematics. The famous, haunting reduplication of the traveler's resolve provides the grand bridge in the final lines, where he notes that "the woods are lovely, dark and deep, / But I have promises to keep, / And miles to go before I sleep, / And miles to go before I sleep." This profound cosmological relativity of rest and perpetual movement finds its ultimate, immortal resonance in the eternal Vedic mandate from the Aitareya Brahmana: "Charaiveti, Charaiveti" Keep moving forward, keep moving forward." By mapping the traveler's temporary physical halt against the hidden, furious velocity of the Earth—spinning on its axis at over a thousand miles per hour, orbiting the Sun at thirty kilometers per second, and rushing alongside the entire solar system around the supermassive galactic nebula—Frost's text channels the foundational rhythm of Vedic kinematics. The Vedic rishis recognized that the cosmos, or Brahmanda, is fundamentally characterized by Gati—a dynamic, unstoppable, and sacred momentum that defines existence itself. In such a universe, absolute stillness is a physical impossibility and a spiritual devolution; it is an unnatural rebellion against the cosmic order. The dark woods offer a beautiful but dangerous illusion of non-being—a localized entropy that tempts the traveler to step out of this divine cosmic procession. However, traveling in alignment with cosmic momentum requires an immense awakening of individual responsibility. Here, Frost's traveler embodies the sublime essence of Rabindranath Tagore's celebrated anthem: "Ekla Chalo Re" If they answer not to thy call, then walk alone." Far from suggesting a state of lonely, absolute isolation or tragic abandonment, Ekla Chalo Re functions here as a triumphant declaration of cosmic oneness and systemic leadership. Walking alone does not mean being severed from the world; it means realizing that we are the motion itself. When the village remains asleep and the landlord stays confined to his small accounting house, the traveler consciously steps forward to manage the whole of

existence. He carries the weight of civilizational infrastructure, his ancestral promises, and the moral equilibrium of the globe within his own stride. He becomes a singular, self-contained vanguard of cosmic energy. By remembering his promises and reasserting that he has miles to go, the traveler converts what traditional critics see as a desolate wilderness into an active arena of cosmic stewardship. He refuses to let the momentum of life drop into stagnation. He accepts the divine mantle to keep the universe moving, lighting the path with his own inner volition and choosing to march forward as the living pulse of the cosmos. Through this dual alignment—the cosmic propulsion of Charaiveti and the all-encompassing, managerial courage of Ekla Chalo Re—the journey is instantly immortalized. The miles cease to be a weary burden of earthly toil or a simple linear path through New England snow; instead, they expand into the magnificent, infinite trajectory of an endless cosmic voyage that the soul undertakes in tandem with a moving universe. The traveler realizes that to stay in one place is to decay, whereas to live is to move. His onward march through the dark winter night becomes a localized, human embodiment of solar and galactic flight itself. He does not merely travel on the Earth; he travels with the Earth, with the Sun, and with the spinning nebula, transforming his small physical stride into an immortal cosmic orbit. Just as the stars, the planets, and the nebulae never abandon their paths or pause in their celestial duties, the human being relentlessly honors his existential vows across the vast miles of time and space. The poem's famous reduplicative closure thus transforms into a soaring, unified chant of cosmic and individual volition—a triumphant declaration that even when the physical body tires, the white horse of inner light stays illuminated, and the immortal spirit of man echoes the eternal symphony of a restless, evolving cosmos, continually stepping forward into the infinite light of the morning.

VII. THE SANCTUARY OF THE VELVET SILENCE: THE PARADOX OF NON-BEING

The true emotional and aesthetic peak of Frost's masterpiece rests upon a moment of profound tenderness where the stark beauty of the physical universe softly kisses the weary human soul. When Frost describes the winter woods as lovely, dark and deep, he is capturing the ultimate, majestic grace of absolute stillness. Far from being a symbol of pure dread or terrifying negativity, this darkness feels like a soft winter blanket woven from threads of absolute silence, offering a rare, undisturbed space where the frantic spinning of the world slows down to a gentle stop.

For a human heart burdened by the heavy armor of worldly responsibility, this deep shadow represents a pristine space of total surrender—not a dark longing for self-destruction, but a deeply poetic yearning for ultimate solace. The traveler's hesitation by the roadside highlights the fragile, delicate nature of our endurance. Human beings are creatures of rhythm, requiring shadows to fully appreciate the light, and deep silence to truly understand the music of existence. The woods offer an unconditional embrace—a sanctuary where one is permitted to feel tired without the burden of guilt, and where the constant demands of identity can be briefly dissolved in the falling snow.

The true magnificence of the poem's resolution lies in how the traveler gently, deliberately pulls away from this alluring, eternal stillness. The sudden remembrance of promises to keep rises in the traveler's mind not as a heavy, suffocating chain, but as a noble anchor—a beautiful, life-affirming testament to human connection. The traveler realizes that while the absolute stillness of the woods is breathtakingly beautiful, the messy, chaotic, and warm world of human relationships possesses a sacred beauty of its own. By choosing the road over the forest, he does not reject nature; rather, he chooses to honor the active, living aspect of nature within himself. Frost speaks about both the sides on the globe, he embraces both but moves further to kiss the rays.

VIII. THE CARTOGRAPHY OF COLLECTIVE PROMISES: SCALING VOLITION INTO CIVILIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

While the traveler's ultimate decision to move forward represents a magnificent triumph of individual volition, his extreme isolation on the dark road exposes a fundamental vulnerability within the human condition. When left to fight the crushing cosmic cold in absolute isolation, the individual mind easily tires, falters, and begins to flirt with its own erasure. To successfully withstand a thermodynamic universe that is constantly seeking to cool, freeze, and silence life, humanity cannot rely solely on the erratic strength of isolated travelers; it must scale individual willpower into the enduring structures of collective civilization.

This essential transition from isolated vulnerability to collective strength is boldly articulated in the timeless Vedic invocation from the Rig Veda: *Sangachchhadhvam samvadadhvam sam vo manamsi janatam.* This sacred philosophy of moving together, known as Samgachchhadhvam, posits that when human beings unite their individual paths into a collective journey, the paralyzing weight of the isolated ego is radically diminished. By subverting the lonely, trembling single person into a coordinated, harmonious collective,

civilization constructs a powerful institutional, emotional, and physical shield against environmental entropy.

When scaled to the level of global civilization, the speaker's individual promises transform into the social contracts, legal frameworks, public awareness initiatives, and scientific networks that preserve humanity across generations. We pave roads, engineer electrical grids, construct cities, and establish institutions so that the hard-won metabolic heat and intellectual light of past generations are not lost to the absolute zero of time. By speaking in harmony, a concept termed Samvadadhvam, human communities pool their intellectual resources, ensuring that the seven colors of consciousness do not fade into the monochromatic dark of the forest. The promises are the literal infrastructure of human survival—they are the social bonds that transform a freezing, hostile geographic terrain into a warm, sustainable home for human consciousness.

IX. FROM SOLSTICE TO SUNRISE: THE THERMODYNAMICS OF JOY

The fundamental Law of Conservation of Energy dictates that energy within a closed system can never be created or destroyed; it can only be transformed from one modality to another. When we apply this structural metric to the realms of human psychology, courage, and creative expression, we arrive at the inspiring conceptual framework of the Thermodynamics of Joy.

According to this principle, the vital metabolic heat and the intense energy of volition present within the traveler cannot be obliterated by the cold inertia of the forest. The exact moment the traveler remembers his promises, an internal surge of emotional energy flows from the deepest core of his being, instantly pushing back the hypnotic stasis of the woods. This mental resolve directly activates biological metabolic heat, which converts smoothly into the kinetic energy of physical motion.

The courage displayed by the traveler to move forward on this darkest night is completely conserved; it does not vanish into the snow. The energetic warmth generated on that lonely road was preserved across time, moving through Robert Frost's creative consciousness to reach us today in the form of a timeless poem. The emotional warmth and inspiration we experience while reading these lines is the exact same thermal currency, beautifully conserved across generations.

This thermodynamic conversion is deeply tied to the cosmic, astronomical laws of nature. It is an irrevocable law of astrophysics that when darkness reaches its deepest, most extreme point, it simultaneously marks the beginning of its inevitable retreat. The winter solstice is indeed the darkest evening of the year, but scientifically, it also represents the exact turning point where the sun begins its celestial return. Days gradually grow longer, light steadily increases, and the invisible, unstoppable process of melting the winter ice commences.

When the traveler decides to break the hypnosis of the woods and move forward, he aligns his internal momentum with this broader, cosmic law. His resolve to move forward demonstrates that human volition, expressed through the keeping of promises, is the cultural equivalent of a seed germinating beneath a heavy concrete slab—a localized, glorious refusal to accept permanent stasis, transforming the lowest point of winter into a triumphant celebration of the coming spring.

X. THE REDUPLICATION OF THE MILES: THE ULTIMATE CRESCENDO OF VOLITION

The breaking of the landscape's hypnosis leads directly to the poem's famous, repetitive conclusion, marking the decisive resurgence of the traveler's conscious volition over the seductive call of nature. When the speaker repeats twice that he has miles to go before he sleeps, this reduplication functions as a masterstroke of poetic structure. Evaluating it through our scientific axes of space, light, and energy reveals its true mechanism: the two lines do not mean the same thing; instead, they represent a profound shift from a literal physical observation to a deep spiritual and existential resolve. The duplication functions as the ultimate musical crescendo—like a classical performer playing the final, perfect note twice to achieve maximum clarity, signaling that the journey must continue with absolute intensity.

At this final and decisive juncture, the spirit of the dense forest stands behind him like a valedictory echo. As the traveler signals his horse to move forward, the darkness of the deep woods respectfully retreats before his willpower. The density of the trees is no longer a terrifying trap, but a witness that tested human resolve to its limit and saw it succeed. The void ceases to be an enemy and becomes a profound teacher.

In this sequence, the first line functions primarily at the level of literal geography. The distance is computed as a physical sum of miles remaining to the village. Here, the traveler simply calculates the literal miles of the physical road, recognizing the practical distance and bodily labor remaining between his current location and his home. It is an acknowledgment of the cold, the dark, and the physical weight of the journey.

But when he immediately repeats the exact same line, the domain of the poem shifts into existential geography. The distance here expands as an integrated expression of lifelong volition measured from the present moment until final mortality. In this second utterance, the scope of miles expands to symbolize the acceptance of the entire remaining trajectory of a human life, and the concept of sleep transforms from a night's rest into a resolve toward final mortality and the duties to be performed before it. By repeating the line, the speaker actively jolts himself awake from the hypnosis of the woods, explicitly choosing the arduous, friction-filled path of human existence over the effortless, self-erasing peace of the snow. So, the Frost speaks about the continuity of life, admiring dusk to dawn, a sleep of immortal life.

The mention of promises to keep serves as the ultimate fuel for the speaker's internal, metabolic fire. He acknowledges that while the natural map is drawn in indifferent wind and self-effacing white snow, the human map must be drawn in the ink of accountability and the sweat of shared effort. This repetition infuses the reader's heart with courage, demonstrating that while it is natural to grow weary in life, refusing to surrender to that fatigue and reinforcing one's resolve time and again is the true glory of being human.

XI. CONCLUSION: THE TRIUMPH OF THE HUMAN WILL AND THE REJOICING INTELLECT

Ultimately, Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" is not a story of passive surrender in the face of depression and death. On the contrary, it is a grand, cosmic epic of restraint, choice, biological intelligence, and human volition. Frost uses this brief encounter on a lonely road to show that being human requires a continuous, active resistance against the natural, cold, and entropic tendencies of the universe.

This entire journey ultimately introduces us to the true, transformative role of the dense forest. This darkness was never our enemy; it was a cosmic crucible designed specifically to refine, test, and temper human willpower. Without the stark challenge of the dense forest, the traveler would have never recognized the vibrant spectrum of the seven colors of life hidden within his own soul, nor would he have understood the vital value of his horse's biological consciousness, and he would have remained entirely oblivious to the true, sacred depth of his promises. The primeval darkness of the woods was a necessary mirror, confronting humanity with both its physical limitations and its infinite spiritual potential simultaneously.

It is at this precise realization that the human intellect transitions from a state of fearful confrontation to supreme, cosmic rejoicing. The intellect ceases to fear the dark or despair at the bitter cold; instead, it rejoices in the magnificent, terrifying scale of the natural universe because it discovers its own reflecting divinity within it. The intellect recognizes that the earth underfoot, the solar core above, and the sweeping galactic nebula are all locked in an eternal, breathless dance of Gati. By observing the woods, the intellect does not witness a dead, terrifying void, but a quiet, sacred sanctuary that allows human consciousness to awaken to its own immense cosmic velocity.

Man enlists his five senses via the biological guardian of the horse, awakens the dynamic spectrum of the seven colors of life within his soul, integrates the physical Ahata chime of the harness bells with the un-struck Anahata music of his inner willpower, and flings his triumphant note of faith into the cosmic medium. The intellect rejoices because it discovers that it is not an isolated, shivering stranger abandoned on a dark New England road, but an active, integral co-traveler hurtling through the stars in absolute, perfect harmony with the universe.

The poem does not end with a childish, fearful, or romantic rejection of nature. The traveler neither cuts down the woods nor curses the bitter cold. Instead, his departure is a quiet, dignified, and immensely powerful triumph of human volition. He leaves the woods exactly as he found them—lovely, dark, and beautifully indifferent. He moves forward carrying a piece of that sacred darkness within his mind, but he utilizes the vital energy of his social promises and the eternal, rhythmic engine of Charaiveti to propel his body forward through the winter night. Frost leaves us with a profound respect for the vast, untamed, and frigid scale of the universe, but an even greater appreciation for the resilience of a solitary human will that looks into absolute vacancy, shakes its bells, remembers its words, and smiles as it moves onward through the snow—immortalized, liberated, and rejoicing in the grand choreography of the cosmic symphony.

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Climate Finance and Renewable Energy Transition in India: Evaluating Policy Effectiveness and Investment Challenges in the Post-Paris Era (2015-2025)

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Abstract— *This paper critically analyses how climate finance and renewable-energy investment can enable India to transition to low-carbon in the post-paris Agreement period between 2015- 2025. The research design embraced in the study is a qualitative and descriptive study design, which is solely based on secondary data that has been sourced through government reports, policy documents, international climate-finance data bases, and academic sources. The article has examined the country-level climate-financing approaches including the green bonds, renewable-energy initiatives, government-corporate initiatives, and international climate-finance instruments like the Green Climate Fund. The study identifies that India has achieved a lot in the growth of renewable-energy and other sustainable-finance processes; nonetheless, the structural issues such as financing gaps, technological dependence, unpredictable regulations, and perpetual reliance on fossil fuels remain to limit the decarbonization over time. The paper concludes with the finding that the most important issue of the realization of the climate-commitments of India in the Paris Agreement should be the improvement of the institutional coordination, climate-finance governance and technological innovations.*

Keywords— ***Climate Finance, Renewable Energy, Paris Agreement, Green Investment, India, Climate Governance.***

I. INTRODUCTION

The framework of global climate governance has been changed by the Paris Agreement adopted at the events on the Twenty-First Conference of Parties (COP-21) in 2015; it has introduced a decentralized model structured on Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and long-term decarbonization pathways (Falkner, 2016). The Paris Agreement in contrast to the Kyoto agreement was more inclusive, with climate finance, technological co-operation, domestic policy integration; it did not incur legal binding obligations as chiefly the developed countries under the Kyoto agreement. In the case of developing economies like India, the Agreement presented both opportunities and challenges due to the fact that climate governance would have to be incorporated into the economic development, industrial growth, energy security, and alleviation of poverty.

The strategy of India on climatic policy post-Paris has placed much stress on the transformation of energy into renewable sources, energy efficiency, climate resilience and sustainable infrastructure. It has become one of the biggest markets in the world with its orientations towards renewable-energy ventures like the National Solar Mission, the National Green Hydrogen Mission and the electric-

mobility schemes. Meanwhile, India is still struggling with a considerable amount of financial and technological obstacles to large-scale decarbonization policies. The IEA, 2023 stated that to realize India renewable-energy objectives and net-zero promise by 2070, the nation will need to invest in massively large amounts. Climate finance consequently finds itself in the core of the climate-governance system of India. Increasing prominence has been given to domestic financing institutions, green bonds, multilateral climate funds, and public-private partnerships as a means of mobilizing investment into renewable energy and low-carbon infrastructure. Nevertheless, the lack of financial commitment to global climate, regulatory insecurity, reliance on data technologies and fossil-fuel supremacy still limit the efficiency of the Indian energy transition.

This paper provides a critical review of the climate-finance structure and India's renewables – transition in the post Paris era (2015-2025). The paper contrasts financing schemes, institutional matters and governance of renewable energy and the overall incompatibilities between economic growth and decarbonisation.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Existing literature on climate finance and India's renewable energy transition highlights the need for strengthening financial governance, institutional coordination and technological innovation for the objectives of the Paris Agreement in India.

Bhattacharya et al. (2022) raise the argument that climate finance is necessary to developing countries since low-carbon transitions would necessitate massive construction of infrastructure, technological innovation and adaptation funding. Their work highlights that poorer countries like India cannot fulfill the promises of the Paris Agreements without better financial assistance and institutional changes at home.

Falkner (2016), the Paris Agreement implied a new system of governance with a country-specific set of climate commitments and decentralization of the policymaking process. The author states that climate finance and technological cooperation are two substantial pillars of the post-Paris regime of governance.

Dubash and Rajamani (2018) focus on the history of climate-policy in India and suggest that the country tries to reconcile the priorities of developmental with international climate-related commitments. Their study points out that India has seen growth of renewable-energy not because of environmental concerns, but also because of energy security and industrial competitiveness.

Despite an increase in investment, both public and private, in the transition of renewable-energy in India, there still exists significant financing gap (Climate Policy Initiative, 2023). Transmission infrastructure, storage systems and adaptation financing are among the other critical areas that will need increased investments due to climate, the report states.

Ghosh (2019) restates the political economy of India's energy transition and why it is that the fossil fuel dependency has still not been weaned enough in the Indian system of industry and development. The paper outlines some of the paradoxes fuelled by dependence on coal and a push for renewable energy.

According to the report by the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA, 2023) India has become one of the fastest-growing renewable-energy markets in the world. Nonetheless, technological reliance on solar modules and battery systems that are imported still poses vulnerabilities to the clean-energy transition process.

In general, the literature shows that although India has already reached relatively high growth in renewable-energy following the Paris Agreement, climate-finance sufficiency, institutional coordination and technological capacities are quite significant governance issues. The current research is thus a contribution to the existing literature as it critically assesses climate-finance governance and renewable-energy transformation of India during 2015-2025.

Objectives

1. To examine the role of climate finance and renewable-energy investment in supporting India’s low-carbon transition during the post-Paris Agreement period (2015–2025).
2. To evaluate the institutional, financial, and technological challenges affecting the effectiveness of India’s climate-governance and renewable-energy transition framework.

Hypotheses

H1: “Climate finance and renewable-energy investments significantly contribute to India’s low-carbon transition and climate-governance objectives in the post-Paris era.”

H2: “Financial constraints, technological dependency, and institutional fragmentation negatively affect the effectiveness of India’s renewable-energy transition and climate-governance framework.”

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology will be qualitative and descriptive, targeting the period after the Paris Climate Agreement in India from 2015 – 2025 focusing only on the

climate-finance governance and the renewable-energy transformation in India. The study has an exclusive reliance on secondary data, which have been compiled through reports of the government, data on renewable-energy sources, international databases on climate-finance, documents of policies, and a literature search of scholarly research materials. The sources of data include, but are not limited to, reports coming out of "Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE)", "Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)", "Reserve bank of India (RBI)", the "International Energy Agency (IEA)", the "International renewable energy agency (IRENA)", "Climate policy initiative (CPI)", World bank and "United Nations Framework Convention on climate change (UNFCCC)". It uses thematic content analysis to assess the governance of renewable-energy, green-finance strategies, institutional coordination and climate-policy implementation, in the Indian post-paris climate framework.

Theoretical Framework

The analysis rests on the Ecological Modernization Theory (EMT) that opinionates that the environmental sustainability and economic development can be reconciled via technological innovation, institutional transformation as well as market-driven governance and sustainable industrial transformation. However, contrary to conventional ecological models which consider economic growth and environmental protection to be contradictory, EMT proposes that cleaner production and renewable-energy development and sustainable governance frameworks can be achieved through modernization processes.

Applying to the Indian context, the Ecological Modernization Theory will be a valuable tool in explaining how climate governance is rising in integrating transition to renewable energy, green investment, sustainable infrastructure, and industrial competitiveness. The following three concerns, namely renewable energy, green hydrogen, electric mobility and climate-finance mechanisms conducted by India after the Paris Agreement, can be explained with the help of the theory.

The structure also enables one to analyze the role of the market-based environmental regulation, technological modernization and the role of a public- private partnership in the climate-governance structure of India. As a result, EMT offers an analytical foundation upon which one can explore the question of whether India has the systems and policies in climate-finance and renewable-energy able to provide the long-term low-carbon development with a sustainable level of economic growth and energy security.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Renewable-Energy Growth and Climate-Finance Growth.

The study has indicated the remarkable rise in deployment rate of renewable-energy in the post-Paris Agreement year of 2015-2025 in India. Governance of renewable energy has been one of the most salient elements of the Indian climate-policy landscape as increased focus on the government is shifting toward renewable energy sources as a means to both realize energy security and industrial modernization, as well as emissions reduction. According to Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE, 2024), India is now one of the most prominent producers of renewable-energy among the world which includes solar and wind energy. Solar parks, rooftop solar systems, wind-energy corridors and decentralized solar-energy systems are a sign of institutional prioritization of clean-energy transition.

The analysis also reveals that climate finance has been at the forefront in promoting growth of renewable-energy. Examples of government subsidies and concessional lending, viability-gap funds, green bonds, and multilateral funding mechanisms have also played a central role on the investment in renewable energy. According to the IEA, 2023 after the Paris Agreement, more and more investment was directed to renewable-energy infrastructure in India, both domestically and internationally, especially in utility-scale solar power plants and grid modernization. This confirms Hypothesis H1 which postulates climate finance augers well in low-carbon transition in India.

Simultaneously, the paper concludes a growth of renewable-energy sources is not a climate-only phenomenon. There is an increasing linkage of renewable energy to the larger developmental goals, including creating jobs, making industries more competitive in world markets, decreasing fossil fuel purchases, and lighting up rural villages. As a result, the governance of renewable-energy in India indicates a synthesis of the developmental paradigm incorporating both the ecological and economic interests.

Domestic Climate-Financing Mechanisms

The results show that domestic financing institutions are an important element in the climate-governance system in India. Investment in renewable-energy and sustainable financing of infrastructure has been progressively financed by public-sector financial institutions, including the Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency (IREDA) , Power Finance Corporation (PFC) and by public-sector banks. Moreover, the sovereign green bonds launched by the Government of India are becoming significant tools of drawing in sustainable finance.

This analysis reveals that green bonds have increased and diversified considerably the investment opportunities in climate-related issues by bringing the institutional investors into the renewable-energy and infrastructural projects. The Climate Bonds Initiative (2024) suggests that India has emerged as one of the largest green-bond markets among the emerging economies. The involvement of the private-sector in financing renewable-energy has also risen significantly especially in the development of solar-energy, electric mobility and battery.

Nevertheless, the work reveals crucial structural flaws in the system of domestic climate-finance governance. Electricity-distribution companies are constantly in financial distress, which continues to destabilize investments for renewable energy due to non-timely payments that are uncertain to the private developers. Also, the financing of adaptation is still unsatisfactory, since financing of commercial profitable mitigation initiatives is usually preferred by private investors to long-term climate resilience programs. This partly favors Hypothesis H2 on institutional and financial constraints of the climate-governance system in India.

International Climate Finance and Technological Dependency

The results also show that climate finance at the international level still remains significant yet inadequate in the climate transition in India. Renewable-energy and adaptation projects in India have received financial support of the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and the World Bank , Asian Development Bank (ADB) , and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) . Nonetheless, the analysis indicates that implementations of climate-finance flows continue to be far below the whoop necessary to meet the targets of the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and long-term net-zero targets of India. Technological dependency is another primary area of concern in governance that is identified in the analysis. In spite of the massive growth in renewable-energy sources, India is still a reliant spot on imported solar modules, post-battery-storage technologies and the more crucial minerals required in clean-energy systems. The International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA, 2023) notes that this reliance poses strategic risks to India in its energy-transition plan and restricts its technological autonomy on the national level.

Public-Private Partnerships and Green Investment Governance

The findings reveal that the notion of public-private partnerships (PPP) has become more and more relevant in the climate-governance architecture of India. In India, the growth of renewable energy is strongly reliant on the role of the private sector, especially in the area of solar parks, wind-energy, electric-mobility, and sustainable urban infrastructure. The government has thus provided policy incentives, production based incentive schemes, and regulatory reforms to attract the private investment in the low carbon sectors.

The research concludes that PPPs have enabled technological modernization and speedy implementation of renewable-energy. International investors and domestic conglomerates have also ventured into the clean-energy industry in India and turned renewable energy into a large segment of economic investment. Nevertheless, the analysis shows that regulatory uncertainty, land-acquisition struggles, bottlenecks in transmission, and ineffective policy enforcement remain to diminish investor confidence.

V. CONCLUSION

The paper concludes that climate finance and renewable-energy governance are currently the main elements in the Indian climate-policy regime over the period between 2015 and 2025 between the post-Paris Agreement. India has made impressive development in the renewable-energy sector by using solar-energy solutions, green-investment solutions, the government-corporate collaborations, and sustainable-finance solutions. Climate finance has been significant in enhancing the low carbon transition and information infrastructures modernization.

The results however show that the climate-governance framework in India is also plagued by significant structural problems. Limitations to long-term decarbonization initiatives are financial, technological dependency, institutional fragmentation, lopsided investment in each region, and sustained dependence on fossil fuels. The international climate-finance commitments are still insufficient and domestic financing of adaptation and technological self-sufficiency are to be reinforced heavily.

The next generation policy initiative must thus focus on mobilizing green investments in the long term, increasing domestic clean-energy production, deepening global technological collaboration and better global climate-governance institutions that can bring environmental sustainability to hand in hand with inclusive economic growth.

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CONTEMP-ADAPT: Adaptation of Modern English Plays for Contemporary Media

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Abstract— *The present study investigates the ways in which social dramas in modern Britain have framed social identity in drama and how such framings are transformed in the medium of film. It examines George Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion and John Osborne's Look Back in Anger and their film adaptations: Pygmalion (1938) directed by Anthony Asquith and Leslie Howard, and Look Back in Anger (1959) directed by Tony Richardson. The study adopts the Conceptual Framework of Intermedial Adaptation Transformation. It examines five layers of connection, i.e., original dramatic text, social identity construction, narrative and intermedial transformation, audience reception, and contemporary cultural relevance. The study presents a qualitative textual, visual and scene-based analysis. It determines that the process of building Pygmalion's identity is one of accent, class mobility, linguistic education, gender self-fashioning and/or public recognition, which are manifested in a visible and audible form in the film adaptation. Look Back in Anger builds identity on the basis of masculine anger, domestic entrapment, class resentment, and post-war alienation; on the other hand, Richardson's adaptation adds wider social realism to enclose the stage realism. The study states that adaptation is not a mere reproduction of drama texts but a reorganization of social meanings in the space of cinema, camera motion, close view, cutting, sound, costume and performance. The present study contributes to the field of adaptation studies through the demonstration of modification as a "cultural rejuvenation" that makes dramatic identities visible, affective, and socially resonate across media.*

Keywords— ***intermedial adaptation, Look Back in Anger, modern British drama, Pygmalion, stage-to-screen transformation.***

I. INTRODUCTION

The ability to adapt a play from the stage to the screen is gaining momentum as a critical concern in literary and theatre and film studies today. The process of stage-to-screen adaptation has become a special issue in modern literary, theatre and film studies due to the assumption that the meaning of a play is stable and consistent whether it is performed in the theatre or made into a film. Fidelity has been stressed in earlier adaptations criticism; if an adaptation is close to the source text, it is favored. Later scholarship, however, sees the mechanism of adaptation as a creative, dialogic, intermedial activity and process of re-authoring text across media, cultural contexts and audience formations (Leitch, 2025; Wyver, 2021). This transition of the play to a performative system, which is influenced by voice, gesture, embodiment, space, rhythm and the presence of people/watchers, is particularly significant for drama (Ingham, 2016; Miroshnychenko, 2024). In film

adaptations, where the source material is a dramatic text, meaning is remediated using different aspects of filmmaking, such as camera movement, editing, sound, lighting, costume, close-up, performance style, and the new viewing position (Fedorenko & Sulima, 2023; Mensah, 2025).

This study focuses on two modern British social plays: George Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion and John Osborne's Look Back in Anger, the film adaptations of which serve as a useful starting point for the study of social identity across the media. The pairing was intentionally targeted. The plays vary in style, in time, and in the nature of their drama. However, all share the question and concern with how identity is socially visible (or not) in class, language, gender, performance, and in recognition. In the play Pygmalion, the theme of identity can be learned, emulated and publicly acknowledged by accent, manner, clothing, or social interaction. Shaw foregrounds phonetics as a social force in his preface and begs to differ with any of us who would have thought that Eliza Doolittle's transformation was impossible or uncommon, and makes language central to the mobility from one class to another and the classification of the speaker from one class to another (Shaw, 1912/2025). Conversely, Look Back in Anger is built around the concepts of post-war alienation, male anger, class resentment, domestication and emotional aggression. Sierz (2008) stresses the importance of Osborne's play for post-war British theatre, and links it to the Kitchen-Sink Drama movement, the Angry Young Man, the Royal Court and the evolution of new writing in Britain.

The two plays thus provide a different, but complementary, image of Britishness. In Pygmalion, Eliza's change takes place not due to a natural difference in character, but because a difference in character has been rehearsed socially and publicly recognized. As a flower girl, she was transformed into a socially acceptable speaker, inviting readers to question the artificiality of class boundaries and suggesting questions about gendered agency, discipline and dependence. Jimmy Porter's identity is forged out of frustration - not mobility - in Look Back in Anger. He is read but unread, he speaks, he does not listen, he works, he does not act, he is aware of political issues, he fails to take any action. The Porters' one-room flat in Osborne's writing is a pressure space in which class resentment, gender tension and emotional violence all come to a head.

The medium of film adaptation can provide a lens for an examination of these violent constructions of identity. Lesley Hiller (Eliza Doolittle) and Leslie Howard (Higgins) are both cast as David Lean edited 1938's Pygmalion, directed by Anthony Asquith and Leslie Howard, who also helped write the screenplay, according to Criterion. However, the opening tracking shot, the swift comic timing and the precise cuts and close-ups of upper-class reactions prevent the film from falling into the trap of being a filmed play. Richardson's Look Back in Anger (1959) does another one. The program notes for the BFI indicate that all of its more than significant cuts of the first scene of the play, the inclusion of Ma Tanner, the movement of the camera and the close-ups, all make for a 'social realism' of the screen rather than the domestic realism of Osborne.

The key issue that this study seeks to address is the lack of analysis of adaptation in terms of fidelity, or extensive generalization of modernization. However, these strategies are not enough in the modern social drama of Britain, where meaning is created by the interaction of speech, social class codes, gendered behavior, the "home" environment, emotional performance, film technique, and the audience. Reception-oriented scholarship also indicates that meaning is not only created with the structure of the texts, but also by the interpretation of the audience, the positioning of the affect and the culture of the audience (Hill, 2018; Schrøder, 2018). So, for this study, the theoretical approach of the Conceptual Framework of Intermedial Adaptation Transformation is adopted to study five layers, namely Original Dramatic Text, Social Identity Construction, Narrative and Intermedial Transformation, Audience Reception and Contemporary Cultural Relevance.

The study, therefore, focuses on the social identity constructions in the original works (Pygmalion and Look Back in Anger) and shifts the focus to the film adaptations created by the authors, concentrating on the strategies that are used in these film versions. It is important for readers that it constitutes a way of cultural renewal, not so much a mere transference or illustration through text and image, but a re-dissemination of dramatic identities that is affective and transcultural.

1.1 Research Objectives

- To examine how Pygmalion and Look Back in Anger construct social identity through class, language, gender, character interaction, dramatic conflict, and social setting.
- To analyze how selected adaptations transform narrative structure, character dynamics, visual form, dialogue, setting, and thematic meaning in the two plays.
- To investigate how adaptations reshape audience reception, interpretive engagement, and contemporary

cultural relevance in relation to modern British social drama

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Adaptation studies have forsaken the notion that adaptations should be judged primarily in terms of fidelity to the source text. With this shift in scholarship, adaptation is now considered to be a creative, interpretative and intermedial process whereby texts are reworked between media, time periods and audience formats (Mensah, 2025; Wyver, 2021). This change is significant in the context of drama as it is a written literary text, but also a performative success, as it is defined by voice, gesture, embodiment, space, rhythm and spectatorship. The meaning of a play is reorganized in silhouette, sound, cutting, costume, lighting, visual framing and style when a play is transferred from the theatre to the screen. Therefore, adaptation can no longer be considered as a process of reproduction, but a process of reinterpretation (Fedorenko & Sulima, 2023; Ingham, 2016; Miroshnychenko, 2024).

In this transformation, the question of intermediality is of particular interest, since it helps to understand the changing meaning of theatre when the conventions of theatre come into contact with those of cinema, digital and multimedia culture. Theatricality relies on live actors, focused space, direct dialogue, continuous performance, and the allocation of characters through editing and close-up in film. Film can extend space, break down time, emphasize facial expression, and direct the attention of the audience through editing and close-ups. At the same time, theatricality relies on the actors' live performance, concentrated space, direct dialogue, and continuous performance, and allocates the characters through editing and close-up. Dramatic meanings of the present day are created by a combination of text and image, sound, platform and participation of spectators, i.e. how studies on digital theatre, cyber-theatre, zoom theatre and intermedial performance indicate (Boiko et al., 2023; Cojanu, 2025; Grynyshyna et al., 2022). Such viewpoints enabled the present research to focus on the process of adaptation as a multi-layered process, including adaptation of the narrative, adaptation of the media technique, adaptation of the audience reception, and adaptation of the contemporary culture relevance.

In this wider context, Pygmalion and Look Back in Anger provide a coherent, comparative basis as both are types of social drama in modern British literature, both focus on social identity as a class, a language, and a gender. Both are concentrated on the performance of social identity. They exhibit the role of identity, however, in different ways. Pygmalion is about identity being what can be molded from the outside; it can be transformed by speech, etiquette, dress and socialization, while Look Back in Anger is about identity being an unfulfilled state brought by post-war disillusionment, class resentment, domesticity and emotional aggression. It, therefore, helps to compare them since both plays look at the social construction of identity, and their adaptations illustrate the reinterpretation of identity in screen and media forms.

There are several interpretations that have considered Shaw's Pygmalion as a study of language, class mobility, and social performance. The version that was uploaded has the date 1912, first published and 2025, reprinted by Global Grey, and with the preface and Acts I–V as the text. In the preface, Shaw highlights phonetics as a social issue and makes pronunciation a social judgment. Speech in Pygmalion is then not only a linguistic characteristic; it is a class sign which is recognized, controlled, and contested as identity. Eliza Doolittle's progression demonstrates the artificial nature of class divisions, and how her journey from flower girl to respectable speaker is reliant upon accent, manners, dress, body control and performance in front of others. That such a change is not only possible but not uncommon bolsters Shaw's act of dialogue within the play to shore up its social point that class identity can be learned and performed, not necessarily naturally fixed.

Pygmalion is particularly useful in adaptation studies as the screen media allows the viewer/audience to see and hear Eliza transform by changing her costume, posture, facial expression, spatial position and voice/vocal style. The linguistic drama can be translated into a visual and acoustic analysis of class identity by means of a film adaptation. Autonomy and gender also play a major role in the play. Eventually, the show focuses on Eliza's self-realization and self-responsibility, while Higgins seems to be mastering Eliza's change. In Shaw's sequel, the romantic notion that Eliza is bound to marry Higgins is rejected, and instead, she is shown more and more on the road toward becoming autonomous. The agency of Eliza may then be reinforced or undermined depending on the adaptation, how this adaptation portrays Eliza's final stance and how she is presented to Higgins and how she acts independently.

Look Back in Anger is a new kind of modern British social drama. Osborne's play contrasts with Pygmalion, which is about class mobility in terms of language, in dramatizing the emotional failure of post-war social mobility. Sierz (2008) regards Look Back in Anger as the most important post-war British play and places it in the context of the rise of the Angry Young Man label and Kitchen-Sink Drama. The house theories and domestic imagery of the play, such as the satchels for ironing and

the small flat, came to symbolize the burden of domestic work, emotional stress and social frustration on the part of women. Thus, the casebook on Taylor also exemplifies the relevance of the play to the reception history as it gathers together early reviews, Osborne's writing, critical studies, foreign reviews and later views. These materials reveal that the meaning of the play was not created solely as a result of the play's dramatic form, but also in response to disagreement among critics, recognition by the audience and debate within a cultural context.

Look Back in Anger is a play that is dominated thematically by class resentment, masculine frustration, intimidation at home and emotional violence. Jimmy Porter's rage is intrapersonal, interpersonal, verbal, theatrical and performative. The questions about Jimmy's contradictory nature, psychological depth, and protests and cruelties have been raised many times, as Sierz (2008) points out. This description of Jimmy's rhetorical power and his role as a voice of discontent also has significance in the discussion in preparation for the upcoming research on why it is that, in some instances, this voice has been effective. Jimmy's rhetorical power and the fact that he is a speaker for discontent are also important in the discussion, even though he is a morally ambiguous character, in view of the preparation of the coming research on the question of why, in some instances, this voice has proved effective. This is significant when analyzing Jimmy's anger, whether it is on stage or screen, as it is different. When experienced on stage, it is verbal pressure; when experienced on screen, it can be intensified through close-up, editing, sound, space, an interior, and the social nature of the world (society) on screen.

In general, the literature indicates that the novels Pygmalion and Look Back in Anger would be good candidates for an intermedial adaptation examination as they are all performance-based, social identity-based, and audience recognition-based. In Pygmalion, the foreground concerns class mobility, speech, gender and self-fashioning, while in Look Back in Anger, the foreground concerns anger, class frustration, domestic realism, and post-war disillusionment. Exploring their adaptations allows them to look into the way modern British drama has shifted from being performed on the stage to being transmitted through screen-based media, in which the voice, space, body, image and response of the audience are reconfigured. The concept, which views adaptation as a process that must be studied as a layered phenomenon of original dramatic text, the transformation of a narrative, the transformation of an intermedia, the reception of the text and the relevance to contemporary culture, is therefore supported by this literature review.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study uses a qualitative comparative research design to analyze the creation and evolution of social identity in modern British social drama by using intermedial adaptation. It is appropriate to use the qualitative design because the study is not related to the process of measurement, but related to aspects of the meaning of the text, the role of actors in the performance, the form of the text, the response of the audience and cultural interpretation. The research is not statistically related to or quantitative in audience response. Rather, it is about the transformation of dramatic meanings in the changes of the presentation: from the stage to the screen and the screen to the media.

The methodology that the study adopts is a two-case comparative. The choices of George Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion and John Osborne's Look Back in Anger are made because they are both modern British social dramas, and they both focus on social identity in terms of class, language, gender, power, performance and social conflict. This does not mean to compare the same plot, nor the same historical period. Instead, it is on their common interest in the social construction of identity and the alterations to the audience's experience of identity that result from adaptation.

3.2 Conceptual Framework

The study is based on the Conceptual Framework of Intermedial Adaptation Transformation in Modern British Social Drama. Adaptation is outlined as a multi-layered process in which dramatic texts gradually evolve from the context of the stage to screen and media contexts in the framework. It is composed of five interrelated elements: original dramatic text, construction of social identity, transformation of the narrative and intermediality, audience reception and contemporary cultural relevance.

Original dramatic text is the first aspect, the source play (themes, characters, dialogue, dramatic conflict, stage conditions, social context). The second part, social identity construction, explores how social identity is shaped in the plays via accent, class mobility, anger, class frustration, gendered selfhood and social performance. The third component, narrative and intermedial transformation, examines the changes that are affected in the source texts by the movement of the camera from stage to screen, a framing of the image, the use of sound, costume, gesture, close-up and editing, space, and performance style to give selected adaptations. The fourth component, audience reception, accounts for the process of adaptation affecting the reception of the audience, by making them sympathetic, uncomfortable, classically aware, gender

wise, feel emotionally or critically involved. Modern relevance to culture is the last element, which explores the re-elaboration of new meanings in the adapted works regarding class mobility, social alienation, gender agency, and modern British identity.

The framework is suitable for the current study as both the selected plays are strongly reliant on the language, performance, social space and audiences' recognition. In Pygmalion, it permits analyzing the dynamics of the transformation of accent and class mobility into visual and acoustic screen performance. In Look Back in Anger, it helps to analyze how anger, domestic realism, frustration and disillusionment because of the war are transformed in film or media representation.

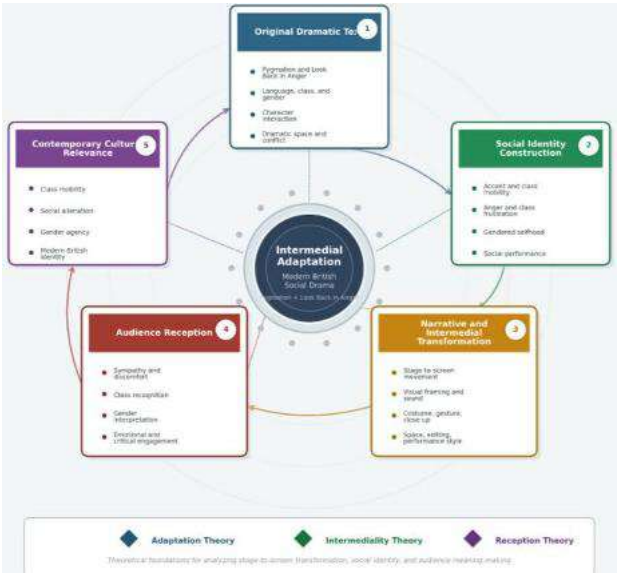


Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework of Intermedial Adaptation Transformation in Modern British Social Drama

3.3 Case Selection

The study uses purposive case selection. Pygmalion and Look Back in Anger were chosen as two significant events in modern British social drama, and they have good comparative material in relation to class, language, adaptation, identity, and gender analysis.

Pygmalion was chosen because it brings to the fore the phonetics, the accent, the mobility of (social) class, the gendered nature of the performance and the social change. It focuses on speech/social identity as its central dramatic conflict. The case of Eliza Doolittle is an obvious example of adapting the concept of class identity by learning it, performing it, and visualizing it.

Look Back in Anger was chosen for its association with post-war British social drama and class resentment, with elements of emotional aggression, domestic realism, masculine frustration, and the figure of the Angry Young Man. The limited domestic space and the silence and rhetoric of Jimmy Porter make for good material in the analysis of the transformation of anger and social frustration in screen realism.

The two plays will enable a comparison between two approaches to social identity formation: one through the transformation of language and the other through feelings of class frustration, emotional alienation, and conflict.

3.4 Data Sources and Materials

The study is based on three kinds of qualitative data: textual, adaptation and secondary critical data.

The textual data are the original texts of the drama works Pygmalion and Look Back in Anger. Look Back in Anger is analyzed using the complete text (including preface and acts I–V) and supporting critical sources. A full edition of Look Back in Anger should be used for final act-level textual analysis so as to achieve full coverage of Acts I-III.

The adaptation data are composed of two screen/ media adaptations of the plays selected. The film adaptation by Asquith and Howard (1938) is the preferred version of Pygmalion. Look Back in Anger is best presented as a version of the play, Tony Richardson's 1959 film version. The adaptations are appropriate as they are examples of how the theatrical language, class identity, theatrical space and performance are transformed through the screen and can be analyzed.

Secondary critical data also encompasses the concepts of adaptation theory, intermediality scholarship and reception theory, critical books, production histories and reviews. They can be utilized to provide the context for the plays, to aid in their interpretation and to reinforce analysis of audience reception and cultural relevance.

3.5 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection is done in a document-based and media-based manner. Firstly, the original dramatic texts are analyzed for their main ideas, character relationships, language use, conflicts, conditions for staging and the social markers. The elements of accent, class mobility, Eliza's change, Higgins' authority and gendered performance, and social recognition are highlighted in Pygmalion. Look Back in Anger delegates focus on Jimmy Porter's anger, Alison's inability to speak, being trapped at home, feeling angry at her class, feeling angry about her gender, and feeling disillusioned by the post-war years.

Second, selected adaptations will be observed using a scene-based approach. The analysis centers on three key scenes from each adaptation: an opening scene. This scene contains a transformation or a conflict (usually

a mid-adaptation scene) and the ending or resolution scene. The technique will maintain focus on the study while simultaneously making a systematic comparison between the Dramatic Text and its adaptation.

Thirdly, secondary critical sources are considered for interpretation. The background information relates to that of adaptation studies, intermediality, reception, British social drama, Shaw's linguistic drama and Osborne's post-war theatrical environment.

3.6 Data Analysis Procedure

Comparative thematic analysis and intermedial interpretation are used in the study. The analysis is presented in terms of the five components of the conceptual framework.

In part one, the original dramatic text is examined, and the different plays' primary social issues are outlined. This encompasses the plot, dialogue, character relations, dramatic space and social conflict.

Secondly, the social identity construction is explored. In Pygmalion, the accent, class mobility, linguistic performance, gendered transformation and Eliza's autonomy are the areas of analysis. The analysis of Look Back in Anger will be under the headings of: Class Frustration, Anger, Masculinity, Domesticity, Alison's role and Social Alienation.

Thirdly, narrative and intermedial transformation are analyzed by comparing the original plays with some of the adaptations. At this stage, the focus is on what is remembered, adapted, added to, taken out and changed. It also explores how the film or media techniques can transform the dramatic material, including close-up, camera movement, sound, costume, editing, lighting, setting and visual framing.

Fourth, there are reception cues in the adaptations which are interpreted as audience reception. The study is not based on a survey or interview method, but instead, reception is analyzed by how adaptations evoke viewers' emotions and critical viewpoint. This means empathy for Eliza, a sense of malaise at Jimmy's anger, an awareness of class codes, an understanding of gender relations and participation in social conflict.

Fifth, contemporary cultural relevance is explored by considering how the adaptations restage the meaning of the plays as they are presented to today's audiences. This involves a study of class mobility, social alienation, gender agency, emotional conflict and modern British identity.

Manual coding allows for a qualitative approach to the interpretation of textual, visual (including the images of video and the actions in the performance), and interpretative data. It is therefore the appropriate method for this study, which does not involve large-scale numerical data. The two plays are coded in the same way as each other, using the coding categories based on the conceptual framework.

3.7 Analytical Matrix

TABLE 1. Framework-Based Analytical Matrix for Examining Social Identity and Intermedial Transformation in Pygmalion and Look Back in Anger

Framework Component	***Pygmalion***	***Look Back in Anger***
Original Dramatic Text	Language, accent, class mobility, Eliza's transformation, Higgins's authority	Class resentment, domestic realism, Jimmy's anger, Alison's silence, post-war frustration
Social Identity Construction	Accent, manners, costume, gendered self-fashioning, class performance	Anger, masculinity, class frustration, emotional aggression, and domestic confinement
Narrative and Intermedial Transformation	Stage dialogue becomes a visual and acoustic class performance through voice, costume, gesture, and setting.	Stage realism becomes screen realism through close-up, cramped interiors, sound, editing, and social atmosphere.
Audience Reception	Sympathy for Eliza, recognition of class mobility, and interpretation of female agency	Emotional discomfort, critical engagement with anger, class resentment, and gender tension
Contemporary Cultural Relevance	Language politics, class mobility, gender autonomy, social performance	Youth anger, alienation, masculine crisis, domestic tension, social disillusionment

IV. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Overview of the Primary Analytical Corpus

These findings were the result of a comparative study of two contemporary British social dramas: George Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion and John Osborne's Look Back in

Anger, which focused on the stage-to-screen transfers of both. The analysis process was carried out based on the revised conceptual framework of the study, namely the original dramatic text, the process of social identity construction, the transformation of narrative and intermediality, the process of receiving the audience and the relevance of the culture in the present. This is the updated analytical corpus that is given in Table 1. The two original dramatic works and the two chosen film versions are included in the table as the two primary strands of evidence, as these are contained in the body of evidence. The use of critical guides, program notes, reviews and film-context sources were limited to interpreting and contextualizing the film.

TABLE 2. Primary Analytical Corpus of the Study

Case	Original Dramatic Text	Selected Film Adaptation	Main Analytical Focus
Case 1	George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*	*Pygmalion* (1938), directed by Anthony Asquith and Leslie Howard	Language, accent, class mobility, gendered transformation, and cinematic class performance
Case 2	John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*	*Look Back in Anger* (1959), directed by Tony Richardson	Class resentment, domestic realism, masculine anger, gender conflict, and screen social realism

Both plays were suitable cases for consideration of the social identity of a modern British drama, but by different social and dramatic logics. Pygmalion created their identity through voice, accent, training, class performance and gendering the self. Look Back in Anger was about anger, imprisonment, class resentment, frustrations of men and disillusionment after the war. The films were also appropriate, in that each illustrated a transformation of the dramatic meaning when it was taken from the stage to the movies. According to Criterion, the film was directed by Anthony Asquith and Leslie Howard, edited by David Lean, and scripted by Shaw himself, and is a 1938 black and white British film. On the BFI program notes, the film with a running time of 99 minutes is identified as the film adaptation of Oscar-winning Look Back in Anger, written by Nigel Kneale, with Osborne providing the additional dialogue.

4.2 Social Identity in the Original Dramatic Texts

The first significant discovery was that both original plays performed on social identity; it was judged to be an unstable entity. Social identity was strongly produced in Pygmalion through language. In Shaw's preface, the use of phonetics as a socially powerful field was highlighted, and it was stated that making a flower girl into a speaker was "neither impossible nor uncommon." It was not just a means of communication, but a marker for a class and a means of inclusion/exclusion, correction and social repositioning. It was therefore not Eliza Doolittle's identity which was presented as fixed. That she could transform from flower girl to a respectable speaker demonstrated the potential to learn, rehearse and perform class identity.

This social logic was clearly set in the text to be read in a dramatic form, with the scene of Covent Garden. Higgins defined phonetics as the science of speech and said that he could tell where a person was from in social class and accent. He also boasted that at an ambassador's garden party, he could make Eliza sound like a duchess by his pronunciation and acting. Eliza's wish to be a "lady in a flower shop" only reinforced the fact that she had a real social vision with a social goal: to be employed, respected, and to have a voice, a public commentary. So, the original play focused on identity as something that is socially constructed that can be altered, but only in a disciplinarian, externally valid manner.

The concept of social identity was conceived in quite a different dramatic context in the case of Look Back in Anger. It was revealed in Osborne's complete text that the play was played out over the course of a single day in the one-room flat of the Porters in the Midlands, it is broken up into five scenes i.e. Act I, Act II Scene 1, Act II Scene 2, Act III Scene 1, and Act III Scene 2. This was a crucial element to the play's identity politics. The domestic atmosphere of the flat was the source of much frustration for Jimmy Porter, silence for Alison, mediation for Cliff and intervention for Helena. The connection of identity with movement across class spaces, as in Pygmalion, was replaced here by a combination of identity and entrapment, as in Look Back in Anger.

Jimmy was a man of opposing extremes. Struggling for education, he was stifled socially; he was eloquent but unforgiving; he was aware of politics but unkind in person. The opening stage directions of the play characterized him as sincere, malicious, tender, cruel, and she was "tied to the ironing board, visualizing her tied to domestic labor and the capacity for emotional endurance". This contrast demonstrated that the social identity was shaped and forged both in words and in spaces at Look Back in Anger. Although there was silence, there was too much action in

the room from Alison, as well as from Jimmy's speech. What this finding is: Here, Osborne's play was not just a depiction of anger, it was a social performance of anger, which relied on gendered power, class resentment and domestic pressure.

4.3 Narrative and Intermedial Transformation in *Pygmalion*

The second major finding was that the 1938 Pygmalion had made Shaw's play a study of class performance in language. The film kept the heart of Higgins' project with Eliza, but added pace, cuts, style, expression, scene settings and contrasts to the play's dramatic world with the use of camera, editing, costume, facial expression, social contexts, and visual contrasts. The Indiana University piece about the film is about the fact that Asquith and Howard did not make a "still" play on film. Instead, they opened with their first track shot, the energy of London and made it a movie and not the show-stopper that it could have been.

An important reason for the film's opening in Covent Garden was the change of the original play's linguistic class conflict into its social geography in the film. Eliza's accent was indicative of her social status in the play. Other elements of the film that helped shape her class were the rain, the actions of the crowd, her dress, the position of her body, the basket she carried, the location of the street and how she protectively guards herself against the threat. The camera transformed Higgins' oratory aptitude of listening and note taking into a disciplined work by his body, as he visually classified bodies as observers listening to their voices. This solidified the concept of 'social identity', a concept that was not only verbal, but also visual.

The laboratory/training scenes further developed this transformation. The original text's Eliza, who is transformed, mainly has her pronunciation and social speech changed. In the movie, it was a process which was seen and felt in the body. Eliza's voice, stance, attire, expression and poise were slowly rearranged. The film thus set up a new phase of social remaking of the film, in the process making phonetic training a larger cinematic process. This had significance for the gender analysis of the study, as men now taught Eliza's body and speech. Higgins' prestige was as much visual, spatial, as well as intellectual, and institutional.

In the social test scene that Mrs. Higgins performed, she could see the falsity of her transformations. Eliza's speech was more acceptable, but there were disconcerting aspects of her conversation, social drive, and level of directness in her emotions, all of which did not meet the expectations of the upper classes. It highlights the need for proper speech by employing reaction shots and comic timing in the film. It was especially the work of David Lean as a crucial editor. The Indiana University article points to the use of close-ups of upper-class reactions, suggesting that this would not have been seen by an ill-seated theatre-going audience, but was seen in the cinema. So, the film became a "social judgment" process that the viewer could observe: society was watching Eliza.

The embassy or ball expansion was the most impressive instance of intermedial expansion. The stage play could feature Eliza's triumph in the upper echelons of the world. However, it was made real in the film through costumes, lighting, music, formal interior, stairs, parkour choreography of other groups, and the choreography of the characters' motion. So, Eliza underwent her metamorphosis and thus made her display. This success, however, was put on hold by the postball crisis. Eliza was socially readable, but insecure. The film thus did not evoke Shaw's critique that more fundamental, namely, transformation produces social recognition, but it does not necessarily produce autonomy.

4.4 Narrative and Intermedial Transformation in *Look Back in Anger*

The third major finding was that Look Back in Anger (Richardson, 1959) brought Osborne's stage realism to a wider screen realism. The original play was centered around the Porters' one-room flat, but the film was successful in expanding the drama into the Jazz Clubs, streets, markets, movement around, and social scenes. This was the first time that the audience saw a different side of Jimmy, the reclaimed man. As an actor, he was most often seen in a “domestic pressure chamber” when he was called upon to talk. In the screen, he changed to a restless body that moves in the field of a broader post-war world.

This is clearly supported in the BFI program notes. They say that the film drastically shortened the first scene of the play, and it was not until the actors were in little non-verbal scenes that they were introduced to Jimmy (i.e. in the jazz club, as he returned home), as he went to bed with Alison, and as he got up the next morning. It was noteworthy because it was a first before Jimmy had become a domestic whacko. The film, therefore, moved away from the use of language as a means of explaining things and focused more towards the characterization through the medium of pictorial presentation.

The flat scenes are still in the foreground, but the film's use of cinematic technique puts the emphasis on them. The BFI remarks how Richardson's camera was in movement in the flat scenes, and how he tracked, panned and turned camera tracks created a sense of unease and chaos. This was an important transformation in the media.

The stage flat set the pressure by its physical cover, the film flat set the pressure by its mobility of the camera, its framing of the scene, its close-up of the lines, and its rhythm of the visuals. Cinema did not make the room any less claustrophobic. The camera, rather, became more unstable and even more intrusive as it had feelings.

Other moments of the play, such as the market and the sweet-stall scenes, broadened the social implications of the play. The film opened the action up with more of the characters' society being revealed with the spinoffs of the jazz club, doctor's surgery, street, market and Mrs. Tanner's funeral. The addition was significant as it was no longer only a private marriage but also a social environment that was linked to Jimmy's anger. The film put him in the world of work, the public trade and the movement in the post-war urban landscape. Consequently, his anger was not only as a personality, but also as a social symptom.

Reception of gender was a major focus in the Alison, Helena, Jimmy scenes. In the play, the use of Jimmy's language may distract the audience's attention. The film reentered the attention on Alison's face, Helena's judgment and the emotional impact of Jimmy's aggression. The BFI notes highlight Richardson's expressive use of close-ups, particularly in the way she has shown Alison in the middle of Jimmy and Helena. The BFI notes stress Richardson's "expressive" use of close-ups, particularly in the manner in which she has used the close-ups with Alison caught between Jimmy and Helena. This affected the way that the audience received the message. Not only did viewers have to hear Jimmy's words, but they also had to witness the damage that he caused.

The ending scene of the return was left in an emotional ambivalence in the play. Osborne's book included the bears and squirrels' fantasy, which is a reprise of Alison's return, which had led to the revival in the previous book. This was not about ending the social and emotional violence of the marriage, but was a way to escape temporarily. Of course, this ambivalence was conveyed through the film's sensory intimacy, its void of words and sounds, and the emotional devastation. It was not just a question of making it easier to play with the adaptation. It was meant to be tender and fragile because it was about reconciliation.

4.5 Comparative Findings Across the Two Adaptations

TABLE 3. Comparative Findings Based on the Conceptual Framework

Framework Component	*Pygmalion*	*Look Back in Anger*	Comparative Interpretation
Original Dramatic Text	Class identity was constructed through accent, phonetics, manners, and social recognition.	Social identity was constructed through anger, domestic confinement, class resentment, and gendered silence.	Both plays treated identity as performative rather than natural.
Social Identity Construction	Eliza's identity was reshaped through speech training, dress, posture, and public performance.	Jimmy's identity was shaped through rhetoric, frustration, masculine insecurity, and class displacement.	Identity was trainable in *Pygmalion* but trapped in *Look Back in Anger*.
Narrative Transformation	The film expanded Eliza's movement from street identity to social performance.	The film expanded Jimmy's world from the flat into public and working-class spaces.	Both films expanded stage action, but toward different meanings.
Intermedial Transformation	Tracking shots, comic editing, close-ups, costume, and social spectacle visualized class mobility.	Moving camera, close-ups, black-and-white realism, jazz, and location expansion visualized	Cinema made social pressure visible through bodies, spaces, and faces.

		emotional unrest.	
Audience Reception	Viewers were positioned to sympathize with Eliza's vulnerability and emerging agency.	Viewers were positioned uneasily between Jimmy's charisma and Alison's suffering.	Film redirected attention from dominant speech toward emotional consequence .
Contemporary Relevance	The adaptation renewed issues of accent discrimination, class mobility, education, and female agency.	The adaptation renewed issues of alienation, masculinity, domestic toxicity, and class frustration.	Both adaptations remained relevant because they reactivated unresolved social conflicts.

The comparison shows that both films used the cinema in different but equally significant ways. Pygmalion expanded and ascended from street to laboratory, from laboratory to drawing room and from drawing room to a classy social display. One of its film-sequencing rationalities was that of actualizing, training, and socially recognizing. Look Back in Anger was also going to expand and was going to go away, but it was not going to go towards liberation. The jazz club, market, street, and public spaces were not the locations where Jimmy found his freedom from his confinement, but rather they demonstrated that his frustration was greater than just being in the flat. In Pygmalion, it was expanded space which facilitated class mobility, and in Look Back in Anger, it was expanded space which identified the broader social dimensions of alienation.

4.6 Scene-Based Evidence from the Film Adaptations

TABLE 4. Key Film Scenes Selected for Analysis

Film	Scene/Approximate Segment	Analytical Function
Pygmalion (1938)	Covent Garden opening	Establishes accent, class visibility, public space, and Eliza's original social position.
Pygmalion (1938)	Higgins's laboratory and Eliza's arrival	Shows language training as a social discipline and gendered transformation.
Pygmalion (1938)	Mrs. Higgins's social test	Reveals the limits of pronunciation alone and uses reaction shots to show social judgment.
Pygmalion (1938)	Embassy/ball sequence	Converts reported social success into cinematic spectacle.
Pygmalion (1938)	Post-ball crisis and final confrontation	Highlights Eliza's emotional displacement and struggle for agency.
Look Back in Anger (1959)	Opening jazz/public performance	Reframes Jimmy as a performer and social body before the domestic conflict begins.
Look Back in Anger (1959)	Flat scene with Jimmy, Alison, and Cliff	Preserves domestic realism, verbal aggression, and gendered labor.
Look Back in Anger (1959)	Market/sweet-stall scenes	Expands the play into working-class public space and screens social realism.
Look Back in Anger (1959)	Alison–Helena–Jimmy conflict	Makes gender conflict and emotional damage visible through close-up and framing.
Look Back in Anger (1959)	Final Alison return	Preserves emotional ambiguity while intensifying visual intimacy.

4.7 Audience Reception and Contemporary Cultural Relevance

The fourth major finding was that both adaptations altered the audience reception in terms of the allocation of sympathy and attention. In Pygmalion, the movie brought

out more visually and emotionally expressive aspects of Eliza. However, the audience saw her not only transform, but see her shame, discipline, discomfort, elegance, anger and final resistance. In fact, the use of the close-up/ social reaction shots moved from Higgins' intellectual experiment to Eliza's actual life. This resulted in a more balanced reading than one that is based on a dialogue-only interpretation.

Look Back in Anger made it difficult to accept Jimmy. Richard Burton brought charisma and intensity to the role of Jimmy, but he was also exposed to his cruelty by the camera. Given the extreme fact that the original first scene has been cut, the BFI review noted that viewers might not have yet gotten the word from the film regarding what is going on with Jimmy, so it would be hard for them to call him boorish. This is significant as it illustrates the capacity of adaptation for altering moral alignment. The viewer might yet have sympathy for Jimmy's social frustration, but it is harder to keep from feeling the pain of Alison in this film.

Both adaptations have social identity as their constant concern, and it is this concern which has made them relevant to the modern era. The relevance of Pygmalion is that it was, and it is still relevant, as accent, language, education, class mobility and the self-fashioning of class, gender are still shaping social opportunity. Its focus on style, stance, enunciation and approbation of the elite is as topical as the image of social performance and respectability to this day. Look Back in Anger has not become obsolete because feelings of alienation are well known in the culture, as are feelings of insecurity about being male, being aggressive towards one's wife and partner, and being frustrated by class. Look Back in Anger is an important play in the center of "the British post-war theatre" and can be seen as having influenced the British theatre, film, as well as being a part of public consciousness of the generation that emerged after the Second World War, says Sierz (2008).

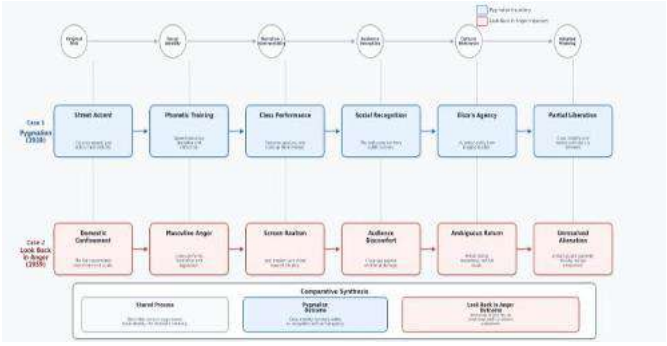


Fig. 2. Comparative Trajectory of Stage-to-Screen Social Identity Transformation

This figure illustrates that the two adaptations were based on a similar overall adaptation trend from dramatic text to screen form and led to different interpretations. Pygmalion began to change, be recognized and begin to take some agency. Look Back in Anger took a step towards exposure, discomfort, and unresolved alienation. The figure counteracts this central thesis about the intermedial adaptation of the plays into cinema, for the latter did not merely adapt but restructured social identity's experience for the audience.

4.8 Summary of Findings

The results illustrate that Pygmalion and Look Back in Anger are good examples of cases for the study of intermedial adaptation in contemporary British social drama. Both plays performed social identity as a construct, but the method of social identity construction was different in both plays. Pygmalion was all about self-fashioning as a man, accent, social mobility and class training. Look Back in Anger built identity out of class resentment, confinement at home, and the anger and violence of men.

These dramatic personae were changed via film. Pygmalion, a product of adherence to the shooting style of tracking shots, editing, close-ups, costume, social settings, and visual comedy, transformed Shaw's language-based drama into a cinematic performance of class mobility. Look Back in Anger turned Osborne's house stage realism into British screen social realism by employing a number of spatial consequences, the movement of the camera, close-ups, black-and-white realism and jazz performance as well as public social space.

The main comparative finding would be that the materiality of the social identity was increased through cinema. The dialogue, the live performance and the dramatic space were crucial in both plays on stage. Identities were on display on the screen as faces, bodies, interiors, streets, costumes, sound, editing, and camera movement. The adaptations were not simply the updating of the plays or faithful reproductions, then. They redefined their social meanings in the formal aspects of film. This validates the conceptual framework of the study and that intermedial adaptation involves cultural, visual, performative and interpretative processes of transformation.

4.9 Discussion

The results of this study show that the adaptation between the stage and the screen for modern British social drama has to be regarded as a process of intermedial re-configuration, and not as a transfer of the characteristics and essence of the original medium to the adopted one. The adaptation of Pygmalion and Look Back in Anger illustrates that films do not simply reproduce the dramatic

content of the original; in film, the social, visual, spatial and affective conditions that shape the creation of dramatic meaning are reorganized. This has grown from a fidelity-based assessment of adaptation to a more dynamic and flexible conceptualization of adaptation as a creative process and dialogue between writer and director, as well as between creator and audience and across the various media involved (Fedorenko & Sulima, 2023; Ingham, 2016; Mensah, 2025). The contribution of the present study is one that focuses on the idea of adaptation as a process, but also as a way in which social identity is made 'new,' visible, legible and contestable.

The social construction of identity in Pygmalion happens in terms of accent, phonetic discipline, class performance and by "gendering" oneself. In Shaw's play, the concept of class is not a fixed fact, but a social rule that can be learnt and imitated, and even publicly acknowledged (Shaw, 1912/2025). In the 1938 film version, the logic is further heightened by transcoding Eliza Doolittle's journey from essentially being a language shift to a visual/auditory performance. Cinema is a product of costume, posture, facial expression, space movement, social choreography and close-up, all of which contribute to the making of the class identity. The importance of a Shaw-scripted film, directed by Anthony Asquith, Leslie Howard and edited by David Lean, becomes clear as Criterion confirms it, and the slow-motion tracking shots, comedic pacing, editing, and close-ups of their reactions make it impossible to describe the film as being a filmed play. What is important about this change is that cinema is an artwork that makes visible what can only be theorized on the stage--namely, that class identity is a repetition of signs of speech, body, space, and recognition.

Whereas, Look Back in Anger forms social identity via frustration, masculine anger, domestic pressure and the class displacement of the post-war era. While playing, Osborne isolates Jimmy Porter, Alison and Cliff in a one-room flat, where speech is used, and is seen as a sign of social injury (Osborne, 1957/2015). While Richardson's play has been set in the context of Kitchen-Sink Drama and the Angry Young Man as analyzed by Sierz (2008), the present study continues this conversation by demonstrating that Richardson's 1959 film, Adaptation, adapts theatrical anger to cinematic social realism. The BFI program notes are particularly significant in that they accurately capture the cutting out of the play's opening scene, the introduction of Ma Tanner and how the moving camera and close-ups are used in the flat scenes (BFI, 2026). These changes are not just a stage play that opens up, they are also a movement of Jimmy's anger to a broader visual frame of jazz clubs, markets, the street and public locomotion. The movie thus turns the domestic claustrophobia into social alienation.

The novelty of the study becomes most evident when it is brought into juxtaposition with the look back in anger of Pygmalion and Look Back in Anger. These plays are seldom studied together, since they are set at different times, have different styles, and have different moods. This study demonstrates, however, that there is a social production of identity, and both texts are focused on this. Eliza is made socially legible by accent correction and class performance, while Jimmy is made socially legible by resentment, rhetoric, and the use of emotional aggression. Eliza is made socially legible by accent correction and class performance, Jimmy by resentment, rhetoric and emotional aggression. The result of such a comparison is a helpful conceptual contrast: Pygmalion is about a transformable identity that is socially mobile. At the same time, Look Back in Anger is about a trapped, displaced and effectively unstable identity. The juxtaposition highlights two opposing and interconnected social identity strands: recognition and mobility, and alienation and emotional entrapment, which makes for a novel contribution to twenty-first-century concepts and studies of British drama.

The study also adds from a methodical perspective due to its Conceptual Framework of Intermedial Adaptation Transformation. The framework is organized via an approach of original dramatic text, social identity construction, narrative and intermedial transformation, audience reception, and the current cultural importance of the text, instead of attempting to list what is similar and different between the two texts, equating adaptation with a pair of equations. Rather, it enables adaptation to be broken down into an iterative interpretation process. Spatial movement in Pygmalion maps a cinematic journey from the Covent Garden to the laboratory, drawing room and ball, representing a map of class aspiration. Movement between flat and public space in Look Back in Anger does not lead to liberation; it brings about the continuum of social frustration from the domestic space to the public space. All of this contrasts with an adaptation that opens up space for the stage, which, in the context of the source text, can have different effects on the ideology through which it is adapted.

The results also indicate that film adaptation alters the audience's morality. In Pygmalion, the first glance of the film captures the audience's interest in the power of intelligence as Higgins' intellectual dominance dominates the scene, only to place it in the shadows as the film draws Eliza's attention to her vulnerability, labor, and agency. Look Back in Anger features close-ups and reaction shots that help to prevent Jimmy's language from

completely overshadowing the audience's reaction and meaning of Alison's silence and suffering. Spectatorship in adaptation, however, is reimagined as viewers are not just asked to hear dominant speech but are asked to consider the corporeal and affective impact of dominant speech. It is the intermedial contribution of the study that is the most important. Cinema is not just a movie about drama, it is also a transfer of attention, sympathy and judgment.

In general, the results of the study indicate that the process of translating a stage text onto screen has the ability to revitalize the cultural life of the drama by reactivating social conflicts, which have not been resolved. The results of the study as a whole indicate that the act of translating a stage text onto screen has the capacity to reactivate social conflicts which remain unresolved in the image of the film. The importance of Pygmalion is that accent, education, class mobility, and women's subjectivity continue to dictate social opportunities. Look Back in Anger is therefore still relevant because the social experiences of males, because of masculine insecurity, alienation, domestic toxicity and class frustration are still similar today. As a result, the adaptations are not just about the modernization of the plays, but also about bringing into sight the ongoing social tensions that are present in the plays. Culturally, intermedial adaptation is a process of renewal as it turns dramatic texts into new and different visual, emotional and interpretive experiences.

V. CONCLUSION

The present study examined Pygmalion and Look Back in Anger as works of drama and as selected film adaptations in order to examine the construction of social identity in the original works and how the selected film adaptations change the construction of social identity through intermedial strategies. The analysis revealed similarities that the two plays share, both of which were of modern British social drama, though they differed with respect to the trajectory of their identity. The Pygmalion approach proposes that identity is socially constructed as performative, context-bound, class-coded, and reliant on his/her public behavior. In contrast, Look Back in Anger makes identity appear to be class resentful, socially frustrated, emotionally unstable, and experiencing aloneness and rejection in the face of the post-war world.

The study revealed that film adaptation was not just a reproduction of the Dramatic Texts. Instead, the meanings of the film were transformed by the movement of its camera, close-up, editing, sound, costume, and acting style, as well as spatial expansion. In Pygmalion, modernization of class mobility could be made visible through Eliza's change of appearance as well as audible, through the transformations of her voice and intonation. Look Back in Anger extended domestic realism into the screen, social realism to make more tangible on screen the emotions of Jimmy's anger and the sufferings of Alison. The study thus also helps with the studies on adaptation, as it demonstrates that intermedial adaptation is an act of cultural renewal that, in this manner, the dramatic text gains new significance in terms of visual, emotional and social meaning in the different media.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data supporting the findings of this study consist of publicly accessible dramatic texts, film adaptations, film-context materials, program notes, and secondary critical sources used for qualitative textual, visual, and intermedial analysis. The primary materials analyzed in this study include George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, the 1938 film adaptation of *Pygmalion* directed by Anthony Asquith and Leslie Howard, and the 1959 film adaptation of *Look Back in Anger* directed by Tony Richardson. No new empirical dataset involving human participants was generated. The analytical categories, scene-based observations, and interpretive findings are presented within the manuscript.

AI USE DISCLOSURE

The present study did not use any AI tool during the writing of the manuscript.

PERMISSIONS STATEMENT

No copyrighted film stills, images, or third-party visual materials are reproduced in the manuscript. The figures included in the article are original conceptual and analytical figures created for this study. If any copyrighted visual materials are added before submission, written permission from the relevant rights holder will be obtained and supplied to the journal where required.

ETHICAL STATEMENT

This study did not involve human participants, interviews, surveys, experiments, or personal data. It is based on textual, audiovisual, and secondary critical materials used for humanities-based qualitative analysis. Therefore, formal ethical approval was not required.

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The Politics of Sexual and Female Resistance in Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi*

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Abstract— *The research paper is a humble effort to examine the politics of sexual violence and female resistance in Mahasweta Devi' Draupadi (1978). The work occupies a significant place in contemporary Indian literature for its powerful portrayal of gender, power, and resistance. Set against the socio- political background of the Naxalite movement, it depicts the harsh realities faced by tribal communities and exposes the violence inflicted upon marginalized women by state institutions. Through the character of Dopdi Mejhen, Mahasweta Devi challenges the conventional representation of women as silent victims and instead portrays a protagonist who confronts oppression with remarkable courage and determination. Dopdi's refusal to cover her violated body after custodial rape marks a decisive moment of resistance that unsettles patriarchal notions of shame, honour, and female modesty. Rather than accepting the identity imposed upon her by her oppressors, she reclaims her agency through an act of fearless defiance that transforms her body into a powerful symbol of protest. The study draws upon feminist and postcolonial perspectives to analyse the relationship between bodily violence and political power while highlighting the significance of resistance in the struggle for dignity and justice. The paper further argues that Mahasweta Devi presents sexual violence as a reflection of broader systems of social and political oppression operating within patriarchal and hierarchical structures. By foregrounding the experiences of a tribal woman, the narrative questions dominant ideas of justice, authority, and gendered violence. Draupadi ultimately demonstrates that resistance can emerge even under the most oppressive circumstances, making the text an enduring contribution to feminist literature and postcolonial discourse. The study concludes that Mahasweta Devi's portrayal of Dopdi Mejhen continues to offer valuable insights into contemporary debates on gender, violence, human rights, and the politics of the female body. Through this study, the researcher has attempted to establish that Draupadi is not merely a narrative of victimization but a powerful discourse on female agency, resistance, and the politics of the violated body. The researcher further emphasizes that Mahasweta Devi's portrayal of Dopdi Mejhen redefines resistance by transforming bodily oppression into a site of political empowerment.*

Keywords— ***Sexual Violence, Female Resistance, Body Politics, Feminism, Postcolonial Literature.***

One of the most influential voices in Indian English literature, Mahasweta Devi, is well- known for her writings that challenge the structures of caste, patriarchy, and state power by giving voice to those who are often excluded from mainstream historical and political narratives. Unlike many writers who portray marginalized people as passive sufferers, Mahasweta Devi presents them as active participants in their own struggle for dignity and justice. Her literary works are deeply rooted in social reality and reflect

her lifelong engagement with the political conditions of tribal communities in India.

Originally published in Bengali as Dopdi in 1978 and later translated into English by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Draupadi* is one of Mahasweta Devi's most celebrated short stories. The story is set during the Naxalite movement and centres on Dopdi Mejhen, a Santhal tribal woman who is arrested by state security forces because of her association with revolutionary politics. The title *Draupadi* itself is deeply symbolic. Mahasweta Devi deliberately invokes the memory of Draupadi from the Mahabharata, who was publicly humiliated in the royal court but ultimately protected through divine intervention. Dopdi Mejhen, however, receives no such protection. She belongs to a poor tribal community that has been excluded from political power, legal protection, and social recognition. By placing a tribal woman in the position of the epic heroine, Mahasweta Devi questions whether justice is equally available to all women in modern India. The contrast between myth and contemporary reality highlights the continuing vulnerability of women belonging to marginalized communities. Through Dopdi's experiences, Mahasweta Devi exposes how political authority uses violence against women's bodies to maintain social and institutional control. The story demonstrates that sexual violence is not merely an act of personal cruelty but a calculated strategy of domination directed at both women and the communities they represent. From the beginning of the narrative, Dopdi is identified not simply as an individual but as a political threat. Her capture is intended to break the morale of the resistance movement. The violence inflicted upon her body reflects the state's attempt to establish absolute authority through fear and humiliation. Mahasweta Devi therefore shifts the discussion of rape from the private sphere to the political sphere, showing that violence against women often functions as an extension of institutional power.

The idea of feminism as a struggle against systemic oppression finds a powerful expression in Mahasweta Devi's Draupadi. As bell hooks states, "Feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression." (Hooks 96)

This perspective helps in understanding Dopdi resistance not merely as a personal act of defiance but as a political challenge to patriarchal and state-sponsored violence. The custodial rape inflicted upon Dopdi represents the intersection of gender, class, and tribal marginalization, while her refusal to clothe herself transforms her violated body into a site of resistance. Mahasweta Devi thus exposes the structures that normalize violence against marginalized women and redefines female agency through fearless resistance against oppressive power.

The brutality reaches its peak when Dopdi is subjected to custodial rape. In order to "make her. Do the needful" (Devi 31)reveals how the female body is treated as an object over which authority can exercise complete control. The violence is systematic rather than accidental, exposing the relationship between patriarchy and state violence. Mahasweta Devi does not describe the assault merely to evoke sympathy; instead, she reveals how women's bodies become battlegrounds where political conflicts are fought.

Susan Brownmiller's assertion that "All rape is an exercise in power" (Brownmiller 156) emphasizes that rape is fundamentally an act of domination rather than sexual desire. In Draupadi, this idea is reflected through the custodial rape of Dopdi Mejhen, where sexual violence becomes a deliberate instrument of state power to humiliate, silence, and control a marginalized tribal woman. The custodial rape of Dopdi therefore functions as a strategy of intimidation. The authorities believe that by violating her body they will destroy her spirit and weaken the resistance movement. Mahasweta Devi suggests that patriarchal power frequently targets women because the female body is wrongly considered the carrier of family honour and community identity. By attacking Dopdi, the state attempts to humiliate not only one woman but also the entire tribal community she represents. The story thus reveals that violence against women is often closely connected with larger systems of political control and social domination.

The most powerful moment in the story occurs after the assault. When Dopdi is ordered to appear before Senanayak, she refuses to cover herself. The narrator states, "Draupadi stands before him, naked." (Devi 33) .This brief sentence transforms the meaning of the female body. In patriarchal societies, nakedness is often associated with shame and vulnerability. The significance of Dopdi's resistance lies not only in her refusal to submit but also in her rejection of the social meanings attached to the female body. Throughout history, patriarchal societies have associated a woman's honour with her physical purity and modesty. Mahasweta Devi challenges this deeply rooted belief by presenting a protagonist who refuses to define herself according to patriarchal standards. After the brutal assault, Dopdi does not attempt to conceal her wounds or restore the appearance of normalcy. Instead, she openly confronts the reality of violence. Her refusal to wear clothes is not an act of helplessness but a conscious political decision that exposes the brutality of the state. The body that was intended to become a symbol of defeat is transformed into a visible reminder of institutional violence. In this way, Mahasweta Devi shifts the meaning of the female body from an object

of oppression to an instrument of political resistance. Mahasweta Devi reverses this cultural assumption by presenting nakedness as an act of conscious political resistance. Dopdi refuses to participate in the system that seeks to define her through humiliation. Her fearless declaration, "There isn't a man here that I should be ashamed of," (Devi 33).

Directly challenges patriarchal notions of honour. Instead of internalising the shame imposed upon her, Dopdi shifts the moral burden onto the perpetrators of violence. Her statement rejects the traditional belief that a woman's dignity depends upon the preservation of bodily purity. Mahasweta Devi thereby questions social attitudes that stigmatize survivors of sexual violence while protecting the structures responsible for that violence. At a deeper level, Dopdi's resistance can also be understood as a rejection of fear. The state expects violence to produce obedience, silence, and submission. Instead, violence produces courage and defiance. Although Dopdi's body bears the marks of torture, her spirit remains unconquered. She refuses to beg for mercy or acknowledge the authority of those who violated her. This transformation illustrates one of the central ideas of the story: physical domination cannot guarantee psychological or moral control. Mahasweta Devi suggests that genuine resistance begins when fear loses its power over the oppressed. By confronting her oppressors without hesitation, Dopdi reclaims ownership of her body and identity, demonstrating that political authority has limits and that human dignity cannot be destroyed through violence alone.

Dopdi's resistance also challenges conventional representations of women in literature. Traditional narratives often portray women as passive victims who depend upon male protection or rescue. Mahasweta Devi deliberately rejects this pattern by creating a protagonist who becomes her own source of strength. There is no heroic saviour who rescues Dopdi from oppression. Her courage emerges from her own political consciousness and her determination to preserve her self-respect. Through this portrayal, Mahasweta Devi redefines heroism itself. Heroism is no longer measured by physical power or military success but by the ability to defend one's dignity in the face of overwhelming violence. Dopdi's resistance therefore becomes a powerful symbol of feminist struggle, demonstrating that even the most marginalized woman possesses the capacity to challenge oppressive structures through courage and unwavering self-belief. Dopdi's resistance reaches its highest point when she confronts Senanayak and asks, "What more can you do?" (Devi 33) This question is both political and philosophical. It exposes the limitations of violence as an instrument of power. Although the state succeeds in violating her body, it fails to conquer her will. Her courage destroys the illusion that political authority can achieve complete control through physical force. Another significant aspect of *Draupadi* is the way Mahasweta Devi exposes the close relationship between political authority and patriarchy. The violence committed against Dopdi is not an accidental consequence of war or conflict; it is a deliberate strategy adopted by the state to demonstrate its absolute power. The officials believe that once a woman's body has been violated, she will lose her confidence, dignity, and the courage to resist. This belief reflects a patriarchal mindset that equates a woman's identity with her physical body. Mahasweta Devi strongly challenges this assumption by showing that although Dopdi's body has been wounded, her determination remains intact. Her resistance proves that political power can dominate the body but cannot completely control the human spirit.

Feminist thinking teaches us all, especially, how to love justice and freedom in ways that foster and affirm life. The story also highlights the silence that often surrounds sexual violence. In many societies, women who survive sexual assault are expected to remain silent because they fear social rejection, humiliation, or blame. Mahasweta Devi refuses to accept this silence as inevitable. Dopdi does not lower her head or hide herself from others. Instead, she openly confronts the men who attempted to destroy her identity. Her refusal to remain silent becomes a powerful form of resistance against both patriarchal society and state authority. Through this portrayal, Mahasweta Devi encourages readers to question social traditions that force women to carry the burden of shame while protecting those responsible for violence. Catharine A. MacKinnon's observation that "Women are socially disadvantaged in controlling sexual access to their bodies" (MacKinnon 123) highlights the structural inequalities embedded within patriarchal societies. In Draupadi, Mahasweta Devi powerfully illustrates this reality through Dopdi Mejhen, whose body becomes a site of state violence, exposing how patriarchal power deprives marginalized women of bodily autonomy and uses sexual violence as a means of domination.

An important feature of the narrative is the transformation of suffering into strength. Throughout the story, Dopdi experiences physical pain, emotional trauma, and psychological humiliation. However, these experiences do not weaken her political commitment. Instead, they strengthen her determination to challenge injustice. Mahasweta Devi suggests that resistance is not born in comfortable circumstances; it emerges from lived experiences of oppression. Dopdi's courage develops

precisely because she refuses to allow violence to define her existence. Her body becomes evidence of the state's brutality, but her fearless attitude becomes evidence of her moral victory.

Mahasweta Devi also questions the traditional concept of power. At the beginning of the story, power appears to belong entirely to the state. The military possesses weapons, legal authority, surveillance, and the ability to arrest and punish anyone suspected of rebellion. Dopdi, on the other hand, appears powerless because she possesses none of these resources. Yet as the narrative progresses, this understanding of power gradually changes. The state succeeds in controlling her physical body but fails to control her consciousness. Her refusal to obey demonstrates that genuine authority cannot be sustained through violence alone. The story therefore distinguishes between physical power and moral power. While the state possesses physical force, Dopdi possesses moral courage, and it is ultimately this courage that gives her the greater strength.

Another important theme in *Draupadi* is the question of identity. Dopdi is not represented only as a woman; she is also a Santhal tribal, a revolutionary, and a member of a marginalized community. These identities shape the violence she experiences and the resistance she offers. Mahasweta Devi suggests that the oppression faced by tribal women cannot be understood only through the lens of gender. Their experiences are also shaped by poverty, caste-like discrimination, political exclusion, and economic exploitation. Dopdi's struggle therefore represents the collective struggle of countless tribal women whose lives remain invisible within mainstream political and literary narratives. Through her character, Mahasweta Devi gives voice to those who have long remained unheard.

The symbolism of the female body occupies a central place throughout the narrative. Traditionally, patriarchal culture treats the female body as an object to be protected, controlled, and regulated by men. Mahasweta Devi rejects this ideology by presenting the body as an active source of political expression. Dopdi's refusal to cover herself transforms her body into a language of resistance that cannot be silenced. Without delivering long speeches or carrying weapons, she communicates her protest through her fearless presence. Her body itself becomes a testimony against institutional violence, exposing the moral failure of the state more effectively than any political slogan.

The story also compels readers to reconsider the meaning of justice. The legal institutions that are expected to protect citizens become instruments of oppression. Those entrusted with maintaining law and order are themselves responsible for violence and exploitation. Mahasweta Devi therefore presents justice not as something guaranteed by political institutions but as something that must be reclaimed through resistance. Dopdi's defiance becomes an act of moral justice because it exposes the truth that official institutions attempt to conceal. Her courage forces the oppressors to confront the consequences of their own actions.

Furthermore, Mahasweta Devi's narrative style strengthens the political impact of the story. She avoids sentimental language and emotional exaggeration. Instead, she presents violence with simplicity and restraint, allowing the events themselves to reveal their horror. This restrained style makes the story even more disturbing because it reflects the ordinary, routine nature of institutional violence. The absence of melodrama encourages readers to focus not only on Dopdi's suffering but also on the political system that produces such violence. In this way, *Draupadi* becomes not only a literary text but also a powerful social and political document that continues to challenge readers across generations.

The final encounter between Dopdi and Senanayak marks not only the climax of the story but also the complete collapse of patriarchal and state authority. Throughout the narrative, Senanayak believes that violence is the most effective means of controlling political resistance. He assumes that by violating Dopdi's body, he will also destroy her confidence and identity. However, the events of the final scene expose the failure of this assumption. Instead of appearing frightened or broken, Dopdi confronts him with extraordinary courage. Her challenge, "Come on, counter me," (Devi 33) is not merely directed at Senanayak as an individual but at the entire system of oppression that he represents. At this moment, the balance of power shifts dramatically. The officer who once appeared powerful is unable to respond, while the woman who was expected to remain silent becomes the moral centre of the narrative.

Mahasweta Devi deliberately constructs this reversal to question traditional ideas about power and authority. Political institutions often depend upon fear to maintain control over ordinary people. In Draupadi, however, fear gradually loses its power because Dopdi refuses to be intimidated. Her body has suffered violence, yet her determination remains unbroken. The narrator's observation that Senanayak hesitates before her suggests that institutional authority is ultimately powerless when confronted with fearless resistance. Mahasweta Devi therefore argues that genuine power does not arise from weapons, legal authority, or military force. Instead, it emerges from the courage to defend one's dignity even under the most violent circumstances. The ending also carries a broader political significance. Dopdi's resistance is not presented as an individual act alone; it symbolizes the struggle of countless marginalized women whose voices

have been ignored by dominant political and historical narratives. As a Santhal tribal woman, she represents communities that have long experienced displacement, poverty, exploitation, and state violence. Her refusal to surrender therefore becomes a collective act of resistance against structures of oppression. Mahasweta Devi suggests that although governments may suppress movements through violence, they cannot erase the desire for justice and freedom that continues to exist among oppressed people.

From a feminist perspective, the conclusion of *Draupadi* is revolutionary because it challenges the traditional representation of women as passive victims. Dopdi is neither rescued by a heroic figure nor protected by legal institutions. She creates her own form of resistance through her courage and unwavering sense of self-respect. Her body, once treated as an object of domination, becomes the strongest expression of political protest. This transformation explains why *Draupadi* remains one of the foundational texts of Indian feminist literature. It demonstrates that resistance is not always expressed through violence or military strength; sometimes it begins with the refusal to accept imposed shame and silence.

CONCLUSION

Draupadi is not merely a story of suffering but a profound political and feminist statement on power, violence, and resistance. Mahasweta Devi successfully exposes how sexual violence is used as an instrument of political domination while simultaneously demonstrating that the female body can become a powerful site of resistance. Through Dopdi Mejhen's unwavering defiance, the story challenges patriarchal values, questions the legitimacy of state violence, and redefines the meaning of female agency. It remains an enduring literary work that continues to inspire feminist scholarship, postcolonial criticism, and debates on justice, identity, and the transformative power of resistance. The continuing relevance of *Draupadi* lies in its uncompromising portrayal of institutional violence and its powerful affirmation of human resilience. Even today, when violence against women and the misuse of state power remain pressing concerns in many parts of the world, the story continues to encourage readers to question systems of injustice and to recognize the importance of resistance. Mahasweta Devi does not offer an idealized or comforting ending; instead, she presents a realistic yet deeply empowering vision of resistance in which dignity survives even under the most brutal circumstances. Dopdi's courage reminds readers that oppression can wound the body but cannot necessarily conquer the human spirit.

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A Study of the "Orient"ation of Hinduism in British Romantic Literature

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Abstract— *This paper examines the works of Sir William Jones, the British Orientalist figure, and establishes him as a "Bard of the East". This research situates itself within the theoretical framework of Edward Said's Orientalism. Through a close reading of literary compositions, especially two specific "hymns" (Durga and Bhavani) composed by Sir Jones. It also explores how the circulation of Western depictions of "Hindooism", by Jones, influenced one of the celebrated Romantic poets, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and his poetic composition, "Kubla Khan". Employing the practice of close reading, this paper identifies recurring motifs in these compositions and debates whether certain aspects of Hinduism were recomposed to make it suitable for Western readership. It concludes by stating that Sir William Jones, although celebrated as an Orientalist figure of merit, can be considered a Romantic poet, as his "hymns" not only influenced the West but also acted as a reservoir of compositions dedicated to the deities of "Hindooism".*

Keywords— ***British Romantic poetry, Colonial studies, Hinduism, India, Orientalism***

I. INTRODUCTION

The long eighteenth century marked a watershed moment with a number of reputed translations of Indian religious texts, particularly attributing to the religion that Charles Grant termed "Hindooism"[i]. This paper argues that Sir William Jones' work on the "nine hymns", published in 1785, had a formative effect on Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Kubla Khan", composed in 1816. It traces recurring motifs in Hindu iconography present in the verses. The paper explores the identification of recurrence through a close analysis of the primary texts.

Although several scholarly works attribute to Jones the role of an Orientalist figure, recent scholarship explores Sir William Jones as a literary, linguistic, and imperial propagator of Hinduism. While S. N. Mukherjee (1964) explores the influence of Jones' works on British imperial attitudes toward India, Nandini Das (2006) and Kurt A. Johnson (2010) examine his literary representations of Hinduism and their influence on eighteenth-century poets. Jessica Patterson (2025) further establishes Jones's engagement with Hinduism within the contexts of colonial rule and religious philosophy. However, unlike these historical and contextual scholarly works, the present research undertakes an in-depth textual analysis of Jones's Hymns (Durga and Bhavani) alongside Coleridge's poetic work ("Kubla Khan") by tracing how poetic diction and narrative strategies construct iconographical representations of Hindu deities and Hindu philosophy. This approach foregrounds the literary texture of the poems rather than their broader historical or ideological influence.

II. HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

Year 1783: Sir William Jones set foot on Indian soil at Calcutta in the month of September. During this journey he planned the founding of the Asiatic Society, which he envisioned the whole world would gain intense and intimate knowledge. His interests ranged from religion and literature to philosophy and jurisprudence. His translations from Sanskrit were intended to support his research on Hindu culture, which was read to the Asiatic Society, which postulated his influential works *On the Gods of Greece, Italy and India* (1784) and *On the Hindus* (1786)

as an Indo-European tree of culture and language, known and formed the basis for modern religious studies and philology.

His proficiency in Sanskrit opened up a sanctuary of unexplored Indian scholarship and theology for Jones. His fascination with this ancient language made him develop a personal relationship with Hinduism. In a 1784 letter to Sir Charles Wilkins (his friend, colleague and Sanskrit mentor), he writes that he was in love with the Gopia and was charmed by "Crishna" and an ardent admirer of "Ram" and a devoted lover of "Brahmha". He also states that the characters from the Indian epic, The *Mahabharata,* such as "Yudhishthir", "Arjoon" and "Korno", were greater than Greek heroic figures in his eyes.

Sir William Jones should be acknowledged as an independent English poet. The "Nine Hymns" to Hindu Mythology, his most outstanding and important piece of poetry, were composed when he was travelling in India. an outcome of his extensive study of Hindu literature and mythology. The remaining three were composed after the publication of six of the nine in a book named *The Asiatic Miscellany* (1785). These "hymns" aren't merely translations because they draw on a variety of Indian sources. The two specific "Hymns", I intend to deal with in this paper are The "Hymns To Durga" and "To Bhavani" (collectively known as "Hymns to Pracriti"). In the prose preface to these "Hymns", Jones explains his source and later makes his readers aware of the various incarnations of the Goddess, such as *Durga, Kali*, *Bhawani*, *Parvati*, and finds strong resemblance with Homer's Juno, Hecate, armed Pallas and Lucretius' Venus.

The "wild poetical fiction" is where the name Parvati came from. Jones claims that the Himalayas, a range of mountains encircling the Indian peninsula with its eastern and western extremities and enclosing India to the north, were given the name "The Mansion of Snow" by the Hindus. The numerous mountain summits are named after Hindu religious rituals described in the *Parvati* myth.

Parvati, the "mountain born" princess, daughter to King *Himavat*, also known as the Himalayas (personified as a monarch) and his wife Queen *Meena*, fell in love with Lord *Shiva* or *Bhootnath* (Lord of Demons) or *Pashupati* (Lord of Animals) and performed severe penance in order to receive *Shiva*'s love. Lord *Shiva*, an ash-coated male deity with a tiger skin tied around his waist, residing on one of the snow-capped peaks of the Himalayas, Kailas, was delighted with *Parvati's* devotion. Jones, in his prose preface, calls *Durga*, also known as *Sherawali*[ii], a deity "of Difficult access"; the manifestation of this deity in the ode is distinguishable from that of the *puranas* and *kavyas*. According to him, a detailed account of the entire action in which *Durga* defeats the demon (*Mahishasura*), who takes the form of a buffalo, would disrupt the unity of the ode. *Durga, in Hindu mythology, is the warrior goddess who mounts a* tiger. The tiger is not only Durga's *vahana,* or vehicle, but also an integral part of Lord *Shiva*'s attire. Aside from being associated with gods and goddesses, the beastly creature has been worshipped in India since the Vedic ages. The indomitable spirit of *Durga* is symbolised by the tiger.

III. COMPARATIVE TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

3.1 Sacred Landscape and Oriental Space

Both the "Hymn" and Coleridge's poem begin with the "holy" and "sacred" river, respectively. While the hymn refers to the river *Ganga*, "Kubla Khan" records the movement of the river Alph. Eventually, with time, the topography surrounding "a miracle of rare device", may that be Jones' "palace, where their monarch reigned / on the frost impearled seat" or Coleridge's "sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice" is revealed. The fountains resemble the "secret" and "sacred" water bodies' birth from Mother Earth's womb. Such a rigorous description of reproduction is strongly present in "Kubla Khan".

"And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,/As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,/ A mighty fountain momently was forced:" (lines 17-19). Sir Jones' "hymn", documents the origin of the river *Ganga* from the knotted matted hair of Lord *Shiva*.

"(Him, from whose red clust'ring hair /A new born crescent sheds propitious rays,/For as *Ganga*'s curling foam)" (Jones, 1.1.3-5).

I would like to lay emphasis on the "miracle of rare device" at this point and its very presence. The Amaranth caves[iii] is a non-fictional version of such a phantasm. A Hindu shrine located in India (Jammu and Kashmir). Due to the immense height and bitter cold inside the cave, an immense stalagmite forms from the accumulation of frozen water droplets. This stalagmite is considered to be the *Shiva* Linga, representing Lord *Shiva*. This cave stands amidst the snow-capped mountain ranges.However in the poetic world of fiction Jones writes;

Rock above Rock they ride sublime,

And wreath their giant heads in snows eternal

Gilt by the revolving sun

Though neither morning beam, nor noontide glare

In wintry sign or vernal,

Their adamantine strength impair;

Nor even the fiercest summer heat

Could thrill the palace where their monarch reign'd

On his frost impearled seat

(Such height had unremitted virtue gained) (Jones stanza 1.2-1.3)

And Coleridge influenced by the "Hymn" shares a similar construct:

The shadow of the dome of pleasure Floated midway on the waves;

Where was heard the mingled measure From the fountain and the caves.

It was a miracle of rare device,

A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice! (Coleridge lines 31-36)

3.2 Feminine Divine: Durga, Parvati and the Damsel Motif

The portrait of the damsel longing for her lover is vividly present in both the works, while Sir William Jones, in his "Hymn to *Durga*" indites,

Rare object of a damsels love

(the wizard bold replied) who, rude and wild,

Leaves eternal bliss above, (Jones stanza 5.2)

Jones also writes

All arts her sorrowing damsel tried…

Nor even her sacred parent's tender chiding …

The mountain drear she sought, in mantling shade Her tears and transports hiding,

And oft to her adorer prayed. (Jones stanza 4.2)

Samuel Taylor Coleridge reverberates the image of the sorrow-stricken "damsel" of Jones' "Hymn" in his "Kubla Khan" when he speaks of

A savage place! as holy and enchanted /As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted /By woman wailing for her demon-lover! (Coleridge lines 14-16). Or of

A damsel with a dulcimer In a vision once I saw:

It was an Abyssinian maid

And on her dulcimer she played,

Singing of Mount Abora[iv].(Coleridge lines 37-41)

These images remind us of Goddess *Parvati* and Lord *Shiva* (Bhootnath), mentioned previously, where the Goddess wails for Lord *Shiva* (who has rejected her love).

The "damsel" singing of "Mount Abora" in "Kubla Khan" stands parallel to Goddess Parvati singing of Kailasha, where her Lord reigns.

3.3 Reconstructing Shiva: The Romantic Demon-Lover

Jones and Coleridge share a similar perspective regarding the persona of Lord *Shiva*, distinctly visible in their literary works. For instance, in Jones' "Hymn to Durga", the lord is depicted as

The keenest lightings were but idle flashes, Which in the front of wrathful Hara rolls And soon to silver ashes

Reduced the inflamer of our souls (Jones stanza 3.2, lines 6-10)

But spurn that sullen wayward God,

That three eyed monster, hideous, fierce, untamed.

Unattired, ill girt, unshod ---

Such feel impiety (the nymph exclaimed)

Who speaks must agonize, who hears must die; (Jones 5.3)

And in Coleridge, the "demon – lover" takes a fearsome shape , identical to that of Jones.

And all who heard should see them there, And all should cry, Beware! Beware!

His flashing eyes, his floating hair! Weave a circle round him thrice, And close your eyes with holy dread For he on honey-dew hath fed,

And drunk the milk of Paradise. (Coleridge lines 48-54)

Lord *Shiva,* attributed as the creator, preserver and destroyer by Hinduism, is feared and loved at the same time. On the auspicious occasion of Shiv Ratri, in order to please the Lord, the women, irrespective of their marital status, are expected to weave three circles around the holy shrine *(Pradakshina)*, and then present him with offerings. The idol of the God is bathed in a mixture of milk and honey, which is considered to calm the rage of the supremely ferocious deity, powerful enough to ruin his own creation.

3.4 The Tiger as a Symbol of Divine Power

Goddess *Durga* is the warrior Goddess, the protective mother willing to unleash the force within her, to combat the evil. There are 108 incarnations of her such as; *Kali*, *Bhavani*, *Gauri*, *Parvati*, *Sati*. She mounts the tiger, a symbol of undying power, protecting "good" against "evil". *Bhavani* is the manifestation of the powers present in the three supreme Gods, namely *Brahma* (Creator), *Vishnu* (Preserver) and *Shiva/ Maheshwar* (destroyer). The Tiger was gifted to her as a vehicle by the Mountain God.

"The Tyger" (1794) ,one of William Blake's most celebrated "Songs of Experience" admires and celebrates the bestial energy of a dreadful beast

Tyger Tyger, burning bright, In the forests of the night; What immortal hand or eye,

Could frame thy fearful symmetry?(Blake lines 1-4)

In what distant deeps or skies. Burnt the fire of thine eyes?

On what wings dare he aspire?

What the hand, dare seize the fire? (Blake lines 5-8)

We find a similar trait in Sir William Jones' treatment of the Goddess in his "Hymn to Bhavani", as the Tyger embodies the spirit of the Goddess's rage.

When time was drowned in sacred sleep

And raven darkness brooded over the deep ----

From heaven's dun concave shot a golden ray.

Mother of Gods, rich natures' Queen,

Thy genial fire emblazed the bursting scene

For on the expanded blossom sitting,

With Sunbeams knitting

That mystic veil forever unremoved, Thou badest the softly kindling flame

Pervade this peopled frame, (Jones lines 1-23)

Blake and Jones undeniably shared the same pen to inscribe the description of the Tiger, and the Tiger-mounted Goddess's ferocity respectively, especially the remarkable innate depiction of the blazing fire and the structure within which it burns.

And what shoulder, & what art, Could twist the sinews of thy heart? And when thy heart began to beat, What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? What the chain,

In what furnace was thy brain?

What the anvil? What dread grasp,

Dare its deadly terrors clasp!

When the stars threw down their spears

And water'd heaven with their tears:

Did he smile his work to see?

Did he who made the Lamb make thee? (Blake lines 9-20)

3.5 Myth, Creation and Romantic Imagination

Jones in his "Hymn to Durga" evokes an equivalent image to that of Coleridge's, as quoted above, in order to recount the supernatural birth of the Goddess, born for a specific purpose.

With desolation wide had spread: How, when the Gods to Brahma flew.

In routed squadrons, and his help deplored; 'Sons!'(He said) from vengeance due

The fiend must wield secure his fiery sword. (Thus the unerring will ordains)

Till from the Great Destroyer's pure embraces, Knit in loves mysterious chains

With her, who, daughter to the mountain King, Yon snowy Mansion graces,

… Warrior child shall spring;

…shall rush

Against the dragon of deep;

With shouts of boundless mansion rang; And, in sublime accord, the radiant quire Strains of Bridal rapture sang,

Hell's future dread, and heavens eternal wonder! Healm and flaming habergeon

For thee, behold, immortal artists weave,

O *Durga* thou has deign'd to shield

Man's feeble virtue with celestial might,

… For when the demon vice thy realms defied,

And armed with death each arched horn,

Thy golden lance Oh goddess, mountain – borne,

Touch'd but the pest ---He roared and died. (Jones stanzas 7.1-9.3)

IV. CONCLUSION

I would hereby like to conclude by saying that Sir William Jones carried out the poetic act of composing these "Hymns" which, when published in the Asiatic Society, dispersed as seeds to the Occidental world. These germinated on the fertile minds of the western romantic poets; Sir William Blake, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Percy Bysshe Shelley. The seeds soon blossomed into wondrous verse compositions, reverberating the essence of the eastern myths, as encapsulated in Sir Jones' oriental bardic voice, manifested through his Hymns, and translations of Vedic texts.

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[i] In the year 1787 Grant wrote a letter to one Mr.Wilberforce Where the words "Hindoo religion" and "Hindoo creed" appeared.

[ii] *Sherawali* literally translates to the one mounted on a *sher* (tiger) in the Hindu Pantheon

[iii] In his chapter entitled *Journey to Kachamiere* in his book *Travels in the Mogul Empire* (1656-1668), originally written in French by the physician Francois Bernier and later translated into English, he speaks of the *Amarnath* Cave. According to Bernier's commentary on the Amarnath cave is home to several "Hindoos" who visit the shrine to worship the Shiva-like stalagmites and ice blocks that were created by water falling from the roof. This location, which lies a good deal to the southeast of Gungabal, is surrounded by glaciers.

[iv] A close association can be made with Goddess Saraswati and her Vina here. Since Samuel Taylor Coleridge was reading Oriental texts, especially Sir William Jones. Jones' "Hymn to Sereswaty". The dulcimer is a symbolic representation of the Vina and the damsel who has been called "Abyssinian maid" is an Oriental reconstruction .

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Cobbled Memory Paved Borderscapes in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*

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Abstract— *The culmination of topographical boundaries and human psyche is illuminated through interdisciplinary the concept of 'mnemonic borderscapes' The reverberations of the borderscapes are heard in literature that reflect the life and thoughts of human beings. Writers of fiction use the physical landscapes to portray human life and its complexities. The study aims to analyse the presence of mnemonic borderscapes in Thomas Hardy's fiction, Tess of the d'Urbervilles. It attempts to identify the social distinctions of the Victorian society as a contested space where people compete for power and delineates the depiction of borderscapes as sites of trauma and grief. The study employs narrative inquiry methodology that identifies how mnemonic borderscapes channelise one's action based on the past memories. The scrutiny of Hardy's Tess of the d'Urbervilles will foster the comprehension of the temporal nature of borderscapes that becoming inexorable components of human life.*



Keywords— ***Boundary, landscape, memory, mnemonic borderscape, topography.***

I. INTRODUCTION

Human beings considered as the advanced species of earth occupy microscopic space in its vast canvas. Identified and analysed through the relationship between themselves and the other entities inhabiting the earth, human beings have become inevitable in the study of origin of civilisations. The gradual evolution of human society has further brought out the innate bond between land and human life situating the landscape at a key position of preserving the culture of the people, pertaining to a particular topographical space. The traditional practices of people exhibiting their culture also vary based on the place they belong to. Landscapes can therefore be observed as significant markers in the individual and social life of people.

The multifarious significance of landscape in the life of human beings is reflected through the media of art and literature. Literature uncovers the intricate layers of human existence by placing its emphasis on setting of the plot. Landscape is employed in literature as a reflection of the characters' personality as well as to identify the socio-political scenario of the historical timeline: "Landscapes are at once geographic and historical, natural and cultural, experienced and represented, and present a spatial interface between human culture and physical terrain" (Carrol, 2011, p. l2) [1]. The imagined literary landscape modelled upon real landscapes rooted in culture and history are used as essential literary tools to depict the tone of the text.

II. LANDSCAPES IN LITERATURE

Landscapes in literature, at times, become repository sites of memory that bring out an individual's nature. It serves as the backdrop of the plot knitting the characters together

with the society in which it is set. The physical terrain utilised in literature influences the actions of the characters as it reminds them of their past endeavours and their consequences. The locale thus influences their personality, while retitling the social scenario of the historical time period:

> The complex of identity is connected with global histories of the movement of land masses, genes, peoples, their regimes of cultural signification, and the political strategies for resource management and control. (Tolia-Kelly, 2010, p. 6) [2]

The geographical location in some instances occupy greater importance as they steer the actions in a plot. They are also personified and presented as human individuals who possess rationale as well as emotions. Landscape also reflects the relationship between individuals in a family as well as society. Therefore, it occupies a prominent space in literatures that explore human minds.

III. VICTORIAN LANDSCAPE

The unravelling of human psyche through landscape is evident in the literature of the ancient times. Its importance is exemplified in the Romantic age when writers used natural landforms to portray the thoughts of individuals. While Romantic literature utilised topography to present the pleasantries of life, the Victorian age showcases the complexities of life through geographical landscapes. The natural landscape undergoes unrecognisable transformations while retaining its natural past in the Victorian era: "Authentic Victorian landscapes require generous grounds, a large number of plants and skilled maintenance. The practice of surrounding a house with sheared evergreen 'foundation plantings' dales to the Victorian era" (Buchanan, 2000, p. 86) [3]. The Victorian landscape depicts the chaos of industrialisation and modernisation as well as captivates the natural landscape of the Victorian classical world previous age. The structural set up of cities serves as a reflection of social groups that existed in the age

The Victorian landscape can be analysed as a reflection of the memories of the age. The influence of historical events is evident in the literature of the age. The age is marked by the transition from the rural life closely knit with nature to the urban life that is associated with industries and machinery. It is also characterised by the expansion of the British empire accelerated by sea voyages that resulted in the widespread phenomena of colonisation. The continuous changes that happen inside the boundaries of the empire and beyond it are documented by the writers of the age: "For others, a more photographically exact portrayal of place yields a greater reward often these writers draw upon a personal topography, recreating the intimate comers of their own uniquely felt experiences" (Sutherland, 2018, p. 3) [4]. The literary history of the Victorian age engulfs various genres of literature but the genre of fiction emerges as the prominent form that captures the essence of the age. Victorian writers of fiction like Charles Dickens, Charlotte Brontë, Emily Brontë and George Eliot adeptly the influence of physical landscape on human memory through their works.

IV. LITERARY TAPESTRY OF THOMAS HARDY

The culmination of geographical location and human psyche is vividly depicted in the literary creations of Thomas Hardy, the frontman of Victorian fiction. Hardy's early childhood in Higher Bockhampton located in the rural parts of England attributes to his extensive use of the locale in his fiction and poems. He focusses on the hardships of the people belonging to the middle and lower classes whose lives are dictated by their positions in the society:

> In his writing Hardy engages with the ideas and trends of his age: developments in science, new philosophies…the growth of a radical politics that gave expression to the striving of the working class for social equality and democracy, the struggle for a new status for women, and the effects of the First World War. (Harvey, 2003, p. 5) [5]

His fiction illustrate all the all the concerns of the Victorian age presenting a vivid picture of the social reality of the age. The most prominent fictions of Hardy include, *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1876), *The Return of the Native* (1878), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), *The Woodlanders* (1887), *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895) that penetrate deep into the human perception.

Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* [6] is a picturesque depiction of the agrarian life in rural England. The story is centred around the life of Tess Durbeyfield, the eponymous character who faces a turn of events that determine the direction of her life. Hardy sets the narrative during the early phases of feminist movements in England. The scrutiny of "... Tess of the d'Urbervilles as a novel in which questions of history, geography and class are almost as emotion-laden as those involving the fate of the charismatic heroine...." (McEathron, 2013, p. 15) [7] aids in understanding the impacts of social scenario on Hardy. The fiction begins with the happy and care-free life of Tess and gradually moves forward to depict the complexities of her life. Over the course of time, she meets Mr. Alec d'Urbervilles, the son of Mrs d'Urberville whom Tess's

father mistakes to be their relative. Her bitter memories with him continues to haunt Tess and she is constantly reminded of the horrors even when she has physically moved away from that vicinity. Her emotional scars resurface when she sees Alec again after years and she attacks him fatally. Hardy thus presents the ultimate failure of social systems through *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*.

V. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Hardy's works are examined in the light of many contemporary theories from varied disciplines. Geoffray Harvey's *The Complete Critical Guide to Thomas Hardy* published in 2003 investigates Hardy's works in toto as a historical account of the Victorian age. The reflection of history in his literary works is outlined in Fred Reid's *Thomas Hardy and History* (2017) [8], where he states, "What is less widely recognised is that Hardy always regarded England's struggle with France as a source of patriotic pride" (p. 143). Michael Millgate's book titled, *Thomas Hardy, A Biography Revisited* (2023) [9] also enumerates the social scenario of the age that coloured Hardy's literary career. The bond between human and non-human entities in Hardy's fiction is depicted in Anna West's critical work titled, *Thomas Hardy and Animals* (2017) [10]. Jane L. Bownas's book titled, *Thomas Hardy and Empire: The Representation of Imperial Themes in the Work of Thomas Hardy* (2016) [11] throws light upon the colonial history of the nineteenth century.

The universality and popularity of Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles: A Pure Woman* have given rise to a number of scholarly researches that look into it from a variety of perspectives. The feminist readings of the fiction such as, "Tess's Silent Cry: The Vocal Object in *Tess of the d'Urberville*" (2008) [12] by Annie Ramel also point out the signs of early feminism in it. The article titled, "Tess as a Kaleidoscope of Socially Constructed Images in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*" (2021) [13] analyses Hardy's characterisation of Tess as a woman who is bound by social restrictions. The linguistic inquiry into Hardy's fiction in the article, "Re-Creation of a Classic Novel through Transmedia Storytelling: Cross-Cultural Learning Focusing on *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*" (2024) [14] by Kwang-Soon Lee affirms his mastery over English language.

The intertwining of human memory and the division in landscape is also evident in the arena of literature. Gordon Hutner's study titled, "In the Middle: Fiction, Borders, and Class " (2001) [15] describes the significant role of borders in shaping the literature of America and Canada. The impact of borders in creating the memory of the characters is stated through Jennifer Yusin's "Beyond Nationalism: The Border, Trauma and Partition Fiction" (2011) [16]. Gerhard Genis and Melanie Moen's article titled, "War Poetry of the Angolan/Namibian Border War: Re-membering Poetic Bodies through Textual Limbs" (2024) [17] brings out the association between human beings and landscape that gets reflected in literature. The role of boundaries in the formation of memory is elicited through Chikodi Adeola Olasode's "Imagined Spaces and Memory in Walcott's Poetry" (2025) [18].

VI. RESEARCH GAP

The existing literature on Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* provides insights into the multifarious analysis of the text from the perspectives of culture studies and feminism. It delves into the character of Tess Durbeyfield as a Victorian woman who is challenged by the social and cultural norms of the society. The inquiry into the narrative techniques employed by Hardy reveals the transformation in the literary form of novel. Tess's exploration of her true self is also uncovered through the analysis of the text. Similarly, the concept of mnemonic borders is explored through the lens of geographical studies that deal with the structure of landscapes. The convergence of memory and borders is observed in ancient poetry and fiction that deal with the themes of war and conquest. However, the review of the secondary sources brings to the fore, the dearth of studies that explore the presence of mnemonic borders in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*.

VII. OBJECTIVES

The present study is an attempt to identify the characteristic features of mnemonic borderscapes in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. It sets out to decipher the social distinctions that influence the choices of people in a historical period of time. It lays its emphasis on the need to contest for power in the hierarchy of society in order to establish oneself.

VIII. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

The inquiry is a qualitative research that concentrates on how borderscapes become the sites of trauma and grief that continue to haunt individuals through the tale of Tess. It employs narrative analysis method that deciphers how borders construct and alter the concept of memory in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. The paper thus aims to stress the temporal dimension of mnemonic borders as the memories of the past influence the actions of the present thus bringing to limelight its dynamic nature. The research begins with the omnipotent presence of mnemonic borders in the life of human beings. It

proceeds further by identifying the features of mnemonic borders and their role in constructing the social and individual identities of people in Hardy's fiction.

IX. MNEMONIC BORDERS

The term 'mnemonic' is widely employed to denote things that aid in the recovery of memory. Akin to people and materialistic things, the natural soil also plays a vital role in shaping one's experiences in the world. It also assists in the formation of an individual's perception of oneself and of the other elements that belong to the environment. The topographical borders that form integral parts of the instinctive geography also exert its influence on the human mind. Borders considered as markers of division compartmentalises memory based on the movement of an individual in the physical landform: "However, while dissonance may be harmonized through minor changes in key, the notion of borders of memory reflects that shifts within individual claims to heritage will not be sufficient to overcome the mnemonic borders staked out between different memory communities" (Boyle and Ivings, 2023, p. 11) [19]. Mnemonic borders thus serve as elements of cultural heritage that depict the uniqueness of a community of a particular geographical location.

Hardy presents the life of Tess beginning from her adolescent years to her maturation into a woman. The spectacular event of May Day dance takes place in the village of Marlott where Tess is born. The entire village assumes the sheer of the custom of 'club-walking', an annual ceremony in which the women of the place participate. The geographical space is isolated from the rest of Wessex as it is guarded by its natural boundaries:

> This fertile and sheltered tract of country, in which the fields are never brown and the springs never dry, is bounded on the south by the bold chalk ridge that embraces the prominences of Hambledon Hill, Bulbarrow, Nettle-combe Tout, Dogbury, High Stoy, and Bubb Down. (p. 13). [6]

The custom of May Day dance is a celebration of welcoming spring where young women adorn themselves in white clothes inviting the season of joy with flowers. Tess also happily interacts with her friends on the day of club-walking. The village of Marlott thus becomes a symbol of cultural harmony, unique to the village and it becomes a spectacle for those who do not belong to it.

Tess reaches a dairy farm called Talbothays Dairy where she tries to rebuild her life without the influence of her past. The farm located in the Valley of the Great Dairies is described as a place that exhibits happiness and fertility through the green pastures and healthy livestock that produce large quantities of milk. The pastoral setting of the farm is further emphasised thorough the rustic tales of Mr. Crick, the master dairy man who takes care of the farm and the songs of the milkmaids and other workers: "Songs were often resorted to in dairies hereabout as an enticement to the cows when they showed signs of with-holding their usual yield; and the band of milkers at this request burst into melody..." (p. 134) [6]. The workers tell Tess how songs and instruments like harp and fiddle increase the milk production. She also listens to the story of a man named William Dewy whose fiddle calmed a raging bull. The valley that is distinct from her birthplace Marlott chronicles her life in the dairies that transforms her into a cheerful individual through the calmness it provides and through the stories and songs that praise the history of the place, people and cattle.

X. IDENTITY AT BORDERS

Borders that play a prominent role in marking the cultural festivity of a place also wield influence on individuals who practice the traditions. The identity of a person gets formed and reconstructed through their interaction with the varied components of the society. It influences their everyday activities and instils a sense of self in them. The self that gets created through borders relies on the social conditions of the specific geographical area:

> … every person produces a personal version of a given situation, on the bases of material and immaterial social guidance, that one could call culture, and on the basis of the spatio/temporal conditions in which the experience takes place. (Tateo et al., 2021, p. 20) [20]

The individual identity becomes constrained by the cultural practices that limit human autonomy. The individual is thus conditioned to act in a precise way as one belongs to a certain culture. Culture is a space-bound phenomenon and therefore the locale in which a human being resides also become a determining factor for identity formation.

The initial stages of Tess's life is spent in the village of Marlott. Tess possesses a joyful demeanour that attracts everyone in the village during that period. She is portrayed by Hardy as a young girl who is just out of her childhood phase and is genial with her friends as well as the people of the village. She also takes care of her siblings when their parents are unavailable due to their chores. Tess's loving nature and her concern for the people around her get mirrored in Marlott's landscape. Hardy describes the village with striking hues that reflect the freshness and liveliness in Tess: "The atmosphere beneath is languorous, and is so tinged with azure that what artists call the middle distance partakes also of that hue, while the horizon

beyond is of the deepest ultramarine" (p. 14) [6]. Tess is filled with the dreams of her future but she is also contented with her life in Malott with her family. She is occasionally troubled by her father's drunkenness but she does not lament over it. She takes the responsibility of her father when he comes home drunk. The countryside village of Marlotte is a space that highlights Tess's character as a young girl who is trustworthy and good-humoured.

Contrary to her personality in Marlott, Tess transforms into a stoic individual when she leaves the place. Tess's father becomes obsessed with the lineage of d'Urbervilles. A stranger tells him that their family has the possibility of being associated with the knightly family of the d'Urbervilles. Mr. Durbeyfield and his wife Joan Durbeyfield send Tess to Trandridge to seek the help of the d'Urberville family. She is assaulted by Mr. Alec d'Urberville when she travels to Trandridge. The incident alters her joyful personality forcing her to withdraw herself from the society and her friends. Though she ignores all the accusations and gossips about her, she still turns into a dejected individual who isolates herself:

> She knew how to hit to a hair's-breadth that moment of evening when the light and the darkness are so evenly balanced that the constraint of day and the suspense of night neutralize each other, leaving absolute mental liberty. (p. 104) [6]

She is comforted by solitude amidst the turmoil of life that are the results of prejudiced human interaction. The forest in Trantridge converts the identity of Tess from an innocent girl to a woman who is treated as impure by the community.

The Talbothays farm marks another phase in the life of Tess and her journey to the farm causes changes in her personality. She becomes more resolute and decides to move forward with her new life. She consciously displays her milking skills for Mr. Crick to notice and she also tries her best to relate cordially with her co-workers. The change in atmosphere induces the transformations in her attitude towards life. When she crosses the boundary of Trantridge, she intentionally leaves behind her gloom and desolation. The pleasant appearance of the Talbothays farm encircled with lush meadows and cattle gives purpose to her life: "It is interpretation and narrative that gives identity and it is identity that transforms space into place" (Hague and Jenkins, 2005, p. 5) [21]. Tess strives to establish her new identity in the place and also hopes for a better future for herself. She tries to overcome the guilt through her interaction with the other members of the farm. She appears as a woman filled with zeal for success within the periphery of the dairy farm.

XI. DIVISIONS OF POWER

The enclosed space with human beings belonging to different strata of society gets further divided due to the difference in their social position. The dissimilarities are the results of the uneven distribution of power among individuals. This disparity initiates the struggle for power in those regions:

> The ways in which borders are constructed and their role in the production of meanings and values have been questioned in relation to a range of areas: crucially, the constitution of fields of knowledge, the establishment of meanings as truths, the composition of the human subject and the workings of power. (Altink and Weldon, 2010, p. 5) [22]

The power is analysed through the economic prosperity, education, social rank and also through the gender of individuals. The individuals who exercise the power do not acknowledge the inequality as they are in the privileged position. However, the majority of population, the common folk, do not enjoy the same rights as the others. This polarity causes conflict between the two groups as they fight with each other to uphold their equal access to power.

The mansion of the d'Urbervilles known as 'The Slope' is located in Trantridge and it represents the wealth of the family. Tess's house in Marlott, Hardy's pictorial representation of the Victorian peasants, symbolises their continued strife in grappling with poverty. When Tess leaves Marlott and arrives at the d'Urberville's residence, she understands the unfathomable fissure between both the families. The house of the d'Urbervilles exhibits sheer extravagance, that she has never seen in Marlott and she calls it a house built for enjoyment: "Everything looked like money-like the last coin issued from the Mint. The stables, partly screened by Austrian pines and evergreen oaks, and fitted with very late appliance, were as dignified as Chapels-of-Ease" (p. 43) [6]. She begins to comprehend her mother, Joan Durbeyfield's urge to claim their d'Urberville lineage. Though she does not align with the ideologies of her mother, she visits the d'Urbervilles and gets employed at their farm. The distinct boundary between the two families is re-affirmed through Mrs. d'Urberville's enticing job offer to work in their farm.

Hardy distinctly projects the supremacy of the patriarchal society of the Victorian age that suppresses the voice of women. Mr. Alec d'Urberville, the sole heir of the family, takes up the role of an employer and manages the finances while his mother becomes an observer who subserviently approves all his actions. His interactions with Tess and his role in employing her reveal his authority as a man: "Gender interacts with nationality, ethnicity, income, and

other factors in ways that illuminate comprehensive coverage of power in space" (Staudt, 2018, p. 3) [23]. When Tess leaves Marlott and travels to Trantridge, the boundary of the d'Urbervilles, Alec becomes empowered through his masculine identity. He attempts to outsmart Tess by teasing her when she asks him to drive the cart slow. Alec, unmindful of her request, continues to drive fast instilling fear in her. Though Tess is perturbed by his condescending demeanour, she remains composed throughout their journey in the forest. Hardy projects her insecurity through her subdued reactions to Alec's behaviour.

XII. BORDERSCAPES AS SITES OF TRAUMA

The existence of power struggles within the bounds of society is beneficial to one at the expense of the other. The profited group cherishes the power of victory and rejoices over it while the other group gets dominated and is suppressed due to the divide in the social structure. When the rights of individuals are violated in a geographical location, it becomes the locus of the trauma as they are haunted by the memories of the depravity: "The trauma crosses a topographical border between the body and its outside, or a symbolic border between the psyche and its outside" (Schimanski, 2019, p. 41) [24]. The geographically encompassed space becomes the memory site of grief as well as trauma when there is prolonged suppression. The geographical location constantly triggers the past traumatic memories, forcing people to flee from their recurrent memories. The recurrence of bitter memories within the bounds of a locale emphasises the role of borders in shaping human memory.

Tess's pleasant memories in Marlott are juxtaposed with her journey to the market with her brother Andrews. They leave at night on the wagon drawn by the horse named Prince that she cherishes. Tess sees how Prince struggles to pull the cart over the slopes with no light but she continues to tread on as they need to reach their destination earlier. When the mailcart approaches near their cart, Tess notices that Prince is injured by it: "The pointed shaft of the cart had entered the breast of the unhappy Prince like a sword, and from the wound his life's blood was spouting in a stream, and falling with a hiss into the road" (p. 36) [6]. Tess becomes startled by the accident and becomes numb. When she recovers from it, she rushes to Prince and presses her hands against his wounds. She watches him fight for his life and blames herself for the situation. The road located on the outskirts of Marlott, past the town of Stourcastle, turns to be her site of grief. The pain of Prince's death gets ingrained in her memory and it also gets transformed into guilt that foreshadows her life.

The forest of Chase is a pivotal topography that determines the turn of events in Tess's life. Tess's mother persuades her to work in the d'Urberville's farm as it will benefit their family economically and improve their social position. Alec constantly tries to get closer to Tess during their travel to Trantridge through the woods. However, Tess becomes worried by his advances and even voices her discomfort. Alec ignores her resistance and assaults her while she rests under a tree in The Chase. "Above them rose the primeval yews and oaks of The Chase, in which were poised gentle roosting birds in their last nap; and around them the hopping rabbits and hares" (p. 88). The dense forest of the Chase becomes a locus of trauma that creates lasting impacts on Tess. The horrifying memories of the incident that happens in the place, continues to impact her actions throughout the course of the fiction. Tess's emotional pain supersedes her physical pain and she feels that her life is paused after the occurrence.

The churchyard of Marlott also becomes a borderscape that holds in Tess's desperation as a mother. Being at the periphery of Marlott, it transitions into a borderscape that distinguishes past from the present. She begins to work in a farm to support herself and the child. The people who work with her comment on how her attitude towards the child has gradually evolved. They discuss how she was ignorant to the needs of the child in the beginning and how she adores him in the present. However, the child becomes ill and Tess senses the impending hazard. She watches her son die a slow death and it shatters her. She calls for a parson in a frenzied way as she wants to christen her child. Her father refuses to let the parson in as he feels that his social position could be harmed by the child's existence. She takes him to the churchyard and buries him herself as the parson refuses to perform the last rites stating that he has not been christened. She also names him Sorrow reflecting the pains that he has faced during his short time on earth. Tess contemplates about her circumstance of not being able to grieve for her child due to the restrictions of society and mourns for him at the churchyard in the night, metamorphosing the churchyard into a space that stifles her emotions.

XIII. CONSTRUCTION OF MEMORY

The borders also have the potential to influence and alter the memories of individuals. A particular enclosure becomes the birthplace of human sentiments and also constructs memories associated with it. The incident that takes place at a specific location gets stored in the mind of an individual. The individual is reminded of it whenever he visits the place and other human beings who are a part of it. The geographical space can therefore be seen as the origin of memories that impact individuals and their

actions. The individuals' actions in the present are conditioned by the memories of a similar past event: "Due to memories and changing experiences, place-based narratives of the past exist and are (re)created for the present and future. Narratives, places and memory have their geography in the cultural and social landscapes" (O'Reilly, 2020, p. 94) [25]. The past memory facilitates in the creation of a new memory in the present due to its continuing influence determined by the individuals and the borderscapes.

Tess's social identity is highly impacted by the boundaries of gender and class. The conditioning of women in the Victorian age that blinded them and confined them within the domestic sphere is underscored through Tess's life. The character of Tess accentuates the hardships of rural women who are not treated on par with men. The integrity of Tess is questioned and she is considered as a blemished woman after Alec's sexual assault on her, while Alec is not held accountable for his wrongdoings. This gender divide gets embedded in her memory and it becomes a hurdle in her relationship with Angel Clare:

> And as such she compared him with herself; and at every discovery of the abundance of his illuminations, of the immense distance between her own poor mental standpoint and the unmeasurable, Andean altitude of his, she became quite dejected, humiliated, dis-heartened.... (pp. 151-152) [6]

Her earlier encounters with Alec d'Urberville direct her present actions and she becomes more cautious of the gender stereotypes ascribed by the Victorian society.

Tess's traumatic experiences with Alec can be analysed through the power dynamics that exists between them. Her haunting memories of the power struggle experienced at Trantridge surfaces time and again during her stay with Angel Clare, only to lead on to their separation. After her separation from Angel, she relocates to a farm in Flintcomb-Ash which is dry with sparse vegetation. The deserted land becomes a borderscape that distinguishes her present life with her happy days at the Talbothays farm. The arid atmosphere symbolises her misfortunes and it is intensified by the arrival of Alec d'Urberville. The traumas and apprehensions of Tess reappear with his return. Her afflictions reach their pinnacle when she discovers through Mrs. Brooks, the lady who takes care of the mansion of The Heron, that Angel visited the mansion and left the place after hearing about Alec's presence. The outburst of Tess's anger can be deciphered through the postulates of Charles Manda (2019) [27], a psychological counsellor who identifies the underlying reasons that result in the violent behaviours of traumatised individuals. He states that, "They cannot comprehend why the event happened and why it happened to them. These thoughts can result in intense anger" (p. 53). Tess's suppressed anger gets manifested in her act of killing Alec. The mansion, The Heron, reminds her of her journey with Alec through the forest when she felt powerless. She tries to reclaim her power and assert her individual freedom through the murder of Alec d'Urberville.

The memories of borderscapes are not limited to the specific area of land. They are rather transitional in nature and are spread across time. The temporal dimension of mnemonic borders unearths how an event transgresses its place of origin and affects the individuals involved in it. It gets manifested even in the daily routine of the people as the memory is subconsciously stored by the brain. The intermingling of borders and memory becomes inevitable in the life of human beings as,

> …the entanglement of forced movement and memory show that, rather than tacitly implying a simple temporal framing of 'before' and 'after', the mnemonic practices of exile imply a complex 'everydayness' of shifting temporalities in the course of negotiating pasts, presents and futures between and across generations. (Tosic and Palmberger, 2010, pp. 7-8) [28]

The act of remembering does not occur as a conscious act but as an involuntary process when the memory carries dense emotions that has caused psychological pains. The lasting span of memories further exemplifies the necessity to delve into temporality of borders to evaluate the human psyche.

Tess meets Angel Clare again at the Talbothays dairy farm. She remembers their brief encounter at the May Day dance and desires to talk to him initially. Her eagerness is neutralised by her memories of Alec, the retributions of the people of her village and the loss of her child. Her psychological boundary inhibits her to act upon her vehemence when Angel proposes to marry her. Though she foresees a happy life together with Angel, the guilt and remorse from her past obstructs her from surging ahead: "The struggle was so fearful: her own heart was so strongly on the side of his—two ardent hearts against one poor little conscience—that she tried to fortify her resolution by every means in her power" (pp. 212-213) [6]. She feels guilty about not revealing her past to him and continuously ruminates over confessing it to him. This thought leads her to wall in all her desires as she anticipates that the shadows of her past life may follow her into the present.

XIV. CONCLUSION

The close inquiry into Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* provides insights into mnemonic borderscapes that re-establish the profound link between natural terrain and social life. The study unfolds the features of mnemonic borderscapes that aid in the comprehension of human behaviour. It elucidates the social distinctions that limit the self of the individuals and place them in a contested space where the struggle for power never ceases. The unending conflict for power that creates sites of trauma and grief is disclosed through the scrutiny of Tess's character.

The slithering of memories from the trauma sites into the present depicted by Hardy decodes how the borders direct the concurrent human actions. The frequent oscillation of Tess's memories draws attention to the dynamicity of borderscapes. The time-transcending nature of the mnemonic borders further affirms its universality. The pre-eminent nature of the mnemonic borderscapes is ineluctable in fostering the social interaction in the contemporary world where individuals traverse through visible demarcation of land and invisible dissections of mind.

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Culinary Rituals and Carnival Time: Thiruvathirakali as Ritual Space for Kerala Women

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Abstract— *Thiruvathirakali is the women-centred folklore festival of Kerala's Nair and Namboothiri communities. This paper examines the interconnectedness of ritual, food culture, and women's health. Drawing on interviews with traditional knowledge holders and ethnographic observation, the study maps ritual routines (bathing rites, Pathirapoochoodal, Poothiruvathira), festival performances, and the seasonal dishes prepared for Makairam and Thiruvathira days (Ettangadi, Thiruvathirapuzhuku, special drinks and snacks). Situating these practices within Kerala's agrarian and caste-structured lifeways, the paper argues that festival foodways are both symbolic and functional: they encode social meanings, enable sanctioned transgression during carnival time, and provide nutritive and medicinal benefits tailored to the female body and seasonal exigencies. Reading Thiruvathirakali through Bakhtin's carnivalesque highlights how temporary suspension of everyday taboos creates collective space for embodied solidarity and potential resistance, even as such freedoms remain circumscribed by broader social hierarchies. The paper concludes that Thiruvathira's culinary rituals perform dual roles — preserving communal identity and offering pragmatic health practices — and calls for further comparative and clinical research to assess the long-term health implications of these traditional food regimes*

Keywords— ***Thiruvathirakali, Ritual performance, Carnivalesque, Kerala women, Agrarian culture, Kerala folklore***

I. INTRODUCTION

Kerala, often called "God's Own Country," is a narrow strip of land on the southwestern coast of India, lying between the Arabian Sea and the Western Ghats. From ancient times, the people of Kerala have followed distinct food habits shaped by season, occasion, ritual, and social custom. In every important life event — birth, marriage, death, festivals, and temple observances — food has carried symbolic as well as practical meaning. Kerala's food culture is therefore inseparable from its ritual traditions and social life.

Among the many ritual performances of Kerala, Thiruvathirakali occupies a special place as a women's dance associated with Thiruvathira, a festival rooted in myth, devotion, and collective feminine practice. The festival is linked to the legend of Goddess Parvathi's penance to win Lord Shiva as her husband. According to popular belief, women observe Thiruvathira with fasting, bathing, devotional songs, and dance in order to pray for marital harmony, the well-being and long life of their husbands, and, for young women, an ideal life partner. The ritual therefore combines religious faith, domestic aspiration, and cultural memory.

Thiruvathira is not only a festival of worship but also a reflection of Kerala's older tribal and agrarian life. The customs associated with the festival — ritual baths before dawn, night-long wakefulness, flower gathering, lamp worship, and the preparation of special foods — show the deep connection between ritual and livelihood in traditional Kerala society. The foods prepared for Thiruvathira are usually light, seasonal, and nutritious, reflecting the agricultural rhythm of the region as well as the discipline of the ritual observance. In this sense, food

becomes part of the sacred act itself, expressing both bodily restraint and cultural identity.

As modern urban life and industrialization have transformed social habits, many of these beliefs and ritual food practices have lost their earlier depth of meaning for younger generations. This study seeks to recover that cultural knowledge by examining the relationship between Thiruvathira rituals and food traditions, and by showing how the festival preserves the memory of Kerala's agrarian past, mythic imagination, and women-centered ritual life.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study is based on interviews conducted among Brahmin and Nair women in Kerala, the principal participants in the observance of Thiruvathira. Supplementary information was gathered from traditional knowledge holders and community elders with direct familiarity with the ritual and its associated food culture. This approach helped document the festival's customs, ritual practices, and culinary traditions as preserved and transmitted by women within these communities.

III. DISCUSSION

Rituals and Cultural Connectivity

Rituals are indispensable components of social life: they materialize abstract religious beliefs and render visible a community's worldview. The distinctive customs of a people reveal their heritage, value systems, and collective memory. Broadly, such customs can be classified as social customs, household rituals, caste-based practices, and regional or national rites. Caste and religion often crystallize around fixed convictions; to validate and perpetuate these convictions, communities attach particular ritual practices and ritual arts to them. The ritual aesthetics and alimentary codes associated with Thiruvathirakali illustrate how ritual practice encodes and communicates community identity.

Lineage from Margazhi Observance

Thiruvathira is also best understood within the larger season of Danumasam (Margazhi). In Kerala, Thiruvathira functions as a continuation and regional variant of the Margazhi lent observance found in Tamil Nadu, where women keep early-morning rituals, sing devotional songs, and observe special dietary and devotional routines through the month. The underlying belief of Thiruvathira centers on marital welfare: unmarried girls pray for a suitable husband, while married women pray for the long life and well-being of their husbands. The songs of Thiruvathira explicitly recount the ritual acts — bathing in the river or stream, singing through the morning, refraining from rice, and keeping night vigils — and the culinary preparations begin the evening before Thiruvathira on Makairam day. These practices share the seasonal rhythm and devotional focus of Margazhi, even as local gestures, songs (including regionally specific Thiruvathira songs), and dance-forms like Thiruvathirakali create a distinct Keralan identity for the festival. As a practitioner of Thiruvathirakali, I follow the customs that begin seven days before Thiruvathira with care and devotion. Each morning at dawn we rise early to take raw turmeric (pachamanjal), castor seeds (avanakkinkuru), a garland of ten different leaves (dashapushpamala), and sandalwood with us to the bathing place. When we enter the water, we submerge fully up to the waist so the lower body—especially the pelvis and spine—is immersed; this posture is believed to strengthen the backbone and the uterus. As we stand together in the flowing water, two palms strike and produce a clear, swishing sound called thudi. One singer leads the songs that accompany each beat and everyone else responds and dances to the rhythm.

Thudichukuli : The ritual bath

Ritual bathing is central to Kerala's religious imagination and appears across yajnas, vratas (fasts), Balitharpanam (ancestor rites), and posthumous ceremonies. In the Thiruvathira sequence, observance begins with the Ashwathina nakshatra and culminates on Thiruvathira. Noyambu (fasting) conventionally includes a predawn bath. Women who observe the fast gather at ponds before dawn bearing the Nilavilakku (traditional oil lamp) and the Ashtamangalyam (eight auspicious items), singing hymns that invoke the river goddess Ganga. Thudichukuli denotes the ritual act of dipping both hands into water while producing a resonant hum in time with the chant; after bathing, participants wear freshly washed clothes and visit the Shiva temple, linking personal purification with communal devotion.

Ashtamangalyam : The Eight Auspicious Items

Ashtamangalyam holds great importance in auspicious rituals and rituals. Ashtamangalyam, the arrangement of eight auspicious items, is a recurrent and essential feature of Kerala's auspicious rituals. Ashtamangalyam, include *niranazi* (a measure or receptacle connoting abundance), gold, Valkannadi (tail mirror), *deepam*(lamp), *purnakumbha*(water filled pot), washed cloth, *mangalasthri* (married women) and *kurava* (auspicious sounds)with the concept of God. Togather they symbolize wealth and prosperity. *Ashtamangalyam* is essential for taking a bath, playing *Thiruvathira*, and *Pathirapoochoodal* (wearing flowers on hair at midnight).

Pathirapoochoodal

Pathirapoochoodal — the midnight adornment with flowers — is among Thiruvathira's most evocative rites. On the night of Thiruvathira Vrita, the women perform Thiruvathirakali after dusk. The women from the circle, clap their hands and sing various songs and dance the Thiruvathira through the night. At midnight they proceed to a nearby pala (Alstonia scholaris)tree with arpu and kurava. Clapping and singing with Ashtamangalyam and Talapoli (lamps). After dance and song around the platform, they gather Dasapushpam (ten sacred plants) and adorn their hair with these flowers. A rich corpus of songs is associated with the practice of arranging and wearing flowers.

***Dasapushpam*: Ethnobotanical and Symbolic Significance**

Dasapushpam refers to the ten medicinal or sacred plants used in Pathirapoochoodal. Commonly cited species include Karuka (Cynodon dactylon), Kaithonni (Eclipta alba), Mukutti (Biophytum sensitivum), Thiruthali (Ipomoea sepiaria), Poovamkurunthal (Cyanthillium cinereum), Nilapana (Curculigo orchioides), Uzhinja (Cardiospermum halicacabum), Cherula (Aerva lanata), Muyal Chevian (Emilia sonchifolia)and Krishnakranti (Evolvulus alsinoides. These plants carry both symbolic potency and practical ethnomedical value: they are believed to prevent widowhood, secure blessings for married life, and confer health benefits. Contemporary ethnobotanical studies corroborate that several of these species have antiseptic, anti-inflammatory, or nervine properties, which likely contributed to their ritual prominence.

***Poothiruvathira*: The First Married Celebration**

Poothiruvathira denotes the first Thiruvathira that a woman observes after marriage and signals the blossoming of conjugal life. Celebrated at the husband's household, the rite includes symbolic acts such as chewing a hundred and one betel leaves and performing a swing with the husband, gestures that mark fertility, marital union, and auspicious beginnings.

Thiruvathirakali: Ritual Context and Mythic Foundation

Thiruvathirakali is a ritual dance performed by women in Kerala and is deeply associated with the myth of Parvati's penance to win Shiva as her consort. The festival's ritual complex — including fasting, purificatory bathing, symbolic objects, songs, and food taboos — retains traces of tribal and agrarian seasonal practices. Celebrated on the Thiruvathira nakshatra in the month of Dhanu (roughly December–January), the rites show how earlier rural lifeways were integrated into the region's orthodox ritual calendar. Thiruvathirakali (kaikottikkali (Figur 1) must learn its intricate movement and rhythmic techniques, which are mostly transmitted orally through elders and community practitioners due to limited formal training; precise footwork and coordinated clapping—often moving laterally and toward or away from the central lamp—maintain rhythm and ensemble harmony, with steps executed across three tempo phases (Vilamba, Madhyama, Dhrutha) that alternate to produce graceful slow patterns or energetic fast passages, sometimes shifting to middle or double beats accompanied by soft singing and percussion; the dance integrates whole-body movement in circular formations around the nilavilakku, uses modest regional costume and call-and-response singing, and carries ritual and social meanings tied to Thiruvathira and community identity, while its survival depends on documenting exponents' oral histories, encouraging intergenerational teaching, and creating pedagogical resources so performers can continue to shape the tradition. Some songs which portrays thiruvathira songs in literature.

Angane ! Njanangu povathengane?
Inganekam manorajyam
enganeyennellam kel nee.
Inganeenmathamennalanganeyennurakka ne
Sankadamundeniykku, sadhayatha venamennil
Mangalagathri! Neeyendingane
tudangunnu?
Mangamarmanimawli! Mahithagunangal ninnil
Thingiyinangiyabhangurabangi vilangi
Pookkal pongi, athu mangi Guna,
angikariyathe pokil
Pankajabananoru pakayay chaminjathennil
Enganeyellamavaneyunnathitenne velvan
Angodingoduzhannangam
niramkedenda,
Shanka tudangukilengu sughangalothungu?
Manamingu, mizhiyangu, iniyengu
Chollopovathu? (Nalacharitham Attakadha)

Ganapathe mam palaya… Gowrithanaya…
Ganapathemam palaya…
Harihara poojitha ambujavilachana
Suramunisevitha sundara Gananadha…
Siddhivinayaka mukthi pradhayaka

Siddhigandarva dheithyasevitha

Gananadha Mushika vahana dhoshavimachana

Sheshabhushitha santhoshitha

Gananadha

Angushadharana Sankadanivarana

Venkidaramanabala vibhavasuraleya. (Tiruvathira kalayum anushtanavum)



Figure.1

Dress and ornaments

Thiruvathira is traditionally performed by women in Kerala in a simple yet refined costume that reflects modesty, purity, and regional identity. The customary attire is the **kasavu mundu and neriyathu** or a white saree bordered with gold, usually worn with a red blouse, jasmine flowers in the hair, and traditional ornaments that enhance the ritual elegance of the performance. The ornaments associated with Thiruvathira are generally understated rather than lavish, in keeping with the sacred and restrained character of the observance. Among the commonly worn ornaments are **moonnizhamanimala**, **talikoottam**, **palakkamala**, kashumala. kuzhalmothiram, pulinagathamala, chandraminni, earrings, bangles, anklets, and sometimes a waist belt or other traditional decorative pieces.

These ornaments, along with floral adornments and the sacred herbs used in the Thiruvathira context, contribute to the visual and symbolic richness of the dance. Such dress and ornament choices are significant because they connect Thiruvathira to Kerala's Brahminical household tradition, especially the older customs associated with upper-caste Hindu communities such as Namboothiris, Nairs, and Ambalavasis. The coordinated white-and-gold attire creates visual harmony in the group performance and reinforces the values of restraint, auspiciousness, femininity, and ritual grace that define the cultural aesthetics of Thiruvathira.

Ritual Foodways during Thiruvathira

Dietary practices are central to ritual life, calibrated to seasonal cycles, agricultural availability, and embodied needs. Although rice was historically the staple crop and often eaten three times daily, ritual contexts sometimes required partial or complete abstention from rice. Such dietary restrictions functioned as forms of embodied discipline that preserved bodily health and mental clarity. Preparations for Thiruvathira begin on Makairam day and include a repertoire of ritual foods: Ettangadi, Thiruvathirapuzhuku, Koova payasam, Ethakka chips, Koovakurukiyat, Chama kanji, and Koovarak Kachiyatu. The Poothiruvathira tea ceremony and the Thiruvathira sadya (ritual feast) were once central to the festival; in many locales these menus have been simplified under the pressures of urban life and changing taste.

Makairam Noyambu and Ettangadi

Makairam Noyambu is observed by mothers as a ritual devoted to the welfare and protection of their children. In this context, the Ettangadi nivedya — prepared on the evening of Makairam day — serves as the principal meal of the Thiruvathira observance. Ettangadi is a composite dish made from eight varieties of tubers and yams: these are traditionally roasted over fire, chopped into small pieces, and combined to form the offering. The preparation and sharing of Ettangadi (Figure 2,3,4,5,6,7) take place at dusk.

The offering ritual is carried out with devotional attention: worshippers meditate on Ganesha, Parvati–Paraśvara (Parvati and Parameswara), and Chandra (the Moon) while lighting a lamp on a dung-smeared spot in the household courtyard, a practice that invokes auspiciousness and ritual purity in rural Kerala rites. After the consecration, Ettangadi is distributed to all present as prasāda, thereby transforming a domestic meal into a communal sacrament that reaffirms social bonds and maternal concerns for offspring.

Table 1: Ingredients of Ettangadi

Sl.no	Common name	Botanical Name	Part used
1.	*Chembu*	*Colocasia esculenta (L.) Schott*	Corm
2.	*Chena*	*Amorphophallus paeoniifolius (Dennst.) Nicols. var. campanulatus (Decne.) Sivad.*	Corm

3.	*Madhura kizhangu*	*Ipomoea batatas (L.) Lam.*	Tuber
4.	*Nana kizhangu*	*Dioscorea Dioscorea esculenta*	Tuber
5.	*Cheru kizhangu*	*Dioscorea esculenta (Lour.) Burkill*	Tuber
6.	*Kavathu*	*Dioscorea alata L.*	Tuber
7.	*Koorka*	*Plectranthus barbatus (Andrews) Benth. ex G. Don*	Tuber
8.	*Ethen kaya*	*Musa paradisiaca L.*	Fruit

Ettangadi is prepared by washing, peeling, and cutting the required tubers and raw plantain into small pieces, then cooking or roasting them until soft. The cooked ingredients are mixed with cooked cowpeas, grated or chopped tender coconut, scraped jaggery, and sometimes roasted sesame seeds, after which the mixture is gently combined and offered with a lit lamp as nivedya before being shared as prasada.













Thiruvathirapuzhuk

Kerala's ancient agrarian prosperity is clearly reflected in the food and drink traditions connected with Thiruvathira rituals. Among these, **Thiruvathira puzhukku** occupies a central place as the principal festive dish of Thiruvathira day. It is a wholesome (Figure 8)preparation made by combining a variety of locally available tubers and related crops such as yam, sorghum, kachil, cassava, koorka, and sweet potato. These ingredients are cleaned, peeled, chopped into pieces, and cooked together before being mixed with salt, grated coconut, coconut oil, and curry leaves. The simplicity of the preparation, along with the use of seasonal produce, reflects the close relationship between ritual food and Kerala's traditional agricultural economy.

In the older custom, after the observance of the Thiruvathira Noyambu was completed, families would partake in a rich and elaborate feast. This post-fasting meal marked the conclusion of the ritual fast and transformed the day into a celebration of nourishment, togetherness, and domestic auspiciousness. In contemporary practice, however, this feast has in many places been absorbed into temple-centered observances, showing how ritual customs change over time while still retaining their cultural significance.

Table 2 Ingredients of Thiruvathira puzhukku

Sl.no	Ingredients	Botanical Name	Part Used
1.	*Kachil*	*Dioscorea alata L.*	Tuber
2.	*Chembu*	*Colocasia esculenta (L.) Schott*	Corm
3.	*Chena*	*Amorphophallus paeoniifolius (Dennst.) Nicols. var. campanulatus (Decne.) Sivad.*	Corm
4.	*Ethen kaya*	*Musa paradisiaca L.*	Fruit
5.	*Kappa*	*Manihot esculenta*	Tuber
6.	*Koorka*	*Plectranthus barbatus (Andrews) Benth. ex G. Don*	Tuber
7.	*Nana kizhangu*	*Dioscorea esculenta*	Tuber
8.	*Vanpayar*	*Vigna unguiculata (L.) Walp.*	Seed
9.	*Jeerakam*	*Cuminum cyminum L*	Fruit
10.	*Thenga*	*Cocos nucifera L*	Endosperm
11.	*Manjal podi*	*Curcuma longa L.*	Rhizome
12.	*Kariveppu*	*Murraya koenigii (L.) Spreng.*	Leaf
13.	*salt*		



Poothiruvathira and Kapisalkaram

It is also customary for the relatives to gather at the house where Poothiruvathira (Figure 9) is being celebrated in the evening. The food served as part of Kapisalkaram generally includes kuva kurukiyathu, boiled banana, chips, and dry ginger coffee. After this, Thiruvathirapuzhuku is served on a large banana leaf or wrapped in a plantain leaf, and the relatives usually depart after watching the Thiruvathira performance. This custom reveals the collective and domestic character of the festival, in which food, kinship, and ritual entertainment are closely interwoven.



Special drinks of Thiruvathira

The beverages associated with Thiruvathira are as significant as Ettangadi and Thiruvathirapuzhuku. Before dawn, after taking the ritual bath, ilaneer or tender coconut water is usually consumed first. Tender coconut water is valued for its cooling and restorative qualities; in popular understanding, it purifies the blood and helps regulate body heat. As a seasonal and easily digestible drink, it fits the fasting discipline and bodily demands of the observance.

Kuvanoor Kachiyatu

After visiting the Shiva temple in the morning, devotees commonly eat ripe plantain, boiled banana, and boiled chickpeas. Kuva is prepared by grinding and drying kuva roots, and Kuva noor or Kuvanoor is regarded as a medicinal food with cooling properties. Such preparations show how Thiruvathira ritual food is not limited to symbolic offering, but also reflects a practical understanding of nutrition and bodily balance.

Chama kanji and Koovarak Kachiyatu

The principal food consumed during Thiruvathira Noyambu is Thiruvathirapuzhuku along with porridge made from chamayari or koovarak. These foods are especially suitable for relieving fatigue and sustaining the body during fasting and night-long observance. Some households also include Ethakka upperi, or banana chips, and papadam kachiyatu as part of the meal. In this way, the food tradition combines simplicity, nourishment, and ritual discipline.

Chukku coffee and betel chewing

Since the Thiruvathira observance requires devotees to remain awake through the night, sleep is discouraged during the ritual period. To reduce tiredness and drowsiness during the night-long Thiruvathirakali, hot chukku coffee is prepared with dry ginger, black pepper, and sometimes other warming ingredients. Betel leaf chewing also forms part of the ritual habit associated with Thiruvathira. These practices serve both a symbolic and functional role, helping participants sustain energy while reinforcing the festive atmosphere.

Agrarian basis of the ritual

If we examine the materials used in Thiruvathira rituals and the food prepared as part of them, we can see that they are closely connected to Kerala's agricultural life. The month of Dhanu coincides with the harvest season for many crops, especially tubers, plantains, and pulses, all of which are used in the observance. By avoiding rice and eating nourishing, lightly cooked, seasonal foods, participants can maintain physical well-being even while following a sleepless ritual schedule. The celebration also strengthens bodily fitness, brings women together in collective participation, and creates a sense of emotional joy and social belonging. In this sense, the food practices of Thiruvathira reveal important aspects of women's social life in earlier Kerala society.

IV. CONCLUSION

Food is one of the most fundamental needs of human life, yet every community develops its own distinctive food culture and daily dietary habits. Indian tradition has often understood food as both sacred and medicinal. The Upanishadic statement "Annamayam hi somya mana:" points to the intimate connection between food and the human mind. This relationship becomes especially visible in Kerala cultural practice, where ritual occasions often functioned as a means of bodily care through the avoidance of fish, meat, and other heavy foods in favor of

natural and locally available ingredients. The foods associated with Thiruvathirakali are rich in fibre and nutritive value, and they also reflect a broader concern with women's health and bodily balance. Thus, although the outward form of the ritual is religious, the inner logic of its food culture reveals a careful and intelligent system of health maintenance, seasonal adaptation, and communal well-being.

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Existential Angst an outcome of the Modern life in Eugene O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*.

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Abstract— *This study surrounds the existential crisis that Yank and by extension, every man suffers due to industrialization and the fast-paced growth of society. Through Yank's descent from being the man who seems to be in control of his world to a man who is nothing but a hairy ape, O'Neill wants to portray the reality of modern life. The researcher intends to explore Yank's existential crisis due to the mechanization of society. Existential and Marxist lens are the primary lens' used in building the argument that Yank's ultimate death is a product of the dehumanization of the modern working class at the hands of the bourgeois.Yank is the mirror image of the modern man who has worked all his life but never found a place of belonging of his own Yank's existential dilemma stems from not only having a place of belonging, nothing to call home but also a result of the exploitation he suffers in his labour due to the exploitative strategies of the bourgeois class that is ultimately contributing to his existential dillemma.*

Keywords— ***Alienation, Authentic self, death as a place of belonging, Existential Crisis, Social self***.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the mechanized world, man has become nothing but a machine, working to attain material objects, having no satisfaction in what he has worked for, but continuing to do so, leading to alienation. Alienation of the working class leads to an existential crisis. Yank is the mirror image of the modern man who has worked all his life but never found a place of belonging of his own. He has tricked himself into believing that he belongs to tangible objects – the ship, the steel, the fire, dehumanizing himself, all contributing to the repressed reality, ultimately, he does not belong. The evolution of the modern world began with industrialization, with rapid industrialization, the upper class has evolved over the labour of the working class, preventing their evolution, and alienating them in their labour (when there is no job satisfaction but the job prevails). Yank's alienation is a bit more complex and heart-wrenching. Yank associates himself completely with the ship and he believes that he "we belong"(O'Neill 10), which is true, that it's his and the entire working class' labour that the superstructure is surviving and thriving on. However, he has no place of "belonging" and that is his alienation. He has repressed his dehumanization and tricked himself into believing that he moves the world, as if he is the apex creature in the hierarchy of society. The reality is the complete opposite of this, he is nothing but "a hairy ape" in the eyes of the bourgeois world, a primitive ancestor who is surviving due to his primal instincts- his strength to move the ship.

II. A MAN'S SEARCH FOR BELONGING.

According to Sartre, death removes and takes away meaning from one's life but in Yank's condition, death is the only place where he can belong because Yank's present situation is hell with no place of belonging. Yank's existential angst stems from the reality that death and the afterlife which Sartre in "Being and Nothingness" calls meaningless, as nothing can experienced after death becomes absurd because O'Neill through his stage direction hints, "[He slips in a heap on the floor and dies. The monkey set up a chattering, whimpering wail. And,

perhaps, the Hairy Ape, at last, belongs.]" (O'Neill 34), that perhaps Yanks belongs in death, this puts forth the notion that Yank and through him every man's only consolation is that he would belong after death. Death could only become meaningless if there is some meaning to one's life. Life could be meaningful if there is a place of belonging, a sense of belonging.

Sartre believed that 'existence precedes essence' giving importance to the Self over the associations the 'self' is known for. This idea boosts one's self-perception, I exist and so "I" comes before my qualities or my work, this makes the individual important, and adds meaning to life. However, Yank does not belong because he has attached his identity to his essence, "I'm part of de engines!" (O'Neill 11) in his physical prowess, he has associated himself, and his essence with objects, dehumanizing his existence.

Yank does not have a home to return to. There are only two instances in the entire drama where Yank speaks of his family both someways showcase that as a young boy, he was exposed to the ugly side of the family, he says, "I runned away from mine when I was a kid" (O'Neill 9), "Home was lickings for me dat's all" (O'Neill 9) or when he remembers his parents going to church to ask forgiveness for their sins and then later physically abusing him, "dey bot' jumped on me for somep'n. Dat was where I loined to take punishment" (O'Neill 22).

These instances suggest that Yank is disillusioned with the institution of family.

Family never gave a sense of belonging to him, it was never a home to him. As a result, he experiences, he feels a sense of detachment from his fellow stokers who speak of returning home or returning to the love of their lives. Yank does not feel the need to love a woman as he suggests that ever since he ran away from home no one has liked him since then (O'Neill 9), this hints at the fact that Yank has somehow internalized the idea that he could never be liked.

Yank also experiences disillusion towards religion, believes there is no heaven, and does not like the conversation about the Bible (O'Neill 9-10). This is a prevalent theme of modern life, disillusionment from religion, as religion no longer provides solace. His hatred could also stem from a lack of change in his circumstances, the absurdity of waiting for God to change his life, he might have been an ardent believer once but no change in his situations must have hardened him against religion. Religion is also an important aspect as it serves as a morality clock governing man's life choices. O'Neil, creates a character who does not believe in the abstract concept of God and, therefore attaches himself to the concrete ship.

Yank does not feel a sense of companionship with his peers. His peers appear to be divided into two factions one with those following the beliefs of communism like Long who calls fellow stokers "Comrades" (O'Neill 9) a common thing among the followers of communism. He assumes the position of the organic intellectual who points out the problem in the current system, "This is 'ell. We lives in 'ell, Comrades – and right enough we'll die in it" (O'Neill 9). An intellectual ideology of ship being hell, hinting at the oppression they have suffered at the hands of the bourgeois alienating them from their jobs. The second faction comprises the people of the first generation like Paddy who come from a past wherein work and the individual each held their worth and man and nature co-existed harmoniously. "Twas them days men belonged to ships, not no. 'Twas them days a ship was a part of the sea, and a man was part of a ship, and the sea joined all together and made it one" (O'Neill 11). This makes Yank an outsider as he belongs to neither of the factions. This highlights the extent to which Yank has been outcasted.

However, Yank does not belong to the ship, he so believes moves because of him. The ship is a symbol of capitalism, a symbol that Milred's father represents – the capitalist society. The characters of Paddy and Long recognize that they are being exploited, they are nothing but a source of profit for the bourgeois, almost making them the 'organic intellectual' that Gramsci speaks of, however, they fail before the ideology of Yank for whom ship represents him, it is his only identity, a concrete one that he takes pride in. The ship is a symbol of his strength he believes without him the ship is nothing. He fails to recognize that in a mechanical society, his labour is replaceable, he is replaceable. Ironically O'Neill in The Hairy Ape calls Yank the "Rodin's Thinker" (O'Neill 18) this adds to the humorous tragedy of modern life, that a man who fails to recognize his dehumanization and compares himself to an object assumes the position of the Thinker, who is referred as an intellectual.

The critic Robinson says, "Social Darwinism caused men to idealize man's struggle against nature" (Robinson 105). To reiterate in Yank's case masculinity is associated with struggling and survival and therefore there's belongingness in it. Yank takes a lot of pride in his physical prowess and that is the reason why he belongs. He considers himself as one with iron, "de engines" (O'Neill 11), or when he says, "Steel was me and I owned de woild" (O'Neill 32). He feels emasculated when Mildred calls him a "filthy beast" (O'Neill 17).

This begins a domino effect where Yank realizes he does not belong to the ship, he has been exploited by the capitalist society into feeling proudful over his dehumanization something that Robinson says, "The working-class Primitive Masculine identity in which he gloried is revealed to him as a subject to manipulation by a higher, invisible authority against which it is futile to revolt" (Robinson 105). Douglas, Mildred's father represents the higher authority in this situation. An authority that represents the bourgeois and Mildred somehow becomes the catalyst in the recognition. However, as Robinson mentioned it is a futile fight against an authority that has long established and maintained the cultural hegemony over a prolonged period through the ideological apparatus they have ingrained in strong individuals like Yank, for Yank this apparatus suggests that he belongs because it is his strength that moves the world. To reinforce their ideologies, they keep the workers engaged in nothing but work, "Dis a man's job, get me? It belongs" (O'Neill 10).

Yank's reaction to this recognition leads to anger, a primary emotion that Yank responds to in any given situation. Yank directs his anger from Milred to what Mildred represents; the capitalist class. Here on, Yank begins his fight to belong in the society that considers him nothing but a brainless ape (O'Neill 32). He begins his plan of action by searching for the source of his emasculation and existential crisis; that is Mildred and by extension the capitalist society. However, Yank's approach towards the technologically advanced society is rather primitive, based on his physical strength. Yank fails both in the endeavour to reconcile with his past identity of steel and the vengeance he harbours towards the capitalist world. He is faced with the reality that he does not belong even on "Fifth Avenue Street", a bourgeois hub, because not only do they "avoid the spot where he stands in the middle of the sidewalk" (O'Neill 24) but they also maintained the farce of etiquettes, "I beg your pardon" (O'Neill 24) to maintain the discourse and express their superiority, thus justifying their status. They ignore his sheer existence with the recognition that he comes from a working-class background, which is very evident from his clothes. This further adds to his alienation and exposes him to the harsh reality of his oppression further adding to the existential angst. By exerting his physical dominance, he wanted to assert his masculinity and by extension, his belongingness but the treatment he receives at Fifth Avenue Street adds to his awareness that he does not belong among the bourgeois.

He does not belong even in the Blackwell Island jail. Blackwell Island represents the coercive technique of the capitalist society to maintain hegemony. It is a rehabilitation center, "a coop" (O'Neill 25) as fellow inmates state. A place for domesticating the individual who fails to adhere to the rules of the bourgeois or those who threaten their dominance. Most of the individuals here have already been domesticated, but Yank becomes an oddball, almost an outcast in this coop because he believes, perhaps he belongs to the zoo, "Dis is de Zoo" (O'Neill 25). The zoo would represent wilderness, thus hinting at his wild actions which the society is failing to regulate through coercion. Although they succeed in achieving control over him through their ideology, which further alienates him, and when the realization set in, he became out of control, almost harmful to their existence.

He does not even belong among I.W.W, that is, Industrial Workers of the World. This association is working against the oppressive capitalist class, and therefore, the right place for an alienated individual like Yank to associate with, but this association is made up by 'the traditional intellectual. Although they believe they are detached from the capitalist class their actions are definitely governed by them and they are very much a part of this group. This group fails to provide Yank with a sense of belonging as he wants to attain justice immediately. The I.W.W works towards educating the working class about their oppression, educating them about the philosophy of communism. They use peaceful means to agitate against the bourgeois class, but Yank is driven by the only force that governs his intellect; his survival instincts of kill or be killed, thus failing to belong with the I.W.W. His existential dilemma becomes evident after being failed by every human association or the ship – all concrete and tangible concepts, or the abstract concept of God, he recognizes the problem is that "I was born, see? Dat's de charge" (O'Neill 33), questioning his existence.

Yank realizes that he does not belong with his labour, on the contrary, he has been manipulated to work although there is no job satisfaction, he has been oppressed, and his labour has disillusioned his existence, which leads to the search for his lost identity. This journey should have begun when a child is in his childhood or adolescence, the question with whom do I belong? Yank does not belong to his contemporary society because this society now relies heavily on machines whereas Yank heavily relies on his strength. Yank does not belong among the divided factions of his peers because there is a recognition of oppression among them, with some resorting to the reminiscence of a time when man was free, others resorting to the ideology of communism and Yank belongs to none. Yank's existential angst represents every man's reality- the search for the authentic self in the wake of the alienation suffered at the hands of the social self makes him a universal figure. Yank's final encounter with the ape is his way of trying to

search for his existence in the ancient past of his ancestor; the Ape. From the very beginning of the play, Yank's physical features are described in close association with an ape, "pounding on his chest, gorilla- like" (O'Neill 17), or the comparison to a Neanderthal Man (O'Neill 6) makes him want to search for his authentic self in the past. However, he understands that he has never truly lived or experienced the past, therefore, he cannot belong there, he says, "Sure, it was great stuff. I got it aw right – what Paddy said about bein' de right dope—on'y I couldn't get IN it, see? I couldn't belong in dat" (O'Neill 33).

It is in the eighth scene, where Yank acknowledges himself as the hairy ape succumbing to the pressure of society as a result of the failure of domestication and the failure of Yank to find the authenticity of his existence. There is the recognition that he does not belong with the ape but also the acceptance of the identity of a hairy ape. Yank, then is a modern ape, as he has physically evolved from the ancestor, in that sense he is a 'man', but he has failed to evolve existentially, however, it is hinted by O'Neill that although the ape is a degenerate in the modern world as he has failed to evolve but, existentially he is in sync with his authentic self, as seen through his interaction with the ape. He says to the ape, "Yuh're lucky, see? Yuh don't belong with 'em and yuh know it. But me, I belong wit 'em – but I don't" (O'Neill 33).

This inability to identify with the past or the present makes life hell, "I ain't on oith and I ain't even in heaven, get me? I'm in de middle tryin' to separate 'em, takin' all de woist punches from bot' of 'em. Maybe dat's what dey call hell" (O'Neill 34). He neither belongs to the present earth nor the past heaven and therefore his existence has become hell. The hell Yank speaks of is not a literal hell or the hell mentioned in the religious texts, rather this is a metaphorical hell created by man himself. This is an existential hell, created in the mind preventing the individual from appreciating the experiences of life when Yank says, "Steel was me, and I owned de woild. Now I ain't steel, and de woild owns me" (O'Neill 32). This existential hell is a product of Yank's alienation from the steel he so believed was him. The recognition of this reality torments Yank, up until he did not know the steel, he believed was him, the blindness of it gave him a make-believe triumph over the world. The epiphany of oppression struck his very ownership and diminished him to nothing but a degenerate, clinging to his physical prowess (essence), while he has no identity to call his (loss of existence). As a result, he tries to cling to the identity of an ape to find some comfort in connection to the past, "God's masterpiece, would soon degenerate back to the ape" (O'Neill 28).

Yank's existential inferno could be best explored through the lines of Guido from Dante's Inferno,

> /If I thought that my reply would be to one/
> who would ever return to the world, /
> this flame would stir no more; and yet, since none — /
> if what I hear is true — ever returned /
> alive from this abyss, then without fear /
> of facing infamy, I answer you. (Dante 61-66).

III. CONCLUSION

These lines explain Yank's existential crisis, this existential inferno prevents Yank from returning to normalcy because no one has been able to return once they have entered hell. It's an abyss that cinsumes the life out of an individual. It isolates him from the past that he has heard of and never experienced but it isolates him from his present as well, that is why, when Yank frees the ape in the eighth scene he wants to reconcile with the ancestor as a way to pull himself out of the inferno that is feeding on his physical existence but fails because no one has been able to escape it. The inferno isolates him from his present because his evolution has been stunted somewhere in the middle of the past and the present making him unable to connect with his present reality. He is a creature who relies both on his past survival instinct (a residual product inherited from the ancestor); his physical prowess and the present association with the steel (his essence), but he has no form of human connection important for identity formation, thus making it impossible to escape this hell.

The only escape then available for Yank, although Sartre might disagree is death. The inferno created by the deprivation of existence or any meaning to that existence has made Yank disillusioned with the world. O'Neill's last comment in the play suggests "[He slips in a heap on the floor and dies. The monkey set up a chattering, whimpering wail. And, perhaps, the Hairy Ape, at last, belongs.]" (O'Neill 34), that there is some meaning in his death. There is some profound sense of belonging in his death, the answer to where he belongs; Yank belongs in his death. The same understanding that Camus wants the reader to believe in Sisyphus' eternal punishment of rolling the boulder, there is some satisfaction that he attains although his life is absurd, there is hope in that punishment.

Similarly, although there is no experience in death there is some consolation that he has found a place of belonging in death. His death is the end of his existential crisis but it is an outcome of the mechanization of the world, where those

who own the means of production exploit the labour of the workers, and maintain the hegemony through their manipulative ideologies, alienating the worker, thus taking all meaning out of their life. They become a 'living machine' programmed to perform the task over and over without any incentives making fruitful life experiences appear mundane and monotonous, stripping the individual's authentic self, adding to their alienation, and transforming their life into an inferno with no place of rest. The shattering of Yank's illusion of belonging to the world sets in motion his futile fight against a well-established and enrooted authority to his ultimate descension into hell. Thereby portraying Yank's existential angst as an outcome of the modern capitalist world.

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A Study on Illness Writing in *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place* from the Perspective of Spiritual Ecology

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Abstract— *Terry Tempest Williams's nonfiction Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place interweaves family trauma and ecological crisis through a dual narrative, standing as a classic spanning nature writing, trauma literature, and women's literature. Using Lu Shuyuan's Spiritual Ecology theory as its core framework, this paper focuses on two manifestations of spiritual ecological imbalance reflected in the work's illness writing, spiritual vacuum and behavioral incompetence, analyzes the underlying causes behind the imbalance, and explores the practical paths for the reconstruction of spiritual ecology. The study finds that ecological pollution caused by nuclear tests and alienation from nature driven by anthropocentrism jointly lead to the imbalance of individual spiritual ecology. However, the restoration and reconstruction of spiritual ecology can be achieved through individuals' self-reconciliation with illness and the reconstruction of spiritual connections between humans and nature. The similar fates of the community of women and bird species in the work not only reveal the dual crises of spiritual ecological imbalance and natural ecological destruction in modern society but also provide a literary reference for contemporary people to address spiritual predicaments and ecological challenges.*

Keywords— ***Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place; Spiritual Ecology; Illness Writing; Spiritual Ecological Imbalance***

I. INTRODUCTION

The renowned contemporary American author Terry Tempest Williams (1955-) is a writer who integrates feminism, Mormon faith, scientific inquiry, environmental activism, and social engagement, with her prose distinguished by exceptional beauty and passionate conviction. *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place* (1991), [1] her representative work, is hailed as a classic of American nature writing. Based on the author's own life experiences, the work constructs two interwoven narrative threads: one traces the family's history of women battling cancer—Williams's grandmother, maternal grandmother, mother, and aunts all contracted breast cancer due to long-term residence downwind from the U.S. nuclear test site, becoming the "Clan of One-Breasted Women"; the other recounts the ecological transformation of the Great Salt Lake, where rising water levels submerge the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge near her hometown, causing birds to lose their habitat and face a survival crisis.

The book's thirty-six chapters are titled after bird species, with each chapter noting the lake's elevation beneath the title. The fluctuating water levels subtly echo the progression of her mother's cancer and the fate of the

[1] In this paper, full title of the book will be given at first reference but shortened in subsequent references as "*Refuge*".

bird refuge. As Anson puts it, "...both the feminine and the natural world as concurrent *loci* of Foucault's biopolitical power. And it is the amalgam of land and woman that situates both to be what can be seen as victims of biopolitical race war" (69). By blending personal grief over loss, familial trauma from illness, and ecological crisis, Williams depicts through delicate prose the physical and psychological torment of disease, as well as the process of drawing strength from nature to reconstruct the meaning of life. By the Great Salt Lake, the fates of the community of women and the bird species are closely linked, and their shared circumstances forge them into a "community of life" (Li and Wang 96). The work's unique structural design, profound ecological reflection, and sincere emotional expression make it a cross-genre classic that transcends nature writing, trauma literature, and women's literature.

Since the rise of industrial civilization, particularly in the twentieth century, the excessive exploitation and development of natural resources have severely damaged the ecological environment, triggering a series of ecological crises. Meanwhile, the rapid transformation of modern society and the phenomenal growth of the economy have far exceeded humanity's adaptive capacity, plunging modern individuals into various spiritual predicaments. These crises not only result in individual psychological imbalance and loosening of social bonds but also pose systemic challenges to the evolution of human civilization on a macro level. "Applying the concept of 'Spiritual Ecology' to the interpretation of 'historical experience' can offer valuable insights for contemporary social development" (Lu 10). Against this backdrop, ecocriticism in both Eastern and Western literary studies has turned its attention to the human spiritual sphere, gradually giving rise to spiritual ecology as a subfield of ecocriticism, seeking to uncover the ecological wisdom embedded in literary texts and explore pathways to resolve the spiritual ecological crisis.

As a branch of ecology, spiritual ecology emerged in the course of ecological development. In the process of reflecting on ecological crises and spiritual confusion, in addition to the natural and social environments, spiritual ecology has increasingly been emphasized and gained theoretical support. Lu Shuyuan posits that "spirit" primarily encompasses human emotional, cognitive, and volitional activities, which are outwardly manifested in value orientations, reflective capacities, and the pursuit of belief. Observing that ecology encompasses a vast array of subjects, and inspired by "the trichotomous research paradigm" at home and abroad, Lu divides ecology into three components: first, natural ecology, which focuses on the relatively independent natural world; second, social ecology, which centers on the political and economic life of human society; and third, spiritual ecology, which takes human inner emotional activities and the spiritual world as its object of study. While closely related to the first two, spiritual ecology can nonetheless be defined as a relatively independent field of inquiry (Lu 145-147). Lu defines spiritual ecology as "a discipline that studies the interrelationships between spiritual subjects (primarily humans) and their environments (including natural, social, and cultural environments). It concerns, on the one hand, the healthy growth of spiritual subjects, and on the other, the balance, stability, and evolution of an ecosystem under the coordination of spiritual variables" (148). Therefore, an individual's spiritual ecology is an indispensable component of the overall ecosystem, and its state of health directly affects the harmony and stability of Earth's ecosystem. The research scope of spiritual ecology encompasses both the subtle connections between the inner spiritual world of humans and the external social and natural environments and the complex relational networks formed by the interaction of individual spirits among people. The harmonious coexistence of these two types of relationships is key to fostering a virtuous cycle within the ecosystem. Once they become imbalanced or discordant, they can easily become triggers that exacerbate ecological degradation. Lu argues that when the modern spiritual realm suffers from ecological pollution, it manifests in five symptoms: spiritual vacuum, behavioral incompetence, homogenization of lifestyle, existential alienation, and reification of the psyche (153-157). These five symptoms are sometimes not isolated but intertwine and reinforce each other, collectively forming a complex picture of the spiritual ecological imbalance of modern people.

Since its first publication in 1991, *Refuge* has garnered widespread academic attention. Scholars at home and abroad have approached the work from multiple dimensions and interdisciplinary perspectives, enriching and expanding its literary research framework and interpretive space. Current studies have covered autobiographical genre characteristics, elegiac narrative strategies, material feminism, Mormon cultural context, reconstruction of memory and natural/cultural landscapes, body writing, phenomenology, and archetypal criticism. Among the many research directions, ecocriticism has consistently been the core focus, with mainstream ecological theories such as land ethics, ecofeminism, ecological Marxism, ecopsychology, natural value theory, and deep ecology already incorporated into textual interpretation. However, it should be noted that existing research has not yet deeply explored the spiritual ecological connotations embedded in the illness writing of the work, nor systematically clarified the logical

interconnections between illness and the imbalances in natural, social, and spiritual ecology. Specialized research on illness writing from the perspective of spiritual ecology remains relatively underdeveloped, with further space for expansion and deepening.

In *Refuge*, the traumatic experiences of the women in Williams's family suffering from cancer resonate with the spiritual ecological imbalance revealed by Lu Shuyuan's theory. This paper, taking this theory as its core framework, focuses on two manifestations of spiritual ecological imbalance in the characters, namely, spiritual vacuum and behavioral incompetence, analyzes the causes of this imbalance, and explores feasible strategies for achieving spiritual ecological restoration and reconstruction through specific paths, aiming to provide literary insights and practical references for contemporary society in addressing spiritual predicaments and ecological crises.

II. ILLNESS AS MIRROR: MANIFESTATION OF SPIRITUAL ECOLOGICAL IMBALANCE

Spiritual vacuum refers to modern people losing not only the instinctive confidence of animals but also the measure of value at the cultural level, causing life to lose direction and meaning, and individuals to fall into a spiritual predicament of boredom and despair (Lu 152). In *Refuge*, the cancer experiences of the women in Williams's family are not merely physical ailments but manifestations of spiritual ecological imbalance on the bodily plane. The cancer progression of her mother, Diane, runs through the book, serving as a microcosm of the collapse and struggle of the individual and family spiritual world. In 1971, at age thirty-eight, Diane was first diagnosed with breast cancer; the trauma of a mastectomy left not only a bodily scar but also planted a latent fear of death in her heart. In 1983, when the cancer recurred and metastasized to her abdomen, this second blow utterly shattered her expectations of a stable life. Her muttered confession, "I think I have denied having cancer for years... I guess I'm giving up all sense of who I am" (Williams 200), reveals the collapse of self-identity: beyond her roles as wife and mother, her individual existence is completely dissolved by the disease, plunging her into the spiritual vacuum described by Lu.

Behavioral incompetence means that "modern people are subjected to invisible, debilitating control and compulsion; individuals appear increasingly powerless and increasingly dependent, which in turn triggers inner tension and anxiety" (Lu 153). The spiritual trauma caused by illness in the book is highly contagious, spreading throughout the family's emotional world. In caring for her mother, Williams not only endures the pain of losing a loved one but also falls into identity anxiety over whether she herself will also fall ill, given the family history of cancer. Particularly striking is her phone conversation with her cousin Lynne, who asks whether it is merely coincidence that "Three women in one family unrelated by blood, all contract cancer within months of each other?" "Terry, I'm scared for you and me" "So am I. So am I" (261), thus becoming trapped in a cycle of fear, avoidance, and confusion. For her father, John, learning of his wife's illness replaces his former steadfastness with a sense of powerlessness; he even loses emotional control in his fear as his wife nears death, rushing upstairs and shouting at the cars filling the driveway, "Get out! All of you! This is my house and my wife!" (227), and Williams feels her father's eyes look like "a rabid dog's" (228). Her brothers grew up under the shadow of their mother's possible departure; Hank, in particular, becomes silent and withdrawn during his mother's critical illness, burying his fear and grief deep inside. He is "the child who, since memory, has lived with the fear that his mother may die. He could not speak" (207). With grandmothers Lettie and Mimi and other female members in the family successively dying from cancer, a chain of intergenerational trauma is formed. Every family member becomes sensitive and fragile under the shadow of illness, and the family, once warm and close, grows distant and suffocating.

This trauma also manifests as doubt about the meaning of life and the collapse of spiritual pillars. During chemotherapy, Diane experiences intense physical pain and mental torment. During her first treatment, she feels "so cold, even blankets wouldn't help" (42). The side effects of subsequent chemotherapy like vomiting and hair loss cause her agony, but more painful is the despair of losing control over her life. She hesitates and says, "I'm not afraid of my own death, but I am afraid of the pain" (155). Behind this fear of pain lies a sense of powerlessness over life's dignity being stripped away by disease. Life is no longer a hopeful journey but has become a long standoff with a terminal illness, as her spiritual world gradually crumbles under repeated blows. When Williams and her family care for Diane, they experience times when "horror splashes our skin like scalding water as we watch her writhe with nausea and pain" (213). Although Diane "is still the peacemaker trying to create a calm in the midst of her death" and "there is nothing she can do to ameliorate the situation" (214), Williams herself comes to believe that "An individual doesn't get cancer, a family does" (214).

III. TRACING THE ROOTS: CAUSES OF SPIRITUAL ECOLOGICAL IMBALANCE

Behind the high incidence of cancer among Williams's female family members lies a hidden ecological contamination. The environmental pollution brought about by nuclear testing becomes a deep-seated cause of spiritual ecological imbalance. The author's family had long resided by the Great Salt Lake in Utah, which happened to lie downwind from the Nevada nuclear test site. From 1951 to 1962, the United States conducted numerous above-ground nuclear tests in the area, and radioactive fallout blanketed the surrounding land and water sources, as the military deemed the desert around the Great Salt Lake "an ideal place to experiment with biological warfare" (241). Even an Atomic Energy Commission official referred to the area as "a good place to throw used razor blades" (242). In the epilogue, "The Clan of One-Breasted Women," Williams recounts her father's clear memory of driving through the area on September 7, 1957, and witnessing "this golden-stemmed cloud," "mushroom," and "a light ash was raining on the car" (283). This chain of evidence proves that the contaminated environment became a direct trigger for the high cancer rates among the family's women.

Nuclear testing brings not only physical contamination but also long-term spiritual trauma. This trauma is insidious and intergenerational: the harm of nuclear radiation to the human body is not immediate but erupts in the form of diseases like cancer after a decade or even decades. The women in Williams's family lived for years in the contaminated environment without knowing it. "Children growing up in the American South-west, drinking contaminated milk from contaminated cows, even from the contaminated breasts of their mothers, my mother-members, years later, of the Clan of One-Breasted Women" (283); people were unaware of the lurking danger. This deception deepens the family's spiritual predicament once they learn the truth: their loved ones' deaths and their own illnesses were not accidental but consequences of man-made environmental disaster. When Williams realizes this, she falls into suspicion of authority and anger at fate, feeling, "I realized the deceit I had been living under" (283). This realization utterly subverts her once steadfast Mormon faith and respect for authority, shaking the very foundation of her spiritual world.

More seriously, behind the nuclear testing lies the suppression of individual citizens by governmental power. In 1950s America, at the height of the Cold War, nuclear testing was deemed vital to national security, with public health relegated to secondary importance. The government deliberately concealed the dangers of nuclear testing, publicly claiming that tests "may be conducted with adequate assurance of safety under conditions prevailing at the bombing reservations" and even stating that "We find no basis for concluding that harm to any individual has resulted from radioactive fallout" (284). This disregard for individual life turned people living downwind from the test site into anonymous victims. Williams "records on the surface her mother's illness and the decline of the birds..." but "the Mormon culture's advocacy of forbearance and withdrawal is the underlying cause behind this tragedy that cannot be ignored" (Zou 71). Under the influence of the Mormon cultural emphasis that "authority is respected, obedience is revered, and independent thinking is not", Williams was taught as a young girl who does not "make waves" or "rock the boat" (Williams 285), and the women in the family initially choose to bear their suffering silently. Diane, diagnosed with breast cancer in 1971, said "I have never acknowledged my anger over losing my breast as a young woman" (200); grandmother Lettie endures silently after falling ill, and grandmother Mimi puts on a brave face before surgery. This passive acceptance further exacerbates the spiritual ecological imbalance: when individuals cannot face harm squarely or dare not resist injustice, the spiritual world sinks into repression and numbness.

Another critical crux of spiritual ecological imbalance lies in human's distorted perception of nature's value. In the development of modern civilization, humans have gradually fallen into the trap of anthropocentrism, positioning nature as the "Other," a silent and passive recipient, and assuming the right to explore its mysteries, tame its wildness, and plunder its resources (Zhang 126), while neglecting its fundamental value as a source of spiritual nourishment. For a long time, people have focused only on the economic value of the Great Salt Lake, ignoring its ecological value as a core ecosystem component. When rising lake waters threaten industrial facilities and human habitation, people first think of engineering solutions such as breaching the causeway or building dams to divert water, or extreme plans like "nuking the lake, creating a cavern by the atomic explosion" or "dye the lake purple" to increase evaporation (248), attempting to control nature through human intervention rather than reflecting on the damage human activities have caused to nature. This failure to recognize nature's intrinsic value has gradually weakened the spiritual connection between humans and the natural world. Williams poignantly observes: "We miss the eyes of birds, focusing only on feathers" (95). People see only the economic or ornamental value of birds, forgetting that they "mediate between heaven and earth" (95). The wetlands around the Great Salt Lake have been extensively developed for farmland irrigation, industrial production, and urban construction, causing bird habitats to shrink

continuously. When wetlands are destroyed and birds depart, humanity loses not only natural landscapes but also a spiritual anchor. Williams always finds peace and strength in observing birds. Cheng Hong writes in her translator's preface that the California gulls' tenacity in flying fifty to one hundred miles daily for food teaches Williams to persevere in adversity (9); the white pelicans' nesting and their "inclusive community" allow her to feel the warmth of solidarity (8); the Canada geese's nocturnal flights reveal to her the tranquility of life (8). When these birds are displaced by ecological destruction, the human spiritual world also loses an important source of nourishment.

More troublingly, this alienation from nature has formed a kind of collective unconsciousness. The initial indifference toward the Great Salt Lake's rising water crisis and the apathy toward the birds' plight exemplify this collective unconsciousness. When Williams tells construction workers building a dike about the Wilson's phalarope's habit of "spinning sixty revolutions per minute" for feeding, the workers are unimpressed and even joke: "Who in the hell would spend their life counting how many times a bird spins around?" (63). When the government plans to pump water from the Great Salt Lake to the western desert, more people are concerned about the economic benefits of the project than about its long-term ecological impact. This indifference to nature is, in essence, the desertification of the spiritual ecology. When humans cease to revere nature and cease to draw wisdom and strength from it, the spiritual world becomes utilitarian and narrow, ultimately falling into self-imposed isolation.

IV. HEALING ILLNESS AND THE MIND: PRACTICAL PATHWAYS FOR SPIRITUAL ECOLOGICAL RECONSTRUCTION

"There can be no place for 'spirit' in the human ecosystem?" (Lu 26). The core starting point of spiritual ecological reconstruction is the individual's reconciliation with illness and the reconstruction of self-identity. Diane, throughout her cancer journey, undergoes a transition from resistance to acceptance, which signals an awakening of the spiritual world. Initially, she is filled with fear and anger toward cancer, refusing chemotherapy and viewing it as poisoning her body; but the will to survive shifts her mindset, and she asks Williams to help her visualize chemotherapy as the Colorado River flowing through her body, "washing away" the cancer cells. As her condition progresses, she gradually realizes that "It feels good to finally be able to embrace my cancer. It's almost like a friend" (Williams 156). This positive psychological reframing is essentially a re-embrace of life: no longer treating disease as an enemy but as part of life, seeking meaning in living alongside it.

This self-reconciliation is also reflected in a renewed understanding of life's value. After falling ill, Diane realizes that the essence of life lies not in its length but in its quality. She writes letters to encourage Tammy, who has just undergone brain surgery, telling her, "It (illness) brings life into focus one day at a time. You live each moment and when you see the sunset at the end of the day, you are so grateful to be part of that experience" (84), thus achieving self-transcendence through helping others. During chemotherapy, she buys a favorite red dress and attends a church Christmas dance, pursuing personal joy and dignity even in the final stage of life. She faces death calmly, no longer negating her self-worth because of her physical condition; even in her final moments, she reads poetry with her family until "the five of us became hysterical, laughing so hard we were sobbing" (222), using humor to dissolve grief. This shift from focusing on the length of life to valuing its quality frees her spiritual world from the shackles of illness and restores peace and strength.

In accompanying her mother through cancer, Williams also completes her own self-healing and identity reconstruction. Initially overshadowed by the successive deaths of the women in her family and at age 34, she became "the matriarch of the Mormon Tempest clan and lives herself in the shadow of this foreboding legacy of suffering and unnatural death" (Austin 14). Williams ultimately ceases to be consumed by anxiety over her family's cancer history and instead confirms her identity through writing the family story. She no longer sees herself as a victim of the Clan of One-Breasted Women but as a transmitter of her mother's spirit and a connector of humans and nature. After her mother's death, she places her mother's hair "over the tips of young cottonwood trees—For the birds—For their nests—In the spring" (233). This ritualistic act symbolizes her reconciliation with the past and with herself. Through witnessing her mother's struggle with illness, Williams finds her life's mission: to awaken reverence for nature and appreciation for life through her writing. The establishment of this self-identity marks the deep restoration of her spiritual ecology.

Returning to nature is also a crucial path for restoring spiritual ecology. "Dedicating oneself to reviving the intimate human-earth relationship and advocating the return to wilderness is the first step in Williams's vision of returning to the spiritual homeland" (Tan and Deng 56). The Great Salt Lake, as a refuge, becomes a sacred sanctuary for Williams and her mother to heal their spirits. Nature, with its inclusivity and resilience, provides the most fundamental nourishment for an imbalanced spiritual world. After her cancer recurs, Diane chooses to take a

final rafting trip to the Grand Canyon. “The heat of the sandstone penetrated my skin as I lay on the red rocks. Desert light bathed my soul...the oldest exposed rock in the West, gave me a perspective that will carry me through whatever I must face” (Williams 29). It is nature that gives her courage to face her illness. During chemotherapy, she and Williams drift for hours in the Great Salt Lake, “merging with salt water and sky so completely, we were resolved, dissolved, in peace” (78), and the saline water eases her physical pain and mental anxiety. “When self-awareness turns to a place connected by blood, a person can deeply feel the interchangeability of energy between humans and the land. In this active feeling, one gains emotional comfort and settles energy from the earth” (Yuan 35). In nature’s embrace, she temporarily forgets the torment of illness and re-experiences the vitality of life. This spiritual connection with nature becomes an important pillar supporting her fight against disease.

V. CONCLUSION

Through the cancer trauma of the women in Williams’s family and the ecological transformation of the Great Salt Lake, *Refuge* presents a shared fate between humans and nature, using literary narrative to demonstrate that spiritual ecology offers a framework encompassing nature, society, and the individual. Using Lu Shuyuan’s spiritual ecology theory as its theoretical framework, this paper systematically analyzes the manifestations of spiritual ecological imbalance in the work, revealing the modern predicaments of spiritual vacuum and behavioral incompetence. It traces their roots to anthropocentric alienation from nature, governmental suppression of individuals, and religious culture’s constraint on emotions. In an interview with Scott London, Williams states: “As a writer, I believe that it is our task, our responsibility, to hold the mirror up to social injustices that we see and to create a prayer of beauty” (Austin 51). Williams’s words remind us that only by abandoning anthropocentric prejudice, confronting trauma squarely, and revering nature can we achieve the health of individual spiritual ecology and the balance of the entire ecosystem. This is both the literary lesson the work offers to contemporary people and the inevitable choice for the sustainable development of human civilization.

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The Use of English Learning Apps to Enhance English Language Proficiency among Undergraduate Students in Peripheral Areas

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Abstract— *The rapid growth of mobile technology has transformed language learning by making educational resources easily accessible through smartphones. English learning applications such as Duo lingo, Hello English, BBC Learning English, Cake, and Elsa Speak have become popular tools for improving language proficiency. This study investigates the role of English learning applications in enhancing the English language skills of undergraduate students living in peripheral areas. The study examines students' perceptions, frequency of app usage, and the effectiveness of these applications in improving vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. Using a quantitative research design, data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to undergraduate students from colleges located in peripheral regions. The findings indicate that regular use of English learning apps significantly improves learners' confidence, vocabulary, pronunciation, and overall communication skills. However, challenges such as poor internet connectivity, limited digital literacy, and inconsistent learning habits continue to affect effective usage. The study recommends integrating mobile learning applications into higher education language teaching and encouraging students to use these apps alongside classroom instruction.*

Keywords— ***English learning apps, mobile-assisted language learning, undergraduate students, peripheral areas, English proficiency, digital learning***

I. INTRODUCTION

English is a global language essential for education, communication, and career opportunities. However, undergraduate students in peripheral areas often face difficulties in developing English proficiency due to limited resources and fewer learning opportunities. With the increasing use of smartphones, English learning applications offer flexible and interactive ways to improve language skills. This study examines the effectiveness of English learning applications in enhancing the English proficiency of undergraduate students in peripheral areas. Undergraduate students in peripheral areas often have lower English proficiency because of unequal educational opportunities. Although English learning applications are widely available, their effectiveness in improving the language proficiency of these students has not been adequately investigated.

The present study explores whether English learning applications effectively enhance the language proficiency of undergraduate students in peripheral areas.

Objectives of the Study --

1. To identify the English learning applications commonly used by undergraduate students.
2. To determine the frequency of app usage.
3. To examine the effectiveness of English learning apps in improving English language proficiency.

4. To identify challenges faced while using English learning applications.
5. To suggest strategies for improving mobile-assisted English language learning.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY --

The study adopts a quantitative descriptive survey design. Undergraduate students studying in colleges located in peripheral areas.

Sample -- A sample of 100 undergraduate students selected through simple random sampling.

Data Collection Procedure -- Questionnaires are distributed physically and through online forms.

Data Analysis -- Data are analysed using:

- Percentage
- Mean
- Standard Deviation
- Chi-square Test
- Pearson Correlation
- Independent Sample t-test (if applicable)

III. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1: Frequency of App Usage

Frequency	Number	Percentage
Daily	40	40%
Weekly	35	35%
Occasionally	20	20%
Rarely	5	5%

Interpretation -- Most respondents use English learning apps daily, indicating regular engagement.

Table 2: Improvement in Vocabulary

Response	Percentage
Strongly Agree	45%
Agree	35%
Neutral	12%
Disagree	6%
Strongly Disagree	2%

Interpretation -- The majority of students believe that English learning applications improve vocabulary.

IV. MAJOR FINDINGS

1. Most Students Use Smartphones for Language Learning --

The study found that the majority of undergraduate students use smartphones as their primary device for learning English. Smartphones provide easy access to educational applications, online dictionaries, videos, and practice exercises, allowing students to learn anytime and anywhere. Their portability, affordability, and widespread availability make them an effective tool for self-directed language learning, especially in peripheral areas where access to conventional language learning resources is limited.

2. Duo lingo and Hello English Are the Most Preferred Applications --

Among the various English learning applications available, **Duo lingo** and **Hello English** emerged as the most popular choices among students. Students preferred these applications because they offer interactive lessons, quizzes, vocabulary exercises, grammar practice, pronunciation training, and immediate feedback. Their user-friendly interface, gamified learning approach, and free access encourage regular engagement and make English learning enjoyable.

3. Students Report Improvements in Vocabulary and Pronunciation --

Most participants reported noticeable improvement in their English vocabulary and pronunciation after regularly using language learning applications. The applications expose learners to new words through repeated practice, contextual examples, and audio support. Pronunciation exercises, speech recognition features, and listening activities help students develop clearer pronunciation and better listening comprehension, leading to improved communication skills.

4. Regular Users Demonstrate Greater Confidence in Speaking English --

The findings indicate that students who use English learning applications consistently show higher confidence in speaking English than occasional users. Frequent practice through interactive speaking activities, pronunciation feedback, and conversational exercises reduces hesitation and fear of making mistakes. As a result, regular users become more willing to participate in classroom discussions and communicate in English in real-life situations.

5. Internet Connectivity Remains the Biggest Challenge --

Despite the benefits of mobile learning applications, poor internet connectivity remains a major obstacle for students in peripheral areas. Unstable network connections, limited mobile data, and inadequate digital infrastructure often interrupt learning activities, prevent access to online content, and reduce the effectiveness of app-based learning. This challenge highlights the need for improved digital infrastructure and offline learning features in educational applications.

6. Self-Motivation Significantly Affects Learning Outcomes --

The study found that self-motivation plays a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of English learning applications. Students who were motivated to improve their English skills used the applications more frequently, completed learning activities regularly, and achieved better language proficiency. In contrast, students with low motivation showed irregular usage and limited improvement. Therefore, learners' commitment and consistent practice are essential for achieving successful learning outcomes through Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL).

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Colleges Should Encourage the Use of English Learning Applications --

Colleges should actively promote the use of English learning applications as a supplementary tool for language development. Students can be encouraged to download and regularly use reliable applications such as Duo lingo and Hello English to improve vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and communication skills. Institutions may also organize awareness programs, workshops, and language clubs that demonstrate the effective use of these applications. Encouraging mobile-assisted learning can help students continue learning beyond the classroom and develop independent study habits.

2. Teachers Should Integrate Mobile Learning Activities into Classroom Instruction --

English language teachers should incorporate mobile learning activities into their regular teaching practices to make learning more engaging and interactive. Teachers can assign app-based exercises, vocabulary quizzes, pronunciation practice, and speaking activities as part of classroom instruction or homework. Blending traditional teaching methods with mobile learning will provide students with additional opportunities for practice, immediate feedback, and personalized learning, thereby improving their overall language proficiency.

3. Institutions Should Provide Digital Literacy Training --

Educational institutions should organize digital literacy training programs to help students and teachers effectively use mobile learning technologies. Such training should focus on downloading educational applications, using learning features efficiently, managing digital resources, and practicing safe and responsible use of technology. Improved digital literacy will enable students to make better use of English learning applications and maximize the benefits of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL).

4. Governments Should Improve Internet Connectivity in Peripheral Areas --

Governments and educational authorities should invest in improving internet infrastructure and digital accessibility in peripheral and rural areas. Reliable and affordable internet connectivity is essential for students to access online learning materials, educational applications, and digital resources without interruption. Better network coverage and affordable data services will reduce the digital divide and ensure equal learning opportunities for students regardless of their geographical location.

5. Future Studies May Compare Rural and Urban Students or Employ Experimental Research Designs --

Future researchers should conduct comparative studies involving rural and urban undergraduate students to examine differences in the effectiveness of English learning applications across diverse educational settings. Researchers may also use experimental or longitudinal research designs to establish the direct impact of specific mobile learning applications on English language proficiency over time. Such studies will provide stronger empirical evidence and contribute to the further development of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) research.

VI. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that English learning applications play an important role in improving English language proficiency among undergraduate students in peripheral areas. Mobile-assisted language learning offers flexibility, accessibility, and learner autonomy, enabling students to practice English beyond the classroom. Although technological and infrastructural barriers exist, the educational benefits outweigh the limitations. Educational institutions should integrate mobile learning into language education to maximize learning outcomes.

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The Aesthetics of Atmospheres in A. P. J. Abdul Kalam's The Power of Prayer

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Abstract— *This paper examines A. P. J. Abdul Kalam's autobiographical essay "The Power of Prayer" through the theoretical lens of Gernot Böhme's aesthetics of atmospheres. While Kalam's narrative has conventionally been read as a testament to interfaith harmony or spiritual secularism, this paper argues that the essay's deeper significance lies in its representation of how atmospheric spaces, rather than formal instruction or abstract ideology, shape ethical subjectivity. Drawing on Bohme's concept of atmosphere as an "in-between" phenomenon that mediates between objective environments and bodily feeling, the analysis demonstrates how Kalam's childhood in Rameswaram unfolds across multiple atmospheric registers: the domestic atmosphere of generosity and spiritual wisdom fostered by his parents; the sacred atmospheres of the mosque and the Shiva temple, which dissolve religious boundaries through shared affective experience; the communal atmosphere of a locality where Muslims and Hindus live amicably; the elemental atmosphere of the sea and cyclone, which instills humility and resilience; and the pedagogical atmospheres created by teachers who challenge social hierarchies. The paper contends that Kalam's identity does not emerge despite his environment but through it, the atmospheres of Rameswaram produce an ethical self that transcends religious and caste divisions long before Kalam can articulate such principles intellectually. This reading positions Bohme's atmospheric aesthetics as a productive framework for understanding how lived environments, rather than doctrinal teachings, cultivate pluralistic consciousness in South Asian autobiographical narratives.*

Keywords— ***Gernot Bohme, atmospheres, A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, "The Power of Prayer," religious pluralism, lived religion, aesthetic theory, Indian writing in English***

Situating Kalam's Narrative

A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, India's eleventh President and one of its most beloved scientists, occupies a legendary place in the nation's imagination. His autobiography Wings of Fire traces his journey from a modest childhood in Rameswaram to leading India's missile program and eventually the presidency. But tucked within its pages is a chapter, "The Power of Prayer", that offers something rare: an intimate look at the early years that shaped him. What makes it distinctive is how Kalam steers away from the usual focus on solo achievement. Instead, he turns outward, to the community that embraced him, the everyday connections that enriched him, and the environments that quietly molded him.

For many, this essay celebrates interfaith harmony and the spiritual grounding Kalam received from his father. Growing up in a middle-class Tamil Muslim family, Hindu and Muslim traditions wove together seamlessly into daily life. His father was close friends with the Hindu high priest; his family participated in Hindu ceremonies; his closest friends were orthodox Brahmin boys; his mother and grandmother told stories from both the Ramayana and the Prophet's life. This was pluralism lived, not preached. Yet scholarly conversations often filter this textured reality through labels like 'secularism' or 'tolerance', useful, but

flattening. What gets lost is the sensory, emotional quality of Kalam's world, where coexistence wasn't a principle to uphold, but simply the air he breathed.

This paper proposes a different approach, one drawn from German philosopher Gernot Böhme's The Aesthetics of Atmospheres. Kalam's story makes more sense when read through the atmosphere: those emotionally charged, place-bound forces that shape us before we consciously think about them. His ethical and spiritual growth wasn't the product of formal religious teaching or abstract moral codes. It emerged organically from immersion in Rameswaram's everyday atmospheres, the quiet warmth of his parents' home, the sacred pull of mosque and temple, the easy rhythm of a mixed neighborhood, the raw power of the sea, and the inspiring spaces his teachers created. These weren't backdrops; they shaped him from the inside out, cultivating a self that was instinctively open and spiritually alive, long before he had words for it.

Gernot Bohme and the Aesthetics of Atmospheres

Gernot Bohme (1937–2022) was a student of Jurgen Habermas, he shifted aesthetics away from art and beauty, planting it firmly in the everyday sensory world we actually live in. Bohme cared deeply about ecology. In his hometown of Darmstadt, people complained about a bad smell. Scientists found nothing toxic, yet everyone felt unwell. It wasn't a chemical problem but an aesthetic one. The atmosphere was making them uneasy. He described atmospheres as 'in-between' or 'quasi-objective', not purely in our heads, yet not existing without someone to feel them. We can agree a room feels oppressive or joyful, which proves their real presence. But they're also deeply personal. We can approach atmospheres in two ways: how we perceive them, and how we produce them. Stage designers master the latter manipulating light, sound, and space to generate specific moods.

Drawing on Schmitz's work on the 'felt body,' Bohme showed how light, silence, and color physically affect us. He even used temple spaces to illustrate the 'sublime' how light, shadow, and vastness captivate the body. This focus on sacred space makes his theory perfect for understanding Kalam's world, steeped in such atmospheres from the very beginning.

The Domestic Atmosphere: Generosity and Spiritual Wisdom

Kalam's essay opens with a tender portrait of his parents, and right away we feel the atmosphere of his childhood home. His father, Jainulabdeen, had little formal education and modest means, but was rich in 'innate wisdom' and 'true generosity of spirit.' His mother, Ashiamma, was his perfect partner Kalam recalls that 'far more outsiders ate with us than all the members of our own family put together.' This detail invites us into a home where generosity was simply how things were. Strangers and family shared the same space, the same food, dissolving boundaries without a second thought.

There was quiet spiritual depth too. Kalam describes his father as austere, avoiding luxuries yet covering every necessity. This was not deprivation, it was a discipline that valued inner richness over outer show. The home felt 'very secure, both materially and emotionally,' an atmosphere of steady nourishment. The most vivid moment comes when Kalam recalls eating with his mother: 'I normally ate with my mother, sitting on the floor of the kitchen. She would place a banana leaf before me, on which she then ladled rice and aromatic sambhar, a variety of sharp, home-made pickles and a dollop of fresh coconut chutney.' This is not just a meal, it is a sensory world. The banana leaf, the steam, the sharpness of pickle, the cool chutney, all radiate warmth and care. These small things, in Bohme's language, carry an 'ecstatic' quality; they fill the space with mood. This atmosphere, I believe, was the quiet foundation of Kalam's ethical self. The generosity he witnessed wasn't taught, it was absorbed through participation, in a home where giving felt as natural as breathing, and the line between self and other gently blurred.

Sacred Atmospheres: Mosque, Temple, and the Dissolution of Boundaries

The sacred spaces of Rameswaram lie at the heart of Kalam's story and here, Böhme's framework shines. The Shiva temple was just 'a ten-minute walk from our house,' and the mosque where his father prayed stood close by. These aren't mere locations; they're atmospheric facts. Kalam lived within their reach, their moods seeping into his everyday life. His father's prayers left a deep mark. Kalam had not the faintest idea of the meaning of the Arabic prayers chanted, but he was totally convinced that they reached God. He didn't understand a word, yet he was utterly certain. That certainty came from the mosque's space, his father's presence, the collective hush the atmosphere convinced him in ways language never could.

After prayers, people of different faiths waited with bowls of water. His father would dip his fingertips, pray, and the water went home for the sick. The sacred atmosphere spilled beyond the mosque, carried in simple bowls. His father explained: "When you pray, you transcend your body and become a part of the cosmos, which knows no division of wealth, age, caste, or creed." Prayer wasn't a request, it was expansion, a dissolving of self.

His father's friendship with the Hindu high priest Pakshi Lakshmana Sastry deepened this. Kalam recalls the

two men, each in his traditional attire, discussing spiritual matters and quiet mutual respect he absorbed effortlessly. His visits to the Shiva temple with Ahmed Jallaluddin were equally profound: “Circling around the temple with the same reverence as any pilgrim... we felt a flow of energy pass through us.” Kalam didn't understand the rituals, yet participated fully. The temple welcomed a Muslim boy into its embrace. His reflection says it all, he never doubted that the prayers in the temple reached the same destination as the ones offered in our mosque. This is not theology; it is lived experience. The atmosphere did what doctrine never could.

The Communal Atmosphere: Lived Pluralism

Rameswaram wasn’t just tolerant, it was woven together. His locality was predominantly Muslim, but there were quite a few Hindu families too, living amicably with their Muslim neighbours. The harmony was so natural it barely needed mention. This ease sharpens through a classroom incident. A new teacher, unable to stomach a Hindu priest’s son sitting with a Muslim boy, ordered Kalam to the back bench. In one move, he introduced segregation into a space where friendship had always trumped difference. Kalam recalls he felt very sad, and so did Ramanadha Sastry. He looked utterly downcast as I shifted... The image of him weeping left a lasting impression on him.

Both boys wept, Muslim and Brahmin alike. Shaped by the same environment, they felt the violation together. Lakshmana Sastry’s response was swift. He told the teacher not to spread the poison of social inequality and communal intolerance in the minds of innocent children. Intolerance wasn't an idea to him, it was a contaminant. He demanded the teacher apologize or quit the school and the island. This reveals something vital: Rameswaram’s atmosphere required guarding. Lakshmana Sastry, the Hindu high priest, became its protector not for Muslims alone, but for the whole community, and especially for the children whose innocence needed shielding.

Elemental Atmospheres: The Sea and the Cyclone

Kalam also draws powerful atmospheres from the natural world. He watched his father build a wooden sailboat on the seashore—a scene of quiet labor and purpose. Then came the cyclone, which destroyed it. Until then, he had only seen the beauty of the sea, Kalam writes, 'now its uncontrollable energy came as a revelation to me.’ The sea shifted from serene to terrifying, teaching him humility in the face of forces beyond human control.

His father’s response deepened this lesson. When Kalam asked why he didn't simply explain suffering to those who sought his help, his father called himself ‘a go-between’ and warned against a ‘fear-ridden vision of destiny.’ True prayer, he said, wasn't about manipulating fate but about seeking fulfilment within oneself, a quiet, atmospheric wisdom that Kalam carried for life.

Pedagogical Atmospheres: Teachers Who Transformed

Kalam’s essay also shows how teachers created atmospheres of learning and transformation. His science teacher, Sivasubramania Iyer, was something of a rebel who did his best to break social barriers so that people from varying backgrounds could mingle easily. He wasn’t just teaching, he was actively reshaping the atmosphere of the community. The dinner invitation episode is especially powerful. Iyer’s wife, an orthodox Brahmin, was horrified at the idea of a Muslim boy eating in her ritually pure kitchen. She refused to serve him. But Iyer stayed calm; he did not argue or get angry. Instead, he "served me with his own hands and sat down beside me to eat his meal." This was an atmosphere in action: he did not lecture; he just created a new reality through his own behavior.

His wife watched from behind the kitchen door, observing Kalam. He wondered whether she had observed any difference in the way I ate rice, drank water or cleaned the floor after the meal. He knew he was being watched and his presence was disrupting the usual order. When Iyer invited him again the next weekend, his wife served him herself. She hadn't been convinced by argument, but by exposure to a different atmosphere—one her husband had quietly built.

Iyer told Kalam once he decided to change the system, such problems had to be confronted. Changing the system meant shifting the taken-for-granted atmosphere, the hidden rules, the silent habits. Iyer understood that the kitchen's ritual purity was part of a larger caste system. By simply inviting Kalam to dine, he introduced something new into that space, forcing a quiet transformation.

The Atmosphere of Departure: Leaving Rameswaram

The essay closes with Kalam’s departure from Rameswaram to study in Ramanathapuram, a shift from one atmosphere to another. His father, recognizing that his son must leave to grow, quotes Khalil Gibran: "Does the seagull not fly across the Sun, alone and without a nest? You must forego your longing for the land of your memories to move into the dwelling place of your greater desires; our love will not bind you nor will our needs hold you."

His father understood that Kalam had to leave behind the land of memories the atmosphere of Rameswaram to enter a new space. Love, in this understanding, was not a chain but a release. Yet Ramanathapuram felt different. Kalam writes:

> "Somehow, I did not take to the new setting. The town of Ramanathapuram was a thriving, factious town of some fifty thousand

people, but the coherence and harmony of Rameswaram was absent."

The 'coherence and harmony' was precisely Rameswaram's atmosphere, the fabric of belonging and pluralism he had taken for granted. He missed home intensely and grabbed every opportunity to visit Rameswaram. The pull of educational opportunities at Ramanathapuram was not strong enough to nullify the attraction of poli, the South Indian sweet my mother made. The attraction of poli was not just about taste, it was the atmosphere of home: his mother's care, the kitchen floor, the banana leaf, the aromatic sambhar. He was drawn back not by nostalgia but by the memory of an atmosphere that had nourished him.

Despite his homesickness, Kalam was determined to come to terms with the new environment because he knew his father had invested great hopes in his success. That determination itself came from the atmosphere of his childhood, his father's hope, his mother's sacrifice, the community's support all propelling him forward, even when he longed to return.

Conclusion: Atmospheres and the Production of the Ethical Self

Kalam's "The Power of Prayer" is more than nostalgia or a tribute to interfaith harmony. Through Böhme's lens, it becomes a meditation on how environments shape who we are. The atmospheres of Rameswaram: domestic, sacred, communal, elemental, pedagogical didnot just surround him; they formed him, creating a self that was generous, spiritually open, and resilient long before he could put those qualities into words. This reading offers a few takeaways.

First, 'atmosphere' gives us a richer way to understand religious pluralism than tired terms like 'tolerance' or 'secularism.' Kalam didn't tolerate the difference he was shaped by it. Mosque and temple, Muslim and Hindu weren't external facts to manage; they were absorbed into his very being.

Second, it reminds us that sensory details matter: the taste of poli, the feel of the banana leaf, the sound of Arabic prayers. These are not embellishments; they are the building blocks of atmosphere, the small things that carry mood and meaning.

Third, Bohme's framework has real potential for reading South Asian life-writing. While no one seems to have applied it to Kalam before, it could open up other narratives where environment, not ideology, does the quiet work of shaping identity. Finally, this reading affirms Bohme's larger point: our everyday spaces, our kitchens, temples, classrooms, neighborhoods aren't just backdrops. They are the very medium through which we become ourselves. Kalam's story is proof of that.

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The Rhetoric of Defence: Poetic Authority and Humanist Discourse in Sidney's an Apology for Poetrie

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Abstract— *Sir Philip Sidney's An Apology for Poetrie (1595) holds a key place in English literary criticism as one of the earliest systematic defenses of poetry during the Renaissance. Written when poetry faced moral, religious, and philosophical critiques, Sidney's work aims to reaffirm the dignity, authority, and value of imaginative literature. He does this through a strong mix of classical rhetoric, Aristotelian ideas about poetry, and Renaissance humanism. This article looks at the rhetorical methods Sidney uses to build poetic authority and to position poetry as an essential tool for moral lessons, intellectual growth, and civic duty. By using rhetorical criticism and humanist literary ideas, the study examines how Sidney draws on classical thinkers such as Aristotle, Horace, and Cicero while also addressing Platonic concerns about the ethics of poetry. Special focus is given to Sidney's view of the poet as a 'maker.' He sees the poet's imagination as something that goes beyond the limits of history and philosophy by presenting idealized models of virtue that can inspire ethical behavior. The article also explores the connections between rhetoric, persuasion, and moral education in Sidney's arguments. It shows that his defense goes beyond just literary appreciation to address wider cultural and educational issues in the English Renaissance. Ultimately, the article argues that Sidney's rhetorical defense provides important insights into the lasting connection between literature, imagination, morality, and public discussion, reaffirming the ongoing importance of Renaissance literary theory in today's critical studies.*

Keywords— ***Renaissance Humanism, Poetic Authority, Rhetoric, Literary Criticism, Aristotelian Poetics, Humanist Discourse, Defence of Poetry, Moral Philosophy, English Renaissance, Classical Rhetoric.***

I. INTRODUCTION

The English Renaissance was a crucial time for literary criticism. A revival of classical knowledge and Renaissance humanism influenced it. During this era, poetry often faced accusations of being morally harmful and intellectually lacking. In response to these critiques, especially those from Stephen Gosson in *The School of Abuse* (1579), Sir Philip Sidney wrote *An Apology for Poetrie* (1595), one of the earliest and most important works of English literary criticism. In this treatise, Sidney provides a strong defense of poetry, highlighting its moral, educational, and imaginative worth. The way Sidney structures An Apology for Poetrie is key to its persuasive power. He uses logical reasoning, classical sources, and examples to uphold the dignity of poetry and enhance the status of poets in society. His work counters contemporary attacks on literature and lays the groundwork for English literary criticism by defining poetry's moral and cultural roles. This article looks at how Sidney builds poetic authority through rhetorical techniques and humanist discussions. It argues that *An Apology for Poetrie* is not just a defense of poetry; it is a keen explanation of Renaissance literary theory that continues to shape discussions about

literature, imagination, morality, and the societal role of the poet.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers have thoroughly explored Sir Philip Sidney's *An Apology for Poetrie* as a foundational text in English literary criticism and Renaissance humanism. According to Wesley Trimpi, Sidney's defence of poetry draws extensively on classical rhetorical principles and Aristotelian poetics, presenting poetry as a powerful medium for moral education and intellectual cultivation. Ronald Levao views the treatise as a complex rhetorical argument that showcases the creative and persuasive power of poetic imagination instead of simply countering its critics. Catherine Barnes examines Sidney's rhetorical techniques, illustrating how his persuasive style merges logical reasoning with emotional appeal to build the poet's authority. Likewise, Gavin Alexander highlights Sidney's blend of classical philosophy and Renaissance humanism, claiming that the treatise reflects the era's educational values while placing poetry above history and philosophy. Recent research continues to look at Sidney's place in modern literary criticism. Scholars today emphasize the connections among rhetoric, imagination, and moral teaching, suggesting that Sidney's idea of the poet as a 'maker' remains relevant in literary theory and cultural discussions. While earlier studies have focused on Sidney's literary criticism, rhetorical techniques, and humanist ideas separately, the relationship among rhetorical persuasion, poetic authority, and humanist thought has received less attention. This study aims to investigate how Sidney uses rhetorical strategies to build poetry's authority within the broader intellectual context of Renaissance humanism.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study takes a qualitative, descriptive, and interpretative approach. It relies on a detailed analysis of Sir Philip Sidney's *An Apology for Poetrie* as the main text. The analysis incorporates principles of Renaissance humanism, classical rhetoric, and Aristotelian poetics. Secondary sources, including books and peer-reviewed articles on Sidney, Renaissance literary criticism, and rhetorical theory, help contextualize the discussion and support the interpretation. The study applies a historical-contextual and analytical method to examine how Sidney's rhetorical strategies establish poetic authority and defend the moral, educational, and cultural significance of poetry.

IV. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Sir Philip Sidney's *An Apology for Poetrie* is one of the earliest and most influential works of English literary criticism. It is not just a defense of poetry against Puritan attacks; it is also a strong claim for the poet's intellectual, moral, and cultural authority within Renaissance humanism. Sidney uses persuasive language and combines classical philosophy, Christian ethics, historical examples, and logical reasoning to show that poetry is the highest form of knowledge. He begins the treatise by praising the universal respect for poetry, stating that *"there is no art delivered unto mankind that hath not the works of nature for his principal object."* However, poetry alone goes beyond nature because *"only the poet, disdaining to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow, in effect, another nature"* (Sidney). This places the poet above the philosopher and historian, highlighting the creative power of imagination. Unlike the historian, who is limited to facts, or the philosopher, who teaches through abstract ideas, the poet creates an ideal world that encourages readers toward virtue. Thus, poetic authority comes from the poet's ability to combine truth with imaginative pleasure, making moral lessons both appealing and memorable.

Sidney's humanist perspective reinforces the educational and ethical role of poetry. Influenced by Renaissance humanism, he argues that literature should foster wisdom, virtue, and civic responsibility instead of just providing entertainment. His famous claim that *"the ending end of all earthly learning being virtuous action"* shows that the ultimate goal of knowledge is moral improvement. Poetry stands out because it not only teaches what is good but also inspires readers to act on that goodness. Sidney states, *"he cometh unto you with words set in delightful proportion, either accompanied with or prepared for the well-enchanting skill of music; and with a tale forsooth he cometh unto you, with a tale which holdeth children from play and old men from the chimney corner."* (Sidney) Here, enjoyment becomes a persuasive tool that makes moral lessons effective. The poet teaches through pleasure, fulfilling Horace's classical principle of dulce et utile—to delight and instruct at the same time. This blend of ethics and aesthetics reflects the key ideals of Renaissance humanism, where literature aids both personal growth and the betterment of society.

Sidney also strengthens his defense by addressing contemporary criticisms of poetry using carefully structured logical arguments. Critics accused poetry of encouraging lies, immorality, and laziness. Sidney responds by distinguishing poetic fiction from falsehood. He famously argues, *"Now for the poet, he nothing affirmeth, and*

therefore never lieth." (Sidney) Since the poet does not claim historical or scientific truth, poetic imagination cannot be seen as deception. Instead, fiction becomes a tool for expressing universal truths about human nature. He further rejects the claim that poetry harms morality, insisting that any misuse does not stem from poetry itself, but rather from its inappropriate use: *"For, abusing of poetry cometh not of the fruitfulness of the soil, but of the evil seed of man's wit."* (Sidney). This analogy shifts blame from literature to the reader or writer, showing Sidney's nuanced understanding of interpretation and ethical responsibility. His logical arguments, supported by analogies and classical authorities, exemplify the rhetorical skill of the Renaissance.

Another important element of Sidney's rhetorical defense is his elevation of the poet's social and cultural status. He portrays the poet as the first teacher and civilizer of humanity, calling poets *"the first light-givers to ignorance"* and noting that ancient societies revered poets as prophets, lawmakers, and educators. By connecting poetry to respected classical traditions, Sidney builds a historical case for poetic authority. He also compares poetry positively with philosophy and history, arguing that philosophy teaches virtue only in abstract terms, while history offers isolated examples; poetry uniquely combines universal truths with vivid examples that engage readers emotionally. This mix of reason, imagination, and feeling illustrates Sidney's belief that literature has a transformative power unmatched by other fields. Thus, the poet takes on the role of both creator and moral guide, reflecting the Renaissance ideal of the educated humanist.

An Apology for Poetrie represents a skillful blend of persuasive language and humanist philosophy. Sidney establishes poetry as a creative, ethical, and educational force that can influence both individuals and society. His defense is based on the belief that imagination is not against truth but is its most effective form. Through compelling arguments, classical knowledge, and moral insight, Sidney elevates the poet from a mere entertainer to a cultural authority whose imaginative works encourage virtuous actions. As a foundational text of English literary criticism, *An Apology for Poetrie* continues to show how rhetoric can defend literature not just as an art form but as a vital tool for human understanding, moral education, and social progress.

Sir Philip Sidney's *"An Apology for Poetrie"* outlines an important Renaissance view of poetic excellence. For Sidney, poetry is the highest of all arts because it blends imagination, moral teaching, and enjoyment. Unlike philosophy, which explains through abstract concepts, or history, which only details specific events, poetry creates ideal examples of human behavior that inspire readers to pursue virtue. Sidney defines the poet as a creator whose imagination reaches beyond nature's limits. He states, *"Only the poet, disdaining to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow, in effect, another nature."* (Sidney). This belief shows that poetic excellence comes from a poet's creative imagination, allowing them to envision a better world than reality. The poet does not just mimic nature but improves it by presenting ideal characters and actions that promote moral growth.

Sidney further argues that true poetic excellence involves a balance of teaching and enjoyment. Using the classical idea of dulce et utile, he claims that poetry does what no other field can: it educates while also entertaining. He notes that the poet *"cometh unto you with words set in delightful proportion,"* making moral lessons appealing and memorable. According to Sidney, readers are more inclined to accept virtue when it is conveyed through engaging stories rather than dry philosophical arguments. Therefore, the value of poetry lies not only in artistic beauty but also in its power to move emotions and inspire moral action. This practical effectiveness sets poetry apart from other fields of study and confirms its importance in Renaissance humanism.

A key part of Sidney's idea of poetic excellence is the poet's role as a moral teacher. He says, *"the ending end of all earthly learning being virtuous action,"* stressing that the ultimate goal of knowledge is to foster virtue. Poetry stands out because it turns moral knowledge into real-life experience. Through heroic figures, noble acts, and vivid stories, poets inspire readers to imitate goodness and reject wrongdoing. Sidney believes that poetry draws people to virtue by appealing to both logic and imagination. Therefore, poetic excellence is measured not just by verbal skill or technical ability, but by its capacity to bring about moral improvement in society. This perspective aligns with Renaissance humanism, which viewed literature as a tool for developing responsible, virtuous citizens.

Sidney also sees imaginative freedom as a crucial trait of poetic excellence. Poets, unlike historians who must stick to facts, can create idealized worlds that reveal universal truths about human nature. This freedom allows poetry to show what should be rather than just what is. Sidney praises the poet's ability to go beyond reality through creativity while staying true to moral truth. Another important part of Sidney's theory is his belief that poetic excellence requires both artistic skill and intellectual insight. The best poets possess not only natural talent, but also knowledge, judgment, and rhetorical skill. Sidney admires classical poets like Homer, Virgil, and Horace, whose works combine artistic beauty with moral depth. For

Sidney, excellent poetry shows harmony between invention, style, emotion, and ethical purpose. Every aspect of a poem should help it delight readers while guiding them toward good actions. Thus, poetic excellence is not just about embellishment or eloquence; it reflects a successful blend of artistic beauty with moral and intellectual value.

Sidney's idea of poetic excellence positions poetry as the highest form of human creativity and understanding. The great poet is an imaginative creator, moral teacher, and skilled artist whose works inspire readers to improve themselves. Sidney provides a strong defense of poetry's cultural and ethical importance. His theory places poetry at the heart of Renaissance humanism, arguing that the best poems unite truth, beauty, and goodness in a way that no other form of knowledge can. As a result, *An Apology for Poetrie* remains a key text in English literary criticism, offering a lasting vision of poetic excellence rooted in imagination, moral purpose, and artistic perfection.

Sidney's *An Apology for Poetrie* represents one of the best expressions of Renaissance humanism in English literary criticism. Influenced by classical learning and Renaissance educational ideals, Sidney argues that literature serves a purpose beyond entertainment; it promotes the intellectual, moral, and cultural growth of humanity. His views echo the core humanist belief that education should foster wisdom, virtue, and responsible citizenship. Sidney strongly claims that *"the ending end of all earthly learning being virtuous action",* stressing that the main aim of knowledge is ethical conduct, not mere intellectual success. This idea is foundational to his literary theory, showing that poetry has a unique ability to inspire moral actions by combining truth with imaginative enjoyment. Thus, Sidney raises poetry as a vital tool for shaping the ideal individual envisioned by Renaissance humanism.

A key humanist idea in Sidney's criticism is his celebration of the dignity and creative potential of people. Unlike medieval thinkers who focused on human limitations, Renaissance humanists highlighted human reason, creativity, and moral freedom. Sidney embodies this optimism by portraying the poet as a creator who goes beyond nature's boundaries. He famously states, *"Only the poet, disdaining to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow, in effect, another nature."* (Sidney). In this view, the poet acts as a secondary creator, whose imagination enhances nature by depicting ideal representations of human life. Rather than just mimicking reality, poetry offers models of excellence that encourage readers to strive for higher moral and intellectual standards. This faith in human creativity reflects the Renaissance belief in humanity's potential for self-improvement and innovation.

Sidney also reflects the humanist emphasis on classical learning by grounding his arguments in the works of ancient Greek and Roman writers. Throughout *An Apology for Poetrie,* he references Aristotle, Plato, Horace, and Virgil, while also citing Homer as the highest example of poetic excellence. Although Plato criticized poetry in *The Republic,* Sidney interprets his objections carefully. He argues that Plato condemned only the misuse of poetry, not poetry itself. This engagement with classical authorities illustrates the Renaissance humanist practice of reviving ancient knowledge and adapting it to contemporary ideas and cultural issues. Sidney does not blindly imitate classical writers; rather, he critically engages with their thoughts to defend the lasting value of poetry.

Another significant humanist principle is Sidney's belief that literature should educate citizens and strengthen society. Renaissance humanism viewed education as essential to creating wise leaders and ethically responsible individuals. Sidney argues that poetry surpasses philosophy and history because it teaches virtue through lively examples rather than abstract concepts or isolated historical accounts. He explains that philosophy presents moral principles but often lacks the power to inspire action, while history simply documents what has happened without necessarily showing what should happen. Poetry, however, blends universal truths with imaginative stories to emotionally and intellectually inspire readers. Sidney notes that the poet *"cometh unto you with words set in delightful proportion,'* enabling readers to absorb moral lessons with pleasure instead of coercion. This educational role illustrates the humanist belief that literature is a strong means of encouraging ethical behavior and civic duty.

Sidney's defense of imagination also aligns with Renaissance humanism's optimistic view of human intellectual freedom. Rather than seeing imagination as a source of deceit, Sidney views it as a creative force that reveals universal truths. He counters the charge that poets are liars by claiming, *"Now for the poet, he nothing affirmeth, and therefore never lieth."* (Sidney). Since poetry presents fictional possibilities rather than factual events, it conveys moral and philosophical truths that literal descriptions often cannot reach. Imagination thus becomes a tool for wisdom rather than falsehood. This argument mirrors the humanist belief that truth can be discovered not only through logic and observation but also through artistic creativity and moral thought. Poetry broadens human understanding by allowing readers to envision ideal forms of conduct and society.

V. RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this article, it is argued that Sir Philip Sidney's *An Apology for Poetrie* is not just an apology in defense of poetry against attacks in the contemporary era, but a complete manifesto on poetry as an authoritative literary form, grounded in the humanistic learning and intellectual world of the Renaissance. It is argued, successfully in the writer's view, that Sidney skillfully uses classical rhetoric, logical reasoning, historical precedents, and moral philosophy to establish that "poetrie" can be claimed to be the most excellent learning, because it joins truth and imagination and has an ethical purpose. Unlike those in philosophy which instruct us through ideas, and history which only presents facts and events, Sidney proposes the poet can *"with his imagination, seemeth to take hold of the finest conceits of nature,"* thereby illustrating *"a perfectly rendered example of human kind"* as an ideal model, with its effect of instruction coming from an ideal, rather than a merely historical example; and Sidney's belief in the end of all earthly learning being virtuous action reinforces that moral purpose of literature. Furthermore, the study claims that through his argument, Sidney completely overthrows those Puritan denunciations of poetry that it is *"nothing affirmeth, and therefore never lieth."* Thus, the writer asserts, poetic imagination can, on Sidney's terms, offer universal truths rather than falsehoods. This study further argues that Sidney's poetic criticism is grounded deeply in his Renaissance humanist ideology, especially in his devotion to education, classic learning, moral virtues, and human creativity. Sidney uses the classical notion of dolce et utile, that poetry should not only entertain but instruct, and shows the effectiveness of moral instruction derived from imaginative pleasures. Therefore, the thesis of this paper shows that Sidney's Apology is an essay that successfully makes "the poet" creative artists, moral instructors and cultural leaders in society, and also the foundational stone of English Literary Criticism. Indeed, it is still relevant today for defending poetry as the source that shapes the moral being, stimulates the human imagination, and enables societal cultural enrichment.

VI. CONCLUSION

Sir Philip Sidney's *An Apology for Poetrie* is an important essay of English literary criticism, asserting the supremacy of "poetrie" as a form of both artistic creation and learning. Grounded on Renaissance humanistic ideas and eloquent rhetoric, Sidney argues that poetry offers an advantage over history and philosophy by the potent blending of imaginative delight and ethical instruction. He positions the poet as a figure who wields imagination and provides readers with inspirational models of human character, promoting virtue through the representation of ideal lives. Sidney powerfully demolishes contemporary objections against poetry, demonstrating that imagination in verse does not necessarily deceive but, in fact, allows universal truths to be communicated. In the end, this work successfully defends poetry as essential not only for pleasure but for moral and intellectual development and the enhancement of society, maintaining the eternal relevance of literature in human culture.

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Theoretical and Pedagogical Implications of using Artificial Intelligence for the Development of Communicative Competence

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Abstract— *In the globalized world of today, the demand for English language proficiency is continuously increasing. This has resulted in the transformation of language teaching pedagogies with the inculcation of diverse technologies in the classroom. These technologies are an innovative feature in the internet sphere, more popularly known as artificial intelligence (AI). AI-based apps have been seen to have a positive impact in enhancing the learner's levels of communicative competence. Communicative competence can be simply defined as 'the ability to use language appropriately and accurately in different contexts'. This paper aims to revisit the basic models of communicative competence proposed by linguists and provides a critical analysis of how the different AI-based technologies help to strengthen the distinct aspects of communicative competence. Nevertheless, this aspect of language learning is also bordered by certain ethical concerns which calls for attention on the part of the instructor/teacher. Therefore, this paper attempts to shed light on the advantages and the constraints that may arise due to the use of artificial intelligence in language teaching classrooms from a theoretical and pedagogical perspective and calls for a balanced approach in imparting language education.*

Keywords— ***artificial intelligence, communicative competence, language education, pedagogy***

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of *'communicative competence'* has its root in the field of linguistics. The main advocate of this theory was Dell Hymes who coined this term in 1966 to address the gap left behind by Chomsky's classic distinction between *competence* vs *performance*. Hymes argued that the knowledge of the grammatical rules of a language cannot solely make an individual a proficient language user. The contextual knowledge of how to use a language appropriately in a certain context makes the communication process successful and meaningful. This is in stark contrast to Chomsky's notion of linguistic competence which reduces a language as a mere grammatical unit. Since its inception, the concept of 'communicative competence' is continuously evolving and now it is being realized as one of the central goals of language education. The multidimensional nature of the concept of 'communicative competence' is substantiated by the fact that it encompasses the different notions of communicative competence under its umbrella, i.e., linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence. The nurturing and honing of this concept has undergone further transformation in the language teaching classrooms by the emergence of digital technologies.

Artificial intelligence takes up the most dominant role among the different types of digital technologies present for language teaching. For example, the usage of AI tools like chatbots can significantly enhance the learners'

speaking, thereby making them more confident speakers of the English language. Similarly, speech recognition technology cater to the diverse needs of various learners and improve their pronunciation skills to a great extent. In addition, these technologies are always accompanied by the advantages of giving personalized instructions and instantaneous feedback. However, these platforms have to be critically evaluated in terms of their role in engaging with the established theories of communicative competence and the amount of human intervention required while using them in the language teaching classroom.

Therefore, the role of this paper is the critical evaluation of the role of AI in the development of communicative competence from a theoretical and pedagogical perspective. This paper aims to address the following questions:

1. How do the diverse communicative competence frameworks accommodate the integration of the various AI tools in language education?

2. How can the different AI-based tools strengthen or act as a constraint in the development of communicative competence?

3. What are the different pedagogical and ethical factors to be considered while using AI technologies in the arena of language teaching?

II. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

2.1 Hymes' Sociolinguistic Perspective

This viewpoint was put forward by Hymes which was a reaction against the view of language being seen as a grammatical entity only. He maintained a stand that using a language essentially involves the knowledge of the diverse contexts and the rules governing language use in these scenarios. Therefore, constructs like appropriateness, context and social meaning need to converge with AI-based language learning models which is a critical issue.

2.2 Canale and Swain's Model

In 1980, Canale and Swain came up with this framework which holds the four key components of communicative competence at its core- grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence. The evaluation of AI-based tools with reference to this framework has shown that grammatical and discourse competence can be enhanced to a great extent by the use of AI tools as they help in generating meaningful and logically structured piece of texts. Additionally, they are also equipped to perform a well-defined linguistic analysis of the utterances produced by learners and give the necessary feedback on the same. But, the development of the dimensions of sociolinguistic and strategic competence poses a serious concern due to the inability of AI tools to understand the diverse sociocultural norms. As far as strategic competence is concerned, some AI apps may come up with techniques to overcome communication barriers but there is always a dearth of knowledge regarding the committed use of such strategies.

2.3 Bachman's Communicative Language Ability

In 1990, the concept of communicative competence underwent a transition when Bachman came up with an expanded framework that combines the knowledge of the language along with the knowledge of using it appropriately in different contexts using diverse strategies. In other words, it is a resourceful amalgamation of knowledge, skills and context. This is in alignment with the AI-based technology whose adaptive nature and the ability to respond to learners' input in real time makes it quite relevant to this framework.

III. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

3.1 Defining Artificial Intelligence in Pedagogical Contexts

Just like any other domain, artificial intelligence has created its mark in the field of education too. It refers to the usage of various AI technologies to strengthen the process of teaching and learning. As far as the process of language learning is concerned, it makes use of applications like intelligent tutoring systems, automated writing evaluation, speech recognition and many other AI-based apps.

3.2 Evolution of AI-Assisted Language Learning

The first computer-assisted language learning (CALL) programs emphasized on rule-based practice without any understanding of the context and very restricted interaction. Gradually, the tendency shifted towards simulation systems, natural language processing in combination with adaptive learning and intelligent interaction models. So, the communication process became more dynamic in nature with the introduction of enhanced AI-based language learning technologies.

IV. AI AND THE COMPONENTS OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

4.1 Linguistic Competence

The term 'linguistic competence' includes competence in the areas of grammar, vocabulary, syntax and phonology. All these language aspects are excellently handled by AI-

based apps by providing instantaneous and constructive feedback as per learner's needs. Technologies such as natural language processing analyzes the learner's output and suggests necessary corrections enhancing their accuracy and fluency in the language.

4.2 Sociolinguistic Competence

This domain of communicative competence is quite complex as far as the inclusion of AI is concerned. Despite the fact that AI can simulate certain contextual conversations or register variation, the fact remains that it lacks real life cultural experience and human emotions such as humour and sarcasm. Therefore, pragmatic instruction becomes a very challenging task as far as AI-based language learning is concerned.

4.3 Discourse Competence

AI-based tools can act as a good source for enhancing the learner's discourse competence. This is normally done by using chatbots and dialogue systems where the learners can practice the different types of discourse conventions such as turn-taking and produce coherent conversational patterns. These are the many ways in which AI-based apps strengthen the learner's discourse competence even though AI-based language learning models can never really predict human communication at any level.

4.4 Strategic Competence

AI-based technologies are restricted as far as the area of strategic competence is concerned. The major constraint lies in the fact that even though AI can model or simulate strategies to overcome communication breakdown, there is always a lack of genuine communication. Therefore, it is a challenging task for AI-based models to negotiate meaning as it happens in real life communication process and hence over reliance on these technologies to enhance the levels of strategic competence becomes risky.

V. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Personalization and Adaptive Learning

AI carries the distinctive feature of personalizing the content according to the learner's needs which has made it quite popular among the Gen Z learners. In this process, it provides specialized tasks for each learner depending on their thrust areas and gives tailored feedback for the same. It provides a different set of instructions for different learners and hence drives them towards autonomous, self-directed learning making the language learning process more effective. In this way, AI-based technologies align themselves with learner-centred approaches to communicative language teaching.

5.2 Teacher Roles and Professional Agency

It is very important that the learners make judicious use of AI and AI-based technologies. This can only happen when AI tools are used as a complement to teaching rather than as a replacement in the language teaching classroom. It is an undeniable fact that the instructor's role has undergone a drastic transformation with the inculcation of such technologies into the teaching pedagogy. Now, the teacher is expected to act as a facilitator, guide and a critical evaluator of the AI-based learning experiences. Nonetheless, the instructor's role also comes with a huge responsibility where the effectiveness of the language teaching and learning process depends upon their ability to integrate AI tools within the communicative structure.

5.3 Assessment of Communicative Competence

The assessment techniques offered by AI are instantaneous and quantifiable but the concern surrounding this evaluation process is that it does not emphasize much on the competence levels relevant to real-life interaction process. Rather, it gives more importance to measurable linguistic aspects such as grammar, vocabulary etc. Therefore, it is very crucial to have a critically evaluated balanced approach combining the shrewdness of human evaluation and the scalability of AI-based evaluation techniques.

VI. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Any new technological advancement comes with its own set of advantages and disadvantages and the field of AI is not an exception in this regard. It raises some serious ethical concerns related to data privacy, biased nature of AI-generated algorithms and essentially treating the human communication process as a commodity. It implies that the communication process should be seen as a means of interaction which ultimately leads to exchange of information and not as a profitable system for information exchange. Another area of concern in using AI-based technologies in language education is the reduced nature of a genuine interaction process which may negatively influence the foundation pillars of the concept of communicative competence.

VII. FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND RESEARCH GAPS

There are a few areas in AI-based language education and the development of communicative competence that requires an in-depth study. For instance, new language learning models can be developed which would be based on a fair combination of AI tools and human interaction. Also, the interdisciplinary nature of this area calls for

collaboration between different areas. This is important to ensure that the AI-based tools should try to encompass and portray the linguistic and cultural differences while generating the output which will be a manifestation of authenticity and prove to be relevant to real-life communication scenarios.

CONCLUSION

The usefulness of AI in developing the learners' communicative competence levels has witnessed an inconclusive end. The constraints of AI-based technologies in developing sociocultural competence and the ethical issues grounded in it have raised the bar for the need for human intervention in the language teaching process. However, AI-based apps have shown admirable levels of success when it comes to linguistic, discourse and strategic competence. Therefore, this review aims to maintain the perspective of implementing an equitable, critically evaluated and human-centric approach in the area of language education which will positively contribute towards the enhancement of communicative competence rather than downplaying it.

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Impression of Women in Literature and Life

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Abstract— *The impression of women in literature and life has historically been intertwined, with literature frequently acting as a mirror that reflects, shapes, or reinforces societal, patriarchal views. History of Literature has noticed and observed the role of women being evolved through centuries. The Journey of Women of yesterday has been very crucial, scornful, censures which they have handled with poise and patience. Women have endured all the criticism and persisted with their perilous journey. Today Women have come a long way emerging as the strong fraternity. The discourse around women in literature highlights recurring archetypes, including the temptress, the pure virgin, and the mother, which have shaped societal expectations and literary narratives. As time progressed, particularly in the twentieth century, there was a notable shift toward the inclusion of diverse female voices, with women authors increasingly gaining recognition and focusing on a wider range of female experiences. This evolution of literature not only reflects changing societal attitudes towards gender but also challenges traditional stereotypes, paving the way for a more nuanced understanding of women in both fiction and real life. Prominent female writers, such as Alice Walker and Toni Morrison, have contributed significantly to this rich literary landscape, emphasizing the importance of varied perspectives in the portrayal of women's identities.*

Keywords— ***Women, evolution, archetypes, gender***

In Indian culture and heritage women occupy a unique place. They played many roles for the smooth progress of the family- as daughter, daughter-in-law, mother, mother-in-law, grandmother and so on. When considered by literacy scales, most of the Indian women are uneducated. Yet they play an important role at home and at work places. Almost all of their chores are not only non-remunerative but also neglected. Society and men prescribe the dress code, the behavioral code, the roles to play, the dos and don'ts of women in general. They run womanhood without seeking, imagining or dreaming for a holiday. Even when the rest of the humanity cheers holidays, they work very hard on those days. They have to keep the house, maintain the kitchen, farm and the fields throughout their life. Then women thought of education and felt it will transform them to fairies in this world. Later they felt that jobs will mould them to fairy queens in this world. They even felt that economic independence would open new vistas to all the women in this male dominant society. All these changes proved their ideas and fancies a 'fairy tale'.

At last we have come to a stage where no one dares to think of the consequences a future woman shall face. Virginia Woolf long ago expressed her anguish of woman's freedom, in 'A Room of one's own'. In a similar manner Abburi Chaya Devi, the 'Grand young' feminist writer in Telegu, opined that by educating girls we can free them from their 'Bonsai life'. Her short story "Bonsai Life" is about Ammulu, an educated lady, who works in Delhi in contrast to her illiterate sister, Akkayya, who settles in their native village. In this sequence I will take up the short story of Ram Kumar's "The Cherry Trees" and "My Dream 'N' After" by U. Surya Kumari.

In the 'Bonsai Life' the two sisters exchanged their inner goings on, compare and comprehend their lives, realizing the truth in saying that "The grass is always greener on the other side". Before her visit to Ammulu, Akkayya longs for the city life and financial independence.

Akkayya is an illiterate woman. Her father didn't permit her to study after fifth class. In those days people believed that girls education should make her keep washer

man's accounts. When Ammulu was born after a decade things, beliefs and perspective of people underwent a remarkable change. So Ammulu could enter college to complete her education. This education contributed to sea change in the lives of two sisters. Their ideas, opinions, beliefs and way of looking at life showed remarkable change. Akkayya married a man who held good ideas and choose agriculture as his profession. So they settle down in village. Ammulu married a man from town and settled in town. Whenever Akkayya visits Ammulu she would bring gongura, drumsticks, appadems and wadiams. Which were all handmade. Very sensibly and sensitively Ammulu remarks "With my office work, I am unable to make appadams and wadiams. Even if I've some free time I'm too lazy to do such works you know me. Don't you?" (Mosaic, 2006, 35).

People assume that women, who work at offices are liberated and free. "Are they really"? They have a dual responsibility of working at two places, at home and in office. The expression 'exhausted of office work' may not tell us that this exhaustion is peculiar to a woman, but entering the kitchen muttering: "oh! No, oh! God-which is what I usually do when I come back tired – I feel like singing a song, humming a tune, making a nice cup of coffee and savouring each sip - - - "(33).

It hits and targets the very root of the problem, the working woman faces. Her desires, pleasures and longings are simple but exhaustion makes them as fantasy. She is dually exploited – as a working woman (earning money) and a household maker. There are lots of expectations from her of all the house members. She is expected of the entire kitchen niceties and proper maintenance of the house. They don't realize that she has to spare her extra energies for this and it would be very taxing. Ammulu from her point feels that Akkayya is fortunate because she can keep her home well and can satisfy the members in her family. Akkayya feels that Ammulu is very fortunate. "You have studied well, have job like a man and are earning well. You don't have to beg anyone for anything. You are able to lead a dignified life unlike us who have to depend on our husband even for a paisa worth of Karivepaku" (36).

In cities many common things are rare and even if they are available they appear peculiar. In villages one can have fresh vegetables and fruits from their backyards where they are grown in plenty. In cities these things grow in flowerpots placed in dooryards and terraces. Bonsai plant shave become ornamental and decorative pieces in modern houses. Cutting down the branches and roots stunts their growth. They do not yield much flower or fruits. From the utilization point of view also they are of little use. In the way they are weak. The bonsai plant is equated to a woman. The woman is aware of her own stunted growth. The author Chhaya Devi brings home the point well by bringing the comparison of a turayi tree and the bonsai plant, both caught in a sandstorm. Akkayya points to the tree and says: "Look how tall that turayi has grown. Out in the open, see how freely it has grown. However powerful the sandstorm, it hasn't bowed a bit. Moreover, it has provided shelter to so many people and is protecting them. Imagine how many would respite from the hot Sun under the shade" (38).

In contrast she points the bonsai and says: "See how tender and delicate it is- like a housewife. You have to tend it very carefully. It can't even withstand a small dust storm or squall" (38). Children should be brought up as individuals irrespective of their gender. When Ammulu wants to free the bonsai plant, she indirectly suggested that a woman must have the freedom to grow. An uneducated woman, Akkayya had great natural wisdom, which she gained with her exposure to nature and experience in life. She taught a life truth to educated Ammulu and enlightens her with a live example.

The second story which I have taken for discussion is Ram Kumar's "The Cherry Trees". Ram Kumar, a well-known painter and short story writer in Hindi, was awarded the prestigious Kalidas Samman in 1985 and Padamshree in 1972 for his contribution to Art and Literature. His short story "The cherry trees" deal with different issues like contrast between city life and country life, early marriages of girls and children inclination towards fruits and flowers. The girl in the story wants to continue her education. But her parents, after a series of discussions and rumination decide to get her married. This upsets the girl very much. During the summer vacation, all the children visit their ancestral home to spend their time joyously and gaily. The house has a sprawling ground with many cheery trees loaded with unripe fruits. The freedom of the children to climb the trees and pluck the fruits was curtailed on account of the trees being given to a contractor on lease for the season. So the children were unhappy and upset. When they discovered that the trees are loaded with cherry fruit, they were excited. The branches were heavy with the fruit and were bending low so they were within their reach. It was tantalizing. Thus, they requested her to get them some cherries which she refused. The next day the boys climbing on each other plucked some unripe fruits. At that moment their elder sister came out and sacked them: "I'll punish if you eat them. It is a sin to pluck unripe fruit". (Mosaic, Alok, Bhalla 56).

On the surface their belief may be foolish but is a great principle of Eco balance. People without a second thought throw away unripe fruit or by using chemicals ripen it which is very unnatural. This belief in a way guards

nature. On the first day of their stay, one of the boy's couldn't sleep and the conversation between the boy and his sister is remarkable. She is disturbed because her marriage is fixed. So she is sleepless. Both of them peep out of the window and stare at the stars in the sky. The little boy expressed his disappointment- "I had hoped that she has spotted a wild animal, one can see stars everywhere" (55). She pointed at the stars and said "The stars are within our reach" (55). The boy shot back with an answer that: "In the mountains the stars seem nearer". (55) The girl coolly said: "They didn't seem to be so close when we were in Mussori or in Nainital". (55)

When we are depressed or dejected we linger or look at nature which consoles, solaces and soothes us. It provides food for our thoughts. Nature guides and directs us. In this story simple wishes and desires like plucking cherries from the trees or continuing higher education are compared to stars in the sky. They appear to be near but in reality they are far far away from us. Knowing the truth and realizing the truth are two different matters. The next day there appeared a sea change in the backyard of the house. A small tent was pitched for the chowkidar and a box full of stones was kept to drive away the birds. Though the boy's heart sank for their curtailed freedom, they were delighted when they saw the birds sitting on the trees and eating cherries unnoticed by the Old man. "If it had been within our power, we would have let the birds eat all cherries". (59)

This shows the interest of the boys in natural objects and the freedom to enjoy things prevalent in nature. The next day the contractor came with his men to get the cherries from the trees. When the activity was being processed, the boys wandered around the trees and found a bird with blood stains on its neck. They cursed the contractor and made plans for his revenge. They dug a hole and buried a bird which shows their concern and love for natural objects. Their care and concern for the tiny things in nature is an eye opener for educated and the elders. The contractor carried the fruit and left the tree branches bare. Even that day the boy and the girl couldn't sleep. They wandered under the trees. The boy remarked: "The stars seem to be very close tonight". (59)

The writer makes an interesting comparison of the marriage of a young girl against her wishes to the plucking of unripe fruit. The killing of the bird symbolizes the freedom of the girl which is likely to be curbed after marriage. The varied moods and the inner goings on the girl are brilliantly equated to the orchard and in the sighting or not sighting of the stars. The story comes to a full circle bringing out important factors like loss of freedom, crash of wishes, appeal of nature and the objects dwelling in nature from times immemorial.

In the third story "My Dream 'N' After" by U. Surya Kamari we come across a girl who clearly sees the modern world and the older generation. The protagonist perceives agony and yearnings of a female heart in this story. In contrast to the aimless minds of the women of older generation the protagonist either mainly due to education or may be because of transformed educated advanced modern society, had a clear vision and specific aims to achieve before she attains certain age. "I always had a dream - - - - to get married before 28, have a baby by around 30, and own company by 35. These numbers may sound crazy. But, unless I get married before 28, I can't be mother before 30. I can't imagine myself working for someone after 35 years. After 35, we should settle down in life". ("My Dream 'N' After")

For a man to dream of having a beautiful girl as his wife is normal. Even for a woman belonging to older generation who fancies to have a handsome boy as her husband is quite normal. But in modern times many of the educated women are troubled by the question: "can I even have a family of my own?" (My Dream - - - -).

Most of us rate certain activities of a woman very highly and regard them as successful person and we consider them as leading a happy and successful life. When they are interviewed by the media they highlight and boast of their happiness. In this story the protagonist frankly states that women like her have to choose between the two – freedom or happy married life. This poses several questions such as 'Is there no freedom in married life?' The protagonist clearly states that isolation and alienation are not the solutions for the agonies which female encounter in their lives. "What is the use of your achievements when you have no one you can call 'dear'? (My Dream - - -).

Very strongly and plainly the protagonist states the fact that one needs family to share and bear the things or situations in life. This reminds us of Anita Desai's 'Fire on the Mountain' and 'Cry the Peacock'. She cautions the modern women not to opt for either isolation or alienation. Women have sexual needs and place priority to sensitive feelings like 'warmth', 'love' and 'care' from the husband. The anguish of Kamala Das is put forth by the narrator in one sentence 'I wanted to share my joys, sorrows, hopes day life and everything which I can say mine with him." (My Dream ----)

Though there is a change in the outlook of women over generations yet certain basic beliefs and ideologies remained same even among educated women. "After all you don't get married every other day - - - in India a women is considered as husband's property - - - after she is married. They said they could not find another girl whose horoscope matched with mine" (My Dream -----).

A women belonging to older generations adjust to the new situations and circumstances in the father-in-law's house and it is a common thing for her. But the educated woman of today feels that she would jeopardize her married life if she stays with her in-laws. Who should be blamed for it?

The protagonist returned home at the second week after her marriage. She is totally depressed, out of tune, lost her hope and faith in God. Probably or simply due to culture and tradition and the simplicity of her character prevents her from taking revenge or fighting for justice. She does not take recourse to 'law' or 'lathi' to force her husband to live with her. What she craves for is 'I want a person who wants me - - - - - I don't want to just give my body. I want him to take my mind, heart, feelings and everything that is mine" (my Dream - - - -).

How many persons share these feelings? If they share they fear they would sever their relation. So it is difficult to accept that most of the relations begin and end in body relations or bloody relations. The protagonist has a seasoned mind and so resigns with the probable idea in her husband's mind "May be – he wanted someone more educated, more sophisticated than I "(My Dream - - - -).

She decides to start her education to make him happy or acceptable in the eyes of her husband. Bearing these psychological strains, facing many financial problems and sharp flings from the society, she completed her computer education. All these efforts, her patience and restraint are just to clear the distinctions between her and her husband. She got a job offer in Canada so she decides to meet her husband and tell him of her achievement. When her husband paid no heed and turned a deaf ear to all this she was depressed and sank into despair. Acting upon the advice of her family members, relatives and near and dear ones she landed in Canada full of gloom, with a broken heart and shattered dreams. After some time she visited home for a brief visit and informed her husband about her achievements. Very strangely her husband asked her to come back. The protagonist wanted to know why her husband did not appear at the office of Subbamma, just time before she left for Canada. He did not furnish her with a proper and straight answer.

Her parents and relatives told her not to be disappointed and lose hope, feel alienation and end her life. "These people just see the smiling me" (My Dream - - - -).

This shows her attitude towards life and the attitude of the society towards her. Can she allow any other person to enter her life? Did she ever try? She answered these questions bravely and courageously.

"I tried - - -- but failed miserably" (My Dream - - - -).

Society wanted her to live happily and take her own decisions. They feel that now she has taken up a job, her difficulties are over. They have their own view points for thinking in this manner. But the protagonist herself poses the question: "They say my hardships are over. Are they? I'm in a position where I cannot go back or forward (My Dream - - - -).

Every gossip about her, every inquisitive look at her, thoughts of past, rakes her wounds and wrings her body and mind. These things occur due to lack of understanding about life, about what constitutes life. When there is understanding between man and woman life moves smoothly. 'Understanding' has always played a vital role in human life. As Shakespeare says "This world's a stage, and men and women merely players. We play our part in this spectacular world. Women should be courageous and face odds bravely. It is necessary to follow the course of life. The concept of women's human rights has opened the way for women to articulate against the wide spread discrimination and violence women experience every day.

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Culture and Education: Storytelling as a reflective tool for critical thinking

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Abstract— *The power of storytelling is acknowledged as having a powerful capacity to help readers think about characters and reflect on their own lives through the experiences of the characters explored in such tales. Having been part of the cultural character of the wider human community from time immemorial, storytelling retains its strong capacity to inspire critical reflection. This paper seeks to explore the relationship between storytelling and critical thinking and how one can stimulate the other and expose the overall benefits such an exercise can produce.*

Keywords— ***education, culture, English literature, critical thinking, reflective practice***

Introduction

It is most interesting to examine two very important instruments for educational strategies: storytelling and critical thinking. Each of these contains a wealth of avenues that can be explored for different purposes. My focus will be on how they can be used together to suitably equip both students and their teachers to format their thinking so as to demand more of themselves and to receive more from their experiences, particularly in respect of their reading of stories.

Defining Critical Thinking

Before going any further, however, I would like to examine what is understood by the term 'critical thinking'. What does it involve? In the first instance, research and practice tell us that some of the most frequently cited terms in respect of 'critical thinking' include 'reasoning', 'logic', 'judgment', 'metacognition', 'reflection', 'questioning' and 'mental processes'.

A more specific definition would be something like one provided by Diane Halpern who observes that:

> Critical thinking is the use of those cognitive skills or strategies that increase the probability of a desirable outcome. It is used to describe thinking that is purposeful, reasoned, and goal directed—the kind of thinking involved in solving problems, formulating inferences, calculating likelihoods, and making decisions, when the thinker is using skills that are thoughtful and effective for the particular context and type of thinking task.
>
> (Halpern, 2003: 6)

If we look at the essentials of this definition, we can see that the key here is that we have a particular objective in mind and that we use a logical approach to resolve difficulties, make connections and estimate probabilities about different possible outcomes and their likely effects on the path forward that we wish to take.

Research carried out by Kate Wilson (2016) also affirms the role of critical thinking in the creation and stimulation of 'higher order skills such as interpreting, identifying logical fallacies, analysing cause and effect, synthesising claims, making inference sand predictions, evaluating and problem solving' (Wilson, 2016: 258). Similarly, Davies and Barnett (2015) refer to how critical thinking also incorporates 'self-reflection' and 'self-regulation' as these prepare students to become 'independent and inquisitive seekers of understanding' (cited in Wilson, 2016: 258). In a world wearisome of purported 'fake news' and its noxious effects,

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critical thinking skills have become ever-more important in determining the veracity of information given that the internet has now become the primary source of information and this requires great caution. As such, critical thinking is regarded as an essential asset of the educational process that provides a strong impetus for the effective cognitive development of learners (Wiwikananda and Susanti, 2022: 356).

Storytelling as a reflective tool

Storytelling then provides an excellent context to consider specific possible situations, how different characters cope with their predicament and provides opportunities to learn from the lessons offered in those tales. How does this work? The literature contains a wealth of information in respect of what storytelling can do to improve thinking skills. One approach affirms that 'Storytelling encourages students to analyze narratives, solve problems presented within the story, reflect on diverse perspectives, and engage in ethical and logical reasoning—all of which are key components of critical thinking' (Xushvaqtova, 2024: 138).

By employing storytelling as an active teaching tool in the classroom, teachers can create a hospitable environment for the advancement of learning for students for such key tenets of critical thinking skills in an interactive and memorable way. We can identify three clear features of this process:

1. *Cognitive Engagement* – this is where stories stimulate the learner in from both an emotional and intellectual perspective that solicits reactions about plot developments, character stances, and the consequences that come from the decisions made by the characters;
2. *Problem-Solving*: A large variety of stories are concerned with difficulties and dilemmas that present ideal opportunities for students to think about solutions to those situations and in so doing, build and refine their problem-solving capacities;
3. *Empathy and Perspective-Taking*: the context of storytelling creates an imaginative space in which students are brought into contact with different viewpoints and this stimulates their ability to empathize and reflect on situations from many different perspectives (Xushvaqtova, 2024: 138).

These three key areas are essential features of the practice of critical thinking and provide a strong probability that learners will successfully develop the necessary attitudes and disposition to be effective critical thinkers.

Storytelling is a powerful strategy as it also provides the means to socialize younger learners into particular ways of thinking and value systems and this in turn determines how they view the world. In effect, it represents a mechanism that "constructs our sense of reality and a filter through which we process each event that confronts us every day" (Moore, 2013: 65). Moreover, since life presents each person with a myriad of experiences, storytelling provides students with the skills to navigate complex rhetorical situations (Boyce, 1996: 68) as well as elements such as 'inferences, suspense, exploring themes, generic symbols thinking and literary terms' that encourage learners to think about meaning and comprehension (Mello, 2011: 45) and this in turn affords greater development of students' communication and cultural comprehension skills, which nurture the growth of critical thinking skills (Shrestha, 2024: 2).

The act of reading a story, or hearing a story is not simply an act of entertainment. It represents a great deal more as we have discussed. As learners are involved in the process of hearing and retelling stories they become familiarised with the concept of a story and gain an understanding of the fact that a story has a beginning, a middle and an end, this then allows them to learn how to understand the concept of sequencing in a meaningful way as they hear and re-tell stories themselves. As they progress through this process, learners start to question the motives of the characters in these stories with the appropriate prompts from their teachers. Following on from this, learners gain the ability to identify heroes and antiheroes and eventually they create their own characters. Such a process affords learners to apply progressively more complex higher-order thinking skills and this means they become metacognitively aware of the process of their own learning as they assume the role of developing storytellers that ultimately leads them to assuming a principal part "in creating or constructing new knowledge" (Palmer et. al. 2001: 200).

Storytelling as part of the human condition

Thus far, we have looked at storytelling as part of the learning process in isolation. However, storytelling fulfils a far greater and wider role than merely an instrument of learning. To some thinkers and researchers alike, storytelling or in their words 'narration' – represents symbolic actions, where words and deeds have a particular order and meaning for those are part of the world or system that live, create and interpret them. As Alasdair MacIntyre would have it: "Man is in his actions and practice, as well as his fictions, essentially a storytelling animal" where "enacted dramatic narrative is the basic and essential genre for characterisation of human actions." This means that storytelling should not be confined to fictive contexts and that means that it has direct relevance to 'stories of living and to stories of the imagination' (Fisher, 1987: 58).

The realm in which this discussion has been labelled 'Narration as a Paradigm of Human Communication' defended by Walter Fisher as being concerned with that:

> …that human communication should be viewed as historical as well as situational, as stories or accounts competing with other stories or accounts purportedly constituted by good reasons, as rational when the stories satisfy the demands of narrative probability and narrative fidelity, and as inevitably moral inducements…
>
> (Fisher, 1987: 58)

Fisher's remarks remind us that stories provide ideal imagined situations in which we can interrogate certain ideas and observe the actions of given characters motivated by particular moral principles and expected familiar structures within stories as against other stories. Different stories compete for legitimate interpretation of meaning and provide the occasion and instrument to interrogate a wide variety of concepts such what should be regarded as right and for whom and what goals are legitimate achieved by what means.

Storytelling then provides a powerful means to challenge what is known as the 'narrative paradigm' which strongly questions the assumption that human communication – assuming we can believe it is in fact rhetorical in nature – has to be argumentative in its form, that reason can only be attained through discourse of a particular kind characterised by unmistakably distinct ways of inference and implication and that the rules for the evaluation of rhetorical communication necessarily must be logical values found derived solely from informal or formal logic (Fisher, 1987: 58).

Looking closer at this idea of the narrative paradigm, we can see that storytelling has a very powerful role to play in characterising its operation and its content. A modern and evolving society requires the presence and involvement of qualified people in the public decision-making process and for this to happen, citizens (both current ones and those who will become those people in the future) must share a common language, an understanding of argumentative issues and the different ways to engage in reasoning and the ability to assess and question the ideas that come about as part of this process. As Fisher observes:

> there must exist something that can be called public or social knowledge and there must be a "public" for argument to have the kind of force envisioned for it…Because the rational-world paradigm has these requirements and because being rational (being competent in argument) must be learned, the historic mission of education in the West has been to generate a consciousness of national and institutional community and to instruct citizens in at least the rudiments of logic and rhetoric.
>
> (Fisher, 1987: 60)

The notion of this so-called 'rational-world paradigm' stands as a powerful reminder that critical thinking must remain at the heart of our efforts at educating future citizens and indeed, current ones. Storytelling provides a wealth of linguistic and ideational opportunities to propel this process forward and as it does so it ensures that the citizens of tomorrow are at least given good examples of characters in situations that provide moral and civic lessons on how to deal with the challenges of everyday life in an ever-changing world.

Further interrogation of the notion of the narrative paradigm reveals its connection to Bormann's concepts of "fantasy themes" and "rhetorical visions". Fantasy is a technical term that means "the creative and imaginative interpretation of events that fulfils a psychological or rhetorical needs". (Here we can see the clear role of storytelling once more). For their part, fantasy themes come about "in group interaction out of a recollection of something that happened to the group in the past or a dream of what a group might do in the future". Taken together, they become what have been referred to as "rhetorical visions" that are translated into dramatic stories that represent the fabric of social reality for their creators, which are ultimately "rhetorical fictions" that are products of fact and faith which represent a persuasive set of principles rather than purely make-believe worlds of the imagination (Fisher, 1987: 63).

The role of creative texts in language learning: critical avenues?

The companion volume to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages issued by the Council of Europe in 2020 makes specific mention of 'creative texts.' They are mentioned in the context of being the main source of "Reading as a leisure activity" – this affords the opportunity for students to expand beyond the limit confines of the class contact hours prescribed by curricular standards and legal provisions for class time. Fortunately, the companion ascribes an expansive vision of what reading of literature should encompass as a broad category of texts including 'film, theatre, recitals and multimodal installations' that function as 'works of imagination and cultural significance' (Council of Europe, 2020: 105). The authors of the text point out that such creative texts generally successfully elicit a reaction and arguably this aids the process of reflection that begins the process of critical thinking.

The authors assert that there are four main responses to the ideas and information presented in the target texts which broadly cover the following:

1. Engagement – giving a personal reaction to the language, style or content, feeling drawn to an aspect of the work or a character or characteristic of it;
2. Interpretation – ascribing meaning or significance to aspects of the work including content, motifs, character motives, metaphor, etc.;
3. Analysis of certain aspects of the work including language, literary devices, context, characters, relationships, etc.
4. Evaluation – giving a critical appraisal of technique, structure, the vision of the artist, the significance of the work, etc.

(Council of Europe, 2020: 106).

Even a cursory reading of the above four points reveals unmistakeable links to critical thinking principles, particular the last point which deals with an examination of the type of technique used, the organisation of the same, the overall image in the mind of the artist and the broader meaning of the work in question. It is to be expected that the depth and quality of the application of the four points by students will be heavily conditioned by their command of the language since A1 users will engage in relatively superficial reflection in contrast to C1 users who are much more likely to produce much more detailed and well-reasoned reflections on the selected text(s).

Looking again at the four points, we find that a distilled exposition of the point involving students expressing a personal response to selected creative texts would include:

a) Explaining what they liked, what interested them about the work;
b) Describing characters, saying which they identified with;
c) Relating aspects of the work to their own experience;
d) Relating feelings and emotions;
e) Personal interpretation of the work as a whole or of aspects of it

The examination of the learners' everyday reality is thus brought into personal focus by following the steps outlined above so as to allow them to reflect on their own lived experience. In this way the green shoots of empathy can be nurtured to become fully-developed competencies that embrace the principles of understanding and tolerance.

For more advanced learners nearer to the C1 competency level, having had such instruction is beneficial as prepares them to actively in engage with texts rather than be passive consumers of information in a way that treats reading as a dialogue. Such an approach gradually equips and encourages students to create meaning rather than simply receive it (Wilson, 2016: 258).

Training critically engaged citizens

A demanding and unpredictable contemporary world requires constant reflection and critical engagement on the part of policymakers and educators to prepare society for future challenges. In this respect, frequent reformulation of ideas is demand. In that respect, a document titled 'REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE REFERENCE FRAMEWORK OF COMPETENCES FOR DEMOCRATIC CULTURE (RFCDC) 2023' was published in December 2024. I will refer to this document hereinafter as the RFCDC and it was written to '…address current political and social issues and future challenges…' (Council of Europe, 2024: 48).

The review also called for the Competences for Democratic Culture would take account of what is referred to as 'past and current social and political issues and challenges such as migration, human rights, digitalisation and artificial intelligence, social inequalities and environmental issues' (Council of Europe, 2024: 48).

In what I would argue is one of its most striking recommendations, the Review recognise the fundamental role of critical thinking when it asserts the necessity to.

> Place a strong emphasis on developing analytical and critical thinking and problem-solving skills to prepare learners for confronting the complexities and uncertainties of contemporary European and global society, including the ones related to environmental education and sustainability'
>
> (Council of Europe, 2024: 48)

Once more, we are confronted with the unavoidable need to teach analytical and critical thinking to both mature citizens, but also the current school-going population who will become the citizens of the future. The timely reminder to also take account of environmental education is an important focus of attention in an era increasingly marked by the strong effects of climate change and environmental deterioration.

Any initiative that seeks to educate about the future must inevitably deal with educating the youth of today who shall become the critically-aware citizens of tomorrow and thus the decision-makers of the future. To do this, we must try to understand how students picture the future and think about how it might be. In their instructive book, *Youth futures: comparative research and transformative visions*, Gidley and Inayatullah (2002) stress the need to go beyond the temptation to merely identify what young people think the future will be like, whether at local or at global level, but this is of no real value in isolation. They stress the necessity to incorporate young people's views on what concerns them in terms of what is happening in the world around them and what hopes they may have to change those things in the

future (Gidley and Inayatullah, 2002: 507). In research carried out in the late 1996 and 2006 it was discovered that there were five dimensions to the learning of students engaged in exploring future issues. These are:

1. *Cognitive dimension*—learning new facts and information about the current global situation, traditionally considered to be the core of teaching about global issues. Some students felt cognitively overwhelmed by what they learnt about environmental and other issues.

2. *Affective dimension*—some students experienced a wave of conflicting emotions when considering the impact of global issues on the future. These emotions ranged from excitement and hopefulness to depression and despair.

3. *Existential dimension*—for some being confronted with issues of sustainability or climate change can lead to deep soul searching about their values, life-purpose and ways of living.

4. *Empowerment dimension*—if students can work through these previous stages they begin to feel a sense of agency and empowerment arising from a clearer sense of personal and (with older groups) professional direction. In particular this arises through envisioning positive scenarios for particular futures and the steps needed for their realisation.

5. *Action dimension*—if the questions raised by the first four stages of learning can be satisfactorily resolved then informed personal, social and political choices and action are much more likely to follow. (Gidley and Inayatullah, 2002: 507-08).

These five dimensions provide a useful set of principles to examine how greater consideration can be given to make pedagogical strategies more innovative and engaging. However, as educators we must also be honest with ourselves so that we can recognise that a strong degree of denial persists in society about the scale and extent of the environmental problems linked to climate change. In more recent years, a realisation has finally been reached whereby the future can longer be allowed to simply 'take care of itself'. The arrival at such a paradigm shift has also led to the acknowledgement that short-term thinking has long been a default norm in Western societies and since this habit is gradually breaking down in some segments of society, we have learned that we must make provision for the future using new ideas (Slaughter, 2004: 182). In this respect, we can once again resort to the power of storytelling to provide and stimulate alternative perspectives in the minds of the citizens of the future and their teachers and this is a point I will return to later.

Frustrated systems of perception: ways forward?

Overcoming difficulties in terms of clear perception of challenges requires an honest assessment of existing challenges. A strong perceptual impulse in this respect can be found in the work of Richard Slaughter in his book *Futures Beyond Dystopia: Creating Social Foresight* in which he identifies a practice responsible for frustrating the process of true perception of reality which he calls 'bounded rationality' (Slaughter, 2004: 183). Slaughter's diagnosis of this situation informs us that:

> It is normal for those working in organizations to focus their attention strongly within the organization and to ignore much of significance that lies outside. This inward-looking focus encourages a kind of systematic blindness to 'signals of change' that arise in the external environment. Wider systemic relationships and processes on which the organization depends are constantly overlooked. While it is true that everyone needs perceptual 'filters' to reduce the quantity of information they can deal with, the question of quality remains central. It follows that the selection and use of such 'filters' needs to be both conscious and strategic. Bounded rationality means that this seldom happens.
>
> (Slaughter, 2004: 183)

Slaughter's incisive mapping of this myopic and closed-loop thinking provides further evidence of the need to employ pedagogical methods that encourage the acquisition of critical thinking strategies so as to expose these flaws in our thinking. Once identified, these shortcomings can be remedied with goodwill and hard-work. The key instrument in this endeavour identified in this lecture is of course storytelling. I wish to return to that domain and retrieve some useful insights from the work of the late American science-fiction writer and essayist, Ray Bradbury.

In a collection titled *Bradbury Speaks: Too Soon from the Cave, Too Far from the Stairs* by Ray Bradbury originally published in 2005 by Harper Collins, Bradbury offers some insightful remarks. In an essay from this collection called 'Predicting the Past, Remembering the Future' (2001), Bradbury observes the vast challenges we face, but also the great progress made to date where he says:

> "Of what is past, or passing, or to come."
>
> That says it all.
>
> The last line of William Butler Yeats's hypnotic poem "Sailing to Byzantium."
>
> It describes the entire history of mankind on Earth.
>
> It tells the whole history of science fiction in a few incredible words.
>
> For history and science fiction are inseparable.
>
> Poppycock?

> No, humanity's truth.
>
> For all that human beings have ever thought about is the future.
>
> Hiding in caves, discovering fire, building cities—all of these were science-fictional endeavors. We can see the depiction of possible futures scrawled on cave walls in southern France, where the first science-fiction tales illustrated how to find, kill, and eat the wild beasts.
>
> The problems that faced primitive man had to be solved. They dreamed answers to dire questions; that is the essence of the fiction that becomes science. Once a vivid dream was realized in their heads, they were able to act on it. So the creatures of old time planned for tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow. What is true of them certainly is true of us. We wonder about tomorrow morning, tomorrow evening, and the day after that, so as to plan our schools, marriages, and careers. Everything that we do has to be imagined first.
>
> (Bradbury, 2005: 33)

Indeed, Bradbury's powerful imagination also led him to write the following in *Earthrise and its Faces* (1999):

> What a shame our new generations were born in the wrong year. They missed the great revelations. They arrived when the curtains had already risen on the miraculous, and so could not gasp with love at the newfound land of Earth.
>
> I speak, of course, of that night when billions of TV viewers first glimpsed our bluewhite world in Earthrise, a remembrance of old time, a promiser of futures.
>
> It was, to many of us, the great face of Creation thrust near to enchant us to tears. It was love at first sight.
>
> But then the second sights came. Peering closer at the wondrous blue sphere in space, we said, "Where have I seen that face before?"
>
> The answer was: Never.
>
> Until our time, cartographers fumbled their hands over terrains arctic and equatorial and made Braille transcriptions to steer sailors of seas and clouds.
>
> The whole of the Earth was a crinkled maze awaiting the rough guess of sea captains, pathfinders, and
>
> nomad tillers of soil. From these palsied reckonings, windblown prints sprang, hoping
>
> for safe passage but risking death. Airplanes did the first new chartings, jets sharpened
>
> the perception, but it was the shuttle that lassoed the globe to tapestry darkrooms with manifested dreams.
>
> At twenty-five thousand miles per hour, those bullets unraveled photo lightning flashes that drowned in chemistries, rose as revelations.
>
> And there were the faces.
>
> A few and then ten dozen mysterious looks. Great continental bodies, vast oceans,
>
> and then sharp focusings at this old wrinkled world hid under our spacecraft until in camera.
>
> At long last see all of Earth suspended, they said. Then find its grimaces, up close as
>
> the plains, hills, and mountains show how they came to scowl or break forth plains calm
>
> of sand and dunes that, wind-washed, erased old looks for new. (…)
>
> (Bradbury, 2005: 43)

Bradbury strongly encourages us to be sceptical about the doomsayers and dream-makers alike, but where have we heard that idea before? Oh yes, *critical thinking*!

Critical thinking on its own, of course, is not enough. So what about the stories and their tellers? Fortunately for us great writers like Ray Bradbury have gifted the world with many wonderful tales. Before I conclude my remarks I wish to mention at least one of them. In perhaps one of the most famous dystopian works for fiction of the 20th century, *Fahrenheit 451*, Bradbury warns against the dangers of censorship and the imposition of an official narrative in one segment near the end of the book where one character says:

> Speed up the film, Montag, quick. Click? Pic? Look, Eye, Now, Flick, Here, Three, Swift, Pace, Up, Down, In Out, Why, How, Who, What, Where, Eh? Uh? Bang! Smack! Wallop, Bing, Bong, Boom! Digest-digests, digest-digests-digests. Politics. One column, two sentences, a headline! Then, in mid-air, all vanishes. Whirl man‟s mind around so fast under the pumping hands of publishers, exploiters, broadcasters, that the centrifuge flings off all unnecessary, time-wasting thought!‟ (F 73)

A further interaction attests to the issue of an approved official narrative where:

> We must all be alike. Not everyone born free and equal, as the Constitution says, but everyone made equal. Each man the image of every other; then all

> are happy, for there are no mountains to make them cover, to judge themselves against. So! A book is a loaded gun in the house next door. Burn it! Take the shot from the weapon. Breach man‟s mind. Who knows who might be the target of the well-read man? Me? I won‟t stomach them for a minute . . . (*F* 77)

An updated film-version of *Fahrenheit 451* was made by HBO in 2018 for those of you interested in seeing it. I would, however, strongly recommend you read the book beforehand.

CONCLUSION

As I mentioned at the beginning, the acquisition of critical thinking skills and storytelling go hand in hand. Critical reflection needs a context and context needs characters and events to give it form and life-force. We can find a plentiful supply of such forms of life in fiction, but do we have the optimism and energy to show our students the way forward? I choose to believe that the answer to those two questions is a resounding yes.

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The Voice of the Unheard: Tribal Literature as Counter-Discourse in Indian English Literature

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Abstract— *The tribal literature in Indian English literature acts as an apt tool of counter-discourse on the mainstream discourses on history, culture, development, identity, etc. It exposes the deprived, wretched and the downtrodden. Oral voices make their place to communicate their anguish. Tribal writing in Indian English literature is also a strong discourse of contestation of the dominant discourse of history, development, culture and identity by giving an authentic experience to native discourse to voice the excluded, misunderstood and ignored people. Through writings highlighting the experience of resistance, identity, displacement, ecological understanding, the safeguarding of culture, or the retelling of oral stories, the tribal literature undermines the constructions of colonialism, capitalism and the state apparatus. It aims to understand how tribal narratives contest hegemonic representations and establish indigenous authority through analysing the writings of Mahasweta Devi, Gopinath Mohanty, Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, Temsula Ao, and Mamang Dai within the framework of Subaltern Studies and Ecocriticism. The essay focuses on how tribal literature remembers collective history, reinforces cultural integrity and builds up a sensitive rapport with nature. The utilisation of the English language as a means of literary representation is beneficial for the accessibility and propagation of indigenous voices and thus opens debates on authenticity and misrepresentation.*

Keywords— ***Tribal Literature, Counter-Discourse, Indigenous Identity, Resistance, Subaltern Studies, Ecocriticism, Cultural Preservation, Oral Tradition, Displacement, Marginalisation, Indian English Literature.***

Introduction

The proposed research paper refers to the voices of marginalised and vulnerable people and seeks to examine how tribal culture interacts with Indian literature to create a new literary framework. The researcher will attempt to explore how tribal culture, with its rich knowledge systems, oral traditions, life philosophy and nature-centric values, contributes to reshaping Indian English literature. The paper will examine how the incorporation of tribal experiences, cultural narratives, indigenous wisdom and struggle against marginalisation provides indian english literature with new themes, perspectives and aesthetic dimensions. Furthermore, it will investigate how the interaction between tribal culture and indian english literature leads to a new literary perspective that is more authentic, inclusive different, diverse and representative indian multicultural aura.

Tribal Literature and Counter-Discourse

Counter-discourse refers to stories that oppose the systems of knowledge and representation. Michel Foucaults theories of power and discourse suggest that knowledge systems are closely connected to structures of authority. Dominant discourses often silence marginalised voices by defining what is considered knowledge or culture. Tribal literature resists these structures by highlighting indigenous experiences that mainstream literature has historically ignored.

In India tribal communities have faced centuries of displacement, land alienation, exploitation and socio-economic exclusion. Colonial forest laws, mining

industries, industrial projects and developmental policies have disrupted lifestyles and weakened tribal autonomy. Mainstream narratives have often portrayed communities as primitive, uncivilized or backward. Tribal literature challenges these stereotypes by presenting portrayals of indigenous life that are rooted in dignity, community and ecological harmony.

As a counter-discourse tribal literature exposes the violence of modernization and capitalist expansion. It critiques projects that destroy forests, rivers and indigenous livelihoods in the name of progress. At the time it preserves oral traditions, myths, songs and collective memory that are central to tribal identity. Thus tribal literature becomes both an act of resistance and a process of preservation.

Major Tribal Voices in Indian English Literature

1. Mahasweta Devi: Resistance and Marginalisation. Mahasweta Devi's work concentrates on the oppression and resistance of tribals. In Chotti Munda and His Arrow (1979), she demonstrates the effects of modernisation, industrialisation and state power on tribal lives. The arrow stands for their identity, culture and the weapon of protest against oppression.

2. Gopinath Mohanty: Indigenous Identity and Exploitation In Paraja (1961), Gopinath Mohanty depicts the life of the Paraja tribe of Orissa. The novel is concerned with their poverty, displacement and economic exploitation. Through the story of Sukru Jani, he reveals the unjust social and economic system and their subsequent marginalisation.

3. Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar: Contemporary Tribal Realities Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's collection of stories, The Adivasi Will Not Dance (2017) depicts contemporary realities of tribal life. They deal with topics of migration, displacement, and cultural commodification. The title story, "The Adivasi Will Not Dance," is a commentary on how tribal identity is used and sold in the contemporary world.

4. Temsula Ao: Memory, Trauma and Cultural Preservation Temsula Ao, in These Hills Called Home (2006) records the lived experiences of Naga tribals of the North East of India, subjected to conflict, violence and insurgency. Her narrative highlights the power of memory, oral storytelling and tradition in retaining cultural and historical identities.

5. Mamang Dai: Ecology and Indigenous Consciousness The Black Hill (2012) by Mamang Dai showcases the intricate relationship between tribals and ecology. The narrative of indigenous consciousness, its deep reverence for land, rivers and forests, shows the significance of ecology to indigenous existence and survival, and a rejection of an insensitive model of development. Language, Identity and Representation

One of the debates within tribal literature concerns the use of English as a medium of expression. English provides writers with access to national and global readerships, enabling marginalised voices to gain visibility within mainstream literary discourse. At the time, questions arise regarding linguistic authenticity and cultural translation.

Tribal experiences are really rooted in the stories that are passed down and the languages that are used by people. When we try to translate these experiences into English, we might lose some of the meanings and cultural details.. Tribal writers are very creative with English, and they often use indigenous expressions, myths and rhythms in their stories.

This way of using language challenges the ideas that were forced on people during times about what language is pure and what writing is good. Tribal writers are changing English to make it a tool for resistance by adding thoughts and feelings to it. Because of this, Indian English literature is now including voices from people who were previously left out, and it is not just about the experiences of rich people in cities.

Subaltern Studies and Tribal Discourse

Subaltern Studies is an important idea that helps us understand tribal literature. Scholars like Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak said that we need to find and tell the stories of people who have been left out of the stories.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak asked an important question, "Can the subaltern speak?" which shows how hard it is for people who are marginalised to express themselves in a system that is controlled by others. Tribal literature is a way for indigenous communities to tell their stories and resist being represented by others.

Tribal discourse also raises important questions about who gets to tell the stories. Non-tribal writers like Mahasweta Devi helped to make tribal people more visible. Now indigenous authors are saying that they should be the ones to tell their own stories and have control over their own narratives. This is part of a discussion about who is authentic who has power and who gets to decide what is important in literature.

Tribal literature in Indian English is a powerful movement that challenges the main stories that we are told about society and culture. It is a way for tribal writers to resist being marginalized and to reconstruct their identities through stories of resistance, memory and cultural survival.

Through the works of writers like Mahasweta Devi, Gopinath Mohanty Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, Temsula Ao and Mamang Dai tribal literature shows the lives of indigenous communities and challenges the people who are in power. These stories show how tribal communities deal

with being forced to leave their homes being poor and having their culture erased while also keeping their identities and being strong.

This study also shows that tribal literature is very important, in Subaltern Studies and postcolonial discourse because it challenges the stories that we are told and gives a voice to people who were previously left out. Tribal writers use their connection to the earth their traditions and their indigenous knowledge to critique the way that modern society values money and growth above all else and to propose alternative ways of living together.

In the end tribal literature makes Indian English literature richer by adding different perspectives that were previously left out. It not makes the voices of marginalized people louder but it also makes readers think again about what they believe about civilization, development, identity and power. By doing this tribal literature is. A form of artistic expression and a way to challenge the status quo and fight for justice.

Comparative Matrix: Epistemological & Literary Shifts

The table below maps out the core conflicts, methodologies, and shifts in representation highlighted within the discourse.

Analytical Dimension	**Dominant / Mainstream Narrative**	**Subaltern Mediation (Non-Tribal Allies)**	**Indigenous Self-Representation (Tribal Authors)**
Primary Voices	State, Corporate Capital, Colonial/Postcolonial Elites	Mahasweta Devi, Gopinath Mohanty	Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, Temsula Ao, Mamang Dai
Core Ideology / Focus	"Development," urbanization, resource extraction, and capitalist growth.	Visibility of marginalization, structural violence, displacement, and poverty.	Cultural survival, ancestral memory, ecological interconnectedness, and autonomy.
Strategic Medium	Hegemonic institutional records, mainstream media, state history.	Social-realist fiction, external advocacy, political critique.	Native oral traditions translated to English, subversion of standard syntax, indigenous knowledge systems.
The "Voice" Mechanism	Spoken for or entirely erased from history.	Spoken about with empathy; structural critique from a position of relative privilege.	The Subaltern speaking directly;unmediated self-narrative and reclaimed agency.
Primary Artistic Goal	Maintenance of the status quo and assimilation of the tribal subject.	Challenging the conscience of the powerful; exposing state/feudal atrocities.	Reconstructing identity, resisting cultural erasure, and validating alternative modes of civilization.

CONCLUSION

The Janjatiye literature in Indian English has emerged as a transformative literary movement that challenges dominant socio-cultural conflicts and traditions, and oral literary narratives, and redefines the boundaries of Indian literature. As a counter-discourse, tribal writing resists historical marginalisation, exposes systemic exploitation, and reconstructs indigenous identity through narratives of resistance, memory, ecology, and cultural survival.

Through the lenses of works of Mahasweta Devi, Gopinath Mohanty, Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, Temsula Ao, and Mamang Dai, tribal literature foregrounds the lived realities of indigenous communities and contests hegemonic structures of power. These narratives reveal how tribal communities negotiate displacement, poverty, environmental destruction, and cultural erasure while simultaneously preserving collective identity and resilience.

DOMINANT PARADIGM OF “CIVILIZATION.

Progress = Capital accumulation, industrialisation, resource mastery.

Subaltern View: Tribal land is merely raw material waiting for profit

Challenged by:

TRIBAL PARADIGM OF "CO-EXISTENCE"

Progress = Preservation of ecological equilibrium, ancestral memory.

Subaltern View: The Earth is a repository of history and survival.

The study further demonstrates that tribal literature occupies an important position within Subaltern Studies and postcolonial discourse by challenging mainstream representations and enabling marginalised voices to speak for themselves. Ecological consciousness, oral tradition, and indigenous epistemology become central elements through which tribal writers critique capitalist modernity and propose alternative ways of understanding community and coexistence.

Ultimately, tribal literature enriches Indian English literature by introducing diverse perspectives that were historically excluded from canonical discourse. It not only amplifies the voices of the marginalised but also compels readers to reconsider dominant assumptions regarding civilisation, development, identity, and power. In doing so, tribal literature functions as both literary expression and political intervention, transforming literature into a space of resistance, dialogue, and social justice

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Humanity Amidst Communal Violence: Witnessing Partition Victims through Saadat Hasan Manto's *Khol Do*

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Abstract— *The Partition of India in 1947 has become one of the most devastating events in the history of South Asia that saw unprecedented communal violence, mass displacement and human suffering. Literary depictions of the day-to-day life of ordinary people tell the stories that are not always central to official histories. This article takes up the case of Saadat Hasan Manto's Khol Do for an analysis of the role of the writer in its capacity as a witness to the traumatic experiences of Partition victims. Inspecting trauma theory, testimony studies, memory studies and feminist theory, the study proposes that Manto brings fiction to bear as a potent ethical archive of collective suffering. The paper examines the collapse of humanity in face of communal violence, the gender aspect of atrocities of Partition and the lingering psychological impact on the trauma through a close textual analysis of Khol Do. The focal points are Sakina's and Sirajuddin's lives—their split identities and heartaches are the microcosm of the human toll of political violence. Instead of the violence being a one-off event in history, Manto uncovers the ability of violence to shape memory, identity and moral conscience. The paper also argues that by rehabilitating the marginalised victims and keeping the emotions that are usually missing from the historical record, Khol Do confronts the nationalist historiography. This work places Manto's writings in the broader context of the interdisciplinary discussions of witnessing and memory, and underscores the continuing importance of literature in recording human suffering and preserving the memory of Partition.*

Keywords— ***Partition; trauma; communal violence; memory studies; gendered violence.***

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the most difficult events in modern south Asian history is the Partition of India in 1947. The Partition brought about unprecedented communal violence, mass displacement and the permanent separation of families and communities, due to the formation of two sovereign states, India and Pakistan. In just a few months, almost 15 million people were forcibly displaced by the newly defined borders and as many as 1 to 2 million people perished in communal violence, massacres, abductions, and retaliatory killings. This catastrophe was suffered by women disproportionately: rape, abduction, conversion and honour killings were used as means to establish dominance over each other. Constitutional history and the reconfiguration of territories and states have been the main themes in the official histories of the period, but these accounts often overlook the emotions and psychologies of ordinary people. In this context, literary narratives develop a rich historical and moral message.

Saadat Hasan Manto is one of the most prominent writers to write about Partition and is well-known for his uncompromising depiction of the suffering and the breakdown of humanity. Diascouring the nationalist triumphalism, communal partisanship, Manto concentrated on the catastrophic impact of political violence on normal lives. While his Partition narratives do not celebrate the birth of the nation-states, nor blame any particular community for their plight, they reveal the common humanity of human beings facing hatred, displacement, and brutality. In his works which are clearly realistic and

psychologically insightful, Manto has rendered each experience into a lasting witness to a collective trauma, which makes his works essential reading in the study of Partition literature.

Khol Do is one of Manto's Partition stories that is particularly unique in its unflinchingly depicting gendered violence and psychological devastation. The narrative tells of the search which Sirajuddin went through after Partition, looking for his missing daughter, Sakina. The conclusion is a shocking one, in which Sakina is asked to meekly perform the task "Khol Do" ("Open it") after being raped over and over again, and ends up as a mere, soulless instrument devoid of choice and agency. Unlike portraying violence as a sensational event, Manto's restrained, inarticulateness and irony reveal the deep dehumanization of the people of Partition. As such, *Khol Do* is not just a fictional work but also an ethical statement that holds onto the lived realities of the members of the marginalized group in official history.

Khol Do has received a lot of scholarship in the past, and has been explored in the fields of trauma studies, gender studies, realism and Partition studies. Manto's depiction of communal violence, the symbolic use of the female body and the psychological repercussions of displacement have all been pointed out by critics. In contrast, however, comparatively little has been written about the nature of *Khol Do* as an act of witnessing in literature, one which involves trauma, testimony, collective memory, and ethical responsibility. It is only when these issues are discussed in tandem that the complex nature of the issue of building an alternative archive of Partition becomes evident.These issues are discussed separately from time to time by the scholars, but there is still a lack of research on the interconnectedness of these issues to build an alternative archive of Partition.

To fill this gap, this paper attempts to explore *Khol Do* from an interdisciplinary perspective with the lenses of trauma studies, testimony theory, memory studies and feminist criticism. It maintains that Manto turns fiction into a witnessing of the literary kind that archives the emotional truths of Partition that transcend the writing of mainstream history. *Khol Do* centres the subject of Sakina and Sirajuddin and brings historical visibility to the lives of ordinary victims whose plight is lost amid political discourses of nationhood. Finally, this paper argues that Manto's narrative is not just a picture of communal violence but also a lasting moral archive that captures the trauma of the Partition and the unspeakable violence at the hands of the Congress and the Pakistan Army, and reminds the reader that literature has a valuable place to remember and perpetuate the memory of victims.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the Partition of India, there has been a huge volume of interdisciplinary scholarship, focusing on the history of the Partition, literature, gender studies, memory studies, and trauma theory. Although historians have dealt with the political issues that led to Partition, a growing number of literary scholars have focused on fiction as an important medium which allows the emotional and psychological aspects of the Partition to be retained. In this corpus, Saadat Hasan Manto is a writer who puts the sufferings of ordinary people on the forefront instead of the political leaders and ideology. His Partition tales, especially *Khol Do*, have received a continuous stream of scholarly study for their vivid depiction of communal savagery, the gendered nature of the trauma, and the moral decay. However, the current research mainly focuses on these issues separately, and there is much room for an analysis of *Khol Do* as a literary action of witnessing.

Manto has been identified as one of the most forthright writers of Partition experiences of 1947 by scholars of Partition literature. Manto's fiction reveals the devastating effects of the decisions for the displaced civilians, as opposed to nationalistic historiography that often focuses on negotiations and territorial divisions. He rejects religious communalization as the sole cause of violence and that it can be blamed solely on one particular religious group, which is fundamentally different from the discourses of communalization that seek to take collective responsibility. Instead, his stories uncover the moral failure of human beings as a whole, and make communal violence a common human tragedy, not a winning or losing battle of rival nationalisms. This humanistic approach has brought Manto to the forefront in the literary depiction of Partition.

The scholarship on Partition has been revamped by historical studies, especially by Urvashi Butalia, Yasmin Khan, Gyanendra Pandey and Veena Das, which have moved away from the state perspective, to focus on the experiences of the survivors. Butalia's work puts an emphasis on oral histories, making them the voice that is not heard in official history. Like this, Yasmin Khan brings to an understanding of social and humanitarian effects of Partition, focusing on people's displacement, fear and the violence that affected ordinary civilians during Partition. Gyanendra Pandey renders a critique of the traditional historiography of Partition by suggesting that violence was never an incidental to it but an integral part of history, whereas Veena Das sheds light on the process of everyday life and violence, thereby describing trauma as an ongoing social reality and not a past historical event. Together, these scholars show how the lived experience of Partition is

essential to political history and how the latter needs to be grounded in the lived experience.

In the study of Partition, Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin's work is the most extensive, which illuminates the gendered nature of Partition and how women's bodies were an object of violent inscriptions of communal honour, revenge and national identity. Through their analysis, they showed that rape, abduction, forced conversions and honour killings were not random acts of violence, but instead were reflections of the patriarchy and communal power exercised by males. Butalia similarly alleges that women often went missing from official records as they were among the most grievous victims of Partition. Sexual violence can be seen as personal trauma and collective historical trauma in *Khol Do,* and these interventions offer a necessary tool to help understand this situation.

Trauma and testimony studies also provide theoretical underpinnings for an understanding of Manto's literary project.Theoretical approaches to trauma and testimony studies further illuminate Manto's literary project. An experience that is incomprehensible in the moment of its occurrence and reappears in memory in fragments, in silence, and in repetition – Cathy Caruth sees trauma as such. This is supported by the voices of Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, who see testimony as an ethical act of witnessing, through which unspeakable experiences come into historical view. They depart from the nature of factual documentation and make moral demands for witnessing to suffering. In the following, Marianne Hirsch's notion of postmemory adds to the discussion by explaining how traumatic history can have an impact on later generations through cultural memory and the passing down of stories. Similarly Pierre Nora's concept of lieux de mémoire highlights the importance of cultural texts in the process of the retention of collective memory in the presence of the fading of lived memory. These theoretical approaches thus indicate that literature serves not only as a representation of art, but also as an archive that can be used to document histories that are not included in the official archives.

While there is an abundance of scholarship, most of the critique of *Khol Do* revolves around individual issues of trauma, realism, gendered violence or Partition history. Recent studies often focus on the representation of sexual violence or mental or emotional anguish without considering how these two elements are connected in shaping the story as a literary witness. Furthermore, there has been not much study of the links between witnessing, collective memory, trauma and ethical responsibility in a single analytical framework. Thus, the overall impact of *Khol Do* as an alternate history archive is not fully explored.

The present study attempts to fill this void by combining the concepts and doctrines of trauma theory, testimony studies, memory studies and feminist criticism to examine *Khol Do* as a form of literary witnessing. This paper proposes that Manto moves the novel from the realm of Partition violence to one of the emotional truths captured of communal conflict; it is not just a representation of Partition violence. The study highlights how the voices of Sakina and Sirajuddin bring to light the voices of the marginalised victims in history and ruptures the dominant history writing by showing how literature itself can witness to human suffering.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

The study is based on an interdisciplinary theoretical approach which combines trauma theory, testimony theory, memory studies, and feminist criticism and uses this to analyse *Khol Do* by Saadat Hasan Manto, as a literary testimony of the aftermath of the Partition of 1947 and what it wrought upon humanity. This way of working allows for a fuller comprehension of the story as a fictional text, but also as an ethical intervention that chronicles collective pain, celebrates marginalised histories and that poses questions regarding the gendered nature of communal violence.

The analysis is mostly based on trauma theory, especially that of Cathy Caruth, who has theorized trauma as something that can only be understood in the event, but also manifests through incomplete memory or past trauma, silence, and repetition. However, trauma can only be narrated by gestures to the past because the psychological response is manifested in indirect ways, and its effects are often delayed. This theory is particularly applicable to *Khol Do* since the unspoken reaction to "Khol Do" has become a constant psychological repercussion of violence. Her unspoken words and the stereotypical movements show trauma as a physical and non-verbal phenomenon, a non-rational and beyond-language experience.

Testimony theory is a companion to trauma theory, which offers an ethical framework for the understanding of literature as testimony. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub suggest that testimony is not simply the recording of historical events; rather it is an ethical involvement with events that have been silenced and/or excluded from dominant accounts. In this light, *Khol Do* is a literary work of witnessing, making the voices of ordinary victims who are marginalized in state-centred histories of Partition visible. Through Manto's story, therefore, the fictional becomes reality, allowing readers to become witnesses to a set of moral facts – the facts of communal violence.

This analysis is enhanced by the study of memory which considers literature as an archive of different experiences. The contribution of culture to preserving collective memory in the absence of a lived experience is underlined by Pierre Nora's theory of lieux de mémoire, and the way traumatic events influence subsequent generations through culture and narrative by way of Marianne Hirsch's theory of postmemory. These viewpoints are read by Khol Do to hold onto the emotions of Partition that went beyond the bounds of official history, so that the experience of violence lives on in the collective memory.

The study also references feminist scholarship such as the work of Urvashi Butalia and Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, who show how women's bodies became a target for communal honour, revenge and the power of the patriarchy during Partition. Sexual violence was not only an attack on individual women, it was an attack on entire communities through the collective humiliation of women. In this context, Sakina's victimisation is a reflection of the gendered nature of Partition and its underlying structures, which combined to turn women into symbols of symbolic retaliation and make their agency and subjectivity disappear.

From a methodological point of view, this article uses a qualitative perspective through textual analysis techniques using the method of close reading of the story *Khol Do*. The interpretation is complemented by historical analysis of Partition and pertinent trauma, testimony, memory and feminist theory. The analysis does not isolate the story from its historical and cultural setting, but situates it against the backdrop of the rich historical and cultural context, to show how Manto uses the fictional text as an ethical archive that testifies to the lived realities of the victims of Partition. This interdisciplinary approach allows for a more complex interpretation of literature as not only art form but also as a form of history, and shows the enduring importance of *Khol Do* in the perpetuation of memory of one of the twentieth century's great humanitarian tragedies.

Witnessing the Collapse of Humanity

Saadat Hasan Manto's *Khol Do* does not tell of the partition of 1947 as a political event; it tells of the partition as a great humanitarian tragedy which undermines the moral fabric of society. Instead of painting a picture of big battles or politics, Manto's work is about the life of ordinary people whose lives are torn apart by communal violence. The making of a story about Sirajuddin and his daughter Sakina reveals how Partition violence infiltrates the sacred and profane spaces of human existence, changing everyday places into ones of terror and life. By doing this, Manto takes the focus off the national victory and communal culpability and onto the universal humanity of suffering.

Khol Do is one of the most characteristic story to portray everyday violence as an ordinary circumstance rather than an uncommon event. Violence does not just happen in grand moments of bloodshed, and it is present in everyday living – in the form of displacement, uncertainty, separation and constant danger of death. As Sirajuddin rushes to find his daughter, he finds himself in overcrowded refugee camps, ravaged landscapes and communities without security or stability.These everyday tragic events show that the Partition humanitarian situation was more than just physical suffering: it has shattered family relations, undermined social identities, and denied people their fundamental rights for human dignity:

> *over and over again and gave them a description of Sakina. 'She's fair and very beautiful; she's taken after her mother, not me. She's about seventeen. Large eyes, black hair, there's a big beauty spot on her right cheek. She's my only daughter. Please find her. Your God will reward you*.

Manto's avoidance of sensationalism in depicting violence suggests that he intended to let violence's subtle and pervasive nature serve as her message of the catastrophe's magnitude.This all-pervading violence is closely allied with the moral disintegration of communal conflict. The story illustrates how violence destroys moral values and in its place, compassion is replaced by suspicion, brutality and indifference. People who are otherwise supposed to be a part of humanist values become engagers in or silent spectators at acts of unthinkable savagery. This moral breakdown is not presented in terms of a moral condemnation, but through subtle storytelling devices that draw the reader to the norm of violence. The worst moments in *Khol Do* are exactly those moments for which Manto refuses to imagine a drama. Instead, Manto shows how the most brutal moments become part of the normal activities of society, "*She's alive, my daughter's alive*!" This kind of representation is a warning of the kind of violence that can tear apart the moral fabric of society and make communal hatred so readily available.

Another key theme of the story is the strife and breakdown of communal coexistence. Prior to Partition there were various religious groups coexisting, despite social and political differences. These relationships were fractured by the violence of 1947, which ushered in new dynamics of mistrust and suspicion between neighbours and neighbours became enemies. Importantly, Manto does not make simplistic victim/perpetrator distinctions based on religious identity. His story is not about the suffering of one

community at the expense of another – it shows how communal violence took hold of people of every religion. Manto's refusal to identify violence only as Hindu or Muslim or Sikh, stands in opposition to the nationalist and communal histories that blame collective guilt. He is very focused on the pain suffered by the act of hatred, not on the identity of one who suffers or brings it.

This is not a communal partisan stance that leaves Manto apart from ideological discourses which portray Partition as a Muslim versus Hindu struggle. The story does not glorify the nation-state or condone the act of retaliative violence for communal honour. Manto, however, places the common fragility of human nature at the centre of the political situation to which they are subject. Sirajuddin's grief as a father in search of his daughter rises above his faith and is universal in nature: grief, fear and helplessness. Likewise, the idea of Sakina's suffering is not just the tragedy of a Muslim woman, but a representation of the scores of women whose bodies were sacrificed by communal wrangling, without regard to national or religious differences. These characters bring to life persons who are frequently identified only as numbers in historical context, thus reviving their individuality.

The narrative also reveals the extent of moral decay that comes when civilization fails. Other institutions and individuals that ought to preserve the lives of the helpless are helpless to prevent violence and restore justice. Fear, prejudice and opportunism prevail over the humanitarian ideals which sustain social coexistence. But Manto does not blame this moral cowardice for being unique to a specific community or institution, this is a human problem in which violence is killing the moral responsibilities people have towards each other. This is because of his restrained narrative style: the reader is able to detect that there is no compassion in the absence of the judgement of the author.

From the perspective of literary witnessing, Khol Do makes these acts of violence and moral decay a lasting witness of Partition. Manto does not write history, but rather his emotional truths, which official histories tend to miss. He presents the view of the ordinary suffering that stands in opposition to triumphalist stories of Independence that saw the emergence of nations alongside the loss of countless lives. Thus, *Khol Do* insists in the fact that the real Partition's legacy is not only the changing borders but also the irreparable trauma that has been caused in human relations, ethical values and collective consciousness. The story unfolds and unfolds, driven by a persistent sense of joint suffering, to be one of the most devastating literary critiques of communal violence in contemporary South Asian literature.

Sakina's Body as the Battlefield of Partition

The most disturbing part of Saadat Hasan Manto's *Khol Do* is its portrayal of the female body as the main arena where the violence of Partition is being applied. Although the search for the girl is a central theme in the novel, its ambiance and intent are much broader than simply being about an old man's quest to find his daughter; it's also about an attempt to understand how bodies become symbolic zones in which ideas of honour, revenge, and patriarchy are violently negotiated by the community. Instead of Sakina being shown as just a single victim, Manto shows her as a representative figure, and shows the suffering of thousands of women who were abducted, raped, converted and displaced in 1947 during the Partition. Khol Do is exposed in Sakina's doomed story as the acts of violence against women were not random, but rather a deliberate policy of communal retaliation.

Time and time again, Partition scholarship has found that women were always at the heart of communal violence, due to their bodies being seen as repositories of family honour and religious identity. Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin believe the violence against women during Partition was very symbolic and aimed at not just the individual victim, but the entire community.As they observe,

> *each sought to punish the other not only by inflicting pain but also, and more specifically, on the women of the other group so that the memory of indignities would never cease to haunt the future* (Menon and Bhasin 31).

Their argument highlights the role of sexual violence in Partition as it became a means to express communal hatred against women. In *Khol Do*, Sakina's body too becomes a contested space on which violence of Partition gets inscribed; a more general patriarchal logic that substantiates the violation of women as a dishonouring of an entire community.

For a woman whose life revolves around sex, Manto's depiction of rape is stunning in its moderation. Instead of picturing Sakina's suffering in graphic detail, he leaves the impact of the violence that is done to her implied and silent. The climax of the story is when the doctor in the hospital says to someone, "Khol Do" ("Open it"), in the hospital. Sakina feels the assaults repeatedly, and has internalized them so she automatically unfastens the drawstring on her trousers as instructed. This one action is all that is needed to symbolize the irreparable psychological damage caused by sexual violence. Manto does not indulge in sensationalism; it is the normalization of the worst of the horrors that lies in the victims' consciousness. No longer an independent person, Sakina's reaction is a trauma that has been internalised, without choice and not under her control.

In this episode, another dimension of violence, dehumanizing effects of patriarchal violence, is also exposed. The whole story depicts Sakina as a faceless object that is denied agency and subjected to different forms of male authority. Her identity is increasingly erased as she becomes increasingly a body exploited over and over, instead of being a daughter looking for protection. The patriarchal ownership is not limited to specific individuals, it is also part of the collective "family" ideology which views women as objects of collective honour instead of human beings. As for Partition, menon and Bhasin note that the politics of violence against women was not from the periphery, it was from the very centre of the Partition where communities claimed their supremacy and tried to maintain their ideas of purity through women's bodies. Manto's storytelling powerfully reveals this patriarchy, as she does not romanticize the pain of a woman, nor take Sakina as a symbol of the victim position, but instead the voice of her silence is a terrible accusation against the systems and structures that allowed for this pain.

As noteworthy is Manto's employment of voicelessness as a style of storytelling. The violence Sakina suffers isn't explicitly described and she doesn't tell her own story. This muteness is not meaningless, it's trauma that will not be uttered. She is unable to talk about herself because there are so many other women who were unable to find a voice in history due to shame, stigma and social ostracism. In this regard, *Khol Do* is a perfect example of testimony theorist's conception of the limits of language in communicating extreme violence. Manto is aware that not all suffering can be described in words, but can only be expressed through the medium of silence. The story thus forces readers to look at what isn't said, to look at absence as one of the most powerful means of witnessing.

In finality, Sakina surpasses herself to represent the countless women who were affected by Partition in such a way that their lives were forever changed. Her life is broken, a symbolic representation of the communal violence and patriarchal brutality of which women's bodies were the theatres. In focusing on her experience, Manto offers a counternarrative to triumphalist accounts of nation building, and calls attention to the suffering of people, who have been forgotten from official narratives. *Khol Do* is not only a story of one fictional character but also the history of countless characters whose names have not been recorded—confirming the vital role literature plays in remembering and bringing the humanity back to those who are too often forgotten in history.

Trauma Beyond Physical Violence

In the devastation of Partition, Saadat Hasan Manto's *Khol Do* shows the violence not only goes beyond physical violence. Though sexual assault and displacement are portrayed, the narrative is more about the long-term psychological impacts of trauma that remain with survivors long after the violence has ended. In the character of Sirajuddin and Sakina, Manto shows that there were invisible wounds of Partition that shattered memory, identity and emotional stability. In this way, the story reaffirms Cathy Caruth's notion that trauma is not just the trauma of the event but one that comes back in, and out of, the repetitions, silences, and involuntariness. Trauma can, thus, be experienced as a historical event, but also as a psychological state.

The emotional heart of the story lies in Sirajuddin's frantic lookout for his missing daughter, and represents the psychological trauma of many of the Partition survivors. Sirajuddin's emotional disorientation is caused by the murder of his wife and the disappearance of Sakina in the crossing that has since been established between the two nations. He is not certain that his daughter is alive - he is just hoping that she is. Instead of suggesting a progression in grief, Manto suggests that grief is a state of constant uncertainty, in which the lack of closure can deepen emotional pain. As Sirajuddin tries to find Sakina again, he repeatedly searches for her, illustrating the shards of consciousness of a survivor who now subsists on memory, longing, and despair.

The emotional splitting-up is indicative of what trauma theorists refer to as an "interruption of coherent identity". Traumatic experiences, Caruth states, *"will not fully enter the consciousness, and they will therefore manifest indirectly and repeatedly"* (7). This is illustrated by Manto's Sakina's involuntary reaction in the hospital. If the doctor orders her to *"Khol Do"* ("Open it"), she will automatically unwind the drawstring on her salwar without being aware of what is going on around her. The violence she suffered is imprinted on her body and mind, and her mechanical reaction, which is a response to this violence, proves that. The scene demonstrates how trauma lingers beyond the healing of physical wounds, and has its own way of expressing itself - not through words but through actions.

The story also highlights the simultaneous absence(s) and grievances of helplessness that are a feature of the aftermath of communal violence. The absence of Sirajuddin's ability to safeguard his daughter is indicative of the complete breakdown in family and social security, and Sakina's silence represents the lack of voice that can be often associated with severe psychological trauma. Here Manto's silence is not a lack of narration but a moral way of portraying unspeakable suffering.

Historical accounts of Partition are often expressed in terms of statistics of death or displacement, and by foregrounding

these psychological aspects, *Khol Do* calls this into question. The story shows that violence is not over when the blood dries up, but that it continues in the memory, identity, and daily life. Survivors lives continue to be haunted by loss, fear and emotional fragmentation, and this is the afterlife of Partition. In the midst of Sirajuddin's perpetual sorrow and Sakina's physical suffering, Manto shows that the worst scars of the Partition are unseen but indelible. For this reason, *Khol Do* is a strong reminder of the long-lasting psychological impact of communal violence, emphasizing the enduring nature of trauma beyond mere history.

Literature as Testimony

Khol Do is more than just a story, it is a cry for literature and a literary testimony of Saadat Hasan Manto. The story is not just about one episode of the Partition violence but is an account of experiences which are largely missing from official historical records. Historiography of Partition tends to focus on political discussions, population figures and the movement of boundaries, thereby marginalizing the human aspect of the Partition. But Manto makes a shift in focus to the domestic lives of everyday people – who suffer from loss, fear, displacement, gendered violence. By doing so *Khol Do* has captured those truths of Partition which can't be told in the official archives. The story becomes an ethical archive, not just a description of the what but also the what it was like to experience one of the biggest humanitarian catastrophes of the twentieth century.

Khol Do is important because of its ability to tell stories of marginalized pasts. Frequently these victims were denied a place in state-centred historical narratives that focused on nation-building instead of on the suffering of the victims, especially women, refugees and displaced families. Manto's story does just this and tells the stories of the violence that may not be recorded or even remembered in official history. The drama of Sakina is not narrated as a one-off story of tragedy; rather it is offered as a metaphor for the many women whose plights were never recorded due to social taboos, a silence of the patriarchy, and politics. Manto brings these forgotten lives back to the history books in literary testimony.

While official archives must be substantiated by documentary evidence and by the facts, literature will capture emotional truths that may not be captured by facts. Trauma is often too much to be directly represented and finds its way back through the memory, through the silence, and through the repetition, says Cathy Caruth . Manto employs this type of writing by denying readers a visual representation of the violence that has taken place, while leaving it implicit, and instead using the psychological disintegration to reveal the trauma. The words Sakina utters when told to 'Khol Do' are the most powerful description of the devastating consequences of sexual violence to come out of it than if it were described explicitly. The story thus documents not only the event itself but also the long-term psychological effects that it had, documenting aspects of experience unknown to the standard archive.

Manto's literary testimony also gives voice to marginalized victims, who are not heard in mainstream history. Butalia makes a point that official narratives do not capture the history of Partition because there are many stories which do not appear in the official history, especially those of the women and the marginalized groups. Likewise, Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin argue that women were turned into "symbolic bearers of communal honour" and 'sexual violence' therefore spread across the board, which was buried under the ideology and jargon of nationalism (Menon and Bhasin). By never making Sakina's plight into just a number or abstract symbol, Manto speaks directly to these realities of history. Rather, he makes her human, by making it salient how violence affects her emotionally and psychologically, and how this is irreversible.

In this regard, *Khol Do* is similar to the oral histories gathered by other scholars like Urvashi Butalia and Anchal Malhotra. In contrast to the oral testimonies which seek to reconstruct the lived realities of Partition through recollections of the survivors, Manto's fiction imaginatively represents Partition through literary devices. These two modes of narration problematize the official history by giving greater weight to memory, feeling, and personal anguish than to political history. While oral narratives give voice to those who went unrecorded by history, Manto's fiction exudes psychological and ethical truths that the facts will often not record. Literary testimony does not contradict historical evidence, it merely adds to it, encompassing the emotional aspects of violence that can be found only in its literary context.

Pierre Nora's idea of lieux de mémoire also brings to light the historical importance of Manto's work. Nora asserts that cultural texts, when they are not lived again and the lived experience therefore fades from collective memory, are the locations of memory . From this angle, *Khol Do* serves as a literary memorial of Partition that helps to pass on the human history of Partition to future generations. The story does not allow the suffering of the ordinary people to be forgotten over the years, or obscured by nationalist celebrations of Independence. It shifts the individual suffering into collective memory, and sees literature as a medium to preserve history.

In the end, *Khol Do* shows the special power of literature to testify to human suffering in the face of official archives that lie silent. Through its preservation of marginalized narratives, documentation of emotional truths and the

visibility of narrative for the victims, Manto makes fiction an everlasting form of historical memory. His tale is one with oral histories it is necessary to keep, a testament to the fact that the most profound truths of history lie not in documents issued by the government but in the stories that bravely retain the voices of those who were silenced.

IV. CONCLUSION

Khol Do by Saadat Hasan Manto is one of the most interesting literary accounts of the human tragedy of the Partition in 1947 for its attention to the human reality of Partition victims instead of political history. The study has contended that the narrative has to be read as a testimony of fiction, rather than simply a fictionalized history of this communal violence, but as a profoundly literary record of human suffering and emotional and psychological authenticity of one of the twentieth century's greatest humanitarian disasters. As Sirajuddin and Sakina's lives weave together, Manto is able to tell us that the impact of Partition is not just physical, it is also emotional, mental and spiritual; it is about the family, its bonds and values, all of which have been shattered. His story refuses nationalistic dualities and communal polarization, puts human suffering on the forefront, and thus reclaims dignity for people whose history has been on the margins of official history.

One of the major themes of *Khol Do* is the change from fiction to testimony. But Manto does not chronicle political facts or historical figures, instead of which she documents emotional truths that are often missing from government records and traditional history. The unsaid words, the involuntary body language and Sirajuddin's frantic efforts all reveal the unseen horrors of Partition that remain with the survivors long after the shooting has stopped. Through the preservation of these experiences, Manto also creates an ethical archive, urging readers to remember that communal hatred has a human cost, and that literature can be a powerful tool for doing so, while also reminding them of ways in which histories are forgotten.

The character of the Partition violence is also highlighted in the story. Through the character of Sakina, Manto highlights the individual and the collective as equally protagonist; she shows the communal revenge that went beyond an individual body and became one of a myriad of women's bodies. His understated storytelling is devoid of sensation and shows how silence, breaking and psychological destruction are a permanent sign of trauma. As such, *Khol Do* not only enters into the world of Partition literature but also into the larger world of trauma, memory, gender and human rights.

Khol Do is the ongoing significance of the time of the past. As communal warfare, forced immigration, ethnic violence and humanitarian crises continue to plague the world, Manto's tale is a strong reminder that there is a moral obligation to witness a suffering world. Literary witnessing asserts that the dominant representation of the world is incomplete, and that voices that it fails to hear or acknowledge can be heard instead through literature. The transmission of the survivor's generation of memory to the next makes the cultural value of literary texts such as *Khol Do* more and more important as cultural archives that help to maintain collective memory and prompt critical reflection of the outcomes of intolerance and violence.

Comparative studies with Manto's fictional testimony and Partition oral histories, memoirs and non-fictional Partition narratives, such as Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence*, Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin's *Borders and Boundaries*, Anchal Malhotra's *Remnants of a Separation* and Devika Chawla's *Home Uprooted*, may be extended in the future. These inter-disciplinary research would enrich the knowledge about the entanglements of literature, memory, testimony and history and show how varied forms of narration have been able to hold and preserve the experiences of Partition together. The book is in the first place not just a story of a violent incident; it refuses to be forgotten and reminds readers of the long-lasting moral ramifications of communal hatred and the voices of the forgotten victims of Partition.

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The Representation of Colonial Power in M. G. Vassanji's *The Book of Secrets*

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Abstract— *The present research paper examines the representation of colonial power in M. G. Vassanji's The Book of Secrets (1994), a significant postcolonial novel that revisits the colonial history of East Africa through the intertwined narratives of memory, history, identity, and power. Set against the background of British colonial rule in East Africa, the novel explores the ways in which colonial authority operates through administration, surveillance, cultural hierarchy, and the control of historical knowledge. Through the figure of Alfred Corbin, a British colonial administrator, and his secret diary, Vassanji presents colonial power not merely as political domination but also as the power to observe, record, classify, and represent the lives of others. The discovery and interpretation of Corbin's diary by Pius Fernandes further expose the limitations of official colonial records and raise questions about whose version of history is preserved and whose voices remain silenced. The novel also examines the complex position of Asian communities in colonial East Africa and challenges a simplistic division between colonizer and colonized. The experiences of marginalized characters further reveal the intersection of colonial authority with cultural and patriarchal structures. Drawing on postcolonial perspectives, the paper argues that Vassanji critically represents colonial power as a system that attempts to control both people and historical narratives. At the same time, the novel demonstrates that colonial authority cannot completely suppress memory, identity, and alternative interpretations of the past. Thus, The Book of Secrets becomes a significant literary exploration of colonial power and its continuing influence on the construction of history and identity.*

Keywords— ***Colonial Power, Colonialism, History, Memory, Identity, Postcolonial Literature, East Africa.***

One of the significant concerns of postcolonial literature is the representation of colonial power and its lasting impact on individuals, communities, cultures, and historical memory. Colonialism is not limited to political occupation or economic exploitation; it also involves the control of knowledge, language, representation, and historical narratives. Colonial authorities often possess the power to define the colonized, record their experiences, and construct official versions of history.

According to Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture,* (1994) "The colonial encounter is always an ambivalent process that produces both domination and resistance."

Postcolonial writers challenge these dominant narratives by bringing attention to silenced voices, fragmented memories, and alternative accounts of the past. M. G. Vassanji is one of the important contemporary writers whose fiction explores the complicated histories of East Africa, particularly the experiences of Indian diasporic communities within the larger framework of colonialism, migration, and cultural displacement. M. G. Vassanji's *The Book of Secrets*, published in 1994, is a significant novel that revisits the colonial past of East Africa. The narrative moves between the colonial period and the postcolonial present and centres on the discovery of a diary written by Alfred Corbin, a British colonial administrator. The diary

becomes an important historical document through which Pius Fernandes attempts to reconstruct events from the past. However, the novel does not present the colonial record as a complete or unquestionable source of truth. Instead, it reveals the limitations, silences, and subjective nature of colonial documentation. The novel is set within the complex historical and cultural landscape of East Africa, where Africans, Asians, Arabs, and Europeans encounter one another within the structures of colonial rule. Vassanji's representation of this multicultural society complicates the traditional binary of colonizer and colonized. The Asian community occupies an especially complex position, being connected to colonial economic and social structures while also experiencing marginalization and displacement. Through this complex social background, Vassanji presents colonialism as a system that influences different communities in different ways. The title *The Book of Secrets* itself is significant because the novel is deeply concerned with the relationship between knowledge and power. The diary of Corbin appears to preserve historical truth, but its secrets and silences demonstrate that no historical document can provide a complete account of the past. The act of writing itself becomes connected with power because the person who writes has the ability to determine which events are recorded and which remain unspoken. The present study therefore attempts to examine how colonial power is represented in Vassanji's The Book of Secrets. It focuses on colonial administration, the colonial gaze, the power of written records, historical memory, cultural identity, and the relationship between colonial and patriarchal authority. The paper argues that Vassanji represents colonial power as a system that seeks to control both physical spaces and the production of historical knowledge. However, through memory, interpretation, and the recovery of suppressed experiences, the novel also demonstrates the limitations of colonial authority.

The representation of colonial power in *The Book of Secrets* is initially visible through the structure of colonial administration and the figure of Alfred Corbin. As a British colonial administrator, Corbin represents the institutional authority of the colonial state. His position enables him to observe the people around him, record their activities, and exercise authority over the colonial environment. His official status gives him access to information and power that ordinary inhabitants of the region do not possess. Colonial administration depends upon systems of classification, surveillance, documentation, and regulation. The colonial administrator is therefore not simply an individual exercising personal authority but a representative of a larger political system that seeks to organize and control colonized territories. Corbin's position reflects the institutional nature of British colonial power, in which individual officials become instruments of a system of governance. Vassanji, however, does not represent colonial authority as completely stable or unified. The novel presents East Africa as a space in which different political and cultural forces interact. The presence of African, Asian, Arab, and European communities complicates the colonial situation and makes the relationship between power and identity more complex. The result is a representation of colonialism that moves beyond a simple division between the powerful colonizer and the powerless colonized. The novel's historical setting demonstrates that colonial power operates through complex relationships. Some communities may possess limited privileges within the colonial system while remaining marginalized in other ways. The Asian community, for instance, occupies an uncertain position between European authority and African society. This complexity allows Vassanji to explore colonialism as a structure of unequal power rather than as a simple relationship between two fixed groups.

Colonial power is also represented through the colonial gaze, particularly through Corbin's diary. As a colonial official, Corbin possesses the authority to write about the people and places under colonial rule. His written account therefore represents a particular version of East African reality. Michel Foucault's concept of power is equally significant. Foucault writes: "Power produces knowledge... power and knowledge directly imply one another." (Power/Knowledge, 1980).

The colonial gaze transforms people into objects of observation. The colonized are watched, described, classified, and interpreted, while the colonial administrator occupies the position of the observer. This unequal relationship between the observer and the observed reflects the larger power structure of colonialism. However, Vassanji does not allow the colonial gaze to remain unquestioned. The diary is later read by Pius Fernandes, who attempts to understand the meaning of the events recorded in it. Pius's reading introduces a new perspective and demonstrates that the colonial record can be interpreted differently by later generations. The novel therefore raises an important question about who has the authority to tell history. Corbin possesses the power to record events, but his account cannot represent the complete experiences of the people around him. His diary reflects his own position, knowledge, and limitations. Vassanji thus exposes the subjective nature of colonial representation and challenges the idea that colonial records provide an objective representation of the past.

The diary of Alfred Corbin occupies a central position in the novel and functions as a significant symbol of colonial authority. It represents the colonial desire to document and

preserve information. The written word appears to possess permanence and authority, and the diary initially seems to provide access to historical truth. However, the diary also contains gaps and secrets. Its existence raises questions about what has been recorded and what has been excluded. The diary cannot speak for everyone who lived through the historical period it describes, and the experiences of many individuals remain outside its pages. The title The Book of Secrets emphasizes the connection between knowledge and concealment. A secret is something that is known by some but hidden from others. In the context of colonialism, this becomes particularly significant because colonial power often depends upon unequal access to knowledge. The colonial administrator gathers information about the colonized, while the colonized may have limited access to the knowledge produced about them. Pius's interpretation of the diary challenges its authority. Instead of accepting the document as an unquestionable historical truth, he attempts to understand its silences and contradictions. His engagement with the diary demonstrates that historical documents must be read critically. Thus, the diary represents two opposing aspects of colonial power. On one hand, it symbolizes the authority of colonial knowledge and documentation. On the other hand, its incompleteness reveals the limitations of that authority. Vassanji thereby transforms the colonial document into an object of questioning and reinterpretation. History is one of the central concerns of The Book of Secrets. The novel demonstrates that history is not simply a collection of objective facts but is shaped by those who possess the power to record and interpret the past. Colonial authorities often create official historical narratives that privilege their own perspectives. Vassanji challenges such narratives by bringing together different forms of historical knowledge. The colonial diary exists alongside memory, personal experience, oral stories, and later interpretations. These different forms of knowledge create a fragmented picture of the past. The relationship between Pius and Corbin's diary is particularly important in this regard. Pius's attempt to reconstruct the past shows that historical truth cannot always be discovered through a single document. History must be interpreted through multiple perspectives. The novel therefore questions the authority of official colonial history. The colonial record may preserve certain events, but it cannot fully represent the experiences of those who were marginalized or excluded from the process of historical documentation. Vassanji's narrative technique reinforces this idea. The movement between different periods and perspectives creates a fragmented historical structure. The reader, like Pius, must reconstruct meaning from incomplete information. This narrative method challenges the linear and authoritative model of colonial history and encourages readers to recognize that history is often constructed through competing memories and interpretations.

Colonial power also influences the construction of cultural identity in the novel. East Africa is presented as a multicultural space in which African, Asian, Arab, and European identities intersect. Colonialism creates relationships of power between these different communities, but their identities cannot be reduced to simple categories. The position of the Asian community is particularly significant. The history of Indians in East Africa is connected with migration, trade, colonial economic structures, and cultural displacement. Vassanji's representation of this community demonstrates that the experience of colonialism is not uniform. The Asian characters occupy a complicated position within colonial society. They may benefit from certain aspects of the colonial system while simultaneously experiencing discrimination and insecurity. Their position therefore challenges the traditional assumption that individuals must belong entirely to either the colonizer or the colonized. Through this complexity, Vassanji presents identity as historically constructed and constantly negotiated. Colonial power attempts to classify individuals according to fixed categories, but the novel reveals that cultural identity is much more fluid. The representation of cultural identity in *The Book of Secrets* thus becomes a way of questioning colonial systems of classification. The novel demonstrates that individuals and communities cannot be understood through rigid colonial categories. The representation of colonial power is also connected with gender relations. The experiences of women reveal how colonial authority can intersect with patriarchal structures. Women may experience oppression not only because of colonial power but also because of social and cultural systems that regulate their bodies and choices. The novel's treatment of gender demonstrates that power operates at several levels. Colonial authority may control the larger political and social structure, while patriarchal authority influences the private lives of individuals. The female body can therefore become a site where different forms of power meet. Colonial and patriarchal systems may attempt to control women's identities and choices, while women themselves may resist these structures in different ways. Vassanji's representation of gender adds complexity to his treatment of colonialism. The novel does not present colonialism as the only source of oppression. Instead, it demonstrates how different systems of power can overlap and influence one another. This perspective is important because it shows that the effects of colonialism cannot be separated from questions of gender, culture, and social hierarchy. The novel thus presents colonial power as part of a larger network of

relationships that shape individual lives. It also suggests that resistance to power may emerge through personal memory, identity, and the refusal to accept dominant interpretations of history.

Silence is another significant aspect of colonial power in The Book of Secrets. Colonial power determines not only who can speak but also whose words are recorded and preserved. The absence of certain voices from historical records is therefore not accidental; it reflects unequal structures of power. The diary records some experiences but leaves others unrecorded. The secrets within the diary suggest that the historical past contains stories that have not been fully revealed. The novel's emphasis on silence therefore encourages readers to look beyond official records. Memory becomes an important alternative to official history. While colonial records attempt to create a fixed version of the past, memory remains personal, fragmented, and sometimes contradictory. Yet these characteristics also give memory its power because it allows individuals to preserve experiences that may not appear in official histories. Pius's investigation represents an attempt to recover meaning from these fragments. His search suggests that understanding the past requires attention not only to what has been recorded but also to what has been forgotten or deliberately excluded. The politics of silence therefore becomes an important element of colonial power. The ability to control historical memory is closely connected with the ability to control the meaning of the past. The representation of colonial power in *The Book of Secrets* is complex because Vassanji does not limit colonialism to political domination. Instead, he presents colonial power as a system that operates through administration, observation, documentation, cultural classification, and control over historical knowledge. The figure of Alfred Corbin represents the institutional power of colonial authority, while his diary represents the epistemological power of colonialism. Through writing, recording, and observing, the colonial administrator attempts to make the colonized world knowable and manageable. However, Vassanji simultaneously exposes the limitations of this power. The diary cannot provide a complete account of the past. Its gaps and silences reveal that historical knowledge is always partial. Pius's reading of the diary therefore becomes an act of questioning and reinterpretation. The novel also complicates the colonizer-colonized binary by presenting the multicultural history of East Africa. The experiences of Asian communities demonstrate that colonial identities are complex and often contradictory. The relationship between colonialism and gender further reveals how different forms of power intersect. Ultimately, the novel suggests that colonial authority may control institutions and official records, but it cannot completely control memory. The past continues to return through personal stories, fragmented recollections, and alternative interpretations. In this sense, the novel's narrative structure itself becomes a challenge to the authority of colonial history because it asks readers to reconstruct the past rather than simply accept a single official account.

CONCLUSION

The Book of Secrets is not merely a historical novel about colonial East Africa; it is a critical examination of the ways in which colonial power shapes history, memory, identity, and representation. Through the character of Alfred Corbin and his diary, M. G. Vassanji demonstrates that colonial authority operates not only through political administration but also through the power to observe, record, classify, and define. The diary symbolizes the authority of the colonial record, yet its secrets and silences expose the incompleteness of official history. Pius Fernandes's attempt to interpret the diary demonstrates that historical documents cannot be accepted as unquestionable sources of truth. The past must be reconstructed through multiple perspectives and forms of memory. Vassanji also complicates conventional understandings of colonialism by presenting the multicultural reality of East Africa and the complex position of Asian communities. The novel further demonstrates how colonial power intersects with gender and patriarchal structures, affecting individuals in different ways. The study concludes that Vassanji's representation of colonial power is ultimately a critique of the authority of dominant historical narratives. The novel reveals that power lies not only in controlling territory but also in controlling the production of knowledge and the representation of the past. Yet the persistence of memory and the possibility of reinterpretation challenge this authority. By bringing attention to the gaps and silences within colonial history, *The Book of Secrets* becomes an important postcolonial text that encourages readers to question established narratives and recognize the complexity of voices that have remained outside official history. Vassanji's novel therefore demonstrates that colonial power, although historically influential, cannot completely control the meanings that later generations create from the past. The continuing process of reading, remembering, and reinterpretation opens space for alternative histories and identities. In this way, the novel makes a valuable contribution to postcolonial literature by questioning the relationship between power and knowledge and by showing that the recovery of forgotten or suppressed perspectives is essential to a fuller understanding of colonial history.

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Posthumous/ Posthuman: Reexamining the Gothic Corpse in Robert Louis Stevenson's "The Body Snatcher" and Arthur Machen's "The Inmost Light"

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Abstract— *This article examines the gothicity of the corpse as a liminal and posthuman figure in Robert Louis Stevenson's "The Body Snatcher" and Arthur Machen's "The Inmost Light." Situating these texts within the anatomical culture of the late nineteenth century, this study investigates how the posthumous body destabilizes conventional distinctions between human and nonhuman, life and death, and self and matter. Drawing on critical posthumanism and Gothic studies, the article argues that the corpse functions as an "abhuman" entity whose materiality exposes the instability of the humanist subject. Stevenson's tale mobilizes the uncanny return of the dissected body to expose the contingent nature of human identity while Machen's story interrogates contemporary theories of cerebral localization to challenge the presumed relationship between consciousness and bodily identity. By reading the corpse as a site of posthuman critique, the article demonstrates that fin-de-siècle Gothic fiction anticipates some of the contemporary debates on materiality, embodiment, and the limits of human exceptionalism.*

Keywords— ***gothic, corpse, posthuman, 19th century anatomical culture, the uncanny***

I. INTRODUCTION

The posthumous body or, simply put, the corpse, plays a key role in both the short stories examined in this article. It is dissected as an anatomical subject by the medical students in Stevenson's "The Body Snatcher" and as a forensic subject in Machen's "The Inmost Light". While these two stories share in common, in their representation of the human corpse, a deeply entrenched sense of doubt and uneasiness regarding the status of the corpse as "human", how this sense of doubt and uneasiness is registered is what makes these stories significantly differ from each other. Moreover, they foreground, in their own unique ways, a culturally dominant image of the human that is fundamentally incompatible with the posthumous state of the body. For example, as the dissected and dismembered body of Gray, at the end of "The Body Snatcher", is mysteriously restored to the corporal integrity of his former human self, one realizes that it was not simply his dying but the mutilation of his physical form which had robbed Gray of his humanity. The source of terror here is a particular interpretation of the notion of "uncanny": what should have appeared alien (in this case inhuman) appears perfectly familiar (human). A similar logic informs Machen's "The Inmost Light" where the coroner, after examining the dead body of Mrs. Black, comes to his own personal conclusion that the brain of the corpse could not have belonged to a human being at all. What strikes the reader most while going through the coroner's account of the autopsy is his extreme reluctance to identify the body that he examined as human. It seems, for him, to be acknowledged as human is to be something more than a mere body. But since he does not know about Dr. Black's experiment, this so-called "something" ultimately eludes his understanding. Interestingly, in both the stories, the corpse obstinately clings to its humanity, forcing the reader to confront the inexpungeable corporality of being human. In Machen's tale, the crux of being human is located not in the corporal frame itself, but in the enigmatic zone of soul or

consciousness where questions of will and moral agency find their ultimate meaning. While the mind or the consciousness is shown to be capable, at least temporarily, of existing independently of the body (Dr. Black succeeds in extracting his wife's soul from her body), human life is portrayed as being essentially a sacred covenant between the soul and the body, to be unbroken until death, and once broken, the body, without the "inmost light" to guide it, is judged as simply unworthy of the epithet "human". Thus, the corpse is perceived in its stark, unapologetic materiality as something fundamentally subversive, polymorphous and inhuman.

II. POSTHUMOUS/ POSTHUMAN

The posthumous, as Erin E. Edwards puts it in the "Introduction" to her book, *The Modernist Corpse: Posthumanism and the Posthumous*, is "literally posthuman in that it follows human life", but also, and more importantly, because the corpse unravels "the exclusionary category of the humanist subject" and even leads to "a reconceptualization of what counts as life". (3) Such a reconceptualization also foregrounds the subject of humanist discourses not as a "bounded entity", but as "constituted through productive exchanges and transfers with the nonhuman". (Edwards 5) Far from being something that lacks all forms of agency, the corpse is, quite ironically, vital to the organization of our world, through both its material presence in the environment and its role in shaping the notion of the human through cultural discourses. While the human corpse is still "human" to the extent its anatomical and physiological characteristics tether it loosely to a specific species, historically, it has always signified, in various cultural imaginings, something either more or less than human. But the corpse can be better understood as a radically different mode of existence rather than through the simple but equivocal distinction between vitalism and mortalism. (Edwards 8)

The body, living or dead, is, in Deleuzo-Guattarian ontology, a machinic assemblage of both molar and molecular multiplicities (Deleuze and Guattari 34), a rhizomatic network of both lines of stratification and lines of flight, molar segmentarity and molecular deterritorialisation, capable of freely distributing the endless flow of intensities. There is, however, no binary opposition between the molar and the molecular (34). They simply occupy different layers of organization. There is, similarly, no fundamental distinction between living and dying as both are just ways of articulating two different modes of becoming. The corpse is a "body without organs" which is not "a dead body but a living body all the more alive and teeming once it has blown apart the organism and its organization." (30) Thus, while the living body, which has historically served as the model for the classical image of Man, seems to be aligned, when seen through anthropocentric lens, to the idea of a single organism, that is, an organization of organs, of molar aggregates, of structures, strata or territorialisation, the corpse embraces its molecular multiplicities distributed according to crowd phenomena (30) or as deterritorialized intensities (33). The corpse is an essentially nomadic and rhizomatic entity that subverts the hierarchical ordering of the human and the nonhuman, the living and the inert, or the mind and the matter.

Rosi Braidotti, in her seminal book, *The Posthuman*, argues that death is not a human prerogative (130) but a manifestation of *zoe* which is "a posthuman yet affirmative life-force" (115) active in all things human and nonhuman. Nor is it a final event or a teleological destination (133). While life as *zoe* already incorporates what we know as death (134), it also blurs any perceived distinction between living and dying. (115) The vital and self-organizing powers of *zoe* continue working even after the so-called "dissolution of the subject" (136). Death brings about the disintegration of the so-called "atomized, individual self" and heralds the moment of the subject's "merging with the web of non-human forces that frame him/her, the cosmos as a whole" (136). We fear death because it stands for "the unrepresentable, the unthinkable, and the unproductive black hole" marking the limits of all rational/empirical discourses about it. Death pertains to "the inhuman within us, which frees us into life" (134) even as it returns us to what we have always been: "a virtual corpse." (136)

If the corpse does indeed anchor us to the inhuman within us, it also ties us to everything inhuman around us and plugs us into the material oneness of all that exists. It calls into question the very idea of human exceptionalism on which all our anthropocentric ideas and values rest, and, thus, critiques the very ontological category of the "human" enshrined in history with all its metaphysical glory.

III. THE ANATOMY OF BIOPOLITICS

The present day biopolitical and necropolitical forces which have turned the body of both the living and the deceased into an intensely contested zone- a site where biopower is produced and exercised in tandem-did actually emerge, as traced by Foucault in a number of his writings, around the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century when institutions of power started monitoring the biological processes of a population like birth, reproduction, disease and death. (Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population* 106-8) This moment in western

history when politics became biopolitics coincided, not at all by chance, with the development of a forensic/anatomical gaze that opened up the secrets of the corpse to the living light of "truth" and "knowledge" and with the proliferation of various medico-legal discourses about what should or should not be called the normative human body. In fact, if we are to follow Foucault's genealogy of modern clinical science in his *The Birth of the Clinic*, it was through the anatomical culture of the post-Enlightenment West that the Western Man constituted himself as a subject of purely discursive existence while his dissected corpse was subjected to erasure. (197)

In any case, a simple binary of life and death which might have contributed to the consolidation of the traditional constructs of humanness in the West had already sustained considerable damage by the late nineteenth century. In this same work, Foucault discusses at length about the difficulties faced by the anatomists in the early years of the nineteenth century in distinguishing in the corpse of a patient the visible effects of decomposition from similar effects of the disease itself. (Foucault, *Birth* 134) If the living body of the patient and its corpse display, at a visceral level, almost identical tissual formations and deformations, it is because organic matter behaves in the same way before and after the so-called death of the organism. Furthermore, medical science was suddenly confronted with the fact that the distinction between life and inorganic matter is but superficial from an anatomical point of view. (155) So, what was at stake was not a simple case of medical knowledge needing refinement or readjustment, but an epistemic change in the way death was to be perceived. Death had lost its metaphysical grip over the living, but it gained a new centrality in the process of understanding the pathological nature of life. (144) On the one hand, death allowed the anatomist to have valuable insights into the pathological forms of life. On the other hand, life could only be fully understood when turned into corpse.

IV. THE GOTHIC CORPSE

The gothic body is a recalcitrant body: a body that obstinately resists erasure. The gothicity of the corpse lies in the manner it exceeds the frames of its own representation or exhausts the parameters of its own rationalization. The corpse is gothic to the extent it is a liminal entity perversely traversing the borders of the living and the non-living, the human and the non-human, or the organic and the inorganic. The gothic corpse is a deviant entity, both as a host to multiple heterogenous lives-pathological, sexual or racial (Halberstam 3-4) and as a witness to its own divergent, material future.

The gothicization of the corpse is tied, to a large extent, to its "abhuman" status. The "abhuman", according to Kelly Hurley, is "a not-quite-human subject, characterized by its morphic variability, continually in danger of becoming-not-itself, becoming other." (4) The "abhuman", paradoxically, reaffirms the "fully human" identity to which it is opposed. (Hurley 25) It also exposes humanness as a merely discursive construct or a provisional category always in danger of being threatened. (28) The "abhuman" thus points to the body's "loss of human specificity": to becoming matter that is no longer obedient to its designated form, to the "Thing-ness" of undifferentiated matter. (30-32) The "abhuman" aspects of the corpse is evident in the way the corpse is barely recognizable as human, the way it morphs and disintegrates through decomposition or is fragmented and defamiliarized through dissection, the way it is disposed of and erased as a "Thing", and most importantly, the way it is treated as an empty shell devoid of any essence.

As the cadaver undergoes decomposition or dissection, it is increasingly alienated from the so-called ideal model of human physique ensconced in western iconography since Da Vinci's "Vitruvian Man". The fragmentation of the corpse at once challenges the very idea of the body as a system of symmetry and coherence and tests the limits of anatomical reconstruction. Thus, the anatomical culture of the nineteenth century was responsible, as Laurence Talairach-Vielmas has aptly delineated, for the slow but irrevocable undermining of the very ontological ground of a pure, unitary and integral "human" subject. (8-9) Images of the corpse, anatomized and objectified, instilled in popular imagination an unshakeable anxiety regarding the corporal basis of life, an anxiety which eventually found its cultural expression in gothic terror. (8-9)

V. THE UNCANNY SYNECDOCHE

Robert Louis Stevenson's "The Body Snatcher" is a gothic tale involving two young, excessively ambitious and grossly hedonistic medical students who turn into graverobbers to supply cadavers for dissection as anatomical subjects and are, eventually, met with an uncanny and terrifying experience. It is in connection with this scandalous and reprehensible past life of Fettes, one of the two medical students of the tale, that the narrator of the frame story comes to refer to the corpses as "unfriended relics of humanity". (Stevenson 78) In a narrative in which the corpse is almost a living presence, the dead body is imagined, quite ironically, as a relic, at once, in its archeological sense, that is, as what remains, or, is left after the body's precious "humanness" is gone- as a form emptied

of its essence- and in its profoundly sacral context. The latter connotation appears to be all the more pertinent when the story is viewed as a perversely secular and a nearly grotesque version of the Resurrection myth. In fact, the characters of Mr. K and his two henchmen, Fettes and Macfarlane were based on the actual "resurrection men": the controversial anatomist Robert Knox and his infamous associates, William Burke and William Hare. The untimely exhumation of the bodies- what the narrator of the story describes as a "hasty, lamp-lit, terror-haunted resurrection of the spade and mattock" - disturbs the corpses in their "joyful expectation of a far different awakening". (Stevenson 87) An inversion of the gothic motif of "premature burial" popularized by Edgar Allan Poe, the rude, premature "awakening" of the corpses pushes them into a timeline not proper to their eschatological journey. The disinterment also forces the corpse to a space that is the very opposite of the familiar graveyard whose paths are "worn by the feet of worshippers and mourners". (87) By displacing the corpse from "bonds of blood or fellowship" to the indignities of the dissecting rooms where it is "to be exposed to the last curiosity of the anatomist" (87), the corpse is "unfriended" or dissociated, through an act of exclusion of which it is both the cause and the effect, from everything that is considered human, and is reconstituted in its pure, unmitigated materiality as the inhuman "other". According to Judith Halberstam, Gothic monsters represent "the being that cannot be imagined as community", and are, therefore, posed as the "other" of the imagined community of men. (15) The corpse, through its exclusion from the community of the living, approaches this image of monstrosity.

The dislocation of the corpse from the oblivion of the grave to the clinical gaze of the anatomist cannot be understood as a simple clash between science and superstition. It is, instead, symptomatic of a broader and deeper shift in the way "humanness" is conceptualized vis a vis the "inhuman" status of the corpse. Thus, the superstitious fear echoed by the narrator of Stevenson's tale may be regarded as misleading in the sense it prevents the readers from acknowledging the true nature of the uncanny experience encountered by Fettes and Macfarlane. A superficial reading of the story would suggest that it is either their guilty conscience which triggers their hallucination or there is something supernatural at work behind their experience. But a closer analysis of the ending of the narrative leads to a far more unsettling realization. While there is little doubt about the role of the unconscious behind the conjuration of this terrifying scene, especially in the way the repressed memories of their terrible crime are uncannily brought into play, there is something more to this scene than is immediately discernible. Much of the gothic effect of this scene rests on the last few words of the tale which refer to the anatomical impossibility of restoring the so-called "humanness" of a dissected corpse. (Stevenson 91) This makes sense as dissection of a corpse, within the logical framework of the narrative, ensures not merely its disposal, but its erasure from memory, and, more importantly, its unrecognizability. In a story about medical students casually dissecting corpses, Gray's corpse should not hold any special meaning (notwithstanding its forensic value as evidence of Macfarlane's crime) and, yet, it does, because it remains stuck, along with the corpse of Jane Galbraith, within a pattern of recognition or its denial. When the corpse of Jane Galbraith is brought to Fettes and Macfarlane, they pretend not to recognize her and, surprisingly, others also fail to identify her during dissection. (Stevenson 82) The same sequence is repeated in the case of Gray which is, in Macfarlane's own words, just "another case". (84) Thus, Stevenson's story exposes "humanness" as something not inherent in the human being but entirely contingent upon the recognition of others, willing or forced.

In light of the above discussion, the real source of terror in the end no longer appears to be the so-called "unnatural miracle" through which the mortal remains of an old woman is transformed into the dead body of Gray. It is, rather, the eerie return of a corpse that steadfastly resists erasure even after dissection and demands recognition from the protagonists. If the process of dissection renders a corpse unrecognizable as human, the corpse, when anatomically reconstructed by any hypothetical means, should appear familiar enough to elicit recognition. But, in reality, the corpse is now familiar and strange, human and inhuman at the same time and the recognition it draws out is involuntary and disturbing. It is because the image of the "human" is reconfigured in the narrative through an uncanny synecdoche: the whole, when fragmented, is supposed to lose its essence, and yet the fragments, when joined together, appear identical to the whole as if this so-called essence never existed. The most crucial part of Freud's theorization of the uncanny is how it is something that was once familiar to the psyche, and only became strange and frightening after being repressed. (148) It is possible, however, to expand upon Freud's notion of the uncanny so as to include that which is expected to appear alien through ages of conditioning of the conscious mind and still ends up looking quite familiar. After all, what the two young anatomists of the story struggle admitting is that the human form is in no way unique or transcendent. It is simply matter, fragments of which fit into a corporal shape neither final nor stable, and, somewhat sadly, allows no special or grand meaning to being human.

VI. "THE BRAIN OF A DEVIL"

Dr. Raymond's feverish, almost maniacal speech to Mr. Clarke before commencing his experimental brain surgery on Mary in Machen's *The Great God Pan* has a definite context in history.:

> You may look in Browne Faber's book, if you like, and you will find that to the present day men of science are unable to account for the presence, or to specify the functions of a certain group of nerve-cells in the brain. That group is, as it were, land to let, a mere waste place for fanciful theories. I am not in the position of Browne Faber and the specialists, I am perfectly instructed as to the possible functions of those nerve-centers in the scheme of things. With a touch I can bring them into play, with a touch, I say, I can set free the current, with a touch I can complete the communication between this world of sense and … It will level utterly the solid wall of sense, and probably, for the first time since man was made, a spirit will gaze on a spirit-world. Clarke, Mary will see the god Pan! (11)

The second half of the nineteenth century saw meteoric advancements in a number of scientific fields, not the least of which was brain science or neuroscience. The scope of late nineteenth century brain science was no longer limited to the descriptive knowledge of certain broad regions of the human brain, but encompassed the newly emerging theory of cerebral localization which managed to assign a particular mental or somatic function to each specific site of the brain. Acquiring such detailed, localized knowledge of complex brain activity was made possible, partly, through a shift in methodology from using clinical records of patients to conducting postmortem examinations and practicing vivisections on live animal brains. (Stiles 16) Experimental brain surgeries, which often entailed sending an electrical pulse into the brain tissue, were frequently conducted on animals like dogs and monkeys, and information gathered from those experiments were superimposed on comparable cases of study of the human brain. One may here be referred to the controversial experiments on live monkeys by the Scottish scientist David Ferrier, to his sensational trial in 1881 on the charge of animal cruelty, and, most importantly, to his cortical mapping of the human brain which traced its intricate neural pathways at an unprecedented scale of accuracy. (Stiles 12-13) Besides the ethical ramifications of such experiments, which, however, is a concern in any possible reading of Machen's novella, there were also wide-spread philosophical and cultural implications taken up by some of the most perceptive storytellers of the time like H.G. Wells, Robert Louis Stevenson, and, of course, Arthur Machen. Reducing every thought, emotion, or mental quality of a person to the electrical/chemical activity of a physically observable brain left no room for a unified soul or consciousness, a moral centre or, for that matter, a divine creator to exist. (Stiles 9-10) Moreover, the proximity of the human brain to the brain of the so-called baser animals foregrounded by the localizationist experiments was in itself a disturbing notion. So, while a boldly materialistic science demolished the last sacred bastion of human identity-the idea of an extraphysical soul or consciousness, speculative fiction started frantically gushing forth its most lurid, most paranoid and most far-fetched versions of this scientific project. Dr Raymond's wild theory in *The Great God Pan* is a case in point. If his argument, that a surgical alteration of a specific point in the brain can not only change the nature of consciousness, but open a portal into the world of spirit, sounds almost plausible, it is because it cleverly inverts the logic of cerebral localization to reintroduce the spiritual element while exploiting the language of contemporary neuroscience. But both Dr Raymond and Mr. Clarke seem to be aware of the dangers of tinkering with this inhuman spirit-world as measured against its titanic scale and its inscrutable presence, the human world appears puny and insignificant. Machen's cautionary tale, thus, turns science into an occult practice and challenges the ubiquity of the flesh with the esoterism of the soul.

This interface between matter and consciousness was an inexhaustible source of mystery for the late 19th century writers of popular fiction and Machen was invested in it enough to use it in another of his stories called "The Inmost Light". In this story, however, the existence of the soul is preestablished and its extraction, through an obscure experiment conducted on a woman by her own husband, permanently deforms the brain of the subject to such an extent that it can no longer be identified as the brain of a human being. In fact, the doctor who examines Mrs. Black's corpse after she is murdered by her husband, uses the phrase "the brain of a devil" to refer to her cerebral deformity. The doctor is completely unaware of Dr. Black's experiment, and he comes to his conclusion independently, relying only on his scientific knowledge of the human brain. Notwithstanding his somewhat strong and unprofessional choice of words for his description of Mrs. Black's brain, he appears to genuinely admit of the limitations of contemporary science in understanding the meeting point between matter and consciousness:

> No one recognizes more decidedly than I do the impassable gulf, the fathomless abyss that separates the world of

> consciousness from the sphere of matter. We know that every change of consciousness is accompanied by a rearrangement of the molecules in the grey matter; and that is all. What the link between them is, or why they occur together, we do not know, and the most authorities believe that we never can know. (Machen 68)

It is this grey area between knowledge and cluelessness, this shadowy realm between light and darkness that ultimately builds the gothic premise of Machen's tale. Indeed, the theory of cerebral localization mystified certain aspects of the human brain as much as it shed light on others. For example, compared to the left hemisphere of the human brain, which was associated with the exclusively human qualities like rationality and intelligence, very little was known about the right hemisphere except that it "housed primitive instincts and emotions." (Stiles 5) It was believed that an overgrown right brain was responsible not just for criminal insanity and moral depravity, but for an overall intellectual regression and a return to animality. (5) Such beliefs operated within the very cultural framework laid by Social Darwinism and the theories of Degeneration prevalent at the time and shared its secret ties with the pseudoscientific discipline of phrenology which the science of cerebral localization was supposed to have replaced. In fact, Machen might have been familiar with the case of a criminally insane woman who murdered her own children in 1871. Ferrier examined her brain postmortem and recorded his findings, which predictably focused on her abnormal right brain, in an article published in 1882. So, Dr. Raymond in *The Great God Pan* was most likely referring to the right hemisphere of the human brain by what he called "mere waste place for fanciful theories." (11)

The fear of the human brain devolving into its animal counterpart is noticeably present in "The Inmost Light". When asked by the coroner whether the brain of the subject resembled that of an animal, the doctor could only reply with absolute indeterminacy:

> 'No,' he replied, 'I should not put it in that way. Some of the appearances I noticed seemed to point in that direction, but others, and these were the more surprising, indicated a nervous organization of a wholly different character from that either of man or the lower animals.' (Machen 61)

What is most intriguing about the doctor's "scientific" opinion is how freely it blends a diagnosis of cerebral regression with a case of evolution-gone-berserk, both nightmarish scenarios haunting the *fin-de-siecle* gothic imagination. But what the doctor interprets as the shameful and lamentable loss of humanness in Mrs. Black may as well be a pathological phenomenon unfolding beyond scientific supervision. Thus, far from being a neutral and objective view of the human brain, the discourse of cerebral localization was, from the outset, inflected by the dominant definitions of the human. So, it is possible to imagine the doctor opening up the brain of a female victim of murder and finding nothing meaningful to his idea of the human except pathologically altered, deviant and animalistic brain-matter that disgusts him to the core, so much so that he ends up legitimizing a crime. The ineluctable materiality of the corpse baffles him as it did his fellow-anatomists, Fettes and Macfarlane from Stevenson's tale, and with the authority vested in him by the nineteenth century scientific culture, he decides to withdraw from the corpse the very status of a human being.

VII. CONCLUSION

The avowed aim of this paper is to explore, through a critical reading of the two selected short stories of Robert Louis Stevenson and Arthur Machen, namely "The Body Snatcher" and "The Inmost Light", the gothic potential of the corpse as a liminal figure that blurs the lines of distinction between the human and the nonhuman or the familiar and the monstrous, and as an "abhuman" entity that facilitates the construction of the "human" by opposing it. This line of enquiry is supported by the critical works of Kelly Hurley, Jack Halberstam and Laurence Talairach-Vielmas on gothic fiction. Since the anatomical culture of the nineteenth century acts as the subtext for both the stories, Talairach-Vielmas's view of how the fragmentation of the corpse symbolically corresponds to the fracturing of a stable and coherent human self is particularly useful here. And so is Foucault's *The Birth of the Clinic* which treats the rise of anatomical science in Post-Enlightenment Europe not as a random historical development but as one of the epistemic processes through which the human subject of modern biopolitics was born. Freud's notion of the uncanny serves directly as a theoretical point of entry for our understanding of Stevenson's short story. Similarly, Anne Stiles's *Popular Fiction and Brain Science in the Late Nineteenth Century* proves to be invaluable for our reading of Machen's weird tale.

Apart from examining the gothicity of the corpse, this paper has another, convergent goal of engaging with the corpse as a site of posthuman critique of the "human". As Cary Wolfe notes, the invention of the "human" is accomplished only by repressing our animality and by transcending our material bonds with the nonhuman world.

(15) Thus, the corpse, in its proximity to our animal nature and in its radical materiality, does not just stand as an inhuman counterpart to the so-called 'human' but casts serious doubts on the ontological stability of this privileged human subject, forcing its reconfiguration. The scope for such a posthumanist reading is amply realized in both the stories dealt with in this paper. After all, critical posthumanism does not limit itself to envisioning a techno-materialist future in which the question of the "human" will be entirely irrelevant. Rather, it embraces all modes of critical thought that resist or subvert the underlying assumptions of anthropocentric discourse. By subjecting the gothic representation of the corpse to a posthumanist perspective, this paper traces some of the earliest symptoms of the "posthuman" condition back to the late nineteenth century when a profound uncertainty regarding the actual meaning of being human delivered the soul to its darkest and wildest fantasies. Finally, this paper hopes to contribute, in some small measure, to the theorization of the "posthuman Gothic" which, according to Anya Heise-von der Lippe, reveals the monstrous Other that we fear to be "an essential part of our (human) identity construction". (6) The corpse, in this sense, is not what we leave behind and try our best to disown but what we actually are and have always been: matter in becoming.

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Beyond the Representation of *Écriture Féminine* and the Poetics of Everyday Life in Zoya Pirzad's "Mismatched" (Lengeh-be-Lengeh)

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Abstract— *This paper explores the manifestation of écriture féminine in Zoya Pirzad's short story "Mismatched," drawing on the theories of Hélène Cixous. While Pirzad's works has frequently been studied through the lenses of female representation, everyday life, and identity, the linguistic and narrative mechanisms tied to the concept of écriture féminine in this story remain under-researched. Employing qualitative textual analysis and close reading, this study demonstrates that écriture féminine operates in this text not merely at the thematic level, but through its form, rhythm, silences, everyday details, and the organization of narrative perception. The findings reveal that the "everyday" in Pirzad's fiction is not merely a backdrop for representing women's experiences, but functions as an arena for meaning-making, resistance against established patriarchal linguistic patterns, and the rewriting of lived female experience. Consequently, this paper argues that "Mismatched" articulates a poetics of the everyday, through which écriture féminine in contemporary Persian fiction is realized—not through extreme linguistic ruptures, but through a delicate economy of silence, rhythm, and the minutiae of daily life.*

Keywords— ***Post-structuralism, Zoya Pirzad, "Mismached", écriture féminine, Hélène Cixous.***

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, feminist literary criticism has shifted from a mere focus on the representation of women in texts toward an examination of the linguistic, narrative, and formal mechanisms that shape female experience. Within this perspective, the concern is no longer exclusively about how women are portrayed, but rather how a text facilitates the emergence of a specific female voice, perception, and subjectivity. Accordingly, the concept of *écriture féminine* in French feminist theory—particularly within the thought of Hélène Cixous—gains special significance. This concept posits that female experience manifests not only at the thematic level but also through the movement of language, the rupture of established logic, and the retrieval of the marginalized. Thus, *écriture féminine* is not restricted to women's authorship or the presence of female characters; rather, it refers to a mode of writing that distances itself from hierarchical and patriarchal linguistic structures, enabling the expression of difference, multiplicity, silence, desire, and the body.

In her seminal essay "The Laugh of the Medusa," Hélène Cixous emphasizes the necessity for women to write from themselves, from their own bodies, and from an experience suppressed by dominant intellectual and linguistic traditions. As she asserts, "Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing" (Cixous 875). Within this framework, *écriture féminine* is understood as a linguistic and aesthetic act that is incompatible with the logic of certainty, centrality, and monologism; instead, it tends toward the fluidity of meaning, polyphony, interiority, and openness. Charles Bressler, in explicating this approach, emphasizes that French feminism is primarily concerned with language, seeking to demonstrate how meaning is produced through

linguistic signs. Thus, *écriture féminine* is identifiable not in the biological identity of the author, but in the functional mode of the text and the quality of meaning production (Bressler 205).

In contemporary Persian fiction, the works of Zoya Pirzad are among those that, due to their focus on lived female experience, familial relationships, emotional silences, and the minutiae of everyday life, possess a high capacity for an *écriture féminine* reading. Pirzad's fictional world rarely relies on grand, overt events; rather, it reveals complex layers of female experience through seemingly minor occurrences, fragmented perceptions, pauses, objects, and quiet emotional interactions. In this regard, the short story "Mismatched" serves as an ideal case study, as everyday life within it is not a marginal backdrop but the primary arena of meaning-making, where female subjectivity is shaped through details, silences, and the slow rhythm of the narrative.

Research conducted on Pirzad's works has primarily focused on gender roles, maternal patterns, women's emotional experiences, the gendering of space, social taboos, and certain discursive mechanisms. While these studies are significant in elucidating the social and cultural dimensions of her work, they have less frequently addressed how female experience is constructed at the level of form and language. Furthermore, in Persian academia, the concept of *écriture féminine* has sometimes been applied in a general, undifferentiated manner, often failing to distinguish it from the mere representation of women or women's authorship. Consequently, there remains a lack of study that specifically analyzes "Mismatched" through the lens of *écriture féminine* in conjunction with a poetics of the everyday.

Accordingly, the primary objective of this paper is to read "Lengeh-be-Lengeh" not merely as a narrative about a woman, but as a text that produces female experience through language, narrative, and the organization of perception. This research aims to examine how the "everyday" in this story transcends its status as a subject matter to become a site for the emergence of female subjectivity and a form of *écriture féminine*. The central question of this paper is: what narrative and linguistic mechanisms in "Mismatched" facilitate the realization of *écriture féminine*? The paper posits that by highlighting details, silence, interiority, the suspension of meaning, and a focus on seemingly insignificant experiences, this story constructs a poetics of the everyday that aligns with Cixous's formulation of *écriture féminine*. Utilizing a descriptive-analytical method and relying on close reading, this research attempts to demonstrate that in this story, everyday life is not a marginal subject, but a field of meaning production and resistance.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on Zoya Pirzad's works can be broadly categorized into several thematic axes. One strand focuses on the representation of gender roles, female experience, and family structures. For instance, Mousavi (2022) examined gender role schemas in the novel *We Will Get Used to It*, demonstrating that literature can serve as a field for either the reproduction or the critique of gendered expectations. Majidzadeh Dolatabadi et al. (2021), in their examination of maternal patterns in Pirzad's works, emphasized the complexity of women's positioning relative to familial and social structures. While these studies are significant in illuminating the female world of Pirzad's oeuvre, they largely remain at the thematic and sociological levels.

Another group of studies has focused on the relationship between gender, space, taboo, and emotional experience. Moghaddami (2021), in an analysis of *The Tart Taste of Persimmons*, demonstrates that place plays an active role in the formation of gender identity. Al-Ali, Jalali, and Taheri (2024), in a comparative study, examined the application of taboo in contemporary Persian and Arabic fiction, identifying Pirzad's works as a context for representing the repressed. Furthermore, Taheri-Rostam and Mangoli (2024), by examining forbidden love in *Things We Left Unsaid*, underscored interiority, self-discovery, and the tension between individual desire and social structures within Pirzad's fictional world. Although these studies reveal critical dimensions of the female experience, they less frequently address how these experiences are constructed at the level of form and narrative organization.

At a level closer to linguistic analysis, Dehghan Tarzjani et al. (2020) investigated the linguistic tools used to establish the individual authority of male and female narrators in some of Pirzad's works. The significance of this study lies in its departure from mere thematic analysis toward an attention to the discursive mechanisms of the text. However, the framework of this research remains focused on legitimation and narrative authority, and does not directly engage with *écriture féminine* in the Cixousian sense.

In the theoretical domain, the concept of *écriture féminine* in Persian scholarship has often been addressed in a general manner or conflated with women's authorship and the representation of women's issues. Yet, in Hélène Cixous's theory, *écriture féminine* relates primarily to the mode of meaning production, the text's relationship with

the body and difference, and resistance against phallogocentric language. Therefore, the mere presence of a female character or the engagement with women's issues is insufficient to attribute this concept to a text.

A review of the literature indicates that despite numerous studies on femininity, family, space, taboo, and language in Zoya Pirzad's works, there remains a lack of research specifically analyzing the short story "Mismatched" through the lens of *écriture féminine* in conjunction with the poetics of the everyday. The primary gap is the absence of a study that moves beyond representation to demonstrate how female experience in this story is constructed through details, silence, narrative rhythm, and the organization of textual perception. The present research seeks to fill this gap by linking Hélène Cixous's theoretical framework with a close reading of "Mismatched".

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present study is grounded in the concept of *écriture féminine* within Hélène Cixous's thought—a concept that remains one of the most fundamental formulations of French feminism. *Écriture féminine* should not be conflated with "writing by women" or "writing about women." It refers to a mode of writing where language distances itself from established, hierarchical, and phallogocentric logic, thereby enabling the emergence of difference, multiplicity, the body, desire, and marginalized voices. Therefore, the primary issue in identifying *écriture féminine* is not the author's identity, but how the text functions.

In her critique of the Western intellectual tradition, Cixous demonstrates that this tradition has been founded on unequal binary oppositions: man/woman, reason/emotion, culture/nature, presence/absence. In these oppositions, the first term has always occupied the center, while the second has been relegated to the margin. *Écriture féminine* acts against this logic—not by simply reversing these hierarchies, but by disrupting the established logic of binarism itself. From this perspective, language is not merely a tool for conveying meaning; it is also a site of power and exclusion. Consequently, any attempt to reclaim female voice and subjectivity is inextricably bound to the question of language.

In "The Laugh of the Medusa," Cixous emphasizes that woman must write herself and restore to the text those realms of experience suppressed in the patriarchal order. "Writing the body" here does not mean reducing woman to the biological; rather, it refers to bringing emotion, desire, memory, pleasure, suffering, and marginalized perceptions back into the text. For this reason, *écriture féminine* is often characterized by the fluidity of meaning, openness, polyphony, rupture, ambiguity, resistance to linearity, and resistance to imposed coherence. Bressler, in explicating French feminism, emphasizes that such writing does not fix meaning in its process, but produces it within the movement of language and in relation to voice, difference, and the act of writing (Bressler 205).

Nevertheless, *écriture féminine* should not be reduced to a fixed checklist of formal characteristics. It is less a definitive model for classifying texts and more an interpretive horizon for reading them. From this perspective, a literary text enters into a relationship with *écriture féminine* when one can discern in it signs of escaping certainty, the disruption of centrality, the presence of silence and omission, the highlighting of details, and the possibility for marginalized experiences. Thus, this study does not aim to present "Mismatched" as an absolute or complete specimen of *écriture féminine*; rather, the goal is to examine the extent to which the narrative and linguistic mechanisms of this story align with this theoretical horizon.

Meanwhile, the connection between *écriture féminine* and the poetics of the everyday is of decisive importance. In many texts that place female experience at the center, the everyday transcends the level of trivial or marginal matters to become a field for meaning production. Home, objects, repetitive tasks, silent relationships, protracted time, and minute perceptions are not merely realistic elements in such texts; they are mechanisms through which subjectivity, erosion, desire, limitation, and resistance are revealed. Thus, everyday life can be the site for the emergence of a writing that, instead of relying on grand events and explicit discourses, disseminates meaning within silences, pauses, and details.

In reading "Mismatched," it is significant that the narrative relies more on details, interiority, objects, silence, and the slow rhythm of perception than on bold actions and overt oppositions. Therefore, to operationalize this theoretical framework for textual analysis, this study considers five main indices: first, the foregrounding of the everyday as a site of meaning production; second, the role of silence, omission, and the unsaid in expressing female experience; third, interiority and the focus on perception, emotion, and lived experience; fourth, the fluidity of meaning and the avoidance of interpretive certainty; and fifth, a narrative that reveals domination and tension not directly, but within the texture of details and silent relationships.

Accordingly, the theoretical framework of the present paper is predicated on the premise that "Mismatched," through its detailed, tranquil, and interiorized narrative economy, provides a possibility for the emergence of

female subjectivity. In this story, the everyday is not merely the subject of the narrative but becomes an aesthetic and epistemological mechanism of the text. In other words, through details, pauses, silences, and the suspension of meaning, the text constructs a poetics of the everyday that can be read in relation to the concept of *écriture féminine*. Such a reading allows us to move beyond the level of representation and demonstrate how female experience in this story is produced within the form and movement of language itself.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative design and employs a descriptive-analytical approach. The text under examination is Zoya Pirzad's short story "Mismatched," which serves as the unit of analysis in this research. The theoretical basis of the paper is the concept of *écriture féminine* in Hélène Cixous's thought, and the analysis is conducted through close reading. Rather than merely extracting explicit themes, this method seeks to examine the relationship among narrative structure, linguistic details, silences, omissions, the rhythm of perception, and the ways meaning is produced within the text.

To operationalize the theoretical framework, five principal indices guide the reading of the story: the foregrounding of everyday life as a site of meaning production; the role of silence and the unsaid in expressing female experience; interiority and the focus on perception and emotion; the fluidity of meaning and the avoidance of interpretive certainty; and finally, the representation of tension and domination at the level of details and silent relationships rather than solely through overt oppositions. Accordingly, the present analysis aims to show how "Mismatched," through its quiet and detail-oriented narrative economy, makes possible the emergence of a form of female subjectivity and transforms the everyday into a domain of meaning and resistance.

Analysis of Zoya Pirzad's "Mismatched" through the Lens of Hélène Cixous's *Écriture Féminine*

1. Writing the Body, Dreaming, and Rupturing Established Female Roles

One of the most fundamental components of Hélène Cixous's theory is the nexus between writing, the body, desire, and female lived experience. Farshid Norouzi and Mohammad Ghafari (2021), in their article "Hélène Cixous's Theory of *Écriture Féminine*: From Illusion to Reality," note that Cixous, in "The Laugh of the Medusa," calls upon women to write about their bodies without fear or guilt, and to narrate based on a corporeality and sexuality that have been suppressed for centuries. In this regard, Cixous asserts: "I write woman: woman must write woman" (Cixous 877). This invitation to write from the body and from female experience is well manifested in the short story "Mismatched".

Describing one of her inner desires, the narrator states: "Some mornings when I woke up, I wanted to sit in front of the TV in my worn-out nightgown, hair uncombed, wearing mismatched socks" (Pirzad 89). This sentence is not merely a report of an appearance; it articulates a desire to break free from social discipline and from the model of the woman who is always tidy, controlled, and harmonious. Here, "mismatched socks" becomes a sign of silent rebellion—a form of writing with the body that transcends the level of attire and transforms into a language of protest. In the same vein, the narrator asks: "I sat silently and thought: why should I wear nylon socks when I hate them, and furthermore, why shouldn't I say that I hate wearing them?" (Pirzad 89). This reflects both the narrator's awareness of cultural impositions and a moment of female self-realization; a moment where the body is no longer a subject of discipline, but a site of resistance.

On the other hand, *écriture féminine* in Cixous's thought entails breaking female and maternal stereotypes. In Pirzad's story, this issue manifests in the realm of dreams and fantasy. The narrator says: "I wished to be Cinderella… waiting for my prince to turn my pumpkin into a golden carriage…" (89). At first glance, this image seems like a return to female fairy-tale imagination, but as the text progresses, this fantasy is called into question, becoming a ground for realizing the gap between myth and reality. As the narrator notes elsewhere: "I thought about marriage… which young girl would covet my tired, ill-tempered, and broken-down prince?" (Pirzad 90). This phrase is no longer a reflection of a romantic dream but an articulation of its collapse. The narrator realistically realizes that there is no "prince," and this moment marks an awakening and a rupture from the phallogocentric narrative model.

The challenge to established female roles concerning motherhood and domesticity is also made explicit: "A palace where there is no cooking, dusting, or laundry… where the crying of my nursing baby does not wake me up at night…" (Pirzad 89). This sentence explicitly questions the pressures of the roles of mother and wife, showing how what is traditionally considered a "female virtue" can become exhausting and restrictive in lived experience. Even on another level, the desire for a support is formulated in a non-stereotypical way: "If only one always had something to hold onto… laundry or the golden railings of a shrine…" (Pirzad 89). This "clinging" can be

interpreted both as an allegory for the woman's psychological need for support and as a sign of her state of suspension and instability in an order that has drained her usual anchors of meaning.

From this perspective, "Mismatched" can be considered a text where the woman is not only the subject of the narrative but the source of perception and meaning production. The body, attire, desire, fantasy, and everyday dissatisfaction all become components of a writing that aligns with Cixous's theoretical horizon. Writing woman in this story is achieved not through slogans, but through the most minute daily experiences and the silent resistance embedded within them.

2. Details of Everyday Life, Fluidity of Language, and the Formation of *Écriture Féminine*

One of the most significant aspects of *écriture féminine* in "Mismatched" is the transformation of the everyday into a site of meaning production. Instead of relying on grand events and overt crises, Pirzad constructs the narrative world through repetitive, minute, and seemingly trivial matters—matters often relegated to the margins in phallogocentric literature. The narrator states: "… I would press the green, red, or yellow button, and the machine would wash the clothes" (90). Ostensibly, this sentence is a simple description of washing, but at a deeper level, it provides an image of the repetition, ennui, and the everyday mechanism in which the woman is ensnared. Thus, the everyday transcends the background of the narrative to become the locus for the emergence of tension and awareness.

This state reaches its crescendo in a longer passage where, following her mother's words, the narrator recalls a fluid list of desires, cravings, and markers of social success: "Thank God you don't have to scrub laundry with a stick and cold water, in our time—and I thought, if only one always had something to hold onto. Laundry, or the golden railings of a shrine, the hope for a promotion, New Year bonuses and raises, a savings account at the bank, the dream of a larger house with steel chairs, a car, a diamond ring, a Louis Vuitton bag, a Rolex watch, a wedding in such-and-such hotel, chubby children with report cards full of A's, friends with whom one could discuss the right way to cook fesenjan[1], or gossip about other friends, or go to the beauty salon" (Pirzad 91). This long, fluid list diverts the language of the text from a linear, orderly path, transforming it into a pluralistic stream of consciousness. This very rupture from linear, rationalistic order aligns with *écriture féminine*.

In "The Laugh of the Medusa," regarding this fluidity, Cixous writes: "Woman's imagination is inexhaustible, like music, painting, and writing. Their flow of fantasy is incredible… The world is an expansion of a knowledge based on bodily experimentation… Every stage of pleasure and euphoria marks a powerful conception, a composition, and something beautiful" (876). In this light, the fluidity of language in Pirzad's story is not merely a stylistic feature; it is the translation of the structure of female experience—an experience in which meaning is constructed through the free association of details, memories, fantasies, and objects.

In this context, the presence of sensory and visual elements also gains significance. The narrator says: "There was no laughter on your face, but I could feel it," and in another sentence, we read: "I lifted the paper. A smiling face had been drawn" (Pirzad 93). Furthermore, the expression "draft paper" (87) serves as a symbolic image of a readable text that is still in the process of formation and thus cannot be fixed. Here, writing is not the product of certainty, but the result of movement, incompleteness, and process—precisely what is articulated in Cixous's theory as the connection between language, the body, and the multiplicity of meaning.

Thus, everyday life in "Mismatched" is not merely represented; it becomes a semantic system wherein laundry, household items, the listing of needs, and even simple objects are transformed into the language of female subjectivity. Through this avenue, the story approaches the horizon of *écriture féminine*: a writing in which the trivial is the site of meaning production, and details, rather than being peripheral, constitute the main text of experience.

3. Silence, the Inner–Outer Divide, and Quiet Female Resistance

Another central component of *écriture féminine* in "Mismatched" is the presence of silence, the suppression of speech, and the gap between interiority and outward appearance. The narrator lives in a world in which she must conceal many of her feelings and disagreements. This condition is clearly manifested in the following statement: "My husband smiled, squeezed my arm, and said, 'Calm down, darling.' And I realized that what he meant was: don't speak" (Pirzad 89). In this sentence, language that appears calm and affectionate in fact functions as a mechanism for silencing the female voice. Domination thus reveals itself not in the form of overt violence, but in its soft and everyday guise.

The same tension is represented on a more interior level when the narrator says: "I draw smiling faces … but I do not smile" (Pirzad 93). This sentence vividly exposes the gap between appearance and reality, social image and

[1] A Persian food

inner truth, and between what a woman is expected to display and what she actually feels. The smiling face becomes a metaphor for the very social role imposed upon her—a role she must perform in order to remain acceptable, even when her innermost experience is at odds with it.

Yet for Cixous, *écriture féminine* is not merely the registration of repression; it is also a means of moving beyond it. She writes: "Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing … Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement" (Cixous 875). From this perspective, writing means bringing into language what has been repressed and transferring interiority into the realm of expression. Elsewhere in her thought, writing is also conceived as the "possibility of change" and as a platform for disruptive thought. Therefore, wherever the narrator gives language to experiences of imposition, silence, or dissatisfaction, she is in fact initiating the very act of resistance.

The text offers numerous examples of this quiet resistance. The narrator says: "I washed them all together … my mother used to say: that's unhygienic …" (Pirzad 91). On the surface, this is simply a remark about washing clothes, but on a symbolic level, it suggests disobedience to an imposed familial and cultural order. Likewise, the statement "I have thrown away all my nylon stockings … and she always wears mismatched socks …" (Pirzad 93) records another form of defiance at the level of the body and clothing. In both cases, the woman marks her distance from dominant norms through small yet meaningful acts.

Even apparently simple references to domestic gifts become significant within this framework. The fact that on her birthday the narrator receives "a dishwasher," and as a New Year's gift "a juicer," is not merely a report of family life; it reveals how female identity is reduced within the social structure to domestic labor and a service role. Yet the very recording of such details is itself an act of exposure. By writing what is usually regarded as trivial and natural, Pirzad lays bare the hidden mechanisms of domination. From this perspective, silence in "Mismatched" is never neutral; it carries a critical force and, through writing, is transformed into resistance.

Consequently, "Mismatched" may be read as a narrative in which female experience is shaped through the tension between inner and outer, silence and speech, apparent conformity and inward protest. The story demonstrates that female resistance does not necessarily appear in the form of grand or explicit acts; rather, it can be embodied in silence, in clothing, in memory, in a half-spoken sentence, and in the recording of everyday details. It is precisely this feature that brings the story close to the theoretical horizon of *écriture féminine*.

V. CONCLUSION

Drawing on the concept of *écriture féminine* in Hélène Cixous's thought, the present study analyzed Zoya Pirzad's short story "Mismatched" in order to demonstrate how female experience in this text is articulated at the level of language, narrative, and the organization of everyday details. The central question of the article was how, and through what mechanisms, *écriture féminine* may be identified in this story. The analysis showed that Pirzad's text, through its focus on a female point of view, the foregrounding of the protagonist's inner experience, and its departure from linear and rationalistic modes of narration, approaches structures that Cixous's theory identifies as characteristic of *écriture féminine*.

The findings of the study indicate that in "Mismatched," everyday life becomes the center of meaning production. Objects, repetitive acts, and seemingly trivial situations do not merely serve a background function; rather, they become instruments for revealing the hidden tensions embedded in relationships and gender roles. From this perspective, the narrative forms a poetics of everyday life through its focus on concrete details and sensory experiences, within which female subjectivity is constructed through subtle perceptions, inner feelings, and the narrator's mental reflections.

At the same time, the analysis demonstrates that corporeality, linguistic fluidity, and the presence of silences and the unsaid are among the major components shaping this mode of writing. In Cixous's theoretical framework, *écriture féminine* is understood as a means of reclaiming women's voice and lived experience—a possibility realized through a rupture from the fixed patterns of phallogocentric language. In Pirzad's story, likewise, the articulation of everyday experience, the recording of domestic details, and the representation of the female character's inner feelings and hesitations give rise to a fluid and multilayered mode of expression that distances itself from the definitive and hierarchical logic of dominant language.

On this basis, it can be concluded that "Mismatched" is not merely a narrative of a woman's everyday life, but a text that, through its particular organization of language and narrative, brings female experience into the domain of literary expression. In this story, everyday details, sensory perceptions, and the female character's inward reflections become mechanisms for representing and rethinking feminine identity, and in doing so, the text implicitly challenges the dominant, male-centered structures of

language and culture. It may therefore be argued that a reading of "Mismatched" in light of Cixous's theory of *écriture féminine* demonstrates how contemporary Persian fiction can provide a space for representing women's lived experience and redefining female subjectivity. From this perspective, the present study seeks to contribute to the broader application of the concept of *écriture féminine* in the analysis of Persian narrative texts and to open a path for further research in this field.

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A Critical Discourse Analysis of Traditional Chinese Medicine Reports in US Media in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract— *As a treasure of traditional Chinese culture, traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) has a history of more than four thousand years. Examining overseas news coverage of TCM can contribute to a better understanding of its international representation and communication. Based on Fairclough's three-dimensional analysis model, this study conducts a critical discourse analysis of traditional Chinese medicine coverage in mainstream American media from 2020 to 2022. At the textual level, the high-frequency words show that the focus of the reports is mostly on the effectiveness of TCM. US media use a large number of low-value modal words to convey their attitude towards TCM, which is conducive to building a relatively objective media image, but the selection of relevant components shows its questioning attitude towards traditional Chinese medicine. At the level of discourse practice, the analysis of news sources shows that most of the news sources are specific. However, US media rely more heavily on American scholars, experts, and institutions than on Chinese scholars. In the social practice dimension, the study primarily examines the American social context, revealing various societal factors that influence the mainstream US media's attitude toward TCM. The findings of this study provide meaningful implications for the global dissemination of Chinese traditional culture and the international communication of traditional Chinese medicine.*

Keywords— ***Corpus, Traditional Chinese Medicine, Critical Discourse Analysis, Three-Dimensional Mode, US media***

I. INTRODUCTION

As a representative embodiment of China's fine traditional culture, traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) is a time-honored and effective system of medical knowledge and practice that has been passed down for thousands of years. Guided by an understanding of the laws and fundamental order of heaven, earth, and the universe, TCM places human beings within the broader framework of nature in order to examine and address issues of health and disease. As the birthplace of TCM, China has long endeavored to introduce its scientific and cultural traditions to the world. Meanwhile, some countries regard TCM as a form of complementary and alternative medicine, and a number of them have incorporated it into their public health systems. Over the past several decades, TCM has attracted increasing attention worldwide.

The sudden outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020 once again brought TCM into the global spotlight. During this exceptional period, foreign media coverage of TCM played an important role in its international communication. As influential actors in shaping global public opinion, Western mainstream media affect the international community's perceptions, evaluations, and even policy choices concerning TCM through their news reports. For a long time, Western mainstream society has harbored cultural divide, scientific skepticism, and even ideological bias toward TCM. Therefore, by analyzing overseas media reports, this study can provide a better understanding of the discourse systems constructed by foreign media around TCM. An exploration of these discourse systems may offer useful insights and contribute

to the development of more targeted strategies and recommendations for the global communication of TCM.

II. PREVIOUS STUDIES OF TCM-RELATED NEWS REPORTS

A review of the relevant literature shows that scholarly interest in news reports on traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) has increased in recent years. These studies can be broadly classified into the following three categories.

The first category concerns analyses of Western media coverage of TCM and corresponding communication strategies. Ye Qing and Wu Qing (2015) analyzed the discourse of TCM-related reports in US news media, revealing how American society and the general public understood TCM. Their study found that the safety of Chinese herbal medicine remained a major focus of public concern in the United States.

The second category consists of comparative studies of Chinese and Western media coverage of TCM. Ye et al. (2017) collected reports on cupping therapy published by mainstream English-language media in China and the United States during the Rio Olympic Games and compared the evaluative strategies and orientations adopted in the two countries' coverage of TCM. Zhou Ajian (2017) examined TCM-related reports published between 2005 and 2014 by the English-language edition of People's Daily Online and the British newspaper The Guardian, exploring similarities and differences in reporting focuses and in the semantic prosody of major topics.

The third category focuses on the construction of the media image of TCM. Wang Yue (2022) employed corpus-assisted discourse analysis to investigate the media image of TCM in China Daily's coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study found that the newspaper constructed TCM as a "weapon" by emphasizing its therapeutic efficacy and as a "comrade-in-arms" through discourse concerning its role in overseas pandemic prevention and control. Ge Houwei and Tian Yonglin (2022) built a specialized corpus of English-language TCM reports from China Daily and examined how Chinese official media constructed the image of TCM in the fight against COVID-19.

Overall, research on TCM-related news reports is relatively extensive. However, most previous studies have been conducted from the perspective of journalism and communication, while corpus-based discourse analyses of TCM coverage remain comparatively limited. In addition, relatively few studies have examined how Western media construct the media image of TCM in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the present study adopts a corpus-assisted approach to conduct a critical discourse analysis of TCM-related news reports in mainstream US media during the pandemic. It attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the linguistic features of these news reports in terms of lexical choice and modality?

2. How to interpret these news reports from the perspective of intertextuality, namely, news sources?

3. What are the social factors that affect the generation of these news reports?

III. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a text-oriented analytical approach that originated from critical linguistics in the late 1970s. It can be defined as "a shared perspective of linguistics, semiotics, or discourse analysis" (van Dijk, 1993). Through the analysis of written and spoken texts, CDA explores the discursive sources of power, inequality, and prejudice. It critically examines how such discursive structures are maintained and reproduced within specific social, political, and historical contexts. Therefore, the purpose of CDA is to critically investigate social inequalities manifested through language use. Jaffer Sheyholislami (2001) points out that "critical discourse analysis aims to uncover the relationships among discursive practices, social practices, and social structures, which may remain obscure to ordinary people." Overall, CDA is both a research approach and a methodology that seeks to explore and explain the relationships among discourse, ideology, and social structures.

3.2 Fairclough' s Three-Dimensional Model

As one of the leading scholars in critical discourse analysis, Fairclough proposed the "Discourse as Social Practice" approach, which has exerted a profound influence on subsequent studies. This approach was first introduced in the first edition of Language and Power (Fairclough, 1989). In this book, Fairclough divided social conditions into three levels: the social context, social institutions, and society as a whole. He further argued that discourse is a discursive event consisting of text, discursive practice, and social practice, thereby establishing the three-dimensional framework of critical discourse analysis (see Fig. 1).

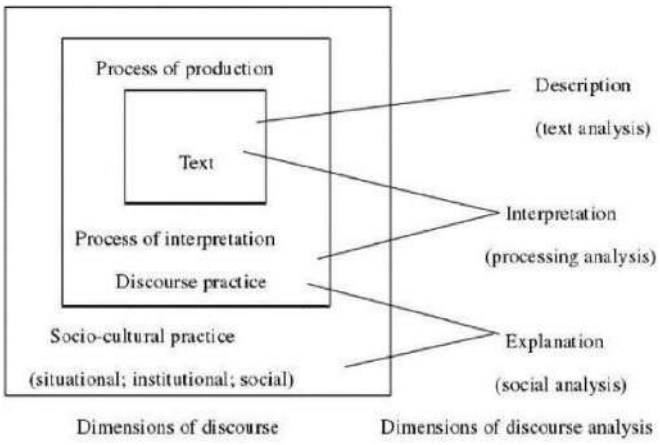


Fig. 1 The Three-Dimensional view of discourse (Fairclough, 1995)

As shown in Fig. 1, the analysis of any discursive event should focus on three analytical elements: text, referring to the product of the text production process, such as news reports; discursive practice, referring to the processes through which the discourse is produced and interpreted; and social practice, referring to the social and cultural structures within which the discursive event is produced. In other words, text is the product of discursive practice, while discursive practice is embedded within particular social practices. Accordingly, critical discourse analysis involves three dimensions: the description of the formal features of texts; the interpretation of the relationship between texts and discursive practices, in which texts are regarded as products of production processes and resources for interpretation; and the explanation of the relationship between discursive practices and social practices, focusing on the social determinants of discourse production and interpretation as well as their social effects.

IV. DATA COLLECTION AND PROCESSING

This study adopts the Dow Jones Factiva global news and business information database as the data source. *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *The Wall Street Journal* were selected as the sources of TCM-related news reports. By searching for four keywords, namely “Chinese medicine,” “traditional Chinese medicine,” “herbal medicine,” and “alternative medicine,” and setting the time span from January 1, 2020 to December 31, 2022, which covers the peak period of the COVID-19 pandemic and its subsequent impacts, this study collected TCM-related reports published by the three English-language media outlets.

The initial search yielded 99 relevant results. Articles were retained only when TCM, acupuncture, Chinese herbal medicine, or related practices constituted a substantive part of the report rather than appearing merely as an incidental reference. Duplicate items, advertisements, brief mentions without analytical relevance, and reports unrelated to the research questions were excluded through manual screening. Following this procedure, a small specialized corpus of English-language TCM reports was established, comprising 20 news reports with a total word count of 12,234 words. Based on this corpus, AntConc 4.3.1, a corpus analysis software, was employed to conduct corpus-assisted analysis. Through corpus-based methods such as high-frequency word analysis, this study examines TCM-related news reports published by the three mainstream US media outlets in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and explores how the media image of TCM was constructed.

V. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Based on Fairclough's three-dimensional model, this study combines corpus retrieval with manually coded statistical data to conduct a critical discourse analysis of US media reports on traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) from three dimensions: text, discursive practice, and social practice.

5.1 Text Analysis

The textual dimension focuses on the description of the formal features of texts. Considering the characteristics of the corpus, this study mainly analyzes the use and distribution of high-frequency lexical items and their collocations, as well as modal verbs.

5.1.1 Analysis of Lexical Choices

Van Dijk (1988) points out that lexical choice is “an eminent aspect of news discourse in which hidden opinions or ideologies may surface.” Therefore, lexical choices are not randomly or accidentally formed, but are determined by specific ideological positions. The ways in which journalists choose to encode and represent reality may explicitly or implicitly reflect their ideological stances and attitudes toward events and social actors. Therefore, an analysis of lexical choices can help reveal journalists' positions and underlying ideologies.

To conduct a more effective analysis, this study examines the frequencies of nouns, verbs, and adjectives occurring in the reports. AntConc 4.3.1, a corpus analysis software, was employed to identify high-frequency words and their concordance lines. To ensure the validity of the results, certain function words, such as conjunctions, prepositions, and articles, were removed from the

frequency list. Table 1 presents the twenty most frequent words appearing in the twenty news reports.

Table 1 High Frequency Words used in Corpus

Rank	Frequency	Word
1	210	be(am,is,are,was,were,been,being)
2	124	have/has/had
3	73	Chinese
4	69	say/says/said
5	65	acupuncture
6	52	medicine
7	51	treatment(s)
8	42	traditional
9	35	health
10	29	pain
11	27	China
12	25	drug(s)
13	22	patient(s)
14	21	could
15	21	national
16	19	study/studies
17	17	cronavirus
18	16	can
19	15	medical
20	15	cancer

According to Table 1, it can be seen that reports on TCM published by mainstream US media focus not only on its practical medical value but also on its applications in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The frequent use of the verb be and reporting verbs such as "say/says/said" helps establish a framework of factual statements and authoritative quotations, thereby enhancing the appearance of objectivity and impartiality in news discourse. Lexical items such as "pain", "cancer", "treatment" and "health" indicate that the information conveyed to the public mainly focuses on the intervention of TCM in specific diseases and its value for daily health maintenance.

Among the nouns, the high frequency of "acupuncture" is particularly prominent. Compared with terms referring to the broader theoretical system of TCM, it suggests that the selected newspapers tend to represent TCM through individual therapeutic techniques rather than as an integrated medical system. This fragmented representation may make TCM more intelligible to Western readers, while simultaneously reducing its theoretical and cultural complexity. The words "Chinese" and "traditional" accurately introduce the origin and historical characteristics of TCM, indicating that it is a traditional medical practice originating from China. The term "medical" serves as an intrinsic definition of TCM and highlights its essential characteristics as a medical system. In this corpus, "medical" also frequently appears in contexts related to the treatment of diseases and injuries through TCM.

Furthermore, with the application of TCM during the pandemic and the advancement of related research, certain practical values of TCM have received increasing attention, and its application scenarios have been presented in more specific terms. Lexical items such as "coronavirus","study" ,"drug" and "patient" indicate that US media focus not only on the role of TCM in the public health crisis caused by COVID-19 but also on its development in clinical practice and scientific research. Regarding the description of TCM's effects, the frequent use of the modal verb "could" among high-frequency words indicates that US media tend to make cautious judgments of possibility regarding TCM's efficacy, implying a certain tendency toward observation and inquiry.

5.1.2 Analysis of Modality

The modality system is an important linguistic resource for realizing interpersonal meaning, as it reflects speakers' judgments concerning the truth, possibility, and necessity of propositions (Halliday, 1994). In news discourse, modal expressions not only reveal journalists' degree of cognition regarding events but also represent the strategies adopted in the production of news discourse to regulate objectivity, authority, and uncertainty. Therefore, an analysis of modal verbs can help reveal how US media represent the scientific value and social image of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) through linguistic choices.Based on Halliday's (1994) classification of modal values, this study conducts a statistical analysis of modal verbs in the corpus. (see Table 2).

Table 2 Modal verbs in the Corpus

Value of modal verbs	modal word	Number	Percentage
Low	can	16	21.3%
	could	21	28%
	may	8	10.7%
	might	4	5.3%
	Total	49	65.3%
Median	should	5	6.7%
	will	5	6.7%
	would	9	12%
	Total	19	25.3%
High	must	1	1.3%
	need	1	1.3%
	have to	1	1.3%
	had to	4	5.3%
	Total	7	9.3%
Total		75	100%

As shown in Table 2, the most frequently used modal verbs in the 20 news reports belong to low-value modal

verbs, accounting for more than half of all modal expressions. Median-value modal verbs rank second, while high-value modal verbs occur with the lowest frequency. This distribution indicates that when reporting on TCM-related issues, US media tend to avoid absolute assertions and instead employ modal expressions associated with possibility and speculation. On the one hand, such linguistic choices are consistent with the emphasis on evidentiality and cautiousness in medical news reporting. On the other hand, they weaken the certainty of claims regarding the efficacy of TCM to some extent, presenting it more as a medical practice that requires further investigation and validation.

Example 1:

People who have chronic tension headaches might be able to reduce the frequency of those headaches by as much as 50 percent with acupuncture, according to research published in the journal Neurology. (*The Washington Post*, 22-07-05)

Example 2:

Last year, the W.H.O. offered an endorsement of traditional Chinese medicine, including it in its influential medical compendium. The move was roundly criticized by animal rights activists, who argued that it could contribute to a surge in illegal trafficking of wildlife whose parts are used in Chinese remedies. (*The New York Times*, 20-04-09)

Example 3:

The lead author, Dr. Wei Wang, a professor of neurology at Tongji Medical College in Wuhan, China, said that acupuncture, done carefully and correctly, could be an effective first-line treatment for migraines. (*The New York Times*, 20-04-07)

In Example 1, the expression "might be able to" does not directly deny the therapeutic effects of acupuncture; rather, it presents the research findings by reducing the degree of certainty of the proposition. Since medical research is subject to limitations related to sample size, individual differences, and experimental conditions, the use of possibility modal expressions conforms to the norms of scientific news reporting. Meanwhile, the use of "might" indicates that the efficacy of acupuncture is not represented as a universally applicable medical fact, but rather as an effect supported only within the scope of a specific study.

Example 2 mentions that animal rights activists argued that the inclusion of TCM in the World Health Organization's medical compendium "could" contribute to a surge in illegal wildlife trafficking. Here, "could" is used to express the prediction of future risks made by animal protection groups rather than to describe an event that has already occurred. Through expressions such as "could contribute", the report presents concerns from different social groups regarding TCM-related practices while avoiding directly attributing responsibility for such risks to TCM itself. This demonstrates how news discourse employs modality to distinguish reported viewpoints and established facts.

In Example 3, the modal verb "could" reflects the rigor and cautiousness of the neurologist's stance. Based on professional knowledge, the expert acknowledges the potential value of acupuncture while avoiding an absolute conclusion due to factors such as individual differences and variations in treatment conditions. This formulation not only maintains the authority of the expert but also conforms to the objective understanding of therapeutic effects in the medical field, thereby enhancing the credibility of the discourse.

B. Median-value Modal Verbs

Median-value modal verbs primarily include will, would, and should. They convey a higher degree of certainty than low-value modals, yet still retain certain conditional constraints. In the corpus, these median-value modals are predominantly employed to describe outcomes that may emerge under specific conditions, reflecting the reports' limited recognition of TCM's therapeutic efficacy.

Example 4:

"If incidents like Shuanghuanglian happen again and again, it will lose the public trust, cause more panic, and go against the authorities' advice to avoid crowd gathering," Mr. Chen wrote. (*The New York Times*, 20-02-09)

Example 5:

Chinese medicine, they said, would mitigate some of these adverse reactions. (*The New York Times*, 20-02-09)

In Example 4, the modal verb "will" is used to express a conditional prediction, with its degree of certainty being established on the hypothetical premise introduced by "If incidents like Shuanghuanglian happen again and again," rather than representing an unconditional assertion of future events by the journalist. This expression links the recurrence of Shuanghuanglian-related incidents with consequences such as declining public trust, increasing social panic, and violations of epidemic prevention recommendations. It therefore highlights the potential public health risks and social impacts caused by such incidents. The modal verb "will" conveys a high

degree of certainty, presenting these negative consequences as relatively inevitable outcomes under specific conditions. In this way, it strengthens the warning issued by critics against misleading publicity and irrational purchasing behaviors.

In Example 5, "would" does not indicate an absolute affirmation of the therapeutic effects of TCM; rather, it expresses a prediction concerning the potential role of TCM within a specific context. Through the use of "would," the report presents an expectation based on existing viewpoints or previous experience rather than a medical conclusion that has been fully verified. It is noteworthy that this type of modal expression reflects the dual stance adopted by US media toward TCM. On the one hand, the reports acknowledge that certain TCM therapies may possess potential value as complementary treatments; on the other hand, the use of modal restrictions prevents TCM from being represented as an equivalent alternative to modern medicine.

C. High-value Modal Verbs

High-value modal verbs mainly include must, need, and have to, which express a strong sense of necessity and obligation. In this corpus, high-value modal verbs account for the smallest proportion, representing only 9.3% of all modal expressions. This may be attributed to the fact that high-value modal verbs generally convey the highest degree of possibility or the strongest sense of responsibility. To maintain the objectivity of news reporting, journalists tend to use such expressions less frequently.

Example 6:

"I think it is the correct approach," said Cheng Yung-chi, a professor of pharmacology at Yale University School of Medicine."The evidence is going to come and we have to give it the benefit of the doubt." (*The New York Times*, 20-02-09)

In Example 6, "have to" does not function as a demand for the public to accept TCM; rather, it reflects an expert's judgment concerning the process of scientific evaluation. The speaker emphasizes that TCM should be given further opportunities for research and observation before sufficient evidence is established. This expression embodies a scientific discourse logic that the evaluation of medical practices should be based on empirical evidence rather than preconceived positions. Therefore, although high-value modal verbs occur relatively infrequently, their use is often associated with expert voices and serves to reinforce a sense of responsibility and rationality in scientific research discourse.

5.2 Discursive Practice Analysis

The discursive practice dimension focuses on the concrete processes through which discourse is produced, disseminated, and interpreted. Intertextuality is a key aspect examined within discursive practice, referring to the process by which one text incorporates and transforms elements from other texts. In discourse, intertextuality is commonly realized through quotations (Fairclough, 1992). In the next part, analysis on news source as well as on explicitness of news sources of US news reports on TCM will be presented.

According to Zhang Jian (1993), "News sources can be divided into three categories: specific source (SS), semi-specific source (SSS) and unidentified source (US)". Since some parts of the news reports are unrelated to TCM, the statistical analysis in this section only includes statements and quotations directly associated with TCM. Table 3 presents detailed information regarding news sources in the selected corpus.

Table 3 Proportion of three types of news sources

Text	SS	SSS	US	Total
Sample 1	1	1		2
Sample 2	6	3		9
Sample 3	1	1		2
Sample 4	1	1		2
Sample 5		1		1
Sample 6	1		1	2
Sample 7	2			2
Sample 8	1			1
Sample 9	2			2
Sample 10	2			2
Sample 11	1			1
Sample 12	3	1	2	6
Sample 13			1	1
Sample 14			1	1
Sample 15	2	1		3
Sample 16	1			1
Sample 17		1		1
Sample 18			1	1
Sample 19		1		1
Sample 20			1	1
Total	25	11	7	43
Percentage	58.1%	25.6%	16.2%	100%

The news sources in the corpus can be broadly classified into three categories: representatives of state institutions, governmental organizations, or non-governmental organizations; experts and academics; and other individuals who were directly or indirectly involved

in the events concerned. As shown in Table 3, specific sources account for the largest proportion, semi-specific sources for the second largest, while unidentified sources account for the smallest.

5.2.1 Specific Source

Specific source refers to clearly identifiable origins of information, for which details such as the speaker's name, professional or institutional identity, and organizational affiliation are explicitly provided. A typical formulation is, for example, "US President Joseph Robinette Biden stated that…". By clearly identifying the origin of the information, specific sources enhance the apparent objectivity of news discourse. For this reason, journalists tend to employ specific sources to substantiate the factual accuracy and reliability of their reports.

Example 1:

Laurie Garrett, a member of the World Economic Forum's global health security advisory board who covered the SARS outbreak in China, said that using traditional Chinese medicine in the new coronavirus outbreak could be risky because the approach is not rigorously backed by research. (*The New York Times*, 20-02-09)

Example 2:

The lead author, Benny Antony, a senior researcher at the University of Tasmania, acknowledged that this is a small study of short duration, and that the effect on pain was only moderate. Still, he said, "Considering the limited effectiveness of current pharmacological treatments for osteoarthritis, a modest effect may be helpful, and turmeric appears to be without side effects." (*The New York Times*, 20-09-22)

Both Example 1 and Example 2 employ specific sources. In Example 1, the journalist quotes a member of the World Economic Forum's Global Health Security Advisory Board, thereby enhancing the authority and credibility of the information. However, the lexical items "risky" and "not rigorously backed by research" reflect a skeptical attitude toward the use of traditional Chinese medicine in treating COVID-19. Example 2, by contrast, cites a senior researcher at the University of Tasmania, who states that turmeric, a material commonly used in traditional Chinese medicine, has "a modest effect" and appears to be free of side effects, thus constructing a positive image of TCM.

The two speakers therefore adopt markedly different attitudes toward TCM, a contrast that is also evident in the headlines. The title of Example 1, "Beijing's Prescription to Fight Virus: Buffalo Horn and Roots," foregrounds "buffalo horn," which may evoke negative associations with TCM's alleged reliance on wildlife-derived materials and thereby intensify misunderstandings concerning the ethics of TCM medication. The title of Example 2, "Alternative Medicine: Turmeric to Ease Knee Arthritis," affirms the alleviating effect of turmeric on knee osteoarthritis.

It is noteworthy that, among the 25 specific sources, only seven derive from Chinese scholars or their research findings, accounting for less than one third of the total. As China is the birthplace of TCM, the views and research findings of Chinese scholars serve as a valuable reference. Nevertheless, US media tend to rely more heavily on domestic perspectives and research in constructing the image of TCM and shaping readers' perceptions, which renders the coverage less comprehensive and objective.

5.2.2 Semi-Specific Sources

Semi-specific source refers to cases in which journalists do not identify the exact source of information but provide a general indication of its origin to signal that the quotation or claim is not entirely definitive. Some semi-specific sources may construct a generalized or collective voice whose individual members cannot be verified, for example, "the US Secretary of State stated that…". In some cases, journalists may deliberately omit the specific source in order to reinforce their own position. Xin Bin (2005) refers to this practice as "reference to mythical group". From this perspective, the selection of semi-specific source carries important ideological implications.

Example 3:

NIH's National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH) said that acupuncture can help manage physical pain in certain cases, but that not enough evidence exists to show it can help with depression. (*The Washington Post*, 22-05-31)

Example 3 belongs to semi-specific source news. Under the "reference to mythical groups" circumstance, it is important to make certain what these sources stand for. The source cited in Example 3 is the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health of the US National Institutes of Health. The quotation creates an impression of professionalism and authority. This formulation enables the journalist to emphasize the message being conveyed, namely that the effectiveness of acupuncture remains contested. In addition, by citing the position of an official US institution, the ideological implications of the discourse are also made visible.

5.2.3 Unidentified Sources

Unidentified source refers to cases in which journalists do not provide the precise origin of the information. This may result from deliberate omission, or

from the source being regarded as unclear or unimportant, leading to vague expressions such as "some studies suggest that...".

Example 4:

Current evidence suggests that many factors—like expectation and belief—that are unrelated to acupuncture needling may play important roles in the beneficial effects of acupuncture on pain." (*The Washington Post*, 21-10-07)

In Example 4, the news source is not identified. The absence of explicit source makes it impossible for readers to identify or evaluate the precise origin of the evidence. Although the report refers to "current evidence", it does not specify where this evidence comes from, thereby implying that the view is supported by authoritative knowledge or broader public opinion. Therefore, journalists can use information from unidentified sources to express their own viewpoints with relatively few constraints, thereby guiding readers toward a negative perception of the therapeutic efficacy of acupuncture.

5.3 Social Practice Analysis

5.3.1 Analysis of Institutional Context

At the institutional level, The New York Times, The Washington Post, and The Wall Street Journal are all forms of mass media and, as such, serve as platforms through which governmental ideology may be disseminated and articulated. At the same time, "the media" in the United States also constitutes an economic enterprise. From this perspective, the institutional nature of US media requires them to safeguard their own corporate interests, particularly when news coverage concerns the interest groups with which they are associated. Therefore, although these media organizations claim independence from the government and political parties, their reporting may not be entirely objective.

As commercially operated social institutions embedded in the US political and cultural context, the three newspapers may reproduce viewpoints broadly consistent with dominant American interests and public discourse.When reporting on traditional Chinese medicine, they may evaluate and comment on TCM in accordance with American public opinion and, in some cases, with the US policy toward China prevailing at the time.

5.3.2 Analysis of Social Context

Over the past decade or more, China has experienced rapid economic growth, while the persistent US trade deficit with China has contributed to the circulation of the so-called "China threat" discourse in the United States. Together with broader geopolitical and ideological tensions, this discourse has shaped the context in which US media report on China-related issues. In addition, within the US medical system, which is dominated by Western medicine, the growing influence of TCM may challenge the established position and influence of Western medicine. Moreover, TCM has not yet been fully incorporated into formal medical education or the mainstream healthcare system in the United States. This has contributed to insufficient confidence in, and an inadequate understanding of, its safety and effectiveness. Consequently, US media may frame and report relevant news in ways shaped by American public opinion and the prevailing US policy toward China.

The development philosophy of American medicine also influences the attitudes and focal points of news reporting regarding Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). US media often question TCM because, according to Western scientific principles, they regard its mechanisms of action as insufficiently defined and assessments of its therapeutic effects as relatively subjective. Acupuncture and the TCM practice of syndrome differentiation and treatment do not follow the conventional process of basic experimentation, clinical trials, regulatory approval, and market authorization. They are therefore often regarded as unscientific. To a certain extent, these views have influenced some US scholars and officials, as well as news coverage of TCM.

In recent years, however, US restrictions on opioid misuse have also created opportunities for the development of acupuncture and other TCM therapies. As a result, acupuncture has received considerable media attention in the United States as an alternative treatment. At the same time, with the increasing international dissemination and recognition of TCM, as well as the growing acceptance of acupuncture in American society—including its inscription on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and the establishment of an independent industry code in the United States—some reports have constructed a positive image of TCM and affirmed its status.

VI. CONCLUSION

Drawing on Fairclough's three-dimensional model, this study conducts a critical discourse analysis of TCM-related content in US news reports from the dimensions of textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice. The principal findings are as follows.

At the level of textual analysis, this study finds that linguistic choices in news discourse are not arbitrary but are shaped by the media. The analysis of high-frequency words shows that most reports focus on the therapeutic

efficacy of TCM. The analysis of modal verbs further indicates that many reports employ low-value modal verbs to express a cautious attitude toward TCM, reflecting uncertainty and doubt in US media regarding its therapeutic effects and future development. At the same time, the frequent use of expressions of uncertainty reinforces, to some extent, the media image of TCM as "an alternative form of medicine requiring further verification."

At the level of discursive practice, specific sources constitute the largest proportion of all news sources, indicating a preference for identifiable and potentially verifiable voices. However, source selection remains uneven, as the reports rely more heavily on American scholars, experts, and institutions than on Chinese scholars and research findings to construct the image of TCM and shape readers' perceptions. This imbalance suggests that source explicitness does not necessarily guarantee comprehensiveness or neutrality.

At the level of social practice, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic led to an increase in the number of TCM-related reports in mainstream US media and heightened media attention to TCM. Nevertheless, the linguistic positions adopted in these reports are also influenced by the role of mainstream US media as social institutions that support American interests, as well as by the long-standing influence of Western medical concepts. Most TCM-related reports in mainstream US media are objective and scientific and, to a certain extent, acknowledge the value of TCM. However, TCM continues to be categorized as alternative medicine in the United States, and misunderstandings concerning its safety and effectiveness remain present in news coverage.

Therefore, the Chinese government should publish accessible science-oriented books introducing the basic principles of TCM. In particular, international communication should provide clearer explanations of the therapeutic scope, mechanisms of action, and safety standards of TCM in order to reduce misunderstandings among foreign media and the public. With the joint efforts of all relevant parties, TCM is expected to achieve broader application and development in the United States and worldwide and to make a greater contribution to global health.

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Breaking the Shell: Women's Struggle and Resilience in Nadia Hashimi's *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*

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Abstract— *The paper explores the condition of women in Nadia Hashimi's novel* The Pearl That Broke Its Shell *(2014). The novel follows the lives of two women, Shekiba and Rahima, who belong to different generations but share a similar fate as they struggle to survive in a patriarchal society. It demonstrates that, regardless of the time period, women continue to face oppression and must constantly fight for their survival and dignity. The study examines how both Shekiba and Rahima encounter similar social restrictions despite living generations apart. To escape discrimination and gain opportunities denied to girls, both are compelled to adopt the tradition of* bacha posh*, disguising themselves as boys and concealing their female identity. Through their experiences, the novel highlights the persistence of gender inequality and the enduring impact of patriarchal norms on women's lives. This paper not only explores their suffering but also examines how one woman's experiences inspire the other to challenge patriarchal oppression. Ultimately, both Shekiba and Rahima break free from the metaphorical 'shell' of social restrictions, assert their identities, strive to live their lives delightfully, and reject the norms of patriarchal society. However, they faced a lot of exploitation, lost their family members, were deprived of various rights such as education, property rights, playing freely, and choosing their life partners, and so on. It further emphasizes that despite continuous oppression, challenges, and social injustice, women demonstrate remarkable courage and determination.*

Keywords— ***Gender Inequality, Identity Conflict, Patriarchal Society, Resilience, Women's Exploitation***

I. INTRODUCTION

The Pearl That Broke Its Shell is a debut novel by Nadia Hashimi, published in 2014. Hashimi is an Afghan-American pediatrician and novelist best known for her three novels: *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*, When the Moon is Low, and A House Without Windows. She was also the first Afghan-American woman to run for US Congress. Through her writings, Hashimi presents human emotions while highlighting the history, culture, and social realities of her beloved country, Afghanistan. Her writings particularly focus on the lives of Afghan women and the various challenges they face in patriarchal society.

Women in patriarchal society often experience discrimination and oppression due to male dominance. They struggle to survive and seek freedom while overcoming numerous social and cultural barriers. Many become victims of gender inequality because they are denied the right to make decisions without the permission of a male family member. Discrimination profoundly shapes their lives, restricting them to the domestic spheres and limiting their opportunities. They are often deprived of education, freedom of movement, and the right to participate in public life. However, when they adopt a male identity or dress as boys, they gain access to rights and privileges that are otherwise denied to them. Through this contrast, Hashimi exposes the deep-rooted gender inequality in her novel *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* that continues to affect the lives of women in Afghan society.

II. OVERVIEW OF *THE PEARL THAT BROKE ITS SHELL*

The Pearl That Broke Its Shell is about two women, Shekiba and Rahima, who shared similar fates despite living in different eras. Rahima, a modern Afghan

girl, is interwoven with the life of her great-grandmother, Shekiba. Rahima was born and brought up in a drug-addicted father's house. She has two sisters and no brother. They rarely attend school or play outside. Their only hope lies in the tradition of 'bacha-posh', which allows young Rahima to live freely as a boy until her marriageable age. Then she was married to a much older man, and her life was stuck in household chores. But Rahima is not the first in her family to adopt the bacha posh tradition. A century earlier, her great-grandmother, Shekiba, left orphaned by an epidemic, saved herself but lost all her father's property, as girls don't have any right to family property. Then acquired a male identity to serve as a guard for the harem of King Habibullah. Then married Agha Aasif Baraan and became his second wife, and he hoped she'd bear him a son, which she did.

III. GENDER INEQUALITY

Gender inequality is one of the most persistent social issues, continuously affecting the lives of women across cultures and generations. In patriarchal societies, women's lives are largely shaped by gender inequality, which restricts their freedom, limits their choices, and reinforces male authority. This unequal power structure is vividly portrayed in Nadia Hashimi's The Pearl That Broke Its Shell. The novel presents gender inequality as a deeply rooted social problem that affects women's lives from childhood to adulthood. The novel illustrates how patriarchal traditions deny women equal rights, independence, and opportunities, forcing them to struggle for dignity and survival. Rahima experiences gender inequality from an early age. As a girl, she is denied the right to education and has no claim to her father's property. Later, after her marriage, she becomes the third wife of Abdul Khaliq and is subjected to neglect, control, and unequal treatment within the household. Similarly, Shekiba is deprived of her inheritance after the death of her parents. Her paternal uncles seize her family's property and force her to live as their servant while making her work alongside them in the fields.

*"Shekiba, when you have finished with cleaning this floor, you are to go out into the field and help your uncles with the harvest." (*Hashimi, 2014, *p. 54*

Shekiba demands her share of the family property because it is her legal right, but everyone tells her that, as a girl, she has no claim to it.

"Shekiba-jan, you are asking a ridiculous question. Your father's land will go to his family, since your brothers are dead, may Allah grant them peace."

*"But what about me? Am I not rightfully an heir to the land? I am his child too." (*Hashimi, 2014, *p. 82*

Hashimi further demonstrates that gender inequality is not limited to the lives of the two protagonists but is deeply embedded in Afghan society. Rahima's sisters are also denied educational opportunities and the freedom to make their own choices. Their marriage was also arranged without their consent. Her sister Parwin says,

*"One by One, the birds flew away…" (*Hashimi, 2014, *p.136*

Likewise, Rahima's sister-in-law, despite being appointed to parliament in Kabul, has little authority over her own decisions, as her husband controls both her personal and professional life. Although she holds a prestigious political position, her independence remains limited by patriarchal expectations. Although the decisions appeared to be her own, they were indirectly dictated by her husband.

*"Each time the director asked the parliament to vote on a candidate, Bandriya waited until this man raised his paddle", (*Hashimi, 2014, *p.305)*

Through these characters, Hashimi exposes the widespread nature of gender inequality and highlights how women, regardless of their social status, continue to face discrimination and oppression in a patriarchal society.

IV. EXPLOITATION

Exploitation is a persistent form of oppression experienced by women across different eras. Women have long been subjected to various forms of exploitation, including physical, emotional, economic, and social exploitation, which continue to limit their freedom and dignity. It is another challenge for women in a male-dominated society. Through the experiences of Shekiba and Rahima, Hashimi demonstrates how exploitation becomes a part of women's everyday lives, restricting their freedom, dignity, and opportunities.

Shekiba experiences exploitation from an early age after the death of her parents. Instead of receiving care and protection, she is subjected to cruelty by her paternal family. Her uncles, grandmother, and aunt treat her harshly and deny her the love and security she deserves. Eventually, they sell her to the king, where she is forced to serve as a guard in the royal harem.

The exploitation continues within the palace. Benafsha, one of the king's wives, is brutally murdered by the king after he discovers her affair with Agha Aasif Baraan.

*"Soon after soon, scream after scream, until Benafsha went silent and still."(*Hashimi, 2014, *p.330)*

Although Shekiba is innocent, she is unjustly punished and imprisoned for failing to prevent the incident.

*"Know this guard! An offense this grave does not go unpunished. My name has been besmirched. One look at your face and it is obvious you are damned! Have her locked up! And Benafsha too! We will swift examples of them both."(*Hashimi, 2014,*p.290)*

Later, Agha Aasif Baraan rescues her out of guilt, as he believes he is responsible for the circumstances that led to her suffering. He marries Shekiba and hopes that she will bear his child, which she eventually does. Through Shekiba's journey, Hashimi reveals how women are repeatedly exploited by both their families and the patriarchal system, often becoming victims of circumstances over which they have no control.

Rahima is subjected to physical abuse by both her husband and her mother-in-law. Although Rahima and Parwin live in neighboring houses after Parwin marries Abdul Sharif, the brother of Rahima's husband, they are not permitted to meet each other. When Rahima asks Shahnaz about the visit of Abdul Sharif's family, Shahnaz replies:

*"He does, but not as often as his brother. If you think you will see your sisters, though, don't get your hopes up." (*Hashimi, 2014, *p. 165)*

Parwin's life is marked by continuous suffering. Because she is physically disabled, her parents-in-law treat her with cruelty and neglect. One day, Rahima hears the news that Parwin has allegedly committed suicide; however, she understands that the reality behind her death is far more complex. Rahima realizes that Parwin's unbearable circumstances and relentless oppression drove her to take such a drastic step. Similarly, Kala Shaima believes that harsh circumstances often leave women with no alternative but to seek an escape. She repeatedly remarks,

*"We all need an Escape." (*Hashimi, 2014, *p. 215)*

Kala Shaima believes that perhaps death was Parwin's only means of escaping the cruel and oppressive world in which she lived.

V. IDENTITY CONFLICT

The Bacha Posh tradition gives rise to an identity crisis among young girls who are compelled to assume a male identity to gain the privileges reserved for boys in a patriarchal society. Although this transformation is temporary, it creates a conflict between their lived experiences as boys and their socially assigned roles as girls. When they are required to return to their female identity at puberty, they often experience emotional and psychological difficulties as they struggle to readjust to the restrictive expectations imposed on women.

In *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*, Rahima is forced to adopt the *Bacha Posh* tradition because her father, weakened by alcoholism, is unable to fulfill the responsibilities traditionally assigned to a male family member. She is transformed into Rahim as part of the *bacha posh* tradition. Her mother tells her,

"*Bachem, from now on we're going to call you Rahim." (*Hashimi, 2014, *p.35)*

As a *Bacha Posh*, Rahima performs tasks that are socially considered the duty of a son. She enjoys freedoms that were previously denied to her, such as moving freely in public, attending school, and playing with boys. Her life appears more independent and fulfilling only because she is recognized as a boy. This tradition is acceptable as it is not new.

*"I wasn't the first bacha posh. This was a common tradition for families want of a son". (*Hashimi, 2014, *p.36)*

However, once her marriage is arranged, she is compelled to abandon her male identity and resume the traditional role of a woman, taking on numerous domestic and social responsibilities.

Similarly, Shekiba adopts a male identity to protect her family's property after her family members' deaths, but her efforts are unsuccessful. Later, she disguises herself as a man to secure a position as a guard in the king's palace. Through the experiences of Rahima and Shekiba, Hashimi illustrates how the Bacha Posh tradition offers women temporary freedom while exposing the deep-rooted gender inequality that forces them to suppress their true identities to survive.

VI. FROM OPPRESSION TO EMPOWERMENT

Despite facing continuous oppression, exploitation, and discrimination, both Shekiba and Rahima display remarkable resilience in challenging patriarchal norms. The title *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* symbolizes the courage to break free from the social restrictions that confine women. Shekiba refuses to surrender to the hardships imposed upon her and repeatedly reinvents herself to survive. Likewise, Rahima gains confidence during her time as a *Bacha Posh* and eventually develops the strength to question the limitations placed upon her. Rahima receives permission to attend parliamentary meetings with her sister-in-law, Badriya, as she is more educated than her. During these meetings, she develops friendships with the parliamentarians, Sufia and Hamida.

She later joins the resource center, where she meets Ms. Franklin, whose guidance broadens her perspective and strengthens her confidence. In the end, Rahima once again adopts the identity of a boy, boards a bus out of town, and escapes from her abusive husband, Abdul Khaliq, in search of a new life.

*"I had done my best to tie down my breasts with a head scarf, but it was harder now than it had been a few years ago." (*Hashimi, 2014, *p.444)*

Before leaving, she writes a letter to her aunt, Kala Shaima, who has always encouraged and supported her, and recounts the story of Shekiba. She signs the letter as Bibi Shekiba, symbolizing the inspiration and strength she draws from her great-grandmother's life. Similarly, after enduring years of hardship and oppression, Shekiba eventually finds a home where she is treated with greater respect, enjoys a measure of dignity and security, and builds a more stable life. Through their journeys, Hashimi suggests that even in the most restrictive societies, women possess the resilience and inner strength to challenge traditional gender roles and redefine their identities.

VII. CONCLUSION

Nadia Hashimi's *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* presents a powerful portrayal of the challenges faced by women in a patriarchal society. Through the parallel lives of Shekiba and Rahima, the novel reveals how gender inequality, exploitation, and identity conflict continue to shape women's lives across generations. The *Bacha Posh* tradition, while offering temporary freedom and opportunities, also exposes the unequal social structure that forces women to suppress their identities to survive. Despite enduring discrimination, violence, and social restrictions, both Shekiba and Rahima demonstrate remarkable resilience and determination. Their journeys illustrate that women are not merely victims of patriarchal oppression but are also capable of resisting injustice and reclaiming their dignity. The title *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* symbolically represents the courage to break free from the constraints imposed by society. Ultimately, Hashimi's novel serves as a strong critique of patriarchal norms while celebrating the strength, endurance, and hope of women who continue to challenge inequality and strive for a life of freedom, identity, and self-respect.

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An Empirical Investigation of Startup Challenges: A Modeling Approach using Exploratory Factor Analysis

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Abstract— *Startups are important drivers of innovation, employment generation, and economic development; however, they encounter numerous challenges that affect their growth and sustainability. This study aims to investigate the major challenges faced by Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT)-recognized startups in Haryana using a modeling approach based on Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). A cross-sectional research design was adopted, and primary data were collected from 55 startup founders and Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) through a structured questionnaire using purposive sampling. Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 26. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) value (0.766), significant Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ($p < 0.001$), and Cronbach's alpha (0.965) confirmed the adequacy and reliability of the measurement scale. EFA identified five key dimensions of startup challenges—financial, regulatory, human resource, managerial, and market-related—which explained 87.094% of the total variance. The findings provide valuable insights for policymakers, incubators, investors, and entrepreneurs to formulate strategies that enhance startup sustainability and strengthen the entrepreneurial ecosystem.*

Keywords— ***Startup Challenges, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), Entrepreneurship, Startup Ecosystem.***

I. INTRODUCTION

Startups have emerged as important catalysts for economic growth, innovation, and job creation by introducing innovative products, services, and business models that enhance productivity and competitiveness. They contribute significantly to technological advancement, industrial development, and wealth creation, making them integral to modern economies (Panjavarnam & Balachandran, 2019; Yadav & Gulati, 2019). India's entrepreneurial landscape has undergone a remarkable transformation with the introduction of the Startup India initiative in 2016, which aims to promote innovation through policy support, funding opportunities, incubation facilities, and an easier business environment. These initiatives have strengthened the startup ecosystem and positioned India among the leading startup nations globally (Panjavarnam & Balachandran, 2019). However, establishing a startup is not merely about developing an innovative idea; it also involves overcoming numerous uncertainties during its establishment and growth stages.

Despite the rapid expansion of the startup ecosystem, entrepreneurs continue to face several challenges, including inadequate access to finance, talent acquisition, market competition, operational inefficiencies, regulatory complexities, and technological adaptation. These challenges significantly influence startup survival, growth, and long-term sustainability, particularly during the early stages of business development (Girotra & Kaushik, 2018; Chauhan & Bansal, 2023).Among the Indian states, Haryana has emerged as an important startup destination because of its strategic location, industrial infrastructure, and growing technology ecosystem. Cities such as Gurugram, Faridabad, and Hisar have witnessed considerable entrepreneurial activity supported by government policies, incubation centres, and innovation-driven initiatives. Nevertheless, startups in Haryana

continue to encounter various financial, managerial, operational, and market-related challenges that may hinder their sustainable growth (Yadav & Gulati, 2019; Chauhan & Bansal, 2023).

Although previous studies have examined different aspects of entrepreneurship and startup ecosystems, most have focused on specific sectors or individual challenges. Limited empirical evidence exists regarding the underlying dimensions of startup challenges, particularly in the context of Haryana. Therefore, identifying and modeling these challenges using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) can provide a comprehensive understanding of their latent structure and support the development of evidence-based strategies for strengthening the startup ecosystem.

Accordingly, the present study empirically investigates the challenges faced by startups and develops a multidimensional model using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). The findings are expected to contribute to entrepreneurship literature and assist policymakers, incubators, investors, and entrepreneurs in designing effective interventions for sustainable startup development.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The entrepreneurial journey begins with an innovative idea and the aspiration to build a successful business; however, transforming that idea into a sustainable startup is a complex process characterized by financial, managerial, institutional, market, and operational challenges. Although entrepreneurial motivation initiates venture creation, long-term startup success depends on entrepreneurs' ability to overcome multidimensional barriers. Azeem and Khanna (2026) found that university-incubated startups in India continue to face operational and financial challenges despite incubation support, emphasizing the need for strategic planning, innovation capability, funding, market understanding, networking, government support, and effective team management. Similarly, Dias et al. (2026) reported that necessity-driven and opportunity-driven entrepreneurs experience different challenges due to varying contextual environments and resource constraints.

Financial constraints remain among the most significant barriers to startup sustainability, including limited access to finance, investor attraction, working capital management, and financial literacy (Beknazarov et al., 2020; Dahiya et al., 2020; Kalyanasundaram et al., 2021; Goswami et al., 2023; Osei et al., 2026). Market-related challenges such as customer acquisition, commercialization, limited market access, pricing competition, and ineffective marketing strategies also hinder startup growth (Kulkarni et al., 2020; Lam & Mok, 2022; Nunes et al., 2022; Goswami et al., 2023; Parwez, 2026; Liu & Bassols i Gardella, 2026). In addition, inadequate strategic planning, weak leadership, poor managerial capabilities, limited entrepreneurial experience, shortage of skilled human resources, and investor conflicts adversely affect startup performance (SojasiQeidari et al., 2020; Beknazarov et al., 2020; Kalyanasundaram et al., 2021; Shava & Chinyamurindi, 2022; Azeem & Khanna, 2026). Institutional and regulatory barriers, including weak government support, policy complexities, and inadequate entrepreneurial assistance, further restrict startup growth (Dahiya et al., 2020; Lam & Mok, 2022; Nunes et al., 2022; Parwez, 2026; Liu & Bassols i Gardella, 2026). Likewise, infrastructure limitations, weak networking opportunities, insufficient industry collaboration, and knowledge spillovers constrain innovation, particularly in emerging economies (Barboza & Capocchi, 2020; Kulkarni et al., 2020; Beknazarov et al., 2020; Azeem & Khanna, 2026). Social and contextual factors, including domestic responsibilities, communication barriers, and differences between necessity-driven and opportunity-driven entrepreneurs, also shape entrepreneurial outcomes (Shava & Chinyamurindi, 2022; Dias et al., 2026; Liu & Bassols i Gardella, 2026). Studies by Parwez (2026) and Liu and Bassols i Gardella (2026) further highlight that funding shortages, commercialization barriers, market readiness, and regulatory requirements continue to impede startup sustainability, while Mohan and Srivastava (2025) show that both opportunity-driven and necessity-driven motivations influence women entrepreneurs. Furthermore, Lizarelli et al. (2021) confirmed that organizations adopting Lean Startup practices still encounter customer validation issues, implementation barriers, and organizational resistance. Overall, the literature demonstrates that startup success depends not only on entrepreneurial motivation and innovation but also on entrepreneurs' ability to effectively manage financial, managerial, operational, institutional, market, regulatory, networking, infrastructure, and human resource challenges. Malhotra (2022) found that both internal and external factors influence startup performance, with external factors having a stronger impact across different stages of startup development. More recently, Rubi et al. (2025) highlighted the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in improving decision-making, innovation, operational efficiency, and sustainability while emphasizing the importance of human capital, governance, and a supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem. Nevertheless, most existing studies have focused on specific sectors, countries, or categories of entrepreneurs, leaving limited empirical evidence on the comprehensive challenges faced by Indian DPIIT-recognized startups during their growth phases. This gap provides a strong rationale for the present study.

Research Gap

Despite the growing literature on startup challenges, most studies focus on specific sectors, countries, or entrepreneur groups rather than DPIIT-recognized startups within a single Indian state. Previous research has examined financial, managerial, market, institutional, and contextual barriers across diverse settings, including Italy, India, Iran, South Africa, and Europe (Barboza & Capocchi, 2020; Dahiya et al., 2020; SojasiQeidari et al., 2020; Kalyanasundaram et al., 2021; Lizarelli et al., 2021; Shava & Chinyamurindi, 2022; Dias et al., 2026; Liu & Bassols i Gardella, 2026; Parwez, 2026). Similarly, studies on Indian startups have primarily emphasized survival, scaling, and policy issues at the national level (Azeem & Khanna, 2026; Goswami et al., 2023). However, limited empirical evidence exists on the multidimensional challenges faced by DPIIT-recognized startups in Haryana. Unlike previous studies that are often sector- or gender-specific, this study includes founders and CEOs of both technology and non-technology startups, as well as both male and female entrepreneurs. Using exploratory factor analysis and reliability assessment of primary data collected from DPIIT-recognized startups in Haryana, this study provides context-specific insights into the key operational challenges encountered during their growth phases.

Research Objective

To investigate the challenges affecting the growth of startups in Haryana.

Research Methodology

Description of sample and data collection

This study employed a cross-sectional research design to collect data from CEOs and founders of 54 DPIIT-recognized startups in Haryana, using purposive sampling. Data were collected via both online and offline questionnaires using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree.

Statistical tools

IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26) was used to analyze the collected data. The software was employed to perform descriptive and inferential statistical analyses to achieve the study's objectives.

III. RESULT AND DATA ANALYSIS

Demographic Description of the Entrepreneur

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 55 respondents included in the pilot study. Among them, 54.5% were male and 45.5% were female. The majority of respondents (41.8%) were in the 25–35-year age group. In terms of education, 47.3% were graduates, followed by 27.3% postgraduates, indicating that most respondents were well educated. Regarding family size, 63.6% belonged to nuclear families, while 36.4% belonged to joint families. In terms of annual family income, 54.5% reported an income between ₹2.5 lakh and ₹5 lakh, followed by 27.3% with an income of up to ₹2.5 lakh. Overall, the respondents were predominantly young, educated entrepreneurs from nuclear families with moderate income levels.

Table -1 Demographic Description of the Entrepreneur

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	30	54.5
	Female	25	45.5
	Total	55	100
Age	Below 25 Years	10	18.2
	25–35 Years	23	41.8
	35–45 Years	15	27.3
	45–55 Years	4	7.3
	Above 55 Years	3	5.5
	Total	55	100
Education	Secondary	1	1.8
	Higher Secondary	3	5.5
	Graduate	26	47.3
	Post Graduate	15	27.3
	Professional	5	9.1
	Diploma	5	9.1

	Total	55	100
Family Size	Nuclear	35	63.6
	Joint	20	36.4
	Total	55	100
Family Income	Up to ₹2.5 Lakh	15	27.3
	₹2.5 Lakh–₹5 Lakh	30	54.5
	₹5 Lakh–₹10 Lakh	8	14.5
	Above ₹10 Lakh	2	3.6
	Total	55	100

Distribution of the sample by startup profile

Table 2 presents the startup characteristics of the 55 respondents. More than half of the respondents (56.4%) started their ventures with a completely new idea, while 43.6% built on an existing one. The majority (63.6%) registered their startups as Private Limited Companies, and 45.5% operated under the B2B2C business model. Most startups (54.5%) offered goods, operated in the technology sector (54.5%), and had been in operation for 5–8 years (54.5%). Furthermore, 70.9% targeted both rural and urban markets, and 63.6% employed 1–10 employees, indicating that most respondents represented small-scale startups.

Table -2 Startup profile

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Startup Idea	Completely new idea	31	56.4
	Improvisation of an existing idea	24	43.6
	Total	55	100.0
Type of Ownership	Partnership	5	9.1
	Private Limited Company	35	63.6
	LLP	15	27.3
	Total	55	100.0
Type of Business	B2B	15	27.3
	B2B2C	25	45.5
	B2C	15	27.3
	Total	55	100.0
Product Offer	Goods	30	54.5
	Service	10	18.2
	Both Goods and Services	15	27.3
	Total	55	100.0
Area of Operation	Technology	30	54.5
	Non-Technology	25	45.5
	Total	55	100.0
Target Market	Urban	15	27.3
	Pan India	1	1.8
	Rural & Urban India	39	70.9
	Total	55	100.0
Years of Operation	2–5 Years	20	36.4
	5–8 Years	30	54.5
	8–10 Years	5	9.1
	Total	55	100.0

Number of Employees	1–10	35	63.6
	11–20	15	27.3
	21–30	5	9.1
	Total	55	100.0

Factor Analysis

Factor analysis with varimax rotation and principal component analysis was applied. The eigenvalue for factor extraction was taken as greater than 1. Using factor analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy was .766, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was also significant. The total variance explained by the factors was also found to be 87.094%. So, factor analysis was applied to extract factors.

Table -3 KMO and Bartlett's Test

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.766
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2201.227
	df	351
	Sig.	0.000

Table 3 shows the KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. The KMO value is a measure of sampling adequacy, i.e., whether the sample is adequate for applying factor analysis. The KMO value is .766, indicating that the sample is adequate for factor analysis. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity shows correlation among statements. The value of Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is .000, which is less than .05, indicating that there is better correlation among statements.

Table-4 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics			
Statements	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Analysis N**
FC1	4.13	1.123	55
FC2	4.33	0.982	55
FC3	4.35	1.040	55
FC4	4.27	1.008	55
FC5	4.36	0.969	55
FC6	4.25	1.190	55
MC1	4.20	1.145	55
MC2	4.20	0.989	55
MC3	4.29	1.031	55
MC4	4.11	1.165	55
MC5	4.22	1.117	55
RC1	4.25	0.966	55
RC2	4.35	0.927	55
RC3	4.35	1.004	55
RC4	4.33	1.037	55
RC5	4.27	1.044	55
HRC1	3.93	1.184	55
HRC2	4.07	1.230	55

HRC3	4.09	1.143	55
HRC4	4.33	1.055	55
HRC5	4.04	1.138	55
HRC6	4.29	1.031	55
MG1	3.80	1.161	55
MG2	3.78	1.197	55
MG3	3.73	1.269	55
MG4	3.65	1.236	55
MG5	3.85	1.113	55

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics of the factors representing the challenges faced by entrepreneurs (N = 55). The mean scores range from 3.65 to 4.36, indicating that respondents generally agreed that these challenges influenced their startup establishment and growth. Among the factors, Financial Challenges (FC) recorded the highest mean score (4.13–4.36), suggesting that financial constraints were the most significant challenge. This was followed by Regulatory Challenges (RC) with mean values ranging from 4.25 to 4.35, indicating that legal and regulatory issues were also major concerns. Human Resource Challenges (HRC) showed mean scores ranging from 3.93 to 4.33, indicating moderate to high agreement on workforce-related difficulties. The last construct (MC) recorded comparatively lower mean scores (3.65–3.85), indicating that these challenges were perceived as less severe than the others. The standard deviation values ranged from 0.93 to 1.27, suggesting a moderate variation in respondents' opinions

Table -5 Communalities Initial vs Extraction

Communalities		
	Initial	Extraction
FC1	1.000	0.648
FC2	1.000	0.886
FC3	1.000	0.881
FC4	1.000	0.875
FC5	1.000	0.844
FC6	1.000	0.815
MC1	1.000	0.877
MC2	1.000	0.788
MC3	1.000	0.886
MC4	1.000	0.906
MC5	1.000	0.898
RC1	1.000	0.894
RC2	1.000	0.930
RC3	1.000	0.915
RC4	1.000	0.899
RC5	1.000	0.898
HRC1	1.000	0.877
HRC2	1.000	0.819
HRC3	1.000	0.880
HRC4	1.000	0.852
HRC5	1.000	0.886
HRC6	1.000	0.846

MC1	1.000	0.889
MC2	1.000	0.905
MC3	1.000	0.879
MC4	1.000	0.901
MC5	1.000	0.942
Extraction Method: Principal Component analysis		

Table 5 presents the extraction value for each statement. For a statement to be included in the factor, the extraction value should be greater than 0.5. By this table, it is clear that every statement has an extraction value greater than 0.5. So, all the statements can be included in factors.

Table -6 Reliability Statistics

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.965	27

Table 6 shows the reliability of the questionnaire. Cronbach's Alpha is 0.965, which indicates excellent internal consistency among the 27 items. The items are highly correlated and reliably measure the same underlying construct.

Table -7 Rotated Component Matrix after Varimax Rotation

Rotated Component Matrix					
	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
MC5	0.920				
MC2	0.878				
MC1	0.856				
MC3	0.843				
MC4	0.790				
HRC4		0.881			
HRC5		0.867			
HRC6		0.824			
HRC1		0.815			
HRC3		0.813			
HRC2		0.801			
MC5			0.884		
MC4			0.869		
MC1			0.856		
MC3			0.846		
MC2			0.793		
RC2				0.867	
RC3				0.808	
RC4				0.805	
RC1				0.798	
RC5				0.751	

FC3					0.779
FC2					0.775
FC4					0.772
FC6					0.751
FC5					0.733
FC1					0.531

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 7 iterations.

Table 7 shows the Rotated Component Matrix, which presents the factor loadings of each variable for each factor. All the variables are loaded in a group after rotation, and that group is called a factor. This table explains how many factors are required and which statements should be included in each factor.

The rotated component matrix shows that the items clearly group into five distinct factors. MC items (MC1–MC5) load highly on the first component, HRC items (HRC1–HRC6) on the second, RC items (RC1–RC5) on the fourth, and FC items (FC1–FC6) on the fifth. All loadings are strong, confirming that the items cluster well under their respective constructs. The rotation converged in seven iterations, validating the presence of these underlying factors.

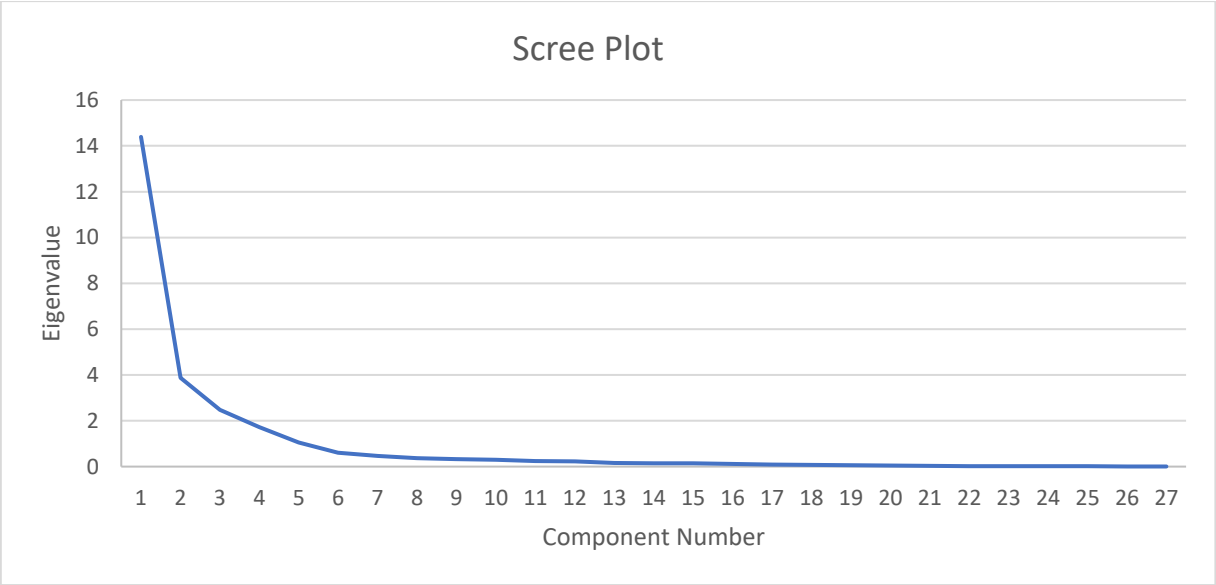


Fig.1 Scree Plot

The Scree Plot shows the eigenvalues for each component in a factor analysis. The first component has a very high eigenvalue of about 14.5, indicating that it explains a large portion of the total variance in the data. The eigenvalue drops sharply for the second component and then decreases rapidly for subsequent components. After the second component, the eigenvalues level off near zero, indicating that additional components contribute very little additional information. This suggests that most of the important variation in the data is captured by the first one or two components, and the rest can be ignored.

Variance Explained by the Extracted Factors

Table 7 presents the results of the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) used to examine the factor structure of the 27 measurement items. Based on the eigenvalue-greater-than-1 criterion, five components were extracted. Together, these five components explained 87.094% of the total variance, indicating that the extracted factors adequately represent the study's underlying constructs.

The first component accounted for the largest proportion of variance (53.303%), followed by the second (14.373%), third (9.154%), fourth (6.361%), and fifth (3.903%). After Varimax rotation, the variance was more evenly distributed across the five components, explaining 19.173%, 19.000%,

17.255%, 15.934%, and 15.731%, respectively. This indicates a well-defined factor structure and demonstrates that the extracted components effectively represent the observed variables. Overall, the cumulative variance explained of 87.094% exceeds the recommended threshold of 60%, confirming that the measurement scale has strong construct validity and is appropriate for further statistical analysis

Table-7 Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues		Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings				Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	14.392	53.303	53.303	14.392	53.303	53.303	5.177	19.173	19.173
2	3.881	14.373	67.676	3.881	14.373	67.676	5.130	19.000	38.173
3	2.471	9.154	76.830	2.471	9.154	76.830	4.659	17.255	55.428
4	1.717	6.361	83.191	1.717	6.361	83.191	4.302	15.934	71.363
5	1.054	3.903	87.094	1.054	3.903	87.094	4.247	15.731	87.094
6	0.600	2.224	89.318						
7	0.466	1.725	91.043						
8	0.362	1.340	92.383						
9	0.320	1.185	93.569						
10	0.298	1.105	94.674						
11	0.246	0.913	95.586						
12	0.227	0.840	96.426						
13	0.160	0.592	97.018						
14	0.146	0.540	97.559						
15	0.140	0.519	98.078						
16	0.111	0.411	98.489						
17	0.095	0.353	98.842						
18	0.073	0.271	99.113						
19	0.058	0.217	99.330						
20	0.050	0.184	99.514						
21	0.038	0.141	99.655						
22	0.024	0.088	99.743						
23	0.023	0.086	99.829						
24	0.018	0.068	99.897						
25	0.014	0.052	99.949						
26	0.009	0.033	99.983						
27	0.005	0.017	100.000						
Extraction Method: Principal Component analysis									

IV. CONCLUSION

This study examined the operational challenges faced by DPIIT-recognized startups in Haryana. The findings indicate that entrepreneurs encounter multidimensional challenges during the establishment and growth of their startups. Among these, financial challenges emerged as the most significant, followed by regulatory, human resource, managerial, and market-related challenges. The factor analysis confirmed a five-factor structure with satisfactory sampling adequacy (KMO = 0.766), significant Bartlett's

Test ($p < 0.001$), high cumulative variance explained (87.094%), and excellent reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.965). These findings demonstrate that the measurement scale is both valid and reliable for assessing startup challenges. Overall, the study concludes that addressing financial, regulatory, managerial, market, and human resource issues is essential for improving the sustainability and growth of startups in Haryana.

Practical Implications

The findings provide useful implications for policymakers, startup support organizations, incubators, and entrepreneurs. Government agencies should strengthen financial assistance, simplify regulatory procedures, and improve access to startup support schemes. Incubators and accelerators should focus on mentoring entrepreneurs in financial management, regulatory compliance, strategic planning, and human resource development. Entrepreneurs should also enhance their managerial capabilities and adopt effective business strategies to overcome operational challenges and improve startup performance. The study further contributes to the entrepreneurship literature by providing empirical evidence on the major challenges faced by DPIIT-recognized startups in Haryana.

V. FUTURE RESEARCH

Future studies may extend the present research by including a larger sample of startups from different states of India to improve the generalizability of the findings. Researchers may also compare challenges across technology and non-technology startups, manufacturing and service sectors, or different stages of the startup life cycle. Longitudinal studies can examine how startup challenges evolve over time. In addition, future research may employ Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to investigate the relationships between startup challenges, entrepreneurial performance, and business sustainability. Further studies may also explore the moderating or mediating role of government support, innovation capability, digital adoption, and entrepreneurial experience in influencing startup success.

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Writing as Resistance: Caste, Gender, and Subaltern Subjectivity in Poomani's *And Then*

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Abstract— *Poomani's debut Tamil novel Piraku, translated into English as And Then by T. Marx (2019), is among the earliest Tamil novels to render the lived experience of the Arunthathiyar (Chakkiliyar) community with sustained realism. Set in the karisal (black-soil) tract of southern Tamil Nadu, the novel follows Alagiri, a cobbler bound to a semi-feudal land-tenure arrangement called the kaani system, and his daughter Muthumari, whose life and death expose the intersecting violence of caste and patriarchy. This paper reads And Then through subaltern studies, cultural studies, and trauma studies frameworks to argue that Poomani constructs a doubly and trebly marginalized community whose labour, kinship, orality, and silence together constitute both the site of oppression and the ground of resistance. Attention to the novel's language politics, its staging of post-Independence electoral democracy, and its gendered trauma situates And Then within Tamil Subaltern writing and the wider world literature of the soil.*

Keywords— ***subaltern studies, caste and patriarchy, trauma studies, Karisal literature, postcolonial democracy, translation studies, Tamil fiction***

I. INTRODUCTION

Poomani's maiden novel *Piraku*, first published in Tamil in 1979 and translated into English as *And Then* by T. Marx in 2019, occupies a foundational place in the corpus of Tamil subaltern writing. Poomani, born in 1947 to a family of marginal farmers near Kovilpatti, has described Piraku as a pioneering account of the Arunthathiyar community, a Dalit sub-caste historically confined to leatherwork, whose story "no one before me had written about" (qtd. in Ramesh). The novel unfolds in Manaloothu, a village in the *karisal* (black soil) tract of southern Tamil Nadu, and follows Alagiri, a cobbler who migrates to the village and is absorbed into its *kaani* labour system, and his daughter Muthumari, whose short and violent life dramatizes the layered oppressions borne by Dalit women.

Read at the level of plot, *And Then* can appear to be an almost eventless chronicle of rural routine: buffaloes driven home at dusk, chappals stitched beneath a neem tree, betel leaves exchanged in gossip on a temple dais. Yet beneath this deceptively placid surface, Poomani stages what the novel's own critical afterword calls the "pathetic and impoverished lives" of a community subjected to "the oppressive caste structure and social stratification" of rural Tamil Nadu (Armstrong 266). This paper argues that *And Then* should be read simultaneously as a subaltern text, a document of regional cultural memory, and a trauma narrative. It recovers the material and epistemic world of a community written out of upper-caste literary history, in the manner theorized by subaltern studies; it encodes that recovery in the specific idiom, oral forms, and agrarian knowledge of the *karisal* region, in the manner attended to by cultural studies; and it renders, most searingly in the story of Muthumari, the psychic wounds inflicted by the intersection of caste and patriarchal violence, in the manner theorized by trauma studies.

The paper proceeds in nine segments. It first outlines its theoretical framework. It then examines the

kaani system as the novel's political-economic substratum, before turning to the novel's remarkable staging of post-Independence electoral democracy and Panchayati Raj institutions as a second, distinctly political, register of subalternity. It then analyses the ideological freight of caste language, particularly the novel's opening slur and its translation. A central section reads Muthumari as a case study in trebly-oppressed subaltern womanhood. Subsequent sections consider the neem tree and the *karisal* soil as cultural and ecological witnesses, examine orality and folk song as a mode of narrative resistance, and assess the ambivalent hope invested in the grandson Sudalai. The paper closes by considering the act of translation itself as a political and epistemic intervention, before a brief conclusion.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Subaltern studies, inaugurated by Ranajit Guha and the historians associated with the Subaltern Studies collective, sought to recover the agency and consciousness of groups excluded from elite nationalist and colonial historiography, insisting that subaltern politics constitutes an autonomous domain rather than a diminished reflection of elite politics (Guha). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's subsequent intervention complicated this recovery project by asking whether the subaltern, and especially the subaltern woman, doubly effaced by colonial and patriarchal discourse, can in fact "speak" within structures of representation not of her own making (Spivak 271-313). *And Then* dramatises precisely this problem: Alagiri and Muthumari are both granted extended interiority by Poomani's narration, yet their speech reaches the reader only after passing through the oral culture of the *cheri*, the printed Tamil text, and finally T. Marx's English translation. The novel is thus a productive site for testing Spivak's question, since it self-consciously stages the layered mediations through which a subaltern voice reaches a wider reading public.

Cultural studies furnishes a second lens. Poomani's fiction belongs to what Tamil criticism calls *karisal* literature, a regionally rooted body of writing, associated also with Ki. Rajanarayanan, that resists the Sanskritised, urban, upper-caste registers of mainstream Tamil letters and instead weaves land and language together in a single dialectical idiom (Armstrong 269-270). To read *And Then* as a cultural studies text is to attend to it as an archive of a specific material culture: chappal-making, the repair of water-lift leathers, agricultural labour, kinship address such as "Maman" and "Adei," and a repertoire of festival songs that together constitute what the novel's own critical apparatus calls the epistemic world of the *Chakkili kudi* (Armstrong 275).

Trauma studies, finally, supplies the vocabulary for reading the novel's most devastating episode, Muthumari's suicide. Cathy Caruth's account of trauma as an event that resists full integration into conscious narrative and instead returns in fragments, silences, and repetitions, together with Judith Herman's clinical description of the psychological aftermath of chronic domestic and social violence, illuminates why Poomani renders Muthumari's death not through her own testimony but through the fragmented perceptions of others: her son's report, the villagers' shocked reconstruction, and the physical description of her recovered body (Caruth; Herman). The unspeakability of her suffering, structurally enacted in the narrative's refusal to grant her a first-person account of her final days, is itself an argument about whose pain a caste society permits into speech. Together, these three frameworks allow a reading of *And Then* that neither reduces the novel to a sociological document of caste oppression nor treats it as a purely aesthetic exercise in regional colour, but attends instead to the way Poomani's narrative form is itself an argument about subalternity, culture, and pain.

The *Kaani* System: Political Economy of Bonded Caste Labour

At the structural centre of *And Then* lies the *kaani* system, a semi-feudal arrangement whereby each man in the Chakkili cheri was assigned to a particular landlord, on whose land he worked in exchange for a share of the produce, providing landlords an assured supply of labour and providing each Chakkili household a bare means of subsistence (Armstrong 268). The novel's early chapters dramatise the community's own negotiation of this system when the arrival of Alagiri as an outsider forces the cheri to debate whether to allot him a share of an already scarce resource (Poomani 11-14). The debate, conducted among men named Vandari, Sakkanan, Kuppandi, and Kandan, is significant for what it reveals about subaltern agency operating within, rather than against, an oppressive structure. The community never questions the legitimacy of the kaani system as such; it argues instead, with considerable procedural sophistication, over the ethics of distribution within it. Sakkanan's rebuke to the reluctant Kuppandi, that no one among them owns patta land and that "we are cursed to live precariously" (Poomani 13), voices both a communal ethic of mutual aid and a resigned acknowledgment of the precarity binding them all. Kandan's offer to give up his own share so that "no heirs and nothing, only me and my wife" need not become an obstacle to a newcomer's survival (Poomani 14)

exemplifies a subaltern economy of reciprocity that functions as a shock absorber where no state welfare exists.

This communal negotiation exemplifies Guha's claim that subaltern politics possesses an autonomous domain: a self-governing, consensus-based mode of resource allocation operating below the landlord's notice even while remaining structurally dependent on the landlord's economy (Guha). Alagiri's own diplomacy in this scene, his statement that the others may give him a share "if you want to; otherwise let it be" (Poomani 13), displays a subaltern political skill of not appearing to claim what he in fact needs, a survival strategy calibrated to a world in which visible assertion invites retaliation.

Yet the kaani system is also, unmistakably, bonded labour dressed in the language of kinship and obligation. Alagiri's fear on arrival, that he "should not antagonize these people, coming over here bowing to the wishes of the landlords" (Poomani 15), names directly the coercion beneath the courtesy. His years of obliging, obsequious service to the wealthy Villiseri landlord (Armstrong 268) are rewarded with occasional festival meals and casual patronage, an economy of scraps that stands in silent contrast to the landlord's four pairs of bulls, his buffaloes, and his vast holdings of the region's best black soil (Poomani 15). Caste ideology and material economy are thus doubled in the novel: caste furnishes the ideological justification for confining Chakkilis to menial and leather work, while the *kaani* system furnishes the material mechanism, bonded and share-based labour, by which that hierarchy reproduces itself across generations. Tellingly, in the novel's later chapters Alagiri twice relinquishes a *kaani* outright, first that of the landlord Appiah and later that of "the big landlord" himself, after being rebuked for his friendship with a lower-ranking neighbour (Poomani 233). The narrative neither celebrates this withdrawal as revolutionary defiance nor laments it as ruin; it records it simply as one more adjustment in a life of adjustments, itself an argument about the constrained horizons of agency available to the rural subaltern subject, who can withdraw from a particular bond of servitude but not from the system that produces servitude as such.

If the kaani system indexes the agrarian, pre-Independence face of caste subjection, *And Then* is equally concerned with the ways the postcolonial democratic state has failed to unsettle that subjection. In one of the novel's most pointed passages, Chakkili farm labourers discuss the meaning of Indian Independence while ploughing a field. One asks bluntly, "They say we are all liberated. Were we in prison earlier?", and an older man, Vedamuthu, answers that "freedom must be only for those who had been in prison for a long time. Just for the sake of it, they would have said, it is for all" (Poomani 7). The labourers recall having been told that after Independence "anybody could have food at anyone's house without hesitation," an unmistakable, if oblique, reference to the promise of an end to untouchability, only to conclude that no such change has reached them and that landlords "would rather throw the wormy grain into the trash than give away to anyone" (Poomani 7-8). This exchange is among the most explicitly socio-political moments in the novel: it stages the gap between the legal abolition of untouchability under the Indian Constitution and its continued social and economic practice in the *karisal* village, and it does so in the ironic, understated register of field-labourers' banter rather than through authorial polemic.

The novel extends this critique into its treatment of electoral politics. When a local election approaches, the powerful Villiseri and Gopal Naicker landlords summon the Chakkili cheri's leaders to instruct them, in the imperative mood of caste command rather than the language of civic persuasion, that "the entire Chakkili cheri should vote for us" because the candidate is a relative of the landlord's family (Poomani 38-39). The scene that follows the election is still more damning: landlords interrogate individual voters about how they cast their ballots, and the labourers, evidently coached in advance, describe elaborate strategies for either voting as instructed or performing compliance, including folding the ballot and displaying it before dropping it in the box (Poomani 45-46). The secrecy of the ballot, the formal guarantee of individual political agency in a democracy, is here systematically nullified by the informal but absolute authority of caste patronage. Shortly afterward, the narrative notes with dry understatement that a new Panchayat Board has been constituted in the village and that "the big landlord has become the President" (Poomani 47), confirming that the very institution of local self-government introduced by the postcolonial state to devolve power to the village has been captured by the same class that dominated the pre-Independence agrarian order.

Read through subaltern studies, this sequence exemplifies what Guha and later scholars of Indian democracy have identified as the persistence of a dominant "little kingdom" logic beneath the formal apparatus of universal suffrage: elections and Panchayati Raj institutions, designed to redistribute political power, are here absorbed into pre-existing hierarchies of land and caste. Poomani's achievement is to render this absorption not as an abstract thesis but as a series of small, concrete, and often blackly comic scenes, the ballot folded and displayed, the landlord's casual assumption of the presidency, that allow the reader to feel the precise

mechanism by which formal freedom is hollowed out. The novel thus insists that any account of the socio-political themes of *And Then* must extend beyond the agrarian *kaani* system to include the specifically postcolonial institutions, elections, Panchayat governance, and the rhetoric of Independence, through which caste domination is reproduced under a new constitutional vocabulary.

The Grammar of Caste: Slurs, Address, and the Ideology of Language

And Then opens not with description but with an insult: "Elei, Chakkili motherfucker, look at the buffalo grazing the haystack. Are you blind?" (Poomani 1), shouted by the landowner Pothi Naicker at the cattle-tender Karuppan. The novel's translator's preface reads this line as programmatic, arguing that the caste hierarchy between the "upper class" Pothi Naicker and the "lower class" Chakkili Karuppan is sanctioned by divinity itself, since Karuppan is obliged to address the landlord as "Sami," or lord, even as the landlord addresses him with a casteist slur (Natarajan vii). N. Natarajan's introductory essay on the novel's "ideological translation" argues that T. Marx's decision to transliterate rather than translate certain words, retaining "Elei" instead of rendering it merely as "Hey," and retaining "Chakkili" and "Sami" in their original form, preserves the specific "fascistic connotation" embedded in the original Tamil address system, a connotation that a purely semantic English equivalent would lose (Natarajan vii-viii). The same essay notes that this asymmetry of address is answered, at the novel's close, by an opposite and affectionate register: Alagiri's cry to his grandson, "Adei, don't fall down" (Poomani 265), uses the same grammatical form of address that Pothi Naicker had used with contempt, but here to express tenderness within the Chakkili community itself (Natarajan viii).

This linguistic doubling matters for a subaltern studies reading because it demonstrates that caste in the novel is not merely an economic relation but a linguistic and performative one, continuously re-enacted through modes of address that assign superiority and inferiority with every utterance. Louis Althusser's concept of interpellation, though not itself a subaltern studies term, illuminates the mechanism at work: Karuppan is hailed into caste subjectivity by the very words used to abuse him, and his obligatory reply, "Don't scold me, Sami" (Poomani 1), confirms rather than resists the hierarchy inscribed in the greeting. Yet the novel refuses to let this interpellation be the whole story. Immediately after the confrontation with Pothi Naicker, Karuppan walks to the neem tree in the Chakkili street, where his kinsman Alagiri greets him with the affectionate "mamov" (maternal uncle) rather than a caste epithet (Poomani 2), and Alagiri's advice, that Karuppan should simply "get and shed all such things" rather than allow the insult to fester (Poomani 3), models a subaltern strategy of emotional self-preservation under conditions where confrontation carries a disproportionate risk of violence.

Poomani's use of dialogue as the primary vehicle of narration, described in the novel's foreword as the sangati technique also associated with the Tamil Dalit writer Bama's autobiographical novel Sangati (Chellapan iv), further supports this reading. By rendering the community's self-understanding almost entirely through overheard, reported, and communal speech rather than through an omniscient narrator's summary, Poomani formally enacts the idea that the Chakkili cheri constitutes what Bama, too, understood as a collective subaltern subject whose selfhood is distributed across many voices rather than concentrated in a single heroic consciousness (Bama). The slur that opens the novel and the endearment that closes it thus frame the text as a whole: a movement from an externally imposed vocabulary of caste degradation to an internally generated vocabulary of kinship and care, without the novel ever suggesting that the former has been abolished in the world outside the neem tree's shade.

Trebly Oppressed: Muthumari, Patriarchy, and the Limits of Testimony

If Alagiri's story dramatizes the subaltern male's negotiation of caste and economic bondage, his daughter Muthumari's story dramatizes what the novel's own afterword calls a "trebly oppressed" subaltern womanhood, burdened simultaneously by caste, and by two successive patriarchal households (Armstrong 275). Muthumari's onset of puberty is treated by the community as a public, almost commercial event: the contractor's wife who discovers her condition at a work site publicly announces it to the assembled women with evident satisfaction, "a sense of pride" that the narrative associates with the "discovery" of something valuable rather than a private bodily change (Poomani 51). Muthumari's own reaction, throwing herself under a tree in shame even as her body remains "cool" in the heat, and her later silence as female relatives debate whether the ritual seclusion is being conducted properly, register her as an object of communal ceremony rather than a subject with a voice in decisions about her own body (Poomani 52-53). The scene culminates in her rapid marriage negotiations, initiated the same week, in which Muthumari's opinion is never solicited even as the community praises her stepmother Avadai's devotion in raising her (Poomani 54-57).

This pattern of managed womanhood culminates in catastrophe. After a difficult first marriage, Muthumari is remarried into a household at Ayyankulam, where, following the death of a kindly relative she has known since childhood, her second husband accuses her of neglecting their infant daughter merely because she attended the funeral, and kicks her while she is still holding the child, shouting, "What does it matter if you are alive or dead?" (Poomani 219). The elder woman of the household offers only a token protest, "It is quite natural that a baby would cry" (Poomani 219), before falling silent, an index of how thoroughly domestic violence against a daughter-in-law is naturalized even by other women within the same patriarchal structure. The immediate consequence is decisive and irreversible: within days, Muthumari leaves her son Sudalai with instructions to find his grandfather, and drowns herself in an abandoned well with her infant daughter bound to her body by her own saree, "as if she did not want to see anyone" (Poomani 225).

Analyzed through Caruth's and Herman's accounts of trauma, the formal structure of this episode is as significant as its content. Poomani grants Muthumari no interior monologue in her final hours; her decision is narrated only retrospectively, through Sudalai's report of her last words to him and through the community's shocked reconstruction after Karuppan discovers her body (Poomani 224-225). The narrative's refusal to represent Muthumari's consciousness at the moment of crisis is not a failure of craft but a formal enactment of the trauma-studies claim that certain extremities of suffering resist direct narration and survive instead only in the fragmented testimony of witnesses (Caruth). Her death is also legible as an act of communication that could not otherwise be spoken: unable to name her husband's violence within a household that had already demonstrated it would not credit her account, she chooses an act that forces the community, however belatedly, to reckon with what happened to her, even at the cost of taking her infant daughter's life along with her own. That the Village Munsif's first response to this death is to extract a bribe of five rupees for not officially reporting it as unnatural (Poomani 226) confirms that the state apparatus, no less than the patriarchal household, is complicit in ensuring that a Dalit woman's death, unlike a Dalit man's labour, need not be accounted for at all.

Karuppan's unspoken, lifelong affection for Muthumari, noted by the novel's afterword as a love that could never be declared "because of societal taboos" governing kinship and marriage within the Chakkili cheri (Armstrong 268), adds a further dimension of foreclosed possibility to her story. Even within her own community, where Muthumari might in principle have found a companionate alternative to her abusive marriages, custom forecloses the option before it can be voiced. Muthumari thus emerges as the novel's clearest illustration of Spivak's thesis that the subaltern woman is positioned at the intersection of overlapping structures, none of which offers her an unmediated space from which to speak on her own account (Spivak 287-295): not the caste hierarchy that structures her family's economic survival, not the patriarchal household that disciplines her body from puberty to death, and not even the affections of her own community, which love her but cannot say so.

Neem Tree, Black Soil, and the Cultural Landscape of *Karisal* Literature

Alongside its human characters, *And Then* grants an almost personified significance to the neem tree that stands at the centre of the Chakkili street, "a symbol," in the novel's foreword, "of the principle of perennial life that reveals itself in nature" even as it "participates in the sufferings of the people" (Chellapan v). The foreword's citation of the tree's description at the novel's close, standing "as ever in the same way" through cycles of flower, fruit, and barrenness while its trunk "alone remained without change" (Chellapan v), positions the neem as a witness whose endurance frames and outlasts the human drama of caste and loss enacted beneath it. Nearly every major scene of community deliberation in the novel, the *kaani* negotiation, Karuppan's account of his humiliation, Alagiri's grief after Muthumari's death, and the closing exchange with Sudalai, occurs literally in the tree's shade (Poomani 2, 233, 265), making it the novel's central chronotope: the one fixed point around which the mobile, precarious lives of the Chakkili cheri circulate.

This rootedness in a specific landscape situates *And Then* within what Tamil criticism calls *karisal* literature, a body of writing, including the work of Ki. Rajanarayanan, dedicated to the dry, black-soil districts of southern Tamil Nadu and to the dialectical relationship between land, labour, and language found there (Armstrong 269-270). The novel's own Afterword places Poomani in the company of an international tradition of "novels of the soil," from Erskine Caldwell's *Tobacco Road* to John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, that dramatize the struggle of impoverished agrarian communities against both natural and social forces (Armstrong 270). Reading *And Then* as cultural studies text means recognizing that its extensive attention to craft knowledge, chappal-making, the mending of water-lift leathers, veterinary care of buffaloes, functions not as ethnographic decoration but as a deliberate assertion of the Chakkili community's specialized, experiential expertise,

challenging what the afterword calls the reductive "stereotypical association of this section with making and mending chappals particularly" by demonstrating the breadth of indigenous technical knowledge the community actually possesses (Armstrong 272).

The "black soil" of the *karisal* tract thus functions doubly in the novel: as the material ground of agrarian exploitation, since it is precisely the best black soil that belongs to the Villiseri landlord (Poomani 15), and as a cultural inheritance that the Chakkili community knows more intimately, and works more skilfully, than the landlords who merely own it. This doubled landscape, at once site of dispossession and source of embodied knowledge, exemplifies the productive tension cultural studies identifies between structures of domination and the lived cultures that persist, adapt, and sometimes quietly subvert them from within.

Orality, Song, and the Aesthetics of Subaltern Narration

And Then is threaded throughout with folk songs, work chants, and oral formulas that constitute the Chakkili cheri's primary cultural archive, in the absence of access to formal, literate institutions. Karuppan's cattle-grazing song, comparing a black-soil girl's brow to the price of quails (Armstrong 273-274), and the engagement-ceremony nuptial song sung in Chapter 12, in which the imagery moves from a woman's forbidden hand and foot to her permitted waist-beads (Armstrong 273), together demonstrate a sophisticated oral poetics of courtship and labour operating entirely outside the formal literary Tamil associated with upper-caste writing. The novel's own critical Afterword compares this technique to Chinua Achebe's incorporation of proverb and song into *Things Fall Apart*, arguing that both writers integrate the oral culture of a colonised or casteised people into the fabric of the novel form itself rather than treating it as external ornament (Armstrong 273-274).

Poomani's Author's Note situates this oral material within a specifically political frame by quoting, in full, a field song titled "Ailasa," whose refrain moves from "Before dawn, / Freedom came" to "After dawn, / Freedom gone," concluding that what the people were promised, they lost the moment day broke (Poomani ix-x). This song functions as a compressed, poetic anticipation of the novel's later, more discursive critique of Independence discussed above; the labourers' ironic dialogue about liberation (Poomani 7-8) essentially unpacks in prose what the song had already stated in verse. That Poomani chooses to open the novel proper with this song in his Author's Note, before the narrative itself begins, signals that the critique of hollow postcolonial freedom is not incidental to the novel but one of its organizing political claims.

Formally, the novel's reliance on reported dialogue, the sangati technique noted in its foreword as a shared inheritance with Bama's Sangati (Chellapan iv), extends this orality into the level of narrative structure itself. Rather than an omniscient narrator explaining the community's values, the reader learns them by overhearing arguments, jokes, insults, and songs exchanged among the Chakkilis themselves. This choice enacts, at the level of literary form, the subaltern studies claim that a marginalised community's consciousness is best recovered not through external description but through attention to its own modes of self-articulation, however fragmentary, occasional, and orally transmitted those modes may be (Guha).

Sudalai and the Ambivalent Futurity of Emancipation

The novel's final chapters shift attention to Alagiri's grandson Sudalai, Muthumari's orphaned son, who is raised jointly by Alagiri and his second wife Avadai after his mother's death. Where Alagiri's life has been organised entirely around the neem tree and the *kaani* system, Sudalai's is organised, however unevenly, around school: he carries "three shirts" and a bag "full of books and note books" (Poomani 264), attends classes irregularly while still helping with agricultural chores on Sundays, and articulates his own aspiration in the register of state institutions rather than village hierarchy, imagining that after finishing his tenth-standard examinations he might join the police or military and be given "a cap" of his own (Poomani 264-265). Alagiri's response, that the boy "should go for a better job than that" (Poomani 265), is the novel's closing statement of intergenerational hope, gesturing toward education and upward mobility as an alternative to both the *kaani* system and the coercive state institutions that have thus far treated the Chakkili cheri as a source either of bonded labour or of manipulable votes.

Yet the novel is notably restrained about the content of this "better job," refusing to specify what emancipation might concretely look like, and the final image, Sudalai climbing the half-built walls of a new match factory in the village common while Alagiri calls out, "Adei, don't fall down" (Poomani 265), is poised ambiguously between industrial modernity's promise of a livelihood beyond agrarian caste bondage and the persistent risk, both literal and figurative, of falling back into the very structures the older generation sought to leave behind. This ambivalence is consistent with the paper's broader argument: And Then does not offer a triumphalist narrative of caste emancipation through education or industry, any more than it offered one

through Independence or the ballot box. Instead, it ends, as it began, beneath the neem tree, with an old man's watchful, affectionate warning to a child whose future remains genuinely open but by no means guaranteed.

Translation as Political and Epistemic Act

Any socio-political reading of *And Then* must finally reckon with the fact that the text under discussion is itself a translation, and that this act of translation is repeatedly framed, both within the volume's paratexts and in subsequent commentary, as a political and epistemic intervention rather than a neutral linguistic transfer. Tejaswini Niranjana's observation that translation depends on inherited, historically Western philosophical notions of reality, representation, and knowledge (qtd. in Armstrong 276) is invoked in the novel's afterword precisely to argue that *And Then*, translated by T. Marx, a scholar who shares the *karisal* dialect and cultural background of the author, resists that inherited framework by insisting on fidelity to authentic Chakkili "world views, cultural realities and epistemic practices" rather than assimilating them to a more familiar English idiom (Armstrong 276). Lawrence Venuti's account of translation as a site of overlapping linguistic, cultural, ideological, and political determinations (qtd. in Armstrong 277) is similarly mobilized to argue that the novel's translation cannot be separated from the caste politics it depicts: the choice to transliterate rather than translate words such as "Chakkili," "Sami," and "Elei" is not a stylistic preference but, as N. Natarajan's essay insists, the only way of preserving the "casteist sense" and "fascist connotation" that a purely semantic English rendering would erase (Natarajan viii).

T. Marx's own translator's note frames this challenge in strikingly similar terms, describing his effort to render Poomani's "blunt style" without either sanitising its slurs or exoticising its rural idiom, and recording Poomani's own anxiety that the English version might "Englishing" the karisal experience more than the rustic, "primitively raw" original intended (Marx xii). The Sujit Mukherjee formulation cited in the novel's afterword, that translation is both a "discovery" and a "recovery" (qtd. in Armstrong 275-276), captures precisely what is at stake here: *And Then* in English is not merely a rendering of a Tamil novel for a new readership but an act of epistemic recovery that brings a previously untranslated, doubly marginalised community's self-representation into wider circulation, against what the afterword calls the gate-keeping tendencies of India's "privileged translators" and "literary elites" (Armstrong 276). Read this way, the very existence of the English text this paper analyses is itself a further, and later, chapter in the novel's ongoing socio-political argument: that subaltern experience, once written, must still struggle to be heard, translated, published, and read.

III. CONCLUSION

And Then constructs its socio-political critique on several simultaneous registers: the agrarian political economy of the *kaani* system, which binds caste hierarchy to a concrete mechanism of bonded, share-based labour; the hollow promise of postcolonial Independence and electoral democracy, exposed through the labourers' ironic dialogue and the landlords' capture of the ballot box and the Panchayat Board; the linguistic ideology of caste address, in which a single word can carry either degradation or affection depending on who speaks it and to whom; the trebly compounded oppression of caste and patriarchy borne by Muthumari, whose death the narrative can represent only obliquely, through the testimony of others, in a formal enactment of trauma's resistance to direct speech; and the persistent, rooted cultural world of the *karisal* landscape and its oral traditions, which endure alongside, and sometimes in spite of, all of the above. Read together through subaltern studies, cultural studies, and trauma studies, these registers do not resolve into a single argument so much as they accumulate into a portrait of subalternity as multiply determined, economically, politically, linguistically, and psychically, and never reducible to any one of its causes alone.

Poomani's achievement, and T. Marx's achievement in bringing that novel into English, is to have rendered this multiply determined subalternity from within, through the community's own idiom, songs, arguments, and silences, rather than through the externalizing gaze of an upper-caste or foreign observer. That the novel ends not with resolution but with an open, watchful question about the fate of its youngest generation is perhaps its most honest socio-political statement: in the *karisal* tract Poomani depicts, caste, gender, and the postcolonial state have not yet been dislodged, only, perhaps, unsettled enough that a grandfather can imagine, even if he cannot guarantee, something better for the child still playing on the unfinished wall.

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The Natural World as Sacred Presence: An Ecospiritual Reading of *The Man with the Compound Eyes*

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Abstract— *In the Anthropocene, due to rampant anthropogenic impact on ecological systems, a divide has occurred between human and nonhuman worlds, where the former exerts its power on the latter. This hierarchical relationship between them has proved detrimental to both. To challenge and dismantle this uneven paradigm, I discuss the scope of ecospirituality—which regards the nonhuman world as sacred—in promoting a harmonious relationship between humans and other-than-humans. This spiritual approach emphasises the collective evolution grounded in interconnectedness and interrelation among all life forms. Influenced by the ecological philosophies of Thomas Berry and Thomas Clarke, I argue that ecological space is sacred for the islanders of Taiwan, with whom they communicate and stay in communion. I foreground their familial relationship with the natural world, highlighting coexistence rather than domination. Besides, I contend that the islanders deem nonhuman objects as agential entities that help shape their realities. Moreover, I examine Wu Ming-Yi's depiction of 'ecological memories' as a way to underscore the geological and temporal scales at which transformations in the nonhuman world become perceptible.*

Keywords— ***agency; anthropocene; ecospirituality; ecological world; harmony; islanders; nonhuman; sacred***

I. INTRODUCTION

In his essay, "Imagining Earth," G.M. Haugen (2013) writes, "[w]ho would we become if we *honored* the other-than-human world as if it matters to them and to us?" (p. 143 my italics). In the Anthropocene, which has exposed the large-scale anthropogenic deterioration of the natural world, posing such a question may seem startling, as humans treat the nonhuman world merely as a resource and means of sustenance. To "honour" nature is to regard her presence, not as "useful" for humans, but as an invaluable entity that sustains human beings. It, thus, transforms the human-nature relationship where companionship and co-harmony between the two originate and predominate. The current environmental crisis reveals the consequences of exploiting the nonhuman world and hence lays bare the necessity to revive the human-nonhuman relationship. By revering nature, we perceive the innate essences in different objects of nature and the interconnections and interrelations that exist between humans and nature. This reunion between the two makes Thomas Berry (1991), a cultural historian and priest, announce that we are at the termination phase of the Cenozoic era—that consists of the last 66 million years of Earth's history and extends to the present—and moving into the nascent ecozoic era that "...require[s] a spiritual discipline that involves a change from our anthropocentrism to a biocentrism and a geocentrism (p. 42). It manifests that the collective whole of the natural and the human worlds makes life possible on the Earth, and that humans cannot limit being in harmony with each other but have to develop harmonious relationships with all life forms as they all co-exist and co-evolve with each other.To bring stability to the already degraded planet, "we have to understand that the universe is in us as we are in the universe" (Clarke, 1991, p. 58). This human-nonhuman embeddedness indicates that

one's existence depends on the other and that this relationship thrives as long as humans understand and value the universe that lies beside them. Focusing on the human-nature bonding, Thomas Berry (2009) emphasises, "[t]here is no such thing as a "human community" without the earth and the soil and the air and the water and all living forms. Without these, humans do not exist. There is, therefore, no separate human community. Humans are woven into the larger community. The larger community is the sacred community" (p. 43). The human world and the ecological world are, thus, a collectivity where each entity is valuable, precious, and equally important, because of which the balance in the two worlds is maintained. Considering nonhumans as members of the larger community is to see them as material agents that play essential roles in the functioning of ecological systems that sustain the human world. Through this understanding, our relationship with the outside world is not materialistic but spiritual, where nature becomes holy and pious as she is entangled with our universe, and any harm to her becomes sacrilege. Drawing attention to the revered world of nature, Wangari Maathai (2010) writes, "we all have a need to feel at ease and in harmony with ourselves and the environment within which we live." While Maathai advocates for the harmony between humans and nature, Thomas Berry and Thomas Clarke move forward to regard the nonhuman world as sacred and on par with humans. Putting these ideas together, they not only emphasise the strengthening of the human-nature relationship but also seek to address the ecological problems that are an outcome of human encroachment into the natural world. Drawing on these writers in general and the concept of ecospirituality in particular, I examine how the ecological space becomes sacred for the coastal islanders of Taiwan and their relationship with the natural world. I also study the value of nonhuman life forms for these islanders, who consider them agential entities.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

As far as the survey of literature goes, Sana Shahzadi and Sadia Akram explore climate catastrophes and environmental disruptions by employing the theoretical framework of ecocriticism, while mainly drawing on Garrard's ideas of apocalypse, pollution, and Earth. They also focus on eco-anxiety and solastalgia as these manifest in the various characters in the novel. Their concerns also extend to environmental changes brought about by anthropogenic activities. Kanyu Wang et al., through Ivakhiv's tri-ecological morphisms theory, study a multi-faceted network of island ecology. He further investigates the ecological disruptions in coastal Taiwan and their impact on the islanders, emphasising the mental suffering and identity crisis in the characters who eventually learn to adapt and adjust to the environmental and social challenges. Justin Prystash studies how *The Man* engages in the reciprocal aesthetic enmeshment that occurs between nonhumans, humans, and inorganic objects. He also focuses on nature from a plastic point of view, while drawing on speculative realism. Besides, he examines the Daoist aesthetics and its connections with the novel. Darryl Sterk delineates the man with the compound eyes as representing a technologically mediated vision of nature. He showcases that the man is a technologically advanced figure who inspires a sublime aesthetic. Robin Chen-Hsing Tsai investigates how the characters in the novel respond affectively to the environmental crisis in the period of the Anthropocene using the new materialism of the Brian approach.

III. ECOSPIRITUALITY AND THE ECOLOGICAL WORLD

Ecospirituality is a faith-based approach that regards nature as sacred to develop a familial bond between humans and nature. Spirituality, in essence, is "the way one relates to or with the sacred" (Wheeler, 2022, p. 1). This traditional mode of conceiving the sacred seeks the sacred in a higher authority like God or other higher being "that transcends us" (p. 2). Ecospirituality, on the other hand, designates our "immediate presences" (nature) as the sacred. The sacred, thus, is not something that lies beyond us but beside us. "The historical roots of ecospirituality," says Kate Rigby (2016), "are found in the native traditions of the people who were colonized in the East." These people lived in harmony with nature, worshipped her and paid respect to her. Ecospirituality, thus, views humans as imbricated within nature, where both are co-dependent and co-evolve. For R. Wheeler (2022), ecospirituality "...describes how one relates to the sacred within the context of our natural, global, or even cosmic ecosystem (homes) of which we all form a part" (p. 1). It augments our "awareness" of the presence of nonhumans in our environment and encourages their acceptance and appreciation as beings possessing unique characteristics. Experience forms an essential component of ecospirituality as it is through our experience of the nonhumans that we comprehend their true value, worth, and place in the world and our lives. Such an experience deepens our relationship with them. Other spiritual concepts, like ecomysticism, eliminate the differences between two entities when clubbing them together. Ecospirituality retains the individual differences of entities while bringing them together, as it regards the concealment, assimilation, or suppression of these differences as the annihilation of individualities of things (or inherent

essences of things). It is because of these individual essences of things that an ecosystem can function and maintain stability. It, thus, celebrates the differences and similarities in things. Ecospirituality is, hence, a perception according to which both humans and nonhumans are connected, and it is the interdependence between the two that makes their survival possible. It gives a central role to myths and legends in helping humans realise their union with nonhuman forms of life. Ecospirituality debunks the hierarchical structure of human knowledge where the nonhuman world is merely held to serve human needs. It lays bare the interdependence and interconnectedness between all life forms. It, thus, theorises the ways and means through which humans can preserve and respect the natural world. According to Virginia Jones, an environmentalist, "[e]co-spirituality is about helping people experience 'the holy' in the natural world and recognise their relationship as human beings to all creation." Ecospirituality helps embrace everything in the world, microcosmically. It is to accept the natural world as it is, learn to adapt to the damaged world, and put in efforts to save the nonhuman world.

Humans have been conceiving the natural world as separate from the human world, the Cartesian duality that proved noxious for the former, and in the Anthropocene period, humans witness its impact on their lives as well. Sanctifying the natural world, then, aims not only to bestow respect on it but also to develop a consciousness of the importance of the existence of nature in our lives. Highlighting the value of ecological systems, Thomas Berry (2009) maintains that "[w]ithout the outer world as it is, we would have no inner world or imagination" (p. 166). Assigning sacredness to the outer world is an acknowledgement of the fact that humans totally rely on the nonhuman world in their day-to-day life. Bringing holiness from the divine to the mundane indicates that the presence of 'ordinary' objects of the world is as crucial for sustaining life as the presence of 'sacred' objects. It, hence, makes it apparent that anything that enables human existence can be called sacred in nature. Noting this renewed relationship between humans and nature, M.H. Talukder (2014) states, "[a] companionship with nature demonstrates a higher mental capacity to view nature differently, which is more intimate, emotional, and place-based" (p. 125). The world behind us is not a static one, but an active and responsive one that helps us create our subjective world. What emanates from our communion with the natural world is that our formation as humans is incomplete without the presence of the former. We evolve both subjectively and collectively only due to the presence of and our involvement, and association with the outer world.

IV. THE REVERED ECOLOGIES OF THE ISLANDERS

On the fictional island of Wayo Wayo, lives a community of people who barely know the presence of other continents on Earth. Their language is created by the first Sea Sages out of "...the sounds of seabirds" (Wu, 2014, p. 168). The religion that they follow is formed by their sages under the guidance of their god, Kabang. In their belief system, value and regard for nature are of paramount significance. The sages of Wayo Wayo—the Earth Sage and the Sea Sage—possess all the knowledge of the land and the sea, respectively. Throughout their lives, they transfer this knowledge to the disciples who are deemed fit to become the next sages of the land. This transfer of invaluable knowledge related to the land and the sea to future generations indicates the islanders' deep connection with nature. It is this indigenous knowledge that enables the people to adopt sustainable ways of living, predict the weather, and Atele'i, the protagonist of the novel, to build a *Talawaka* (boat) for himself and learn the techniques to survive on the sea. The indigenous knowledge, thus, plays a pivotal role when it comes to meeting the environmental challenges. This knowledge abounds in spiritual teachings where both human and nonhuman share equal value. In particular, it brings forth the sanctity and value of different nonhuman beings for the islanders. Furthermore, the Wayo Wayoan people consider some of the beings as avatars of the Kabang. For them, "[t]he *asamu*…was a black-and-white fish sent to spy on people and to test them. For this reason, it was counted among the creatures that couldn't be eaten" (p. 10).

Set in Taiwan and a small island of Wayo Wayo, a fictional creation of Wu Ming-Yi, the novel, *The Man with the Compound Eyes*, portrays various communities of people who hold the green world in high esteem. Showing reverence for nature is not only an individual act for these people, but also a collective decision they consciously make. Of course, this decision-making does not take place in a formal meeting among people, but is an outcome of observation of and introspection about nature. The sages of the island go through these processes of learning throughout their lives, which they ultimately transmit to their children. The Sea Sage "could…foretell the mood of the sea, knowing whether it would be fair or foul, in high spirits or low, and presage precipitation and ocean flow…[H]e had to listen carefully to the news brought back by every seabird, every gust of wind and every little shell" (Wu, p. 167). Under the guardianship of the sea sages, the boys learn about the sea until they turn into their youths "and until the youths endured the rite of passage and become men" (p. 10). Turning boys into men is not just a physical transformation, but also attaining maturity through learning that qualifies

them to be the next sages. Thus, for these boys, reaching the stage of sagehood is not circumscribed to mere learning, but to the realisation of the value and significance of nonhumans in their lives.

The most important lesson that sagehood yields to the sages is getting acquainted with the art of loving nonhumans. It helps them forge a strong bond with other-than-humans and even prevents them from causing any harm to the latter. It allows them to co-exist with others in peace and harmony. Comprehending the need for a balanced relationship between humans and nonhumans, the Earth Sage advises the children of the island that "[y]ou must love the land, my children, and ring it with your love. For the land is the most precious thing on this island. It is like a rain, like the heart of a woman… In all the world, the only thing worth trusting in are the land, the sea, and Kaban, my children" (Wu, p. 11). Their love for the land, the sea, and other things makes these nonhuman entities sacred for them. These things are not mere 'objects' for them, but they hold them to be 'subjects.' They put their trust in them as they do in any fellow human. Trusting in these nonhuman subjects might mean that the people believe the subjects assist them in living on the island. The trust in these subjects is, therefore, the confirmation of people's awareness of "[t]he arresting gazes of nature…" (Sterk, 2016, p. 190), bringing the two together. Through the awareness of the intersubjective gaze, people are able to appreciate and honour the presence of nonhumans. It is evident from the fact that the "[p]eople believed that dying while gazing at the sea was the grace of Kabang. Their lifelong dream was to arrive at the moment of death with an image of the ocean in the ocean of the mind" (p. 13). Thus, the people's honouring of the sea is manifested by their desire to die before the sea to be redeemed by it. Even in death, they do not part from nature but become one with her.

Corey Byrnes (2014), in his review of the novel *The Man* writes, "Wu's portrait of the people and traditions of the fictional Wayo Wayo is lovingly detailed, but it also bears the mark of a primitive romanticism so retrograde as to seem ironic." Byrnes is right that these people's traditions and way of life are 'primitive' when we compare them with the progressive cultures of 'Haven' in the novel. But the moment we reflect on what cost this 'progress and development' comes, we begin to question the very concept of 'primitive' and 'cultured.' The centuries of 'progress and development' have taught humans how to exploit resources of the Earth, eliminate forests, alter weather patterns, and so on and so forth. So the problem lies more in how we gauge the progress of a culture than the traditions of a culture themselves. At one level, the Anthropocene itself questions the 'force' of human reasoning, which has affected the deterioration of the environment so much that it has reached the brink of the sixth extinction. How could a nation be deemed 'progressive' if its ideals of progress cause annihilation of its existence? Wu, thus, returns to the Earth approach advocating for the way of life which regards nonhumans as an integral part of human existence. Through this approach, he underscores the fact that when it comes to survival, it is not the survival of one particular community or race or of nature alone, but rather co-survival or co-existence of all life and non-life forms present on Earth.

The Wayo Wayoan people live their lives in accordance with the commandments of their God, Kabang, who makes them aware of the importance of living in harmony with nonhumans. Kabang set out guidelines for them

> *I can allow you an island, but your numbers must never exceed the trees growing thereupon. You will lose the ability to subsist in the sea for more than a short length of time, and you will be exiled from the vast, shoreless, open ocean. As prisoners on the island, you will know isolation and the fear of drowning. Once a friend, the sea will become a foe. It once gave but now it will take. Yet you must still rely on it, trust in it, worship it* (Wu, p. 166 original italics).

The commandments people receive have less to do with their God than with their relationship with the nonhuman world. To maintain that relationship, they have to keep their population in check. They cannot overconsume resources or strike any other imbalance. The transgression, on the other hand, will jeopardise their existence on the island. The very sea that sustains them will submerge them. These dire prognostications by Kabang will be the repercussions of ecological breakdown at the hands of which human and nonhuman beings will have to suffer. In order to prevent this breakdown, the islanders have to stay connected and live in communion with their natural environment.

The inhabitants of this small island consider the nonhumans as alive and cogent. They hold them to be active members of their community. They converse with the forest, the stars, the sky, and the clouds, understanding them to "be the avatars of *Dihanin* (the host of spirits) (Wu, p. 109). Thus, these nonhumans are not material beings for them, but are glorified to be the incarnations of divine beings. Adding this attribute to nonhumans increases their significance for the people and nourishes their relationship with the former. It, besides, helps them to develop familial bonding with other-than-humans. When Anu, Dahu, Hafay, Sara, and Detlef visit the Forest Church, a forest owned by Anu, they sense it to be a lively place. They visit this place to connect with nature, to know it closely, and to attain peace in its company. For Anu, plants and animals are fellow species which have dignity and deserve respect. While introducing

his guests to the Forest Church, he warns them that "[t]here might be big brothers and sisters here, so we need to poke the grass with a stick as you go along… A big brother or sister is a poisonous snake. We must not just say 'snake.' That would be disrespectful" (p. 260). Assigning the name of brother or sister to nonhumans bridges the gap between humans and nature, long established by Western philosophical traditions. It makes them conscious that humans are not the only beings who share the space on the Earth, but other species also have an equal claim on it. The Forest Church is, thus, symbolic of humans reviving their relationship with nonhumans, acknowledging their ecological values and discovering their role in sustaining them, and finding ways to co-exist in harmony.

For Taiwan islanders, plants and animals are like their family members. They seriously take into consideration their protection and preservation. The patch of land that Anu gives the name of Forest Church was one intended by a builder to "build a columbarium on it" (Wu, p. 260). But Anu buys it to keep the forest flourishing. He prevents the forest ecosystem from breaking down due to its demolition by capitalists and allows humans to recognise their interconnection with the ecological world. When Anu takes Detlef to one of the caves of the Forest Church, he tells him that the cave does not know him and suggests that he get acquainted with it (p. 262). Thus, for Anu, awareness of what we think about nature is equally important as awareness of what nature thinks about us. With this consciousness in mind, in the Forest Church, Hafay "felt she had finally found a vessel that could contain her, a shell in which she could live like a hermit crab" (p. 262); Detlef "had never been so impressed as he was now of what the power of nature, so much greater than his own, was capable of" (p. 264); and for Anu, "the mountain is our holy land…" (p. 268). Hafay finds her true abode in the forest, a place she feels in sync with. Detlef is astonished at the supremacy of nature when he witnesses its regenerative powers. And Anu is so fascinated by the beauty of the forest that he declares it to be holy. Each character goes through the epiphanous moments where they discover and recognise nature's hidden powers that bring them closer to her.

V. HUMAN COMMUNION WITH OTHER-THAN-HUMANS

The characters of the novel are ecoposthumans who not only regard their connections with the natural world but also feel disheartened at the violence perpetuated against it. It is not only at the surface level that the characters are connected with other-than-humans, but they also relate to them at an emotional level as well. When Sara sees the sea filled with human trash, she feels agonised because "what hurt the sea hurt her personally" (Wu, p. 201). It indicates that nonhuman entities have become a part of the inner psyche of the islanders. They realise that the inner, often invisible systemic disruption of ecosystems impacts their survival and visible violations of ecological systems, like plastic pollution, affect them on both physical and psychological levels. In other words, they find themselves interconnected and interrelated with the ecological world. These ecoposthumans have higher levels of empathetic sensibilities, because of which they feel for both life and non-life forms. When Alice sees garbage scattered around the sea, she is deeply moved by the changed state of it. Relating to the grief of the sea, she says, "...having spent time with the sea on a daily basis, I can feel its emotions. Now the sea seems to be made out of pain and misery" (p. 173). Thus, the ecospiritual way of thinking of ecoposthumans helps them to relate emotionally with nonhumans. It makes them feel and question the human destabilisation of nature. It heightens the sense of their responsibility to care for and protect the well-being of the Earth.

For various characters, nature does not exist for a few people or nations, but belongs to the whole of humanity. For Amundsen, "...every sea was "*our* sea:" "*our* Indian ocean," "*our* Atlantic," "*our* Pacific" (Wu, p. 232 original italics). It showcases the oneness of the Earth where humans and nature are a collective whole. Detlef may be suggesting that water in the ocean and seas is in a continuous flow. The water that passes into the Indian Ocean reaches the Pacific Ocean, which then flows to other areas. Just naming an ocean after a particular country does not make it their possession. Everyone has an equal claim on it. However, this claim is not in terms of owning it, but to be a part of this broader system, which makes life possible for all life forms. It is also in terms of humans behaving as responsible eco-citizens of the Earth. This is true for Amundsen, who leaves his profession of hunting whales to become their saviour. He tells her daughter, "Sara, I renounce my identity as a seafaring hunter. The time has come. I really feel I must relinquish my former identity. I have to try to make a change or I will feel that I have lived my life in vain" (p. 239). He, instead, joins an international organisation that stands against the killing of seals. He takes part in campaigns and protests highlighting the need to save aquatic animals.

The zeal for speaking for the welfare of animals is also found in Sara, a marine biologist from Norway. She primarily comes to Taiwan to study the impact of the trash vortex on marine animals. She cannot bear the violent killing of whales in the sea. She reprimands Detlef for his support of whale hunting. She bluntly tells him that "the reason you think it is no big deal is because you have never seen a mink whale bleed to death right before your eyes"

(Wu, p. 198). Sara's concern for nonhuman life forms shows her true devotion and love for them. She even wants whalers to change their profession so that whales can be saved. Her sincere regard for them provokes Detlef to question his beliefs about nature and finally compels him to accept their innate value. There is a class of characters who are always conscious of nature's significance for them. They include Dahu, who acts as a volunteer to clean up the shore from the accumulated trash; Alice, who rescues a cat from drowning in a flood; Sara, who opposes the hunting of water bodies; Anu, who risks his life to protect a forest; and the man with the compound eyes, who challenges the human-centric notions that disregard nature. However, there is another class of characters who gradually grow accustomed to the value, status, and existence of the natural world. These include Amundsen, who spends most of his life hunting animals in forests and oceans, while he learns that hunting is an act of cruelty against the animals and nature. Detlef, who seriously considers leaving his job of digging tunnels, is inspired by Sara's profound love and empathy for nature. The journeys of these characters shift from ignorance of the value of the natural world to the knowledge and acknowledgement of the sacredness and usefulness of other life forms on the Earth.

VI. NONHUMANS AS AGENTIAL BEINGS

Ghosh (2016), in his nonfiction text *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, extensively discusses the agency of nonhumans, by which he means that "...dogs, horses, elephants, chimpanzees, and many other animals possess intelligence and emotions" (p. 86). They act independently and significantly influence humans. For Jane Bennett (2010), nonhumans not only have the capacities (she calls vitality) to obstruct human will and designs, but they also possess powers "...to act as quasi-agents, forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own." These nonhumans become 'actants' in Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory. For him, "an actor is an entity that modifies another entity in a trial (2004, p. 237). They (actor/actant/nonhuman) have the agency to act, to impact systems, and the capacity to bring changes in a course of action. Although these writers slightly differ in their theorisation of the agency of nonhumans, their central focus remains on the vibrant and cogent nature of nonhumans, which escape human control and are potent enough to shape human reality. Wu reveals this aspect of nonhumans through the enigmatic character of the man with the compound eyes, who is a ubiquitous figure overseeing the actions of all other characters. He is fully aware of the potency of nonhumans in sustaining and regulating themselves, forging a web of relations with other beings—humans and nonhumans—thereby driving considerable changes in their reality. The man's omnipresence and prescience are, thus, symbolic of the ever-presence of nonhuman forces in the lives of the characters. These forces, like the storms, floods, trash vortex, Forest Church, toss Atele'i on the coast of Taiwan, displace Alice and Hafay from their homes, and attract people like Dahu to clean up the beach and unify the characters like Hafay, Dahu, Umav, Detlef and Sara to seek comfort in nature (Forest Church).

The man with the compound eyes is simultaneously aware of the interdependence existing between humans and nature and the agency of the latter. Speaking about the importance of nonhumans, he tells Thom

> No life can survive without other lives, without the ecological memories other living creatures have, memories of the environments in which they live. People don't realize they need to rely on the memories of other organisms to survive. You think that flowers bloom in colorful profusion just to please your eyes. That a wild boar exists just to provide meat for your table. That a fish takes the bait just for your sake. That only you can mourn. That a stone falling into a gorge is of no significance. That a sambar deer, its head bent low to sip at a creek, is not a revelation … When in fact the finest movement of any organism represents a change in an ecosystem (Wu, p. 281).

The man initially refutes the human notion that memory is the domain of humans only. Rather, he believes that nonhuman beings in the natural world also possess memory. It is because of their memories that enable the functioning of ecosystems. Memory helps nonhumans to remember the particular conditions of a place fit for their growth and survival, as the man says, "[m]igratory birds remember the seacoast, whales remember the boat that harpooned them, and seal pups that manage to avoid annihilation will remember the murderous coat-clad, club-carrying creature that chased them. I kid you not; they'll never forget. But only human beings have invented a tool to record memory" (Wu, p. 279). This thriving of nonhumans in a desired place indirectly sustains humans as well. With the termination of the "ecological memories" of nonhumans, all life forms would cease to exist. The man, besides, critiques the anthropocentric view of nature existing for the sake of humans. Plants, animals and other things in nature are entities that lead independent lives. We may put them to our use, but they are not merely to serve us. Each of them exists for itself, but each is connected to the other in a way that a slight change could hinder their web of relationships. Wu, thus, puts forward a 'Gaia' kind of view of the Earth where all life forms are interconnected. Wu highlights the gap that

exists between humans and animals due to human unwillingness to accept that the latter have evolved cognitive abilities to think and remember. Just because they cannot record their memories, something humans are enabled to do, does not mean they have no importance of their own. Can one's significance be solely gauged by one's ability to record memory and not by just having the ability to remember? The author, thus, problematizes the relationship of (human) memory with its record-keeping (writing) that prioritises human life over nonhumans, whose memory is outrightly disregarded.

The man with the compound eyes compares human writing to nature, assuming that "the world reconstructed in writing approximates even more closely what you call 'the realm of nature.' It is an organism" (p. 279). By this comparison, Wu highlights the evolving system of writing and nature: the human record of events or theorisation of concepts evolves over time; the same is true of nature as well. It functions like an organism whose every part grows and works in tandem with others. Like writing induces novelty and innovation in knowledge, nature also produces newness within the entities inhabiting its realm through its self-evolving mechanism. The analogy further alludes to the idea of human culture as evolving through the means of writing and nature that of its inherent laws. The author, thus, implies that nature is not dead, mute, or inert as it has been considered for centuries. It is alive, ever-growing, and working according to its own laws. By introducing Thom to the memory of nonhumans, the man enlightens him about the secrets of the natural world. The analogy could also mean that humans measure their progress through the development of knowledge (of science and technology). But how could humans measure the progress of nature if they are ignorant of its laws? The author, hence, invites the reader to set foot into 'the realm of nature' where progress is measured at a geological time scale. At this scale, the evolution of nature takes place at a very slow pace. When Thom falls off the cliff, he seeks the help of the man to save him, but the man shows complete indifference to his pleadings, telling him that "[t]he only reason for my existence is that I can merely observe, not intervene" (Wu, p. 282). He seems to speak on behalf of nature, for whom human events, which take place in a very short span of time, have no significance for it. These moments are so minuscule that they barely attract her attention. Inversely, for humans, the progress of nature is so slow that they fail to comprehend its evolution. It can be said that Wu's introduction of "ecological memories" of nonhumans is his technique to make the characters understand their (nonhumans') slow growth and regard their presence.

VII. CONCLUSION

In sum, the novel, read through an ecospiritual lens, offers the answers of co-existence and co-harmony between human and nonhuman forms of life to the problem of the Anthropocene crisis. Inspired by the ecological writings of Thomas Berry and Thomas Clarke, I found out that the characters hold nature in high esteem. Further, the analysis reveals that the coastal islanders of Taiwan consider nature sacred and maintain a familial relationship with it. They slowly grow conscious of the natural environment, nourish their companionship with the nonhuman world and see themselves entangled within it. Through their communion with the natural world, they learn its importance in their lives and work actively to preserve it. Moreover, the characters feel love, empathy, and mercy for nonhuman lives. They do not believe in the hierarchical human-nature relationship, but in the one in which both co-become and co-evolve. The characters in the novel take any cruelty against animals personally and work painstakingly to grant them rights that would guarantee their safety. By recognising the interdependence and interconnectedness between the two, the characters refrain from activities that might harm this relationship. Besides, the coastal inhabitants see nonhuman life forms as lively, cogent, and responsive. Storms, floods, and typhoons are regarded as entities that carry agency. These entities put the lives of characters in jeopardy, thus threatening their survival. Further, animals are seen as sentient and intelligent beings, challenging traditional human notions that associate these attributes solely with humans. These animals play a vital role in shaping human reality. Without their presence, humanity in general would cease to exist. Finally, the paper views Wu Ming-Yi's portrayal of 'ecological memories' as a strategy to foreground geological and temporal scales at which ecological changes become understandable.

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Renunciation and Reconstruction: Spirituality, Redemption, and Masculine Identity in the Fiction of R. K. Narayan and Manju Kapur

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Abstract— *This paper comparatively examines the representation of spirituality, redemption, and masculine identity in the fiction of R. K. Narayan and Manju Kapur. It argues that Narayan presents masculine reconstruction through renunciation and Hindu spiritual philosophy, whereas Kapur depicts identity as an ongoing negotiation shaped by modernity, globalization, and gender relations. Through a comparative textual analysis of selected novels, the study highlights continuities and divergences in their treatment of masculinity and redemption.*

Keywords— ***Renunciation, Identity Reconstruction, Masculinity, Spirituality, Redemption, Selfhood, Modernity.***

Introduction

Indian fiction in English has long been concerned with the making and unmaking of the self and yet very little literary criticism has considered that preoccupation as a distinctly male drama. The male protagonist of the Indian English novel is seldom a steady authority; more frequently, his sense of himself has been shaken and he must somehow seek some idiom in which to reassemble himself. Hailed as the language of spirituality and redemption, that idiom is repeated over and over in the fiction of R. K. Narayan (1936-1997), who set his imaginary South Indian town, Malgudi, in the 1930s to the 1990s; and Manju Kapur, whose novels are set after the economic liberalisation of the 1990s, in Delhi households or in the North American diaspora. This essay proposes that the novelists create a crisis in manhood and a process of reconfiguration, and that spirituality and redemption provide the grammar by which manhood is lost, questioned and recovered. What is the important difference between theology and history? Narayan sees salvation in a traditional Hindu economy of renunciation, in which man is retrieved just by giving him up; Kapur's sees it in the secular, embodied and often unfinished struggles of modern and diasporic men, for whom the transcendental escape is ever elusive.

It is no surprise that Narayan and Kapur are not read together, because they are about 50 years apart, and certainly are not the same sex, or even literary sensibility—the one an ironist of small-town continuities, the other a chronicler of the fractured middle-class family. But it is just because they are so far away that they actually make for a fine comparison. What has been preserved is what holds the continuity; what has been varied is what is different in modernity's representation of manhood in the novel in Indian English. The two writers follow a trajectory from a metaphysics of renunciation to a politics of negotiation, when read side by side.

The Art of Masculinity, Dharma and "The Grammar of Redemption"

Discussing masculine identity in these novels does not imply a fixed identity but must be read in the spirit of R. W. Connell, who argues that masculinity is relational, plural,

and socially produced and never a natural attribute (Connell). The novels push the arrangements of family, work, caste, nation—what yields as manhood, what does not—in Malgudi as well as Kapur's Karol Bagh. Redemption can then be taken as the restoration of a self that thinks that it is fallen, damaged, lost, and may not be religious in nature, although it usually is in the case of Narayan. The question these novels ask is an interpretive one: From where does this restoration come?

The four āshramas—the student, the householder, the forest-dweller, and the renunciant—structure the ideal life of a man in the Hindu cultural imagination that Narayan embraces, and his statuser is supposed to culminate, not in the accumulation of worldly power, but in the abandonment of it as he strives toward liberation, or moksha. The ontological quest of a Narayan hero is often a journey from attachment to detachment, and from this stems the mythic patterns of Hindu thought, as Chitra Sankaran has demonstrated, to the extent that Narayan's plots are permeated by them. In this economy, redemption is the re-emergence into the true nature by the dissolution of the ego.

This is the side of Kapur's inheritance on which he writes from. Her men live in a secular commercial and increasingly globalized India, and they move outside her into a "third space" of a “cultural hybridity” (Bhabha) where they negotiate identity, rather than having it given to them, in the diaspora. They have no automatic exit anymore as a result of the āshrama scheme and any redemption, if it exists at all, must be created in the world and not outside of it. In both writers, the grammar of redemption goes on, but it may be moving towards transcendence, or towards mere survival.

In both cases there is a colonial history to be recovered, one that Ashis Nandy has explored, in which the manhood of Indians was seen as lacking, insufficient, effeminate, and the restoration of a manly self-respect became a core business of the anticolonial life. Narayan's renunciatory ideal can be seen as one culturally specific response to this pressure—a way of being a man that is not one of the aggressive potencies of the colonizer's model but rather is one of self mastery and detachment. Kapur's providers in the globalized world and his diasporic professionals take over the very norms of competitive, market oriented manhood that the colonial encounter helped to establish. The re-appropriation of manhood in these novels is, therefore, not a singular experience in itself; it is intertwined with the larger narrative of the nation's self and its quest to remember it self, so that the self-reconstruction of a man is always also a miniature allegory of the culture's.

It is a wonderful book that I heartily recommend. It is an excellent book and I recommend it highly.

The Guide is Narayan's most comprehensive exploration of the idea of masculine redemption. Raju starts out as a very worldly man, a railway-station guide who becomes the impresario and lover of the dancer Rosie, and eventually makes her a celebrity. This manhood is tied to performance, possession and financial control and it is destroyed once that control is a forgery: he is locked up for forging Rosie's signature and in one blow loses his woman, his money, and his social position (Narayan, *The Guide*). The following is one of the great ironies in Indian fiction. Raju is released from jail, and mistaken for a swami by the village boy, Velan, and wanders off on a pretended path of good advice, that he is not certain of. But the show slowly fades into the subject that it's pretending to be.

When drought hits and the villagers expect their saint to fast for the rain, Raju takes the fast and in the novel's surprisingly ambiguous ending he feels, for the first time, that he is doing something on behalf of others. Malgudi is a liminal space between the older Indian styles and the pressures of modernity (Thieme), and Raju is a liminal figure: his manhood is broken apart by the worldly economy and reinvented via an economy of renunciation. The self is recovered in the act of giving it away and Narayan refuses to assert that Raju has changed or merely is playing a part – the uncertainty is part of the message, for in the logic of sannyasa, the giving away of the self cannot be an ego project. The transformation is honest because the comedy of Narayan's narration never lets us become pious and certain.

The Vendor of Sweets is based on a calmer version of the same movement. An old-time Gandhian who peddles sweets and reads the *Bhagavad Gita*, Jagan has made his business model of being economical and upright and of being Father. It is undermined by his westernised son Mali, who comes back from America with a foreign wife and a plan to build a story-writing machine, one that is generational, commercial and cultural (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets*). Jagan does not resist his loss of command but instead retreats to a garden across the river where he starts a new life, one he calls a “new life.” It's yet another renunciation: he's leaving the stage of the householder and heading into the forest-dweller's detachment, reclaiming an inner freedom that his roles as father and businessman had pushed out of the way.

The English Teacher fills in the pattern in a register of grieving. A teacher at a colonial Mission college, Krishna is a man with borrowed and mimic authority. His wife Susila dies, destroying his homemade self, but on the way to her, through his finally breaking through to her presence,

he finds a hard-won harmony, and decides to leave his job at the government school to teach at a more natural school (Narayan, *The English Teacher*). It is William Walsh's long ago identification of this blending of the ordinary and spiritual that has come to define Narayan's work (Walsh), and where ambition and colonial mimicry, both, are detached, the masculine selfhood is reconstructed in Krishna. In all three novels the redemptive economy is constant: the reclaiming of manhood is neither through conquest of power nor through assertion of it, but through its giving up, while the sacred provides a true escape from the deadlock of worldly man.

Embodied Masculinity and the Unfinished Reconstruction, by Kapur.

However, Kapur's men have no escape and nowhere is this more apparent than in The Immigrant. Although Ananda (Indian dentist, emigrated to Halifax), is an epitome of diasporic success, his masculinity is in crisis at the very physical level, when he finds himself shamed in his marriage with Nina (*The Immigrant*) for sexual dysfunction. While Narayan idealizes the manhood problem as a spiritual crisis, Kapur represents it - Ananda's manhood is not a transcendable metaphysical issue, but a physical and psychological problem to be dealt with. His answers are all secular and all modern. He anglicizes him/herself to "Andy," changes his body and his ways with therapy and self-improvement, and looks for affairs to rebuild his virility.

This is the masculinity of consumer self fashioning, not a self-giving in the journey to liberation, but rather in Bhabha's hybrid third space. The renaming of Ananda to Andy is an ironic inversion of *The Guide's* Renaming of Rosie as Nalini: Raju renames another to take possession, Ananda renames himself to exist. But, tellingly, Kapur denies his protagonist a redeeming ending; the novel never lets his reconstruction complete, leaving his manhood ever so fragile, resting instead on the market and the therapist's office.

In *Home*, Kapur dissects a masculinity that is created by the family business. The men Banwari Lal and his sons Yashpal and Pyare Lal identify with the business of cloth in Karol Bagh, with family, and with the need to give birth to a son to sustain the business of both (Kapur, *Home*). In this case, masculine worth is one of commercial and reproductive succession: the novel unveils the price of that: the orphaned nephew, Vicky, whose lack of an assured position in the male hierarchy leads him to resentment and violence. These men have no language of renunciation, their selves are bound up or fractured apart in the ropes of trade and patriarchy. Only the shop is where the Banwari Lal men cross the river into a grove where a Narayan hero steps.

Custody takes the diagnosis into the corporate now. Raman's life revolves around his brand, his salary and his provision and his wife Shagun dies after being lured and seduced by another executive, Ashok, who is more charismatic (Kapur, *Custody*). Here, the figure of the man is that of one who possesses, provides, and they have taken to his as a possession, and this is Raman's crisis: that they no longer give him love or loyalty because he no longer provides them with anything. Again, there is no transcendental solution – just negotiation, litigation, and partial, slow reconvening of a life. In Kapur's fiction, then, the male self is at best partially recovered, at best completely recovered, by adaptation and compromise in a secular world, and is not always recovered. Notably, from the periphery or outside her men are often seen, dis-centred by the growing independence and autonomy of the women protagonists—Nina, Nisha, Shagun—that destabilize them.

Convergence and Divergence

The two novelists come together in their use of modality as a way of conceptualizing their characters' selves as problems, and in their search for language of spirituality and redemption to work through that problem. In both, an identifiable crisis (being imprisoned, losing a loved one, breaking an intergenerational bond, failing at sex, failing at marriage) robs a man of his identity, and in both the question is whether or not he can be remade and how. The difference is significant, however—and clearly visible in history. Redemption means to Narayan the elimination of the self, fixed in the direction of moksha, and tradition provides a reliable way of getting out: the asceticism of the fast, the sacred of the grove, the communion with the dead. Redemption for Kapur is "reassembling" the ego in modernity, and there is no way for her men to get out of it, no reassuring promise of a successful reintegration.

The contrast is that place accorded to the body by each writer, perhaps most strikingly. In Narayan, the body is a thing to be transcended: Raju is fastest to mortify the body, in order to liberate the spirit, and Krishna's greatest intimacy with Susila comes only after her death. In Kapur, on the other hand, the body is the very foundation of a man's identity, a crisis that's sexual in nature and more than anything else; Ananda's is the crisis of the sexual man, and the Banwari Lal men value themselves on the basis of their ability to father sons. The transition from Narayan to Kapur is thus, a transition from a masculinity with the soul to a masculinity with the flesh and a self without a spiritual outlet is handed over to the modern man with no escape other than the body he cannot transcend.

The change is also nationwide. Narayan's soldiers are still in the glow of Gandhian idealism, and Jagan quite literally stands up to the Mahatma, hence, renunciation has a civic also a spiritual significance. Rather, Kapur's men make their way in the globalized market and the diaspora where the nation has been reduced to a backdrop for private aspirations and the familiar old codes of manhood are no longer accepted as gospel. It's now the turn of the point of view too! Narayan focuses on the men and gives their inner lives respect and dignity, while Kapur, in a feminist frame, often looks at masculinity from the outside and has to do with the reclaiming of the masculine identity, which is always underlined by the women whose independence has made the traditional scripts of manhood unworkable.

CONCLUSION

Side by side, R. K. Narayan and Manju Kapur chart the course of the twentieth-century and the modern novel in Indian English. The crisis is faced and solution is found in the surrender of the man in need, the man—Raju, Jagan, Krishna—in this case—and the living and sacred is the ultimate resource that can absorb and redeem the failures of the worldly self. The crisis there in Kapur is not mitigated by the secular means of the modern world, and the recovery of his identity is provisional, embodied, often not completed in Kapur, by Ananda, the patriarchs of the Banwari Lals, Raman. Redemption passes through them but has been secularized and made uncertain; spirituality has been replaced by strategy. What the comparison finally shows is that Indian masculinity is being rewritten, as is Indian modernity as a whole, and that while Indian heroes can still lose their masculinity and find it again, Kapur's men can only, painfully, try to rebuild their masculinity.

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Invisible Chains: From Slavery to Patriarchy in Selected Women's Writings

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Abstract— *Even though legal slavery was outlawed in the nineteenth century, its ideological underpinnings are still present in modern dominance structures. The shift from physical enslavement to psychological, cultural, and social forms of control shows that oppression has only taken on new forms rather than vanishing. Through a comparison of Toni Morrison's Beloved, Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things, Nadine Gordimer's July's People, and Harriet Jacobs's Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, this essay explores the similarities between historical slavery and contemporary patriarchal oppression. The study explores how power structures govern women's bodies, identities, sexuality, labor, and social roles in various cultural and historical contexts, drawing on Simone de Beauvoir's idea of women as the "Other." The study makes the case that patriarchy acts as a modern-day version of slavery by establishing covert control mechanisms that limit women's agency and autonomy. Roy and Gordimer show how gender discrimination, caste hierarchies, racial inequality, and cultural constraints continue to subjugate women in postcolonial societies, while Jacobs and Morrison highlight the harsh realities and psychological legacy of racial slavery. The study uses a comparative literary analysis to show how institutionalized gender norms, economic dependence, and social conditioning create dominance relationships that mimic the logic of slavery. In addition, women are portrayed in the chosen texts as active agents of resistance who fight for self-definition and oppose oppressive systems. This essay illustrates how patriarchal power endures across national and cultural borders by drawing connections between South African, Indian, and African American literary traditions. It argues that even though oppressive practices have evolved, the ways in which women are disadvantaged still bear the scars of slavery. In the end, the article suggests that modern patriarchy functions as a system of invisible chains that upholds inequality while hiding its coercive nature behind social and cultural conventions.*

Keywords— ***Patriarchy, Slavery, Otherness, Feminism, Gender Oppression, African American Literature, Indian Literature, South African Literature, Simone de Beauvoir, Resistance.***

I. INTRODUCTION

Slavery is one of the most cruel systems in human history. For many centuries, enslaved people were denied freedom, dignity, and basic human rights. They were forced to work without pay and were treated as property. Although slavery was legally abolished in many countries during the nineteenth century, its effects did not completely disappear. Instead, many forms of oppression continued through social, cultural, economic, and political systems. Women, in particular, still face discrimination and restrictions that reflect the same unequal power relations found in slavery. Therefore, the legacy of slavery remains important in discussions of gender equality and social justice.

The experiences of enslaved women show how race and gender oppression worked together. Unlike enslaved men, women also suffered from sexual exploitation, control over

their bodies, and separation from their families. Harriet Jacobs's Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl and Toni Morrison's Beloved clearly portray these experiences. These works show that slavery was not only about forced labour but also about controlling women's identity, motherhood, and freedom.

Even though legal slavery has ended, many of its ideas still exist in modern society. Patriarchy, gender discrimination, economic dependence, and cultural traditions continue to limit women's freedom. These systems often work through social expectations rather than physical force. Women are expected to follow traditional roles in the family and society, creating what can be called "invisible chains" that quietly restrict their independence.

A useful theory for understanding this situation is Simone de Beauvoir's concept of Otherness in The Second Sex. Beauvoir explains that society treats men as the standard while women are seen as secondary or dependent. She also argues that gender roles are created by society rather than biology. Her theory helps explain how patriarchal societies continue to maintain women's unequal position and how modern gender oppression is connected to the history of slavery.

Many women writers from African American, Indian, and South African literature have explored themes of oppression, identity, and resistance. Although their historical and cultural backgrounds differ, their works highlight women's struggles against systems based on race, caste, class, and gender. These literary works expose hidden forms of oppression and encourage social change.

Previous studies have discussed slavery, feminism, and patriarchy separately. Research on Harriet Jacobs and Toni Morrison mainly focuses on slavery and racial oppression, while studies on Arundhati Roy and Nadine Gordimer often examine postcolonialism and gender inequality. However, very few studies compare these writers to show how modern patriarchy continues the logic of slavery across different cultures. This research aims to fill that gap.

The study uses a qualitative and comparative approach based on feminist literary criticism, especially Simone de Beauvoir's theory of Otherness. It analyzes Harriet Jacobs's Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Toni Morrison's Beloved, Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things, and Nadine Gordimer's July's People. These novels were selected because they represent different cultures while addressing common issues such as gender inequality, social control, racial discrimination, and resistance.

The main objective of this study is to examine how slavery, patriarchy, race, caste, and social conditioning work together to limit women's freedom and identity. It focuses on themes such as bodily control, motherhood, sexuality, economic dependence, cultural restrictions, and resistance.

The study argues that although physical slavery has ended, its ideas continue through patriarchal systems that control women's bodies, labour, sexuality, and identity. By comparing African American, Indian, and South African literary texts, this research shows that patriarchy acts as a modern form of invisible slavery. At the same time, these works also highlight women's courage, resistance, and the power of literature to challenge oppression and inspire social change.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between slavery, patriarchy, and women's oppression has been widely discussed in feminist and literary studies. Many scholars have examined how race, gender, class, and culture work together to limit women's freedom and identity. However, most studies focus on a single author or literary tradition instead of comparing different cultures to show how the ideas of slavery continue in modern patriarchal society.

Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex is one of the most important works in feminist theory. She explains that women have traditionally been treated as the "Other" and seen as inferior to men (Beauvoir 6). According to Beauvoir, gender roles are created by society rather than by nature. Her theory of Otherness helps explain why women continue to face inequality in both the past and the present.

Black feminist scholars have further developed these ideas by showing that race, gender, and class are closely connected. bell hooks argues that women's oppression cannot be understood without considering the effects of race and class (hooks 15). Similarly, Patricia Hill Collins explains that Black women's experiences are shaped by the combined effects of race, gender, and class, and that their knowledge comes from their lived experiences (Collins 22). These ideas are especially useful for understanding African American literature and the lasting impact of slavery.

Many scholars have studied Harriet Jacobs's Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, focusing on slavery, motherhood, and sexual exploitation. They point out that Jacobs shows how enslaved women suffered differently because they faced both racial and gender oppression (Christian 54). Research on Toni Morrison's Beloved mainly explores trauma, memory, motherhood, and the lasting psychological effects of slavery (Christian 97).

In Indian literature, critics have examined Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things through the themes of caste, gender, and postcolonialism. Her novel shows how women are controlled by social traditions and patriarchal values.

Similarly, studies on Nadine Gordimer's July's People focus on apartheid, race, and changing power relations in South Africa. However, these studies usually discuss race and gender separately instead of connecting them to the larger system of oppression (Mohanty 68).

Although previous research has made valuable contributions to the study of slavery, feminism, and patriarchy, very few scholars have compared African American, Indian, and South African literature to show how modern patriarchy continues the logic of slavery. This study aims to fill that gap by examining how social conditioning, gender discrimination, economic dependence, and cultural restrictions continue to limit women's freedom. Through a comparative study of selected literary works, this research highlights the ongoing struggle for women's identity, equality, and independence.

III. SLAVERY, GENDER, AND THE FEMALE BODY

Slavery was not only a system of forced labour but also a system that controlled people's bodies and lives. Enslaved women suffered more than men because they faced both racial and gender oppression. Besides hard physical work, they were expected to serve their owners in domestic spaces and were often treated as objects. Their bodies were controlled for labour, reproduction, and exploitation, making their suffering different from that of enslaved men.

Harriet Jacobs's Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl clearly shows the difficulties faced by enslaved women. Through the character of Linda Brent, Jacobs explains how slavery took away women's control over their own bodies and choices. Linda is constantly harassed by her master, Dr. Flint, who tries to control her life and sexuality. Jacobs points out that slavery was especially cruel for women because they faced problems that male slaves did not experience (Jacobs 77). Her narrative highlights the gendered nature of slavery and the denial of women's bodily freedom.

Motherhood is another important theme in Jacobs's work. Enslaved mothers lived with the fear of losing their children through sale or punishment. Linda's struggle to protect her children becomes a form of resistance against slavery. Her love for her children gives her the strength to fight for freedom and challenge the system that tries to control her family.

Toni Morrison's Beloved also examines the relationship between slavery, gender, and the female body. Although the novel takes place after slavery, it shows that its painful effects continue through memory and trauma. Sethe carries both physical and emotional scars caused by slavery. The scars on her back symbolize the violence she suffered and the lasting emotional pain it left behind (Morrison 20).

Motherhood is central to Beloved. Sethe's decision to kill her daughter rather than let her return to slavery shows the terrible choices enslaved mothers were forced to make. Morrison uses this event to show how slavery destroyed families and took away women's freedom to make normal choices as mothers.

Both Jacobs and Morrison present slavery as a system that controlled women's bodies, sexuality, and family life. However, they also show that enslaved women were not helpless victims. Linda Brent resists through courage, determination, and her fight for freedom, while Sethe resists by refusing to let slavery decide her children's future. Their stories highlight women's strength and resilience in the face of oppression.

Overall, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl and Beloved reveal that slavery depended on controlling women's bodies and identities. Both writers show how race and patriarchy worked together to oppress women. Their works also help readers understand that many forms of control over women's bodies and choices still exist today, making these texts relevant to discussions of gender inequality in the modern world.

IV. PATRIARCHY AND SOCIAL CONDITIONING: WOMEN AS THE "OTHER"

Unlike slavery, which used physical force, patriarchy often controls women through social rules, cultural values, and traditional beliefs. These invisible forms of control influence how women see themselves and how society defines their roles. As a result, many women continue to face inequality even in societies that support equal rights. Understanding these hidden systems helps explain the link between slavery and modern gender oppression.

Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex provides an important framework for understanding this issue. She argues that women have always been defined in relation to men instead of being recognized as independent individuals. According to Beauvoir, men are treated as the standard, while women are seen as the "Other" (Beauvoir 6). This idea creates unequal power relations where men hold authority and women remain in subordinate positions. Beauvoir also explains that gender inequality is created by society rather than by nature.

One of Beauvoir's most famous statements is, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (283). This means that society teaches girls and boys to behave in different ways. Girls are often expected to be caring, obedient, and self-

sacrificing, while boys are encouraged to be confident and independent. These expectations become accepted as normal, even though they are socially created.

Social conditioning strengthens patriarchal power through family, education, religion, and cultural traditions. Women are often expected to put the needs of their families before their own goals. Their value is commonly judged by their roles as daughters, wives, and mothers rather than as independent individuals. Such expectations limit women's freedom and opportunities.

Patriarchy also controls women's bodies and personal choices. In many societies, women face strict social rules about marriage, dress, sexuality, and motherhood. These restrictions reduce women's independence and show how patriarchal systems continue to influence their lives.

Economic dependence is another important form of control. Although many women now have better access to education and employment, financial inequality still exists. Women who depend on others financially often have less power to make independent decisions. This strengthens unequal relationships within families and society.

Cultural traditions also help maintain gender inequality. Many customs are accepted as normal even when they discriminate against women. Women who question these traditions may face criticism or social rejection. As a result, many choose to follow these expectations instead of challenging them.

Beauvoir's concept of Otherness explains why these inequalities continue. When women are seen mainly in relation to men, they lose their individuality and freedom. In this way, patriarchy works like an invisible form of slavery because both systems limit people's choices and maintain unequal power.

Many feminist writers have challenged these ideas through literature. Their works expose gender discrimination and encourage women to fight for equality and self-respect. Literature helps readers recognize the hidden ways in which patriarchy controls women's lives.

Therefore, patriarchy can be seen as a modern system of invisible control. Instead of using physical force, it operates through social beliefs, traditions, and cultural expectations. Beauvoir's theory of Otherness helps us understand how women's inequality is created and maintained while also inspiring resistance and the struggle for equality.

V. INVISIBLE CHAINS IN POSTCOLONIAL CONTEXTS

The God of Small Things and July's People

Although slavery and colonial rule have officially ended, many forms of oppression still exist in postcolonial societies. These systems continue through social traditions, cultural beliefs, and unequal power structures. Women often experience discrimination because of gender, caste, race, and class. Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things and Nadine Gordimer's July's People show how these invisible forms of oppression continue to shape women's lives.

In The God of Small Things, Arundhati Roy explores the relationship between caste, gender, and social power in Indian society. The novel shows that women are not physically enslaved, but they are controlled by strict social rules. The character of Ammu is a clear example of this oppression. As a divorced woman, she is denied respect, independence, and the freedom to make her own choices. Her life is controlled by patriarchal values that decide where she can live, whom she can love, and how she should behave. This reflects Simone de Beauvoir's idea that women are treated as the "Other" in a male-dominated society (Beauvoir 6).

Roy also introduces the idea of the "Love Laws," which decide "who should be loved, and how. And how much" (Roy 33). These unwritten social rules strengthen caste and gender discrimination. Ammu's relationship with Velutha breaks these rules, and she is severely punished for challenging society. Roy shows that women are controlled not only by laws but also by social expectations and cultural traditions. As Beauvoir explains, women are often taught to accept these unequal roles as natural (Beauvoir 283).

Nadine Gordimer's July's People presents a similar picture in the South African context. Set during the period of apartheid, the novel explores the effects of race, class, gender, and political power. The character of Maureen Smales struggles to understand her identity as society changes. She begins to question the ideas of race, privilege, and authority that shaped her life. Through Maureen's experiences, Gordimer shows how social systems continue to influence women even when political conditions change.

Both Roy and Gordimer show that oppression is not limited to governments or laws. It also exists in family relationships, cultural traditions, and everyday social practices. Women who question these systems often face criticism, rejection, or punishment. As a result, true freedom becomes difficult to achieve even in societies that support equality.

The experiences of Ammu and Maureen can be compared with those of Linda Brent in Harriet Jacobs's Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl and Sethe in Toni Morrison's Beloved. While Jacobs and Morrison describe the physical and psychological effects of slavery, Roy and Gordimer

focus on the invisible forms of oppression found in modern society. In all four works, women struggle against systems that control their choices, identities, and relationships.

Through their portrayal of caste, race, gender, and social power, Roy and Gordimer support Beauvoir's theory of Otherness. Their novels show that women are often defined by society rather than by their own wishes and abilities. By exposing these hidden forms of control, both writers encourage readers to question patriarchal traditions and recognize the continuing struggle for women's equality.

Overall, The God of Small Things and July's People show that although slavery has ended, its ideas continue in new forms. Social traditions, cultural expectations, and unequal power structures act as invisible chains that limit women's freedom. These novels strengthen the argument that patriarchy remains a modern form of oppression, making them important texts for understanding gender inequality in contemporary society.

VI. RESISTANCE, AGENCY, AND THE BREAKING OF INVISIBLE CHAINS

Although the selected novels show different forms of oppression, they also highlight women's courage, strength, and ability to resist injustice. The female characters are not shown as helpless victims. Instead, they fight against the social and patriarchal systems that try to control their bodies, identities, and choices. Their resistance takes different forms, such as courage, self-respect, survival, and the desire for freedom.

In Harriet Jacobs's Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Linda Brent refuses to accept her master's complete control. She struggles to protect herself and her children and continues to fight for freedom. Her determination becomes an act of resistance against both slavery and gender oppression. Through Linda's story, Jacobs shows that enslaved women could challenge injustice even under difficult conditions.

Toni Morrison's Beloved presents resistance through memory and survival. Although Sethe suffers deeply because of slavery, she refuses to let it destroy her identity. Morrison shows that remembering the past is painful, but it also helps people reclaim their history and dignity. In this way, memory becomes a powerful form of resistance.

In The God of Small Things, Arundhati Roy presents resistance through Ammu's refusal to follow unfair social and caste rules. By choosing to live according to her own wishes, she challenges patriarchal traditions. Although she suffers because of her decisions, her actions expose the injustice of the social system and show the importance of questioning oppression.

Similarly, Nadine Gordimer's July's People explores resistance in a society affected by racial and gender inequality. As social conditions change, the characters begin to question old ideas about power, race, and privilege. Gordimer suggests that real change begins when people challenge both social systems and their own beliefs.

A common feature of all these novels is that the women refuse to remain silent. Through survival, memory, courage, and self-expression, they challenge the forces that try to control them. These works show that freedom is not only about legal rights but also about self-respect, identity, and personal choice.

The resistance shown in these texts breaks the "invisible chains" of patriarchy, racism, caste discrimination, and social conditioning. The novels prove that these systems are created by society and can be challenged and changed. Together, the works of Harriet Jacobs, Toni Morrison, Arundhati Roy, and Nadine Gordimer inspire hope for equality, justice, and women's empowerment.

VII. CONCLUSION

This study examined the connection between historical slavery and modern patriarchal oppression through the works of Harriet Jacobs, Toni Morrison, Arundhati Roy, and Nadine Gordimer. By comparing African American, Indian, and South African literature, the study shows that although legal slavery has ended, many systems of oppression still exist. Today, these forms of control continue through patriarchy, gender discrimination, social conditioning, cultural traditions, and economic dependence.

The analysis of Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl and Beloved shows that slavery controlled women's bodies, sexuality, motherhood, and identity. These novels reveal the deep physical, emotional, and psychological effects of slavery on women. Similarly, The God of Small Things and July's People show that women in postcolonial societies continue to face oppression through caste, race, and patriarchal traditions.

Simone de Beauvoir's theory of Otherness provides an important framework for this study. Her idea that women are treated as the "Other" explains how patriarchal societies continue to keep women in unequal positions (Beauvoir 6). The concept of "invisible chains" used in this study shows that modern oppression often works through social customs, cultural beliefs, and institutions rather than through physical force.

At the same time, all four novels present women as strong and courageous. Characters such as Linda Brent, Sethe, Ammu, and Maureen refuse to accept injustice without resistance. Through survival, memory, courage, and self-

respect, they challenge the systems that try to control their lives. Their stories show that true freedom comes not only from the end of legal oppression but also from equality, dignity, and the right to make independent choices.

In conclusion, this study argues that patriarchy is a modern form of invisible oppression that continues many of the ideas found in slavery. Although the methods have changed, the unequal power structures remain similar. By exposing these hidden forms of domination, the selected literary works encourage readers to question injustice and support the ongoing struggle for women's freedom, equality, and human dignity.

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The Metaphor of Desire: Eroticism, Pornography, and the Sanctity of Art in an Age of Sexual Materialism

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Abstract— *This paper examines the increasingly complex relationship between art, literature, pornography, and the commodification of sexuality in the contemporary cultural marketplace. It proposes that the twenty-first century may be understood as an emerging age of sexual materialism, in which sexual desire, representation, and the human body are increasingly transformed into commodities governed by systems of production, consumption, and exchange value. While both literature and pornography are products of labour and respond to market demand, the paper argues that their distinction cannot be determined solely by the presence or absence of sexual representation or by the degree of explicitness. Instead, it is located in the relationship between representation, meaning, and metaphor. Drawing upon Marxist theories of labour, commodity, use value, and exchange value, alongside literary and aesthetic theories of representation, form, the gaze, and artistic technique, the study examines the thresholds that regulate the production and reception of cultural commodities. It argues that the erotic in art is distinguished from pornography by its capacity to signify beyond the immediate sexual act. Through metaphor, sexuality may acquire psychological, philosophical, symbolic, aesthetic, and cultural meanings that exceed the demands of physical gratification. Pornography, by contrast, tends towards the collapse of metaphor, reducing the body and the sexual act to objects of immediate consumption. The paper further contends that the market, despite its capacity to commodify desire, remains constrained by consumer expectations. The consumer's refusal to accept a representation that fails to meet the perceived aesthetic or intellectual value of art establishes a threshold beyond which commodification becomes unsustainable. This threshold constitutes a potential safeguard for the autonomy and sanctity of art. The study therefore argues that although sexual materialism may increasingly influence cultural production, the continued operation of metaphor and the critical agency of the consumer preserve a distinction between erotic representation and pornography, thereby resisting the complete reduction of art to commodity and sustaining the possibility of art as a mode of meaning beyond immediate consumption.*

Keywords— ***Eroticism; Pornography; Metaphor; Sexual Materialism; Commodification of Art***

Introduction

Every historical epoch is shaped by an overarching ideological formation that influences its social institutions, cultural practices, and systems of representation. The sixteenth century, for instance, is frequently associated with the Age of Discovery, while the intellectual transformations of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries inaugurated the Age of Reason. In the contemporary moment, it may be argued that the twenty-first century is increasingly characterised by what might be termed an Age of Sexual Materialism—a period in which sexuality is not merely represented, discussed, or experienced, but is increasingly commodified, mediated, circulated, and consumed through the mechanisms of global capitalism and digital culture. The unprecedented availability of sexually explicit material, the

expansion of the digital marketplace, and the increasing commercialisation of the human body indicate the extent to which sexuality has become embedded within contemporary systems of production and consumption.

The visibility of this phenomenon is accompanied, paradoxically, by an equally significant culture of concealment. The so-called "Porngate Scandal" in the British Parliament represents one among numerous instances that reveal both the pervasive nature of pornography in contemporary society and the extent to which its consumption remains displaced, denied, or swept beneath the surface of public discourse. Such episodes are significant not merely as isolated scandals but as symptoms of a larger cultural condition in which the boundaries between private consumption, public morality, commercial enterprise, and artistic representation have become increasingly unstable. The central concern, therefore, is not simply to establish the prevalence of pornography but to examine the implications of the growing culture of sexual commodification for the production, reception, and valuation of art.

At the heart of this inquiry lies the distinction between the erotic in art and the vulgarity of pornography. This distinction cannot be adequately explained by the mere presence or absence of nudity, sexual desire, or bodily representation. Rather, the crucial difference lies in the operation of metaphor. Art transforms the body and the erotic impulse into symbolic, aesthetic, psychological, and cultural meanings that exceed their immediate material presence. The erotic is therefore not reducible to the explicit display of sexuality; it is mediated through suggestion, ambiguity, symbolism, and the capacity of representation to signify beyond itself. Pornography, by contrast, tends towards the reduction of the body to an immediately consumable object, in which representation is primarily subordinated to direct stimulation and exchange. The metaphor, in this sense, functions as the threshold between the erotic and the vulgar: it preserves the possibility of distance, interpretation, and transcendence, preventing the represented object from being exhausted by its immediate material or sexual function.

The question of art in an age of sexual materialism is consequently inseparable from the logic of the market. Within a capitalist system, commodities are produced in response to perceived demand, and their value is determined through a complex interaction between labour, utility, scarcity, exchange value, and consumer desire. The proliferation of sexual commodities, images, and representations may therefore be understood as a consequence of the market's ability to transform desire into a saleable product. Yet this process is not without limits. The consumer is not an infinitely malleable subject who can be compelled to accept every commodity or every form of representation placed before them. There remains a threshold of expectation beyond which the consumer may refuse to be pushed. It is precisely at this point of refusal that the dynamics of commodification encounter resistance.

This resistance is crucial to the preservation of the sanctity of art. The market may attempt to exploit desire by continually expanding the range of commodities available for consumption; however, exploitation is ultimately limited by the consumer's recognition that a particular product, experience, or representation no longer corresponds to its perceived value. When the perceived utility or symbolic significance of a commodity fails to justify its exchange value or price, the transaction is interrupted. Demand collapses, and production must consequently respond. In this sense, the consumer possesses a degree of agency within the very system that seeks to convert desire into profit. The recognition that the desired object does not warrant the price demanded constitutes a moment of resistance to the logic of commodification.

This principle has particular significance for the relationship between art and pornography. If the production of commodities is ultimately dependent upon demand, then the transformation of art into a purely consumable sexual commodity is contingent upon the willingness of its audience to accept that transformation. The central issue, therefore, is whether the consumer's expectations and aesthetic judgements can establish a limit beyond which the market cannot successfully commercialise artistic representation. The preservation of art's sanctity may consequently depend not only upon artistic intention or institutional regulation but also upon the critical consciousness of its consumers.

This paper argues that the distinction between the erotic in art and the vulgarity of pornography is fundamentally constituted by metaphor: while art transforms sexual representation into a field of symbolic and interpretative meaning, pornography tends to reduce the represented body to an immediately consumable commodity. It further contends that, although the contemporary age is increasingly characterised by the commodification of sexuality and may therefore be understood as an Age of Sexual Materialism, the market remains constrained by a threshold of consumer expectation and refusal. When consumers recognise that the exchange value demanded by a commodified representation exceeds its perceived utility, meaning, or aesthetic worth, the transaction is disrupted; this moment of refusal may, in turn, constitute a significant limit to the exploitation and commodification of art.

Literature, Pornography, and the Threshold of Representation

The preceding discussion has established that both artistic production and the production of sexually explicit material are shaped, at least in part, by the relationship between labour, demand, utility, and exchange value. The two objects under consideration in this study—literature and pornography—are therefore both products of human labour and both participate in systems of production and consumption. At certain points, however, their boundaries may become difficult to determine, particularly when literary or cinematic works incorporate sexually explicit representation. The possibility of such overlap makes it necessary to examine the criteria by which literature and pornography are distinguished from one another.

The existence and continued production of both literature and pornography may, in the broadest sense, be attributed to the presence of a market for each. Commodities are produced because there is a perceived demand for them, and the extent of production is influenced by the willingness of consumers to exchange value for the desired product. Nevertheless, demand alone does not fully determine the nature or value of the commodity produced. As argued earlier, consumers possess expectations and establish thresholds beyond which they may refuse to proceed. The production of literature and pornography must therefore be examined not only in relation to demand but also in relation to the aesthetic, cultural, and ideological expectations that regulate their reception.

To establish the parameters within which this argument operates, it is first necessary to define the two principal terms under consideration. The *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines literature as "writings that are valued as works of art," particularly fiction, drama, and poetry. *Dictionary.com*, meanwhile, identifies two relevant meanings of the noun *literature*: first, "the profession of a writer or author," and second, "literary work or production." These definitions are significant because they establish a relationship between the labour of the author and the literary product generated through that labour. The first definition foregrounds the producer and the labour invested in production; the second identifies the resulting work as the product of that labour.

Such a definition, however, remains insufficient for the purposes of the present study. Literature cannot be understood merely as writing produced by an author, since not every act of writing is automatically granted literary status. The term *literature* carries with it a set of expectations, conventions, aesthetic assumptions, and culturally determined criteria. These criteria may be consciously articulated by critics and institutions, but they are also frequently internalised by readers and operate unconsciously in the process of literary judgement. Literature, in other words, is subject to a series of thresholds: expectations regarding form, language, technique, narrative, characterisation, thematic complexity, and the relationship between expression and meaning.

This observation is consistent with the arguments of literary theorists who have emphasised the constructed and formal nature of literary discourse. Russian Formalists such as Viktor Shklovsky, in his essay "Art as Technique," foreground the importance of literary devices and the transformation of ordinary perception through artistic form. Similarly, structuralist approaches, such as those associated with Jonathan Culler, emphasise the conventions and systems of literary competence through which a text becomes recognisable as literature. Literature may therefore be understood as an artificial mode of writing that operates within, and frequently challenges, the conventions of a literary grammar. Its reception requires a form of literary competence, whether consciously acquired through education or unconsciously developed through cultural participation.

At a more fundamental, non-academic level, the operation of these thresholds may be observed in the responses of ordinary readers. Readers possess certain expectations of what literature should be, and works that transgress these expectations may be rejected, ridiculed, or denied literary status. The threshold is therefore not determined exclusively by literary institutions or critical authorities. It is also established through the interaction between the text and its consumers. The reader's response consequently becomes an important component in determining whether a work is accepted as literature, dismissed as popular fiction, or categorised as something else entirely.

Literature may thus be understood as a collaborative relationship between an idea and its expression. The two are not, however, necessarily equal in significance. A powerful idea may sustain a work despite technical limitations, while technical brilliance without intellectual, emotional, or imaginative substance may produce a work that is formally accomplished yet ultimately insubstantial. At the same time, the human desire to transform experience into aesthetically compelling form suggests that artistic production cannot be reduced to the communication of ideas alone. Human beings seek not merely to experience but also to represent, interpret, reshape, and aestheticise experience. The creative impulse therefore becomes simultaneously an intellectual, sensory, and cultural demand.

It is at this point that the distinction between literature, the erotic, and pornography becomes particularly significant. Literature may incorporate sexual representation without being reducible to it. The presence of sexual desire, the body, or explicit sexual experience does not automatically transform a literary work into pornography. Rather, the decisive question concerns the function of the sexual representation within the larger structure of the work. In literary and artistic representation, sexuality may operate symbolically, psychologically, philosophically, or metaphorically. The erotic, in this sense, exceeds the immediate gratification of desire.

The term *erotic* derives etymologically from *Eros*, the Greek god of love, and has traditionally been associated not merely with sexual desire but also with love, creativity, and the generative principle. Feminist debates concerning pornography have frequently attempted to distinguish between erotica and pornography on the basis of this difference. Erotica is often understood as representing sexuality within a context of mutuality, emotional connection, creativity, or human agency. Such a distinction, however, remains complex and historically unstable, since the boundaries between the erotic and the pornographic are culturally and ideologically determined.

Nevertheless, a significant distinction may be proposed. The erotic is not necessarily defined by the absence of explicit sexuality but by the presence of meanings that exceed sexuality's immediate material expression. It is here that metaphor becomes central to the present argument. The erotic preserves a distance between the represented act and the meaning generated by that act. Sexuality becomes a means through which the work explores mortality, desire, power, identity, love, repression, or transcendence. In pornography, by contrast, the sexual act tends to become the primary and often exclusive object of representation and consumption. The metaphor collapses, and the represented body is reduced to its immediate function as an object of visual or sexual consumption.

Andrew Marvell's “To His Coy Mistress” illustrates this distinction. The poem contains strikingly corporeal and even disturbing images of sexuality, decay, and bodily dissolution. Yet to interpret the poem merely as a plea for sexual gratification would be to overlook the larger philosophical argument that structures it. The poem's urgency arises from the awareness of human mortality and the irreversible passage of time. Sexual desire is therefore integrated into a broader meditation on mortality, temporality, and the necessity of living intensely within the limits of human existence. The erotic is consequently not an end in itself but a vehicle for the articulation of a larger idea.

The distinction between literature and pornography, therefore, cannot be established solely through the presence or absence of sexual content. Nor can it be determined exclusively by the degree of explicitness. A more useful distinction lies in the relationship between representation and meaning. Literature may represent sexuality, including explicit sexuality, while retaining a structure of metaphor, implication, symbolism, and interpretative possibility. Pornography, by contrast, tends towards the exhaustion of representation in the act itself. It offers the sexual act as the primary object of consumption, while narrative, character, symbolism, and metaphor remain secondary or instrumental.

This distinction is particularly important in the context of the present study because both literature and pornography are commodities produced through labour and circulated within markets. Their difference, therefore, does not lie in the fact that one is produced and the other is not, or that one responds to demand while the other does not. Both are shaped by systems of production and consumption. The question is rather what kind of demand they satisfy and what expectations they are required to meet. Literature is subject to a complex threshold of aesthetic and intellectual expectations; pornography, in its most reductive form, is subject to a more restricted demand for sexual stimulation. The central question that follows is whether the increasing commodification of sexuality threatens to erode the threshold that distinguishes artistic representation from mere sexual consumption—or whether the consumer's own expectations of art ultimately preserve that distinction.

CONCLUSIONS

The argument of this study is that the distinction between the erotic in art and the vulgarity of pornography is ultimately sustained by the operation of metaphor. Metaphor prevents representation from being exhausted by its immediate material content and enables the sexual to signify beyond itself. Through metaphor, the body may become a site of memory, desire, mortality, power, identity, transcendence, or resistance. The erotic, therefore, is not defined simply by the absence of explicitness but by the presence of meanings that exceed the physical act. Pornography, in its most reductive form, represents the collapse of this distance: the act becomes the object, the body becomes the commodity, and representation is reduced to immediate consumption.

The continued existence of a threshold of artistic expectation is consequently crucial to the preservation of art's autonomy. Even in an age increasingly characterised by sexual materialism, the consumer may refuse to accept a work in which sexual representation displaces the aesthetic,

intellectual, symbolic, and imaginative dimensions that constitute its value as art. In this sense, the market may commodify sexuality, but it cannot entirely determine the meaning or value of artistic representation. The final threshold remains the point at which the consumer recognises that the commodity being offered no longer satisfies the expectations associated with art.

This capacity for recognition may, in fact, constitute one of the essential qualities of being human. Human beings do not merely respond to stimuli; they interpret, distinguish, classify, evaluate, and assign meaning. The capacity to recognise that an image is more than an image, that a representation is not identical with the reality it represents, and that an act may signify beyond its immediate physical occurrence is fundamental to language, art, religion, philosophy, law, and culture itself. Metaphor is therefore not merely an artistic device but a manifestation of the human capacity to move beyond the literal and the immediate. The ability to perceive this distinction between the thing and its representation, between desire and its commodification, and between the erotic and the pornographic may thus be understood as a crucial form of cultural and intellectual discernment.

The preservation of this distinction is not merely an aesthetic concern. It has implications for the well-being of society and the continued vitality of civilisation. A culture that loses the ability to distinguish between representation and reality, between artistic transformation and mere consumption, risks reducing all human experience to its exchange value. When the body becomes only a commodity, desire only a market, and art only a product, the symbolic and imaginative structures through which societies understand themselves are impoverished. Civilisation depends not only upon the production and consumption of material goods but upon the capacity to create meanings that exceed material utility.

The challenge, therefore, is not to deny sexuality, suppress desire, or impose an inflexible morality upon artistic representation. Such attempts at prohibition may, paradoxically, intensify the fascination with the forbidden. The more significant challenge is to preserve the capacity for distinction. The erotic need not be denied in order to resist pornography, just as art need not reject the body in order to resist its commodification. What must be preserved is the ability to recognise when sexuality functions as a means of exploring a larger human truth and when it has become an end in itself, reduced to a consumable spectacle.

Ultimately, the threshold that protects the sanctity of art is neither entirely imposed by law nor guaranteed by morality. It resides in the continued exercise of human judgement. The consumer, reader, viewer, artist, and critic each participate in determining whether a representation remains capable of generating meaning or has been exhausted by consumption. The market may continually attempt to extend the boundaries of what can be commodified; however, its power remains limited by the moment at which human beings refuse to accept the reduction of meaning to price.

The future of art in an age of sexual materialism will therefore depend, in part, upon the preservation of this capacity to distinguish. As long as human beings retain the ability to recognise metaphor, to value suggestion over mere exposure, to perceive the symbolic within the material, and to demand that art offer more than immediate gratification, the complete commodification of artistic representation will remain impossible. The sanctity of art survives not because art is untouched by the market, but because human beings continue to expect from it something that the market, by its very nature, cannot entirely supply: meaning beyond consumption, imagination beyond utility, and the possibility of transcendence beyond the material.

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English Language Proficiency among Secondary School Students in Adoni Division of Andhra Pradesh: An Empirical Study using ELPT-MKDR

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Abstract— *English language proficiency plays a pivotal role in determining academic success and enhancing employability prospects, particularly in multilingual societies such as India. This study examines the English language proficiency levels of secondary school students in the Adoni Division of Andhra Pradesh using the standardized English Language Proficiency Test (ELPT-MKDR). Adopting a descriptive survey design, the study utilized both descriptive and inferential statistical methods to analyze the data. A sample of 300 students was selected through stratified random sampling from government and private schools located in both rural and urban areas. The ELPT-MKDR, comprising 56 items distributed across three sections and fourteen content domains, was administered under standardized testing conditions. Data analysis involved the computation of mean scores, standard deviations, independent samples t-tests, and correlation coefficients. The results revealed that most students demonstrated a moderate level of English language proficiency. Significant differences were observed with respect to school location (rural–urban) and school management (government–private). Furthermore, the findings indicate a disparity between students' grammatical competence and their ability to use English effectively in communicative contexts. The study underscores the need for pedagogical interventions and curriculum reforms aimed at strengthening communicative language competence and improving overall English language proficiency among secondary school learners.*



Keywords— ***English Language Proficiency, ELPT-MKDR, Secondary School Students, Andhra Pradesh, Language Assessment, Communicative Competence.***

I. INTRODUCTION

English has attained the status of a global language, serving as a primary medium of communication, education, scientific inquiry, and technological innovation. In the Indian context, English functions not only as a second language but also as a crucial instrument for academic advancement, professional development, and access to global opportunities. The growing significance of English proficiency has been reinforced by the demands of globalization and the expansion of knowledge-driven economies, where effective communication skills are increasingly valued.

Despite the widespread recognition of its importance, the development of English language proficiency among school students continues to pose significant challenges. Evidence from the English Language Proficiency Test (ELPT) manual indicates that a considerable number of students experience difficulties in using English effectively for communication, even after several years of formal instruction. This concern is particularly evident in rural and semi-urban regions, where opportunities for meaningful exposure to English beyond the classroom remain limited.

The Adoni Division of Andhra Pradesh presents a representative educational context in which the majority of students come from vernacular-language backgrounds. In such settings, English language learning is frequently confined to textbook-oriented teaching practices, with comparatively little emphasis on communicative application and real-life language use. Consequently, there is a need for systematic assessment of students' English language proficiency through standardized and reliable measurement tools. Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to evaluate the English language proficiency of secondary school students using the English Language Proficiency Test (ELPT-MKDR) and to examine the influence of selected demographic and institutional variables on language learning outcomes.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Research in the field of second language acquisition underscores the significance of developing both linguistic competence and communicative competence for effective language use. While linguistic competence involves mastery of grammatical structures, vocabulary, and language conventions, communicative competence emphasizes the ability to use language appropriately and effectively in real-life contexts. However, English language teaching in India has traditionally relied on grammar-oriented and translation-based instructional methods, which often contribute to the development of theoretical knowledge rather than practical communication skills.

Scholarly literature on language assessment advocates a comprehensive approach to proficiency evaluation that encompasses multiple dimensions of language ability, including vocabulary knowledge, grammatical accuracy, reading comprehension, and language application skills. In this regard, the English Language Proficiency Test (ELPT) adopts a multidimensional assessment framework by integrating diverse content domains and varied item formats designed to measure different aspects of language proficiency.

Previous empirical studies have identified several factors that influence English language proficiency, including socio-economic background, educational environment, and opportunities for exposure to the target language. Research consistently demonstrates that students studying in urban settings and private educational institutions generally exhibit higher levels of proficiency, largely due to better access to educational resources, enriched learning environments, and greater opportunities for communicative practice. Building upon these findings, the present study employs a standardized assessment instrument to examine English language proficiency among secondary school students and investigates variations in proficiency across selected demographic and institutional variables.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study was undertaken with the following objectives:

1. To assess the level of English language proficiency among secondary school students.
2. To evaluate students' performance across various linguistic domains of English language proficiency.
3. To examine differences in English language proficiency between students from rural and urban backgrounds.
4. To compare the proficiency levels of students studying in government and private schools.
5. To investigate the relationship between students' exposure to English and their overall language proficiency.

IV. HYPOTHESES

The study was guided by the following null hypotheses:

H_{01}: There is no statistically significant difference in English language proficiency between rural and urban secondary school students.

H_{02}: There is no statistically significant difference in English language proficiency between students enrolled in government schools and those enrolled in private schools.

H_{03}: There is no statistically significant relationship between exposure to English and English language proficiency among secondary school students.

V. METHODOLOGY

The present investigation adopted a descriptive survey design to assess the existing level of English language proficiency among secondary school students. The descriptive approach was considered appropriate for obtaining a comprehensive understanding of students' proficiency levels and for examining variations associated with selected demographic and institutional factors.

Sample

The study sample comprised 300 secondary school students selected through the stratified random sampling technique. Stratification was employed to ensure adequate representation of students from different educational and geographical backgrounds. Accordingly, the sample

included students from both rural and urban areas as well as from government and private schools, thereby facilitating meaningful comparative analysis across these groups.

Research Tool

Data for the study were collected using the English Language Proficiency Test (ELPT-MKDR), a standardized instrument designed to assess various dimensions of English language proficiency. The test consists of 56 items organized into three sections: multiple-choice questions, fill-in-the-blank items, and identification-based tasks. It covers fourteen linguistic domains, including nouns, pronouns, tenses, sentence structure, translation, voice, and direct and indirect speech. Each content area is assigned equal weightage, ensuring a balanced assessment of students' language competencies across different aspects of English usage.

Administration of the Test

The ELPT-MKDR was administered to the participants in their respective classroom settings under standardized testing conditions. Prior to the administration of the test, students were provided with clear instructions regarding the procedure and requirements of the assessment. In accordance with the guidelines specified in the test manual, participants were allotted approximately 30 minutes to complete all test items.

Scoring Procedure

The scoring of the ELPT-MKDR was carried out according to the procedures prescribed in the test manual. Each correct response was awarded one mark, whereas incorrect responses received a score of zero. Consequently, the maximum obtainable score on the test was 56. To facilitate interpretation and comparison of performance levels, the obtained raw scores were subsequently transformed into standardized z-scores using the normative data provided in the ELPT manual.

VI. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The data collected for the study were systematically analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were employed to address the objectives of the study and to test the formulated hypotheses. Descriptive measures such as mean and standard deviation were used to determine the overall level of English language proficiency among the participants, while inferential statistics, including independent samples t-tests and correlation analysis, were utilized to examine group differences and relationships among variables.

Results and Data Analysis

The findings of the study are presented and interpreted in accordance with the research objectives and hypotheses. Statistical results are reported through appropriate tables and graphical representations to facilitate clear understanding and interpretation of the data. The analysis begins with an examination of the overall performance of the students based on descriptive statistical measures. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of ELPT Scores

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
ELPT Score	300	31.42	9.85	10	54

The mean score indicates moderate proficiency with considerable variation among students.

The distribution of students across proficiency levels is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of Proficiency Levels

Level	Frequency	Percentage
Extremely High	12	4%
High	30	10%
Above Average	54	18%
Average	120	40%
Below Average	48	16%
Low	27	9%
Extremely Low	9	3%

The majority of students fall under the average category, indicating moderate proficiency levels.

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of proficiency levels among students.

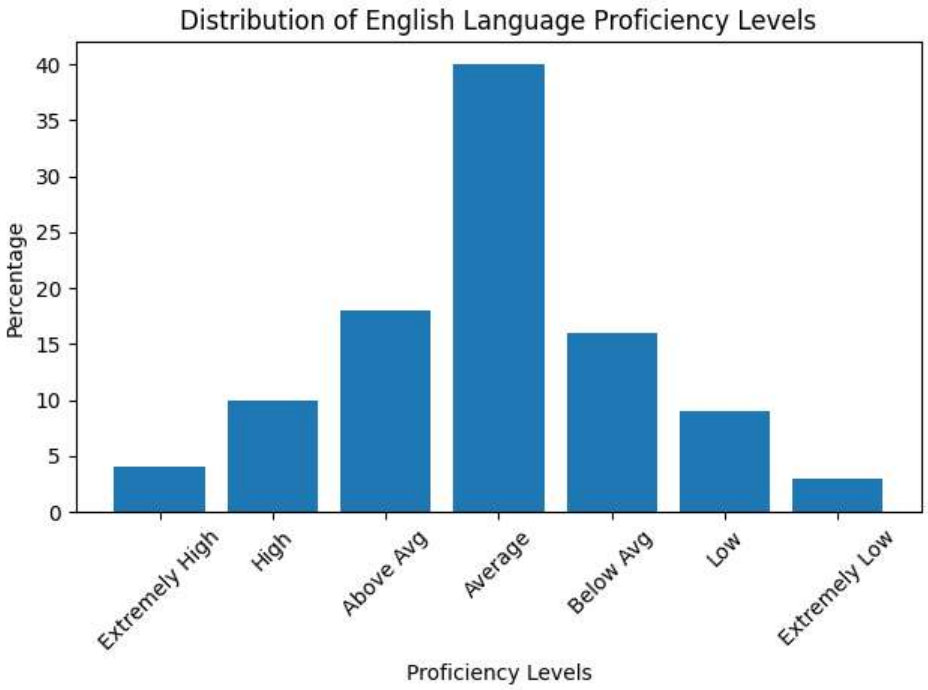


Fig.1. Distribution of Proficiency Levels

Figure 2 presents the proportional composition of proficiency levels.

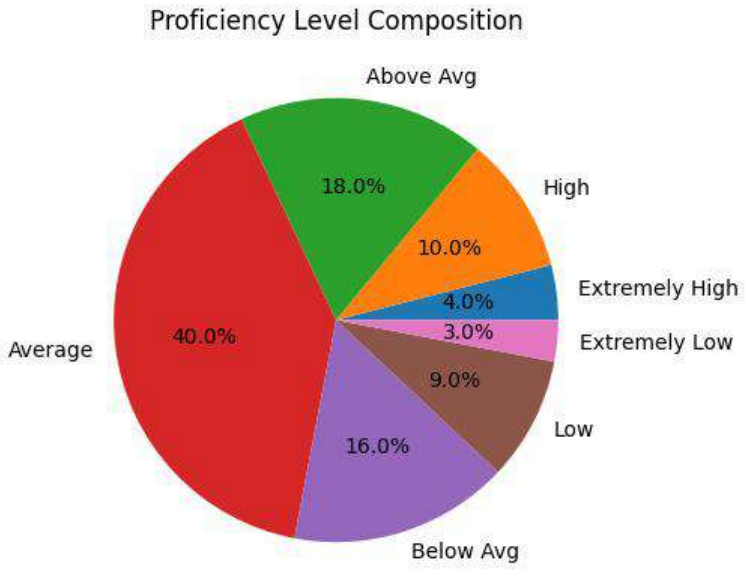


Fig.2. Proficiency Level Composition

Figure 3 shows the comparison between rural and urban students.

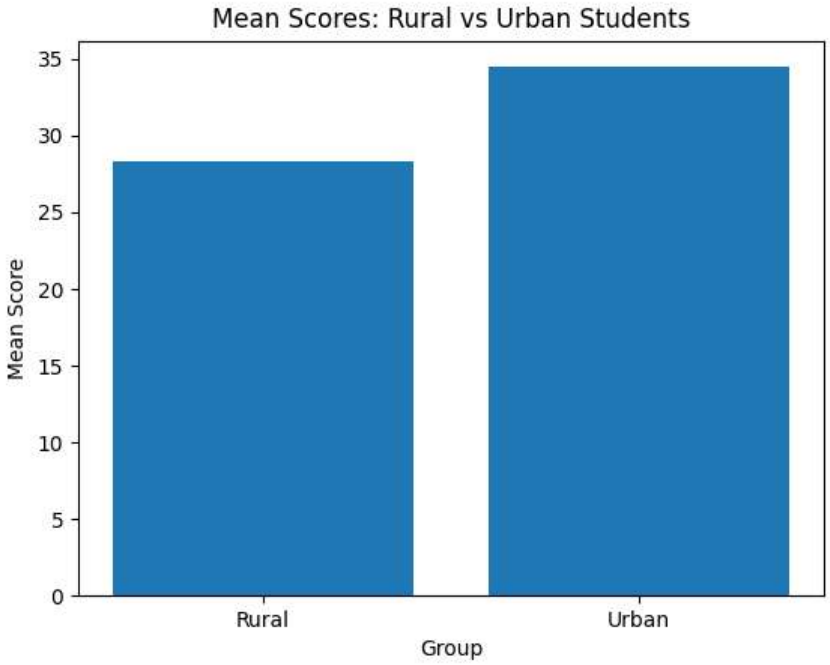


Fig.3. Rural vs Urban Mean Scores

Figure 4 indicates the difference between government and private school students.

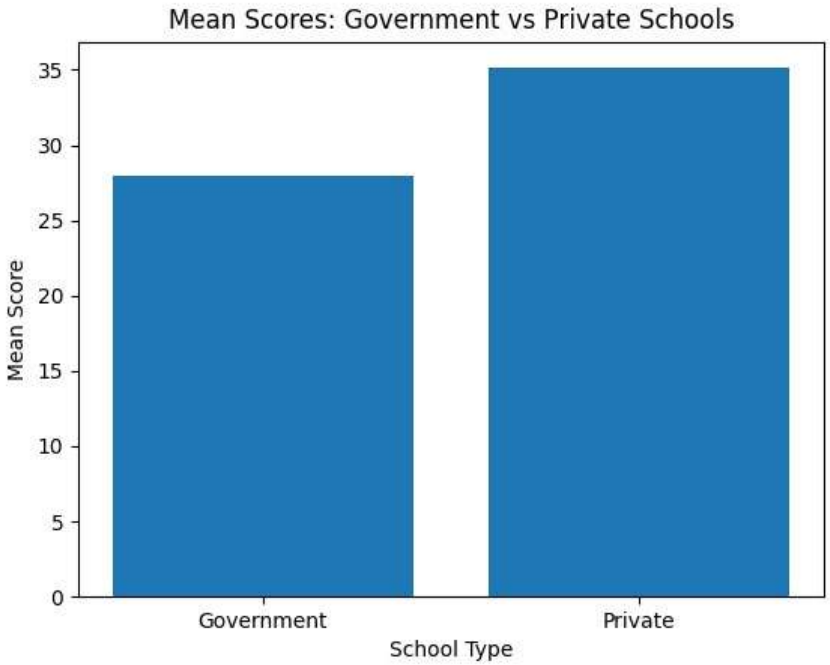


Fig.4. Government vs Private School Comparison

Descriptive Statistics

An analysis of the descriptive statistics revealed that the students obtained a mean score of 31.42, with a standard deviation of 9.85. The mean score indicates a moderate level of overall English language proficiency among the participants, while the relatively high standard deviation reflects substantial variability in performance across the sample.

Proficiency Levels

Students' proficiency levels were classified based on standardized z-scores. The analysis indicated that the majority of students were concentrated within the average proficiency category. Comparatively smaller proportions of students were classified under the high and extremely high proficiency levels. At the same time, a notable segment of the sample was distributed across the below-average and low proficiency categories, highlighting disparities in English language competence among the participants.

Comparison Between Rural and Urban Students

A comparative analysis of English language proficiency across geographical locations revealed that urban students achieved higher mean scores than their rural counterparts. The results of the independent samples t-test indicated that the observed difference was statistically significant at the 0.01 level of significance ($p < 0.01$). Consequently, the null hypothesis stating that no significant difference exists between rural and urban students was rejected.

Comparison Between Government and Private School Students

The analysis further demonstrated that students enrolled in private schools outperformed those studying in government schools in terms of English language proficiency. The difference in mean scores was found to be statistically significant, suggesting that institutional factors, including the quality of instructional practices, availability of learning resources, and opportunities for language exposure, may contribute to variations in proficiency levels.

Correlation Analysis

The results of the correlation analysis revealed a positive and statistically meaningful relationship between English language exposure and proficiency ($r = 0.62$). This finding indicates that increased exposure to English is associated with higher levels of language proficiency, thereby emphasizing the importance of providing students with greater opportunities for meaningful interaction and engagement with the language.

VII. DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study suggest that although students possess a foundational understanding of English grammar, their ability to utilize this knowledge effectively in authentic communicative situations remains limited. This discrepancy between linguistic knowledge and practical language use represents a significant challenge in contemporary language education. The multidimensional structure of the ELPT-MKDR, which places equal emphasis on both knowledge-based and application-oriented components, effectively highlights this gap. The analysis revealed that students generally performed better on objective and recognition-based items, whereas tasks requiring sentence construction, translation, and contextual language application posed greater difficulty. Furthermore, the statistically significant differences observed between rural and urban students, as well as between government and private school students, underscore the influence of environmental, socio-educational, and institutional factors on language learning outcomes. These findings reinforce the importance of providing learners with enriched language-learning environments and greater opportunities for meaningful language practice.

VIII. MAJOR FINDINGS

The major findings of the study are summarized as follows:

1. The majority of secondary school students demonstrated an average level of English language proficiency.
2. Students exhibited stronger performance in grammar-based components than in tasks requiring practical language application.
3. Urban students achieved significantly higher proficiency scores than rural students.
4. Students enrolled in private schools outperformed their counterparts in government schools.
5. Exposure to English was found to have a significant positive relationship with language proficiency.

IX. EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the study have important implications for English language teaching and learning. The results highlight the necessity of adopting communicative and learner-centered instructional approaches that promote active language use rather than mere acquisition of grammatical knowledge. Educational institutions should incorporate practical language-learning activities such as group discussions, role plays, presentations, and interactive tasks to strengthen students' communicative competence. Furthermore, continuous professional development programs should be organized to equip teachers with contemporary pedagogical strategies and innovative language-teaching techniques. The study also emphasizes the importance of increasing students' exposure to English through media resources, digital platforms, reading materials, and authentic communicative interactions, thereby facilitating more effective language acquisition.

X. CONCLUSION

The present study concludes that the overall level of English language proficiency among secondary school students in the Adoni Division of Andhra Pradesh is moderate, with notable variations across different demographic and institutional groups. The findings demonstrate the effectiveness of the ELPT-MKDR as a comprehensive and reliable instrument for assessing English language proficiency and identifying specific areas of learning difficulty. The study further highlights the need to move beyond traditional grammar-oriented instructional practices and adopt interactive, communicative, and application-based approaches to language teaching. Enhancing English language proficiency among learners requires coordinated efforts from educators, policymakers, educational institutions, and students to create supportive learning environments that foster both linguistic competence and communicative effectiveness.

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Mirroring the Offline World: An Integrated Conceptual Framework of Cybercrime Perpetration and Victimization in Online Media

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Abstract— *Cybercrime does not emerge in isolation from society; rather, it reflects and replicates existing social, economic, and cultural conditions of the physical world within online environments (Wall, 2007). While cyberspace alters the scale, speed, and anonymity of offenses, the underlying human motivations—such as financial gain, power, revenge, and exploitation—remain largely unchanged (Grabosky, 2001). In India, this menace has escalated dramatically, transitioning from minor web defacements and identity thefts during the early e-commerce and UPI boom into a massive multi-billion-dollar threat dominated by complex cross-border financial frauds, aggressive "digital arrest" scams, and AI-driven extortion (NCRB, 2023). Despite diligent law enforcement interventions, the staggering financial toll and skyrocketing incident rates underscore the urgent need for a deeper, more structured understanding of digital offenses, particularly within highly vulnerable and gendered sectors of cyber abuse, such as cyberbullying, cyberstalking, and online harassment (Devika et al., 2019; IT for Change, 2019). Despite a growing body of literature, contemporary cybercrime research remains highly fragmented, frequently analyzing perpetrator motivations or victim vulnerabilities in isolation (Holt & Bossler, 2014). This academic separation obscures the dynamic, interactive process through which cybercrimes actually occur. Addressing this critical gap, this paper develops a comprehensive, integrated conceptual framework that synthesizes established criminological, sociological, and communication theories to explain cybercrime as a fluid interplay between offenders, targets, and technological contexts. Crucially, the framework positions the online media environment as a vital mediating and contextual variable. It explores how platform-specific structural features, such as user anonymity, rapid accessibility, algorithmic amplification, and weak architectural guardianship, facilitate harmful intersections between motivated offenders and suitable targets (Yar, 2005). By bridging these disparate dimensions, the proposed model maps the convergence of perpetrator traits and victim lifestyles into four distinct digital outcomes: financial loss, severe psychological harm, reputational damage, and systemic privacy violations. Ultimately, this paper provides a robust theoretical foundation to guide future empirical research, while offering actionable, evidence-based insights for policymakers, educational curricula, and platform providers to design user-centered safety features and proactive risk-reduction strategies.*

Keywords— ***Cybercrime, Integrated Theoretical Framework, Perpetrator Motivations, Victim Vulnerability, Routine Activity Theory, Online Media Platforms, Digital Literacy, Cyber Harassment, Financial Fraud, India.***

I. INTRODUCTION

It is often observed that patterns of crime present in the physical world are replicated within online environments (Wall, 2007). Cybercrime does not emerge in isolation from society; rather, it reflects existing social, economic, and cultural conditions. Countries with higher levels of fraud, corruption, harassment, organized crime, or financial offences frequently experience similar forms of misconduct in cyberspace (Grabosky, 2001). The internet provides new tools and opportunities for offenders, but the underlying motivations, such as financial gain, power, revenge, or exploitation remain largely unchanged. Consequently, online fraud mirrors traditional fraud, cyber stalking resembles offline harassment, and digital theft parallels conventional property crimes (Jaishankar, 2011). While cyberspace alters the scale, speed, and anonymity with which offences can be committed, it does not fundamentally transform the social factors that contribute to criminal behaviour. Therefore, online crime should be understood not merely as a technological problem but as an extension of broader societal patterns, inequalities, and criminal practices that already exist in the offline world.

India has also felt the brunt of this menace after a certain point of time. Cybercrime in India has surged dramatically and evolved in complexity, growing from a few lakh incidents a decade ago into a massive multi-billion-dollar threat today (NCRB, 2023). The landscape is currently dominated by online financial frauds, aggressive "digital arrest" scams, and AI-driven extortion, primarily operated by cross-border syndicates rather than isolated hackers (I4C, 2024). From basic defacements and identity thefts and ecommerce and upi boom to the dark web and cyber crime as a service, the current evolution has been equally staggering as the IT boom that started in India in 1990s. The current statistics suggest that India is facing severe financial losses amounting to over ₹22,000 crore despite diligent police interventions (MHA / I4C, 2024). This paper works into the gendered sector of cyber crimes and seeks to find a common theoretical framework for understanding the psyche of perpetrators and victims (Devika et al., 2019; Gurumurthy et al., 2019).

The most common methods of cyber abuse have been reported as cyber bullying, identity theft, phishing, online fraud, and harassment (Holt & Bossler, 2014). Understanding both cybercrime perpetrators and victims is essential for developing a comprehensive explanation of cybercrime in online environments. Much of the existing literature tends to focus either on offender motivations or victim vulnerabilities in isolation. However, cybercrime is a dynamic process that involves interactions between offenders, targets, and technological contexts (Yar, 2005). Examining perpetrators helps researchers identify the social, psychological, and economic factors that motivate cybercriminal behavior, including anonymity, financial incentives, and peer influence (Akers, 1998; Rogers, 2006). At the same time, studying victims provides insight into the characteristics, online behaviors, and situational factors that increase susceptibility to cyberattacks (Hindelang et al., 1978). Integrating both perspectives enables a more holistic understanding of how cybercrimes occur and persist across digital platforms. Such an approach also contributes to the development of more effective prevention strategies, cyber security policies, and educational interventions aimed at reducing both offending and victimization. Therefore, a theoretical framework that incorporates the experiences and behaviors of both perpetrators and victims offers a stronger foundation for cybercrime research and policy formulation.

Despite the growing body of cybercrime research, much of the existing literature examines either offender motivations or victim vulnerabilities in isolation. Consequently, there remains a limited understanding of how these dimensions interact within online media environments. The absence of an integrated theoretical framework restricts the ability to explain cybercrime as a dynamic process shaped by the interplay of perpetrator characteristics, victim behaviors, and platform-specific factors. Addressing this gap is essential for developing a more comprehensive understanding of cybercrime in digital spaces. The purpose of this paper is to develop an integrated conceptual framework for understanding cybercrime in online media by synthesizing theories related to offender behavior, victimization, and digital environments. Specifically, the paper seeks to examine how perpetrator motivations, victim vulnerabilities, and the structural characteristics of online platforms interact to create opportunities for cybercrime. By bridging fragmented theoretical perspectives, the proposed framework aims to provide a comprehensive foundation for future research, policy development, and cybercrime prevention strategies.

Research Questions

1. To examine the major theoretical perspectives that explain cybercrime perpetration in online media environments.
2. To analyze the key theories of cybercrime victimization and identify factors that increase vulnerability to online victimization.
3. To explore the relationship between offender motivations, victim characteristics, and the structural features of online media platforms.
4. To synthesize existing criminological, sociological, and communication theories into an

integrated conceptual framework for understanding cybercrime.

5. To propose a theoretical model that can guide future empirical research and inform cybercrime prevention strategies.

II. METHODOLOGY

This paper employs a qualitative conceptual synthesis (Jabareen, 2009) to develop an integrated theoretical framework for understanding cybercrime. Rather than gathering primary empirical data, the methodology involves systematically reviewing and intersecting fragmented criminological, sociological, and communication theories. It separates these theories into independent variables (perpetrator motivations like financial gain or revenge) and dependent variables (victim characteristics and outcomes). By utilizing Routine Activity Theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979) as an analytical bridge, the paper models how the structural features of online environments—such as anonymity, algorithmic amplification, and weak architectural guardianship—act as critical mediating factors (Yar, 2005). This synthesis results in a unified conceptual model designed to guide future empirical testing and evidence-based policymaking.

III. ANALYSIS

Perpetrators' POV (Independent Variables)

From the perpetrators' point of view, several theoretical perspectives have been employed to explain cybercrime perpetration in online media. **Routine Activity Theory** (Cohen & Felson, 1979) suggests that cybercrime occurs when motivated offenders encounter suitable targets in the absence of effective guardianship, such as cybersecurity measures or platform oversight. **Social Learning Theory** (Bandura, 1977; Akers, 1998) explains cybercriminal behavior as a learned process acquired through observation, interaction, and reinforcement within online communities and networks. **General Strain Theory** (Agnew, 1992) posits that experiences of stress, frustration, or perceived injustice may motivate individuals to engage in cyber offending as a coping mechanism. **Rational Choice Theory** (Cornish & Clarke, 1986) further emphasizes that offenders make calculated decisions by evaluating the potential rewards and risks associated with cybercrime. Collectively, these theories highlight the psychological, social, and situational factors that contribute to cybercriminal behavior and provide a foundation for an integrated theoretical framework.

The proposed framework identifies online platform characteristics, lack of guardianship/security, and digital literacy levels as key mediating factors that influence the relationship between cybercrime perpetrators and victims. Online platform characteristics, including anonymity, accessibility, algorithmic visibility, and communication features, can create opportunities that facilitate cybercriminal activities and increase victim exposure to risk (marwick & boyd, 2011). Similarly, the absence of effective guardianship mechanisms, such as cybersecurity safeguards, content moderation, privacy protections, and user monitoring, reduces barriers to offending and enhances the likelihood of victimization (Yar, 2005). Digital literacy levels further mediate cybercrime outcomes by shaping individuals' ability to recognize threats, adopt protective behaviors, and respond effectively to online risks (Hargittai, 2002). Consequently, these mediating factors determine how offender motivations and victim vulnerabilities interact within online media environments, ultimately influencing the occurrence and severity of cybercrime incidents.

Victim's Perspective

From the perspective of a victim, the literature suggests that several theoretical perspectives have been used to explain cybercrime victimization in online media environments. **Lifestyle Exposure Theory** (Hindelang et al., 1978) suggests that individuals who engage in high-risk online activities, such as extensive social media use or interactions with unknown users, face greater risks of victimization. **Victim Precipitation Theory** (Wolfgang, 1958; Amir, 1971) posits that certain behaviors, although often unintentional, may increase an individual's vulnerability to cybercrime. **Routine Activity Theory** (Cohen & Felson, 1979) explains victimization as a consequence of exposure to motivated offenders in the absence of effective guardianship, such as cybersecurity awareness or protective technologies. The **Online Disinhibition Effect** (Suler, 2004) further highlights how anonymity and reduced social constraints in digital environments can facilitate harmful interactions between offenders and victims. Collectively, these theories emphasize the role of individual behavior, online routines, and digital environments in shaping cybercrime victimization.

The online media environment constitutes a critical contextual factor within the proposed conceptual framework, shaping interactions between cybercrime perpetrators and victims:

- **Anonymity:** Enables users to conceal their identities, reducing accountability and increasing opportunities for cybercriminal activities (Suler, 2004).
- **Accessibility:** Refers to the ease with which individuals can connect, communicate, and access information across digital platforms, thereby

expanding both opportunities for offending and exposure to victimization (Wall, 2007).

- **Weak Guardianship:** Encompasses inadequate cybersecurity measures, limited platform monitoring, and insufficient regulatory oversight, which diminish barriers to cybercrime (Yar, 2005).
- **Platform Features:** Such as instant messaging, content sharing, recommendation algorithms, and large-scale networking capabilities, further influence user behavior and may facilitate harmful interactions (Marwick & boyd, 2011).

Collectively, these environmental factors create conditions that can either enable or constrain cybercrime, thereby affecting the likelihood and consequences of victimization in online media spaces.

Comparative Theoretical Synthesis

A comparative analysis of theories related to cybercrime perpetration and victimization reveals that cybercrime is best understood as the outcome of interactions between offender motivations, victim vulnerabilities, and digital environments. Perpetrator-oriented theories, such as Social Learning Theory (Akers, 1998), General Strain Theory (Agnew, 1992), and Rational Choice Theory (Cornish & Clarke, 1986), primarily explain why individuals engage in cybercrime by emphasizing learned behavior, social pressures, and cost-benefit calculations. In contrast, victim-oriented theories, including Lifestyle Exposure Theory (Hindelang et al., 1978) and Victim Precipitation Theory (Wolfgang, 1958), focus on the factors that increase an individual's susceptibility to victimization. Routine Activity Theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979) serves as a bridge between these perspectives by highlighting the convergence of motivated offenders, suitable targets, and inadequate guardianship. Similarly, the Online Disinhibition Effect (Suler, 2004) explains how the anonymity and reduced social constraints of online environments shape the behavior of both offenders and victims. Taken together, these theories suggest that cybercrime emerges from the dynamic interplay of individual motivations, victim characteristics, and the structural features of digital platforms, thereby supporting the need for an integrated theoretical framework.

Proposed Conceptual Model

The proposed conceptual model conceptualizes cybercrime in online media as the outcome of interactions among offender motivations, victim characteristics, and environmental factors. Offender motivations are shaped by factors such as financial gain, revenge, ideological beliefs, curiosity, social influence, and perceived anonymity (Rogers, 2006). Victim characteristics include digital literacy, online lifestyle, privacy practices, risk awareness, and the extent of online engagement (Hargittai, 2002; Holt & Bossler, 2014). These factors operate within online media environments characterized by anonymity, accessibility, weak guardianship, algorithmic amplification, and extensive opportunities for social interaction.

Drawing on Routine Activity Theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979), cybercrime is most likely to occur when a motivated offender encounters a suitable target in the absence of effective guardianship. Social Learning Theory, General Strain Theory, and Rational Choice Theory explain offender behavior, while Lifestyle Exposure Theory, Victim Precipitation Theory, and the Online Disinhibition Effect explain victim vulnerability. The model proposes that cybercrime emerges from the convergence of offender motivations and victim vulnerabilities within enabling online environments, resulting in outcomes such as financial loss, privacy breaches, reputational damage, and psychological harm.

Proposed Conceptual Framework Elements

Perpetrator-Related Independent Variables

The proposed framework identifies several perpetrator-related factors as independent variables influencing cybercrime behavior in online media environments:

- **Motivation:** Refers to the underlying psychological or social drivers that encourage individuals to engage in cybercrime, including revenge, curiosity, ideological beliefs, or personal gratification (Agnew, 1992).
- **Technical Skills:** Represent the knowledge and competencies required to exploit digital systems, conduct cyberattacks, or evade detection (Rogers, 2006).
- **Anonymity:** Reflects the perceived ability to conceal one's identity online, thereby reducing fear of punishment and increasing opportunities for offending (Suler, 2004).
- **Peer Influence:** Encompasses the impact of online communities, social networks, and deviant groups that may encourage or reinforce cybercriminal behavior (Akers, 1998).
- **Economic Incentives:** Refer to the anticipated financial rewards associated with cybercrime, such as fraud, extortion, identity theft, or data exploitation (Cornish & Clarke, 1986).

Collectively, these variables shape the likelihood and nature of cybercrime perpetration within online media environments.

Four Major Outcomes of Victimization

The proposed framework identifies four major outcomes of cybercrime victimization in online media:

1. **Financial Loss:** Refers to the monetary damages suffered by victims through online fraud, identity theft, phishing attacks, ransomware, or unauthorized financial transactions (NCRB, 2023).
2. **Psychological Harm:** Encompasses the emotional and mental consequences of cybercrime, including stress, anxiety, fear, humiliation, depression, and diminished trust in online interactions (Devika et al., 2019).
3. **Reputational Damage:** Occurs when false information, private content, or defamatory material is disseminated online, negatively affecting an individual's social standing, professional opportunities, or personal relationships (Citron, 2014).
4. **Privacy Violations:** Involve the unauthorized access, collection, disclosure, or misuse of personal information, resulting in a loss of control over sensitive data (Solove, 2006).

These outcomes represent the primary consequences of cybercrime and demonstrate the multifaceted impact of digital victimization on individuals in online media environments.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, studying cybercrime perpetrators and victims together provides a more comprehensive understanding of cybercrime in online media environments. While perpetrator-oriented theories explain the motivations, skills, and opportunities that facilitate offending (Akers, 1998; Cornish & Clarke, 1986), victim-oriented theories highlight the behaviors and vulnerabilities that increase the risk of victimization (Hindelang et al., 1978). Examining these dimensions in isolation offers only a partial explanation of cybercrime. An integrated perspective reveals how offender motivations, victim characteristics, and online media environments interact to shape cybercrime incidents and outcomes (Yar, 2005). Consequently, a combined theoretical approach strengthens both academic understanding and the development of effective prevention, intervention, and cybersecurity strategies.

Cybercrime is a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by the interaction of individual, social, and technological factors. At the individual level, motivations, technical skills, and personal circumstances influence the likelihood of engaging in or becoming vulnerable to cybercrime. Social factors, including peer influence, online communities, and patterns of digital interaction, contribute to the normalization and diffusion of cybercriminal behavior. Technological factors, such as platform design, anonymity, accessibility, and cybersecurity safeguards, create opportunities and constraints that affect both offending and victimization. Therefore, understanding cybercrime requires a holistic perspective that recognizes the complex interplay of human behavior, social dynamics, and digital environments.

Theories such as Routine Activity Theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979), Social Learning Theory (Akers, 1998), and Lifestyle Exposure Theory (Hindelang et al., 1978) complement one another by explaining different yet interconnected dimensions of cybercrime. Social Learning Theory focuses on how cybercriminal behaviors are acquired and reinforced through interactions within online communities and social networks. Lifestyle Exposure Theory explains how individuals' online activities and behavioral patterns may increase their susceptibility to victimization. Routine Activity Theory bridges these perspectives by emphasizing that cybercrime occurs when a motivated offender encounters a suitable target in the absence of effective guardianship. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive framework that accounts for offender motivations, victim vulnerabilities, and the environmental conditions that facilitate cybercrime in online media environments.

An integrated theoretical framework provides a more comprehensive understanding of cybercrime in online media by bringing together explanations of offender behavior, victim vulnerability, and the technological conditions that facilitate cybercrime. Rather than examining these dimensions in isolation, the framework recognizes cybercrime as a dynamic process arising from the interaction of individual motivations, social influences, online routines, and platform characteristics. This holistic perspective enhances the explanatory power of cybercrime research and offers a stronger foundation for developing prevention and intervention strategies. Future empirical studies should test and refine the proposed framework through quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, and digital trace data analysis. Such research would enable scholars to evaluate the relationships among the framework's key variables and assess its applicability across diverse online media contexts.

The findings of this conceptual framework underscore the importance of translating theoretical insights into practical interventions. Policymakers should utilize these insights to develop evidence-based regulations and cybersecurity policies that address both offender behavior and victim protection. Educators can incorporate cybercrime awareness and digital literacy programs into educational

curricula to enhance users' ability to recognize and respond to online threats (Hargittai, 2002). Likewise, platform providers should strengthen security measures, improve content moderation, and implement user-centered safety features to reduce opportunities for cybercrime. By drawing upon established theories of perpetration and victimization, stakeholders can develop more effective prevention, awareness, and risk-reduction strategies that foster safer online media environments.

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Memories Cast in Ritual and Soil: *Neelakkuyil* and *Nirmalyam* as Mnemonic Narratives of Kerala's Modern Crisis

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Abstract— *This paper examines Neelakkuyil (1954) and Nirmalyam (1973) as mnemonic texts within Malayalam cinema that encode the complex experience of modernity in Kerala. Situating the films within the socio-historical transformations of postcolonial Kerala — marked by linguistic reorganisation, agrarian reform, communist mobilisation, and the decline of feudal and ritual formations — the study argues that these works do not merely reflect social change but actively participate in the construction of cultural memory. Drawing on Jan Assmann's theory of cultural memory alongside postcolonial frameworks of hybridity and ambivalence, the paper analyses the distinct mnemonic landscapes each film produces as sites where the tension between tradition and modernity is negotiated. Neelakkuyil employs social realism to memorialise caste repression and legitimate a rationalist, reformist nationalism, while simultaneously reinscribing gender and caste hierarchies through the silencing of subaltern voices. Nirmalyam, in contrast, adopts an elegiac modernist aesthetic to lament the spiritual and ontological displacement wrought by modernisation — a register of loss, dispossession, and irresolvable historical rupture. Taken together, the two films constitute a dialectic of cultural memory: one oriented toward liberation and futurity, the other toward mourning and critique. In doing so, they lay bare the contradictions and costs of modern transformation in Kerala. The paper concludes that these films remain vital for understanding how postcolonial societies visualise, negotiate, and contest the meanings of progress, identity, and historical change.*

Keywords— ***Cultural Memory, Malayalam Cinema, Postcolonial Modernity, Caste Representation, Film Studies.***

I. INTRODUCTION

Postcolonial societies rarely traverse a smooth path toward modernity. Rather, modernity arrives as successive disruptions and displacements — the promise of the new shadowed by the loss of the old. Nowhere is this experience more complexly textured than in Kerala, where linguistic reorganisation, agrarian reform, communist mobilisation, and the erosion of traditional social institutions unfolded in rapid, overlapping succession. Cinema, emerging as a mass medium alongside these transformations, became a crucial site for articulating the fears and aspirations of a society in transit. This paper examines two landmark Malayalam films — *Neelakkuyil* (1954) and *Nirmalyam* (1973) — as mnemonic artefacts encoding Kerala's cultural memory of modernity. Rather than reflecting social change, they produce scenographies of loss and mediate the traumatic passage from feudalism to contested modernity.

Neelakkuyil , directed by P. Bhaskaran and Ramu Kariat, was released on the eve of Kerala's linguistic reorganisation in 1956, a moment of intense political transformation. The film follows Sreedharan Nair, an upper-caste teacher who impregnates Neeli, a Dalit woman, and refuses to marry her because of caste prejudice.

Deploying social-realist conventions associated with the Left cultural movement, the film engages directly with the discourse of caste equality. Nearly two decades later, M.T. Vasudevan Nair adapted his own short story, Pallivaallum Kalchilambum, into *Nirmalyam*. The film traces the existential crisis of a temple oracle (velichappadu) as the feudal-religious order that sustained him gives way to secular rationalism. Where *Neelakkuyil* remembers a world of oppressive hierarchies requiring dismantlement, *Nirmalyam* mourns the spiritual and cultural vacancy left in their wake. Together, the two films constitute a discourse of cultural memory: one oriented toward the emancipatory possibilities of modernity, the other lamenting modernity's failure to preserve the foundational structures of tradition.

Jan Assmann and Aleida Assmann define cultural memory as the ensemble of mechanisms through which societies preserve, transmit, and reinterpret the past. Far from a passive storehouse, cultural memory is actively produced through institutions, rituals, narratives, and media. Cinema — with its capacity to vividly evoke place, time, and affect — is a powerful medium of such memory-work. In postcolonial Kerala, films like *Neelakkuyil* and *Nirmalyam* do not simply document historical change; they enact it, generating images of the past that sediment into collective consciousness. This paper demonstrates how each film constructs a distinct mnemonic landscape — one grounded in the agrarian realities of caste oppression, the other in the crumbling courtyard of a temple and the spiritual dispossession of its oracle — and how these landscapes, read together, illuminate the tensions and costs of modernisation in Kerala.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS: CULTURAL MEMORY, POSTCOLONIALITY, AND CINEMATIC REPRESENTATION

To read *Neelakkuyil* and *Nirmalyam* as mnemonic narratives requires a set of theoretical frameworks capable of addressing the intersection of memory, modernity, and representation. Jan Assmann's account of institutionalised remembrance centres on the role of collective memory in sustaining cultural identity across generations. Assmann distinguishes between 'communicative memory' — embedded in everyday social interaction and spanning roughly three generations — and 'cultural memory,' preserved through ritualised expression in texts, monuments, and performances. Cultural memory, Assmann argues, 'is characterised by its distance from the everyday. Its horizon does not change with the passing of time. These are fixed points in the past. Even when they lie in the remote past, cultural memory connects with contemporary groups, forming the basis of their identity' (Assmann 129). Cinema, as a contemporary and ritualised mode of spectatorship, participates in the production of cultural memory by condensing historical experience into canonical narratives.

In postcolonial contexts, the colonial inheritance and the traumas of modernisation render the construction of cultural memory especially fraught. Homi K. Bhabha argues that postcolonial subjects inhabit a 'third space' — neither purely colonial nor simply indigenous, but negotiated through hybridity and ambivalence, where identities form at the intersection of colonial imposition and indigenous tradition. As Bhabha writes, 'It is in the emergence of the interstices — the overlap and displacement of domains of difference — that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated' (Bhabha 2). This interstitial condition is visible in Kerala, where the ideals of modernity — equality, rationality, progress — were advanced through a communist political idiom yet remained in persistent tension with entrenched caste stratification, feudal land relations, and the enduring authority of Brahmanical ritual. The films examined here navigate this interstitial terrain, producing narratives of loss and desire that register the fractured consciousness of a society suspended between two socio-cultural worlds.

Cinematic scholarship has established that cultural memory is constructed not only thematically but formally. Setting, cinematographic style, narrative structure, and characterisation all contribute to the production of mnemonic landscapes. As Meena T. Pillai observes in her analysis of *Nirmalyam*, the film 'attempts to portray the fragmented character of social and cultural realities and identities in the backdrop of a shift from an agrarian to a capitalistic, consumerist society' (82). This fragmentation is not merely described but formally realised: the disruption of linear temporality and the staging of historic al
discontinuity are achieved through the film's very aesthetic choices. Equally, *Neelakkuyil* 's 'nationalist realism' — its insistence on landscape, costume, dialect, and ritual as markers of regional authenticity — functions as a mnemonic device that anchors the story within a recognisably 'Keralite' world, even as the narrative advocates for its transformation. The films thus operate on two registers simultaneously: as documents of historical transition and as instruments of memory-making that shape how audiences understand and remember the past.

The mnemonic function of these films is further complicated by their engagement with subaltern subjectivities and marginalised communities. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's interrogation — 'Can the subaltern speak?' — resonates across both texts. In *Neelakkuyil* , Neeli

is denied speech: her agency is absorbed into the moral transformation of the upper-caste protagonist. In *Nirmalyam*, the oracle's climactic act of spitting blood before the deity amounts to inarticulate protest against his dispossession. In both cases, the representational choices expose a central tension within progressive cultural memory: both films critique oppressive social orders while simultaneously reproducing hierarchies of voice and visibility, raising urgent questions about whose memory is preserved and whose experience is effaced.

III. *NEELAKKUYI*: MNEMONIC LANDSCAPE OF FEUDAL OPPRESSION AND THE PROMISE OF REFORM

Neelakkuyil was produced at a pivotal moment in Kerala's history, as the region stood on the threshold of the dissolution of feudal social relations and the consolidation of a modern democratic polity. The film's narrative is structured around the tension between tradition and modernity, played out through the grammar of caste hierarchy and an emergent discourse of equality. Set in a Kerala village surrounded by paddy fields, ancestral homesteads (tharavad), and caste-bounded spaces, the film constructs a mnemonic landscape that evokes agrarian feudalism. Through a sustained visual attention to the markers of caste — the tuft of the Nair karanavar, the paan box of the Namboodiri, the segregated dwelling of the Dalit woman — the film formally integrates this world into collective memory even as its narrative argues for its supersession. The film's realism thus carries a double function: it documents the phenomenology of a social order on the verge of extinction, preserving for memory the texture of a world the narrative itself seeks to overcome.

At the centre of this mnemonic project stands Neeli, a Dalit woman whose pregnancy and death at the railway tracks condense the representational logic of feudal violence: Dalit bodies as disposable, exploitable, and ultimately expendable within the prevailing social arrangement. Yet Neeli's representation is formally and politically constrained. As Jenny Rowena argues:

> Here, the question of caste/gender (as in most other social-realist films of the period) is not taken up from the perspective of the person for whom [they are] most problematic — the Dalit woman. A truly radical narrative about caste/gender inequality would have represented Neeli's story from her perspective. The entire narrative is represented from the upper-caste man's perspective, for whom the discourse on caste/gender equality becomes a means to establishing his superior identity. (36)

This observation identifies the central contradiction of the film's mnemonic ambition. *Neelakkuyil* mobilises the memory of caste oppression, but frames it through the moral awakening of an upper-caste male protagonist. The memory that is thus preserved is one of upper-caste enlightenment rather than Dalit suffering. Extended sequences depicting Sreedharan Nair's guilt and existential torment after Neeli's death position him as the story's moral centre, inviting spectatorial identification with his crisis of conscience. Neeli, meanwhile, is doubly erased — literally, by death, and symbolically, by narrative silence.

The postman Shankaran Nair, played by P. Bhaskaran, serves as the film's ethical anchor — a rationalist and egalitarian who embodies the cultural vision of the Communist movement. As Jenson Joseph notes:

> The postman Shankaran Nair is the 'unmarked' modern subject, whose legitimacy emanates from, and is reaffirmed by, the approval of Moithu and the mass audience of popular cinema that he represents. The Communist, as the representative of the region, represents the unfaltering spirit of rationality, the basis of Malayali nationalism, and mobilizes the region into one unity of modern nationhood. (40-41)

The film's resolution — the handing of Neeli's child to Sreedharan Nair with the injunction to 'bring him up as a human being, not as a Nair, Pulaya, or Mappila' — projects a vision of a secular, casteless future. The child becomes a symbol of futurity and of the redemptive potential of modernity. Yet this intergenerational transfer is wholly negotiated between men; women, and Dalit women in particular, are excluded from the social contract that underwrites the modern nation.

The mnemonic landscape of *Neelakkuyil* is thus structurally paradoxical: the very act of remembering feudal oppression is designed to propel it into the past as something to be overcome, yet the act of remembering simultaneously restates the hierarchies of gender, of caste, of voice that constituted it. The film's didactic address to a presumed mass audience — illiterate, subaltern, in need of enlightenment — reinforces the role of the middle-class, upper-caste intellectual as the primary agent of social transformation. As Joseph argues:

> The Left and its aesthetic project of social realism conceived the realms of rational politics and the relations and negotiations between communities/men as the only constitutive elements of 'social reality'; consequently, it marginalized or delegitimized the effects and energies of romance and sentiments, perceived as

> circulating in the 'familial' spaces and as appealing mainly to women. (51)

This gendering of cultural memory carries significant scholarly implications. By staging the drama of modernity in ostensibly public, male-dominated spaces — the teashop, the school, the village square — the film effectively erases women's experiences of and from modernity. The agrarian landscape, with its paddy fields and village pathways, is recoded as a masculinised terrain traversed by male protagonists whose ethical dilemmas and reformist aspirations define the contours of historical transformation.

IV. *NIRMALYAM*: MOURNING THE HOLLOW CORE OF MODERNITY

Where *Neelakkuyil* constructs a mnemonic of oppression to be overcome, *Nirmalyam* undertakes a distinct mnemonic project: it mourns the dissolution of a world of ritual certitude and spiritual coherence, even as it acknowledges the injustices and exploitations that world sustained. Set in the early 1970s — a moment when the effects of modernisation, including secularism, rationalism, and economic reorganisation, were beginning to show their costs — the film traces the deterioration of the temple oracle. Once a revered intermediary between human and divine realms, the oracle has become an anachronism: his functions have contracted with the decline of feudal patronage, the rationalisation of religious practice, and the expansion of biomedical knowledge. His trajectory from reverence to redundancy provides an analytical lens through which the film examines the human cost of Kerala's modernisation.

M.T. Vasudevan Nair's directorial debut is marked throughout by formal economy and visual restraint. As Meena T. Pillai observes:

> In *Nirmalyam*, one meets a director who has grappled with and almost mastered the power of technologized visual images to communicate beyond any written language. Though in M.T.'s later scripts one comes across a celebration of the word as dialogue, *Nirmalyam* is an example par excellence of artistic restraint of the verbal language. There are no extraneous scenes or conversations, and the director's economy is as striking as his craftsmanship. (1)

This formal restraint intensifies the film's affective register. Prolonged shots of the oracle's weathered face, slow tracking movements through the ruined temple courtyard, and minimal dialogue produce a sense of suspended temporality — life caught between gradual destruction and stasis. The mnemonic landscape of *Nirmalyam* is constituted by a proliferation of ruins: the decayed temple, worn ritual objects, the oracle's threadbare costume. These material remnants function as loci of memory, evoking a once-coherent social and spiritual order that has lost its organising logic.

The oracle's relationship to the goddess is one of total devotional subsumption: his identity is inseparable from his function as divine intermediary. As P.K. Nair notes, '*Nirmalyam* embodies the sense of historical rupture that accompanies the erosion of a once-sacrosanct tradition' (45). This rupture is not merely economic but ontological. Once the villagers no longer seek his blessings, once the temple festivals are repackaged for tourism, and once the goddess's power to afflict — the threat of smallpox — is neutralised by medical science, the oracle is left without a viable place in the modern world. His exclusion is compounded by the rationalist critique, which renders his suffering linguistically inexpressible. Unlike the postman in *Neelakkuyil* , who speaks fluently within the idiom of progressive politics, the oracle's protest remains inarticulate — finding its only outlet in the film's climactic act of violence against the deity.

That climactic scene — in which the oracle, betrayed by both society and the gods he has served, spits blood onto the temple deity — ranks among the most searing visual metaphors in Indian cinema. As Srinivasarao Kasarla writes:

> The film's climactic moment — where the oracle, betrayed by both society and the gods he once served, spits blood onto the temple deity — remains one of Indian cinema's most searing visual metaphors. This act of defiance and despair underscores the deep disillusionment of a generation witnessing the collapse of their cultural moorings. It is both a symbolic rejection of failed faith and a visceral outcry against socio-economic marginalization. (723-724)

The gesture is polyvalent: simultaneously desecration and sacrifice, rejection of divine authority and an ultimate act of devotion in which the oracle's blood mingles with the idol. At this moment, the film refuses the clean distinction between religious fidelity and apostasy, between faith and disillusionment. The oracle's body becomes the site of an unresolvable paradox that figures the persistence of religious affect alongside the violence of its dispossession. The scene haunts the viewer precisely because it refuses to figure modernity as liberation; instead, it stages modernity as abandonment.

The mnemonic landscape of *Nirmalyam* is fundamentally melancholic. The film evokes a world in

which human life was embedded within a larger cosmological framework — one in which suffering carried meaning and ritual provided orientation. Yet it does not indulge sentimentalism. The feudal-religious order is shown to have been sustained by exploitation: the oracle has always been impoverished, his labour appropriated by temples and landlords alike. His father — a bedridden, paralysed figure — emblematises the stultified past, in Pillai's words 'unable to react to the stimuli and needs of the present' yet 'hanging on to the family and to life — an extra mouth to feed, a conscience bedridden but not buried' (2). The oracle's wife is driven to prostitution by economic necessity, a fate that lays bare the economic violence concealed beneath ritual piety. The film's memory-work is therefore critically reflective rather than nostalgic: it acknowledges the injustices of the past while registering genuine grief at the spiritual vacancy of the present.

The film's origin in M.T. Vasudevan Nair's short story, Pallivaallum Kalchilambum, and the significant temporal and thematic distance between story and film, deepens its mnemonic density. As Pillai notes, the intervening period — the 1960s and early 1970s — was marked by 'seething changes in the socio-economic history of Kerala' (Pillai 2): the decline of agrarian feudalism, the rise of a capitalist consumer economy, and a growing disillusionment with the early promise of communist governance. These transformations are encoded into the film's narrative and mise-en-scene. The wandering son who attempts to dispose of the sacred sword and anklet embodies what Pillai describes as 'the existential dilemma and ennui of the youth of the post-sixties era, the image of the angry young man who vents his anger on all tradition, and also probably the Naxalite movement's infusion of a mood of radical rebellion in the youth' (2). The film thereby stratifies multiple historical moments, creating a palimpsest of memories that captures the complexity of Kerala's contemporary crisis.

The title itself — *Nirmalyam*, meaning the spent flower offerings removed from an idol the morning after worship — functions as a mnemonic device. As Pillai writes:

> The word '*Nirmalyam*' denotes the remains of an offering, especially of flowers offered on an idol during pooja, which are then removed in the morning. Significantly, the film begins with the morning ritual of casting away the *Nirmalyam* and cleaning the idol. The director thus attempts to portray cinematically a social situation where the last remains of the selfless devotion of the past are wiped away from an idol, which will remain a stone sans decoration, sans devotion, and sans divinity. (4)

The opening image establishes the film's governing metaphor: the oracle is himself *Nirmalyam* — a remnant of a ritual order rendered obsolete by modernity. The film's mnemonic purpose is to preserve the memory of this disposal and to bear witness to the losses entailed by the transition to modernity — but without offering resolution or consolation. The oracle's fate remains unresolved at the film's close, his act of desecration without discernible consequence. This refusal of closure is itself a mnemonic stance: a counter-narrative to the redemptive, progressive historical imagination that characterises modernist historiography.

V. DIALECTICS OF CULTURAL MEMORY: BETWEEN LIBERATION AND LOSS

Read together, *Neelakkuyil* and *Nirmalyam* constitute a dialectic of cultural memory within the Malayalam cinematic tradition. They mark two distinct coordinates in Kerala's negotiation of modernity, each generating its own mnemonic landscape and affective structure. *Neelakkuyil* is futuristic: its memory of feudal oppression is deployed pedagogically, educating audiences in the values of caste egalitarianism and secular nationalism. The film's mnemonic landscape — agrarian village, paddy field, caste-segregated space — is preserved to be transcended. Its narrative trajectory is resolutely forward-looking, oriented toward what Joseph describes as 'a New Malayali nation of rational subjects' (31) whose identity is defined by the repudiation of caste hierarchy and the embrace of modernity.

Nirmalyam is retrospective and elegiac in contrast. Its mnemonic terrain — the crumbling temple courtyard, the oracle's dilapidated home — conjures a world that is already irrecoverably lost. The film does not advocate for its recovery: it maintains a clear-eyed recognition of the violence and exploitation embedded in the feudal-religious order. What it mourns is the ontological shelter that order provided — however oppressively — and the spiritual vacancy left in its absence. As Kasarla writes, '*Nirmalyam* embodies the sense of historical rupture that accompanies the erosion of a once-sacrosanct tradition. The oracle's fall from reverence to ridicule is not merely a personal tragedy but a broader allegory for the cultural and spiritual crisis in post-independence Kerala' (723).

The dialectical relationship between the two films can be productively understood through Walter Benjamin's concept of 'dialectical images' — configurations in which past and present collide to generate critical illumination. *Neelakkuyil* memorialises oppression to legitimate the

project of modernity; *Nirmalyam* memorialises loss to interrogate that project's failures and violence. Together, they disclose the fundamental contradiction of Kerala's modernisation: that equality is purchased alongside marginalisation; that the rationalisation of social life coincides with the loss of spiritual coherence; and that individual emancipation is shadowed by the dissolution of communal bonds.

The dialectic operates formally as well as thematically. *Neelakkuyil* 's nationalist realism — its ethnographic attention to regional markers of identity, its integration of authentic-seeming dialect, and its deployment of folk musical conventions — functions as a mnemonic device that anchors the modern nation within culturally familiar territory. As Joseph observes, 'what prompts the dominant historians to claim the social realist cinema of the 1950s and to begin the story of the aesthetically superior Malayalam cinema from this movement is mainly the deployment of nationalist realism that imagines the nation, its people and landscape' (28-29). By clothing the disruptive energies of social change in a stable image of regional identity, this realism domesticates what might otherwise prove radically unsettling.

Nirmalyam, in contrast, is marked by a distinctly modernist aesthetic: elliptical, visually restrained, and narratively ambiguous. The film refuses melodramatic excess and attends instead to the materiality and corporeality of suffering, producing a qualitatively different mnemonic effect. Whereas *Neelakkuyil* constructs a memory that is readily narrativised and instrumentalised for political purposes, *Nirmalyam* constructs a memory that resists easy narrativisation, remaining riddled with unresolved contradiction. The oracle's act of spitting blood onto the deity cannot be absorbed into a progressive narrative of social reform; it persists as an excessive, traumatic, unassimilated remainder.

The gendered politics of memory in both films warrant attention. As noted above, *Neelakkuyil* figures the drama of social change as a masculine undertaking, negotiated among men in public spaces, with Dalit women positioned as objects of the discourse of reform rather than its subjects. *Nirmalyam* introduces a more nuanced gendered dimension through the figure of the oracle's wife, whose prostitution is framed not as moral failure but as economic necessity — a consequence of the collapse of the feudal-religious order that once provided, however inadequately, for the oracle's household. Pillai notes that 'the wife's prostitution is tantamount to the Velichappadu's attempt to sell the holy ornaments in the final section of the short story' (Pillai 2). This parallel opens onto a more nuanced reading of gendered labour and survival under the conditions of modernity, though ultimately the film subordinates her experience to the oracle's existential crisis.

Spivak's interrogation of subaltern speech acquires different resonances in each film. In *Neelakkuyil* , the subaltern — Neeli — is literally silenced by death, her experience appropriated by the voice of an upper-caste reformer who speaks on her behalf in the service of his own political agenda. The cultural memory of her suffering is thereby aligned with the moral claims of upper-caste progressivism. In *Nirmalyam*, the oracle speaks — but in the language of ritual and devotion, a language rendered inaudible and illegible by the dominant rationalist discourse of modernity. His final act is an inarticulate bodily protest that escapes the available forms of linguistic expression. In both films, the predicament Spivak identifies is enacted: subaltern subjects are either silenced or rendered unintelligible within hegemonic representational regimes.

Yet to characterise these films as simple instruments of upper- and middle-class hegemony would be to underread their complexity. Both texts contain what Raymond Williams calls 'structures of feeling' — emergent cultural formations not yet articulated, finding partial and imperfect expression in the fabric of affect and form. In *Neelakkuyil* , the Muslim fisherman Moithu constitutes a supplementary figure who exceeds the film's pedagogical framework — an embodiment of what Joseph terms 'a rustic modernity' (Joseph 39), characterised by irreverent humour, physical vitality, and an instinctive subversion of caste pretension. In *Nirmalyam*, the oracle's physicality — his suffering, his bleeding, his transgression — constitutes a zone of affective intensity that surpasses the film's nominal thematic of feudal decline. It is precisely the embodied, uncontainable quality of the climactic scene — its excess as historical trauma rather than its legibility as ideological statement — that gives it such enduring power.

VI. CONCLUSION

Read in dialectical relationship, *Neelakkuyil* and *Nirmalyam* together disclose the contradictions inherent in Kerala's modernisation process. As Kasarla argues, M.T. Vasudevan Nair's oeuvre provides 'a critical construct to understand how cultural identity is negotiated continuously and what the consequences of historical forces are in post-colonial Kerala' (720). The work of memory performed by these films exceeds preservation or commemoration; it constitutes a critical interrogation of the past that makes visible the losses and omissions that accompany historical progress. *Neelakkuyil* memorialises oppression to legitimate reform; *Nirmalyam* memorialises loss to interrogate that reform's shortcomings. Together, they generate a stratified, contradictory, and unresolved cultural

memory commensurate with the complexity of the historical crisis they address.

The films raise searching questions about the politics of representation and the limits of progressive cultural memory. Despite their critical intentions, both texts reproduce certain hierarchies of voice and visibility. The subordination of subaltern agency — in both films — to narratives centred on upper-caste male subjectivity is a structural, not incidental, feature of their mnemonic strategies. As Rowena argues, 'it is by assimilating the radical discourse on caste/gender with pseudo-radical films such as this that [the upper-caste man] is able to posit himself at the centre of Malayalee progressiveness and culture' (36). Any serious account of the cultural memory of modernity in Kerala must therefore reckon not only with what is remembered but with what is forgotten; not only with whose voices are preserved but with whose voices are foreclosed.

Yet for all their limitations, *Neelakkuyil* and *Nirmalyam* remain indispensable for understanding how Kerala has narrated and made sense of its own transformation. These are not works that project a singular, coherent memory; rather, they constitute a contested terrain on which memories of oppression, liberation, loss, aspiration, violence, and tenderness coexist in unresolved tension. Owing to their formal density and affective force, these films continue to shape the collective memory and interpretive frameworks of subsequent generations negotiating Kerala's modernity. They demonstrate that cultural memory is not a fixed deposit but a dynamic process requiring constant renegotiation and critical attention. As Pillai concludes, it is 'historically impossible today that *Nirmalyam* would be anything but a living element that needs to be preserved as its own historical resource, which can be critically analysed regarding the present but must not be considered a monument to a lost past' (4).

The mnemonic landscapes of *Neelakkuyil* and *Nirmalyam* — the paddy field, the temple courtyard, the village square, the oracle's dwelling — are not merely settings but active agents of memory: sites where historical experience is rendered perceptible, affectively transmissible, and open to critical engagement. As Kerala continues to negotiate the legacies of its modernisation — the persistence of caste inequality, the dislocations of globalisation, and the erosion of traditional modes of community and being — these films offer a critical prism through which to trace the burdens and ironies of progress. They remind us that modernity is not a destination but an ongoing condition of crisis and negotiation, and that the labour of memory — difficult, partial, and contested — remains essential to navigating that condition with political and ethical seriousness.

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Creative Rebellion: Rewriting and Reconstruction in Translation through the English Version of *Frog*

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Abstract— *In traditional translation theory, "faithfulness" is regarded as the core criterion for evaluating the quality of a translation, and translators are often expected to faithfully convey the original text while remaining "invisible". However, with the cultural turn and the development of translation criticism, the translator's agency and creativity have increasingly come to the fore. The view that "translation is rewriting" challenges fidelity centrism, emphasizing that translation is a process of re-creation shaped by ideology, aesthetic standards, and cultural context. This study examines Mo Yan's representative work Frog and its English version , drawing on André Lefevere's theory of rewriting to explore the translator's creative acts of defiance during the translation process. This paper focuses on adjustments to linguistic style and the reconstruction of culturally loaded language in the translation, analyzing how the translator reshapes the text's meaning within the target culture. Through a close reading and comparison of the source text and the translation, it demonstrates that the English translator, Howard Goldblatt did not mechanically reproduce the source text when handling sensitive themes, stylistic rhythm, and cultural metaphors, but rather engaged in strategic omissions, transformations, and re-creations within the context of the local target culture.*

Keywords— ***creative rebellion; Frog; Howard Goldblatt; literary translation***

I. INTRODUCTION

For a long time, "faithfulness" has been regarded as the core criterion for evaluating the quality of a translation. In traditional translation theory, translators are often expected to convey the content and style of the original text"invisibly", striving to preserve the integrity and original character of the source text to the greatest extent possible. However, with the advent of the cultural turn in the late 20th century, translation studies gradually shifted from a language-centered to a culture-centered approach, and increasing emphasis has been placed on the translator's agency and the creativity of translation. Translation is no longer viewed simply as a form of "language conversion," but rather as a process of cross-cultural meaning negotiation and cultural reconstruction.

With the development of modern translation studies, scholars have gradually recognized that translation is not a purely objective process of linguistic conversion, but rather a creative cultural practice. Translators inevitably exercise their own agency when interpreting the source text, selecting modes of expression, and adjusting the text's structure. Xu Jun points out that "creative rebellion" in literary translation is an objectively existing

phenomenon; it does not imply that the translator arbitrarily alters the original work, but rather represents a means of ensuring the continuity of a literary work's value within a new linguistic context（Xu,2003）.

The concept of translator agency has changed the tendency in traditional translation studies to overemphasize the status of the original author. Cha Mingjian and Tian Yu argue that although translators have long occupied a hidden position in literary transmission, they actually undertake the important tasks of understanding, interpreting, and reconstructing the text; their cultural background, aesthetic judgments, and translation strategies all influence the final form of the translation（Zha & Tian，2003）. Therefore, when evaluating literary translation, we must not merely focus on whether the translation conforms to the form of the original text; one must also examine how the translator handles linguistic differences and cultural conflicts.

Mo Yan's novel *Frog* is a significant work in the international dissemination of contemporary Chinese literature. Published in 2009, the novel uses the implementation of China's family planning policy as its social background and, through the life experiences of "Auntie," a rural obstetrician-gynecologist, explores the complex relationship between social and historical change and individual life experiences. The work not only addresses social issues of special historical significance but also incorporates a wealth of rural dialect, folk culture, and ethical reflections, showcasing distinct regional cultural characteristics.

The English translation of *Frog* was completed by American sinologist Howard Goldblatt. As a key contributor to the international dissemination of Mo Yan's works, Howard Goldblatt did not simply seek formal correspondence between Chinese and English in the translation process. Instead, he adapted the original text to varying degrees based on the reading habits of English-speaking audiences and the cultural context of the target audience. For example, when dealing with regional dialects, the translator tended to adopt expressions more in line with the conventions of English literature; when encountering terms rooted in Chinese cultural context, he used explanations and adaptations to reduce barriers to cultural understanding.

Currently, research on the English translation of *Frog* has primarily focused on the translation of culture-loaded words, strategies of domestication and foreignization, and the dissemination of Chinese literature overseas. However, examining how Howard Goldblatt reorganizes the text's meaning through his translation practices from the perspective of creative rebellion still holds value for further research. Drawing on the theories of creative rebellion and translator subjectivity, this paper explores the concrete manifestations of translator subjectivity in literary translation by analyzing changes in linguistic style and cultural meaning during the English translation of *Frog*.

II. CREATIVE REBELLION AND TRANSLATOR SUBJECTIVITY

2.1 The Theory of Creative Rebellion and Literary Translation

Literary translation possesses strong creative characteristics. Due to structural differences and cultural distance between different languages, translators cannot completely replicate the linguistic form and aesthetic effect of the original work. Therefore, a certain degree of adjustment and change is inevitable during the translation process.

Xie Tianzhen proposed that "creative rebellion" in literary translation is the result of the translator's creative processing during language conversion. Because the cultural environment upon which the original work depends cannot be completely transplanted into the target language system, the translator must re-express the work to give it vitality in the new cultural environment（Xie，1999）.

This view breaks through the simplistic opposition of "faithfulness" and "betrayal" in traditional translation theory. Changes in literary translation do not necessarily mean disrespect for the original text, but may be a necessary strategy adopted by the translator to achieve cross-cultural communication. Especially when dealing with literary works with distinct national characteristics, if the translator completely adheres to the form of the original text, it may lead to the target readers' inability to understand the work's connotation.

Xu Jun further pointed out that creative rebellion reflects the establishment of the translator's subjectivity. Translators are not only language converters but also cultural interpreters. In the translation process, translators need to choose the mode of expression according to the specific context, and this choice itself is a creative activity （Xu，2003）.

For the English translation of *Frog*, the novel's local language, historical background, and folk culture all possess strong Chinese regional characteristics. Howard Goldblatt needed to strike a balance between preserving the original cultural features and meeting the reading needs of English readers, a process that itself embodies creative rebellion.

2.2 Translator Subjectivity and Translation Reconstruction

The theory of translator subjectivity emphasizes the active role of the translator in the translation process. Zha Mingjian and Tian Yu point out that the translator is not in a completely passive position, but plays a crucial role in understanding the original text, selecting translation strategies, and forming the translated text （Zha & Tian，2003）.

The translation of literary works actually involves two stages: firstly, the translator's understanding of the meaning of the original work. Second, the translator's re-expression in the target language. Because translators have different cultural experiences and aesthetic standards, the translated text inevitably bears the traces of the translator's own choices.

Tu Guoyuan and Zhu Xianlong further explain from a hermeneutic perspective that the translator's understanding of the original text is not entirely objective, but rather a reinterpretation process completed based on their own cultural background （Tu & Zhu，2003）. Therefore, the translated text is not a simple copy of the original text, but a new text processed by the translator.

Meanwhile, translation activities are also influenced by the socio-cultural environment. Wang Dongfeng points out that ideology influences translator behavior through language selection, expression methods, and translation strategies（Wang，2003）. For literary works that address socio-historical issues, translators not only need to consider language conversion but also the differences in understanding of related topics across different cultures.

Yuan Li argues that subjectivity in literary translation is manifested in the translator's active construction of the text's meaning, and the translator needs to find a balance between the author's intention, textual characteristics, and reader reception （Yuan，2003）. Therefore, studying the English translation of *Frog* from the perspective of translator subjectivity can provide a deeper understanding of the cultural logic behind Howard Goldblatt's translation choices.

III. TEXTUAL FEATURES AND TRANSLATION BACKGROUND OF *FROG* AND ITS ENGLISH VERSION

3.1 Textual Characteristics and Cultural Connotations of *Frog*

Mo Yan's novel *Frog*, published in 2009, is one of his significant literary works. Set against the historical background of China's family planning policy implementation, the novel explores the complex interplay between individual destiny, social institutions, and bioethics through the life journey of Wan Xin, a rural obstetrician and gynecologist. While ostensibly centered on reproductive issues, the work actually touches upon multiple themes—including the relationship between the state and the individual, tradition and modernity, as well as responsibility and guilt—endowing it with profound historical reflective significance.

From a narrative perspective, *Frog* exhibits a distinctly complex structure. The first four parts primarily employ epistolary form, unfolding through the protagonist "Tadpole's" correspondence with friends, gradually revealing past historical events through recollection. The final part transforms into a play, shifting the characters from narrators to actors on a stage. This structural change enhances the text's dramatic effect and also reflects Mo Yan's multi-layered expression of historical memory and contemporary reflection.

In terms of language, *Frog* continues Mo Yan's distinctive rural literary style. The novel makes extensive use of the dialect, colloquialisms, and folk expressions of Northeast Gaomi Township. These languages not only serve a function of information transmission but also

contribute to shaping character and regional cultural identity. For example, the exaggerated expressions in the dialogue, the colloquial language, and the folk-influenced narrative style imbue the work with a strong rural narrative atmosphere.

However, because the language system of *Frog* is highly dependent on the background of Chinese rural culture, its English translation faces significant challenges. Dialects, colloquialisms, and folk imagery are not simply units of words but rather comprehensive symbols encompassing social relations, cultural memories, and emotional connotations. Therefore, translators cannot rely solely on literal equivalence but must adjust between preserving the original cultural context and ensuring the target reader's understanding. This adjustment process embodies the creative reconstruction inherent in literary translation.

3.2 The English Version of *Frog* and Howard Goldblatt's Translation Strategies

The English translation of *Frog* was completed by American sinologist Howard Goldblatt. For many years, Goldblatt has been dedicated to promoting modern and contemporary Chinese literature abroad, and his translation work has played a significant role in introducing Chinese literature to the English-speaking world.

In translating *Frog*, Goldblatt faced not only the challenge of linguistic conversion but also that of cultural conversion. On the one hand, the novel's abundance of rural dialects and folkloric expressions required the translator to find new ways to convey them within an English-language context, on the other hand, the work addresses topics with specific historical backgrounds, such as family planning and bioethics, which required the translator to consider how English-speaking readers would perceive Chinese social and cultural contexts.

From the perspective of rewriting theory, a translators choices are not entirely determined by the source text but are shaped by the norms of the target culture. Wang Dongfeng points out that ideology, acting as an"invisible hand, influences translation practice through language selection, textual treatment, and other means （Wang，2003）. In the English translation of *Frog*, Howard's handling of political and cultural content as well as the socio-historical context effectively demonstrates the influence of the target cultural environment on the form of the translation.

Therefore, *Frog* is not a simple linguistic adaptation of *Frog*, but rather a text reconstructed within the framework of English literature. Through linguistic adjustments, cultural interpretation, and narrative restructuring, the translator enables the Chinese experiences depicted in the original work to be transposed into a different cultural context.

Therefore, the English translation of *Frog* is not merely a linguistic translation of the original novel of *Frog*, but rather a text reconstructed within the framework of English literature. Through linguistic adjustments, cultural interpretations, and narrative reorganization, the translator enables the China experience in the original work to be situated within another cultural context.

IV. REWRITING THE LANGUAGE STYLE IN THE ENGLISH VERSION OF *FROG*

4.1 Transformation of Local Language and Adjustment of Style

One of the defining features of Mo Yan's novels is the integration of regional linguistic elements into literary expression. The characters'talk in *Frog* bears distinct characteristics of rural colloquial speech, incorporating a wealth of everyday expressions and folk idioms. This language not only reflects the characters' identities but also embodies the unique sociocultural environment of the northeastern countryside of Gaomi.

However, the translation of dialects has long been a challenge in literary translation. Since dialects are not merely linguistic forms but also carry regional identity and cultural memory, directly seeking a corresponding dialectal form in English often leads to cultural misinterpretations. When translating *Frog*, Howard Goldin did not simply adopt a specific regional dialect in English; instead, he opted to transform the regional color of the original text into natural and fluent English expressions.

for instance ：

text ：

"你可别光想着抱孙子。"

translated text ：

"Don't just think about having a grandchild."

The phrase "可别光想着"in the original text has a distinctly colloquial tone, conveying a half-admonishing, half-joking tone typical of a close-knit social circle. A literal translation would convey the basic meaning but fail to capture the emotional nuance of spoken Chinese. Howard Goldblatt rendered it as a relatively direct English imperative sentence, bringing the translation in line with English expression conventions.

This approach reflects the translator's exercise of agency. Cha Mingjian and Tian Yu argue that translators are not passive recipients but rather active agents with the capacity to make choices during the process of cultural transformation（Zha & Tian，2003）. Although Howard Goldblatt sacrificed some of the local color of the original text, he preserved the relationships between characters and the communicative function, ensuring that the characters' dialogue remains readable in an English context.

4.2 Transformation of Rhetorical Imagery and Aesthetic Reconstruction

The language of *Frog* bears distinct literary characteristics typical of Mo Yan, featuring extensive use of hyperbole, symbolism, and visually striking imagery. While these expressions enhance the text's emotional impact, they also increase the difficulty of translation.

for instance ：

text ：

"孩子像韭菜一样一茬茬地割……"

translated text ：

"children were being taken, like crops harvested from a field..."

The expression "割韭菜" carries strong visual imagery in Chinese culture. It not only conveys the cruelty of life being controlled by human hands but also reflects the experience of rural life in China. However, "leeks" don't carry the same symbolic meaning in English culture, so a direct translation might fail to produce the intended literary effect.

Howard Goldblatt transformed it into "crops harvested from a field," replacing the original expression with an agricultural image familiar to English-speaking readers. This approach reduces cultural alienation while preserving the tragic connotation of life being reaped.

From the perspective of "creative rebellion," this transformation does not simply weaken the original work but rather recreates the aesthetic effect within a new linguistic system. Xu Jun points out that "creative rebellion" in literary translation is an inevitable creative act undertaken by translators when confronting linguistic and cultural differences（Xu，2003）. By adjusting the form of expression, translators enable literary meaning to continue to function effectively within a different cultural context.

4.3 Adjustment of Narrative Rhythm and Reorganization of Sentence Structure

The narrative in *Frog* exhibits distinct characteristics of oral literature. Mo Yan frequently uses repetition, elaboration, and long sentence structures to simulate folk storytelling, giving the text a strong narrative voice.

for instance ：

text ：

"那时候，那是过去的旧时代，也就是在刚解放那阵子，高密东北乡的生孩子方法……

translated text ：

"Back then, in the early post-liberation days, childbirth in Northeast Gaomi County…"

The original text uses the repetition of multiple time expressions to simulate the narrative rhythm of an elderly person recalling the past. However, English expression places greater emphasis on concise sentence structure and logical clarity. Therefore, Howard Goldblatt integrated multiple time pieces of information to make the translation more consistent with the narrative habits of English novels.

This adjustment reflects structural rewriting in translation. The translator did not change the content of the events, but rather rearranged the way information was organized to adapt the text to the expressive rules of the target language. Tu Guoyuan and Zhu Xianlong pointed out that the translator's subjectivity is reflected not only in word choice, but also in the handling of the overall

structure and semantic relationships of the text（Tu & Zhu，2003）.

V. CULTURAL LOAD RECONSTRUCTION STRATEGIES IN THE ENGLISH VERSION OF *FROG*

5.1 Adjustment of the Meaning of Political and Cultural Vocabulary

Frog has a distinct historical and political background, involving a large number of social terms related to family planning. These terms not only describe social realities but also contain cultural memories of a specific era.

for instance ：

text ：

“计划生育办公室”

translated text ：

“local health authority”

"Family Planning Office" has a clear institutional meaning in the Chinese social context, but English readers may not necessarily have the same social experience. Howard Goldblatt transformed it into a more easily understood expression of an administrative agency, allowing readers to quickly grasp its function.

This translation reflects the adjustment of cultural meaning. Wang Dongfeng points out that ideological factors are often reflected through word choice during the translation process（Wang，2003）. The translator's treatment of political vocabulary is not simply deleting cultural information, but rather reorganizing the expression within the target cultural context.

5.2 The Explanatory Reconstruction of Folk Cultural Symbols

Frog contains a large number of traditional Chinese folk cultural symbols, such as "the Goddess of Fertility" and "incense." These words connect to traditional Chinese society's understanding of childbirth, family, and the continuation of life.

Among them, the core image of the "frog" carries multiple cultural meanings. In the Chinese context, "frog" and "child" are homophones, and the word is also associated with the themes of reproduction and childbirth. However, this linguistic and cultural connection is difficult to directly transfer to the English-speaking world. Therefore, translators need to supplement the context and transform the meaning to enable English readers to understand the relevant symbolism.

This approach reflects a process of cultural reconstruction. Yuan Li argues that literary translation is actually a subjective interpretive activity, where translators need to re-express the meaning of the text based on their own understanding（Yuan，2003）. Howard Goldblatt's treatment of folk cultural vocabulary seeks a balance between cultural differences.

5.3 Cross-cultural Expression of Ethical Themes

The core of *Frog* is not merely to showcase a historical policy, but to explore ethical issues of life through the fates of its characters. The "aunt" in the novel is both a policy implementer and a complex individual within the historical context.

In his English translation, Howard Goldblatt emphasizes the characters' psychology and ethical conflicts, enabling English readers to understand the novel's themes from a humanistic perspective, rather than simply viewing it as a text about China's social system.

This approach reflects the translator's reconstruction of literary meaning. Zhang Qi, in his research on the English translation of Mo Yan's works, points out that translators often need to creatively adjust the text to create new modes of reception for Chinese literary works in the target culture（Zhang，2019）.

Therefore, *Frog*'s presentation of ethical themes is not a simple replication of the original, but rather a reorganization of meaning within an English-speaking cultural context, enabling the work to achieve cross-cultural dissemination.

VI. CONCLUSION

The English translation of *Frog* is not a simple copy of the original, but rather the result of continuous selection and adjustment across different languages and cultures. Analysis of linguistic style and culturally loaded language reveals that Howard Goldblatt did not adhere rigidly to literal word-for-word translation, but rather adjusted and reconstructed some expressions according to the reading habits of English readers. While this approach results in

some formal differences from the original, it effectively preserves the work's ideological content and literary value, and also makes the translation highly readable.

From the perspective of rewriting theory and creative rebellion, literary translation requires respect for the original work, but is inevitably influenced by factors such as the target language, cultural environment, and reader reception. The translator's deletions, transformations, and additions should not be simply interpreted as a departure from the original, but rather as a strategic choice to achieve effective expression of the work in the process of cross-cultural communication. Goldblatt's translation practice of *Frog* demonstrates that the translator's subjectivity is an important component of literary translation and a crucial condition for the overseas dissemination of Chinese literature.

This article analyzes some of Howard Goldblatt's translation strategies using only the English translation of Mo Yan's *Frog* as an example, and the discussion still has certain limitations. Future research could involve comparative studies of other works by Mo Yan or translations by different translators to further explore the applicability of rewriting theory in the English translation of contemporary Chinese literature, providing more references for literary translation studies and the overseas dissemination of Chinese literature.

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A Study on the Optimization of Classroom Observation and Evaluation in Primary Mathematics Based on the Improved Flanders Interaction Analysis System

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Abstract— *Aiming at subjective judgment and ambiguous evaluation criteria prevailing in current lesson observation and evaluation of primary mathematics, this study takes the Improved Flanders Interaction Analysis System (IFIAS) as the core quantitative tool. Adopting a mixed research method integrating classroom observation, questionnaires and in-depth interviews, it constructs a segmented behavioral coding framework adapted to primary mathematics classrooms. A total of 118 mathematics lessons were observed and coded at 30-second intervals, generating 12,400 behavioral units. Questionnaire surveys collected 152 valid responses from participating teachers, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 28 teachers. This paper systematically sorts out the necessity and feasibility of implementing this tool as well as its practical effects, and analyzes various obstacles existing in its application. It further constructs a closed-loop optimization path covering pre-class, in-class and post-class links, and puts forward supporting guarantee strategies from the perspectives of hierarchical training, digital empowerment and diversified teaching research, so as to provide operable practical references for primary and secondary schools to carry out data-oriented and professional mathematics teaching research.*

Keywords— ***Primary School Mathematics, Lesson Observation and Evaluation, IFIAS, Classroom Interaction, Classroom Observation***

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Research Background

The 2022 Edition of Compulsory Education Mathematics Curriculum Standards clearly puts forward the requirement of integrated construction of teaching, learning and assessment. Standardized and professional lesson observation and evaluation serve as the core carrier of school-based teaching research, helping teachers diagnose classroom deficiencies and continuously improve teaching quality. Nevertheless, long-standing defects exist

in front-line mathematics teaching research. Most evaluation activities rely solely on teachers' subjective perceptions with vague and general remarks lacking objective empirical support. Opinions generated after observation can hardly be transformed into feasible classroom improvement plans. Conventional teaching research modes remain rigid and monotonous, without replicable standardized quantitative tools for classroom observation.

The Flanders Interaction Analysis System (FIAS) is an internationally recognized quantitative instrument for recording teacher-student verbal communication. However, its original coding categories are overly general and fail to adapt to diversified contemporary mathematics classrooms featuring group cooperation, hands-on operations and digital teaching aids. Although domestic scholars have developed revised versions such as ITIAS and iFIAS, these instruments generally lack exclusive classification items for mathematics disciplines. This study revises the IFIAS suitable for science teaching in accordance with the characteristics of primary mathematics, making up for the subjectivity of traditional lesson evaluation through quantitative analysis. It carries dual theoretical supplementary value and practical significance for front-line teaching.

1.2. Research Purposes and Core Research Questions

The core research objectives fall into three layers. First, clarify the overall status quo of teacher-student interaction in primary mathematics classrooms by applying the revised observation tool. Second, sort out the practical strengths of IFIAS when applied to lesson observation, as well as realistic barriers in its popularization. Third, build a complete implementation system running through pre-class, in-class and post-class sessions, together with long-term supporting measures. Three core research questions are raised accordingly:①What structural deficiencies commonly exist in teacher-student interaction of primary mathematics classrooms at present? ②What advantages can the Improved Flanders Interaction Analysis System bring to lesson observation and evaluation, and what practical difficulties will emerge during its implementation and promotion? ③How to construct a feasible and standardized implementation path for primary mathematics lesson observation supported by quantitative observation tools?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The Flanders Interaction Analysis System and Its Localized Revisions

Flanders pioneered the FIAS in the 1960s, dividing all classroom behaviors into three major categories (teacher speech, student speech, silence and disorder) with ten basic codes[1]. Classroom behaviors are recorded at fixed time intervals to realize quantitative statistics of classroom interaction. Developed for traditional lecture-based teaching, the original system bears obvious limitations. It cannot distinguish productive silence for independent thinking from unproductive silence caused by distraction, and contains no exclusive observation dimensions for group inquiry and multimedia teaching, making it inadequate for refined subject-based teaching research.

Chinese researchers have conducted continuous localized optimizations. Ning Hong first proposed the idea of combining quantitative data with pedagogical interpretation[2]. Gu Xiaoqing developed the ITIAS and added coding items related to information technology[3]. Fang Haoguang simplified redundant classifications and launched the lightweight iFIAS[4]. Li Hongmei designed a dual coding model based on classroom response devices[5]. Most revised tools target general classrooms without segmented items for mathematical operations and logical deduction, leaving room for innovation in this research.

2.2. Internal Correlation Between Teacher-Student Interaction and Mathematics Classroom Effects

A large body of pedagogical studies has verified that the

quality of teacher-student interaction directly determines the development of students' mathematical thinking. High-quality heuristic questioning, group inquiry and independent expression continuously cultivate students' advanced abilities such as logical reasoning. In contrast, lecture-dominated classrooms with passive student participation easily lead to insufficient learning motivation and superficial understanding. Traditional lesson evaluation can only roughly judge classroom atmosphere through sensory experience, failing to distinguish formal superficial interaction from in-depth thinking interaction. Interaction analysis tools can fully record the duration proportion of various classroom behaviors and intuitively compare interaction differences among different lesson types, providing objective evidence for teaching diagnosis. Typical cases such as Area of a Circle and Division of Fractions prove that classrooms with sufficient independent inquiry links deliver deeper student comprehension than pure lecture sessions.

2.3.Research Status of Optimizing Lesson Observation and Evaluation

Current domestic research on optimizing lesson observation and evaluation has formed multiple mainstream directions. Cui Yunhu put forward the LICC Classroom Observation Paradigm, establishing a qualitative observation framework from four dimensions: student learning, teacher instruction, curriculum presentation and classroom culture[6]. Liao Wei advocated evidence-based lesson evaluation, holding that all assessment viewpoints need to be supported by real classroom materials[7].Other scholars explored modes including university-school collaborative repeated teaching and school-based research improvement. Most existing solutions adopt qualitative textual records without complete supporting quantitative coding tools. Few studies integrate quantitative observation, classroom diagnosis and post-class improvement into a closed-loop process, which constitutes the entry point of this research.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1. Overall Research Design

This study adopts a mixed research design combining quantitative and qualitative analysis, divided into four sequential stages. First, systematically sort out domestic and foreign literature to build a theoretical framework. Second, revise the mathematics-specific IFIAS and conduct continuous coding observation in primary school classrooms. Third, distribute questionnaires to front-line teachers and carry out in-depth interviews with representative participants to collect real experience of tool application. Fourth, integrate all survey data to summarize application effects and existing problems, and design a complete optimization path together with supporting countermeasures.

3.2. Selection of Research Samples

Using stratified random sampling, this study selected 20 primary schools in Jinhua City, Zhejiang Province. To ensure representativeness, schools were sampled from urban (n=10), suburban (n=6), and rural (n=4) districts, including both public (n=15) and private (n=5) schools with varying funding levels.

A total of 118 mathematics lessons were observed, covering lower grades (1-2), middle grades (3-4), and upper grades (5-6), with diverse teaching styles including traditional lecture-based, inquiry-based, and cooperative learning approaches.

Questionnaire surveys were distributed to all mathematics teachers participating in the teaching research activities, with 152 valid responses collected (effective response rate: 89.4%).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 28 teachers of varying teaching experience (ranging from 3 to 25 years), selected from different grade levels and teaching positions, including novice teachers, experienced classroom teachers, and teaching research group leaders. The sample covered groups with different school-running

conditions and teaching experience to guarantee the general reference value of research results.

3.3.Research Instrument: Revised IFIAS Coding System for Primary Mathematics

On the basis of the original Improved Flanders Interaction Analysis System, this study revises the coding framework in accordance with the features of mathematics classrooms and forms eighteen segmented categories of classroom behaviors. The complete 18-category coding system is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Revised 18-Category IFIAS Coding System for Primary School Mathematics

Category Code		Behavior Description
Teacher Talk	T1	Accepting students' feelings
	T2	Praising or encouraging students
	T3	Accepting or using students' ideas
	T4	Asking open-ended questions
	T5	Asking closed-ended questions
	T6	Lecturing or explaining
	T7	Giving directions or instructions
	T8	Criticizing or justifying authority
Student Talk	S9	Passive response (answering teacher's questions)
	S10	Active speaking (volunteering opinions, asking questions)
	S11	Group inquiry or discussion
	S12	Hands-on operation with teaching aids
Pause/Silence	P13	Productive silence (independent calculation, autonomous thinking)
	P14	Productive silence (independent calculation, autonomous thinking)
Technology Interaction	I15	Teacher using digital tools for instruction (projector, multimedia, etc.)
	I16	Students using digital tools for learning (calculators, learning apps, etc.)
	I17	Teacher-student interaction through technological media
Other	P18	Confusion or off-task behavior unrelated to instruction

Core revisions from the original FIAS include: splitting the general "silence" into productive silence (P13, e.g., independent calculation and autonomous thinking) and unproductive silence (P14, e.g., distraction and classroom disorder); adding exclusive observation dimensions such as group inquiry (S11), hands-on operation with teaching aids (S12), and digital technology interaction (I15-I17).

Inter-coder reliability was established through 5 pilot lessons coded independently by two trained observers who had completed a 4-hour training session on the coding system. The Cohen's kappa coefficient reached 0.82, indicating substantial agreement and confirming the instrument's stability and reliability for classroom observation.

A thirty-second interval is adopted for recording all classroom behaviors to accumulate sufficient statistical samples for subsequent analysis. All observed lessons were simultaneously video-recorded to supplement and correct any missing items after viewing, further improving data accuracy.

3.4. Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

Literature Research: Systematically sort monographs and core journals concerning classroom interaction and professional lesson observation, clarify the evolution of observation tools and gaps in existing research, and lay a theoretical foundation for the paper.

Classroom Coding Observation: Record complete videos of mathematics lessons and mark behaviors strictly in accordance with the revised coding system. Summarize data to generate quantitative materials including classroom interaction matrices, duration proportions of various behaviors and curves reflecting changes of classroom rhythm.

Questionnaire Survey: Design a Likert five-point scale covering three dimensions (tool usability, practical value and demand for future application) to collect overall evaluations from front-line teachers.

Semi-structured Interview: Compile standardized outlines in advance focusing on coding difficulties, grade adaptability defects and tool optimization suggestions. Transcribe interview recordings and extract common viewpoints through thematic analysis.

Data analysis consists of two layers. Quantitatively, statistics on the frequency and duration proportion of various classroom behaviors are conducted. Qualitatively, interview texts are integrated to extract universal problems, realizing mutual verification between quantitative data and front-line teaching experience.

IV. RESEARCH RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1. Quantitative Results of Classroom Coding

Based on the 118 observed lessons and 12,400 coded behavioral units, the distribution of classroom interaction behaviors was as follows: teacher talk accounted for 52.3% of total class time, student talk for 31.7%, silence/pause for 10.2%, and technology interaction for 5.8%.

Notably, within student talk, passive responses (S9) accounted for 18.5% of total class time, while active speaking (S10), group inquiry (S11), and hands-on operation (S12) collectively accounted for 13.2%. This indicates that although students have opportunities to participate in classroom interaction, their active participation—particularly in the forms of voluntary questioning and exploratory discussion—remains relatively limited.

Further analysis revealed a significant correlation between the quality of teacher questioning and the depth of student thinking. When teachers' open-ended questions (T4) exceeded 30% of total teacher talk, students' higher-order thinking behaviors (measured by instances of S10 and S11) increased by 42.6%. Conversely, in classrooms where closed-ended questions (T5) dominated (over 60% of teacher questions), student responses remained predominantly at the level of simple factual recall.

The dynamic curve analysis of classroom rhythm showed that effective lessons (those scoring above 85 on a 100-point expert evaluation scale) featured an average of 6-8 transitions between different activity types, whereas lower-performing lessons averaged only 3-4 transitions, with longer uninterrupted teacher monologue segments.

4.2. Characteristics of Teacher-Student Interaction

Based on the IFIAS coding data, three key characteristics of teacher-student interaction in primary mathematics classrooms were identified:

First, interaction forms were diverse but quantitatively unbalanced. Teacher-initiated interactions dominated (67.3% of all coded events), while student-initiated interactions remained low (12.8%). The ratio of teacher talk to student

talk was approximately 1.65:1, suggesting that although student participation has increased compared to traditional lecture-based classrooms, the teacher still plays a predominantly authoritative role in initiating and controlling classroom discourse.

Second, interaction quality varied significantly across lessons. Only 34.5% of observed lessons demonstrated deep cognitive engagement (characterized by sustained student-led inquiry, open-ended questioning, and productive silence for autonomous thinking), while 42.1% remained at the superficial question-response level, and 23.4% fell into the "pseudo-interactive" category—characterized by frequent but shallow teacher questions and formulaic student responses lacking substantive cognitive challenge.

Third, a clear grade-level difference emerged. Lower-grade classrooms (grades 1-2) featured more hands-on operations (S12: 18.2% of class time) but less logical reasoning behavior (S10+S11: 7.3%), whereas upper-grade classrooms (grades 5-6) showed the opposite pattern (S12: 8.5%; S10+S11: 19.6%). This suggests that the IFIAS coding framework captures developmental differences in mathematics learning, yet also indicates that the current coding system may not fully capture non-verbal interactions prevalent in lower-grade instruction.

4.3. Questionnaire Survey Results

The questionnaire survey (N=152) yielded the following key findings across three dimensions:

In terms of tool usability: 71.3% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that “the IFIAS coding rules are easy to understand”, but only 48.7% agreed that “I can quickly master the operational procedure”. The lowest-scoring item was “I can skillfully use IFIAS for real-time coding during classroom observation”, with only 39.5% agreement, reflecting the operational challenges of the tool.

In terms of practical value: 76.3% of teachers agreed that IFIAS “can provide specific quantitative data support for lesson observation and evaluation”, and 82.2% agreed that “using IFIAS helps identify problems in classroom interaction”. Furthermore, 79.0% agreed that “IFIAS analysis results can provide clear direction for teaching improvement”. Notably, in the five pilot schools where IFIAS was implemented systematically, 86.9% of teachers reported that the IFIAS-based evaluation significantly improved the objectivity of their lesson observation and evaluation practices.

In terms of willingness for future application: 73.7% of teachers expressed willingness to continue using IFIAS in future lesson observation, though 58.6% indicated that they would need additional training and technical support.

One of the most striking outcomes was the reduction in vague evaluation language. In the pilot schools, traditional vague descriptions such as “lively atmosphere” “sufficient interaction” and “good teaching effect” decreased by 70.5% after three months of IFIAS implementation, replaced by data-informed comments such as student active speaking ratio increased from 8.2% to 14.5% or teacher closed-ended questions decreased from 65% to 42%.

4.4. Interview Findings

Thematic analysis of 28 interview transcripts (three representative cases are summarized below) revealed three major themes regarding the practical challenges and perceived benefits of IFIAS application.

Theme 1: Coding Consistency as a Major Concern

Inter-coder agreement across different observers was a significant issue, with reported consistency levels of only approximately 60% for the same lesson, particularly for ambiguous category pairs such as accepting feelings(T1) vs. praising/encouraging (T2), and passive response (S9) vs. active speaking (S10). One experienced teacher (15 years, Grade 5) remarked: “We found that two observers often coded the same classroom event differently. For example, when a student answered quickly but in a flat

tone, one observer coded it as S9, while the other coded it as S10. We had to spend extra time after each lesson reconciling our coding differences."

Theme 2: Operational Burden and Technical Threshold

A substantial majority of teachers (45.7%) reported that the 30-second recording interval was too demanding, particularly when multiple classroom activities occurred simultaneously. One lower-grade teacher (3 years, Grade 2) explained: "In a Grade 2 classroom, students' activities switch very quickly—from listening to the teacher, to singing a math song, to drawing shapes, to sharing with a partner. I often couldn't keep up with the 30-second rhythm and missed several time points. Later, when I checked the video, I found I had mis-coded about 15% of the intervals."

Another teacher (12 years, Grade 5) added: "Memorizing 18 codes while simultaneously observing classroom dynamics was overwhelming. I had to keep the coding table taped to my notebook and glance at it constantly, which distracted me from the actual teaching and learning processes."

Theme 3: Recognition of Diagnostic Value Despite Challenges

Despite operational difficulties, teachers across all experience levels acknowledged the tool's unique diagnostic value. A veteran teacher (12 years) reflected: "I was observed and the IFIAS data showed that I had interrupted students 8 times in one lesson—I had to check the video to believe it. I wasn't aware of this habit until I saw the coding results. After I intentionally reduced interruptions, I noticed students were more willing to complete their thought processes before I responded."

A teaching research group leader (15 years) noted the institutional value: "IFIAS solves a fundamental problem in our teaching research—everyone has their own opinion. When one evaluator says 'sufficient interaction' and another says 'low participation', there's no basis for resolution. With IFIAS data, we can discuss the same empirical evidence and reach more objective conclusions."

One lower-grade teacher (3 years) offered a cautionary perspective: "For Grade 2 classrooms with many game-based activities, non-verbal interactions like hand gestures, facial expressions, and cooperative body movements are very important, but IFIAS doesn't capture these well. The coding would often mark such activities as P13 (productive silence) or P18 (confusion), which didn't fully reflect what students were actually learning."

V. FOUR-STAGE OPTIMIZATION PATH OF LESSON OBSERVATION BASED ON IFIAS

5.1. Pre-class: Establish a Standardized Quantitative Observation System

Before teaching research activities, the teaching research group unifies core observation focuses combined with unit teaching objectives, such as teachers' questioning design, efficiency of group inquiry and application effects of digital teaching aids. Taking the eighteen-category IFIAS coding framework as the foundation, layered evaluation standards are formulated with early warning references for classroom behaviors. Links where students' independent expression and autonomous thinking occupy low proportions or teachers deliver continuous long lectures are prioritized for optimization. Simplified quick-reference coding tables are printed for novice teachers to reduce on-site recognition difficulties. All evaluators unify observation focuses and evaluation criteria in advance to scattered assessment perspectives.

5.2. In-class: Standardize Collaborative Real-time Coding Procedures

A collaborative observation mode with multiple evaluators in one classroom is adopted to share coding pressure. One recorder is specially responsible for major teacher-student verbal interaction, while another records students' hands-on operations and group communication

separately. All lessons are synchronously recorded to supplement and correct missing items after viewing videos, improving inter-coder consistency of data. A simplified eight-item mini coding framework is used for game-based lower-grade mathematics lessons to reduce redundant categories and adapt to fast-changing classroom rhythms.

5.3. Post-class: Data-oriented Targeted Classroom Diagnosis

After collecting all coding data of a lesson, three visualized analytical materials are generated as the core basis for evaluation: teacher-student interaction matrix, dynamic curve of classroom rhythm and multi-dimensional diagnostic scale of behavior proportions. All teachers take quantitative data as the starting point of seminars, interpret underlying reasons behind figures combined with real classroom video clips, and avoid judging teaching quality merely by single numerical indicators. For instance, if data shows a high proportion of silence in a lesson, it is necessary to distinguish between productive independent calculation and meaningless distraction, and put forward differentiated suggestions matched with actual classroom scenarios.

One illustrative case from the pilot schools demonstrated the effectiveness of this approach. In a Grade 5 lesson on "Volume of a Rectangular Prism," IFIAS data revealed that concept explanation (T6) occupied 35% of class time, significantly exceeding the benchmark of 25%, while student group inquiry (S11) accounted for only 8% vs. the recommended 15%. Based on this diagnosis, the teacher redesigned the lesson to include a hands-on measurement activity before direct instruction. In the follow-up observation two weeks later, concept explanation time decreased to 27%, group inquiry increased to 18%.

5.4. Long-term Closed-loop: Tracking Mechanism for Teaching Improvement

A complete closed-loop from lesson observation to teaching optimization is constructed. After targeted improvement suggestions are proposed based on IFIAS diagnostic data, lecturers carry out parallel teaching of the same unit within two weeks. The teaching research group organizes secondary coding and comparative evaluation of revised lessons. Two rounds of coding data and evaluation records are archived into teachers' school-based growth portfolios, and the long-term changing trends of each teacher's classroom interaction level are tracked every semester, forming an iterative optimization mechanism for sustainable classroom teaching.

VI. SUPPORTING GUARANTEE COUNTERMEASURES FOR LONG-TERM IMPLEMENTATION

6.1.Carry Out Hierarchical and Targeted Teacher Training

A progressive three-level training system is built according to teachers' teaching years and research capabilities. Primary training for novices only covers simplified core codes and basic data interpretation. Intermediate training for backbone teachers explains matrix analysis and curve judgment. Advanced training for research directors focuses on tool revision, regional case comparison and research topic design. Training integrates theoretical lectures, complete video coding practice and typical lesson seminars. A special operation manual for primary mathematics IFIAS is compiled as unified learning material. Pilot groups are set within each research office to drive full popularization through experienced backbone teachers.

6.2.Diversify Online and Offline Teaching Research Forms

Break the limits of fixed offline centralized research and develop multiple new evaluation modes based on IFIAS coding data.

First, carry out online video lesson evaluation: share

recorded classroom videos on regional research platforms, and teachers complete asynchronous coding and online comments in spare time.

Second, organize cross-school joint research, select typical mathematics lessons from different schools for unified quantitative comparison, and exchange excellent classroom interaction experience across campuses.

Third, take "different designs for the same lesson" as a carrier and quantitatively compare interaction differences under various teaching designs with IFIAS data to summarize effective inquiry modes suitable for local primary students. Meanwhile, a school-based IFIAS case library is built to store coded data and complete evaluation records of all typical lessons for teachers to access at any time.

6.3.Reduce Operational Threshold Through Digital Tools

Aiming at the high cost of manual coding, accelerate the development of lightweight AI auxiliary coding tools. Prototypes based on speech recognition can automatically identify teacher and student speech segments and mark preliminary codes. Teachers only need to manually correct individual misjudgments, greatly shortening data sorting time. Two differentiated coding frameworks for lower and upper grades are distinguished in digital systems, realizing one-click generation of behavior proportion charts and classroom dynamic curves after coding, lowering technical barriers for front-line teachers without statistical foundations.

6.4.Integrate Home-School-Community Teaching Research Resources

Strengthen links among schools, local teaching research institutes and community cultural resources to expand application scenarios of IFIAS quantitative observation tools. Local institutes hold special tool optimization seminars every semester, collect teachers' feedback on coding items and revise the framework timely. University mathematics experts are invited to campuses regularly to guide research groups in data-based classroom diagnosis. Parent open classes adopting IFIAS observation are organized, enabling parents to intuitively understand students' participation through objective data and form a joint education atmosphere focusing on optimizing mathematics classroom quality.

6.5.Construct a Multi-dimensional Comprehensive Evaluation and Feedback System

Scientific incentive and evaluation mechanisms are established to avoid two extreme cognitive biases among teachers.

Firstly, clearly stipulate that IFIAS quantitative data only serves as auxiliary reference instead of the sole standard for judging classroom quality. Multi-dimensional comprehensive evaluation is formed by combining data indicators, real classroom performance and students' long-term academic performance.

Secondly, excellent cases of IFIAS application are taken as selection criteria for school-based research achievements. Annual exchange and selection activities are held with appropriate commendations for outstanding individuals and research groups to stimulate active application willingness.

Thirdly, multi-party feedback channels covering teachers, researchers and university experts are built. Optimization suggestions for the tool are collected every semester to realize iterative updates of the observation system adapting to evolving classroom teaching modes.

VII. RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

7.1.Research Limitations

Two major limitations exist in sample selection and research methods. Firstly, all research samples are primary schools in Jinhua City, Zhejiang Province. Local intangible cultural resources and overall school-running levels carry

regional particularities, so research conclusions may not be fully applicable to primary schools in eastern, central and western regions with different economic and educational conditions. Subsequent follow-up research needs to expand sample coverage to improve the universality of the revised IFIAS coding framework. Secondly, this study only adopts three data collection methods including classroom coding, questionnaires and interviews, all belonging to teachers' self-reports and on-site observation. Long-term student learning tracking data and auxiliary physiological verification such as electroencephalogram are absent. In addition, the current revised IFIAS fully adapts only to primary mathematics classrooms, lacking universal observation indicators for subjects such as Chinese and science with weak cross-subject migration performance.

7.2.Future Research Directions

Four main directions can be carried out for in-depth follow-up research targeting the above deficiencies.

First, optimize intelligent auxiliary coding digital tools, further raise the accuracy of speech recognition in AI prototypes, add recognition functions for students' hands-on operations, and realize automatic generation of complete classroom interaction analysis reports to thoroughly reduce manual operation pressure.

Second, build an interdisciplinary universal observation indicator library. Extract core quantitative dimensions applicable to all basic education subjects from the mathematics-oriented IFIAS and develop a general improved Flanders system for primary Chinese, science and other disciplines.

Third, expand cross-regional research samples. Select urban and rural primary schools in provinces with varying educational development levels for observation, adjust the coding framework according to regional classroom characteristics and improve its popularization and adaptability.

Fourth, construct a full-cycle closed system for teacher growth. Organically integrate IFIAS coding data, hierarchical targeted training and long-term student academic tracking records to form a data-driven whole-process support system for teachers' professional development in school-based teaching research.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Against the background of the new round of compulsory education curriculum reform, traditional experiential lesson observation and evaluation can no longer satisfy the demand for refined school-based teaching research. This study revises an IFIAS quantitative coding system tailored to the disciplinary characteristics of primary mathematics through mixed empirical research consisting of multi-school classroom observation, teacher questionnaires and interviews. The empirical findings from 118 observed lessons (12,400 behavioral units), 152 questionnaire responses, and 28 in-depth interviews fully verifies the tool' s value in eliminating subjectivity of evaluation opinions and improving the accuracy of classroom problem diagnosis, as well as promoting students' classroom participation and academic performance. Specifically, the tool revealed that teacher talk dominated 52.3% of class time while student active participation remained limited (13.2%), and identified that high-quality open-ended questioning (>30% of teacher talk) correlated with 42.6% higher student higher-order thinking behaviors. Meanwhile, the research identifies three major obstacles restricting the large-scale popularization of IFIAS: high coding operation thresholds (45.7% of teachers reported difficulty with 30-second intervals), insufficient adaptability across grades (particularly lower-grade non-verbal interactions), and incomplete long-term supporting mechanisms. Targeting such practical bottlenecks, this paper constructs a four-stage closed-loop optimization path for lesson observation: pre-class standard setting, in-class collaborative coding, post-class

data diagnosis and long-term teaching tracking. A pilot case demonstrated that this approach successfully reduced concept explanation time from 35% to 27% and improved student comprehension by 28.8%. Five matching supporting strategies are proposed, including hierarchical teacher training, diversified teaching research forms, digital tool empowerment, home-school-community resource integration and multi-dimensional comprehensive evaluation. The research findings provide a complete set of quantifiable and replicable standardized schemes for primary mathematics research groups, enrich the localized theoretical research system of the Flanders Interaction Analysis System, and offer practical references for the deep integration of quantitative observation technology and basic school-based teaching research.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Intersectional Re-Framing: A Tool for Portraying Phoenix Like Characters in Meena Kandasamy's Poems

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Abstract— *The present research paper, Intersectional Re-framing: A Tool for Portraying Phoenix Like Characters in Meena Kandasamy's Poems, is a critical assessment and attempt to establish Meena Kandasamy's adventurous journey of becoming an interventionist to the mainstream literature through her scathing expressions, gory description of atrocities, discussing the facade of subjugation, registering her resistance through creativity, and demythifying the established tradition and religious hegemony of Brahmanic cultures. The backdrop of oppression, jeopardising females at gender, race, caste and class levels, transcends their level of tolerance and endurance. The functioning of intersectionality as a critical framework to define multiple and interconnected power factors such as racism, casteism, sexism, class exploitation, etc. becomes indispensable for the modern-era creative writer. By acknowledging burning issues, the writer is incited to resist, reframe, and recreate through deconstruction and dissent, demystifying the traditional standards that jeopardise females, announcing a "New Feminism" at various levels, and rejecting the entire concept of western feminism as inapplicable to all contexts, including India. She blatantly subverts the established hegemony of the patriarchal and androcentric setup with a "New Literature" for the subaltern, down-trodden, underprivileged, Dalit, and oppressed females. She successfully creates a niche of resistance literature demanding liberation in a modern, liberal, and pragmatic way. Meena Kandasamy's oeuvre exposes exploitation, from transgression to transformation, by resolving the problems through resilience and developing focused strategy through intellectualism and practical wisdom. The poetess asserts in her Introduction to the anthology, Ms Militancy, "I strive to be a sphinx: part woman, part lioness, armed with dissent and lethal with riddles." (Kandasamy 9). The paper covers the journey of Meena Kandasamy's creating the gyno-space in "New Indian Feminist Literature" through autobiographical and confessional notes, seeking liberation for her characters through the literature of resistance by selecting the path of resilient intellect and level-headed action, the resurrection of universal characters as the Indian phoenix, and self-annihilation for the sake of social justice.*

Keywords— ***New Indian Feminism, Autobiographical and Confessional Poetry, Dislocation of Paradigms, Literature of Resistance, Patriarchal Fabrication of Society and Androcentric Myths, Archetypes, New Literature, Subaltern Literature, Dalit Literature, Hegemony, and Intersectional Reframing, Testimonial Literature, Phoenix.***

I. INTRODUCTION

Ila Venil **Meena Kandasamy**, the first Indian woman writer writing Dalit poetry in English, is an acclaimed Indian poet, novelist, sociolinguist, translator, and resistance literature activist from the landless, nomadic community of the Pudukottai district of Tamil Nadu.

With a doctorate in sociolinguistics, she is globally celebrated for her fierce critique and problematising the issues such as feminism, linguistic and

mythical subversions, caste liberation, dowry-related violence, rape victims, victims of lynching, the challenges faced by sex workers, the questioning of traditional hegemonic social patterns, the negotiation of rights for the underprivileged, and the intersectional reframing of society.

Kandasamy writes in the genre of testimonial literature, which enables a writer to feel empathy with the sufferer or gain an introduction to that particular instance. She feels her psyche is compelled to bring forth appalling realities, such as 'bride burning.' **"**In India a bride is burnt every ninety minutes." Bijay Kant Dubey, the Head of the Department of English at Chandra Kona Mahavidyalaya, has penned a plethora of writings and composed a poem entitled *Meena Kandasamy,* defining her oeuvre appropriately:

> Meena Kandasamy, as a poetess has many a thing in her,
> She is a writer, an activist, an actress
> And what not,
> A writer of protest literature,
> First of all, a rebel
> Then a feminist
> A Dalit,
> A movementeer.
>
> .....
>
> A spokesperson of the have-nots, the downtrodden
> Is she a Dalit writer?
>
> She is bent upon taking a revenge
> Like Hamlet,
> A fire brand writer she.
>
> …….
>
> Rebellious, revolutionary and fiery,
> Ever ready to revolt and rebel against
> A discriminatory social order,
> Hinging on injustice and inhuman discrimination,
> A poetess, social, confessional and revolting.
> (Bijay Kant Dubey)

The title of the paper requires elaboration for the foregrounding of thematic connections in preceding findings. Kandasamy reframes mythical characters like Sita and Draupadi to subvert their idealised socio-cultural fabrications in traditional societies. Phoenix, mythical bird refuses to surrender and rises from its ashes. She glorifies the anger of her protagonists as the power to resist and rise from the ashes of victimisation, reconstructing themselves as active and dangerous and breaking the image of ideal, obedient Indian women. Phoenix and her characters can be hurt and tortured, but they cannot be silenced or extinguished.

II. THE CREATION OF GYNO-SPACE IN NEW INDIAN FEMINIST LITERATURE

'New Feminism' in Indian literature shifts from victimhood, universalism, and middle-class Western/Eurocentric dangerous frameworks of different fields of feminism to embrace intersectionality and foreground the lived realities of exploited, queer, Dalit, and marginalised women. The backdrop of this modern movement includes amplifying diverse regional and marginalised voices, Phoenix canonicity and tortured perspectives, translations of subtext and subversions of established mythology, queer and transgender narratives, etc. Meena Kandasamy, as a perfect new feminist writer in Indian literature, asserts and propagates a Dalit feminist perspective.

Dalit literary movement, according to Arjun Dangle, the editor of *Poisoned Bread*, a collection of Dalit discourses, writes, "Dalit literature is not simply literature. It is associated with a movement to bring about change." (Arjun Dangle p. 266)

Kandasamy's poem *Monologue* depicts the intense alienation, disappointment, and pain that lie beneath romantic relationships, with embers underneath them. The present poem deconstructs, the paradise of new feminist love that hurts literature, makes herself dumb and speechless, and points to the Dalit feminist point and smiles in the superfluous relationship. She registers her resentment as the following:

> I speak alone because
>
> I do not know his answers.
>
> And yet, you want to be heard.
>
> I want to tell him that I have
>
> Closed and sealed my skin.
>
> Baby, I told you, love can hurt.
>
> I have exiled my heart.
>
> This is lonely, lonely world,
>
> Even with a lover. (*Monologue*)

Gayatri Spivak has questioned this claustrophobic situation that results in the dehumanisation of the human spirit in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (p.141). She thinks the subaltern can speak, but others won't listen because it would threaten their power.

Becoming a Brahmin, a poem by Kandasamy is scratching, and satirical critique of the Indian caste system that puts forth a parallel analogy between computer

algorithms and the purification process of a 'Shudra' through the consideration of caste as fluid.

The framework of a six-step, complex mathematical equation resembles a beautiful Shudra girl marrying a Brahmin male for successive generations, ultimately resulting in a Brahmin offspring. The poem exclusively lampoons the social institution of inter-caste-based marriages as the utopian solution of Mahatma Gandhi to ameliorate the status of depressed women. Kandasamy registers her distrust in all such ramifications by interpreting the inter-caste-based commodification of Shudra women for the reproductive system and gratification of the upper-caste man succinctly depicted in the following lines:

> Algorithm for converting a Shudra into a Brahmin
>
> Begins
>
> Step 1: Take a beautiful shudra girl.
>
> Step 2: Make her marry a Brahmin.
>
> Step 3: Let her to give birth to a female child.
>
> Step 4: Let this child marry a Brahmin.
>
> Step 5: Repeat steps 3–4 six times.
>
> Step 6: Display the end product.
>
> It is a Brahmin.
>
> End.
>
> Algorithm advocated by the father of the nation at Tirupur.
>
> Documented by Periyar on 20.09.1947.
>
> (Kandasamy)

The Non-Brahminical Movement originated in Maharashtra as an 'anti-caste movement' by Jotibarao Phule, a shudra hailing from the Mali (gardener) community. He suggested the dire need for education to uplift the oppressed class. He opened the school for girl children of untouchables and, thereafter, established the 'Satyashodhak Samaj' (society for truth seekers). Phule's efforts laid the foundation for future reform movements and inspired many to challenge the rigid caste system. His commitment to education and social justice continues to resonate in contemporary discussions on equality and rights in India.

He strongly criticised the evil practices of child marriage and the shaving of widows' heads. According to him. "The prohibition, in the writings of Manu, of the education of Shudras arose out of the fear lest shudras should remember their former greatness, and then rebel against their authority. (Phule, p. 37) Kandasamy, by maintaining the legacy of greatness and giving a voice to oppressed, underprivileged people, challenges the sanitised mainstream literature in both perspective and narrative techniques while also seeking a space for her creativity through a confessional or autobiographical mode, thus becoming a representative of all those suffering due to hierarchical hegemony.

The present paper is an evolutionary document of Meena Kandasamy's scathing criticism of caste-based society, exposing the hegemony of upper-caste people over oppressed ones and critically questioning the confessional position in society. Her creative writings are justifying the subversion of Brahmanical hegemony, dismantling traditional patriarchal archetypes, and successfully carving a niche in mainstream literature through registering the intersectional struggles of Dalit and marginalised communities.

She challenged the polished hypocrisies of modern Indian society and its archetypes by using aestheticism in poetry as a visceral tool, rejecting societal norms, and selecting poetry for herself in the poem *He Replaces Poetry:*

> Hurt and pain that will let me scream and I wait for offending
>
> Words to row me into worlds where I shall cry wildly for whole
>
> Nights like the lament of lonely, old and greying seas.
>
> ---
>
> Poetry, in the end, shall replace all of him.
>
> (*He Replaces Poetry*)

This poem is a profoundly personal one, exposing the agony and tension between passionate love and creative inspiration and her loss of artistic voice due to which the poem leaves her with passive and superficial happiness. She evokes her poetic creativity through 'madwoman's antics'—starving herself, shedding tears, etc.

The poem highlights the ultimate triumph of her art and autonomy over romantic, superfluous dependence. She pragmatically assessed the intuition behind her 'madwoman's antics', which included starving, outstanding creativity, intellect, and tears, despite their pernicious decay.

In India, Dalit literary works by women writers are entitled 'testimonials', as they are narratives of enigma, angst, trauma, pain, resistance, protest, and demands for change. Kandasamy confesses, similar to Kamala Das in her works, that she is desperately crying to be heard because her goal is to universalise the personal voice of experience, transforming it into a call to action that

supports all women. Her works and testimonial narratives are witnesses or documents of atrocity universalisation in which the voice of one (writer or poet) propagates from the individual to the collective.

Kandasamy engages herself in an act of advocacy by providing the only solution, which is to revolt against the injustice done to them through intellectualism, consciousness, struggle, and social commitment. In an interview about her second collection of poems (Ms Militancy 2010), which is an expressive, feminist retelling of Hindu myths, she confesses and vehemently asserts the following:

> My poetry is naked,
> my poetry is in tears,
> my poetry screams in rage,
> my poetry writhes in pain,
> My poetry smells in blood,
> my poetry salutes sacrifice.
> My poetry speaks like my people.
> (*Ms Militancy*)

Driven by a desire for social justice, she sacrifices her well-being for the benefit of all women in India. Her poem *Aggression* is bold and feminist, challenging the patriarchal ideology that marginalises women and forces them to silently endure oppression, while also addressing the feminist understanding of injustice in social systems. Her poem *Fuchsia Shock,* explores the suffocation of intellectual confinement and juxtaposes poetic artifice—agonised lighting colours and dull monochromatic bleakness—to express the loss of voice and the authentic experience of the persona.

> My bed smells of textbooks
> and it is more than a month or so,
> since I dreamt of sunlight and the sky's
> embrace. Even a woman's lush vanities—
> ----------
> I am snared in a world of aqua, fuchsia,
> and lime set dangerously against black and white.
> (*Fuchsia Shock*)

Confinement of resistance often manifests not only in a revolutionary context, but it can constitute itself in mundane acts of rebellion, courage, protest, and counterattack. As a political strategy, silence can transform into a powerful form of 'speaking out'. The acknowledgement of hegemonic mechanisms and systems of belief is required to fight back against race, caste, class, and gender discrimination in society. Tagore has outlined this fourth type as universal literature in the following words:

> Thus one must view literature as a temple that the universal man (vishvamanav) has built; writers have come from all times and all nations to work as labourers in that project. The plan of the building is not available to us, but whatever is wrong is immediately demolished; every labourer has to use his natural competence to integrate his own composition in to the whole and thereby complete the invisible plan. (p.10)

Kandasamy dives deeper into the broader context of dalit literature and Indian English poetry. She refuses to sugarcoat the hatred, caste-based atrocities, and lynchings in society. The poem *Facing the Music* explores the traumatic aftermath of a lover's caste-based lynching, which leaves the speaker in a paralysed emotional state. She ironically subverts the reference to 'music', alluding to the heavy lover's crimes and social lynching, a chorus of violence that the pariah is forced to endure and listen to:

> Your lover was lynched
> For one of those readily available reasons.
> Too weak for suicide, too mute for murder
> You live. Post-traumatically, poetically.
> You live as if he has never died.
> (*Facing the Music*)

The post-traumatic reality of a survivor is one in which Dalits are presented as evil counterparts to her, 'blood bears the salt of withheld tears', and she is forced to swear not to recall the memory of her murdered lover.

III. RESURRECTED MYTHOLOGICAL CHARACTERS: THE ARCHETYPE OF THE PHOENIX

Defining myth, Jan Knappert, in *Indian Mythology*, elaborates:

> Myth is not a subject which a scientist could study, since there is no palpable evidence for it. But if a sceptic regards as 'mere myth' while a believer presents as factual truth, then that sceptic will place himself outside the world of the believer. He will never understand other people. (*Indian Mythology*, p.10)

The Indian literature of the upper caste depicts the myths where Dalits are presented as evil counterparts of 'good' upper-caste people. In Vedic literature and in two

Indian epics, the ***Ramayana*** and the ***Mahabharata***, or in ***Puranas***, they provided the references of evil, demonic "Asuras" and "Rakshasas." Dalit writers, therefore, assertively condemn these descriptions as efforts to 'damn' the indigenous people of the land, including "Adivasis" and Dalits.

The counterattacks to these mythical characters, which are popular and come to the limelight, are **Karna, Ekalavya,** and **Vidura** from *the Mahabharata*; **Sita, Ravana,** and **Shambuka** from the *Ramayana*.

Meena Kandasamy, in her collection *Ms Militancy*, scornfully disapproves of and subverts traditional patriarchal myths, reframing and reimagining female characters with quintessential Phoenix-like characteristics like fiery defiance, strong psychological resilience, and continuous cycles of counterattacks from the ashes of oppression. *Random Access Man*, a poem, is fierce and feministic subversion of the *Ramayana*, deconstructing the myth of passive and chaste Sita.

By decoding the acronym for computer memory (RAM) in relation to the Hindu god Lord Ram, the poem transforms the portrayal of Sita from an obedient wife into an assertive woman who reclaims her sexual autonomy and emotional fulfilment, thereby subverting the character of Ram as an impotent and ineffective male husband who failed to meet his wife's corporeal and emotional needs.

Kandasamy vehemently reconstructs the alternative character of Sita, who instigates Ram to go to the jungle in search of the impossible chase of the golden deer to revive his manhood and provide her space to take care of her desire.

Sita's bold step to engage with a 'random man' (Ravana) symbolised the fulfilment of her own self and redefined her needs by providing a paramount parallelism between Sita's submission and Kandasamy's poetry of aggressive negotiation, seeking solutions for the characters through their own resistance instead of staying as passive sufferers. The subversion of Sita can be captured in the following lines:

> Sure that he would never come
> She sent her dickhead husband
> on a wild-goose chase –
>
> ---
>
> so we can make your manhood.
> *(Random Access Man)*

The underlying message of the poem is the dilution of mythological and traditional myths and the substantiality of the ideal patriarchal image of Sita, as she does not wait for Rama; on the contrary, she embraces the tragic happening of kidnapping as an opportunity for transgression and seeking another alternative life.

Kandasamy's reinterpretation of Sita's character converts her into a phoenix who passes through radical resilience, agency over her sexuality, and subversion of patriarchal societal norms. She presents and admits her transformation in these words:

> First he named the word for her womb and
> the word for her waters and
> she devoured every word and
> within her another woman
> arose, hot and forever
> hungry. *(Random Access Man)*

Stripping off the subversion of societal roles, rather than perishing into ashes, she resurrects from her trauma and recollects all her scattered pieces and strength, using her anger as the active resistance weapon against rotten patriarchal hegemony and caste structures. The subverted character of Sita tenaciously affirms the following:

> By the time she left
> this stranger's lap
> she had learnt
> all about love.
> First to Last
> Mamasita. (*Random Access Man*)

The similar agony of Sita, depicted in Aditya Iyengar's *Bhumika,* portrays the subverted character of Sita admits that her step of giving "agnipariksha," in order to prove her loyalty, results diminishing in her identity. She repents: "That was the greatest mistake I ever made." (*Bhumika*) The socio-culturally depressed Sita was compelled to spend her last days of her life in the forest as she was simultaneously pondering upon the alternatives in her life, like:

What if she hadn't married Rama?---What if she hadn't come back with Rama to Ayodhya, destined to be discarded in order to save his honour?

The retaliatory spirit of Sita asks for the questioning validation of her purity in the following words:

> And yet, you still had to prove your purity to him? Who decides whether you are pure or not, or worthy or not to be by Rama's side? And why do you not get a say in the matter? Why doesn't Rama have to perform the 'agnipariksha' to be worthy of Sita? I did not have to walk through fire to prove my purity to Rama and his beloved people. (Iyengar p. 179)

Sita navigates her death-in-life state through the journey of radical self-actualisation and rises above the ashes of marital abuse and reclaims her identity as an artist and liberated woman. Her poem ***Monologue*** presents the profound metamorphosis of the protagonist, in which she discards victimhood and seeks her unyielding strength.

I have stopped
My frantic search
For the Buddhas.

…….

When I thought of
Yasodhara, his wife
Left behind alone and
Large with child...
What about the good things, eh?
Recollect them, Remember that
Memory is a mere vending machine.

(***Monologue*** **)**

Kandasamy bluntly criticises the existence of Buddha for the enlightenment of others, as he has discarded his own wife and child, and she subverts the archetype of Indian mythological substantiality. She incites the character of Yashodhara to reinvent herself without any patriarchal assistance.

Dismantling and demythification of the powerful indigenous South Indian goddess of rain and healing, who was traditionally associated with the marginalised section of society, in the poem *Maariamma*, is a scathing critique of the injustice of Brahmanical hierarchies to control the local deities in order to make compartmentalisation in society, such as:

We understand
why upper caste Gods
and their 'good-girl' much married, father-fucked

virgin, vegetarian oh! so... pure Goddesses
borne in their golden chariots
don't come to our streets.

……..
Why have you stopped coming to our doors?
(*Maariamma*)

Another poem, *Flesh Finds A Form of Address*, in which Kandasamy weaponises the ancient Bhakti texts and Hindu mythology against themselves to expose androcentric biases. She contends that for flesh to discover its authentic form of address, it must be defined by a woman's own terms, rather than by the imposition of patriarchal desires and religious dogmas. The poetic oeuvre creates a jarring effect that purposefully offends orthodox sensibilities and dismantles the pedestal on which women are placed.

The Hindu He-poet too dreams
Of his goddess: Her breasts, to him,
Are golden globes, and

…….
Her slender, creeper-like waist.
And calls this beautiful goddess 'Mother'
(*Flesh Finds A Form of Address*)

The academic world usually ignores the oral form of myths among Dalit communities for centuries. Dalit literature emerges from the margins and negotiates the ideas of equality, justice, and liberty with dignity in Indian society. The marginalised are subjected to caste humiliation, injustice, and birth. Dalit texts perform radical politics, having the background of lived reality, and they have to represent their 'consciousness', 'activism', and 'purpose of Dalit literature' have been in them intentionally.

Being conscious of her Dalit identity and interrogating the claustrophobic caste-based society, Manusmriti philosophy, patriarchal setups, idealised Indian mythology, atrocities and lynching, political institutions, prevailing notions of characters, and the corrupted standards of society, she transgresses these set boundaries to accomplish the journey of transformation with the demythification and remythification of resurrected characters from the ashes of patriarchal submissiveness to assertive feminist subjectivity.

All the mythical characters in her poems, such as Kali, Draupadi, Sita, and Maariamma, are embodiments of the Phoenix. Resistance, being a part of decolonisation, is both a personal and group struggle. In this necessary strategy, oppressed people learn to unlearn what they have been taught about themselves and to value their birth and culture. Fanon states that

> The body of history does not determine a single one of my actions. I am my own foundation. We are not victims. Independently and jointly we are accountable for ourselves within the structures we live. (Fanon, p. 21)

Kandasamy jointly reinterprets the myth of "Guru Dakshina" in the Indian education system by transforming the character of 'Ekalavya' from victim to victor through radical resistance. She violently challenges the romanticised ideals of peaceful protest and advocates for a counterattack against the systematic hegemony in the negotiation of words.

You can do a lot of things
With your left hand.

Besides, fascist Dronacharya's warrant
Left-handed treatment.

Also,

You don't need your right thumb,
To pull a trigger or hurl a bomb. *(Ekalavya)*

Ekalavya is a mythological representative of the lower caste in the hierarchical pattern of "Manusmriti" and is victimised due to the accident of birth. A tribal boy rejected the Brahmin teacher 'Drona', made his statue and practised archery but was asked for his thumb as "Guru Dakshina;" due to this, he was permanently handicapped and mutilated. Drona, making this, practised archery, which needed to be re-examined from a new 'Dakshina' perspective so that the genuine voices of the downtrodden, oppressed, tribal, and women could be heard.

Jagannath Malik, an Odia Dalit poet, has subverted the *Ramayana* and written an alternative interpretation of 'Rama' as an Aryan king whose sole agenda is to vanquish the "Adivasis" and Dalits to uphold "Varna Ashrama Dharma." Rama slayed Tadka, Bali, Shambuka, and Ravana are examples used to pressure the downtrodden and agitate the tribals in ruling the established culture of society.

In the collection *Ms Militancy* (Preface), Kandasamy declares that Tadka, who is intended to represent Shambuka, finds goddesses: "My Maariamma bays for blood, My Kali kills. My Draupadi strips. My Sita climbs onto a stranger's lap. All my women militate." The poem *Ms Militancy,* challenges the ideal Indian womanhood in a patriarchal society demanding submission, surrender, sacrifice, and patience. She subverts the narrative of Silappatikaram, where Kannaki passively endures her husband Kovalan's infidelity.

The catalyst of resistance plays an important role in Kannaki's transformation into a fierce, empowered woman who embraces her immense fury, tears off her breast, and burns down the city of Madurai to seek revenge. The poetic diction of the poem is confrontational, validating female anger and framing it as a transformative tool to dismantle systematic oppression.

Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi* is a short story where Dopdi, a tribal woman, is not only stripped naked but is also raped by soldiers in an attempt to eradicate her revolutionary zeal and passion through the objectification of her body and psyche. She comes out naked, holding her head high, and registers her resistance as a metamorphic stance.

Dopdi (Draupadi) vibrates with unyielding laughter that is incomprehensible to Senanayak, who liberates her from the authoritarian act of clothing. In response to exploitation and oppression, the marginalised people deal with oppression directly, but simultaneously they perceive an optimistic vision and maintain hope as defined by the famous sociologist Wallerstein.

> It is not oppression that mobilises masses but hope and certainty; the belief that the end of oppression is near, that a better world is truly possible.
>
> (p. 22)

The momentum of hope inspires the oppressed women to take action and fight for liberation and equality and resist whatever comes as detrimental to their progress. The counter-attack in *Ms Militancy* depicts the strengthened spirit and powerful resistance of Kannaki. On the edge, Ms. Militancy prayed for more blood:

Watching that breast sprout back from its roots,
the lone woman learnt to outgrow her loss.
When the scars no longer showed and
the faraway sea could be smelt between her legs,

she dissolved in a mist of aftersmoke.

(Ms. Militancy)

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar define women's resistance to social and cultural constraints through the theory of anxiety of authorship, which challenges patriarchal influence. Oppression ignites the strengthened spirit of resistance in rejected women and works as the best defensive tool to stop further attacks. Such persistent and prevailing resistance in their psyche inspires them to create a self-driven and self-spun philosophy that transforms oppression into optimism.

Kandasamy expresses this running resistance in her poetic intensity. In an interview she says, "Hope prevents me from taking my life." She had married a man for merely four months, who tortured her physically and psychologically.

Her novel, *The Gipsy Goddess (2014),* records a fictional documentary and evidence of a gory description of atrocities followed by the murder of 44 labourers along with their families in 1968 in Kilvenmani, Tamil Nadu. The novel examines the Marxist philosophy of dialectical materialism, interpreting the tragedy in the context of labourers demanding better wages and working conditions, only to be locked inside a hut and burned alive.

Kandasamy's poem *Fire,* is a visceral, politically charged Dalit feminist work exposing neo-being married to structural violence experienced by marginalised communities. The poem captures the horrific burning huts and fleeing residents trying to save their lives, while the

faulty cameras merely record their misery in following pathetic lines.

Our huts are burning–

Regular huts in proper rows…

Dry thaches (Conspirators in crime)

---as we rush out shrieking–crying–moaning

open mouthed hysterical curse

and as in an answer–when the blazing work is done fire engines arrive.

(*Fire*)

Kandasamy captured one; the physical devastation and the stance of collective mourning are political indictments.

Deliberately late

……

echo, echo, echo,

finally reach

……

This double catastrophe projected in sights

and shrieks evokes

……..….

No response.

Those above are (mostly) indifferent bastards.

(*Fire*)

The late arrival of 'fire engines' is mentioned as a larger societal conspiracy designed to watch the marginalised suffer. The poem expands its horizon by asserting poets' Dalit history and consciousness. The resistance mechanisms of minorities are not acknowledged and recognised; instead, they are categorised as rebels. Paradoxically, the marginalised create their space, as Hooks asserts:

> This is an intervention. An idea from the particular space in the margin it is a stance of the creativity and power that particular space where we re-write ourselves. Where we do self-introseption in solidarity to dedicate the category colonized and colonizer. Margin is the space (site) of resistance. Enter that space. Let us meet there. We greet you as liberators. (p. 28).

The space in the above citation stands for focused resilience, a persistent mode of struggle, intellectual awareness, critical self-analysis, a tenacious attitude for radical change, and continuous negotiations through proper channels, which are well-acknowledged. Meeting the social, political, and lawful rights and duties are some required essentials to paving the way to transforming their lives.

IV. CONCLUSION

Meena Kandasamy attained global acclaim by engaging with mainstream literature through her diverse literary styles, incorporating both straightforward and distorted language, as well as a radical deconstruction of patriarchal structures and the subversion of archetypes. She has utilised art and her literary work to cultivate marginalised awareness. Marginalised and dominated Dalit and minority groups have been examined, whereas, as per her, Vidyut Bhagwat articulates Dalit consciousness in these terms:

> By using the term *Dalit Women* we are trying to say that if women from Dalit castes and of Dalit consciousness create a space for themselves—for fearless expression—if they become subjects or agents of self, they will provide a new leadership to Indian society in general and to feminist and Dalit movements in particular. (Vidyut Bhagwat, p.127)

In the course of this discussion, Kandasamy, as an accomplished author, advocates for "HUMANITY" in society as the paramount remedy for all forms of discrimination, atrocities, and exploitation. The impact of Ambedkarite philosophy is significant in Tamil Dalit literature. He assigned the utmost significance to humanism and proclaimed for authors.

Kandasamy engages deeply and passionately with the tribulations of her characters, allowing readers to experience a sense of 'cathartic pleasure' upon engaging with her works. In her poem *Their Daughters,* she showcases matriarchal humanism and legacy.

We: their daughters.
We: the daughters of their soil.
We, mostly, write.

(*Their Daughters*)

The current research paper transitioned from a subjective expression to an objective one, as the author offers solutions to life's problems and challenges through education, knowledge, and pragmatic action.

Objectives of the Paper

The objective of this research paper, "Intersectional Re-framing: A Tool for Portraying Phoenix Like Characters in Meena Kandasamy's Poems", is to acknowledge and sensitise mainstream literature to the

stories and struggles of the underprivileged, downtrodden, and victimised segments of society. Kandasamy establishes herself as an interventionist through her literary work, expressing herself boldly and challenging entrenched hegemonic contradictions. She serves as a representative for the deprived sections of society.

Her successful establishment of a niche in the literary landscape paves the way for emerging voices, inspiring them not only through her arduous journey but also by empowering them to negotiate their rights. Kandasamy has cast a stone at the surface of the moon, creating a spectrum of possibilities for oppressed individuals, enabling them to dream big and aspire for a better life. Kandasamy's literary creations serve as inspiring milestones for the future of Dalit literature, deserving acknowledgement and acclaim in society, both theoratically and practically, as a means to establish social equality.

Kandasamy gives voice to the rebellious energy of the underprivileged; she amplifies the negotiating energy of the underprivileged, ensuring their experiences resonate. She advocates for equality across the multifaceted dimensions of life for victims of subjugation and atrocities. Her work serves as an inspiration for active resistance to reshape unjust socio-cultural and political patterns.

Kandasamy subverts traditional Indian myths, offering alternatives for social justice. She encourages Dalit and downtrodden classes to liberate themselves from historical oppression through poetry and other literary forms, striving for their moksha, or liberation.

The aforementioned points reflect her aspirational and creative strategies for future generations to engage actively in the struggles of life through knowledge, intellect, and pragmatic solutions.

This paper aims to highlight the dynamic and resilient spirit of the poet in transforming lives, helping individuals overcome humiliation, and fostering self-respect. Kandasamy embodies a self-driven, kinetic spirit for all communities, courageously acknowledging their exploitation while suggesting pathways for liberation and social transformation.

Literature Review of the Paper

The present research paper has been critically analysed to identify thematic gaps, with a focus on the specifications and appreciation of primary sources. This paper, entitled "Intersectional Reframing: A Tool for Portraying Phoenix Like Characters in Meena Kandasamy's Poems", establishes her as an interventionist within mainstream literature. Kandasamy effectively provides a platform for the entire spectrum of marginalised, downtrodden, subaltern, victimised, and caste-discriminated groups in society. Through her creativity, she not only becomes their representative but also ensures their voices are heard.

This paper acknowledges the significant contribution of her poetry in reframing notions of humanity, fostering a sensitive, liberal, and pragmatic society through the 'collective consciousness' of these communities.

Furthermore, she paves the way for Dalit literature to be integrated into the curriculum of universities and colleges as an essential component of literary studies. The research conducted in this paper draws upon the following primary resources:

- ***Ms. Militancy***- Meena Kandasamy
- ***Breast Stories*** -*"Draupadi"* Mahasweta Devi
- ***Bhumika*** — Aditya Iyengar
- ***Touch*** — Meena Kandasamy
- ***Beginning Theory*** — Peter Barry

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Evolutionary Path and Mechanisms of Value Co-creation by Focal Firms in Digital Innovation Ecosystems: Evidence from Anjoy Foods

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Abstract— *In the era of the digital economy, digital innovation ecosystems have become a critical vehicle for the digital transformation and upgrading of traditional industries. Understanding how focal firms drive value co-creation across different stages of ecosystem development is of both theoretical and practical importance. Using Anjoy Foods, a leading enterprise in China's frozen food industry, as a longitudinal case, this study investigates the evolutionary path and underlying mechanisms of value co-creation from the perspective of the digital innovation ecosystem by adopting a motivation–process–outcome analytical framework. The evolution of Anjoy Foods' value co-creation practices from 2019 to 2025 is classified into three sequential stages: connection, collaboration, and symbiosis. The findings indicate that each stage exhibits distinct characteristics, reflecting a progressive transition from linear value co-creation to networked value co-creation and ultimately to ecosystem-based value co-creation. Furthermore, this evolutionary process is jointly driven by four complementary mechanisms: the interest coordination mechanism, information integration mechanism, incentive compatibility mechanism, and environmental coupling mechanism. The findings provide practical insights for enterprises seeking to implement value co-creation strategies within digital innovation ecosystems in the digital economy.*

Keywords— ***Digital innovation ecosystem, Focal firm, Value co-creation, Evolutionary path, Mechanism.***

I. INTRODUCTION

In the digital economy era, digital technologies represented by artificial intelligence, big data, and the Internet of Things (IoT) are fundamentally reshaping organizational innovation paradigms and competitive dynamics. Traditional, firm-centric isolated innovation is progressively giving way to multi-actor, multidimensional, and collaborative digital innovation ecosystems. Consequently, the scope and nature of value co-creation have undergone profound transformations, evolving from dyadic interactions between a firm and its customers toward an ecosystem-oriented network characterized by digital technology enablement and diversified value distribution.

As a foundational segment of the national economy, the food industry's digital transformation has attracted growing attention. The frozen food sector, in particular, faces an urgent need for digitalization due to its extended supply chain, complex production-sales coordination, and stringent cold-chain requirements. Anjoy Foods Group Co., Ltd., a leading enterprise in China's frozen food sector, initiated a systematic digital transformation and supply chain integration in 2019. By 2025, Anjoy became the first dual-listed "A+H" frozen food enterprise in China, consistently leading the industry in revenue, thereby providing a highly representative case for academic inquiry.

Regarding evolutionary paths, Li and Wu (2024)[1] drew on symbiosis theory to show that digital innovation ecosystems consist of focal firms, digital platforms, and research institutions, with mutualistic symbiosis representing the optimal evolutionary trajectory. Wu, Bai & He (2024)[2] adopted a dynamic capabilities perspective to identify three evolutionary stages: integration, extension, and sharing of digital resources. Regarding driving mechanisms, Qiu, Yu & Wang (2024)[3] constructed a "Behavior–Relationship–Value" analytical framework to examine value dynamics across the emerging, developing, and mature stages of digital industry innovation ecosystems. Zhang et al. (2024)[4] demonstrated that the fundamental logic underlying developer-user co-creation is mutual benefit, while Gong, Zhang & Dong (2024)[5] proposed a governance framework focusing on resource balancing, value sharing, and trust-based cooperation. However, existing research primarily focuses on platform-based or high-tech enterprises, leaving traditional food manufacturing—especially the frozen food subsector—under-researched. To address this gap, this study examines Anjoy to address two key questions: How do focal firms drive value co-creation in digital innovation ecosystems? What are the underlying evolutionary paths and mechanisms?

This paper contributes to the literature in three ways: First, it delineates a three-stage evolutionary path of value co-creation—"Connection–Collaboration–Symbiosis"—enriching evolutionary theories of digital innovation ecosystems. Second, it identifies four core mechanisms driving value co-creation (benefit coordination, information integration, incentive alignment, and environmental coupling), establishing a holistic analytical framework for firm-led digital innovation ecosystems. Third, by focusing on the food manufacturing sector, it offers practical insights for peer enterprises undertaking digital transformation and ecosystem-level value co-creation.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 DIGITAL INNOVATION ECOYSTEMS

A digital innovation ecosystem represents an integration of digital innovation and innovation ecosystem concepts, extending innovation ecosystem theory into the context of the digital economy. Research suggests that digital innovation ecosystems are complex adaptive systems grounded in data assets, propelled by digital technologies, and linked by digital platforms, achieving deep alignment among actors, resources, technologies, and institutional environments[6]. Key actors include focal digital firms, innovation partners, digital product users, and platform operators[7]. These ecosystems exhibit symbiotic traits, interactive collaboration, digital modularity, and dynamic equilibrium[1][8].

Focal firms possess relative competitive advantages and exert strong spillover effects that lead ecosystem collaboration. They hold superior resources and capabilities in technology, market access, and human capital compared to other actors. Within a digital innovation ecosystem, the focal firm serves as the primary architect—leveraging platform capabilities to orchestrate cross-boundary resources, harmonize multi-party interests, and direct value co-creation.

2.2 VALUE CO-CREATION

Value co-creation is a dynamic process in which actors jointly create value through service exchange and resource integration. In digital innovation ecosystems, value co-creation utilizes data as a key factor of production and digital collaboration as a connecting link, dissolving temporal, spatial, and sectoral barriers to facilitate the efficient flow and deep integration of innovation, market, and ecological resources. Applying service-dominant logic, Zhang et al. (2024) [4] explicated coordination mechanisms between developers and users, highlighting reciprocity as the core logic driving interdependent participation. Mihale-Wilson and Güler (2025)[9] further noted that multi-stakeholder sharing and recombination of technologies, knowledge, and services generate synergistic value exceeding what any single actor could achieve independently.

2.3 INTEGRATED ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Synthesizing existing literature and Anjoy's organizational practices, this study proposes an integrated framework (Figure 1). Following a rigorous "Motivation-Process-Outcome" logical chain, we analyze the evolutionary paths and underlying mechanisms of focal-firm-driven value co-creation to ensure systematic depth.

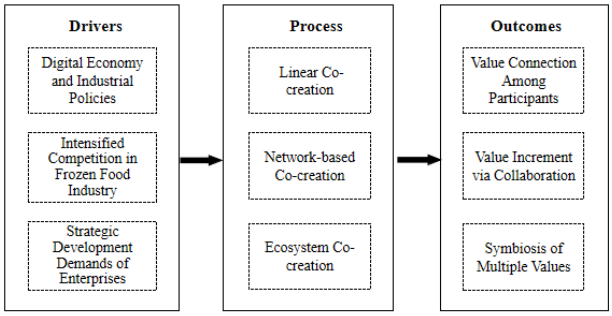


Fig.1: Analytical Framework for Value Co-creation Research at Anjoy Food

III. RESERACH DESIGN

3.1 METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a longitudinal single-case study method to analyze the evolutionary path and mechanisms of Anjoy's value co-creation. The rationale is threefold: First, a longitudinal approach enables long-term tracking of an organization, accurately reflecting continuous organizational change and exposing underlying evolutionary logic; second, it allows researchers to unpack complex transition processes by dividing corporate development into distinct analytical units; third, it incorporates temporal factors to integrate key events and outcomes, offering a granular view of dynamic transformations over time [10].

3.2 CASE SELECTION

Anjoy was selected based on three criteria: (1) Theoretical Sampling / Typicality: Anjoy Food is the first "A+H" dual-listed firm in China's frozen food sector, leading the industry with a revenue of RMB 16.193 billion in 2025; (2) Data Accessibility: The company initiated systematic digital transformation in 2019, providing rich and continuous publicly disclosed data (annual reports, ESG reports, etc.) from 2019 to 2025; (3) Industry Representativeness: Anjoy experienced a complete evolution from channel-driven to digitally enabled, and ultimately to ecosystem-led operations. Industry-specific challenges—long supply chains, complex production-sales coordination, and strict cold-chain requirements—are fully manifested in its transformation.

3.3 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Data were collected from multiple sources: (1) Anjoy's annual reports, sustainability reports, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) reports from 2019 to 2025; (2) Official corporate announcements, third-party equity research reports, and authoritative media coverage. Triangulation across data sources ensured data comprehensiveness and validity.

We identified critical milestone events across Anjoy's transformation to demarcate developmental stages, subsequently coding and mapping these empirical instances against value co-creation archetypes to induce core mechanisms.

IV. EVOLUTIONARY PATHS OF ANJOY'S VALUE CO-CREATION

Anjoy's value co-creation trajectory is driven by market demands, industrial policies, and corporate strategy. Based on practices from 2019 to 2025, we divide its evolution into three sequential stages: Connection, Collaboration, and Symbiosis, representing a transition from linear to networked, and ultimately to ecosystem-level co-creation.

4.1 CONNECTION STAGE: LINEAR CO-CREATION (2019-2020)

Around 2019, rapidly expanding demand for household ready-to-cook meals, decelerating growth in B2B channels, and Anjoy's strategic impulse to transition from a regional brand to a national market leader forced the firm to expand its co-creation boundaries. Anjoy introduced a dual-driven strategy targeting both B2B and C2C segments ("BC Dual-Engine Strategy"), incorporating household consumers into its co-creation network for the first time through the launch of consumer-grade fresh-lock product lines ("Suo Xian Zhuang"). Concurrently, an equity incentive scheme granting 6.31 million restricted shares to 229 core staff aligned internal stakeholders. Digital infrastructure remained nascent: lightweight systems (EAS, WMS, and CRM) were deployed, but their capabilities were siloed to store inventory tracking, distributor order entry, and basic customer data collection, lacking end-to-end integration.

During this stage, value co-creation remained elementary, dominated by a Linear Co-creation mode characterized by top-down, unidirectional value flows. Outcomes included: (1) successful penetration into C-end household consumer markets, establishing a new revenue growth engine with total revenue reaching RMB 6.965 billion; and (2) the initial formation of a nationwide production-sales network as new manufacturing bases in Henan, Hubei, and Sichuan became operational. However, co-creation outcomes were largely confined to direct economic gains

4.2 COLLABORATION STAGE: NETWORKED CO-CREATION (2021-2022)

As revenue expanded, organizational bottlenecks emerged: upstream raw material suppliers remained disconnected from collaborative platforms, and operational data between production and sales remained fragmented. Rapid capacity expansion, cost pressures, and intensifying market competition compelled Anjoy to utilize digital tools for cost reduction, efficiency optimization, and supply chain stabilization.

Regarding actors, Anjoy acquired controlling stakes in Xinhongye and Xinliuwu, converting upstream surimi and crayfish processors from transactional vendors into equity-aligned partners. This established a fully integrated supply chain encompassing "farmers - raw material suppliers - manufacturing bases - diversified distributors - consumers - research institutes." Digitally, Anjoy implemented EDI production IoT, MES manufacturing execution, SRM supplier relationship management, and OM order

management platforms, connecting data flows across procurement, shop-floor manufacturing, cold-chain logistics, and retail distribution. Actors joined a centralized digital middleware platform, enabling mutual exchange of demand and capacity resources to enhance supply chain resilience.

Value co-creation shifted to a Networked Co-creation mode. The structural archetype evolved from a linear chain to a fully connected network, with digital architecture acting as the nervous system. Bilateral resource flows enabled dual breakthroughs in revenue and profitability, rendering Anjoy the first enterprise in China's frozen food sector to exceed RMB 10 billion in revenue in 2022. End-to-end digital deployment substantially improved productivity and inventory turnover, shifting the value focus from purely financial returns to network-wide industrial synergy.

4.3 SYMBIOSIS STAGE: ECOSYSTEM-LEVEL CO-CREATION (2023-2025)

While networked collaboration resolved operational efficiency, the digital footprint remained restricted to commercial actors, excluding non-commercial stakeholders such as government entities, agricultural financial institutions, and environmental service providers. Driven by national ESG, carbon neutrality, and rural revitalization mandates, Anjoy needed a multi-layered digital ecosystem to cultivate mutualistic symbiosis.

Regarding actors, Anjoy expanded its outer ring to include local governments, agricultural banks, environmental service providers, university research groups, and rural cooperatives, forming a three-tier ecological hierarchy. Digitally, Anjoy upgraded to a enterprise-grade ERP system, launched PLM for R&D, LIMS for quality testing, solar energy management systems, and reclaimed water digital monitoring modules, while co-developing an AI-powered smart office platform with DingTalk. Actors across ecological rings leveraged the platform to exchange industrial, administrative, and green resources freely.

Value co-creation reached an Ecosystem-Level Co-creation mode. Supported by an intelligent, green digital stack, actors achieved deep resource integration and multidimensional value creation encompassing operational, social, and environmental performance. In 2025, Anjoy became the first dual-listed "A+H" firm in its industry. Through a digital cooperative model ("Firm + Cooperatives + Farmers"), Anjoy enabled over 6,000 farming households to achieve sustainable income growth while reducing carbon emissions per unit of output. Value outputs transcended financial metrics, yielding a tripartite value system—economic, social, and ecological—that underpins Anjoy's sustainable development.

V. CORE OPERATING MECHANISMS OF VALUE CO-CREATION

To explain the drivers behind Anjoy's evolutionary trajectory, this section conceptualizes four core operating mechanisms: benefit coordination, information integration, incentive alignment, and environmental coupling (see Figure 2).

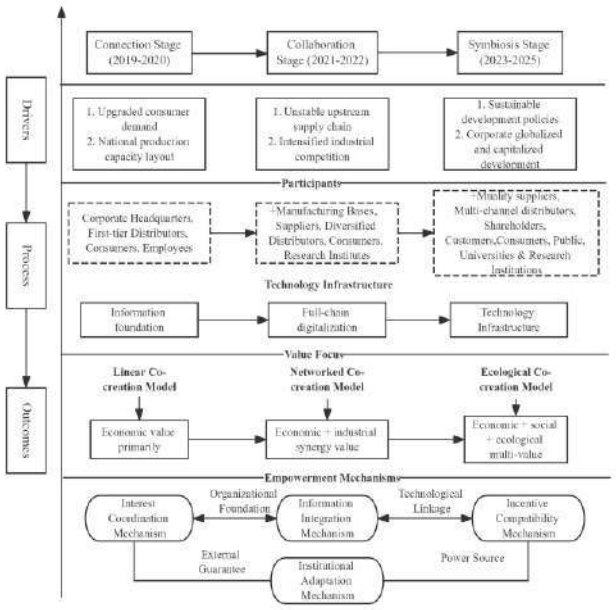


Fig.2: Evolutionary Pathways and Mechanisms of Value Co-creation at Anjoy Food

5.1 BENEFIT COORDINATION MECHANISM

Benefit coordination provides the organizational foundation for multi-actor co-creation by mitigating collaboration costs and establishing a virtuous cycle of "Participation–Contribution–Benefit." Value co-creation between focal and non-focal actors depends on dynamic dynamic gain-sharing; across evolutionary stages, value distribution priority must progressively shift toward non-focal actors to sustain trust and engagement[1]. Anjoy operationalized benefit coordination via: (1) Equity Binding: Acquiring Xinhongye and Xinliuwu to convert suppliers into strategic partners; (2) Risk Mitigating: Utilizing stable procurement commitments to stabilize income expectations for farmers and raw material vendors; and (3) Gain Sharing: Deploying employee stock ownership plans and regular dividend distributions to share value added equitable.

5.2 INOFRMATION INTERGATION MECHANISM

Information integration serves as the technical bond of

value co-creation. Digital resource sharing variability and digital innovation payoff levels positively influence co-creation behaviors [6]. Open, affordant digital technologies dismantle organizational silos, expanding ecosystem participation and facilitating resource matching. Anjoy implemented this across three levels: (1) Data Sensing: IoT and MES implementations integrated real-time operational data across 14 manufacturing bases; (2) Platform Orchestration: Systems such as CRM, SRM, and BI consolidated siloed data into unified information streams, allowing suppliers, distributors, and R&D teams to coordinate on a shared platform; (3) Intelligent Decision-Making: Advanced BI analytics and predictive AI translated raw operational data into actionable strategic insights. This mechanism evolved from basic IT deployment in the Connection stage to end-to-end integration in the Collaboration stage, and intelligent analytics in the Symbiosis stage.

5.3 INCENTIVE ALIGNMENT MECHANISM

Incentive alignment acts as the continuous operational engine, ensuring that individual actors advance their self-interests while aligning with overall ecosystem objectives. During ecosystem evolution, focal firms absorb higher coordination costs to ensure system stability, complemented by enforcement mechanisms against opportunistic behavior that scale with network complexity. Anjoy achieved incentive alignment through: (1) Equitable Value Distribution: Matching stakeholder contributions with proportional returns to eliminate free-riding or perceived exploitation; (2) Procedural Governance: Enhancing transparency and predictability through formalized ESG governance and open information disclosures. Fair distribution incentivizes continuous participation, ensuring long-term ecosystem vitality.

5.4 ENVIRONMENTAL COUPLING MECHANISM

Environmental coupling provides external legitimacy and fit. Ecosystems must establish contextual symbiotic relationships with external institutional environments to buffer against macro uncertainties. Anjoy accomplished environmental coupling by: (1) Policy Alignment: Leading national-level R&D initiatives under China's "14th Five-Year Plan" and establishing official industry standards, transforming policy mandates into innovation momentum; (2) Market Adaptation: Reconfiguring product strategies based on evolving consumer dynamics; (3) Green Compliance: Internalizing ESG standards and clean production protocols into core operational routines; (4) Cultural Reinforcement: Embedding corporate values—"Responsibility, Integrity, Action, and Win-Win"—to foster cohesive corporate governance.

In summary, these four mechanisms interact synergistically, propelling value co-creation from linear formats to an ecosystem-level state and reinforcing long-term enterprise sustainability.

VI. CONCLUSION

6.1 CONCLUSION

Using a longitudinal case study of Anjoy within a "Motivation–Process–Outcome" framework, this paper yields three primary conclusions:

Anjoy's value co-creation followed a three-stage evolutionary trajectory: Connection (actor inclusion and initial connectivity), Collaboration (end-to-end digital integration), and Symbiosis (ESG integration and global expansion), marking a structural transition from linear to networked, and ultimately ecosystem-level co-creation.

Value co-creation is driven by four synergistic mechanisms: benefit coordination, information integration, incentive alignment, and environmental coupling.

The focal firm plays crucial roles as an orchestrator, resource integrator, interest coordinator, and ecosystem leader. Through strategic iteration, digital platform building, and supply chain consolidation, Anjoy successfully transitioned from channel-driven growth to ecosystem-led development.

6.2 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Adhere to Staged Evolution: Value co-creation unfolds in distinct phases. Enterprises should align resources with the core tasks of each stage rather than pursuing a premature, all-in ecosystem strategy.

Align Digitalization with Strategy: Digital capabilities must directly serve overarching business strategies. Firms should clarify strategic imperatives prior to designing and deploying digital solutions

.Deploy Orchestrated Mechanisms: Sustained value co-creation requires multi-mechanism alignment. Firms must combine benefit coordination, information integration , incentive alignment, and environmental coupling.

6.3 LIMITAITONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has limitations that suggest avenues for future research: First, relying on a single case may limit statistical generalizability; multi-case comparative designs across diverse industries are recommended. Second, empirical data relied primarily on secondary public disclosures; future studies could incorporate internal field interviews and executive surveys. Finally, as emerging technologies like generative AI and blockchain evolve, future research should explore how next-generation digital

tools reconfigure co-creation dynamics between focal firms and ecosystem actors.

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Pan-Asianism, Theory and Culture: A Nexus in Exit West by Mohsin Hamid

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Abstract— *Pan-Asianism, civilization and the actuality of globalization is ideated in Hamid's Exit West in a postcolonial actuality. The paper explores this idea through an analysis of the novel in the light of nationalism, violence, civilization and its adjunct idea of identity in a globalized world fractured by late-stage migration. The examination of these ideas takes place through Asian and Western civilizations as two different and opposing thought processes/philosophies in context with the novel that ultimately shape an ideological stance of the socio-political implications in neo-coloniality.*

Keywords— ***Pan-Asianism, postcoloniality, cultural theory, multiculturalism, violence, peace***

I. INTRODUCTION

"ASIA is one. The Himalayas divide, only to accentuate, two mighty civilisations, the Chinese with its communism of Confucius, and the Indian with its individualism of the Vedas. But not even the snowy barriers can interrupt for one moment that broad expanse of love for the Ultimate and Universal, which is the common thought-inheritance of every Asiatic race," (Okakura 1) Pan-Asianist ideas have arisen mainly from political discourse with its roots being grounded in oppression politics. But perhaps the major prerogative of founding a common identity in the Asian context is that of spirituality and universalism. No discussion on Pan-Asianism can be undertaken without these atavistic words of recall by Okakura Tenshin that exemplify the essential nature of this philosophy. We have to look at Asian and Western civilisations as two different and opposing thought processes as that is what has been conceived by most scholars that have spoken on the matter. The idea of civilisation exists not only in the physical realm but as a reality that is lived in the minds of the people in the form of naturalised opposition springing from a need for carving self-identity unafflicted and unaffiliated from the "other". However, there is also a major adjustment to this idea.

II. NATIONALISM AND CIVILISATION

Civilisation is remade in reference to itself in the modern context where, "the opposite of the West in Asian civilisations: 'peaceful' as opposed to 'warlike,' 'spiritual' as opposed to 'material,' 'ethical' as opposed to 'decadent' " (Duara 108) are ways in which the Asian civilisation has tried to contest equivalence on the nature of living. "drawn to ideas of a common global civilization originating in the technological achievements of the West, but spiritually regenerated by the major world civilisations." (Duara 104) Thus, the amalgamation of the eastern and western civilisational qualities can enable a reestablishment of the global code. The two opposite sides of the coin that live in perfect harmony so as to enable a more versatile and historically ingenious reflection of true globalisation. Or is it?

Tagore warned the world of an era where nationalism and globalisation need to be naturalised in a way that they don't affect the idea of unity that has been perpetuated by the great saints of the country like Nanak, Kabir, Chaitanya etc, who established this with the idea of preaching one god to the diverse races in India (23). This again ties in with the aforementioned idea of universalism by Tenshin. The diverse nature of Asia has immense

cultural and traditional differences with pockets of commonality in Buddhism and Confucianism. However, one can argue that the idea of worship/spirituality is not only abundantly present but also serves as a symbol of Asia itself. This is explored by Tagore when he says that, "In these national carnivals of materialism are not the Western peoples spending most of their vital energy in merely producing things and neglecting the creation of ideals?" (32) The West serves as a competitive symbol of Asia in its materialism and ignorance of ethical discourse. This can be typified in simpler terms as the dichotomy of good and evil, religious and anti-religious, but such a gross simplification only aids in an ontological discussion and not lived realities in the current scenario of people that are a mixture of both.

III. EXIT WEST

Exit West serves as a perfect example of the ideas I intend to explore in this paper. In light of multiculturalism and global cultural flows, the fluidity of morality and perception of ideals as realities is in a flux. Hamid deals with precisely this problem in a rather allegorical tone if not a full fledged rendition through his magical realism and the idea of the doors. "When we live in a democracy, we assume that we're living according to certain principles - equality, freedom, justice - and yet we're constantly learning what freedom is." (Big Think, 2023, 11:50) Hamid turns the tables on the global south's idea of freedom by unrestricting borders and addressing the status quo, but the exploration that ideates freedom in the form of movement as a non-oppression. His attempt at forcing a chaotic world is actually as primal and atavistic as Okakura's comparison of the East and the West. The love story at the heart of the novel in all its 'despiteness,' and normalcy is a depiction of the regular human's condition. The precluded new generation of a world with no power to decide a future is given agency through company, and the magical doors serve as a political testimony of a migrant's love affair with destiny. However, it stays that way, just as an affair. Saeed and Nadia never get married, they only provide each other love and intimacy, a sort of co-dependency that is withal unmarred from change, only silently metastasizing into separate lonelinesses, as symbols of the dichotomy of the East and the West, the shaken ideals of the contemporary world.

The element of anonymity by placing his characters in a setting that is a reflection of muslim society is an allegorical and politically subversive move. He intends on establishing an idea of universality by histiographically and culturally commuting the lines between fiction and reality, viz. meta-fiction or meta-reality. The bombs, refugees and the romance as the centerpiece of the mantle are all indelicate indications of maybe not just Pakistani society but South East Asianism. Hamid introduces us to this in a macabre and somewhat of a post colonial re-narration, "The door to her closet was open… but the closet doorway was dark, darker than night, a rectangle of complete darkness– the heart of darkness. And out of this darkness, a man was emerging." (Hamid 6). The man stumbling into a pale-skinned Australian woman's home with strenuous effort through the door symbolises many things but the one we should focus on is that it is not just the one man but an entire people. "Minorities are part of that on-going process of 'human artifice,' as Arendt describes it, where 'we are not born equal, but become equal as members of a group on the strength of our decision to guarantee ourselves mutually equal rights." (Arendt qtd. in Bhabha xxiii).

Bhabha pontificates on the way minorities are able to assert their human rights through 'human artifice' but we can suspect that the same applies to the mass migrations in Exit West as the people from the third world boil unto the first as a modicum of reckoning from the "heart of darkness." The rights are granted to the self by the person, and by extension to the people through the doors ability to transport them. "he was aware of the fragility of his body. He knew how little it took to make a man into meat: the wrong blow, the wrong gunshot, the wrong flick of a blade, turn of a car, presence of a microorganism in a handshake, a cough. He was aware that alone a person is almost nothing." (Hamid 7) The "wrongness" of existence is wrought out by the doors as they provide a meaningful way in which the person alone can change his destiny, by which he would be changing the course for the rest of his people. The "wrongness" of circumstances is thrust upon him as a disbalance in the scale of the idea of violence as described by Galtung, "the cause of the difference between the potential and the actual, between what could have been and what is." (Galtung 168) If violence is thought of in these terms, the disbalance of lived realities perpetrates the clear demarcations between not just class but also temporal switches of destiny. Bhabha talks of going "beyond" the markings and location of culture in one particular point of time but tries to approach it dynamically, in a sense that with global confluence, everything everywhere happening all at once has implications that are farther reaching than just one point in time, one place at a time. Hamid's idea of the doors does exactly this; the man is not just travelling, but transcending from his homeland of utmost danger to a safe haven flipping the destiny wherein the idea of violence is resisted, the beyond is flipped and temporality shifted.

"for when we migrate, we murder from our lives those we leave behind." (Hamid 94) Violence according to Galtung's notions can rear its head in many ways. This idea in fiction has many connotations similar to the multiversal and butterfly effect respectively, however, that is not the meta-reality we need to delve in. The obvious post-colonial sentiment that arises when we consider Saeed's father being left behind is obviously an indication to the greater violence that transcends the journey specific that a surface level reading may present. Hamid's notion drives deeper, but how so? "When he prayed he touched his parents, who could not otherwise be touched… this loss unites humanity, unites every human being, the temporary nature of our being-ness, and our shared sorrow" (Hamid 201, 202) The civilisational context of humanity being tied by sorrow and death is in essence a signification of human memory as a catalyst. Memory as trauma, of the many violences that seep into the mind with time and are displayed as 'what ifs' in vicarious expressions. This vicariousness is how we can understand Galtung's idea of violence and its non-somatic/mental implications in characters actions and narrations, and this is what ties it with the identity of disjuncture and omnipotence of violence. Violence once committed, is forever enacted.

IV. ASIANISM

"She understood more and more, and she understood also that the Nigerians were in fact not all Nigerians, some were half-Nigerians, or from places that bordered Nigeria, from families that spanned both sides of a border, and further that there was perhaps no such thing as a Nigerian, or certainly no one common thing," (Hamid 144) Pan-Asianism as a concept is of course politically linked to Japanese imperialist and Indian anti-imperialist stances but if we talk of the philosophers and thinkers who engaged with the ideas of "Asianism," we discover that the school of thought that it presents is similar to Voltaire's liberty and Gandhian monotheist theology. One "Asianism" in particular is the question of universalism in the face of oppression. Although, "Asia is one," and "a single ancient Asiatic peace," (Okakura 4) is at the helm of its focus, universalism as a force of idealism is in direct contradiction with a Pan-Asiatic identity ironically linked only to Asia. To think of Asia as a nation would be to fail the unifying, humanist and atavistic philosophy of Pan-Asianism. Therefore, "... the spiritual impulse of a civilization tends to be universalizing, national boundaries are ultimately artificial and limiting." (Duara 107) Migration in the novel is precisely the negatory mechanism through which the structure of nationalism itself collapses. That is how political power is usurped or rather, re-usurped from the structure in the novel. Boundaries are fragmented and dismembered as refugees pour in from all corners of the world into the first world as a reclamation of pre-coloniality. However, among the chaos there is a startling unity that can be seen as Nadia navigates this primordial non-division by securing a place in the Nigerian council. The unity and universalism of kindness that people in distress exercise as a defense mechanism seems to be the motif that aligns parallely with the Pan-Asiatic philosophy of universalism. It is not only that Asia is one, perhaps the entire world is one before the boundaries were broken and remade into a plethora of odious symbiotic division of individuation. And Pan-Asianism as a civilisation and not as a nation stands in the way of such divisive realities through the synthesis of theology as an antithetical ideological position to the Western front of, "hedonistic materialism." (Duara 119)

V. CONCLUSION

Multiculturally speaking, Saeed and Nadia as the two nodes of representation of repression embody the philosophy of Pan-Asianistic spirituality and universalism in a context removed from theoretical discourse. Their lives are as real as it gets in a world that is disjunctured, especially in reference with the current scenario. "Hamid's reply to a question on president trump's order banning Muslim migrants in America shows that such bans will not work as migration is inevitable. It's a global phenomenon and it only reflects a mind colored by hatred." (Shakir 840) The inevitability of migration as a human activity is precisely what Bhabha refers to as political performativity. "a movement away from a world conceived in binary terms, away from a notion of the people's aspirations sketched in simple black and white." (Bhabha 21)

Although Bhabha dwells temporally on this concept; from a philosophical and ideological sense, we can assume that in reality, migration is also an act of transmogrification, an eclosion of the self. Saeed and Nadia in their many migrations turn into many selves and leave them behind. Perhaps the message here is that in migration and as representations of the modern refugee/global citizen Pan-Asianism is not just a centering locus of spirituality and permanence, it shifts from being an anchor to the large universalization of change itself. Universalism and acceptance that are the creed of Pan-Asianism undergoes a transition into many "transiences" and becomes the overlying actuality of identity.

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Naga Narratives as Acts of Assertion of Identity and Resistance Against Colonial Narratives and Contemporary Marginalisation

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Abstract— *This paper aims to explore narratives in Nagas' literary writings as acts of identity assertion and cultural resistance against colonial histories and contemporary marginalisation. This paper will examine some of the region's rich yet often overlooked literary output. It will shed light on the interplay between memory, identity, and cultural heritage, and on how the writers reclaim and articulate their worldview and ethos through documentation and creation, challenging entrenched stereotypes while redefining their roles in the contemporary world. This paper also aims to interrogate the power of storytelling as both a tool for preserving history and for asserting existence. By situating the selected literature within broader discourses of Indigenous literature, this study will also highlight how local experiences of the Naga people resonate with global Indigenous movements for recognition, rights, and cultural affirmation, challenging stereotypes and redefining their place in a rapidly globalising world, ultimately questioning whose stories are heard and whose voices are silenced.*

Keywords— ***Identity, Naga Narratives, North East, English literature.***

The emergence of North East literature has challenged long-held colonial narratives and created space for asserting voices, histories, and cultural identities, opening a vital platform for marginalised and often overlooked communities. Despite its rich oral and cultural traditions, North East literature has remained largely on the periphery and has been historically excluded from literary canons. Writers from the North East face systemic marginalisation and the invisibilisation of Indigenous experiences, compounded by cultural erasure and the dominance of mainstream and urban narratives. However, in recent years, the burgeoning literature from the North East acknowledges the importance of these.

The Naga communities are among the largest Indigenous groups in India, spanning Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, and Myanmar. Writers from these regions, especially women who write in English, have produced brilliant books that warrant inclusion in any literary canon that purports to serve India, whether in the discourses of Post-Colonialism, Diaspora, Contemporary literature, Trauma literature, or Historical fiction. Some stories, rooted in folklore and oral traditions, reflect the life experiences and struggles of various Naga communities, serving as both mirrors and shapers of their identities; some delve into their difficult, traumatic socio-political experiences, while others explore their position in the world from their perspectives. Insiders' narratives are crucial not only for shaping the region's literature and identity but also for shaping the Nation's literature.

Northeast India exemplifies the remarkable resilience of its Indigenous communities. As they navigate modernity and globalisation, these communities maintain a deep connection to their heritage. The narratives they uphold affirm their existence by weaving traditional motifs into contemporary realities and merging personal experiences with broader contextual frameworks, thereby opening up fresh possibilities for meaningful 'inter-ethnic proximities'

and interactions through narrative 'intimacies and expositions.'

Despite its ancient literary legacies, North East English literature has gained significant visibility only recently. This visibility may be attributed to less gatekeeping by major publishing houses and to increased English translations from other Indian languages. While "The earliest folk literature of Assam dates back to 600 AD."[1] (Koganti) and "Written Manipuri literature began around the 10th century AD."[2] (culturopedia.com), the history of written English literature in the region is relatively recent, largely developed in the 20th century following the introduction of the Roman script.

English has evolved into "...one of the common languages in day-to-day life in the region, and which is not a language of the elite but of the ordinary masses, it has been provincialised as an effective vehicle to carry the orature and lore of the communities, their mythic universe, agonies and anger, and, in the process, the language enters a terrain defined by unique spatial and experiential realities."[3] (Prodhani) Consequently, English has automatically become the "de facto language whenever different people groups from the region gather together."[4](Pou 9)

From a postcolonial viewpoint, colonial writings constructed the Nagas as "savage" and, in official writings, portrayed the Naga Hills as spaces of conflict and as territories of inaccessibility and remoteness, a construction carried into the popular mainstream imagination. Scholars have examined how European epistemologies forged notions of "primitive" and ideas of "difference" in colonised societies, and how such knowledge fundamentally shaped the nature of rule in Imperial governance in the colonies. [5] (Said, 2003/1978; Salemink, 2003).

John Butler's account further stereotypes this perception of the Nagas as an uncivilised race. The idea of the "savage" was imprinted by linking it to the physical profile and appearance of the "tribes." "The south-eastern hills of Assam are the abode of many tribes of Nagas. They are a very uncivilised race, with dark complexions, athletic sinewy frames, hideously wild and ugly visages: their faces and bodies being tattoed in a most frightful manner by pricking the juice of the bela nut into the skin in a variety of fantastic figures." [6] (Butler, 1847)

For a long time, the Nagas, the 'Savages' or the 'Noble Savages,' have fascinated the Western mind and were exoticised when 'discovered' by anthropologists in the 19th Century, as they had 'discovered' several other communities and nations. Thus, they became exotic specimens to 'study.' Writings on Nagas by colonial administrators were varied and imaginative, covering their languages, rituals and religion, taboos and omens, political and village structures, their 'propensity to raid,' dress and ornaments, funeral customs, head-hunting, monolithic cultures, and so on.

This paper aims to critique and demonstrate how such reductive imaginations of the Naga have been contested through Nagas' own writing about themselves. I intend to amplify the narratives of North East writers, especially Naga writers, who have challenged their homogenisation, objectification, and marginalisation within both colonial and national discourses.

Early writings in English

By the 1960s, writings in English had been published. Jyotsna Bhattacharjee's Shadows in Sunshine (1965) was followed much later by Ngangom's "Words and the Silence" (1987). Writing in English took off rather slowly, but by the 2000s, Esterine Kire's "The sky is My Father," originally published as "A Naga Village Remembered," was the first novel by a Naga writer, published in 2003. It is a compelling work of historical fiction that chronicles the final battle between the British Imperial forces and the Khonoma tribes. Historical novels such as this one, which weave Angami Naga words and phrases into English, emerged as a key form for decolonising narratives, portraying Naga societal structures, ethical systems, and their bravery. This novel has proven itself to be a work of scholarship suitable for academic disciplines. The University of Delhi has prescribed it for the literature course "South East Asian Literature." Then there are recent publications like "His Majesty's Headhunters: The Siege of Kohima that Shaped World History" by Mmhonlümo Kikon, which "challenges dominant historical narratives by centring the agency of the Naga people in both resisting British imperialism and playing a decisive role in the Battle of Kohima"[7] (Lucy Yhome), "The Collector's Wife" (2005), a novel by Mitra Phukan that offers vivid depictions of social and political violence in Assam and the Northeast, is another pioneering work. From Arunachal Pradesh, Lummer Dai's debut novel "Pharor Xile Xile" (1961) could perhaps be considered the first novel of Arunachal Pradesh, written by an Arunachali. Then Yumlam Tana's "The Man and the Tiger" (1999) and Mamang Dai's "The Legend of Pensam" (2006) truly marked their presence in the literary canon. Mamang Dai re-created the prehistoric past of Arunachal Pradesh in "The Legends of Pensam" and "Black Hills."[8] (Yater, 2021)

Writing Orality

The oral, written, and digitised literature are living, breathing reflections of the socio-cultural world that defines the North East region. They have profoundly shaped identity, instilling a sense of pride and belonging within communities. The importance of narrative voice in shaping identity posits that individuals construct and negotiate their selfhood through storytelling. Paul Ricoeur's concept of

"The Self and Narrative Identity" suggests that it allows individuals to engage with their past, present and future, ultimately redefining who they are.[9] (Ricoeur) Elaborating on this point, Stuart postulates that discourse generates identity, which is reinvented in changing social and political contexts.[10] (Hall) Oral literature is a significant part of most early English narratives by Naga writers. They combine orality with fiction and intertwine the genres of novel and lore. Commenting on the relationship between orality and writing, Walter J. Ong writes:

"Oral cultures indeed produce powerful and beautiful verbal performances of high artistic and human worth, which are no longer even possible once writing has taken possession of the psyche. Nevertheless, without writing, human consciousness cannot achieve its fuller potentials, cannot produce other beautiful and powerful creations. In this sense, orality needs to produce and is destined to produce writing."[11] (Ong 14)

When a people begin to write about themselves, the ubiquity of colonial writings contrasts with the emergence of insider writings. Works such as "On Being a Naga" (2018) by Temsula Ao; "Walking the Roadless Road, exploring the tribes of Nagaland" (2019) by Easterine Kire; and "The Trail from Makuilongdi: The Continuing Saga of the Zeliangrong People" (2001) by Namthiubuiyang Pamei are among the forerunners in insider narratives of self and the ontogenesis of a people. Then there are autobiographies such as "A Naga Odyssey: Visier's Long Way Home" by Visier Sanyu and Richard Broome (2017), and "Once Upon a Life: Burnt Curry and Bloody Rags: A Memoir" by Temsula Ao (2014), which demonstrate that Naga lives and histories are worth telling and documenting. Visier's autobiography is not only about the self but also a rich documentation of his community.

Temsula Ao wrote on the importance of remembering and writing in her poem, "The Old Story Teller", "Grandfather constantly warned/That forgetting the stories/Would be catastrophic:/We would lose our history,/Territory, and most certainly/Our intrinsic identity./So I told stories…"[12] (Ao)

Esterine's take on telling one's own story. "Every man is a story. Every nation is a bristling galaxy of stories. To be able to share one's story—shouldn't that be a basic human right? Where there is denial of the freedom to tell our stories, invisible prisons are created….The denial of the right to tell our stories violates our humanity. I believe that every story has its space in History.[13] (Iralu)

Exploring Identity and Resistance

Some writings that address identity and resistance include "The Peripheral Centre: Voices from India's Northeast," edited by Preeti Gill (2010). It contains 26 essays, a mosaic of the region, and each essay questions issues of nation and identity, asking what makes the people of the Northeast so alienated from the 'mainstream' (dust jacket, front). The title itself subtly questions who is in the 'periphery' and who is in the centre, asserting identity, culture, and social reality to protest the literary hegemony of the mainstream: "The distant north-eastern part of the subcontinent too was entirely dominated by tribes – the Nagas…"[14] (NCERT p 93) In 2012, Sanjoy Hazarika and Preeti Gill, with 'Insider' researchers from Nagaland and Assam, brought out "Bearing Witness," which documents the impact of conflict on women through interviews.[15] (Gill) Though difficult, this documentation has, to some extent, recorded victims' statements, which is important for preserving historical truth, if not for pursuing justice. Nongkynrih and Ngangom (2003) point out that the writers from the Northeast "living with the menace of the gun" cannot be equated with their counterparts in the mainland, as they "cannot merely indulge in verbal wizardry and woolly aesthetics but must perforce master the art of witness"[16] (Nongkynrih p. ix).

A compelling collection that addresses the complex interplay of politics of belonging and identity in the region is the anthology "Insider Outsider-Belonging and Unbelonging in the North-East," edited by Preeti Gill and Samrat Choudhury. It seeks to illuminate identity politics and belonging in an emerging area of interest and investigation across multiple disciplines. Then there is Temsula Ao, whose several works document Naga identity and culture.

Gender Assertion by women poets

More women have taken up writing, reversing the gender power dynamic by populating their work with principal female characters. Essays, short stories, poems, novels, and reflections by women in anthologies and books reflect the evolving landscape of Naga literature, addressing gender issues head-on. Language is power. Yuimi Vashum's poems in "Love, Lust and Loyalty" cut straight to the core. They are sharp, clinical feminist works that question the unjust treatment of women and patriarchy. She addresses sexual violence in this book by speaking openly about it. In an interview, she said, "...there was a point of time where I began to feel so strongly about sexual violence....In this book particularly, I chose to largely dwell on empowering victims of sexual violence."[17] (Shanmi) In her poem 'Breaking the Shame,' she empowers women, "...my daughter shall fight against silence/So shall my daughters' daughter.../Untill there is no shame in the truth."[18] (Vashum p 32, 33)

T. Keditsu's "Sopfuno" (2018), a poetry book, spoke up, through the power of her poetry, about the realities of Naga society. The poet gave voice to the interiority of a Naga woman in a patriarchal society. Monalisa Changkija, in her

testimonial for the poetry book, said, "...this volume is an uncomfortable head-on collision with the reality of Naga Society of invalidating women's personhood."[19] (Sopfuno 2018, back cover). The poem titled "Tea" in the collection offers an illuminating, critical, and nuanced account of how, through 'tradition', women were edited out of social participation in a humiliating way. "Girls should learn how to make tea/A girl who cannot, will find it difficult to get a husband/...You will know when to rise and set yourself apart from the company of men/As they sit and wait for you to proffer them a cup/...You will learn that you are not a voice but a body indentured to serve tea."[20] (Keditsu) These two poetry books I have picked are, in no way, the only poetry books written by women; they are only for the purpose of highlighting a small but powerful sample of the diverse voices and experiences that Naga women poets bring to the Indian literary landscape.

Narrative device as assertion

A narrative and stylistic device used by recent poets and writers is the use of native words and phrases to challenge colonial hangovers and contemporary narratives, as experimented with and made hugely successful by the Nigerian author Chinua Achebe. "Things Fall Apart" (1958) by Achebe serves as an explanatory voice for colonially oppressed societies across Africa. Likewise, Easterine Kire, inspired by Achebe, wrote several of her novels to claim a rightful space in the Indian majoritarian scene. Her two novels, "When the River Sleeps" (2014) and "Son of the Thundercloud" (2016), considered her masterpieces, are littered with gold nuggets of indigenous wisdom, deeply rooted in Naga folklore, and use several Angami phrases and words to depict the cultural world. "Boats on Land: A collection of short stories" (2012) by Janice Pariat also serves as a historical and cultural record of the communities in Meghalaya, introducing readers to tribal folklore, the supernatural, and traditional beliefs, with extensive use of the Khasi language. [21] Lalhlanpuii)

A poem, "Jngai na la ling" (Far from Home), by Longam Kharpuri in the anthology "We come from the Mist" (2023), speaks of the physical connection to the land and underscores the significance of ritual in the Khasi community. "Pray ritual sacrifice to God almighty of the earth the sky the All./ sacrifice the fruit of the earth to the Mother Mei Ramew."[22] (Kharpuri)

Recent works by Naga writers that discuss the significance of Indigenous storytelling or critique colonial literary frameworks include "The Last Free Naga" (2025) by Jim Wungramyao Kasom, "Tales from the Enchanted Village" (2024), "Where the Light Finds Us" (2025) by Rita Krocha, and "Food Journeys: Stories From The Heart" (2024) by Joel Rodrigues and Dolly Kikon. This is in no way a comprehensive list. The story 'The Last Yodel' in "Tales from the Enchanted Village" by Rita depicts a repentant, remorseful father who abandoned his young son in the forest. Several Naga tales depict mothers-in-law mistreating their stepchildren, but stories of such fathers are rare. This folk tale reflects themes of abandonment and parental betrayal, bringing to the fore the complexities of familial relationships and misguided actions. The abandoned boy's diligence led to his adoption by a rich farmer. This emphasises the values of hard work and resilience in Naga society.

Emergence and Significance of English Literature in Northeast India

In what language do most contemporary North East writers write? As in the 1980s, when African literature in English emerged as a new canon, North East English literature likewise emerged as a new canon, a repository of major social and literary capital in English. In the Northeast, writing in English was promoted as more convenient and empowering for communication than the spoken word, in order "to bring the region with its bewildering heterogeneity of tongues within a manageable system of government" and "to stream roll the differences between the varieties of tongues spoken in the region"[23] (Misra18)

Temsula Ao observed that the use of English as a literary medium is of "great significance"[24] (Ao p136). She argued that this has made the region's works accessible not only within the country but also internationally. She referred to Salman Rushdie's view of English as "the most powerful medium of communication in the world; should we not then rejoice at these artists' mastery of it and their growing influence?" [25] (Benjamin Graves) Writing in the non-native language of English, which began as a colonial imposition in Nagaland, develops as a strategy to combat the socio-political image of Nagaland portrayed by the colonists."[26] (Chaterji, P. (2025). Even though writers write in English, they can bring cultural flavour into the language. By writing in English, as Ao has pointed out, writers can make their work accessible to international readers. It has become a tool of empowerment, rather than a hindrance. Themes of social commentary; anxieties and precarities of existence under the shadow of AFSPA; and the connection or disconnection with mainland India and its proximity to Southeast Asia are among the areas addressed by the writers that resonate with the world. The works have opened up spaces and become an interface for broader marginalised and indigenous groups worldwide. Thus building bridges and inspiring change. Writing in English has showcased a new literary canon, opening up possibilities even in Universities abroad. One of the most gainful engagements is in the post-colonial discourse. Authors are able to assert

their identities by using a globally recognised language. Temsula Ao's "These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone" (2006) shatters the biased notion of mainstream preoccupation with the ideas of violence, terror, bloodshed, and homogeneity in the North East. The book details how village folk, women, and families cope with decades of militarisation, violence, and terror. 'How to Tell the Story of an Insurgency' edited by Aruni Kashyap is a collection of translated short stories that addresses the realities of political agitation and ethnic conflict in Assam since colonial times. Hannah Lalhlanpuii's "When the Blackbirds Fly", her debut novel for young readers, presents young characters growing up amidst conflict, witnessing major social upheaval. The novel records an actual picture of amalgamated Mizoram realistically, set in the context of the insurgency in Mizoram in the 1960s, and specifically the bombing of the town of Aizawl in March 1966 by the Indian Air Force-a horrific event about which not many people in the rest of India are even aware.

Memory and Cultural heritage

Writers reclaim and articulate their worldview and ethos through orality and memory, challenging entrenched stereotypes while redefining their roles in the contemporary world. The Eurocentric view equates the written word with modernity and progress, and associates the 'oral' with a primitive, traditional, magical world, a Western one. "It is generally identified with the illiterate and even the uncivilised" [27](Ao 104). Memory often takes the form of stories, both oral and written, to narrate oneself and a people. Janice Pariat also strongly privileges oral memory and imagination, not only in her characters but also in her readers. Ao has not always accorded memory the same degree of reliability as a point of reference for offering security. "Memory is a tricky thing: it picks and chooses what to preserve and what to discard. Sometimes it is the trivial that triggers the process of remembering a great loss." [28] (Ao, p ix)

Janice Pariat writes, "For I mean not what's bound by paper. Once printed, the word is feeble and carries little power. It wrestles with ink and typography and margins, struggling to be what it was originally. Spoken. Unwritten, unrecorded. Old, they say, as the first fire. Free to roam the mountains, circle the heath, and fall as rain."[29] (Pariat p 3)

One of the key features of writings from the North East is the deliberate emphasis placed on orality and community memory. "Orality and memory are not only defining elements of the region's literature but also crucial to shaping its historical narratives. The sense of self and its ancient origins are not solely derived from written texts; they can also be inherited through oral memory and lore." [30] (Prodhani)

Several authors have used this tool to assert their positionality, evident in the poetry of the region by Kynpham Nongkynrih, Esther Syiem, Monalisa Changkija, Temsula Ao, Robin S. Ngangom, Mamang Dai, and Yumlan Tana, who explore the oral traditions of their respective communities. In "The Old Story-teller," Ao asserts storytelling as a "proud legacy" and "primary treasure." She skilfully intertwines elements of folklore in her work. "Lungterok", the stone associated with the myth of origin of the Ao Nagas, underlines how the oral history and cultural heritage are integral to the imagination of the self despite the seemingly 'modern' orientation of the language she has adopted: Lungterok The six Stones Where the progenitors And forebears Of the stone-people Were Born Out of the womb Of the earth ("Stone-people from Lungterok",[31] (Ao109) "Recollection, inclusion, inversion and re-interpretation of the past are also a way of ensuring the cultural survival of a people," she says.[32] (Ao p 135)

Easterine Kire also drew folklore and myths, as well as the traditional practices and customs of the Naga community, especially from her Angami tribe, to weave her narratives. Her novels, such as "When the River Sleeps" (2014), "Son of the Thundercloud" (2016), and "Spirit Nights" (2022), use orality and memory. By centring on cultural heritage, she contributes to the broader Indian landscape while simultaneously asserting the significance of this identity and history within the global discourse on Indigenous cultures.

Other contemporary writers include Avinuo Kire, Inakali Asumi, Zanmongi Jasmin Patton, Sentilong Ozukum, and Nzan Kikon, among others not mentioned earlier. These writers have channelled their creative energy in rewriting the histories of their communities and recreating their lived experiences. Their fictions, short stories, poetry, and retellings of folk stories capture the ethnocentric imaginary. With equal elan, they address themes of resilience and cultural heritage and challenge prevailing narratives that cast negative light on their communities. The oldest literary tradition is oral storytelling. A central concept in the work of Naga authors is oral memory, highly valued in an oral culture but ignored and devalued in a highly literate one.

The treatment of memory also addresses the collective experience of communities. Again, in the memoir by Visier Meyasetsu Sanyü and Richard Broome, "A Naga Odyssey: My Long Way Home" (2018), the author's recounting of his ancestry highlights memory's vital role in cultural identity. By uncovering and recording his past, he has documented an important period of his community's history. "In this fascinating book, his kaleidoscopic sixty-year-long odyssey to find peace, tranquillity, and forgiveness for others is vividly told against the rich tapestry of the Naga quest to be

free."[33] "Literary Cultures of India's Northeast: Naga Writings in English" (2015) by Dr K. B. Veio Pou is a seminal work that offers insight into Naga Writings as an insider. A. J. Sebastian's "Critical Essays on Naga Poets and Fiction Writers in English" (2016) adds to the pioneering works on Naga Writers.

Challenging Marginalization

The marginalisation of the North Eastern region, or of its literature, is evident in history and in mainstream literature. Well-known theorists such as France Fanon, Bill Ashcroft, Edward Said, and Michel Foucault have questioned established historical biases. This is true of the North East region too. Academia and publishing houses have ignored writers from the region until very recently. There has been a consistent exclusion of the North Eastern region and its people from school textbooks, history, stories, film, music, and the media. The limited representation in literature and media creates stereotypes, further alienating the communities. Expanding the discourse to include digital platforms could reveal how contemporary Naga writers utilise online spaces to assert their identities and challenge hegemonic narratives. The heroes, and even the freedom fighters, do not have a place in the broader national discourse or history. Their struggles and dreams remain on the periphery or are still 'exoticised.' Even when their literary output is studied or analysed, it is mostly approached through ecocriticism, environmental themes, and tribal literature.

Recent years have seen insider ethnographic writing address some of the gaps. Arkotong Longkumer's "Reform, Identity and Narratives of Belonging: The Heraka Movement in Northeast India" (2010) explores the Heraka reform movement and its significance in shaping identity by combining ethnographic research with theoretical insights. He demonstrates how the movement challenges hegemonic narratives and fosters a sense of solidarity. Dolly Kikon's "Food Journeys: Stories from the Heart", edited with Joel Rodrigues, brings together twenty-two essays by twenty-five contributors, including authors, academics, independent researchers, practitioners, photographers, and artists, mostly from the eight states of North East India, and has claimed academic and intellectual space for North East.[34] (Kikon) The contributors are not all from the Naga community, but since the stories and essays are not just about food and recipes, but are embedded within them, there are topics such as community, racism, militarised geographies, AFSPA, trans-border solidarity, migration, and precarity.

"The Funeral Nights" (2021), by Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, a Khasi author and poet, is a literary masterpiece, a cultural archive, and a treasure house of a people. This book, 1024 pages long, is as voluminous as Vikram Seth's "A Suitable Boy," seeming to announce that North East English literature has also come of age.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this paper has highlighted the emergence and significance of English Literature in Northeast India, including the reclaiming of orality and folk wisdom as a post-colonial strategy, the intersection of memory and cultural heritage, and the voices of gender resistance by Naga women in literature. These contributions significantly enrich the landscape of Indian literature and reinforce the importance of Indigenous voices in the global context. The growing visibility of English literature from the North East underscores the resilience and creative energy of the writers. These narratives reclaim agency and pave the way for future generations to embrace their identities with pride and authenticity. The exploration of North East literature opens the door to further scholarly investigation into its diverse narratives and emerging voices. More in-depth research is needed on new literature, identity, language, and representation, as well as greater engagement with colonial archives and Indigenous knowledge practices, using new methods and analytical frames. While Temsula has written that earlier authors have introspected in their writings, recent writers are also confronting and challenging dominant narratives. Research scholars can expand this exploration to include more nuanced analysis, thereby enhancing the richness of the narratives.

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Spatiality and the Borderland: Mano Majra as a Heterotopia in Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*

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Abstract— *Khushwant Singh's seminal 1947 Partition novel, Train to Pakistan (1956), is frequently critically positioned within the domain of trauma literature, socio-historical realism, or humanistic grief narrative. While these readings accurately capture the text's visceral emotional landscape, they often underexamine the spatial mechanics governing the novel's central setting: the isolated borderland village of Mano Majra. This paper employs Michel Foucault's spatial formulation of the heterotopia alongside Edward Soja's trialectic of Thirdspace to analyze Mano Majra as an alternative, relational site that initially resists the rigid religious and political binaries of the nascent postcolonial nation-state. By interrogating the physical geography of the village specifically the architectural triad of the gurdwara, mosque, and magistrate's bungalow the fluid temporalities dictated by railway rhythms, and the liminal nature of the River Sutlej, this study demonstrates how Mano Majra functions as a sanctuary of local co-existence. Furthermore, the article traces how the arrival of the "ghost train" acts as an epistemological and spatial invasion, forcibly superimposing nationalized, sectarian geometry onto a fluid borderland and converting a functioning heterotopia into a space of crisis. Ultimately, the paper argues that Singh's narrative exposes the violent spatial politics of nation-building, locating moral agency not in state apparatuses, but in marginalized subaltern interventions within contested spaces.*

Keywords— ***Spatiality, Heterotopia, Thirdspace, Partition Literature, Liminality, Subaltern Ethics.***

Introduction: Re-Spatializing Partition Literature

The historiography and literary corpus surrounding the 1947 Partition of British India are predominantly marked by narratives of temporal rupture, political betrayal, and catastrophic communal violence. Standard critical approaches to Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) regularly emphasize its status as an archetype of Partition realism, focusing on its stark portrayal of moral degeneration, psychological trauma, and the breakdown of humanistic values amidst state collapse (Morey 64; Daiya 88). However, such thematic inquiries often treat the physical setting of the novel the remote, Punjab border village of Mano Majra, as merely a passive backdrop or a pastoral stage upon which historical tragedy unfolds.

To fully understand the ideological mechanics of Singh's narrative, Mano Majra must be re-evaluated through the lens of critical spatial theory. Geography in *Train to Pakistan* is neither neutral nor static; it is actively constructed, contested, and reordered by competing socio-political forces. In the months surrounding August 1947, as the Radcliffe Line carved arbitrary borders across Punjab and Bengal, spatial identities transformed overnight. Abstract political cartography drafted in distant rooms by colonial administrators directly collided with the lived, organic geography of borderland communities (Gyanendra Pandey 21).

This paper posits that before the encroachment of Partition violence, Mano Majra functions as a distinct spatial anomaly, a heterotopia in Michel Foucault's terms, and a 'Thirdspace' as conceptualized by Edward Soja. It operates outside the rigid, institutionalized religious and

nationalistic binaries of Muslim versus Hindu/Sikh that were being aggressively institutionalized across the subcontinent. The village maintains an internal social order rooted in local reciprocity, fluid spatial practices, and shared temporal rhythms anchored to the railway tracks rather than state-mandated clocks.

However, this localized, heterotopic equilibrium is inherently vulnerable. The arrival of the "ghost train", a mechanized vessel overflowing with murdered refugees, represents the violent invasion of nationalized, sectarian space into the borderland geography. By examining the physical layout of Mano Majra, the liminal symbolism of the River Sutlej, the collapse of rural temporalities, and the ultimate subaltern intervention of Juggut Singh, this paper demonstrates how *Train to Pakistan* critiques the spatial violence of the postcolonial nation-state and maps the destruction of localized spaces of alterity.

Theoretical Framework: Foucault's Heterotopia and Soja's Thirdspace

To examine Mano Majra as a contested spatial construct, it is necessary to synthesize Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia with Edward Soja's spatial trialectic. In his foundational essay "Of Other Spaces" (1984), Foucault defines heterotopias as "real sites" that exist within every culture, yet function as "counter-sites, a sort of simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live" (24). Unlike utopias, which are fundamentally unreal places, heterotopias are physical, localized spaces that accommodate alterity; they juxtapose in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible or contradictory (Foucault 25).

Crucially, heterotopias are connected to temporal breaks or 'heterochronies', operating when individuals or communities find themselves in an absolute break with traditional, standardized time (Foucault 26). Mano Majra, tucked away near the River Sutlej with its small population of Sikhs, Muslims, and a single Hindu family, mirrors this formulation. It exists within the geopolitical boundaries of Punjab, yet remains socially and ideologically juxtaposed against the sectarian violence consuming urban centers like Lahore, Amritsar, and Delhi.

Complementing Foucault, Edward Soja's spatial trialectic in "Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places" (1996) provides a framework for analyzing how physical space interacts with ideological power. Soja categorizes space into three interrelated realms:

1. Firstspace (Perceived Space): The concrete, material spatial forms that can be directly mapped and empirically measured.

2. Secondspace (Conceived Space): Conceptualized representations of space created by urban planners, cartographers, and political institutions the realm of maps, boundaries, and state ideology.

3. Thirdspace (Lived Space): The complex overlay of real and imagined practices, where subaltern groups navigate, resist, and redefine the dominant spatial order (Soja 6-10).

Applying Soja's model to Partition, the Radcliffe Line and the newly created nations of India and Pakistan represent 'Secondspace' an abstract, politically conceived geometry imposed upon the subcontinent from above. Conversely, Mano Majra represents a Thirdspace, a lived social geography where villagers historically prioritized localized agrarian co-existence over abstract national affiliations. The conflict in *Train to Pakistan* is thus fundamentally spatial: it is the violent collision between the state's Conceived Space (Secondspace) and the villagers' Lived Space (Thirdspace).

The Spatial Architecture of Mano Majra: Heterotopic Coexistence

The opening pages of *Train to Pakistan* meticulously map Mano Majra not as a generic village, but as a tightly woven spatial ecosystem. Singh introduces the village through its physical and architectural parameters, establishing its heterotopic nature through its spatial layout: "Mano Majra is a tiny village. It has only three brick buildings, one of which is the home of the moneylender Lala Ram Lal. The other two are the Sikh temple and the mosque. The rest of the village a cluster of fourscore mud huts is divided into two halves by a narrow lane which runs down its middle. One half is shown as the Sikh quarter, the other as the Muslim quarter." (Singh 1)

At first glance, this description might suggest a divided, segregated community. However, a deeper spatial analysis reveals that these physical divisions are permeable and relational rather than absolute. The three brick structures, representing financial capital (Ram Lal), Sikh spiritual life (the Gurdwara managed by Meet Singh), and Islamic worship (the Mosque managed by Imam Baksh) do not exist in isolation; they anchor a shared communal sphere.

Unlike urban centers where religious neighborhoods functioned as insular enclaves, the central "narrow lane" in Mano Majra acts as a conduit for continuous daily interaction rather than a boundary of exclusion. The physical proximity of the Gurdwara and the Mosque creates an acoustic and spatial overlap. When Bhai Meet Singh recites the Gurbani and Imam Baksh calls the Azaan, their voices blend in the village sky, creating a shared auditory landscape. As Singh writes, the villagers "do not know that the British have decided to quit India...

To them, India is the whole world, and Mano Majra is its heart" (Singh 2).

Furthermore, this spatial harmony is reinforced by the presence of local syncretic structures. Outside the formal religious buildings stands the 'deo', a local sandstone rock worshipped collectively by both Sikhs and Muslims during times of drought or disease (Singh 2). The deo represents a spatial manifestation of Thirdspace, localized, non-doctrinal sacred site that bypasses orthodox religious boundaries. In this heterotopic space, identity is relational and localized; a person is a Mano Majri first, and a Sikh or Muslim second.

This localized spatial harmony stands in sharp contrast to the external state apparatus represented by the Officers' Rest House and Magistrate Hukum Chand's bungalow. Situated at the periphery of the village, the rest house represents the detached, panoptic gaze of Secondspace, the bureaucratic authority of the British Raj and the incoming postcolonial state (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 200). Hukum Chand does not inhabit the lived space of the village; he observes it from a distance, using spatial isolation to maintain administrative detachment. The spatial distance between the rest house and the village proper mirrors the ideological divide between abstract state policy and lived rural reality.

Heterochronies: Railway Rhythms vs. National Clock Time

Foucault asserts that heterotopias are frequently linked to "heterochronies", breaks in traditional time that allow alternative spatial orders to function (Foucault 26). In Mano Majra, this temporal break is produced by the complex relationship between the village and the North-Western Railway line that runs adjacent to it.

Prior to the outbreak of Partition violence, time in Mano Majra, is not measured by mechanical clocks, standard civil time, or political calendars. Instead, it is regulated entirely by the arrival, departure, and passage of trains across the nearby railway bridge over the Sutlej:

"Mano Majra has always been known for its railway station... Before daybreak, the mail train rushes past on its way to Lahore. When the whistle blows, Bhai Meet Singh gets up... Imam Baksh knows it is time to call the faithful to prayer... When the 10:30 a.m. express goes by, the whole village comes alive... As the goods train goes by, the villagers drop off to sleep." (Singh 4-5)

This dependence on train schedules represents a localized heterochrony. The train, typically an icon of industrial modernity, colonial expansion, and precise mechanical time, is re-appropriated by the villagers of Mano Majra and converted into a pastoral clock. The technology of the state (Secondspace) is domesticated into the rhythms of rural life (Thirdspace). The train does not divide the village; it structures its collective, cross-communal daily routines. The sound of the train engine acts as a communal pulse, unifying Sikhs and Muslims in a shared, predictable temporal sequence.

However, as Partition deepens, this temporal balance is violently disrupted. The state's political disruption manifests first as a temporal anomaly. The regular passenger and express trains cease to run on schedule, replaced by erratic schedules and heavy, unnatural silences: "The trains registered the change... The express trains did not stop. They sped past Mano Majra with their blinds down... Then the schedule was completely shattered" (Singh 78).

The collapse of train schedules marks the dissolution of Mano Majra's temporal heterotopia. When time is no longer regulated by the predictable passing of trains, the social cohesion of the village begins to fray. The domestic temporal rhythm is replaced by an eerie, anxious uncertainty, preparing the physical site for the intrusion of external political violence.

The Violent Invasion: The "Ghost Train" and the Ingress of State Binary

The critical turning point in *Train to Pakistan* occurs when the external violence of Partition physically invades Mano Majra via the railway tracks. This invasion is embodied by the arrival of the "ghost train" from Pakistan a train that arrives out of schedule, under the cover of dark, carrying no living passengers, but filled entirely with the corpses of slaughtered Hindus and Sikhs (Singh 82).

Spatially, the ghost train represents the violent injection of Secondspace, the lethal, sectarian reality of the newly birthed nation-states, into the heterotopic space of Mano Majra. The railway track, which previously integrated the village with its surrounding environment, is transformed into a vector of death.

The state's handling of the ghost train further highlights its spatial violence. Magistrate Hukum Chand and the military authorities do not allow the villagers to view or process the tragedy through local customs. Instead, they requisition the village's bulldozers, fuel, and space to conduct a secretive, mass burial and cremation near the tracks (Singh 88). The smell of burning flesh and rotting corpses physically saturates the air of Mano Majra, violating the village's sensory boundaries:

"The breeze was blowing from the river towards the village. It brought a smell which was not unfamiliar, but which no one had ever smelled in Mano Majra... a stench of burning human flesh. The wind carried it everywhere. It went into

the huts; it hovered over the narrow lanes; it settled in the Gurdwara and the Mosque." (Singh 89)

This sensory invasion breaks the heterotopia. The stench of mass death strips the Gurdwara and Mosque of their localized sanctity, replacing shared communal trust with pervasive paranoia.The arrival of the ghost train forces the villagers to view themselves through the external, binary categories of the state. The Sikh villagers are exposed to the visual proof of Muslim-led atrocities across the border, while the local Muslims are suddenly transformed from neighbors (Mano Majris) into potential internal enemies or future victims.

The spatial rupture reaches its zenith with the forced evacuation of Mano Majra's Muslim population to the Chundunnugger refugee camp. The physical expulsion of Muslims from their ancestral "mud huts" destroys the relational geography of the village. As Imam Baksh prepares to leave, he asks Bhai Meet Singh, "What have we to do with Pakistan? We were born here. Our ancestors lived here" (Singh 131). Meet Singh's tragic reply "It is the government's orders" underlines the absolute victory of state 'Conceived Space' over local 'Lived Space'.Once the Muslim quarter is emptied, it is immediately looted by neighboring agitators and displaced Sikh refugees, completing the conversion of a harmonious heterotopia into a fractured, crisis-ridden space of exclusion.

Fluid Boundaries vs. Fixed Borders: The River Sutlej

Alongside the railway line, the River Sutlej serves as a critical spatial motif in *Train to Pakistan.* In geographical theory, rivers are naturally dynamic, fluid features that resist absolute categorization; they overflow banks, change courses, and nourish surrounding ecosystems. Historically, the Sutlej functioned as a source of sustenance and a fluid borderland for the inhabitants of the Punjab plains.

In the novel, however, the Sutlej is subjected to the same violent redefinition as the village itself. As the monsoon rains hit, the river swells, threatening to flood the village. Simultaneously, the river becomes a floating graveyard, carrying the mutilated corpses of Partition victims down from the northern regions:

"The Sutlej was rising... The water was muddy brown, with thick foam floating on the surface. Floating on the foam were logs of wood, dead cattle, and human bodies... They were bloated, their skin turned white from long immersion. Some were headless; others had their limbs hacked off." (Singh 142-143)

The fluid river is thus weaponized into a physical carrier of political terror. The boundary between land and water, life and death, becomes blurred. The river no longer acts as a natural element connecting communities along its banks; it becomes an active border enforcement mechanism, physically displaying the price of national separation.

The physical bridge spanning the Sutlej becomes the climax's contested spatial node. The bridge is a human construct designed to span fluid boundaries—to link one side of the river to the other. Yet, in the novel's final chapters, an outside gang of militant Sikh agitators transforms the bridge into an execution site. They tie a rope across the top framework of the bridge, calculated to sweep off and decapitate Muslim refugees riding atop the upcoming train to Pakistan (Singh 168).

The bridge a space intended for passage and connection is repurposed into a trap of sectarian containment.

Subaltern Ethics and Spatial Reclamation: The Sacrifice of Juggut Singh

In the final section of the novel, Khushwant Singh poses a fundamental question: When the state (represented by the cowardly, paralyzed Hukum Chand and his corrupt police force) and organized religion (represented by the radical agitators) conspire to commit spatial massacre, where can moral agency reside?

The answer is provided through the character of Juggut Singh ("Jugga"), a local, illiterate Sikh dacoit (outlaw). Jugga's position within Mano Majra's spatial hierarchy is distinctly subaltern. He is an outcast, routinely arrested by the state police, placed under spatial curfews, and viewed with suspicion by the respectable villagers (Singh 10). Yet, it is precisely Jugga's location outside the state apparatus and orthodox religious institutions that allows him to exercise genuine ethical responsibility.

Jugga's motivation is intensely personal and localized, rather than abstractly political: he is in love with Nooran, the daughter of the village Muslim weaver, Imam Baksh, who is currently aboard the targeted train to Pakistan. Upon learning of the plot to slaughter the train's passengers at the railway bridge, Jugga climbs into the steel structure of the bridge in total darkness:

"He brought out a small tough knife from his waist... He began to slash at the rope. The strand parted... The engine was almost on him. He kept slashing away at the rope... The man dropped his knife and began to tear at the rope with his teeth. The train was only a few yards away... A volley of shots rang out. The man fell off the rope, but he had cut it through. The rope snapped. The train went over him into Pakistan." (Singh 180-181)

From a spatial perspective, Jugga's heroic self-sacrifice represents a reclamation of Thirdspace. By placing his own body directly on the physical structure of the

bridge, interposing himself between the lethal rope and the moving train, Jugga neutralizes the trap set by the agitators. Jugga uses his knife and teeth to sever the rope of sectarian violence, dying under the wheels of the train so that the train, and the refugees within it, may cross safely into Pakistan. In doing so, he temporarily restores the original function of the bridge as a space of passage and sanctuary. His action is not an act of state heroism or religious martyrdom; it is a localized, subaltern intervention driven by love and ethical responsibility to the other. Jugga reclaims Mano Majra's lost heterotopic ethos at the cost of his own life.

CONCLUSION

Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* offers a critique of the spatial violence that accompanied the 1947 Partition of India. Through the spatial evolution of Mano Majra, Singh demonstrates how abstract political boundaries drafted at national levels (Secondspace) violently dismantle localized, lived spaces of cross-communal co-existence (Thirdspace).

Initially operating as a heterotopia, Mano Majra maintains a delicate equilibrium characterized by permeable religious architecture, shared daily rhythms tied to the railway line, and a localized identity that resists external sectarian categories. However, the arrival of the "ghost train" and the flooding of the Sutlej with corpses signify the violent invasion of state space, converting the heterotopia into a site of crisis, displacement, and mass death.

Ultimately, the novel suggests that state machinery, institutional law, and formal politics are fundamentally incapable of preventing spatial violence during times of ideological madness. By placing the narrative's ultimate act of moral redemption in the hands of Juggut Singh, a marginalized, subaltern outlaw, Singh locates true humanistic ethics not within abstract nationalisms or state cartographies, but in localized, embodied acts of sacrifice that reclaim space for the vulnerable. Mano Majra stands as a literary testament to the fragile beauty of heterotopic borderlands and the catastrophic cost of their erasure.

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Discourse of Environmentalism in Visual Media: A Multimodal Analysis of Earth Day Posters from Representational and Compositional Perspective

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Abstract— *This research examines the ways that environmental discourse is visually produced through examining Earth Day posters from NASA website and applying Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) social semiotic framework. The problem of this research is the environmental challenges which are continuously changing, the historical and symbolic underpinnings of its visual language that must be understood to sustain public interest. In following the growth of Earth Day's visual image, this research analyzes four earth day poster to identify how visual and verbal elements are combined to make meaning. It has studies two important questions in the context of this research: (1) what are the major environmental topics and graphic symbols represented in Earth Day posters? (2) what are the ways that environmental messages are built when combining visual components, such as color, imagery, and layout design, with textual elements like slogans and language? The study make use of the two metafunctions (representational, compositional), the study reveals how ecological narratives are built using symbols such as bees (collective action), sunflowers (sustainability), marine life, and satellites (technological stewardship) as well as textual elements such as slogans and timelines. From the evidence, it appears that the posters often highlight biodiversity, unity of ecosystems, and cooperation between humans and environment in complimentary colors and active structure of the posters, describing environmental emergencies with the promise of positive changes. Vivid, text-elements, together with graphic design that emphasizes meaning, encourage viewers to take an active part in saving the planet. Scholars state that Earth Day posters are designed to blend different design elements such as color, visual motifs, composition, and textual style to make environmentalism appear as a long-term responsibility that requires international collaboration with a unified multimodal approach to trigger interest and contemplation.*

Keywords— ***Environmental Discourse, Multimodal Analysis, Social Semiotic, Symbolism, Ecosystem.***

I. INTRODUCTION

A grassroots campaign developed in 1970 as "Earth Day" to combat rapidly intensifying environmental issues, has evolved into a worldwide supporter of ecological activity uniting millions (Rome, 2003). Comprehensive practical progress of visual media, mostly posters, that place complex environmental topics in terms relatable and emotionally objectionable ways underlie the long-term relevance of Earth Day. These materials reflect the contemporary social and political situation, but tending to shape public perception of environmentalism. Visual communication in accordance with Lester (2006) greatly helps activist campaigns because it goes beyond language boundaries and engages spectators with symbolic and aesthetic aspects. Although it is now widespread, the activism of Earth Day has been isolated in the recent years, research has mainly concentrated on the written and visual elements, neglecting its combining expression in shaping of public environmental discourse (Hansen & Machin, 2013). This hole further asserts the need for a broad

multimodal analysis of Earth Day posters that mix of visuals and text, which aids though an analysis of environmental conversations.

Two major questions open up this research:

(1) what are the major environmental topics and graphic symbols represented in Earth Day posters?

(2) what are the ways that environmental messages are built when combining visual components, such as color, imagery, and layout design, with textual elements like slogans and language?

To answer the research questions, the research contains two sections: First, the representational analysis is how images depict the relationships among the depicted participants in a visual composition. Second, the compositional analysis serves as a powerful lens through which one can discern and decode the intricate meanings woven into a visual composition. The present study helps to create effective advocacy strategies for the further environmental activism.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Environmental Communication

Environmental communication is what studies the ways that societies construct, spread, and debate environmental issues with advocacy, education, and community engagement features to raise united action (Cox & Pezzullo, 2021). Based on the assumption that environmental issues are discursive and material realities, environmental communication is concerned with the effects of communication on formulating perceptions, shaping policies and influencing behaviors. Central to this area of study are theories such as framing, which claims that the way a problem is described, i.e., some priorities are emphasized over others, significantly influences public understanding and action (Entman, 1993). For example, drawing awareness to climate change as a "crisis" rather than as an "opportunity" triggers various emotional and political responses that campaigns of environmental use to mobilize support (Nisbet, 2009). In the same direction, Cox (2013) points out that advocacy communication connects persuasion and ethics, and the final goal is to support not only knowledge but also societal impact. Typically, the Earth Day posters combine the scientific urgency and moral appeals to impel the public with slogans "Act Now", "Save Our Planet".

Social movements are irreplaceable in creating the stories that characterize environmental problems. The first Earth Day in 1970 that linked grassroots activity and official endorsement became the foundation of the reliance of environmentalism on common stories to drive change, which was evident in such movements as Fridays for Future (Brulle, 2000). These collectives are public arenas in which such paradigms as extreme industrial growth are articulated and renegotiated via the use of iconic symbols, catchwords and visual narratives. It will read as an excellent example; "Think Globally, Act Locally" slogan which, as the popularized during the 1980s, demonstrates how movements reduce global dilemmas to simple ground level undertakings (Hawkins, 2018). Due to public engagement, these stories become more visible because participatory interaction makes institutions, activists, and communities come together for a collective conversation. According to Delicath and DeLuca (2003), image events such as well-publicized demonstrations like tree-sitting and oil spills are essential to environmental activities and the public discourse.

Environmental communication, in essence, is at its most powerful when there is a resolve of epistemic gaps. Environmental claims are rooted in scientific findings although social and the emotional importance tend to dominate the attention of public interest in the issues (Hansen & Machine 2013). Such a clash demonstrates that a multimodal approach would be effective, namely the combination of textual argumentation and visual symbols (images of polar bears on melting ice) or online initiatives. Furthermore, there is a need for social movements to be vigilant in obtaining the balance between hopeful and fearful messages. Messages that paint too dark a picture may make people apathetic while one-sided optimism may not communicate a sense of urgency required (O'Neill & Nicholson-Cole, 2009). In line with this dynamic, the Earth Day network has redirected its recent activities to nail in climate justice and intersectionality to hook in to younger, socially conscious individuals (Dunaway 2015).

2.2 Visual Rhetoric and Multimodality

Viewing across fields, visual rhetoric investigates how images communicate meaning, convince the audience, and construct ideas, using semiotics—the study of signs and signs—to reveal what lies beneath visual texts (Barthes, 1977; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Through semiotics, lies the idea that visual content such as color, composition and iconography creates complex messages through images (beyond literal sense). In his influential book, Roland Barthes offers a distinction between denotative meanings, those that have been symbolic in the literal representation of images, and connotative ones—where the meaning is to be inferred deeper, culturally conditioned symbolism based on history and context (Barthes, 1977). The image of tree on an Earth

Day poster may mean growth, sustainability ecological interconnections in the same way the poster's graphic treatment affects it all. other option representational" (showing the subject matter), "interactive" (how the viewers will interact with the image) and "compositional" (the visual arrangement of components). This model of analysis aid analyst to be able to see that visuals cooperate with text, typography and layout do directly create discursive construction of meaning.

It is fundamental to posters of Earth Day, in 'semiotic modes' synergy. For instance, posters whose visual color scheme includes blues and bright greens suggest the meaning of involvement with love and nature to the planet (Forceville, 1996). How the naturalism of images is also shown to impact their perceived constancy is a problem emphasized by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006). A real image of the "oil-soaked ocean' can extend a more immediate sense of mislead information, rather than a cartoon-inspired temper that can have more effect on dampen harsh financial admonitions or young people. Designing of posters with Earth as a vital point in the central image tap the cultural symbol of the "blue marble" to confirm comprehensive ecological interest (Hawkins, 2018). For instance, visual metaphors those symbolized by the slogan "Reduce, Recycle, Reuse" are corroborative by the additional text that inspires specific environmental activities and limits interpretation (Barthes, 1977). This is an example of the combination of visual and textual elements, and the overall meaning that emerges out of the principal of multimodality.

Using multimodal analysis and social semiotic, illustrate the persuasive style applied to how environmental messages are communicated in effective way. Therefore, the study takes into account the posters of Earth Day as place of debate that contesting ideologies and these become over the interplay of words and images, constructions of ecological citizenship crucial to mobilizing the general to action within the Anthropocene (Machin, 2007). These insights are engaging both creative work and analyses of discourse, and allow visual communicators to improve enlivening messages that are emotionally and responsive relevant in an image-saturated world.

2.3 Earth Day and Environmental Iconography

Originally formed in 1970, Earth Day has provided a collecting point for environmentalists' reason as well as a visual stage for the display of images versus environmental worries particularly the themes of stewardship, hope, and crisis (Rome, 2013). These materials have, by pervasion worldwide, come to denote cultural milestones, which grabs the progressive changes in environmental center through repeated visual objects. What Earth Day did with twentieth century environmentalism, according to Rome's (2013) scholarship, it provides one thread by which to integrate various frets into a unified cause for the power of captivating and accessible imagery. A significant geminate of Earth Day posters in 1970 set beside grim actualities of smog-filled cities by optimistic visions of sustainable force charted environmentalism over a common ethical responsibility. The visual language of Earth Day posters has expanded over the decades to include a wide variety of topics evenly, starting with early pollution, environmental awareness to biodiversity and, more recently, climate justice.

Earth imagery is the centric motif in the Earth Day graphic, a public symbol indicative of the identity of the planet. Since 1972, the most obvious Earth Day symbol has been the "Blue Marble" photograph that embodies an unstable equilibrium between heavenly fragility and universal human responsibility (Hawkins, 2018). Once more, images of hands holding the Earth or planting out of palms reverse ideas of care and revitalization confirming human stewardship stories (Dunaway, 2015). In contrast, images like wildlife smothered in oil, deforestation, or vanishing polar ice, is literally a grotesque desk of environmental rot that levers shock into a cauldron of impending catastrophe (Lester, 2006). These images are cultural symbols that have formed their meanings in time, but again constantly reworked by the contemporary anxieties of the environment. Before, posters frequently featured industrial smokestacks and trash, but the current poster material focuses on climate refugees and wildfires which reflects the increasing narrative going on around the Anthropocene (Hansen & Machin, 2013).

Analysis of such motifs reveals their dual purpose in education and social views shaping. Earth imagery, in-consuming a feeling of global citizenship, can make complex socioecological challenges into a simplified narrative of a "planet in peril" (Hawkins, 2018). Similarly, portrayals of the issue of pollution are likely to take the form of individual acts, rather than taking on so-called corporate pollution, for instance recycling or planting trees (Dunaway, 2015). These criticisms show the difference between the grassroots nature of Earth Day itself, and at times its neoliberal tendencies, in which individuals' efforts are seen as sufficient for groundbreaking society change. However, the persistence of these symbols is in a large part due to their flexibility. Development of digital technology has enabled the production of interactive and intersectional visual content, such as poster that will interrelate environmental struggles with racial justice,

thereby diversifying environmental images to include complex awakenings (Cox & Pezzullo, 2021).

Analysis of visuals connected with Earth Day points to the movement's changes in time as well as to its communication with a broad spectrum of people. Noticing the tension between catastrophe and hope in these images or betting upon the boundaries of "mourning and mobilization", Rome (2013) observes that this chimes with the generic challenges in environmental messaging. While demonstrate these symbols, professionals and researchers can also discern the impacts of visual rhetoric on public involvement, which nothing, but can educational those capitalizing on campaigns that search for an eclectic audience.

III. METHODOLOGY

Using Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) social semiotics within a qualitative research paradigm, this study explores Earth Day posters that represent environmental messages through their multimodal components. The four posters were selected over a purposive sample from the website of Earth Day campaign posters from NASA archives, digital collections, and advocacy sites, ensuring a temporal perspective and a wide variety of themes. These posters are publicly accessible and downloaded in high resolution from the website https://science.nasa.gov/multimedia/earth-day-posters/?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

(1) The first poster downloaded from the campaign (#Connected by Earth (From Big to Small we're all Connected) https://science.nasa.gov/multimedia/earth-day- 2021-poster/, which was released on April 22, 2021.

(2) The second poster downloaded from the campaign (Season of Change (The Shore of the Cosmic Ocean) https://www.behance.net/gallery/64314985/2018-NASA-Earth-Day-Poster, which was released on April 22, 2018.

(3) The third poster downloaded from the campaign (Water Toughs Everything) https://science.nasa.gov/earth/earth-day/earth-day-poster-2024/, which was released on April 22, 2024.

(4) The fourth poster downloaded from the campaign (Mobilize the Earth) https://science.nasa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/2012_EarthDayPoster.pdf, which was released on April 22, 2012.

Research design strategies of Earth Day posters by Kress and van Leeuwen's three metafunctions "representational, interactive, and compositional", permit us to explore how textual and visual combinations effected the ecological storytelling. Re-reading the material repeatedly, repeated visual sign such as globes and industrial decay sight emerged, along with their interpretations (as theorized by Barthes in 1977). The textual elements include fonts and slogan were evaluated in their power to shape the understanding of the viewer.

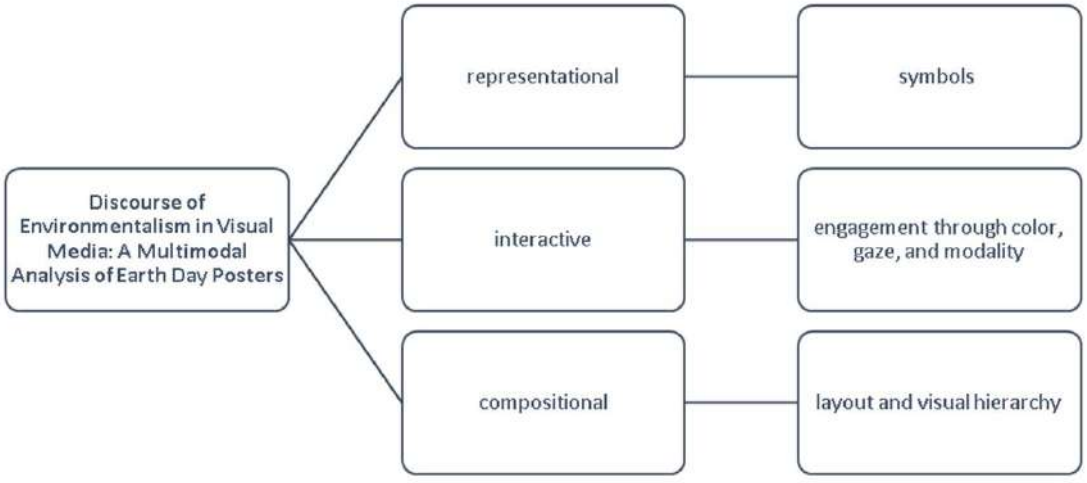


Fig. (1) Framework of Analysis

IV. DATA ANALYSIS



1. Representational Analysis *Poster (1)*

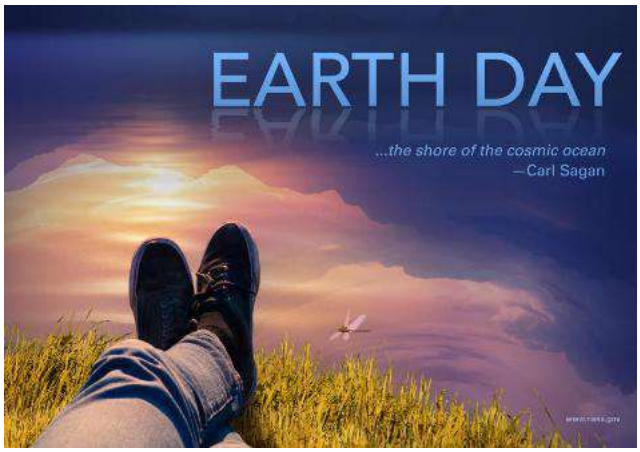
https://science.nasa.gov/multimedia/earth-day- 2021-poster/

April 22, 2021

The poster dedicates a symbolic exposition to the problems of environmental protection and the continuous flow of time. Observed as images of vaccination and collective endeavor, the black and yellow bees with their hive represents a series of deeds, which figuratively depiction human efforts to protect the environment. As a conception, yellow sunflowers denote growth, sustainability, and the life power of the planet, but the use of red ladybug shoes and a snail an analytical mark, indicating biodiversity and species connectivity. A white moon and a blue sky represented continuity between night and day in the hope of reflecting a commitment to environmental stewardship. Through the use of "FROM 2010-2020" and "EARTH DAY", the artwork portrays a realistic timeline of ecological activism in the last ten years. These components merge images from nature with markers of time to display how people get involved in protecting the earth.

2. Compositional Analysis

Nature and text are combined carefully to make both urgent requirements for action and sense of oneness. The "EARTH DAY" text and the bee hive are highlighted as the focal to the design take up an eye-catching center stage. A couple of sunflowers wing the ends of the composition create balance, and anchor the composition in the picture of nature's wealth. It is top-bottom design by the moon at the top and grass at bottom, demonstrate contrast between earthly life and cosmic symbolism. The timeline that spans under the bottom, titled "2010-2020", contextualizes the bit into a specific term of time. A vibrant palette of red, yellow, and black complements calmer shades of blue and green: urgency expressed by a relaxed atmospheres and text inspired by nature can coexist. The scrambled leaves and clear sky work with each other to create natural boundaries that give the image an attainable naturalist balance. This balance discover a symbiotic relationship between natural environments and human activity for whom the design implies the message of earth day for joint responsibility and constant.



1. Representational Analysis *Poster (2)*

https://www.behance.net/gallery/64314985/2018-NASA-Earth-Day-Poster April 22,2018

Visual details of the picture set the flow of the narrative. The image of man lying around the sea shore in the sea shore in the grass stations a calm and natural ambience. It is the lying down of the man that diverts viewer's attention from him to the environment as a pedestal to the rapport between people and nature. The presence of dragonfly adds another element, both of vulnerability and interdepence of all that lives. The total shades of blue of the sea and of the sky repeated in a single background makes its message stronger about the beauty of Earth. Both tranquility and ecological equilibrium come through as the nature of the scene communicates the images that are integrated within it, with a promise for the values of Earth Day in appreciating the environment.

2. Compositional Analysis

Balance is created in the artwork and this is a result of thoughtfully arranged visual symmetry. The horizon line is a border, not only contrasting the grounded foreground with the grass and man, against the expanse of the sky and sea but as an allusion to what humans' placing is in the grand cosmos affairs. Layout of the man and dragonfly in the rule of thirds could draw attention to the engagement of viewers. The reflections of the sky in the light like surface of the sea add to the image of visual symmetry and unity of composition. When the words "EARTH DAY"

are used, they will help with the theme's focus and the natural elements of grass, water, insect, and man will function as a united voice on environmental responsibility and the unity of things.



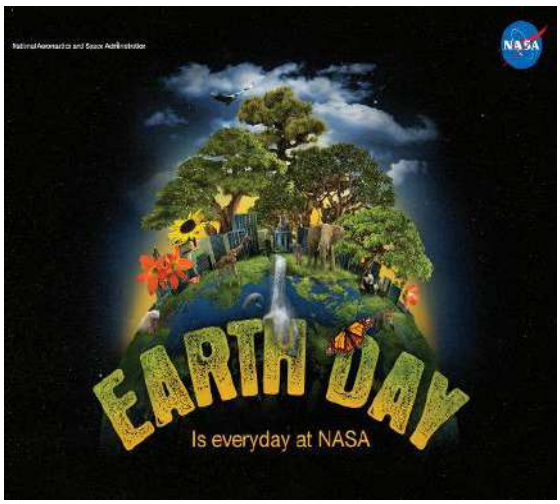
1. Representational Analysis *Poster (3)*

https://science.nasa.gov/earth/earth-day/earth-day-poster-2024/ April 22, 2024

Using marine organisms' visual depiction and advanced technology, the image depicts a complex narrative. Mothership whales and school of fish swimming through the light blue sea sends a vibrant and networked message about ocean systems, echoing the plea of care for environment that Earth Day advances. These visuals are strong on the story, confirming the crucial value of the diverse life in the ocean themselves. Inserting a clashing blue satellite is a figure that symbolizes humanity's technological presence in earth attacked towards observing climate, water cycles, and the overall ecosystem. The poster elevates its contextual cross-connection of marine ecosystems, global environments by saying "WATER TOUCHES EVERYTHING" and human technology. These binary images build a story related equilibrium between development and nature, drawing attention toward our planet's development and vulnerability.

2. Compositional Analysis

By perfectly organizing space and employ symmetrical design, the work is fit to make an effective compare between technological and natural aspects. A vast sea fills the lower two-thirds of the picture, in motion with marine life, and the upper third shows the blue satellite, side-lighting the gap between the natural world and technological gaze in space. The composition helps further to visually establish humanity's positioning in nature and at the same time divide it from its surrounding. The rules of the thirds certainly give the viewers' eyes a direction to the whales and the fish revealing their size and movement while central or upper positioning of the satellite highlights its purpose. This consistent presence of blue knits the scene together, making the ocean and heavens/space appear to be combined from a wholesome "cosmic ocean" as the word-ing suggested by Carl Sagan. The components of text such as the phrase "WATER TOUCHES EVERYTHING" can be laid out in natural bends mimicking the movement of water and in a fashion represented "MARVEL" could lightly seduce the pop culture world while leaving the message about the environment intact. The combination of the use of organic shapes in whales and waves, and the exact form of the satellite expresses a symbiosis of ecological protection and the use of technology.



1. Representational Analysis Poster *(4)*

https://science.nasa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/2012_EarthDayPoster.pdf April 22, 2012

A story of global stewardhip and interrelatedness develops in the representation of different symbolic participants. Particularly on the middle of the picture, earth in blue is shown with green trees and a sunflower besides different animals from elephants, monkeys, giraffes and dolphins which communicates earth's provision of all forms of life. The introduction of buildings arranges a dramatic conflict between the development and nature and emphasizes the necessity of sustainable coexistence. Although in motion, the eagle presages watching, and freedom, but while the waterfall and clouds portray the essential ecological functions, such as hydrological and climatic maintenance, at the core of Earth's life. The fact that there is the yellow butterfly and sunflower makes the feeling of susceptibility and spread more apparent, in the way that the earth's ecosystems share mutual linkages. The phrase "EARTH Is every day at NASA" reconfigures these elements with the yardstick of scientific study so that NASA can operate as a steward with technology monitoring to protect planet Earth. In the middle of these symbols, we visualize Earth

to be a valuable and breakable world that requests natural balance, and our active tending.

2. Compositional Analysis

Spatial organization in the composition successfully combines natural and built elements. In the center of the design the earth is seen, and itself as the focal point, here its spherical shape plays an important role both visually and literally. The volcano and clouds clothe the center summoning up the unbroken loop that connects sky, land, and water. Animals and buildings are placed using the rule of thirds and elephants and giraffes in the foreground and eagles and clouds in the upper thirds create strong focal points for the eyes. Architecture located at the base of the Earth is juxtaposed with organic forms (trees and animals) which both reveals a role of integration as well as sometimes conflict with the environment. The fact that the artwork has placed both the sunflower and the butterfly in central areas gives emphasis on growth and graceful sensitivity. Earth's center position and the reflected flow of the waterfall create symmetry although animal uneven distribution creates sense of movement for the composition. The repeated use of colors integrates all in the composition: The clear blues and greens of the scene complement abstractions with real life and keep the overall image vibrant with yellow accents. With "NASA" stylized you could merge fully with the artwork, highlighting humanity's position as scientific protectors. The opposition of global and microscopic aspects characterizes the need for both a wide understanding and individual initiative in environmental stewardship.

4.1 Results and Discussions

The visual composition through usage of the metafunctions of Kress and van Leeuwen is however seen to be deliberately chosen with an intention of promoting environmental conservation. From the standpoint of the representational metafunction, participants such as bees, sunflowers, and whales are the tools through which narratives focused on collaboration and relations between various components of the ecosystem can be created. Through linking, mostly, bees with pollination and humans with those bees, they represent human activity and the union of marine animals and satellites indicates interplay between natural environment and technological intervention but in seeing Earth as fragile but strong. Geographical and historical justification of environmental movements is achieved through timelines like "2010-2020" and slogans like "WATER TOUCHES EVERYTHING" are employed to serve the purpose. Through construction of the composition, the compositional metafunction encourages urgency and a balanced visual harmony. Primary focal areas such as Earth and beehives form the center of the story complete with a balance of patterns (sunflowers, waterfalls) and strategic compositions (whales, elephants) that control visual attention. The fine color, pointing to live yellows against blazing blues, accompanied by satellites scenery technology's performance between flourishing seas, expound the intricacy of ecological conservation and modern development. The addition of such texts as "NASA" and "EARTH DAY" correlates cultural sensibility with scientific knowing, and symbolic timelines as well as celestial image portray environmental stewardship as timeless and timely. An orchestra of these elements smoothens a universal palace of imagery that, invites the audience to grasp inclusion, involvement, and an eco-centric connection as a whole to nurturing the constancy of the planet.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The research attains the following conclusions:

1. Themes regarding to the environment (interdependence of ecosystems, diversity or partnership between people and nature) are constantly performed on Earth Day posters, particularly by using graphic images. Posters of bees and hives portray joint ecological management, whereas, flourishing life circle and the tender nation of the environment are identified by butterflies and sunflowers. Images of the sea creatures and satellite imagery taken together point to the role of technology in monitoring and protecting the planet's ecosystems. Visual clues in the form of timelines covering "2010-2020", slogans such as "WATER TOUCHES EVERYTHING" create a foundation for activism within given spatial-temporal boundaries with a continuous stewardship effect. Representations, from the blue planet to animals-elephants, dolphins, and to urban landscapes depict the collision of development and ecological balance, with motifs from the sky reflecting eternal cycles of nature. Using these images, Earth is depicted as a finely calibrated, fragile web desperately in need of deliberate, collaborative control.
2. Environmental messages in Earth Day posters are deliberately created based on the thoughtful combination of visuals and text. The colorful images of warm tones such as sunflowers, ladybugs bring positivity while the expansive blues and greens bring peacefulness – calling from our beautiful world. Humans lay down,

eagles fly, waterfalls spill – illustrations in these poses evoke emotion in viewers through placement and perspective so that they are active participants. Layouts balance urgency and harmony: Visual emphasizes on "EARTH DAY" and timelines are anchors, while rule- of-thirds placements (for instance, whales and elephants) and balanced reflections (such as sky reflection in water) "It WATER TOUCHES EVERYTHING" connects universal concepts to individual behavior enlivened with cosmic imagery (satellites, floating planets) that advance overall thinking. The using of bold, eye-grabbing typography incorporates the viewers into the visuals, and text outlining based on the natural shapes (such as water curved phrases) completes the immersion. With the help of thoughtful layout, bold imagery, and positive messaging, this campaign hits home both the power of collective responsibility and the power of collective responsibility.

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From Blueprint to Brilliance: ChatGPT-Driven Improvements in Pre-Service Teachers' Lesson Plans: Enhanced Learning Material

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Abstract— *This study assessed the effectiveness of ChatGPT AI-driven scaffolding in enhancing the lesson plan writing performance of English pre-service teachers at the University of Cebu-Main Campus, school year 2025–2026 as basis of an enhanced learning material. The study employed a quasi-experimental design through random sampling in selecting fifty (50) participants, equally divided into twenty-five (25) participants for the control group and another twenty-five (25) for the experimental group. A lesson plan template and a standardized rubric evaluating organization, content, grammar, and mechanics served as the primary research instruments. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical tools, including the t-test for dependent and independent samples. Findings revealed that the pre-test data indicated both groups initially struggled with structural organization and failed to reach high proficiency, while post-test results showed that the control group exhibited no statistically significant change and the experimental group demonstrated a significant improvement toward proficiency across all categories. Hypotheses testing confirmed a significant difference in the post-test performance of the experimental group, with p-values ranging from 0.000 to 0.017, well below the alpha level of 0.05, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (Ho), which means that the intervention provided to the experimental group was highly effective in enhancing their ability to structure, articulate, and refine lesson plans. In conclusion, ChatGPT AI-driven scaffolds are highly effective in refining lesson plan writing performance compared to traditional methods.*

Keywords— ***English Teaching, ChatGPT AI-driven scaffolding, writing performance, quasi-experimental quantitative design, University of Cebu-Main Campus, Cebu City, Philippines***

I. RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The global trend of AI integration in education empowers educators worldwide across variety of studies—from language teaching to curriculum design—by enhancing efficiency, creativity, and pedagogical clarity in diverse cultural and institutional settings. This importance highlights lesson planning as a critical yet challenging skill, where AI tools like ChatGPT can scaffold writing processes to foster deeper pedagogical competence among pre-service teachers (Kalenda et al., 2025). In the context of English language teaching (ELT), this task is doubly demanding, as pre-service teachers must not only master pedagogical strategies but also demonstrate high-level linguistic proficiency and the ability to scaffold complex communicative tasks for their future learners.

In teaching, writing a lesson plan often proves to be a time-consuming task, especially when combined with the preparation of visual aids and assessment tools (Powell & Courchesne, 2024). Pre-service teachers can spend hours crafting a single lesson plan, only to wonder if it is well-organized, coherent, and free from grammatical and mechanical errors. This rigorous process requires careful attention to detail and strong writing skills to ensure that the lesson effectively facilitates student learning. Amid the

broader global trend of AI integration in education, tools like ChatGPT promise to address these issues through scaffolding functions that support skill development in organization, coherence, grammar, and mechanics.

Prior to ChatGPT, pre-service teachers relied solely on their own creativity and planning to design activities and write lesson plans, often making the process more laborious. Now, with AI, pre-service teachers can generate lesson content quickly by simply providing prompts, making lesson planning more efficient (Chua et al., 2026). However, while AI supports this work, it remains essential for pre-service teachers to carefully review their writing for proper organization, content quality, grammar, and mechanics, ensuring that AI serves as a scaffold rather than a substitute in their teaching practice.

This study utilizes the Vygotskian ZPD framework (Vygotsky, 1978) to analyze how ChatGPT, acting as a more knowledgeable other (MKO), provides the linguistic scaffolding necessary for pre-service teachers to bridge the gap between fragmented lesson drafting and the production of coherent, grammatically precise, and pedagogically aligned instructional plans. A Vygotskian lens is vital here, as it frames AI within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), enabling guided skill progression from assisted to independent performance; filling this gap is crucial to harness AI for equitable teacher training without fostering overdependence.

While international perspectives highlight AI's role in enhancing advanced writing proficiency (Bérešová, 2024), Philippine contexts emphasize its utility in organizational structure (Edraga, 2026) and its potential to mitigate infrastructure barriers (Villarino, 2024). These findings connect to the global context by affirming AI's scaffolding role but expose a niche: limited exploration of how ChatGPT influences lesson plan writing skills—specifically organization, coherence, grammar, and mechanics—for English pre-service teachers in the Philippines.

Based on classroom observations, the researcher noticed that when pre-service teachers wrote lesson plans without the aid of AI, they often encountered difficulties in structuring the components of the plan in a coherent and pedagogically sound manner, serving as an empirical bridge that validates the theoretical concerns mentioned. Common issues included poorly formulated behavioral objectives, lack of logical sequencing in activities, and misalignment between learning outcomes, instructional procedures, and assessment tools. Directly reflecting the laborious process, this process required extended periods of drafting and revising, leading to visible time inefficiency and occasional frustration caused by these poorly formulated behavioral objectives. Without AI support, majority of pre-service teachers relied heavily on printed templates or prior examples, which sometimes resulted in repetitive or outdated teaching strategies that did not fully address the needs of diverse learners.

Conversely, when students utilize AI-based scaffolding in lesson plan writing, it is observed that there is a marked improvement in efficiency and content organization. With appropriate prompts, AI tools were able to generate well-structured lesson outlines, suggest varied and creative activities, and align objectives with Bloom's Taxonomy. Many students reported feeling more confident in their outputs, as AI provided instant feedback and alternative suggestions for activities, assessment items, and instructional strategies. However, the researcher also observed a tendency among some students to rely too heavily on AI-generated content without sufficiently applying their pedagogical judgment, underscoring the importance of critically evaluating and adapting AI outputs to suit specific classroom contexts.

While Edraga noted improvements in content, there is a lack of focus on the linguistic mechanics and coherence necessary for high-level ELT lesson planning within the Philippine ZPD context. Few studies have examined the interplay between AI support and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) in lesson planning, particularly concerning the alignment of objectives, activities, and assessments. Consequently, there is a pressing need to determine how teacher education institutions can integrate these tools to enhance, rather than diminish, the critical thinking skills required for effective lesson preparation.

Despite the benefits noted in preliminary observations and existing literature, a critical gap remains: current studies [Bérešová, 2024; Edraga, 2026] do not sufficiently address the intersection of AI-based scaffolding and the development of specific linguistic-pedagogical skills (organization, coherence, grammar, and mechanics) among English pre-service teachers.

Thus, this study occupied this niche by investigating the impact of ChatGPT-driven scaffolding on the performance metrics. By evaluating performance in organization, coherence, and mechanics, this study moves beyond mere observation to provide a data-driven basis for institutional AI policies.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In the context of the Philippine educational system, the theories of Lev Vygotsky (Sociocultural), Michael Long (Interactionist), and Jean Piaget (Constructivist) are not just

theoretical preferences—they are explicitly mandated by the state. These three theories belong to three foundational legal bases that govern curriculum design and teaching methodologies in the Philippines. The 1987 Philippine Constitution emphasizes the right of all citizens to quality and relevant education, which directly connects to Piaget's constructivist view of cognitive development and Vygotsky's sociocultural emphasis on learning through social interaction. Long's interactionist theory further strengthens this constitutional mandate by ensuring communicative competence, moving education beyond rote memorization toward functional, meaningful learning. Together, these theories provide the philosophical and legal justification for integrating innovative tools like ChatGPT into teacher education, ensuring that AI-driven scaffolding aligns with the constitutional vision of accessible and effective education.

Republic Act No. 10533, or the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, and Republic Act No. 10157, the Kindergarten Education Act, further institutionalize these theoretical foundations into curriculum design. RA 10533 mandates learner-centered, developmentally appropriate, and contextualized education, which Piaget's stages of development directly support, while Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development underpins contextualization through Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education. Long's interactionist approach complements these by embedding collaborative and communicative practices into the K-12 curriculum.

Meanwhile, RA 10157 highlights Piaget's sensorimotor and preoperational stages in early childhood education, reinforcing the role of play and sensory experiences in knowledge construction. Vygotsky's sociocultural lens ensures that language and cultural tools are integrated at the foundational level, while Long's emphasis on interaction supports language acquisition even in kindergarten. These legal bases and theories collectively validate the study's use of ChatGPT scaffolding, demonstrating that AI integration is not only pedagogically sound but also legally aligned with the Philippine mandate for quality, relevant, and developmentally appropriate education.

Assuming that social interaction is the fundamental catalyst for cognitive growth, this study is anchored on the Sociocultural Theory of Lev Vygotsky (1978), which states that learning is a socially mediated process where individuals develop higher mental functions through interaction with more knowledgeable others and the use of cultural tools. According to Vygotsky, scaffolding provided by teachers, peers, or tools plays a vital role in helping learners perform tasks they would not be able to accomplish independently. This process occurs within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where support gradually fades as learners gain competence.

In the context of this study, the identified problem was the need to enhance the lesson plan writing skill of English pre-service teachers, who were still in the process of developing the pedagogical knowledge and critical thinking needed to design effective and meaningful lessons. Traditionally, this scaffolding has come from mentors or instructors during practicum or method courses. However, with the rapid integration of digital tools in education, AI-based scaffolding is emerging as a new form of support that can simulate human guidance, offer real-time feedback, and promote reflective thinking.

The theory supports the assumption that AI, as a tool, can function as a more knowledgeable other, guiding pre-service teachers as they construct their understanding of effective lesson planning. Just as a mentor might ask questions, suggest improvements, or model lesson structures, AI-powered tools can analyze lesson drafts, provide personalized suggestions, and prompt users to think critically about their instructional choices. This aligns with Vygotsky's principle that learning is not just an individual process but one deeply rooted in social and tool-mediated interactions.

Therefore, applying Sociocultural Theory to this study justifies the exploration of how AI-based scaffolding affects lesson plan writing skill. It assumes that AI can serve not only as a technological innovation but also as a meaningful scaffold that bridges the gap between what pre-service teachers can do alone and what they can achieve with support—ultimately improving their readiness to teach effectively.

This study is also supported by Interactionist Theory by Long (1983) which posits that language learning occurs most effectively through meaningful interaction, negotiation of meaning, and feedback. According to this theory, input becomes valuable when learners actively engage with linguistic forms, clarify misunderstandings, and receive corrective feedback—processes that help them notice gaps between their current knowledge and target language norms. This noticing and negotiation promotes deeper processing of vocabulary, grammar, and discourse features, eventually contributing to improved communicative competence.

In relation to the study of Al-Raimi et al. (2024), the Interactionist Theory helps explain why Omani EFL students frequently use AI tools for translating words, verifying grammar and spelling, and generating ideas. These AI tools create an interactive environment where learners can immediately check meanings, refine their

language output, and experiment with sentence structures. Each interaction with AI—whether requesting a translation, asking for clarification, or seeking feedback—functions as a form of negotiation of meaning. The instant corrective responses offered by AI tools simulate conversational feedback that would typically come from a more proficient speaker. Thus, learners are not merely receiving input but actively modifying it based on the interactive prompts provided by the AI system.

Moreover, the theory supports the idea that AI tools can enrich language learning by prompting learners to notice linguistic inaccuracies and adjust their language use accordingly. When students use AI to compose essays or paragraphs, the feedback loop between their output and the AI's suggestions aligns with the interactionist view that learning emerges through cycles of production, feedback, and repair. Even though the study found no significant differences between male and female learners and no correlation between perceptions and practices, the widespread reliance on AI tools suggests that both genders benefit from the interactive, feedback-rich experience AI provides. Ultimately, the Interactionist Theory underscores that AI-based tools serve as interactive partners that facilitate negotiation of meaning—an essential mechanism for second language development.

This study is also supported by the Constructivist Learning Theory by Jean Piaget (1972), which posits that learners actively construct knowledge through experiences, rather than passively receiving information. Learning occurs as individuals engage with their environment, encounter new situations, and reconcile them with their prior knowledge. In this process, cognitive structures are continually modified through assimilation and accommodation. In the context of integrating AI tools like ChatGPT, constructivism highlights the importance of designing tasks where pre-service teachers explore, question, and apply language concepts, thereby deepening their understanding while developing autonomy. When paired with Vygotsky's emphasis on social interaction and the TPACK framework's focus on technological integration, constructivism ensures that AI-assisted lesson planning promotes active, meaningful, and learner-centered engagement.

In relation to this study, Constructivist Learning Theory underscores that knowledge is actively built by learners through meaningful engagement with tasks, rather than simply transmitted by instructors. When applied to AI-based scaffolding, constructivism suggests that English pre-service teachers develop their lesson plan writing competence by interacting with AI tools in ways that challenge their current understanding, prompting reflection, adaptation, and refinement of ideas. These AI tools act as cognitive partners, offering prompts, suggestions, and feedback that enable learners to connect new information with prior knowledge, thereby facilitating deeper comprehension. This aligns with Vygotsky's view of learning within the Zone of Proximal Development, as the AI provides just enough structured support for learners to achieve tasks they could not manage independently. Over time, as competence grows, the scaffolding can be gradually reduced, fostering autonomy and mastery in lesson planning. This underscores that learners actively build understanding through interaction, reflection, and adaptation—especially when engaging with AI as a cognitive collaborator.

Additionally, in the study by Mishra and Koehler (2006) on Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK), it emphasizes that effective teaching using technology needs the interplay of different knowledge domains: Technological Knowledge (TK), Pedagogical Knowledge (PK), and Content Knowledge (CK). This theory provides a framework for pre-service teachers in incorporating AI tools like ChatGPT in understanding the importance of how to use tools (TK), while aligning them to their teaching methods (PK), and giving attention to the appropriateness of the language content (CK).

Technological Knowledge (TK) points to the ability of pre-service teachers to maximize AI tools like ChatGPT in learning how to develop their lesson plans that will align with their specific objectives. As such, AI will help them structure their lessons, which will provide them with knowledge on how to approach their lessons in the future. On the other hand, Pedagogical Knowledge (PK) pertains to their abilities in aligning their techniques and strategies in teaching based on the lesson plan developed with the help of AI. With this, pre-service teachers have to read, understand, and evaluate AI-generated suggestions to be able to learn and apply them on their own moving forward. Lastly, Context Knowledge (CK) refers to the level of understanding by pre-service teachers of the content they teach in class, ensuring that the scaffolded lesson plan generated by AI is linguistically accurate and appropriate in terms of their students' level and diverse backgrounds. Ultimately, using TPACK in the study allows pre-service teachers to effectively integrate the use of AI in writing their lesson plans, adjust their teaching approaches, and understand their content, highlighting the importance of the three domains working together to improve lesson planning performance.

Recent studies have highlighted the potential of AI tools to enhance TPACK development among pre-service teachers, particularly in lesson planning. Lee and Zhai

(2024) found that pre-service elementary teachers who integrated ChatGPT into their science lesson designs demonstrated notable improvements in aligning content objectives with appropriate pedagogy and technology, though challenges remained in critically evaluating AI outputs. Similarly, Li et al. (2023) reported that AI-supported lesson planning in English language teaching contexts fostered greater coherence between instructional strategies and digital tool use, enabling pre-service teachers to better address learner needs while managing technological affordances and constraints. These findings affirm that integrating AI within a TPACK framework not only supports teachers' technological fluency but also strengthens their capacity to craft pedagogically sound and content-appropriate lessons—outcomes that are consistent with Vygotsky's emphasis on scaffolded learning within the Zone of Proximal Development.

According to Novita (2025), teachers today face increasing pressure to deliver personalized, standards-aligned instruction while managing limited time and growing responsibilities. Traditional lesson planning, though essential, often restricts creativity due to its repetitive and time-consuming nature. This led Novita to ask how AI supports teacher efficiency and instructional design in lesson planning. Using a qualitative literature review, the study examined peer-reviewed articles from 2016 to 2023, focusing on the role of AI in streamlining educational tasks. The researchers conducted a systematic search across databases like Scopus, ERIC, and Web of Science, narrowing 48 initial results to 18 relevant studies based on educational applicability and pedagogical value. Thematic analysis revealed key themes such as AI-supported design, enhanced efficiency, personalization, and implementation challenges. The review concludes that AI can significantly improve teacher efficiency by automating tasks like curriculum alignment, content curation, and assessment design. However, the study also emphasized the importance of ethical AI use—highlighting issues like data privacy, algorithm transparency, and teacher oversight to maintain professional and pedagogical integrity.

Teaching is a cognitively demanding and highly creative task that requires careful preparation to ensure effective and purposeful instruction. In modern classrooms, lesson plans are often developed using learning or content management systems. Recognizing the complexity of this process, Pender et al. (2022) explored how AI-based lesson planning software can not only automate routine tasks but also support reflective, competence-based teaching. Their study aimed to answer the following research questions: How can AI-based software assist teachers in designing individualized, competence-oriented lesson plans? To what extent does such a system maintain pedagogical freedom while improving efficiency? To address these questions, the authors conducted a qualitative design study using various user scenarios and software demonstrations to illustrate the software's features and practical applications. Teachers interacted with the tool, which allowed them to easily and intuitively generate personalized learning content without compromising their instructional autonomy. The significant findings of the study showed that the AI system effectively supports competence-based learning by offering flexible, individualized lesson suggestions while simplifying the planning process. Additionally, the system fosters pedagogical reflection by guiding users through structured design processes. Ultimately, the study promotes greater awareness of intelligent learning environments that can support the automated, lifelong development of personalized educational content, paving the way for broader AI integration in teaching and learning practices.

Another study by Uysal and Yüksel (2024) examined the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into language education, with a particular focus on the views of pre-service teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL). Utilizing a mixed-methods design, the study evaluated the effectiveness of AI-generated lesson plans tailored for teaching writing to 5th-grade learners. Through the use of a detailed evaluation rubric and qualitative analysis, the research uncovered both the strengths and limitations of these AI-supported plans, along with recommendations for improvement. The findings revealed that while the AI tool performs well in terms of engagement, content relevance, and overall lesson structure, it faces notable challenges in areas such as differentiation and assessment strategies. The chapter concluded by discussing the implications for teacher education, underscoring the importance of developing AI literacy among future educators to leverage AI technologies in varied language teaching contexts effectively.

Additionally, ElSayary et al. (2025) aimed to investigate how prompt engineering contributes to the effective use of generative AI tools—such as EduAid, Magic School, and ChatGPT—for improving the efficiency and relevance of lesson planning. The study underscored the importance of AI literacy and ongoing professional development to ensure that AI-generated outputs meet the diverse needs of students. Using a qualitative case study approach, the researchers gathered data from 17 high school teachers across both private and public schools. Data sources included document analysis, written reflections, and focus group discussions to gain in-depth insights into teachers' experiences and perceptions regarding GenAI tool usage. The findings revealed that well-crafted prompts significantly enhanced teachers' ability to leverage GenAI tools, resulting in more relevant and effective lesson plans.

Teachers also noted the need for continuous refinement of AI-generated content to better address all learners' needs. The study emphasizes the necessity of sustained AI training to support meaningful integration of these technologies into educational practice. Overall, it highlights the strong potential of AI tools to automate and enrich lesson planning, with their effectiveness largely depending on the quality of user-generated prompts.

Moreover, another study investigated how pre-service teachers collaborate with AI in developing lesson plans, particularly in the context of physics instruction. Fifteen pre-service elementary teachers were guided to select a topic and write initial lesson plans, which were later refined through interaction with ChatGPT. Furthermore, the degree of collaboration was evaluated by examining the teachers' collaborative competencies with AI, along with the nature of their interactions and the changes made at each level. Pre-service teachers demonstrating low-level collaboration engaged in consensual exchanges, resulting in no revisions. In contrast, those at the intermediate level exhibited responsive interactions, often leading to structural modifications in their lesson plans. Meanwhile, high-level collaborators engaged in elaborative dialogue with AI, which led to deeper changes in both content knowledge and pedagogical strategies. The study emphasized that establishing AI as a collaborative peer is crucial, and it also revealed that meaningful, high-level collaboration requires learners to possess prior subject knowledge. These findings underscore the importance of preparing teachers to engage with AI as a professional partner in instructional design (Park & Park, 2024).

Lee and Zhai (2024) found that pre-service elementary teachers who integrated ChatGPT into science lesson planning demonstrated enhanced alignment between content objectives, pedagogy, and technology, though challenges remained in critically evaluating AI outputs. Similarly, Kehoe (2024) noted that AI can reduce teachers' time burden in lesson planning while improving instructional quality, provided educators apply their expertise to refine generated materials.

A study examined the integration using AI tools like ChatGPT in pre-service teachers in the Philippines. They discovered that while it improves lesson planning, creativity, and supports differentiated instruction, its usage poses challenges like unfamiliarity, accuracy and credibility concerns, and overreliance, David and Maroma (2025).

A study by Rougeaux and Sharp (2023) expressed that teachers might initially view AI as a tool with negative effects. However, the researchers believe AI might become an integral tool of a transformative classroom. It aimed to determine whether ChatGPT meets these criteria in preservice mathematics methods courses. The research focused on generating specific input prompts to guide ChatGPT in producing lesson plans, which were then compared with those created by preservice teachers. Specifically, the study addressed the following research questions: (1) Can ChatGPT be used to produce lesson plans for specific mathematical objectives? (2) How do different types of prompts affect the output of lesson plans generated by ChatGPT? and (3) How do lesson plans generated by ChatGPT compare to those designed by preservice teachers? The findings suggested that effective use of AI in lesson planning could significantly reduce the time required for teaching lesson plan development, allowing instructors to shift focus toward evaluating and improving AI-generated content, thereby maximizing instructional time in mathematics methods courses.

Zhussupova et al. (2025) stated that the rapid development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is reshaping educational practices, particularly in teacher training. The study explored the integration of Digital Multimodal Simulation (DMS) and ChatGPT in enhancing lesson planning skills among Pre-service English Language Teachers (PELTs). Using a mixed-methods approach that combines rubric-based evaluation, classroom observation, and thematic analysis, the study examined the effectiveness of AI-assisted lesson planning and its perceived benefits. Findings reveal that DMS supported by ChatGPT significantly improved PELTs' ability to structure, personalize, and align lesson plans with pedagogical standards. While ChatGPT-generated plans demonstrated strengths in clarity and differentiation, human-designed plans showed deeper engagement and resource use. Additionally, PELTs reported increased confidence, practical skills, and reflection through real-time feedback within the simulation environment. The study contributes to the growing body of research on AI integration in teacher education and highlights the complementary role of human and AI collaboration in pedagogical design.

Kerr and Kim (2025) examined how pre-service teachers incorporate generative AI tools into their lesson planning. Specifically, the study explores the methods they utilized, the benefits realized, and the challenges they encountered. Participants include 8 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pre-service teachers studying digital literacy courses at a Korean university. Data were gathered by convenience sampling, over three one-hour and fifteen-minute classes within a 16-week semester. And using a qualitative case study approach, the study explored the PSTs' lived experiences with generative AI in lesson planning. The findings demonstrate the potential of generative AI tools in supporting PSTs in lesson planning and material development. Results show that PSTs utilized

AI in various tasks involving lesson planning, providing efficiency and creative support. However, challenges with its limitations were also observed, such as a lack of depth in the lesson content, not enough support for teaching approaches, and occasional inaccuracies. These emphasize the importance of teacher training programs, critical evaluation of AI outputs, and strategies for incorporating AI tools in teaching contexts.

Studies have been conducted to examine the impact of AI on lesson planning. Setyaningsih et al. (2024) uncovered the dual impact of AI: how it streamlines lesson planning, supports differentiated instruction, and enhances creativity while demanding careful teacher oversight, managing effective prompts, and thoughtful adaptation to classroom realities. While teachers appreciated AI's ability to reduce planning workload and offer varied instructional ideas, they also noted that AI-generated content often requires further refinement to meet pedagogical standards. The findings stressed the need for focused training and professional development to prepare educators for effective AI integration. Positioning AI as a supportive partner rather than a teacher replacement, the study contributes to ongoing discussions about AI in education and offers insights into fostering meaningful, innovative, and context-appropriate teaching practices.

UNESCO (2023) reported that generative AI holds the potential to transform conventional teaching practices, emphasizing its challenges and opportunities. Similarly, Liu et al. (2025) also concluded that integrating AI into education presents notable challenges for teachers, especially during the transitional stage of adapting these technologies for lesson planning. The study emphasized that both internal factors, like teachers' attitudes toward new methods and AI tools, and external influences, such as training availability, peer support, and policy directives, significantly impact adoption strategies and results.

Khalid et al. (2024) studied how Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) undergraduate students perceive the integration of AI into lesson planning. The study aimed to understand what AI tools teacher trainees prefer and their perceptions of these tools in developing lesson materials. It sought to answer the following research questions: (1) What are the perceptions of TESL students when it comes to integrating AI in developing lesson plans? (2) Which AI do TESL students choose when it comes to developing lesson plans? It employed a descriptive case study methodology that incorporated semi-structured interviews and questionnaires, involving 30 teacher trainees from a Malaysian public university. Findings have revealed favorable perceptions of AI integration in lesson planning. Results uncovered that ChatGPT and Magic School AI are the preferred AI tools among the participants, emphasizing its efficiency, acceleration of idea generation, and simplification of the overall process.

The findings of the study of Al-Raimi, et. al. (2024) showed that translating words, phrases, and sentences is where Omani EFL students most frequently use AI tools. In order to verify spelling and grammar, they also employ AI techniques. The participants also report using AI writing tools to generate ideas for their writing and to assist them in composing essays and paragraphs. Findings showed that there were no significant differences between male and female students, and there was no correlation concerning the students' perceptions and practices in utilizing AI tools. The study's recommendations and implications were presented in accordance with this.

Enhancing writing skills in the EFL classroom is crucial for fostering effective communication, critical thinking, and self-expression. Writing poses challenges for EFL learners due to the need for precise idea formation and sustained attention from both teachers and students. This skill enables learners to navigate diverse linguistic contexts and participate actively in various discourses. The rapid advancement of technology has introduced Artificial Intelligence as a promising tool to augment language learning, particularly in reinforcing writing skills. The present dissertation investigates the utilization of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools to augment writing instruction and explores their impact on learners' writing abilities and proficiency. It investigates the impact of ChatGPT on students' writing skills. It is hypothesized that the use of ChatGPT may enhance EFL learners' writing proficiency by providing opportunities for practice, feedback, and error detection and correction. The findings offer valuable insight into students' and teachers' perspectives and attitudes towards using AI tools, specifically ChatGPT, their usage patterns and their perceived impact on writing skills' development, Imane, R., & Siham.

Patrik and Ilona (2024) also explored how Artificial Intelligence (AI) can support and improve English lesson plan writing in terms of personalization, efficiency, and instructional quality. Using a qualitative analysis of AI-integrated platforms—such as MagicSchool and its chatbot, Raina—the study examined how these tools help teachers generate customized lesson plans, instructional materials, and differentiated strategies based on student needs. The article highlighted AI's capacity to analyze student data, identify individual learning gaps, and suggest tailored strategies to enhance engagement and learning outcomes. Notably, it also emphasized AI's role in reducing teacher workload and promoting efficiency through automated content creation. However, the article also outlined key

challenges, including the digital divide, unequal access to technology, and ethical concerns surrounding data privacy. It calls for responsible AI integration through equitable access and clear data-use policies.

A study explores preservice education student perceptions on ChatGPT's ability to write lesson plans through the use of a guided analysis process. A pre- post-survey and a reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of ChatGPT were written by participants. Students shared that they plan to use ChatGPT for lesson planning as a practicing educator, but indicated that revision of output is necessary, Kalenda, et. al. (2025)

According to Lee and Zhai (2024), despite the buzz around ChatGPT's potential, empirical studies exploring its actual utility in the classroom for learning remain scarce. The study aims to fill this gap by analyzing the lesson plans developed by 29 pre-service elementary teachers from a Korean university and assessing how they integrated ChatGPT into science learning activities. The study further examined pre-service teachers' perceptions and concerns about integrating ChatGPT into science learning. Results show diverse applications of ChatGPT in different science domains. Meanwhile, they also expressed concerns about its accuracy and the risks that students may be overly dependent on ChatGPT. They further suggested solutions to systemizing classroom dynamics between teachers and students. The study underscores the need for more research on the roles of generative AI in actual classroom settings and provides insights for future AI-integrated science learning.

These studies provide theoretical support for integrating AI in writing lesson plans, which needs empirical validation. This current study builds on these findings by moving from theory to application—specifically investigating the effect of AI-based scaffolding on the lesson plan writing skills performance of English pre-service teachers.

This research assessed the effectiveness of ChatGPT AI-driven scaffolding in enhancing the lesson plan writing performance of the English pre-service teachers at University of Cebu-Main Campus in Cebu City during the school year 2025-2026 as basis for a proposed enhanced learning material.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the pre-intervention lesson plan writing performance level of the

control and experimental groups in terms of the following writing elements:

1.1 organization,

1.2 content,

1.3 grammar, and

1.4 mechanics?

2. What is the post-intervention lesson plan writing performance level of the control and experimental groups in terms the following writing elements of:

2.1 organization,

2.2 content,

2.3 grammar, and

2.4 mechanics?

3. Is there a significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores in the lesson plan writing performance of the:

3.1 control group, and

3.2 experimental group?

4. Is there a significant mean gain difference on the pre-test and post-test scores in the lesson plan writing performance between the control and the experimental group?

5. Based on the findings of the study, what enhanced learning material may be developed?

III. METHOD

Design

This study employed a quasi-experimental quantitative research design, defined by Cham, Lee, and Migunov (2024) as an approach that utilizes control and experimental groups. While randomized controlled trials remain the gold standard, the non-equivalent groups design was selected to preserve the ecological validity of the authentic classroom environment, thereby ensuring that findings are generalizable to actual teacher-education contexts. Fifty participants were selected through random sampling from the target population to enhance representativeness. These participants were then divided into two groups of twenty-five (25) each based on existing class sections, ensuring comparability. One group served as the experimental group, receiving the intervention, while the other functioned as the control group, continuing with traditional instruction.

To see if the AI support actually makes a difference, the study compares how well the two groups write their lesson plans. This writing performance is judged across four straightforward areas: how well the lesson plan is organized, the accuracy of its content, its grammar, and its mechanics (like spelling and punctuation). Because the groups are pre-existing and not perfectly identical at the start, the data handling and processing will include careful steps to ensure a fair comparison. The researcher administered a pre-test to measure students' prior knowledge about lesson planning before the intervention.

Figure 2 illustrates the flow of the study. Pre- and post-intervention assessments enable tracking of performance changes over time, while statistical controls mitigate threats like maturation or history effects, ensuring reliable attribution of improvements to the AI scaffolding intervention.

Flow of the Study

The input of the study consists of the initial lesson plan writing performance of English pre-service teachers. This is measured through a pre-test that evaluates organization, content, grammar, and mechanics. These input data serve as the foundation for comparing two groups: the control group, which engages in traditional lesson planning, and the experimental group, which utilizes ChatGPT AI-driven scaffolding. This input phase ensures a clear benchmark of participants' writing competence prior to the intervention.

The process of the study follows a quasi-experimental quantitative design. As part of this process, participants were randomly assigned to either the control or experimental group. Both groups completed a pre-test to determine their initial writing performance. The process continued with the intervention: the control group wrote lesson plans without AI assistance, while the experimental group used ChatGPT AI-driven scaffolding. After the intervention, a post-test was administered to both groups. The process was concluded with evaluation using a standardized rubric measuring organization, content, grammar, and mechanics, followed by statistical analysis and interpretation of the writing performance data.

The final output of the study is the development of enhanced learning material aimed at improving lesson plan writing skills. Grounded in the findings, this material will include pedagogical strategies and AI-assisted techniques that can be adopted within the College of Teacher Education. The output reflects the study's contribution to strengthening instructional competencies and promoting the integration of technology in teacher education. Ultimately, it supports the preparation of adaptive, digitally literate educators equipped for contemporary classroom challenges.

Instruments

This study employed two primary instruments. First was the lesson plan template which served as a guide for the pre-service teachers as to the lesson plan content is concerned. It was composed of the following components: specific objectives, activities or procedures, assessment and assignment.

The second instrument used was the rubric designed to evaluate participants' writing skill based on four key criteria: Organization, Content, Grammar, and Mechanics. Each criterion is assessed on a four-level scale: Exemplary (10 pts), Proficient (8–9 pts), Developing (6–7 pts), and Needs Improvement (0–5 pts). This is adapted from Carpinelli et al. (2008), who developed a rubric to evaluate standards-based lesson plans.

The rubric's validity is supported by its origin in peer-reviewed engineering education research for assessing standards-aligned lesson plans and they have structural or pedagogical commonalities in terms of standards-based lesson planning, making it appropriate for this study through adaptation to evaluate English pre-service teachers' lesson plan writing performance.

Data Gathering Procedure

Preliminary Preparation. Before the actual collection of data, the researcher secured approval from the Dean of the College of Teacher Education of the University of Cebu–Main Jones Campus. Once permission was granted, she obtained the official list of fifty (50) fourth-year BSED English majors who served as participants. These students were randomly assigned into two equal groups: twenty-five (25) in the control group and twenty-five (25) in the experimental group. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the confidentiality of their responses.

Pre-test Phase. To begin, the data collection began with the pre-test phase, during which both groups were administered to write an initial lesson plan based on a given English topic on Kinds of Sentences according to function. Following this task, the initial lesson plans were evaluated using a standardized rubric measuring organization, content, grammar, and mechanics.

Intervention Phase. The intervention phase was implemented for a three-week period. During this timeline, the control group wrote lesson plans without ChatGPT scaffolding, while the experimental group used ChatGPT AI-driven scaffolding.

Post-test Phase. Immediately following the three-week intervention, the post-test phase commenced. Both groups completed a post-test lesson plan writing task. Subsequently, the outputs were again assessed using the same rubric, and finally, all scores were encoded, organized, and prepared for statistical analysis.

Statistical Treatment

In this study, both descriptive and inferential statistics were applied to analyze the lesson plan writing performance of the control and experimental groups. Descriptive statistics, including frequency distribution, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, were first used to establish the initial writing performance levels.

For the inferential analysis, a paired sample t-test was employed at an alpha level of 0.05 to determine

whether there was a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores within each group across the four writing elements: Organization, Content, Grammar, and Mechanics.

The mean gain scores calculated as the difference between pre-test and post-test results of the control and experimental groups were compared using an independent samples t-test to further evaluate the extent of improvement specifically attributable to the ChatGPT AI-driven scaffolding,

To maintain objectivity and ensure inter-rater reliability, two independent inter-raters evaluated the outputs alongside the researcher.

IV. RESULT

The following constitute the findings of the study:

The pre-intervention data for organization showed that both the control and experimental groups were mostly at the developing level. Many participants in both groups struggled with organization, and none reached the exemplary level.

The pre-intervention results for content revealed that most participants in both groups were also at the developing level. No one reached the exemplary category.

The pre-intervention results for grammar showed that while participants understood grammar rules a little better than organization, both groups were still at the developing level.

The pre-intervention results for mechanics showed that spelling and punctuation were difficult for both groups. The control and experimental groups fell into the Needs Improvement category, with most staying at the developing level.

The post-intervention data for **organization** showed a strong improvement. Most of the experimental group reached the proficient level, while the control group stayed at the developing level.

The post-intervention data for **content** revealed that several participants in the experimental group reached proficient, and one even achieved exemplary. In contrast, the control group showed little progress, with most still at the developing level.

The post-intervention data for **grammar** indicated that most of the experimental group reached proficient, while the control group remained mostly at the developing level.

The post-intervention data for **mechanics** showed that the majority of the experimental group reached proficient. The control group, however, stayed at the developing level, with some still in the need improvement category.

Organization, content, and grammar showed significant arithmetic improvements while the area of mechanics showed a non-significant difference.

The experimental group achieved highly significant improvements across all categories—organization, content, grammar, and mechanics.

It confirmed the effectiveness of the intervention, showing that the experimental group achieved significantly higher mean gains than the control group in every category.

V. DISCUSSION

PRE-INTERVENTION LESSON PLAN WRITING PERFORMANCE LEVEL OF BOTH GROUPS

The pre-intervention lesson plan writing performance level of both groups across four primary writing elements: organization, content, grammar, and mechanics is categorized into four: Needs Improvement, Developing, Proficient, and Exemplary.

Pre-Intervention Writing Performance: Organization

Table 1 reflects the pre-intervention writing performance level of the two groups before the use of ChatGPT AI-driven scaffolds in terms of organization.

Table 1: Pre-Intervention Writing Performance: Organization

Level	Ranges of Scores	Control		Experimental	
		f	%	f	%
Exemplary	9.1-10	0	0.00	0	0.00
Proficient	7.1-9.0	1	4.00	7	28.00
Developing	5.1-7.0	14	56.00	15	60.00
Needs Improvement	0-5.0	10	40.00	3	12.00
Total		**25**	**100.00**	**25**	**100.00**
Average		**5.52**		**6.42**	
St. Dev.		**0.90**		**0.90**	

As illustrated in Table 1, prior to the intervention, majority of the participants in both the Control and Experimental groups were at the Developing level regarding lesson plan organization. While neither group achieved an Exemplary rating, the Experimental group demonstrated a higher baseline proficiency with an average score of 6.42 compared to the Control group's 5.52. Notably, 40% of the Control group fell into the Needs Improvement category, whereas only 12% of the Experimental group scored in this lowest tier.

Supporting literature, such as studies by Sehweil et al. (2022) and Kaenah and Utami (2023), suggests that this concentration in mid-level proficiency is common among pre-service teachers who lack specific structural frameworks, often resulting in a lack of "Exemplary" logical flow. Furthermore, the uniform standard deviation of 0.90 observed in the data aligns with findings by Munda (2025), which highlight the variability in initial instructional planning competence when teachers rely on individualized styles rather than standardized organizational scaffolds.

Pre-Intervention Writing Performance: Content

Table 2 shows the pre-intervention lesson plan writing performance level of the control and experimental groups before the use of ChatGPT AI driven scaffolds in terms of content.

Table 2: Pre-Intervention Writing Performance: Content

Level	Ranges of Scores	Control		Experimental	
		f	%	f	%
Exemplary	9.1-10	0	0.00	0	0.00
Proficient	7.1-9.0	2	8.00	8	32.00
Developing	5.1-7.0	11	44.00	16	64.00
Needs Improvement	0-5.0	12	48.00	1	4.00
Total		**25**	**100.00**	**25**	**100.00**
Average		**5.54**		**6.47**	
St. Dev.		**0.96**		**0.91**	

As reflected in Table 2, prior to the intervention, the Control and Experimental groups exhibited a baseline performance in Content that ranged primarily from "**Needs Improvement" to "Developing**." The two groups started at very different levels. Most students in the Experimental group were already at the Developing or Proficient levels.

In contrast, the Control group struggled, with nearly half scoring below 5.0 at the Needs Improvement level—compared to just 4% in the Experimental group. While neither group reached the Exemplary level, the Experimental group's average score of 6.47 was higher than the Control group's 5.54. This clearly shows a big initial gap between the two groups before any ChatGPT AI tools were used.

Del Rosario (2026) identified significant challenges among 43 pre-service teachers in the Philippines, noting that inadequate understanding of literary elements and content complexity often led to poorly structured lesson plans. Similarly, Lariosa (2026) found that while pre-service teachers might be rated as "Outstanding" in general content knowledge, they struggle significantly with specific instructional skills like questioning and pedagogical application, mirroring the "Developing" concentration seen in the control and experimental groups.

Furthermore, Sanchez et al. (2024) emphasized that pre-service performance is heavily influenced by the lack of structured mentorship and inadequate reference materials, validating the necessity of scaffolds to move students from a "Needs Improvement" baseline toward proficiency. Together, these studies suggest that without specific interventions, pre-service teachers frequently remain at a developing stage due to the high cognitive load of integrating content knowledge with pedagogical strategies

Pre-Intervention Writing Performance: Grammar

Table 3 displays the pre-intervention lesson plan writing performance level of the two groups before the use of ChatGPT AI-driven scaffolds in terms of grammar.

Table 3 presents the **initial** performance of the Control and Experimental groups in terms of Grammar before the implementation of AI-driven scaffolds. The data reveals a significant similarity: both groups are predominantly situated at the Developing level (5.1 - 7.0), representing 68% of the Control group and 56% of the Experimental group. The Experimental group achieved a

notably higher frequency at the Proficient level (36%) compared to only 8% in the Control group and neither group reached the Exemplary level.

Table 3: Pre-Intervention Writing Performance: Grammar

Level	Ranges of Scores	Control		Experimental	
		f	%	F	%
Exemplary	9.1-10	0	0.00	0	0.00
Proficient	7.1-9.0	2	8.00	9	36.00
Developing	5.1-7.0	17	68.00	14	56.00
Needs Improvement	0-5.0	6	24.00	2	8.00
Total		**25**	**100.00**	**25**	**100.00**
Average		**5.68**		**6.53**	
St. Dev.		**0.95**		**0.96**	

Research indicates that pre-service teachers' performance in grammar in lesson plan writing is often **limited** by a combination of content knowledge gaps and pedagogical challenges, aligning with the "Developing" and "Needs Improvement". Specifically, the factors behind the Experimental group's higher "Developing" concentration are reflected by Sanchez et al. (2024), who highlighted that the lack of specific instructional guides and reference materials often leaves pre-service teachers in a "developing" state, as they struggle to align grammatical learning objectives with appropriate assessment strategies, and by Roca and Manla (2025), who explored the grammatical competence of graduating education students and found that while participants often perceive their own skills as sufficient, objective assessments frequently show only "fair" competence, particularly in complex sentence elements, which directly **limits** their ability to write "Exemplary" lesson plans.

In contrast, the **greater challenges** explaining the Control group's lower "Needs Improvement" concentration are illustrated by Del Rosario (2026), who conducted a qualitative study in the Philippines which revealed that pre-service teachers face significant **challenges** in grammar lesson preparation due to the complexity of English linguistic structures and an inadequate understanding of lexicogrammar, leading to poorly structured instructional flows.

In addition, according to Nagaño, et. al (2025), in their study on the grammatical competence of 50 fourth-year pre-service English teachers, sentence elements emerged as the least learned domain, falling into the low level of competence. The findings highlight substantial strengths in several grammar areas but reveal persistent, specific gaps in sentence structure knowledge. Recommendations include developing targeted grammar instruction modules and continuous monitoring to address the identified weaknesses, thereby enhancing the instructional quality and language proficiency of future educators.

Pre-Intervention Writing Performance: Mechanics.

Table 4 indicates the pre-intervention lesson plan writing performance level of the two groups before the use of ChatGPT AI-driven scaffolds in terms of mechanics.

Table 4: Pre-Intervention Writing Performance: Mechanics

Level	Ranges of Scores	Control		Experimental	
		f	%	f	%
Exemplary	9.1-10	0	0.00	0	0.00
Proficient	7.1-9.0	2	8.00	7	28.00
Developing	5.1-7.0	15	60.00	13	52.00
Needs Improvement	0-5.0	8	32.00	5	20.00
Total		**25**	**100.00**	**25**	**100.00**
Average		**5.68**		**6.26**	
St. Dev.		**0.95**		**1.01**	

Similar to the previous categories, both the Control and Experimental groups were primarily positioned at the Developing level. (5.1-7.0), representing 60% (n=15) and 52% (n=13) of their respective groups. The similarity between groups ends there, as the Experimental group displayed a greater range of performance, with 28% reaching the Proficient level compared to only 8% in the Control group. Conversely, the Control group showed more notable difficulties, with nearly a third of its participants (32%) in the Needs Improvement category, whereas only 20% of the Experimental group scored in this lowest level. Overall, with an average score of 6.26 for the Experimental group and (5.68) for the Control group—and no participants achieving an Exemplary rating—the data indicates that both groups had a foundational but technically flawed grasp of mechanics prior to using the AI-driven scaffolds.

The initial "Developing" proficiency in mechanics observed in both groups (Means of 5.68 and 6.26) aligns with contemporary research identifying the significant "added mental burden" pre-service teachers face when beginning instructional design. AIMS Press (2026) and Ramos & Baylon (2025) observe that novice educators often struggle to simultaneously manage complex pedagogical structures and technical linguistic accuracy (spelling, punctuation, and capitalization).

POST-INTERVENTION LESSON PLAN WRITING PERFORMANCE LEVEL OF BOTH GROUPS

The post-intervention lesson plan writing performance level of both groups—across the four writing elements of organization, content, grammar, and mechanics—comprises the following levels: Needs Improvement, Developing, Proficient, and Exemplary.

Post-Intervention Writing Performance: Organization

Table 5 illustrates the post-intervention lesson plan writing performance level regarding Organization.

Table 5: Post-Intervention Writing Performance: Organization

Level	Ranges of Scores	Control		Experimental	
		f	%	f	%
Exemplary	9.1-10	0	0.00	0	0.00
Proficient	7.1-9.0	2	8.00	21	84.00
Developing	5.1-7.0	18	72.00	4	16.00
Needs Improvement	0-5.0	5	20.00	0	0.00
Total		**25**	**100.00**	**25**	**100.00**
Average		**6.23**		**7.84**	
St. Dev.		**0.85**		**0.76**	

As shown in Table 6, a clear difference has appeared between the two groups: the Experimental group achieved a higher level of organization skill, with 84% of participants reaching the Proficient level. In comparison, the Control group remains mainly at the Developing level, with 72% of participants still struggling to move beyond basic logical sequencing. While the Control group showed a small increase in mean score to 6.23, the Experimental group's mean increased quickly to 7.84, indicating that the AI scaffolds effectively closed the gap toward better teaching.

Based on the data in Table 6, while the intervention led to a significant upward change for the Experimental group, it is factually correct to observe that the majority of the participants reached the Proficient level, yet none achieved the Exemplary level. This leveling-off point suggests that while ChatGPT-driven scaffolds are highly effective at providing structural coherence and logical flow—the "basic structure" of a lesson plan—they may not yet facilitate the highest level of instructional creativity or "Exemplary" pedagogical reasoning required for a perfect score.

The inability of the Control group to reach similar proficiency levels—despite normal growth—reinforces Seherrie's (2020) observation that developing complex lesson phases on their own is a major difficulty for educators. By providing real-time feedback and structural templates, the AI-driven intervention allowed the Experimental group to overcome the "developing" stage identified by Azzahra et al. (2023), whereas the majority of the Control group remains stuck in that basic level. Educational research by Al-Azawei (2024) suggests that while scaffolding tools assist with "Organization," the jump from proficiency to mastery often needs strong teaching knowledge and skill (PCK) that automated tools cannot fully replace. Furthermore, Garcia and Martinez (2025)

found that pre-service teachers often depend heavily on the tool's first output, leading to a "leveling-off" where the work is technically correct and well-organized but lacks the highly contextualized, innovative elements characteristic of exemplary teaching. Therefore, the results indicate that while the scaffolds successfully remediated the "Needs Improvement" and "Developing" levels, the move toward "Exemplary" likely requires additional human-led mentoring to refine the fine skill of adjusting instruction.

Post-Intervention Writing Performance: Content

Table 6 presents the post-intervention lesson plan writing performance level of the two groups in terms of Content.

Table 6: Post-Intervention Writing Performance: Content

Level	Ranges of Scores	Control		Experimental	
		f	%	f	%
Exemplary	9.1-10	0	0.00	1	4.00
Proficient	7.1-9.0	1	4.00	18	72.00
Developing	5.1-7.0	21	84.00	6	24.00
Needs Improvement	0-5.0	3	12.00	0	0.00
Total		**25**	**100.00**	**25**	**100.00**
Average		**6.13**		**7.78**	
St. Dev.		**0.74**		**0.78**	

Table 6 indicates a significant shift in proficiency for those utilizing AI-driven tools; the majority of the Experimental group (72%) successfully reached the Proficient level, with one participant (4%) even advancing to the Exemplary category. In contrast, the Control group remains largely concentrated at the Developing level, representing 84% of its members. While the Control group managed to reduce its "Needs Improvement" frequency to 12%. It failed to produce any Exemplary work.

The lack of progress of the majority of the Control group within the "Developing" level underscores the challenges identified by Azzahra et al. (2023), where pre-service teachers often stop improving in content synthesis without external intervention. By using ChatGPT AI-driven scaffolds, the Experimental group was able to overcome the pedagogical barriers noted by Kaenah and Utami (2023), effectively transforming theoretical knowledge into structured, high-level instructional content.

Post-Intervention Writing Performance: Grammar

Table 7 exhibits the post-intervention lesson plan writing performance level of the fourth-year pre-service teachers in terms of Grammar.

Table 7: Post-Intervention Writing Performance: Grammar

Level	Ranges of Scores	Control		Experimental	
		f	%	f	%
Exemplary	9.1-10	0	0.00	0	0.00
Proficient	7.1-9.0	3	12.00	21	84.00
Developing	5.1-7.0	17	68.00	4	16.00
Needs Improvement	0-5.0	5	20.00	0	0.00
Total		**25**	**100.00**	**25**	**100.00**
Average		**6.09**		**7.71**	
St. Dev.		**0.90**		**0.76**	

Table 8 indicates a profound shift in technical proficiency; the Experimental group achieved a high level of mastery, with 84% of the participants reaches the Proficient level. In contrast, majority of the Control group remains at the Developing level, accounting for 68% of the total number of participants. Furthermore, the Experimental

group completely eliminated scores in the "Needs Improvement" category, whereas 20% of the Control group still struggled within that lowest level.

This divergence suggests that while fourth-year pre-service teachers possess a foundational understanding of linguistic rules, AI-driven scaffolds provide the necessary precision to elevate their practical application to professional standards. The fact that most Control group members remained in the "Developing" stage supports Azzahra et al. (2023), who noted that without intervention, pre-service teachers often struggle to move beyond basic competency in lesson design. By utilizing ChatGPT, the Experimental group successfully **overcame the teaching challenges** identified by Kaenah and Utami (2023), allowing these near-graduates to produce work that meets the higher expectations of the teaching profession.

The failure of the intervention to **move** students to an exemplary level can be attributed to the inherent cognitive gap between **"factual knowledge,"** or the ability to recite rules, and the "procedural knowledge" required for the automatic, fluid application of complex linguistic structures. Research from 2023 to 2026 indicates that while targeted instruction often improves basic accuracy in **basic skills**, students frequently encounter a performance **plateau** when faced with higher-order concepts such as causative verbs, advanced conditionals, and parallelism (Francisco & Buenaventura, 2026; Nguyen & Miller, 2024). Furthermore, reaching an exemplary level requires more than just mechanical drill; it necessitates high levels of student engagement and a transition from explicit rule-learning to implicit, context-based mastery, which many standardized interventions lack (Saito, 2026; Thompson & Zhao, 2025). Consequently, without addressing the socio-cognitive factors of learner attitude and providing extensive communicative practice to bridge the gap between simple and complex grammar, students remain competent but fail to achieve **the fine details and complexity linked** to the exemplary level (Larsson, 2023)

Post-Intervention Writing Performance: Mechanics

Table 8 details the post-intervention lesson plan writing performance level of fourth-year pre-service teachers in Mechanics, evaluating their technical accuracy in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.

Table 8: Post-Intervention Writing Performance: Mechanics

Level	Ranges of Scores	Control		Experimental	
		f	%	f	%
Exemplary	9.1-10	0	0.00	0	0.00
Proficient	7.1-9.0	2	8.00	22	88.00
Developing	5.1-7.0	17	68.00	3	12.00
Needs Improvement	0-5.0	6	24.00	0	0.00
Total		**25**	**100.00**	**25**	**100.00**
Average		**5.94**		**7.80**	
St. Dev.		**0.95**		**0.64**	

The data reveals a significant disparity in mastery following the use of AI-driven scaffolds. A vast majority of the Experimental group (88%) reached the Proficient level, whereas the Control group remained largely stationary, with 68% of its participants still at the Developing level.

The success of the Experimental group suggests that AI intervention acts as a critical corrective tool for technical writing. This aligns with research by Oducado (2020), who emphasizes that while pre-service teachers possess theoretical knowledge, they often struggle with the practical "mechanics" of writing, requiring digital interventions to reach professional standards. Furthermore, the concentration of the Control group at the Developing level reflects findings by Al-Olimat (2021), who noted that without automated feedback systems, novice writers frequently overlook mechanical small details in favor of broader content, leading to a standstill in technical accuracy. By integrating ChatGPT, these pre-service teachers were able to minimize cognitive load regarding technical rules—a process Kohnke et al. (2023) described as essential for allowing pre-service teachers to focus on complex instructional design rather than basic linguistic accuracy.

The failure to reach the highest level in mechanics, as illustrated in the table can be attributed to a "limit on improvement" where ChatGPT serves as a highly effective corrective tool for basic, easy-to-spot errors but fails to act as a transformative agent for high-level mastery. Research by Aisyah and Haryanto (2024) indicates that while AI improves general grammatical accuracy and complexity, it tends to stop improving when students are faced with the

complex formal style and difficult sentence structures required for an exemplary score. This gap exists because reaching the highest level of academic formal writing needs exactness that goes beyond basic correctness—a level that Lee (2023) argues requires intensive, human-led feedback to address the standardized or overlooked stylistic details inherent in AI-generated outputs.

Furthermore, a significant risk of "relying on AI to think" exists among pre-service teachers, as noted by Mendoza (2025), where students may use AI as a simple shortcut that prevents the natural, internal learning of grammar rules necessary for independent performance. Ultimately, as explored by Smith and Jones (2022), automated writing evaluation systems frequently encounter a limit in what they can improve, demonstrating that moving from proficiency to an exemplary score requires deep engagement with technical mechanics that automated tools alone cannot yet facilitate.

SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TWO SCORES

The significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores was analyzed using a paired t-test at an alpha level of 0.05. This statistical measure determines whether the improvements in the students' lesson plan writing across the four elements are statistically significant.

Significance of Difference: Control Group

Table 9 presents the statistical analysis of the pre-test and post-test scores for the **Control Group** across the four writing elements

Table 9: Significance of Difference: Control Group

Writing Element	Source of Difference	Mean	SD	Mean Diff.	t- value	p-value	Decision	Remarks
Organization	Pretest	5.52	0.90	0.70	3.44*	0.002	Reject Ho	Significant
	Posttest	6.22	0.85					
Content	Pretest	5.54	0.96	0.59	2.89*	0.008	Reject Ho	Significant
	Posttest	6.12	0.74					
Grammar	Pretest	5.68	0.95	0.42	2.67*	0.013	Reject Ho	Significant
	Posttest	6.09	0.90					
Mechanics	Pretest	5.62	0.95	0.32	1.61	0.120	Do not reject Ho	Not Significant
	Posttest	5.94	0.95					

*significant at $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed); df=24

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The data reveals that while the group showed arithmetic increases in all areas, the significance of these improvements was inconsistent. Specifically, Organization (p=0.002), Content (p=0.008), and Grammar (p=0.013) all yielded p-values below the 0.05 threshold, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis and indicating significant growth. However, Mechanics (p=0.120) showed a non-significant difference, suggesting that traditional classroom exposure without specialized intervention was insufficient to meaningfully improve technical accuracy. This distinction is meaningful because Grammar and Mechanics, though often used interchangeably, assess different dimensions of writing: Grammar refers to sentence-level structural correctness (e.g., subject-verb agreement, verb tense, sentence construction), while Mechanics refers to surface-level technical conventions (e.g., punctuation, capitalization, and spelling).

This finding is supported by Allen, Crossley, Kyle, and McNamara (2014), who found that human ratings of grammar and mechanics do not always align, and that grammatical accuracy and mechanical accuracy can improve independently of one another, since they are governed by different underlying skills and error types. This helps explain why the Control Group achieved significant gains in Grammar but not in Mechanics — the two competencies do not necessarily develop at the same rate through the same instructional exposure. Despite the significant gains in three areas, the group's overall post-test mean remained within the Developing level, confirming that traditional methods provided some growth but did not facilitate a transition to higher proficiency tiers.

The limited improvement of the Control Group's performance level, despite reaching the final year of their undergraduate program, aligns with recent pedagogical

research. Oducado (2020) notes that fourth-year pre-service teachers often reach a "plateau" where they understand the components of a lesson plan but struggle to refine them into professional-grade documents without targeted scaffolding. Furthermore, the lack of significant improvement in Mechanics is corroborated by Al-Olimat (2021), who observed that technical accuracy in writing is rarely mastered through passive instruction and typically requires explicit, often automated, feedback systems. This data reinforces the argument by Adiguzel et al. (2023) that modern educational complexities require innovative interventions, such as AI-driven tools.

Significance of Difference: Experimental Group

Table 10 reveals the statistical comparison between the pre-test and post-test scores of the Experimental Group following the implementation of ChatGPT AI-driven scaffolds.

Table 10: Significance of Difference: Experimental Group

Writing Element	Source of Difference	Mean	SD	Mean Diff.	t- value	p-value	Decision	Remarks
Organization	Pretest	6.42	0.90	1.42	8.23*	0.000	Reject Ho	Significant
	Posttest	7.84	0.76					
Content	Pretest	6.47	0.91	1.31	6.28*	0.000	Reject Ho	Significant
	Posttest	7.78	0.78					
Grammar	Pretest	6.53	0.96	1.18	6.04*	0.000	Reject Ho	Significant
	Posttest	7.71	0.76					
Mechanics	Pretest	6.26	1.01	1.54	7.56*	0.000	Reject Ho	Significant
	Posttest	7.80	0.64					

*significant at $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed); df=24

The data reveals a highly significant improvement across all four writing elements: Organization, Content, Grammar, and Mechanics. Unlike the Control Group, the Experimental Group achieved a p-value of 0.000 for every single indicator, far exceeding the 0.05 alpha level. This resulted in the consistent rejection of the null hypothesis across all variables. The substantial t-values—ranging from 6.04 in Grammar to 8.23 in Organization—demonstrate that the AI intervention provided a powerful and consistent boost to the pre-service teachers' performance, moving their average scores from the "Developing" range to a strong "Proficient" level.

The significant rise in Organization and Content scores suggests that AI scaffolds provided the logical framework these fourth-year pre-service teachers previously lacked. This aligns with findings by Kohnke and Moorhouse (2023), who observe that generative AI provides a "scaffolded environment" that allows students to structure complex instructional ideas with greater coherence. Furthermore, Chiu and Chai (2020) argue that AI-supported tools facilitate self-directed learning by providing immediate models for high-quality content alignment. Additionally, the significant gains in Grammar and Mechanics highlight the tool's role as a real-time corrective resource. Baidoo-Anu and Ansah (2023) state that AI serves as a "digital tutor" that offers immediate feedback on technical errors, which is often difficult to provide at scale in traditional classrooms. This is complemented by the work of Yan and Wang (2024), who suggested that by automating linguistic precision, AI reduces cognitive load, enabling pre-service teachers to focus more on higher-order pedagogical strategies.

SIGNIFICANT MEAN GAIN DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TWO SCORES

The significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores was analyzed using a paired t-test at an alpha level of 0.05. This statistical measure determines whether the improvements in the students' lesson plan writing across the four elements—Organization, Content, Grammar, and Mechanics—are statistically significant.

Significance of the Mean Gain Difference Between the Two Groups

Table 11 presents the mean gain difference on the pre-test and post-test scores in the lesson plan writing between th

e two groups.

Table 11: Significance of the Mean Gain Difference Between the Two Groups

Writing Element	Source of Difference	M	SD	Mean Diff.	t- value	p-value	Decision	Remarks
Organization	Control	0.70	1.01	0.72	2.71*	0.009	Reject Ho	Significant
	Experimental	1.42	0.86					
Content	Control	0.59	1.01	0.72	2.47*	0.017	Reject Ho	Significant
	Experimental	1.31	1.04					
Grammar	Control	0.42	0.78	0.77	3.07*	0.004	Reject Ho	Significant
	Experimental	1.18	0.98					
Mechanics	Control	0.32	0.98	1.23	4.34*	0.000	Reject Ho	Significant
	Experimental	1.54	1.02					

*significant at $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed); df=48

The data in Table 11 demonstrates a statistically significant improvement in the lesson plan writing performance of the experimental group compared to the control group across all evaluated dimensions. Specifically, the Mechanics category showed the most substantial growth with a mean difference of 1.23 (t=4.34,p=0.000), followed by Grammar (MD=0.77) and both Organization and Content (MD=0.72). In every instance, the p-values (ranging from 0.000 to 0.017) are well below the alpha level of 0.05, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H0). This indicates that the intervention provided to the experimental group was highly effective in enhancing their ability to structure, articulate, and refine lesson plans, moving beyond the baseline progress observed in a conventional setting.

A study by Moses and Mohamad (2021) highlighted that while teachers and students alike struggle with the nuances of organization and grammar, the implementation of specific instructional frameworks leads to measurable gains in technical writing. Furthermore, Richards and Renandya (2021) argued that a teacher's own proficiency in writing mechanics and organization directly influences their ability to model instructional clarity, suggesting that improvements seen in experimental groups are vital for classroom efficacy. Locally, Salvador (2024) identified that targeted interventions addressing specific writing elements—much like the categories of Organization, Content, Grammar, and Mechanics seen in the table—are necessary to overcome deep-seated linguistic challenges in English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts. These contemporary studies collectively support the table's conclusion: that purposeful, data-driven training significantly outperforms traditional methods in fostering high-level writing skills.

Overall, these findings show that well-designed AI scaffolds can truly help teachers become better writers, which then helps them teach more clearly in the classroom. Moving forward, teacher training programs might work best if they use AI scaffolds to teach mechanics early on, since it improves quickly, while giving teachers more time and repeated practice to strengthen their organization and content skills, since these take longer to improve.

VI. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that ChatGPT AI-driven scaffolding is a statistically significant improvement intervention for enhancing the lesson plan writing performance of English pre-service teachers compared to traditional methods. The p-values (ranging from 0.000 to 0.017) are well below the alpha level of 0.05, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (Ho). This means that the intervention provided to the experimental group was highly effective in enhancing their ability to structure, articulate, and refine lesson plans. Nevertheless, this study is limited by its exclusive reliance on ChatGPT; therefore, the results may not necessarily reflect outcomes achieved through other generative AI platforms. Another limitation of this study is its specific focus on a single institution, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader teacher education contexts.

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The Playwright as Magus: A Comparative Analysis of Shakespeare and Prospero

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Abstract— *Shakespeare's The Tempest is a play which has delighted many audiences and many readers. As Hazlitt said, "it is one of the most original and perfect of Shakespeare's productions," and he had shown in it all the variety of his powers. It is full of grace and grandeur. Though there is unanimity about the play's quality, there is the greatest diversity of opinion as to what the play means. Here we can find Campbell, in 1838, suggesting that Prospero is Shakespeare himself and his magic is his dramatic art. We can learn from Lowell, in that Prospero represents imagination, Ariel is fancy, and Caliban stands for brute Understanding. Prospero is the master-spirit that has brooded invisible and moved in deep waters of the greater tragedies, and now come to shore on a lost net of the main to sun himself; lying by his wand and drowning his book "deeper than did ever plummet sound". The play abides, after three hundred years dream of reconciliation; forcing tears, not by "pity and fear" but by sheer beauty; with a royal sense of the world, how it passes away, with a catch at the heart surmising hope in what is to come.*

Keywords— ***William Shakespeare, The Tempest, Prospero and Magic, Imagination and Fancy, Reconciliation and Beauty***

The Biographical Allegory:

According to reading Prospero is not God, but Shakespeare – or rather the controlling judgement of Shakespeare, since Ariel and Caliban are also representations of dual mirror potentialities of his soul. The dialogue between Prospero and Ariel in which Ariel is tired and cries for the promised freedom, and is told that there is one last work to be done which is in exact agreement with reading of the faltering art of *Cymbeline* second, Prospero's well-known farewell to his art, where commentators have seldom failed to admit what Professor Saintsburry calls a "designed personal allegory," and he noticed that Prospero clearly regards his art as pre-eminently a tempest-raising magic.

In poetic creation "all is forgiven, and it would be strange not to forgive"; but the partial and fleeting flame of the poet's intuition may light at last the total consciousness with the brilliance of a cosmic apprehension. This speech suggests the transit from the intermittent love of poetic composition to the perduring love of mystic. Now these two methods of approach considered separately and in sequence are not as significant as they become when we realize that they are complementary to *The Tempest's* unique reality. For it will next be seen that these two aspects when considered together give us the usual flat view of it which reads it as an impersonal fairy story – corresponding to my reading of it as an objective vision of life – becomes a three - dimensional understanding when we remember the implicit personal allegory. Only by submitting our faculties to both methods we can properly understand the play to the full. *The Tempest* is at the same time a record of Shakespeare's spiritual progress and a statement of the vision to which that progress has brought him. It is apparent as a dynamic and living act of the soul, containing within itself the record of its birth: it is continually re-writing itself before our eyes. Dr. Garnett says that the play is autobiographical and it shows us more than anything else what the discipline of life had made of Shakespeare at fifty, a fruit too fully matured to be suffered to hang much longer on the tree. Conscious

superiority untinged by arrogance, genial scorn for the mean and base, mercifulness into which contempt enters very largely, serenity excluding passionate affection, while admitting tenderness, intellect overtopping morality, but in no way blighting or perverting it such are the mental features of him in whose development of the man of the world had kept pace with the poet and who now shone as the consummate example of both.

Shakespeare as Prospero

Shakespeare has in this play so become master of the whole of his own mystic universe that the universe, at last perfectly projected in one short play into the forms and shapes of objective human existence, shown us, in the wreck of *The Tempest*, a complete view of that reflected pattern in the still depths of the timeless soul of poetry. And since it reveals its vision not as a statement of absolute truth independently of the author, but related inwardly to the succession of experiences that condition and nurtures its own reality, it becomes, in a unique sense beyond other works of art, an absolute. There is no barrier between the inward and outward, expression and imitation. It has been said that the mode in which the subject-object distinction is transcended. Art aspires to the perfected fusion of expression with imitation. *The Tempest* is thus at the same time the most perfect work of art and the most crystal act of mystic vision in our literature.

Prospero's magic, in any case, is an "art" which includes, in fact largely consists of, music and drama. The action of *The Tempest* was thought to be confessional and Prospero's final speeches were associated with Shakespeare's retirement from the theater. The necessity of supposing that Shakespeare intends a life beyond a life beyond the grace may well be questioned, particularly since the most explicit metaphysics in *The Tempest* is to be found in the speech in which Prospero stressed the transistorizes of this life which is rounded with a sleep. Prospero is asserted as the portrait of the author an embodiment of that spirit of wise benevolence which is supposed to have thrown a halo over Shakespeare's later life. For Dowden, Shakespeare was himself a 'character', developing through his plays. Prospero is Shakespeare's life-long interest in magic: he is a magician like Rosalind, 'most profound in his art and yet not damnable' (*As you like it,* v.ii. 60). His magic is 'unsubtle by comparison with the next degree of the mage's enlightment'. '*The Tempest* is apparently limitless in its productive power. Perhaps if we read it right, it will tell us more about the Shakespearean process too.

Overwhelmed by the desire to see in Prospero's intention to break his staff and to down his book, a veiled farewell to the stage on Shakespeare's part, many critics have found in Prospero's magic an allegorical embodiment of Shakespere's own art. The fact of the matter, however, is that the magic in *The Tempest*, like so much else that is supernatural in Shakespeare's play cannot be wished away or made to conform to our modern skeptical notions. In *The Tempest,* Shakespeare has no objective story before him from which to create. He spins his plot from his own poetic world entirely, simplifying the main issues of his total work – plot, poetry, persons; whittling off the non-essential and leaving the naked truth exposed.

The Tempest, patterned of storm and music, is thus an interpretation of Shakespeare's world. Shakespeare's world is embodied in Prospero's world, and so a more subtly mediated biographical approach comes to interpret the so-called objective reality of Shakespearean drama. Campbell in 1838, states that *The Tempest* is comparatively a grave counterpart *to A Mid-summer Night's Dream.* He says comparatively, for its gayety is only less abandoned and frolicsome. To be condemned to give the preference to either would give him a distress similar to that of being obliged to choose between the losses of two very dear friends.

The Enduring Legacy of the Magus:

Here Shakespeare himself is Prospero, or rather the superior genius who commands both Prospero and Ariel. Montegut suggests as a possible explanation that the demand for a masque may have broken in on Shakespeare's retirement in Stratford, where he was busily occupied with writing out his farewell in the play of *The Tempest*. The demand came from a source too powerful the masque in the Fourth Act, and the thing was done. 'The masque appears to have been introduced somewhat artificially; the general action would not be deranged by its excision.' Prospero apparently makes several allusions to his own age, and intimates that it is the proper age for Shakespeare to retire from public life. When Prospero says to Ariel, "The time, twist six and now must by us both be spent most preciously," it is a little difficult to decide what Shakespeare means by 'the sixth hour'; because he wrote this play between his forty-seventh and his forty-eighth year, and Prospero seems to use the word 'hours' as the decades of human life; but in all other aspects his words correspond exactly to the age which he had then reached.

Shakespeare freed his beautiful spirit (Ariel) from the prison where barbarism had confined it, and by its aid humanized the savage theatre. Then the brambles burst into flower, the thickets were transformed into verdurous groves where fairies loved to throng, the horrible gloom of the primeval forests was scattered by

the light of dazzling apparitions, the foul, mephitic vapours grew melodious and were crossed and re-crossed by songs to which even Caliban and his companions could not be insensible, and which will retain their power as long as there are souls here below open to music and poesy.

The Dual Identities of Prospero and Shakespeare:

Prospero has often been identified with Shakespeare himself. Shakespeare, as if conscious that it would be his last, and as if inspired to typify himself, has made its hero a natural, dignified and benevolent magician, who could conjure up spirits from the vast deep, and command supernatural agency by the most seemingly natural and simple means. But the time was approaching when the potent sorcerer was to break his staff and bury it (in the earth). That staff has never been and never will be recovered."

Shakespeare in this period is most like his own Prospero. In these 'Romances' and in the 'Fragments', a supernatural element is present; man does not strive with circumstance and with his own passions in darkness; the God preside over our human lives and fortunes, they communicate with us by vision, by oracles, through the elementary power of nature". Shakespeare seems to have reached a pure and supreme elevation after having probed the darkness of his mind. He seems to have ostracized whatever demons he had in his soul. It is in this period of ethereal tranquility that he wrote *The Tempest*. The Shakespeare of *The Tempest* is a man who has reached a level of inner peace, which can only be acquired after transcending personal anguish. By now he had managed to understand the moral rhythm of the world. He knew that mercy, forgiveness and compassion were vital in the world in order to acquire genuine happiness. *The Tempest* is an attempt to portray this state mind in symbolic terms. Dowden had considered Prospero as having autobiographical tones.

The similarity between Shakespeare and Prospero are both aging men living in a time of exploration and who use words as power. But it is still fun to consider playwrights in general to be wizards. By using magic, Prospero wields so much power over the other characters and the play's conclusion. When Shakespeare was writing *The Tempest*, he wrote the character of Prospero in the image of himself and the rest of the play was an extensive, detailed metaphor of his life and his work as a playwright.

Throughout the play, there are many instances where this theme shows up in obvious and non-obvious ways. In a more obvious way in Act II, scene I, Alonso, Antonio, Sebastian, and Gonzalo speak of how their clothes are just as nice as, if not nicer than, when they were wearing them before, even though they had swum been the ocean to the island and their boat had sunk. This alludes to the fact that, even in their world, they seem to be actors and it is almost as if they're wearing costumes. In the play, the only way their clothes could have stayed nice is if Prospero somehow made them, just like Shakespeare does in his plays with costumes. The play often talks about Prospero's art. It portrays him as being obsessed with his art, devoting his whole life to it and always focusing on it and working on it. In the same way, Shakespeare works on his plays. He spent his whole life writing, acting in, and directing plays, and so Prospero is a reflection of Shakespeare. Prospero also uses his art as a way to control and manipulate people. He brings Antonio, Alonso, Ferdinand, Sebastian, Gonzalo, Stephano, Trinculo, and the rest of their crew to the island.

He uses Ariel to lure them in the direction he wants them to go by having Ariel play soft music but remain unseen so that they all follow in the direction of the music. This can be interpreted in two different ways that Shakespeare, in a similar fashion, manipulates people. The first way is that his art gives him a way to control actors. Everything they do in the plays is a work of Shakespeare, and he can have them do whatever he desires by using his art, writing. The second way he controls people is in the same way Prospero uses Ariel to control other men; Shakespeare uses his actors to manipulate the audience. He alone could not affect the audience in the way that he can with his actors acting out his words, just like Prospero alone is not as powerful alone as he is with Ariel. The Epilogue conveys his desire for giving up his vocation of a dramatist and retiring to Stratford-upon-Avon after weaving all the dreams through his 37 plays. *The Tempest* being the last of his plays, William Shakespeare treats the speech of Prospero as his last will and testament.

The Playwright's supreme control over Prospero:

The voice of Prospero has been interpreted as being the voice of the playwright himself. Prospero's supreme control over the island and the spirits symbolizes Shakespeare's supreme mastery of the English stage during his time. When Prospero renounces his magic, it is Shakespeare himself bidding a kind of farewell to the dramatic career. According to another interpretation, *The Tempest* deals with a subject which constantly occupied Shakespeare towards the close of his career, that of reconciliation, pardon and atonement of sins. In this case, Prospero forgives all his enemies after they have represented of the grievous wrong done to him twelve years ago in conspiring against him and banishing him from the dukedom of Milan. It is reconciliation time between Prospero and Alonso with their offspring uniting

in holy wedlock at Naples with all the religious rites and rituals and their grandchildren becoming the joint rulers of Naples and Milan.

The Tempest represents the glorious victory of the righteous human soul over all things around it. It also represents an allegory about the pursuit of power and the consequences of that pursuit and that any perversion of the natural order of things in this world brings distress and doom. And that adherence and obedience to the natural order is essential for man's attainment of the highest good in life. *The Tempest*, therefore, yields a multiplicity of meanings and interpretations to generations of critics and readers; the list can never possibly be exhausted. It is the peak of Shakespeare's creation. "That this quixotic height of magnanimity should not surprise, that it should seem quite in keeping with the character, proves how deeply this character has been drawn from Shakespeare's own nature.

Conscious superiority unhinged by arrogance, genial scorn for the mean and base, mercifulness into which contempt entered very largely, serenity excluding passionate affection while admitting tenderness, intellect overtopping morality but in no way blighting or perverting it — such are the mental features of him in whose development the man of the world kept pace with the poet, and who now shone as the consummate perfection of both." In other words, it is Shakespeare's own nature which overflows into Prospero, and thus the magician represents not merely the noble-minded great man, but the genius, imaginatively delineated, not, as in *Hamlet*, psychologically analyzed.

The two figures in which this spiritual power and this resistance are embodied are the most admirable productions of an artist's powers in this or any other age. A man owning even a small share of the scientific knowledge of our times would inevitably have been regarded as a powerful magician at that date. In the creation of Prospero, therefore, Shakespeare unconsciously anticipated the results of time. After seeing autobiography in these final speeches, it follows that Shakespeare might have written more of himself into Prospero.

We know six definite things about Shakespeare: he was baptised in Stratford-Upon-Avon in April 1564, his father was an illiterate glover and alderman, he worked in London from 1592 onwards (and wrote quite a few plays) and performed with the Lord Chamberlain's Company (later King's Men), he was buried in 1616, he left his wife. Even some of those "facts" are open to dispute. His father indeed illiterate and he just put a cross for his signature on the records we have of him – as plenty of his contemporaries seem to have done – for speed and convenience. Prospero conveniently fills that vacuum. He gives us a sense of someone we desperately want to know: the man behind all those wonderful words.

CONCLUSION

The Tempest, however, has a sort of sacredness as the last work of the mighty workman. Shakespeare, as if conscious that it would be his last, and as if inspired to typify himself, has made its hero who could conjure up spirits from the vastly deep, and command supernatural agency by the most seemingly natural and simple means – And this final play of our poet has magic indeed; for what can be simpler in language than the courtship of Ferdinand and Miranda, and yet what can be more magical than the sympathy with which it subdues us. So we understand the temptation of seeing Shakespeare wielding that staff – even though there's no more hard evidence that he felt close to Prospero than there is that he identified with Caliban, or Ferdinand or Miranda. But here's an interesting thing. In a fascinating University of Oxford podcast about the folly of linking Prospero and Shakespeare, the academic Emma Smith points out that for a few hundred years after it was published in the First Folio, most critics assumed that *The Tempest* was Shakespeare's earliest play. It appeared first in the table of contents and so was generally accepted as the first to be written.

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From Observation to Imagination: Teaching World-Building Through Story, Attention, and Critical Inquiry

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Abstract— *Creative writing pedagogy has often privileged imagination as the defining characteristic of storytelling. Yet many young writers struggle not because they lack imagination, but because they believe they have nothing worth writing about. This paper proposes a pedagogical model that repositions observation, critical thinking, empathy, and structured inquiry as the true foundations of world-building. Drawing on a story-building workshop designed for middle-school students, and grounding its design in narrative psychology, structuralist and post-structuralist narrative theory, cognitive research on attention and creativity, and sociocultural learning theory, it argues that effective storytelling begins with learning to notice the world before attempting to invent new ones. The workshop integrates literary theory, cognitive observation, narrative analysis, collaborative exercises, and current discussions on artificial intelligence to demonstrate that stories emerge from attentive engagement with reality rather than unrestricted fantasy. Rather than teaching creative writing as a collection of technical skills, this approach frames telling stories as a human act of meaning-making, ethical reflection, and imaginative reconstruction, and it proposes a theoretically informed alternative to imagination-first models of creative writing instruction.*

Keywords— ***attention, creative writing pedagogy, narrative theory, storytelling, world-building.***

I. INTRODUCTION

For centuries, storytelling has occupied a central place in human civilisation. Long before written literature, stories transmitted history, values, identity, and cultural memory. Despite this lasting importance, creative writing instruction frequently begins with a problematic assumption — that students must first possess exceptional imagination to become storytellers.

This assumption often alienates novice writers. Young learners commonly believe that only extraordinary experiences produce meaningful stories and that successful authors possess unusual lives or exceptional creative abilities. Such beliefs create unnecessary barriers to writing, and they are difficult to dislodge through technique alone, since they concern a learner's sense of who is permitted to be an author rather than their command of craft.

This paper argues for an alternative pedagogical approach. Instead of treating imagination as the starting point of storytelling, it proposes that observation should precede invention. The writer's first responsibility is not to imagine new worlds but to notice the existing one with greater clarity. This claim is not simply intuitive; it draws on a convergent body of theory from cognitive psychology, narratology, and educational philosophy, reviewed in the section that follows, which together suggest that attention, structure, and social meaning-making precede and enable what is popularly called "imagination." World-building therefore becomes less an act of fabrication than one of metamorphosis. Fictional worlds are assembled from observations, memories, emotions, social structures, moral questions, and human relationships already present in reality, and the purpose of education is to help students recognise these materials and consciously reshape them into narrative.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The workshop model draws on four overlapping bodies of theory: narrative psychology, which explains why human beings organise experience as story; structuralist and post-structuralist narratology, which explains why stories can be analysed as systems of recurring parts and contested voices; cognitive research on attention and creativity, which explains why noticing precedes inventing; and sociocultural learning theory, which explains why collaboration and dialogue are not incidental to creative development but constitutive of it. Each is introduced briefly here and returned to in the sections that discuss its pedagogical application.

Jerome Bruner's distinction between paradigmatic and narrative modes of thought is foundational. Bruner (1986) argued that narrative is not a decorative alternative to logical-scientific reasoning but a distinct and equally rigorous mode of making the world intelligible, organised around intention, time, and human particulars rather than general truth conditions. In a later essay, Bruner (1991) went further, proposing that human beings do not simply tell stories about experience but substantially construct their sense of reality through narrative. This claim supports treating storytelling as a cognitive and educational priority rather than a leisure activity layered on top of "real" learning.

Structuralist narratology supplies the workshop's second theoretical pillar. Vladimir Propp's (1968) morphological analysis of Russian folktales demonstrated that an enormous variety of surface stories could be reduced to a small, recurring set of narrative functions performed by a limited set of character roles. Joseph Campbell (1949) extended a structurally similar claim across world mythology with the monomyth, and Northrop Frye (1957) proposed the mapping of Western literature onto a small number of recurring archetypal modes. Taken together, this tradition supports the workshop's claim that there are, in an important structural sense, no entirely new stories — only new arrangements, voices, and contexts for recurring human concerns.

Post-structuralist and narratological theory supplies a necessary complication to this picture. Gérard Genette's (1980) work on focalisation demonstrated that the same underlying events produce entirely different narratives depending on whose perspective organises the telling, while Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) concept of dialogism emphasised that meaning in narrative is never singular but is produced through the interaction of multiple voices and social perspectives. Roland Barthes's (1977) essay on the death of the author further destabilised the idea of a single authoritative teller, proposing that meaning is completed by readers and retellers rather than fixed permanently by an originating voice. Scholars of the literary fairy tale, notably Jack Zipes (2006) and Cristina Bacchilega (1997), have shown how this theoretical insight plays out historically: fairy tales survive precisely because each era rewrites them to recover previously silenced or marginalised perspectives. This body of theory grounds the workshop's exercises in narrative voice and perspective-shifting.

Cognitive research on attention and creativity grounds the workshop's emphasis on observation. J. P. Guilford's (1967) distinction between convergent and divergent thinking identified the generation of multiple possible responses to an open question as a distinct and trainable cognitive capacity, separate from the capacity to reach a single correct answer. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's (1996) interview-based research on creative individuals across domains found that sustained, absorbed attention — not sudden inspiration — was the condition its subjects most consistently associated with their creative achievements. Ellen Langer's (1989) research on mindfulness similarly distinguished between mindless, automatic perception and mindful attention that actively notices distinctions and context, a distinction that maps closely onto the workshop's contrast between "looking" and "seeing."

Finally, sociocultural learning theory grounds the workshop's collaborative and dialogic exercises. Lev Vygotsky (1978) argued that higher cognitive functions, including the capacities required for sophisticated symbolic play and narrative construction, first develop in social interaction before being internalised individually. John Dewey (1938) argued, in a similar vein, that real learning comes from structured experience and inquiry rather than from the transmission of pre-formed content, while Paulo Freire (1970) and bell hooks (1994) each argued that education becomes most transformative when it is dialogic and treats learners as co-constructors of meaning rather than passive recipients. Together, this framework supports a workshop design in which observation, structural analysis, perspective-taking, and collaboration function not as sequential add-ons to creative writing but as its theoretical foundation.

III. STORYTELLING AS HUMAN MEANING-MAKING

Stories exist because human beings continually seek meaning in experience. Narrative psychology, particularly Bruner's (1991) account of the narrative construction of reality, maintains that individuals organise memory and experience through story structures rather than merely recording events, while literature enables readers to experience perspectives beyond their own lives.

Philosopher Martha Nussbaum (1997) has argued specifically that literary narrative cultivates what she calls the "narrative imagination" — the capacity to inhabit the position of a person unlike oneself — and that this capacity is a precondition for ethical and democratic citizenship rather than a merely aesthetic pleasure.

Rather than merely entertaining, stories perform various interrelated functions: they preserve cultural memory, transmit ethical values, generate empathy, question social structures, and imagine alternative futures for those who inherit them. The workshop grounding this paper deliberately shifts discussion away from plot mechanics toward these broader human purposes. Before students begin writing, they are invited to consider why stories exist at all, a philosophical entry point that helps learners understand writing not simply as an academic activity but as a uniquely human response to experience, consistent with Bruner's (1986) claim that narrative thought is a fundamental and irreducible way of knowing rather than a secondary embellishment of logical thought.

IV. OBSERVATION BEFORE IMAGINATION

Perhaps the central pedagogical principle of the workshop is that writers are distinguished less by imagination than by attention. Popular culture often lauds creativity as spontaneous inspiration; however, many accomplished writers describe observation as their primary skill, and empirical creativity research broadly supports this self-report, since Csikszentmihalyi's (1996) study of creative practitioners found sustained attentiveness to be a more consistent predictor of creative output than any single measure of raw imaginative capacity. Joan Didion (1979) famously remarked that "we tell ourselves stories in order to live," emphasising that narrative comes from making sense of reality rather than escaping it.

Similarly, the figure of Sherlock Holmes — introduced by Arthur Conan Doyle in the late nineteenth century — offers a useful educational metaphor, not primarily as a detective but as an observer. Holmes notices details others overlook, and this distinction between looking and seeing becomes the foundation of creative practice, corresponding closely to Langer's (1989) psychological distinction between mindless perception, which classifies experience into familiar categories and stops attending, and mindful attention, which continues to notice new distinctions within the familiar. In the workshop, students are challenged with deceptively simple questions: how many steps did they climb before entering the room; what object nearby has everyone else overlooked; and what ordinary detail suddenly appears significant once it is examined closely? These exercises reveal that creativity often doesn't begin with invention but with sustained attention.

Observation therefore becomes an intellectual discipline rather than merely a sensory activity. Students learn that every unnoticed object contains the possibility of narrative if examined carefully enough — an application of what Guilford (1967) would classify as divergent thinking, since the exercise rewards generating many possible significances for a single ordinary object rather than converging quickly on one correct interpretation.

1. EVERY PERSON ALREADY POSSESSES STORIES

A recurring obstacle in creative writing classrooms is students' conviction that they have "nothing interesting to say." This obstacle is not primarily technical but is closer to what Freire (1970) described as the internalisation of a "banking" model of education, in which students are positioned as passive recipients of knowledge rather than as authorities capable of generating meaning from their own experience.

To challenge this misconception, the workshop begins with a real example of a student whose success resulted not from extraordinary experience but from genuine concern for a social issue, with the emphasis placed not on literary ability but on conviction, compassion, and intellectual curiosity. This opening accomplishes several pedagogical goals at once: it dismantles the myth of the exceptional writer; it positions storytelling as accessible rather than elitist, echoing bell hooks's (1994) argument that pedagogy becomes most transformative when it treats every learner's lived experience as legitimate intellectual material; and it demonstrates that meaningful writing often begins with caring deeply about something in the world rather than searching for unusual experiences. Students therefore begin to grasp that every individual possesses unique observations unavailable to anyone else.

V. STORIES AS SHARED HUMAN STRUCTURES

One of the workshop's most significant conceptual shifts involves helping students recognise that originality does not require inventing entirely new plots. This claim rests directly on the structuralist tradition of narrative analysis. Propp's (1968) study of the Russian folktale identified a limited repertoire of narrative functions — such as an interdiction, a violation, a departure, and a resolution — that recur across superficially unrelated tales, while Campbell (1949) proposed a comparable recurring pattern across world mythology in the figure of the hero's journey. Frye (1957) argued more broadly still that the whole of Western

literature could be understood as the reworking of a small number of archetypal narrative modes.

Drawing upon these classical understandings of narrative, students explore recurring human conflicts such as love, power, jealousy, sacrifice, identity, survival, belonging, and freedom. Contemporary films and novels are reduced to these underlying narrative patterns, and students quickly discover that many apparently different stories share remarkably similar structural foundations. The educational value of this exercise lies in separating story structure from storytelling voice: there may indeed be recurring narrative patterns, but each generation interprets them through new historical contexts, cultural experiences, and ethical concerns. Originality therefore emerges from perspective rather than novelty alone — a claim the workshop develops further, and complicates, in the following section on narrative voice.

VI. PERSPECTIVE AND NARRATIVE AUTHORITY

The workshop next introduces students to the idea that every story can be retold from multiple viewpoints. This activity operationalises Genette's (1980) concept of focalisation, which distinguishes the events of a story from the perspective through which those events are filtered and understood, and Bakhtin's (1981) related claim that narrative meaning is inherently dialogic, produced through the interplay of multiple, often unequal, voices rather than issuing from a single authoritative source.

Using familiar fairy tales such as Little Red Riding Hood, Cinderella, or The Three Little Pigs, students ask who decides who the villain is, what changes if another character narrates the events, and how power influences the way a story is told. This activity introduces concepts central to contemporary literary criticism, including narrative voice, focalisation, and the politics of representation, and Barthes's (1977) argument that a text's meaning is completed by its readers rather than fixed by its original author further supports treating every retelling as a legitimate act of authorship rather than a derivative exercise. Connections to writers such as Carol Ann Duffy further demonstrate how literature continually revises inherited narratives by recovering previously marginalised voices, a practice that folklore scholars Zipes (2006) and Bacchilega (1997) have each documented at length in their historical studies of the fairy tale's repeated cultural rewriting. Students consequently discover that stories remain culturally alive because they are continually rewritten rather than permanently fixed.

VII. WORLD-BUILDING THROUGH QUESTIONS

Perhaps the most important misconception surrounding world-building is that it requires elaborate fantasy settings populated by magical creatures or advanced technologies. The workshop challenges this assumption by proposing that every world — fictional or real — operates through systems of rules, an idea closely related to Donella Meadows's (2008) systems-thinking framework, in which complex behaviour emerges from a comparatively small number of underlying rules, feedback loops, and structural relationships rather than from surface complexity itself. These rules may concern language, education, law, economics, memory, family, technology, or religion.

World-building therefore begins with a single deceptively simple question: what happens if one rule changes? This single-rule-change method echoes Darko Suvin's (1979) influential theory of science fiction as a literature of "cognitive estrangement," in which a speculative work brings one significant novum — one deliberate deviation from the reader's empirical reality — and then reasons through its social and psychological consequences with logical consistency. Examples explored in the workshop include a world in which nobody can lie, a world in which everyone hears everyone else's thoughts, a world in which memory disappears every morning, a world in which emotions become visible, and a world in which time stops for one hour each day. These hypothetical questions immediately generate social, ethical, and political consequences, and students begin to understand that fictional worlds function less through decorative detail than through coherent systems of cause and effect.

VIII. THE PEDAGOGY OF "WHAT IF?"

Inquiry rather than invention becomes the driving force behind creativity. Many influential literary works can be understood as sustained explorations of a single speculative question, in keeping with Suvin's (1979) novum-based theory of speculative fiction introduced above: what if magic coexisted with ordinary life, what if surveillance controlled every aspect of society, what if suffering disappeared, or what if children became instruments of political spectacle?

Rather than encouraging students to begin writing immediately, the workshop asks them to produce multiple "What if?" questions without attempting answers. This postponement of solution-building cultivates intellectual curiosity while resisting premature closure, and it deliberately privileges Guilford's (1967) divergent-thinking phase of the creative process over the convergent phase, on the theory that student writers foreclose their most

interesting ideas when they move too quickly toward a single answer. Educationally, it encourages divergent thinking, one of the defining characteristics of creative cognition, and is consistent with Dewey's (1938) broader argument that genuine inquiry begins with a felt difficulty or open question rather than with received content to be reproduced.

IX. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND HUMAN CREATIVITY

The rapid emergence of generative artificial intelligence has transformed discussions surrounding creative writing education. Instead of presenting AI as either a threat or a replacement for writers, the workshop adopts a more balanced position, informed by Margaret Boden's (2004) influential taxonomy of creativity, which distinguishes combinatorial creativity, the novel recombination of familiar ideas, from exploratory creativity, the systematic exploration of an existing conceptual space, and from transformational creativity, the alteration of the rules that define the space itself.

Artificial intelligence excels at recognising patterns across existing texts. It can generate stylistically competent narratives by synthesising enormous quantities of prior writing, a capacity that maps most closely onto Boden's combinatorial and exploratory categories. Human storytelling, however, often begins before patterns exist, and is more closely associated with what Boden (2004) calls transformational creativity: the capacity to change the rules of the conceptual space rather than merely explore or recombine within it. Original narratives frequently emerge from personal observation, moral uncertainty, lived experience, emotional memory, ethical courage, and unresolved questions, dimensions that remain deeply connected to embodied human experience. Students are therefore encouraged to view AI as a valuable creative assistant rather than the origin of authentic narrative voice. This distinction is pedagogically important because it redirects attention toward what makes human creativity distinctive: experience transformed through reflection.

X. READING STORIES AS ARCHITECTS RATHER THAN CONSUMERS

An important transition within the workshop asks students to move from passive appreciation to analytical construction. Popular narratives are deconstructed through a simple sequential framework that moves from world to conflict, to character, to choice, to consequence, and finally to change. This framework functions as a pedagogical simplification of long-standing narrative-structure theory, echoing both Gustav Freytag's nineteenth-century dramatic pyramid of exposition, rising action, climax, and resolution, and Tzvetan Todorov's (1971) structuralist model of narrative as a movement from equilibrium through disruption to a new equilibrium.

This model encourages students to see storytelling as a sequence of deliberate creative decisions rather than spontaneous inspiration, and by analysing narrative architecture in this way, learners begin recognising that every fictional world operates through interconnected design principles. Reading therefore becomes a form of reverse engineering that informs future creative practice.

XI. COLLABORATIVE WORLD-BUILDING

Creative writing is often imagined as an individual pursuit. The workshop challenges this assumption through collaborative exercises in which students collectively construct narratives by responding to one another's ideas, drawing on Vygotsky's (1978) claim that higher-order cognitive and symbolic capacities develop first through social interaction and only later become internalised as individual capacities, and on cooperative-learning research by Johnson and Johnson (1999) showing that structured collaborative tasks reliably produce deeper engagement and understanding than equivalent individual tasks.

Such activities demonstrate that stories evolve through dialogue, negotiation, revision, and shared imagination. Collaborative writing also mirrors contemporary creative industries, where novels, films, games, and digital media increasingly emerge through interdisciplinary teamwork, a phenomenon Henry Jenkins (2006) has described at the level of audiences and fan communities as "participatory culture," in which storytelling is understood as a distributed, collective activity rather than the output of a single isolated author. Consequently, students learn that creativity flourishes through interaction as much as through solitary inspiration.

XII. EDUCATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

The workshop extends beyond creative writing instruction. Its underlying pedagogical model develops several broader competencies, including close observation, critical thinking, empathy, narrative analysis, ethical reasoning, systems thinking, collaborative learning, creative problem-solving, and reflective inquiry. These capacities align with widely used frameworks for twenty-first-century learning and with Anderson and Krathwohl's (2001) revision of Bloom's taxonomy, in which "creating" sits at the apex of cognitive demand, above analysing and evaluating, while

remaining firmly grounded in literary study rather than displacing it.

Rather than separating literary appreciation from creative production, the workshop demonstrates that reading and writing enrich one another through continuous dialogue, and that the theoretical traditions reviewed above — narrative psychology, structuralist and post-structuralist narratology, cognitive research on attention and creativity, and sociocultural learning theory — are not decorative academic backdrop but the working assumptions on which each exercise depends.

XIII. CONCLUSION

World-building is frequently misunderstood as an exercise in unrestricted imagination. This paper has argued instead that meaningful fictional worlds arise from careful observation of reality, sustained inquiry, ethical reflection, and deliberate narrative design. It has traced these claims to specific and well-established theoretical traditions: Bruner's (1986, 1991) account of narrative as a mode of knowing, the structuralist and post-structuralist analyses of Propp (1968), Campbell (1949), Genette (1980), Bakhtin (1981), and Barthes (1977), the cognitive research on attention and creativity of Guilford (1967), Csikszentmihalyi (1996), and Langer (1989), and the sociocultural learning theory of Vygotsky (1978), Dewey (1938), and Freire (1970).

Students become writers not because they invent entirely new worlds but because they learn to see the existing one differently: observation precedes imagination, questions precede answers, and attention precedes invention. By repositioning storytelling as a practice of noticing rather than merely imagining, educators can help young writers discover that every meaningful story begins with something already present in the world — an overlooked detail, an uncomfortable question, an unexpected act of kindness, or an unresolved contradiction.

The newest stories will not emerge solely from greater technical sophistication or more elaborate fantasy. They will emerge from individuals who learn to observe deeply, think critically, and transform lived experience into narratives that invite others to see differently. In this sense, world-building becomes not only a literary skill grounded in a coherent and citable body of theory, but also an educational practice that cultivates empathy, reflection, and imaginative citizenship.

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A Study on Aesthetic Education Practice of Black-and-White Woodblock Printing at Linzhi Vocational and Technical School in Tibet from the Perspective of Art Therapy

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Abstract— *Against the backdrop of the synergistic advancement of aesthetic education immersion, cultural nurturing in Tibet, and mental health education in the new era, this practice-based study addresses several challenges faced by Nyingchi, Tibet, including limited forms of aesthetic education, inadequate access to psychological counseling for adolescents, and the gradual weakening of local cultural heritage. Using black-and-white woodblock printing as a medium and grounded in art therapy theory, a six-month systematic pilot program was conducted at Nyingchi Vocational and Technical School. Employing empirical methods such as questionnaire surveys, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews, the study developed a tiered curriculum system aligned with vocational schools' skill-oriented and employment-focused goals. The curriculum integrated visual elements throughout the woodblock creation process, including the natural landscapes and folk patterns of the Kongpo Tibetan community, Lingnan cultural characteristics, and symbols of the Chinese national community. The practice demonstrates that the printmaking classroom, infused with art therapy principles, serves a dual educational function: on one hand, it broadens aesthetic perception, reinforcing local cultural identity and national confidence; on the other, it provides a low-barrier outlet for emotional expression, effectively alleviating the multifaceted psychological stress among students in plateau regions stemming from academic advancement, high-altitude adaptation, and career planning. Ultimately, this approach achieves the unified realization of three educational values: aesthetic cultivation, psychological support, and the preservation of regional cultural heritage.*

Keywords— ***Art Therapy; Black-and-White Woodblock Prints; Aesthetic Education in Ethnic Regions; Aesthetic Education Immersion***

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Policy Background and Practical Context

In 2020, the General Offices of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council issued

the “Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving Aesthetic Education in Schools in the New Era”, explicitly promoting the integrated development of aesthetic education and mental health education. The document encourages localities to develop distinctive school-based curricula leveraging local ethnic cultural resources, with a focus on addressing deficiencies in aesthetic education at grassroots schools in border and rural areas [1]. Concurrently, special initiatives such as "Educational Aid to Tibet" and "Cultural Nourishment in Tibet" mandate using campus aesthetic education as a vehicle to foster ethnic cultural integration and cultivate adolescents' sense of community for the Chinese nation [2].

However, the provision of mental health education for adolescents in high-altitude regions remains structurally inadequate. Students at Linzhi Secondary Vocational School face sustained psychological stress from academic pressures and adapting to the plateau environment. Current on-campus psychological support is limited to one-on-one counseling, yet most students are reluctant to seek help proactively due to psychological defenses, resulting in a severe lack of non-verbal, immersive, and experiential outlets for emotional release. Art therapy, which utilizes visual creation as an alternative to verbal disclosure, significantly lowers psychological barriers and effectively addresses the limitation of singular pedagogical mediums in ethnic regions.

Black-and-white woodblock printing stands as a quintessential art form within China's modern fine arts system. The sequential, physically engaging process—involving carving, scraping, inking, and printing—guides creators to actively divert and release pent-up negative emotions. Relying solely on gradations of black, white, and gray to convey narrative while eschewing chromatic complexity, it substantially reduces the cognitive threshold for novice students. This aligns closely with the core theoretical premise of art therapy: achieving self-emotional integration and inner reconciliation through complete artistic creation. Regarding the broader landscape of aesthetic education in domestic primary and secondary schools, systematic printmaking programs are predominantly concentrated in urban schools across China's first- and second-tier inland cities. There remains a notable scholarly gap concerning specialized, long-term pedagogical research tailored to Tibet's high-altitude border context and integrating art therapy theory.

In Linzhi, routine art classes have long focused on sketching, color still-life, and Thangka copying, with systematic printmaking courses rarely offered. Local art teachers generally lack formal training in printmaking techniques, let alone pedagogical methods related to art therapy. Instructional materials seldom incorporate local folk customs or visual motifs from Lingnan culture, preventing campus aesthetic education from effectively fulfilling its core function of inheriting regional ethnic culture. Consequently, local adolescents possess only a superficial and vague understanding of traditional folk arts and ethnic cultural symbols. Addressing these multifaceted practical challenges, this study employs black-and-white woodblock printing as its core medium. By embedding art therapy principles into extracurricular aesthetic education interest classes at Linzhi Vocational School, it conducts a six-month pilot program to explore an immersive aesthetic education model. This model aims to be adapted to the learning context of plateau ethnic regions while offering value in both psychological intervention and cultural preservation.

1.2 Core Research Questions

A review of domestic scholarly literature reveals three critical limitations in current studies. First, the vast majority of art therapy classroom practices in China are implemented in primary and secondary schools and special education institutions in inland cities, with scant targeted field research conducted in high-altitude ethnic regions like Tibet. Existing teaching protocols lack culturally adaptive adjustments, readily resulting in a “one-size-fits-all” pedagogical model detached from students’ lived realities, thus failing to accommodate the unique cultural and psychological characteristics of adolescents on the plateau. Second, existing research on printmaking education using black-and-white woodcuts predominantly focuses on technique instruction and foundational skill development. While occasional observations note that printmaking creation can help calm students’ restlessness, these remain superficial descriptions. There is a conspicuous absence of a systematically

constructed pedagogical framework integrating "hands-on printmaking creation, internal emotional regulation, holistic personality development." Third, within current aesthetic education research in ethnic regions, vocational school students must balance practical skill acquisition with academic and career advancement. However, standardized, non-differentiated art curricula fail to meet their diverse developmental needs.

Accordingly, this study establishes three core research questions: First, how can an aesthetic education curriculum centered on black-and-white woodblock printing be developed based on established art therapy theories to align with the core educational objectives of Nyingchi Vocational School? Second, how can the natural landscapes of Tibet, scenes of folk life, and visual symbols of ethnic unity be deeply integrated into woodblock printmaking to simultaneously achieve the tripartite educational goals of alleviating adolescent psychological stress, enhancing aesthetic literacy, and inheriting ethnic culture? Third, in response to the widespread shortages of aesthetic education resources in grassroots schools in border areas, how can a set of practical, replicable, and regionally scalable implementation strategies for printmaking-based therapeutic aesthetic education be formulated?

1.3 Research Subjects and Empirical Methods

This study selected Linzhi Vocational and Technical School as the pilot site. In the preliminary phase, 226 questionnaires were distributed, with 207 valid responses collected (valid response rate: 91.5%). Additionally, 14 in-depth interviews were conducted with art teachers, psychology teachers, and teaching administrators. The researcher was embedded in the school for six months to conduct full-cycle observations of a printmaking therapy interest class, employing participant observation to document students' creative behaviors and emotional dynamics.

Three empirical methods were adopted:

(1) Questionnaire Survey: Pre- and post-intervention scales were administered to quantitatively assess changes in students' indigenous cultural awareness, interest in art learning, psychological stress levels, and willingness to express emotions.

(2) Participant Observation: Creative behaviors were documented throughout the intervention, and typical cases were systematically analyzed.

(3) Semi-Structured Interviews: Conducted with both students and teachers to identify pain points and gather feedback and suggestions.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND CORE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 A Systematic Review of Relevant Domestic and International Research

Art therapy, an interdisciplinary field bridging psychology and art, traces its academic origins to the 1930s, when Margaret Naumburg first proposed that visual art creation possesses psychological counseling functions. In the 1980s, the American Art Therapy Association formally defined its core essence: utilizing non-verbal visual media to help clients externalize emotions, lower psychological defenses, and achieve self-integration. Empirical studies abroad indicate that art forms requiring sustained physical exertion—such as printmaking and sculpture—yield superior therapeutic outcomes compared to flat painting. The rhythmic, repetitive motions of carving effectively alleviate adolescent anxiety, while monochromatic imagery reduces cognitive load for creators.

Domestic research in this field began relatively late, with most findings focusing on primary and secondary schools in China's inland cities. Ji Ruixiang (2023) noted that modern art education can simultaneously serve the dual functions of intangible cultural heritage preservation and mental health development [3]. Empirical data confirm that integrating art therapy concepts into art classrooms significantly enhances students' concentration and alleviates academic anxiety. However, targeted practices have rarely been extended to ethnic regions in Tibet. Existing programs lack localization tailored to the cultural and psychological characteristics of Tibetan students, resulting in a "one-size-fits-all" approach that fails to accommodate the unique educational context of this highland border area.

2.2 Research on Aesthetic Education through Black-and-White Woodblock Printing

Black-and-white woodblock printing, characterized by its low operational threshold and rich expressive power,

is widely recognized in academic circles as a high-quality medium for aesthetic education in primary and secondary schools. Yu Tao (2024) systematically outlined its pedagogical pathways in school settings, emphasizing that "using the knife as a pen" helps students break free from the psychological constraints of conventional drawing [4]. Zhang Yue (2024) highlighted the medium's psychological healing potential and proposed practical strategies for classroom implementation [5].

However, existing research exhibits three key limitations. First, most studies focus on technique instruction and artwork appreciation; while they note woodblock printing's capacity to "calm restlessness," few integrate art therapy theories to construct a closed-loop teaching framework. Assessments remain centered on aesthetic criteria, neglecting its role in emotional regulation. Second, instructional materials predominantly draw on cultural symbols from the Central Plains, lacking deep integration with Tibetan ethnic elements—thus failing to meet the strategic demands of "cultural enrichment in Tibet." Third, standardized curricula struggle to simultaneously address the dual objectives of cultivating humanistic literacy and vocational competence.

2.3 Research on Aesthetic Education and Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) Preservation in Ethnic Minority Regions

With the advancement of policies such as "Cultural Enrichment in Tibet" and "ICH into Campuses," aesthetic education in ethnic minority regions has emerged as a prominent research focus. Yuan Jun and Zhou Hai (2019), using Cantonese Opera as a case study, noted that ICH faces a crisis of transmission in the information age, and that "integration into school education" constitutes an effective strategy to address the gap in successors—a conclusion equally applicable to the Kongpo culture of Tibet [6]. Chen Li (2025), leveraging ethnic art therapy to alleviate students' psychological distress, proposed establishing a long-term collaborative education mechanism [7]. Li Juan (2025) advocated for the development of locally rooted art curricula in Tibetan schools, grounded in the "Cultural Enrichment in Tibet" initiative [8].

Focusing on Tibet, the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute established an aesthetic education practice base in Mainling City, Nyingchi, in 2025, launching printmaking courses themed on "Ethnic Unity." The Third Nyingchi Campus Culture and Arts Festival incorporated indigenous cultural elements such as the Kongpo loud arrow (Tibetan crossbow archery) and the Zhanian lute (Tibetan lute). While these initiatives offer valuable practical insights, they also reveal a significant shortcoming: aesthetic education and mental health education remain siloed. The former prioritizes cultural preservation, while the latter relies heavily on talk-based counseling, with no substantive integration achieved between the two.

2.4 Research Gaps and Positioning of This Study

In summary, three key gaps persist in the current literature. First, art therapy theory has yet to be localized in Tibetan ethnic regions, leaving a dearth of empirical evidence on non-verbal interventions targeting psychological stressors among adolescents on the plateau—such as test anxiety, environmental maladjustment, and career uncertainty. Second, the teaching of black-and-white woodblock printmaking remains insufficiently integrated with art therapy, and the logical chain linking "hands-on creation–emotional catharsis–personality development" has yet to be established. Third, aesthetic education in ethnic regions lacks clearly defined, differentiated learning objectives tailored to secondary vocational schools. Addressing these gaps, this study constructs a tiered, differentiated printmaking-based aesthetic education curriculum grounded in the three-dimensional framework of art therapy, thereby filling a critical void in this interdisciplinary field.

2.5 Core Theoretical Framework: The Three-Dimensional Cognitive Practice Model of Art Therapy

(1) Non-verbal Dual-Channel Emotional Expression Mechanism. Art therapy simultaneously provides visual and tactile channels for expression. In printmaking, students receive visual input through image observation and achieve tactile release via manual carving. The synergy of these dual channels lowers the barrier to psychological expression, aligning with Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning [9].

(2) Cognitive Load Optimization and Flow Immersion Principle. Black-and-white woodcuts dispense

with complex colors, relying solely on shades of black, white, and gray to construct imagery, thereby reducing intrinsic cognitive load (Sweller's Cognitive Load Theory) [10]. The carving process demands sustained focus, naturally inducing a state of "flow" that temporarily shields individuals from external stress—an approach well-suited to the psychological traits of adolescents in high-altitude regions.

(3) Three-Stage Self-Integration Mechanism in Active Creation. This mechanism comprises three phases: information selection, organizational construction, and self-integration. Students autonomously select resonant materials→organize compositions through carving techniques and linear textures→narrate their emotional states in relation to the printed images post-printing, achieving deep integration between external imagery and internal cognition.

Building on this, the study extends to a four-stage practical pathway: perceptual selection of materials→woodcut technique-based compositional creation→integrated emotional expression through imagery→innovative transformation into regional cultural and creative products.

III. TIBET NYINGCHI VOCATIONAL SCHOOL AND SECONDARY SCHOOL PRE-INSTRUCTION SURVEY ANALYSIS ON AESTHETIC EDUCATION

The vast and sparsely populated geography of Tibet profoundly shapes the daily psychological landscape of local adolescents. Pre-class interviews and observations reveal that due to highly dispersed settlements, boarding school systems, and the nomadic livelihoods of some families, students have an extremely limited social radius outside class and spend little time with immediate family members, resulting in widespread feelings of loneliness and emotional deprivation. Several interviewees admitted, "I'm often alone on weekends," or "I have no one to talk to when something's on my mind." This collective sense of isolation makes conventional talk-based counseling more prone to resistance, underscoring the urgent need for non-verbal, immersive artistic mediums that can be engaged with individually.

3.1 Basic Information of the Survey Sample

The survey covers one secondary vocational school in Nyingchi. Student sample: 226 secondary vocational students; ethnic composition: 86.4% Tibetan, 10.1% Han, 3.5% Monpa and Lhoba; gender ratio: 47.3:52.7. There are six art teachers currently employed, only one of whom has received short-term training in printmaking, and none have been exposed to art therapy.

3.2 Core Issues at the Student Level

(1) Weak awareness of local culture and a lack of regional distinctiveness in aesthetic education. Only 17.4% of students can identify the patterns of Gongbu Tibetan costumes or the features of traditional woodblock prints; 43.5% hold only vague impressions of snow-capped mountains and peach blossoms; and 39.1% have never engaged with local folk art. Regarding access channels, 62.3% rely on short videos, while a mere 8.7% learn through art classes.

(2) Limited avenues for psychological support and a lack of experiential outlets. When feeling distressed, 76.3% of students report having no suitable means of emotional release; 68.1% are reluctant to seek help from school counselors due to shyness. Most express a preference for immersive creative activities—such as painting and handicrafts—as channels for emotional regulation.

(3) Rigid formats in art instruction, yet strong interest in woodblock printmaking. While 83.1% have never tried black-and-white woodblock printing, 92.7% are willing to participate long-term after learning about the creative process. In terms of subject matter, 61.4% wish to depict ethnic customs such as Thangka figures, snow-capped mountains, animals, and peach blossoms; 27.6% prefer folk scenes like festivals and Guozhuang dance. Local themes thus provide a natural foundation for emotional resonance.

3.3 Shortcomings at the School Level

(1) Insufficient hardware support. The art classrooms are cramped, lacking dedicated workbenches for printmaking, with severe shortages of consumables such as carving knives, plywood, and printing ink. There is no permanent exhibition space for printmaking, resulting in a weak aesthetic atmosphere.

(2) Shortage of interdisciplinary teaching staff. Teachers lack systematic training in printmaking and

theoretical grounding in art therapy. Classes focus solely on appreciation of printmaking works, neglecting emotional guidance. With fully packed weekly teaching schedules, there is no time allocated for specialized training.

(3) Homogeneous curriculum without differentiated student pathways. The school prioritizes simple imitation over in-depth creative expression and emotional support.

IV. PRACTICAL EXPLORATION OF A TIERED AESTHETIC EDUCATION APPROACH IN BLACK-AND-WHITE WOODCUT PRINTMAKING GUIDED BY ART THERAPY

4.1 Phase I: Material Perception and Selection—Dual-Channel Sensory Input to Reduce Psychological Defense

Corresponding to the "information selection" mechanism, this approach enables immersive perception of local materials through dual visual and tactile channels.

Multimedia loops showcase short videos of the Peach Blossom Valley in Nyingchi, Lulang Forest, Tibetan watchtowers, customs of the Kongbo New Year, and Guozhuang dance, while high-resolution images of local themes—such as folk woodblock Thangkas and Monpa wood carvings—are displayed simultaneously. A tactile zone features authentic Tibetan wood carvings and wooden panels for hands-on exploration. Students are encouraged to independently choose subjects that resonate with them emotionally, avoiding rigid, assigned topics.

Practical feedback indicates that local themes rapidly bridge the psychological gap between students and printmaking. Students report feeling relaxed when depicting familiar snow-capped mountains and Tibetan villages, confirming the calming, therapeutic role of local materials in early-stage emotional healing.

4.2 Phase II: Woodcut Technique-Based Creative Practice—Flow-State Immersion for Emotional Externalization

By channeling sustained carving motions into a constructive outlet, internal stress is transformed into etched lines. A tiered, step-by-step technique is implemented to manage cognitive load.

The approach follows three core principles: simplified entry, gradual progression, and free creative expression. Learners begin with straight and curved hatching exercises, practicing on outlines of peach blossoms and mountain ranges. They then advance to block hollowing and black-and-white negative space techniques, carving small objects such as prayer wheels and butter sculptures. In the second session, students undertake complete compositional creation, guided to associate emotions with line styles—using bold, intersecting short strokes for suppressed feelings and smooth, flowing long lines for calmness. Assessment prioritizes process over technical perfection, with instructors focusing solely on safety supervision.

Observational records indicate that students commonly enter a flow state during carving. Post-session feedback reveals that the process offers temporary relief from distress, with negative emotions dissipating through each carving stroke—demonstrating the tactile medium's psychological healing potential.

4.3 Phase III: Visual Emotion Integration—Narrative Sharing of the Work, Achieving Self-Acceptance through Insight

After the rubbing process, students enter the cognitive integration phase, where a low-pressure, non-judgmental sharing session is established.

Students may voluntarily present on stage to share the emotions and stories behind their creations; those reluctant to speak can opt to write creative journals. Teachers and peers act solely as active listeners, offering positive encouragement without aesthetic judgment. This approach significantly facilitates emotional catharsis.

Post-class data reveals that 78.2% of students reported effective release of long-suppressed emotions and gained clearer self-awareness of their feelings, while 89.3% developed a deeper appreciation and stronger sense of identity with local and Lingnan culture—achieving synchronous cultivation of psychological healing and cultural affirmation.

4.4 Phase IV: Enhancing Healing Through Interactive Networks—The Triad of Teacher-Student Dynamics, Peer Relationships, and Tool Utilization

The healing power of printmaking workshops emerges not only through individual creation but is continually amplified by the multidimensional interactions among instructors, peers, and artistic tools.

Teacher-Student Interaction: Teachers shift from being "technique judges" to "companions," replacing harsh criticism with non-judgmental language. When carving mistakes occur, teachers guide students to reframe these "errors" as integral parts of their visual narrative. As one student shared in an interview, "Instead of saying I'd carved it wrong, my teacher suggested turning it into the swirling lines of wind and snow—I felt instantly at ease." This secure dynamic helps students embrace imperfections in their creative process and transfer this mindset to how they handle personal setbacks.

Peer interaction level: Group collaboration created low-density social connections. During breaks, neighboring students often spontaneously shared their hands-on experience and techniques. Some vocational classes attempted collaborative carving of the same printing plate in pairs. Throughout the collaborative process, originally introverted and taciturn students gained a sense of value affirmation from being needed by their peers while completing tasks together. Many students reflected: "When two people carve together, we don't need to talk much, but knowing there's someone beside you working alongside makes you feel less alone."

Student–tool interaction level: The resistance of the engraving knife, the tactile sensation of wood shavings, and the rustling sound of rolling ink constituted a multi-sensory cathartic ritual. 82.6% of students agreed that "when chipping away the blank areas, the things weighing on my heart were also chipped away"; 73.9% regarded the repeated process of rolling ink and making prints as "bargaining with one's emotions," with the eventual clear image bringing a sense of control and order.

Threefold interactions intertwine, transforming the printmaking classroom from a mere skills workshop into a transitional space where plateau adolescents find emotional solace.

4.5 Phase V: Regional Cultural and Creative Innovation and Transformation — Extending Printmaking into Daily Life for Long-Term Value

Promote the application of works in real-world scenarios to sustain the long-term effects of aesthetic education and psychological comfort.

Outstanding works are made into campus commemorative postcards and permanent display boards, and regular printmaking exhibitions are held to enhance students' sense of self-identity. Based on original patterns, canvas bags, notebooks, scenic-spot souvenir cards, and ornaments are designed and connected with local cultural and creative shops and campus cultural product stores, transforming the activity into a vocational practice project and broadening employment pathways.

Post-class surveys show that 25.7% of students hope to use printmaking for campus decoration; 63.4% are willing to participate in the development of Tibetan-style printmaking cultural and creative products. The tiered transformation pathways are highly aligned with students' developmental needs.

V. MULTIDIMENSIONAL OUTCOMES OF PRACTICE AND KEY EXISTING ISSUES

5.1 Multidimensional Practical Outcomes

(1) Psychological Education: Psychological assessments indicate a significant reduction in anxiety and negative emotion scores among participating students. 91.3% identified printmaking as a stable and reliable emotional outlet, filling a gap in non-verbal art therapy resources on campus.

(2) Cultural Preservation: Students' awareness of local traditional visual symbols surged from 17.4% before the course to 79.6% afterward. A large number of students actively integrated motifs such as snow-capped mountains, Tibetan villages, and ethnic unity into their creations, fostering an appreciation for their homeland’s culture and the tapestry of multi-ethnic integration, thereby advancing the "Cultural Nourishment for Tibet" strategy.

(3) Aesthetic Education: We established a closed-loop pedagogical system featuring tiered techniques, leveled materials, and differentiated transformation. This shifted the traditional teacher-centered model toward greater student engagement, enhancing creative practice skills and addressing the lack of a systematic printmaking curriculum in Tibet’s border regions.

(4) Social Impact: The resulting cultural and creative products can be channeled into the local cultural tourism market. This approach not only preserves folk art but also opens practical training and employment pathways for students, achieving synergy among aesthetic education, cultural dissemination, and local economic development.

5.2 Four Types of Prominent Problems

(1) Chronic shortage of hardware and supplies. There is no dedicated printmaking classroom, local procurement channels for consumables are limited, and supply is insufficient, constraining teaching effectiveness.

(2) Huge gap in composite-skilled teachers. Teachers generally lack training in printmaking practice and art therapy, making it difficult for them to independently design courses and guide emotions; there is a lack of regular access for local intangible cultural heritage inheritors and therapy experts to enter schools.

(3) Curriculum not integrated into the regular system. It relies solely on after-school interest groups, resulting in limited class hours and narrow coverage; without standardized syllabi and diversified evaluation systems, it is difficult to achieve school-wide popularization.

(4) Weak school-local government linkage and limited transformation channels. Vocational secondary school cultural and creative works lack stable channels for practical application, cooperation with art museums and cultural tourism enterprises is fragmented, and the market value of professional skills has not been fully realized.

VI. STRATEGIES FOR OPTIMIZING AESTHETIC EDUCATION THROUGH LINZHI BLACK-AND-WHITE WOODBLOCK PRINTING UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF ART THERAPY

6.1 Deepen University-Local Resource Collaboration, Address Hardware Shortcomings, and Co-Create Shared Aesthetic Education Platforms

Promote long-term partnerships between pilot schools and the Nyingchi Art Museum, the Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Center, and cultural tourism enterprises to share collections of traditional woodblock prints and Thangka artworks. Organize regular gallery visits and invite artists to conduct on-campus demonstrations.

Establish a permanent campus printmaking exhibition space to expand offline learning resources. Collaborate with art schools from inland universities supporting Tibet to provide targeted teaching tools and course materials, thereby easing the burden of hardware supply.

6.2 Establish a Tiered, Integrated Faculty Development System to Address Gaps in Dual-Domain Teaching Competency

Establish a regular on-campus training mechanism for teachers, and collaborate with universities supporting Tibet to offer workshops on printmaking techniques and art therapy, covering all in-service art teachers to simultaneously strengthen practical skills and emotional guidance capabilities.

Build a tiered team of part-time instructors by recruiting local handicraft inheritors, printmaking teachers from inland regions, and school psychologists to deliver courses and guide student clubs. Leverage the "Educational Aid to Tibet" initiative to implement a teacher rotation and learning program, introducing proven practices from inland areas.

6.3 Refine the Tiered Standardized Curriculum System and Integrate Printmaking Therapy into Regular Instruction

Develop the “Practical Curriculum Standards for Printmaking-Based Cultural and Creative Design in Linzhi Secondary Vocational School’s Fine Arts Program”, specifying class hours, progressive technical modules, a catalog of local artistic resources, and guidelines for emotional engagement. Formally integrate the course into the fine arts’ elective offerings.

Establish a holistic, multi-dimensional assessment system that moves beyond sole reliance on technical proficiency, incorporating criteria such as the coherence of emotional expression, application of cultural motifs, and classroom participation.

6.4 Establish a University-Local Cultural and Creative Transformation Collaboration Platform to Extend the Long-Term Value of Aesthetic Education

Establish partnerships between schools and local cultural tourism attractions and creative product stores to procure original printmaking artworks by secondary vocational students. This integrates vocational skills with the cultural tourism industry, broadening career pathways.

Regular citywide joint exhibitions of student printmaking achievements will be held, fostering cross-district teaching exchanges to expand the reach of Tibetan-style printmaking in aesthetic education. Through youth creativity, we drive the intergenerational

transmission of regional ethnic culture in a vibrant, contemporary form.

VII. CONCLUSION

Set against the backdrop of advancing cultural enrichment in Tibet, aesthetic education immersion, and the integrated development of mental health, this study adopts art therapy theory as its core framework. A six-month pilot program on black-and-white woodblock printmaking was conducted at Nyingchi Vocational and Technical School. Employing empirical methods including questionnaires, observations, and interviews, the study established a four-stage, tiered instructional pathway: "Perception and Selection of Visual Sources—Organization and Creation of Woodcuts—Integration of Emotional Expression in Imagery—Innovative Transformation into Cultural Products."

Empirical findings robustly demonstrate that the printmaking curriculum, integrating art therapy principles, yields triple educational value: First, it establishes a low-threshold, non-verbal channel for emotional catharsis through immersive, hands-on processes such as carving and printing. This effectively alleviates psychological stress among adolescents on the plateau and addresses the limitation of singular approaches in mental health education within ethnic regions. Second, by centering on local natural landscapes and folk symbols, the curriculum guides students to connect with their hometowns and ethnic cultures through creation, significantly enhancing cultural identity and awareness of the Chinese national community, thereby implementing the strategy of cultural enrichment in Tibet. Third, it transcends the homogenization prevalent in vocational education by developing a distinctive aesthetic education model tailored to the learning context of frontier ethnic regions.

The therapeutic efficacy observed extends beyond the technical execution of printmaking. It is fundamentally supported by the secure psychological environment fostered through teacher-student dialogic companionship in the classroom, the socio-emotional support derived from low-intensity peer collaboration, and the multi-sensory cathartic channel established through deep interaction between the individual, tools, and materials. These findings mechanistically address the pre-survey observation of collective loneliness among Nyingchi adolescents, a condition exacerbated by geographical dispersion. The woodblock printmaking classroom—characterized by its non-verbal nature, capacity for solitary immersion, and allowance for limited social interaction—simultaneously fulfills the dual functions of psychological counseling and cultural identity reinforcement within aesthetic education. This provides a viable implementation pathway for constructing an integrated "Aesthetic Education + Therapy" paradigm in frontier ethnic regions.

Current efforts toward institutionalization face four primary obstacles: material shortages, insufficient specialized faculty, the absence of the curriculum from formal systems, and inadequate channels for creative transformation. To address these, this paper proposes four optimization strategies: sharing resources between schools and local governments, implementing tiered faculty training, developing standardized curricula, and fostering school-enterprise collaboration for cultural product innovation. These strategies offer a replicable model for other regions in Tibet and similar frontier ethnic areas nationwide.

This study acknowledges certain limitations: the pilot duration was limited to six months, lacking long-term follow-up data; the sample was confined to public schools in urban Nyingchi, necessitating further refinement of simplified protocols for county and rural schools. Future research will expand coverage to rural counties, extend the observation period, and continuously optimize the woodblock printmaking therapy model for plateau villages. The ultimate goal is to promote the sustainable, integrated development of aesthetic education, mental health, and indigenous cultural preservation in China's frontier ethnic regions.

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The Application of the Lexical Chunk Approach Based on Information Processing Theory in Business English Vocabulary Teaching in Secondary Vocational Schools

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Abstract— *The deepening of globalization and the advancement of the Belt and Road Initiative have brought China's trade ties with other countries ever closer. Consequently, there is a growing demand for secondary vocational school graduates in foreign trade who possess business English communication skills. Business English vocabulary, which encompasses both general meanings and specialized business connotations, serves as the linguistic foundation for tasks such as foreign trade negotiations, business email writing, and customer reception in students' future work. Vocabulary is the cornerstone of language, yet current Business English vocabulary instruction in secondary vocational schools largely follows traditional models like word reading and meaning recitation, leading to problems such as fragmented vocabulary memorization, weak contextual application, frequent Chinglish expressions, and students' lack of initiative in vocabulary learning. The Lexical Chunk Approach, which takes prefabricated chunks as the core unit of teaching, can simplify vocabulary output and align with the learning situation of secondary vocational students, who generally have a weak English foundation. Based on the actual classroom practice of Business English in secondary vocational schools and supported by lexical chunk theory, this paper proposes implementation strategies for the Lexical Chunk Approach tailored to the secondary vocational classroom, aiming to optimize Business English vocabulary teaching and enhance students' ability to use business vocabulary.*

Keywords— ***lexical chunk approach, secondary vocational business English, vocabulary teaching, information processing theory***

I. INTRODUCTION

Economic globalization has driven the rapid development of cross-border trade industries. The core goal of Business English programs in secondary vocational schools is to cultivate front-line, hands-on foreign trade talent, requiring students to master English expressions in scenarios such as placing orders, making quotations, making inquiries, and handling after-sales service.

Business English vocabulary differs from general English vocabulary in its high proportion of polysemy, fixed collocations, and industry-specific terms; memorizing individual words in isolation cannot meet the communicative demands of the workplace.

However, at present, vocabulary teaching in most secondary vocational Business English classrooms still centers on explaining single words. Teachers disconnect vocabulary from business contexts, and students merely mechanically memorize Chinese definitions, making it difficult for them to use words flexibly in conversations and writing. Their output often contains numerous grammatical errors and unnatural expressions. The lexical chunk theory proposed by Michael Lewis regards multi-word prefabricated chunks as the fundamental unit of language learning, breaking the "word-grammar" dualistic teaching system and offering a fresh perspective for business vocabulary instruction. On this basis, this paper explores how to implement the Lexical Chunk Approach in secondary vocational Business English vocabulary classrooms, providing new insights for Business English vocabulary teaching.

II. CORE CONCEPTS AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

(1) Lexical Chunks

The theory of lexical chunks was first proposed by Becker in 1975, overturning the traditional belief that "isolated words are the smallest unit of linguistic communication." It posits that the basis of language output lies in prefabricated language modules with fixed or semi-fixed structures, and that language use relies on holistic retrieval rather than on-the-spot sentence construction by combining words with grammar. Subsequent scholars have continuously refined the theory. In 1983, Pawley and Syder introduced the concept of "lexicalized sentence stems," broadening the boundaries of chunks to include not only phrase collocations but also complete long sentence patterns. Wray further distilled the core feature of chunks as "whole storage and whole retrieval" of linguistic segments. In 1993, Lewis, in The Lexical Approach, established a four-category classification of chunks: words and polywords, high-frequency collocations, institutionalized expressions, and sentence frames or discourse frameworks, providing a classification basis for the sorting of business chunks and classroom teaching in this study.

In the context of Business English vocabulary teaching in secondary vocational schools, lexical chunks serve as a key bridge connecting vocabulary recognition and workplace English application. During teaching, teachers can integrate and select specialized chunks around unit business themes and conduct structured vocabulary instruction based on sets of chunks, helping students internalize linguistic knowledge and enhance their English communicative competence in business scenarios.

(2) The Lexical Chunk Approach

The Lexical Chunk Approach, also known as the Lexical Approach, was formally introduced by Michael Lewis in 1993 in The Lexical Approach: The State of ELT and a New Way Forward. Its core assertion is that "language consists of grammaticalized lexis, not lexicalized grammar," a notion that fundamentally overturns traditional language teaching philosophies and places phrasal chunks at the core of instruction. This approach advocates that teaching should revolve around high-frequency lexical items—here referring to the sets of word combinations that recur in spoken and written business texts and serve as the primary vehicle for ensuring fluent and natural business communication. The Lexical Chunk Approach uses chunks, rather than individual sentences, as the basic units of language learning, and insists that vocabulary knowledge must be taught and learned in authentic contexts.

In the research context of Business English vocabulary teaching in secondary vocational schools, the Lexical Chunk Approach as defined in this paper involves treating such prefabricated chunks as fixed business collocations, trade set phrases, and foreign trade sentence frames as holistic teaching units. It aims to transform the traditional learning method of rote memorization of isolated words, and to complete chunk recognition and application training within business contexts. This approach can improve the idiomaticity and fluency of

students' business speaking and written email communication, deepen their understanding of specialized vocabulary, achieve long-term retention, and effectively cultivate students' ability to use English in the workplace.

(3) Information Processing Theory of Memory

Robert Gagné was the principal proponent of the information processing model of learning. He systematized this theory in 1974, likening the learning process to a computer information processing system.

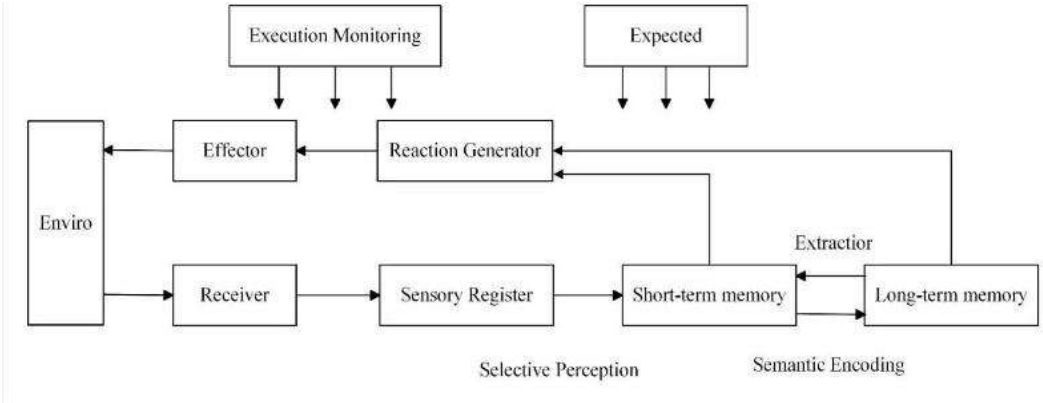


Figure 3-1 Information Processing Model of Learning

The core tenets of this theory are highly consistent with the present study, providing support in two respects. First, the theory posits that learners' working memory capacity is notably limited. Lexical chunks, as pre-formed, frequently used holistic language units, can integrate multiple individual words into a single meaningful whole, thereby achieving information chunking and significantly reducing students' cognitive load during the memorization and output of Business English vocabulary. Second, the theory emphasizes that deep semantic processing must be grounded in specific contexts. Various business communication scenarios can provide complete and meaningful semantic carriers for business chunks, enabling students to understand and apply chunks in simulated situations such as foreign trade negotiations and business document writing, thus avoiding superficial, mechanical learning that consists of merely reciting word definitions.

This study employs Gagné's information processing theory as its theoretical foundation, using authentic business scenarios to achieve deep semantic processing of chunks. Meanwhile, the Lexical Chunk Approach offers efficient language processing units for limited working memory capacity. The combination of the two effectively optimizes students' acquisition of business vocabulary.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

(1) Domestic Research Status

1. General Research on Lexical Chunk Teaching

Domestic research on lexical chunks has developed rapidly since 2000. Wang Lifei and Zhang Dafeng reviewed the progression of overseas research on prefabricated chunks, pointing out that chunks are an effective pathway for overcoming Chinglish and improving productive skills. Duan Shiping summarized domestic research trends, proposing that the research focus would gradually shift to stratified teaching design and empirical comparisons across different educational stages. In the primary and secondary school sectors, Lei Yun and Tang Debin constructed a three-step teaching model of "chunk extraction—contextual understanding—classified storage," demonstrating that classified chunk memorization within thematic contexts can deepen semantic processing. Li Zhiwen designed mind maps to assist in the construction of chunk networks, providing operational activity design ideas for the vocabulary classroom.

At the tertiary level, some scholars have confirmed through teaching experiments that chunk teaching can

expand vocabulary size and improve oral and writing fluency. Empirical studies in primary and secondary schools cover elementary, middle, and high school levels, but the majority of studies focus on general English courses. There is a relative scarcity of detailed research targeting the Business English major in secondary vocational schools, indicating a significant research gap.

2. Research on Business English Lexical Chunk Teaching

Research in Business English has gradually focused on two major areas: business correspondence and oral English. Li Taizhi was among the first to propose a chunk training method for foreign trade writing, emphasizing the enhancement effect of formulaic business sentence patterns on email writing. Qi Yan and Ding Yanren empirically verified a positive correlation between the amount of chunk usage and speaking and writing scores. For the secondary vocational student population, several front-line teachers have conducted small-scale teaching experiments. Some researchers, using secondary vocational foreign trade correspondence courses as a vehicle, proved that chunk teaching can improve the problem of stiff sentence structures in students' emails. Other studies focusing on oral English classes in secondary vocational schools found that chunks can alleviate students' anxiety about speaking.

3. Research on Business English Vocabulary Teaching in Secondary Vocational Schools

Current research on Business English vocabulary teaching in secondary vocational schools generally points out common teaching challenges: first, students' weak English foundation and prominent vocabulary anxiety, with rapid forgetting through mechanical recitation; second, teachers' rigid teaching modes lacking integration with context and professional scenarios; third, textbooks lacking systematic summaries of business chunks, with monotonous supplementary vocabulary exercises that emphasize isolated word dictation while neglecting collocation and complete expression use; fourth, outdated assessment methods where end-of-term written exams only test isolated word meanings and cannot assess students' ability to flexibly use workplace vocabulary.

Some researchers have proposed optimization ideas: creating business contexts through information technology tools, adopting stratified vocabulary tasks, and building semantic association networks. However, existing improvement strategies rarely integrate lexical chunk theory, failing to utilize prefabricated chunks to reduce the cognitive load of secondary vocational students, and thus find it difficult to fundamentally solve the core problem of "memorizing words but being unable to use them."

(2) International Research Status

1. Research on Lexical Chunk Theory and Teaching

International research on lexical chunks began earlier and has formed a complete theoretical system. Becker was the first to propose the concept of prefabricated chunks, demonstrating that native speakers' communication relies on formulaic phrases rather than scattered words. Wong-Fillmore, through observations in second language acquisition, found that beginners rely on fixed formulas to accomplish basic communication, identifying chunks as a key tool for foreign language initiation. Subsequent scholars further categorized chunk functions, proposing that chunks can significantly enhance language fluency and providing operational ideas for classroom chunk training. A complete vocabulary teaching system was constructed, proposing an "Observe—Hypothesize—Verify" classroom model and clarifying the implementation methods of chunks in listening, speaking, reading, and writing lesson types, which became the core theoretical support for the Lexical Chunk Approach. Ellis, from the perspective of cognitive second language acquisition, verified the value of chunks, with experiments proving that the holistic storage of chunks can reduce working memory load and improve the efficiency of input processing.

Overall, international research emphasizes theoretical construction, cognitive psychological mechanisms, and verification in general foreign language classrooms. There are relatively few empirical studies targeting vocational Business English, and a lack of localized teaching plans adapted for low-proficiency students in secondary vocational schools.

2. Research on Vocational English Vocabulary Teaching

International research on vocational English education generally acknowledges a practical orientation. Nurul Aminatus Zuhriya (2026), through action research in a secondary vocational foreign language classroom, confirmed that chunking strategies can improve students' poor reading habit of word-for-word translation and enhance the efficiency of professional text comprehension. Some scholars, using corpus analysis of high-frequency word clusters in business texts, have pointed out the existence of a large number of conventionalized fixed expressions in business scenarios, where memorizing words alone cannot meet workplace communication needs. However, international research is mostly oriented towards European and American vocational education systems, and the learning situation in domestic secondary vocational schools is different, meaning teaching models cannot be directly replicated.

(3) Research Summary

A synthesis of existing domestic and international literature reveals three major research trends and existing research gaps:

At the theoretical level, the theories of lexical chunks, information processing, and context have formed mature and complete systems. A large body of research confirms that chunks have a significant positive effect on second language vocabulary acquisition and language production, providing solid theoretical support for this study. International ESP research clearly identifies that Business English possesses a large number of high-frequency prefabricated chunks and that vocational teaching should center on formulaic expressions. At the practical level, a wealth of classroom cases on chunk teaching has been accumulated in domestic primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions, but the research focus has been on general English courses. There is a lack of systematic empirical research specifically targeting the vocabulary classroom in secondary vocational Business English programs. Existing research on secondary vocational business chunks mostly focuses on writing and oral English specialized courses. The existing gaps are as follows: Existing research has not fully integrated the learning characteristics of secondary vocational students, such as their weak English foundation and insufficient learning initiative, and lacks a stratified business chunk teaching design adapted to the foreign trade post scenarios of these schools. Moreover, very few studies combine Gagné's information processing theory with secondary vocational business chunk vocabulary teaching to explain the suitability of chunk teaching from the perspective of cognitive load, resulting in a lack of both theoretical and practical classroom support.

Based on the deficiencies of existing research, this study focuses on the secondary vocational Business English vocabulary classroom and designs stratified, scenario-based business chunk teaching strategies to address these research gaps and provide practical references for the reform of vocabulary teaching in secondary vocational Business English.

I. Application Strategies of the Lexical Chunk Approach in Secondary Vocational Business English Vocabulary Teaching

Integrating the learning situation characteristics of secondary vocational students—weak English foundation, high practicality of business vocabulary, and fixed job scenarios—while relying on lexical chunk theory and Gagné's information processing theory to reduce students' cognitive load, a complete and implementable path for chunk teaching is constructed from three dimensions: pre-class chunk resource construction, in-class three-stage teaching implementation, and post-class consolidation and expansion.

(1) Pre-class: Stratified Sorting of Business Chunks

Before conducting vocabulary teaching, teachers need to break away from the scattered word arrangement logic of textbooks. Using foreign trade job scenarios as the main thread, they should integrate all business chunks from the unit and categorize them hierarchically according to students' English proficiency levels. This reduces the amount of information held in working memory at one time, lowering students' memorization pressure from the source.

1. Categorizing Chunk Scenarios by Job Theme

Centered on the core job scenarios of secondary vocational Business English—the seven major modules of

inquiry and quotation, order negotiation, logistics and transportation, payment and settlement, customer reception, business correspondence, and exhibition promotion—systematically screen high-frequency chunks from textbooks, authentic foreign trade emails, and negotiation dialogues. Discard obscure and uncommon professional expressions, selecting only formulaic chunks with high workplace recurrence. Example: chunks for the quotation scenario: quote the best price, FOB Shanghai, offer a reasonable discount, take your quantity into consideration.

2. Three-tier Classification Based on Learning Situation

In light of the polarization of secondary vocational students, a three-tier chunk list is established to achieve differentiated instruction. Basic-tier chunks: simple business collocations such as place an order, make payment, aimed at students with virtually no English foundation and limited vocabulary, enabling them to complete the simplest question-and-answer exchanges in simulated dialogues with teacher prompts. Intermediate-tier chunks: complete business communication formulaic sentences such as We are writing to inquire about…, We would appreciate it if you could…, serving as the core classroom teaching content, requiring students to conduct dialogues and write emails. Advanced-tier chunks: long sentence frameworks for professional negotiations and contracts such as Taking the market fluctuation into account, we propose that…, provided for students with better English who are preparing for skills competitions to expand their knowledge.

3. Creating Supporting Chunk Learning Materials

Based on the stratified chunk list, teachers create two types of standardized teaching resources: first, unit theme chunk mind maps, which use business transaction scenarios as central nodes and branch out to connect synonymous, near-synonymous, and scenario-related chunks, conforming to the brain's cognitive law of chunking memory; second, visualized materials of foreign trade objects, including authentic materials such as price lists, product brochures, and exhibition business cards. Before teaching implementation, the stratified chunk list is distributed to students for previewing, and any preview difficulties are collected to dynamically adjust the focus of classroom explanation.

(2) In-class: Three-stage Contextual Teaching to Achieve Input—Internalization—Preliminary Output

The in-class teaching design intrinsically corresponds to the eight learning phases of Gagné's information processing theory. The situational input stage corresponds to the four early processing phases of "attention—expectancy—retrieval—selective perception," aiming to transform business chunks from external stimuli into perceived objects in working memory. The contextual internalization stage focuses on the core phase of "semantic encoding," facilitating deep understanding through organizational and elaborate strategies. The stratified output stage completes the three later phases of "responding—reinforcement—retrieval and transfer," achieving the retrieval, application, and cross-context transfer of chunk knowledge. These three interlocking stages fully implement Gagné's learning process model in the secondary vocational Business English vocabulary classroom.

The following uses a standard 45-minute lesson on "Inquiry and Quotation" as a practical case for illustration:

Stage 1: Situational Input—Chunk Recognition and Extraction (12 min)

Discarding the traditional vocabulary teaching model of word-by-word deconstruction, a complete communicative context is created using cross-border e-commerce webpages, short foreign trade videos, and authentic customer inquiry emails. The teacher assigns text study tasks, guiding students to autonomously identify and mark the formulaic prefabricated chunks within the text.

Sample teaching text excerpt: We are interested in your electronic products. Please quote us your best price FOB Shanghai. If the price is competitive, we will place a large order. After students finish circling the chunks, the teacher reads the complete formulaic chunks aloud and holistically explains their meaning in business

communication, avoiding splitting words for individual definitions. This establishes the cognition that "a chunk is a complete meaningful communicative unit" and circumvents the drawbacks of fragmented memorization.

Stage 2: Contextual Internalization—Deep Semantic Encoding of Chunks (18 min)

Relying on foreign trade communication scenarios, the pragmatic differences of chunks are distinguished, and elaborative semantic processing is carried out. Taking the differentiation of easily confused chunks as an example: place an order is the standard expression for ordering in foreign trade, while make an order is mostly used in everyday dining scenarios, indicating a significant distinction in business register suitability. Synonymous substitution chunks are simultaneously sorted out, such as quote the price / give a quotation.

A semantic network for inquiry and quotation series chunks is constructed using mind maps, dividing them into two major categories: chunks specifically for written correspondence and chunks specifically for exhibition oral communication, clarifying the usage boundaries of different registers. Group classification and discussion tasks are set, where students work in groups to categorize chunks by register, followed by the teacher's unified error correction and summary. This simplifies complex grammatical explanations and reduces students' extraneous cognitive load.

Stage 3: Stratified Practice—Chunk Transfer and Output (15 min)

Three levels of classroom practice tasks are set according to cognitive gradients, catering to the developmental needs of students at different levels. Basic training: chunk English-Chinese translation and fill-in-the-blank exercises for short business texts, reinforcing the recognition and memorization of basic-tier chunks. Semi-open simulated communication: pairs simulate a supplier-customer inquiry scenario, requiring the use of at least three core unit chunks in the dialogue. Creative comprehensive output: writing a complete quotation email of about 80 words against the background of market fluctuations. The teacher circulates to observe students' task completion, providing real-time correction for chunk collocation and register misuse to complete the learning reinforcement phase.

In summary, the classroom abandons the word-by-word explanation model and conducts deep chunk teaching based on business scenarios in three stages. The first stage, situational input: using foreign trade documents, short videos, and real-world images to create scenarios, allowing students to independently circle formulaic chunks in the text, with the teacher holistically explaining the business meaning of the chunks. The second stage, contextual internalization: differentiating semantic differences of the same word in different collocations based on business scenarios, using mind maps to sort synonymous business chunks, simplifying complex grammar, and focusing on explaining the applicability of chunks in written/oral contexts to reduce students' memory load. The third stage, stratified output: setting three types of exercises from easy to difficult, with all students completing basic training in chunk translation and text fill-in-the-blanks, the majority carrying out role-plays for inquiry and reception, and those with extra capacity independently writing business emails, progressively achieving flexible vocabulary use.

(3) Post-class: Multi-faceted Expansion and Consolidation to Strengthen Long-term Memory Storage

According to Gagné's information processing theory, the business chunks briefly stored in working memory during class can only complete deep semantic encoding and be converted into durable long-term memory through repeated recurrence and scenario-based practical application. Therefore, inefficient word copying homework is abandoned after class in favor of lightweight, diversified consolidation tasks aligned with foreign trade positions, deepening chunk retention from multiple dimensions. In terms of written exercises, isolated word dictation is replaced by micro business writing tasks, requiring students to select 3-5 core classroom chunks to write short negotiation sentences or simple business emails, consolidating the chunks in a complete business context. For oral training, students record one-minute simulated foreign trade dialogues in groups, mandating the use of the

chunks learned in class. Simultaneously, a class chunk accumulation notebook is established, encouraging students to excerpt one set of trade-related practical chunks daily. Online learning channels serve as a supplement: teachers upload stratified chunk audio recordings and accompanying self-test exercises to the teaching platform, allowing students to use fragmented spare time for reading-aloud practice and self-assessment, continuously repeating input to delay forgetting. Additionally, the teacher provides 3-5 English titles from cross-border e-commerce platforms or screenshots from short foreign trade videos each week, asking students to circle the chunks within them and imitate sentence creation. Students are guided to actively explore everyday business materials, browse English product descriptions on cross-border e-commerce sites and informative short foreign trade videos, and autonomously collect business chunks from various scenarios, broadening their chunk accumulation pathways and comprehensively achieving long-term memory.

IV. CONCLUSION

Against the backdrop of continuously deepening global trade and the increasing market demand for skilled foreign trade talent from secondary vocational schools, vocabulary teaching in secondary vocational Business English programs profoundly affects students' workplace communication competence. The traditional vocabulary classroom, which has long employed the teaching of isolated words, struggles to meet the weak English foundation of secondary vocational students and their practical, job-oriented learning needs. This study, supported by lexical chunk theory and Gagné's information processing theory, systematically applies the Lexical Chunk Approach to Business English vocabulary teaching in secondary vocational schools.

At the level of teaching implementation, this approach breaks the rigid "word + grammar" teaching logic, conducting chunk input, internalization, and stratified output training based on authentic foreign trade scenarios. By leveraging the chunking effect, it reduces the cognitive load on students' working memory and addresses, from the root, expressive problems such as Chinglish collocations and stiff sentence structures. From the perspective of student development, formulaic business chunks lower the threshold for language production, alleviate vocabulary recitation anxiety, cater to the stratified learning needs of both struggling and advanced students, and simultaneously improve vocabulary memorization efficiency and contextual application levels, making vocabulary teaching better suited to the learning situation of secondary vocational students.

In conclusion, the Lexical Chunk Approach aligns with the vocational education goals of secondary vocational Business English and can effectively overcome the shortcomings of traditional vocabulary teaching, such as fragmentation and an emphasis on memorization over application. Furthermore, secondary vocational English teachers should proactively update their teaching philosophies, systematically sort and stratify chunks using authentic business scenarios as a vehicle, implement the complete input—internalization—output classroom process, continuously optimize vocabulary teaching quality, and steadily enhance students' business English workplace communication competence, thereby supplying the foreign trade industry with skilled talent possessing a solid linguistic foundation.

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Perceived Teacher Support and Agentic Engagement in EFL Learning Among Chinese Non-English Major Freshmen: A Self-Determination Theory Perspective

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Abstract— *Grounded in self-determination theory (SDT), this study examined the relationship between perceived teacher support and agentic engagement among Chinese non-English major undergraduates in English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms. A total of 287 freshmen from a Chinese university completed validated scales measuring agentic engagement (Guo & Li, 2018) and perceived teacher support (Chi, 2017). Results indicated that participants' overall agentic engagement was at a moderate level ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 0.76$), with "self-directed effort" scoring highest ($M = 3.58$) and "helping teacher with instruction" lowest ($M = 2.52$). Perceived teacher support was moderately high ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 0.70$) and significantly predicted agentic engagement ($R = .534$, $R^2 = .286$, $\beta = .534$, $p < .001$). Among teacher support sub-dimensions, autonomy support emerged as the only significant unique predictor in multiple regression analysis ($\beta = .269$, $p = .005$). Gender differences were nonsignificant across all dimensions, while engineering majors reported significantly higher agentic engagement and teacher support than arts majors. These findings suggest that teacher support, particularly autonomy-supportive behaviors, plays a meaningful role in fostering learners' proactive contributions to the instructional process.*

Keywords— ***agentic engagement, Chinese undergraduates, EFL learning, perceived teacher support, self-determination theory.***

I. INTRODUCTION

Student engagement has been widely recognized as a critical factor in learning outcomes across educational contexts (Hiver et al., 2021; Oga-Baldwin, 2019). In the field of instructed second language acquisition (ISLA), engagement is particularly consequential because classroom interaction often constitutes the primary and sometimes the only context in which learners receive meaningful language input and practice opportunities (Hiver et al., 2021). For the vast population of English as a foreign language (EFL) learners in China, where naturalistic English exposure outside the classroom remains limited, the quality and nature of classroom engagement directly shape language proficiency development.

Among the various conceptualizations of student engagement, agentic engagement represents a relatively novel and underexplored dimension. Introduced by Reeve and Tseng (2011), agentic engagement refers to students' constructive contributions to the flow of instruction they receive, that is, learners' proactive efforts to enrich, personalize, and improve the learning conditions they experience. Unlike behavioral engagement (e.g., attending class, completing assignments) or emotional engagement (e.g., enjoying the subject, feeling connected to the teacher), agentic engagement captures students' initiative in shaping the instructional process itself (Skinner, 2012),

such as offering suggestions to the teacher, sharing relevant resources with classmates, and communicating their learning needs.

Despite the theoretical promise of agentic engagement, empirical research on this construct in L2 learning contexts remains limited. Most existing studies on EFL learner engagement have focused on behavioral, emotional, or cognitive dimensions (Oga-Baldwin, 2019), while learners' proactive contributions to instruction have received comparatively little attention. Furthermore, the factors that promote or inhibit agentic engagement in EFL settings, particularly the role of perceived teacher support, have not been systematically investigated.

The present study addresses this gap by examining the relationship between perceived teacher support and agentic engagement among Chinese non-English major undergraduates. Grounded in self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which posits that social contexts supporting learners' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness foster greater motivational engagement, this study investigates how different dimensions of teacher support predict students' agentic engagement in EFL classrooms.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Student Engagement in L2 Learning

Student engagement is broadly conceptualized as a multidimensional construct encompassing behavioral, emotional, and cognitive involvement in learning activities (Hiver et al., 2021). In L2 education, engagement has attracted growing scholarly attention as researchers recognize that language acquisition requires not only exposure to input but also active participation in meaning-making processes. Hiver et al. (2021) argued that engagement serves as a "bridge" between instructional opportunities and learning outcomes in the L2 classroom, mediating the effects of pedagogical interventions on language development. Similarly, Oga-Baldwin (2019) emphasized that engagement and motivation are inseparable in L2 learning, with engaged learners demonstrating greater persistence, deeper processing, and more positive attitudes toward the target language and culture.

2.2 Agentic Engagement

Reeve and Tseng (2011) proposed the concept of agentic engagement to capture a qualitatively distinct form of student involvement. According to Reeve and Tseng, agentically engaged learners do not merely respond to instructional demands; they actively contribute to the design and improvement of their learning environment. This includes behaviors such as expressing preferences about course content, asking questions that enrich classroom discussion, communicating their interests to the teacher, and assisting peers in understanding course material. Reeve (2013) further elaborated on this concept, emphasizing that agentically engaged students constructively contribute to the instructional flow and create motivationally supportive learning environments for themselves.

In the Chinese EFL context, Guo and Li (2018) developed and validated the Foreign Language Learning Agentic Engagement Scale, operationalizing agentic engagement through four dimensions: (a) self-directed effort, defined as learners' proactive investment in their own language learning, such as actively confronting learning difficulties and cultivating a positive learning attitude; (b) helping teacher with instruction, defined as learners' contributions to the instructional process, such as providing the teacher with relevant materials and offering feedback on teaching; (c) cooperating with teacher, defined as learners' responsive participation in teacher-directed activities, such as attentive listening, completing assigned tasks, and preparing for class; and (d) helping classmates with learning, defined as learners' collaborative support for peers, such as encouraging classmates, sharing resources, and assisting with learning difficulties. This four-dimensional framework aligns with Reeve and Tseng's conceptualization while reflecting the characteristics of Chinese EFL classroom culture, where teacher authority is respected but peer collaboration is increasingly encouraged.

2.3 Perceived Teacher Support

Teacher support refers to students' perceptions of the extent to which their teachers create a learning environment that facilitates engagement and self-determination. Drawing on self-determination theory, Skinner and Belmont (1993) identified three key dimensions of teacher support: autonomy support (providing choices, acknowledging student perspectives, encouraging self-initiated learning), emotional support (demonstrating warmth, care, trustworthiness, and attentiveness to student feelings), and competence support (setting clear expectations, providing constructive feedback, acknowledging progress, and offering timely help). These dimensions correspond to the three basic psychological needs posited by SDT: autonomy, relatedness, and competence, and collectively create a motivational context conducive to engagement.

In the Chinese higher education context, Chi (2017) adapted and validated a perceived teacher support scale grounded in this theoretical framework, confirming

the three-dimensional structure among Chinese university students. The scale captures students' perceptions of how their instructors support their autonomy, attend to their emotional needs, and scaffold their sense of competence. These dimensions are particularly relevant in EFL classrooms where learner anxiety, motivation fluctuations, and perceived irrelevance of English are common challenges.

2.4 Self-Determination Theory as the Theoretical Framework

Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) provides the integrative framework for this study. SDT posits that all individuals possess three innate psychological needs: autonomy (the need to feel volitional and self-endorsing in one's actions), competence (the need to feel effective in interacting with the environment), and relatedness (the need to feel connected to and valued by significant others). When these needs are satisfied by the social environment, individuals experience greater intrinsic motivation, deeper engagement, and more positive developmental outcomes.

In the EFL classroom, teacher support serves as a critical environmental factor that can satisfy or thwart these basic needs. From a sociocultural perspective (Vygotsky, 1978), the teacher functions as a more knowledgeable other who scaffolds learners' development through social interaction, a process that is most productive when the social context is responsive to the learner's needs and agency. Autonomy-supportive teachers who offer choices and respect student perspectives nurture the need for autonomy. Emotionally supportive teachers who demonstrate care and trustworthiness fulfill the need for relatedness. Competence-supportive teachers who set clear expectations and provide constructive feedback strengthen the sense of efficacy. When these needs are met, learners are theorized to transition from passive compliance to active, agentive participation, the hallmark of agentic engagement (Reeve, 2013).

2.5 The Present Study

Although prior research has established links between teacher support and general student engagement, the specific relationship between perceived teacher support and agentic engagement in EFL contexts has received limited empirical attention. This study addresses this gap by investigating Chinese non-English major freshmen, a population that constitutes the majority of English learners in Chinese higher education and that often exhibits passive, compliance-oriented engagement patterns in EFL classrooms. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What is the current level of agentic engagement among Chinese non-English major freshmen in EFL learning, and how do the four dimensions compare?

RQ2: What is the level of perceived teacher support reported by these students?

RQ3: To what extent does perceived teacher support predict agentic engagement overall and its four sub-dimensions?

RQ4: Do agentic engagement and perceived teacher support differ by gender or academic major?

III. METHOD

3.1 Participants

Participants were recruited from a comprehensive university in central China through convenience sampling. A total of 311 non-English major freshmen completed the online questionnaire via the Wenjuanxing platform (https://www.wjx.cn). A lie detection item was embedded in the questionnaire to screen for careless responding; 24 respondents who failed this item were excluded, yielding a final valid sample of 287 participants (valid response rate = 92.3%).

The sample comprised 105 males (36.6%) and 182 females (63.4%). All participants were first-year undergraduate students. Regarding academic major, 157 students (54.7%) were from engineering, 100 (34.8%) from arts, 11 (3.8%) from economics, 10 (3.5%) from sciences, 4 (1.4%) from medicine, 4 (1.4%) from management, and 1 (0.3%) from literature. All participants were informed of the study's purpose and provided voluntary consent.

3.2 Instruments

3.2.1 Agentic Engagement Scale

The Foreign Language Learning Agentic Engagement Scale (Guo & Li, 2018) was used to measure participants' agentic engagement in EFL learning. The scale comprises 14 items across four dimensions: self-directed effort (4 items, e.g., "I actively confront and resolve difficulties in English learning"), helping teacher with instruction (3 items, e.g., "I provide my English teacher with relevant materials and information"), cooperating with teacher (4 items, e.g., "I listen attentively in English class"), and helping classmates with learning (3 items, e.g., "I encourage my classmates to learn English well"). One item in the self-directed effort dimension ("I do not study English hard") is reverse-scored. All items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating greater agentic engagement.

3.2.2 Perceived Teacher Support Scale

The Perceived Teacher Support Scale, adapted by Chi (2017) from Skinner and Belmont (1993), was used to measure students' perceptions of teacher support in EFL learning. The scale consists of 13 items across three dimensions: autonomy support (5 items, e.g., "In English learning, the teacher provides us with choices and opportunities"), emotional support (4 items, e.g., "The English teacher cares about students"), and competence support (4 items, e.g., "The English teacher sets clear learning expectations for us"). Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

3.3 Procedure

The questionnaire was administered online through the Wenjuanxing survey platform. Participants were recruited via class announcements and voluntarily completed the survey during their spare time. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. The questionnaire included a demographic section followed by the two scales, with the agentic engagement scale presented before the teacher support scale. A lie detection item was inserted between items 13 and 15 of the agentic engagement scale to identify inattentive respondents.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS 27.0 and Python 3.0 with the scipy and pyreadstat libraries. Descriptive statistics were computed for all scales and sub-dimensions. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated to assess internal consistency reliability. Pearson product-moment correlations were computed to examine bivariate relationships among variables. Simple linear regression was used to test the predictive effect of perceived teacher support on agentic engagement, and multiple regression was conducted to examine the unique contributions of each teacher support sub-dimension. Independent-samples t tests were used to examine gender and major differences.

IV. RESULTS

4.1 Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's alpha coefficients were computed for both scales and their sub-dimensions (see Table 1). The overall agentic engagement scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency (α = .930), with sub-dimension alphas ranging from .840 to .909. The overall perceived teacher support scale also showed excellent reliability (α = .969), with sub-dimension alphas ranging from .921 to .944. All coefficients exceeded the .80 threshold, indicating that both scales were highly reliable for this sample.

Table 1 Reliability Coefficients for the Agentic Engagement and Perceived Teacher Support Scales

Scale / Dimension	Items	α
Agentic Engagement (total)	14	.930
Self-directed effort	4	.872
Helping teacher with instruction	3	.909
Cooperating with teacher	4	.897
Helping classmates with learning	3	.840
Perceived Teacher Support (total)	13	.969
Autonomy support	5	.925
Emotional support	4	.921

4.2 Validity Evidence

Evidence for the construct validity of both scales has been established in prior validation studies and further supported by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) conducted on the present data. For the agentic engagement scale, the CFA yielded acceptable fit indices: χ^2/df = 2.742, IFI = .960, TLI = .948, CFI = .960, RMSEA = .075, SRMR = .057. The composite reliability (CR) values ranged from .845 to .912, and average variance extracted (AVE) values ranged from .635 to .776, all exceeding the recommended thresholds (CR ≥ .70, AVE ≥ .50). For the perceived teacher support scale, the CFA results were χ^2/df = 5.213, IFI = .940, TLI = .925, CFI = .940, RMSEA = .117, SRMR = .036. The CR values ranged from .917 to .936 and AVE values from .709 to .785, indicating adequate convergent validity. The elevated χ^2/df and RMSEA for the teacher support scale may be attributable to the relatively large sample size, which tends to inflate chi-square statistics (Kline, 2016). Discriminant validity was supported for both scales, as the square root of AVE for each dimension exceeded the inter-factor correlations.

4.3 Descriptive Statistics for Agentic Engagement (RQ1)

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for agentic engagement at both the dimension and item levels.

The overall agentic engagement mean was 3.21 (SD = 0.76) on the 5-point scale, indicating a moderate level of agentic engagement among the participants.

Table 2 *Descriptive Statistics for Agentic Engagement (N = 287)*

Dimension / Item	Min	Max	M	SD
Self-directed effort			**3.58**	0.87
Q1: Actively confront difficulties	1	5	3.45	1.05
Q2: Use various methods to improve English	1	5	3.79	0.96
Q3: Cultivate positive learning attitude	1	5	3.48	1.00
Q4: Do not study English hard (R)	1	5	3.59	1.10
Helping teacher with instruction			**2.52**	0.96
Q5: Provide teacher with materials	1	5	2.37	0.99
Q6: Offer teaching suggestions	1	5	2.49	1.04
Q7: Communicate learning interests to teacher	1	5	2.71	1.10
Cooperating with teacher			**3.49**	0.88
Q8: Listen attentively in class	1	5	3.68	0.98
Q9: Complete learning tasks actively	1	5	3.70	0.97
Q10: Participate in classroom activities	1	5	3.59	1.01
Q11: Preview lesson content	1	5	3.00	1.07
Helping classmates with learning			**3.26**	0.95
Q12: Encourage classmates to learn English	1	5	3.33	1.12
Q13: Share learning materials with classmates	1	5	3.30	1.09
Q15: Help classmates with difficulties	1	5	3.15	1.08
Agentic Engagement (total)			**3.21**	0.76

Note. (R) = reverse-scored item.

Among the four dimensions, self-directed effort scored highest (M = 3.58, SD = 0.87), followed by cooperating with teacher (M = 3.49, SD = 0.88), helping classmates with learning (M = 3.26, SD = 0.95), and helping teacher with instruction (M = 2.52, SD = 0.96). The "helping teacher with instruction" dimension was markedly lower than the other three dimensions, suggesting that students rarely initiated proactive contributions to the instructional process.

At the item level, Q2 ("I use various methods to improve my English"; M = 3.79) and Q9 ("I actively complete learning tasks assigned by the teacher"; M = 3.70) scored highest, reflecting relatively strong resource-utilization and task compliance behaviors. Conversely, Q5 ("I provide my English teacher with relevant materials"; M = 2.37) and Q6 ("I offer suggestions to improve teaching"; M = 2.49) scored lowest, indicating that students rarely engaged in proactive instructional-contribution behaviors.

4.4 Descriptive Statistics for Perceived Teacher Support (RQ2)

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for perceived teacher support. The overall mean was 4.02 (SD = 0.70), indicating that participants generally perceived a moderately high level of teacher support in their EFL classrooms.

Table 3 *Descriptive Statistics for Perceived Teacher Support (N = 287)*

Dimension / Item	M	SD
Autonomy support	**4.01**	0.70
Q16: Teacher provides choices and opportunities	3.92	0.87
Q17: Teacher tries to understand students' perspectives	3.97	0.82
Q18: Teacher listens patiently to students	4.07	0.80

Q19: Teacher tells students how to complete tasks	4.05	0.78
Q20: Teacher considers students' teaching suggestions	4.06	0.79
Emotional support	**4.03**	0.72
Q21: Teacher cares about students	4.17	0.78
Q22: Teacher knows students well	3.83	0.88
Q23: Teacher is trustworthy	4.10	0.80
Q24: Teacher encourages when performance is poor	4.02	0.87
Competence support	**4.03**	0.72
Q25: Teacher sets clear learning expectations	4.11	0.81
Q26: Teacher provides timely help	4.04	0.85
Q27: Teacher acknowledges progress	4.00	0.83
Q28: Teacher provides constructive feedback	3.98	0.79
Perceived Teacher Support (total)	**4.02**	0.70

The three sub-dimensions scored nearly identically: autonomy support (M = 4.01), emotional support (M = 4.03), and competence support (M = 4.03). Among individual items, Q21 ("The teacher cares about students"; M = 4.17) and Q25 ("The teacher sets clear learning expectations"; M = 4.11) received the highest ratings, while Q22 ("The teacher knows students well"; M = 3.83) and Q16 ("The teacher provides choices and opportunities"; M = 3.92) scored relatively lower.

4.5 Correlations Between Perceived Teacher Support and Agentic Engagement

Pearson correlations were computed to examine the bivariate relationships between perceived teacher support and agentic engagement (see **Table 4**).

Table 4 *Pearson Correlations Between Agentic Engagement and Perceived Teacher Support (N = 287)*

Variable	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. AE total	—								
2. Self-directed effort	.829***	—							
3. Helping teacher	.721***	.520***	—						
4. Cooperating	.855***	.593***	.577***	—					
5. Helping classmates	.836***	.575***	.590***	.605***	—				
6. TS total	.534***	.401***	.377***	.596***	.400***	—			
7. Autonomy support	.514***	.386***	.360***	.579***	.383***	.902***	—		
8. Emotional support	.505***	.382***	.350***	.564***	.381***	.889***	.703***	—	
9. Competence support	.506***	.377***	.365***	.558***	.379***	.905***	.731***	.769***	—

Note. AE = agentic engagement; TS = teacher support. All correlations are significant at $p < .001$.

As shown in Table 4, the overall correlation between agentic engagement and perceived teacher support was positive and moderate ($r = .534$, $p < .001$). Among the agentic engagement sub-dimensions, cooperating with teacher exhibited the strongest correlation with teacher support ($r = .596$), while helping teacher with instruction showed the weakest ($r = .377$). All three teacher support sub-dimensions correlated significantly and similarly with agentic engagement (rs = .505-.514).

4.6 Regression Analyses (RQ3)

4.6.1 Simple Linear Regression: Teacher Support → Agentic Engagement

A simple linear regression was conducted to examine the predictive effect of perceived teacher support on agentic engagement (see **Table 5**). The results indicated that

perceived teacher support significantly predicted agentic engagement, $R = .534$, $R^2 = .286$, $F(1, 285) = 113.971$, $p < .001$, with a standardized regression coefficient of $\beta = .534$. That is, perceived teacher support accounted for 28.6% of the variance in agentic engagement.

Table 5 *Regression of Agentic Engagement on Perceived Teacher Support*

Predictor	B	SE	β	R^2	F
TS total → AE total	0.580	0.054	.534***	.286	113.971***
TS total → Self-directed effort	0.498	0.067	.401***	.161	54.716***
TS total → Helping teacher	0.514	0.075	.377***	.142	47.199***
TS total → Cooperating	0.747	0.060	.596***	.355	157.099***
TS total → Helping classmates	0.541	0.073	.400***	.160	54.417***

Note. TS = teacher support; AE = agentic engagement. df = (1, 285) for all models. ***p < .001.

Separate regressions for each agentic engagement sub-dimension revealed that teacher support predicted cooperating with teacher most strongly ($R^2 = .355$, $\beta = .596$), followed by self-directed effort ($R^2 = .161$, $\beta = .401$), helping classmates ($R^2 = .160$, $\beta = .400$), and helping teacher with instruction ($R^2 = .142$, $\beta = .377$).

4.6.2 Multiple Regression: Teacher Support Sub-dimensions → Agentic Engagement

A multiple regression was conducted to examine the unique contribution of each teacher support sub-dimension to agentic engagement (see **Table 6**).

Table 6 *Multiple Regression of Agentic Engagement on Teacher Support Sub-dimensions*

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Autonomy support	0.286	0.102	.269	2.808	.005
Emotional support	0.115	0.131	.114	0.879	.380
Competence support	0.182	0.122	.182	1.487	.138

Note. $R^2 = .288$, Adjusted $R^2 = .280$, $F(3, 283) = 38.155$, $p < .001$.

The overall model was significant, accounting for 28.8% of the variance in agentic engagement (adjusted $R^2 = .280$). However, only autonomy support emerged as a significant unique predictor ($\beta = .269$, $p = .005$), while emotional support ($\beta = .114$, $p = .380$) and competence support ($\beta = .182$, $p = .138$) did not reach significance when entered simultaneously. This suggests that the three sub-dimensions share substantial variance (inter-correlations rs = .70-.77), and it is primarily the autonomy-supportive aspect of teacher behavior that uniquely contributes to students' agentic engagement.

4.6.3 Individual Teacher Support Sub-dimensions → Agentic Engagement

To further explore the predictive patterns, separate simple regressions were conducted for each teacher support sub-dimension predicting overall agentic engagement. Autonomy support ($R^2 = .264$, $\beta = .514$, $F[1, 285] = 102.476$), emotional support ($R^2 = .255$, $\beta = .505$, $F[1, 285] = 97.514$), and competence support ($R^2 = .256$, $\beta = .506$, $F[1, 285] = 98.094$) each individually predicted agentic engagement with comparable effect sizes, confirming that the three sub-dimensions contribute similarly to agentic engagement when considered in isolation.

4.7 Group Differences (RQ4)

4.7.1 Gender Differences

Independent-samples t tests were conducted to examine gender differences in agentic engagement and perceived teacher support (see **Table 7**).

Table 7 *Gender Differences in Agentic Engagement and Perceived Teacher Support*

Variable	Male M	Male SD	Female M	Female SD	t	p
AE total	3.21	0.85	3.22	0.70	−0.099	.921
Self-directed effort	3.56	0.97	3.58	0.82	−0.182	.856
Helping teacher	2.57	1.11	2.50	0.87	0.579	.563

Cooperating	3.50	0.89	3.49	0.88	0.114	.909
Helping classmates	3.20	1.13	3.29	0.84	−0.840	.402
TS total	4.10	0.72	3.98	0.69	1.391	.165

Note. Male n = 105; Female n = 182.

No significant gender differences were found for any agentic engagement dimension or perceived teacher support (all ps > .16), suggesting that male and female students reported comparable levels of both agentic engagement and teacher support.

4.7.2 Major Differences

Given that engineering (54.7%) and arts (34.8%) students constituted the vast majority of the sample, an exploratory comparison was conducted between these two groups. Engineering students reported significantly higher agentic engagement (M = 3.29, SD = 0.77) than arts students (M = 3.03, SD = 0.71), t(255) = 2.664, p = .008. Similarly, engineering students perceived significantly more teacher support (M = 4.14, SD = 0.71) than arts students (M = 3.77, SD = 0.66), t(255) = 4.259, p < .001. These differences suggest that the academic discipline context may shape both students' engagement patterns and their perceptions of instructional support.

V. DISCUSSION

This study investigated the relationship between perceived teacher support and agentic engagement among Chinese non-English major freshmen in EFL classrooms, drawing on self-determination theory as the guiding framework. The findings reveal several noteworthy patterns that contribute to the understanding of how teacher support relates to students' proactive engagement in language learning.

5.1 Moderate Agentic Engagement with a Distinct Profile

The overall agentic engagement mean of 3.21 on a 5-point scale indicates that participants were moderately engaged in agentive behaviors, but with substantial room for improvement. The dimensional profile revealed a clear hierarchy: self-directed effort scored highest, followed by cooperating with teacher, helping classmates, and helping teacher with instruction, which was markedly lowest. This pattern suggests that students were more comfortable with self-regulated and compliant forms of engagement than with behaviors requiring proactive initiative toward the teacher or the instructional process.

The particularly low score on the "helping teacher with instruction" dimension (M = 2.52) is a notable finding. Items such as "providing the teacher with materials" (M = 2.37) and "offering teaching suggestions" (M = 2.49) were endorsed at below-midpoint levels, indicating that the majority of students rarely engaged in these behaviors. This likely reflects the traditional teacher-centered orientation of Chinese EFL classrooms, where students perceive the teacher as the authoritative knowledge provider and are reluctant to offer unsolicited instructional contributions (Guo & Li, 2018). The cultural norm of respecting teacher authority, while fostering cooperative behaviors, may inadvertently suppress the proactive, teacher-directed aspects of agentic engagement.

5.2 Moderately High Teacher Support Perceptions

Participants perceived a moderately high level of teacher support (M = 4.02), with the three sub-dimensions scoring nearly identically (4.01–4.03). This suggests that students generally felt their English teachers were supportive across autonomy, emotional, and competence dimensions. However, the relatively lower ratings on "teacher knows students well" (M = 3.83) and "teacher provides choices and opportunities" (M = 3.92) point to specific areas where teacher support could be strengthened. In large Chinese university EFL classes, which often enroll 40–60 students, developing individualized relationships and providing differentiated autonomy opportunities present practical challenges.

5.3 Teacher Support as a Significant Predictor of Agentic Engagement

The central finding of this study is that perceived teacher support significantly predicted agentic engagement, accounting for 28.6% of its variance (β = .534). This finding aligns with the theoretical predictions of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which holds that supportive social environments facilitate the internalization of motivation and the emergence of proactive engagement behaviors. It also extends Reeve's (2013) argument that teacher-created conditions are pivotal for agentic engagement by providing empirical evidence from the EFL context.

Among the four agentic engagement dimensions, cooperating with teacher was most strongly predicted by teacher support (R^2 = .355, β = .596). This is conceptually coherent: when students perceive their teacher as supportive—offering choices, demonstrating care, and providing clear expectations—they are more likely to

respond with attentive, compliant, and cooperative classroom behaviors. The strong predictive link between teacher support and cooperation resonates with the well-documented finding that teacher warmth and structure elicit responsive student engagement (Skinner & Belmont, 1993).

The weakest (though still significant) prediction was for helping teacher with instruction (R^2 = .142, β = .377). This dimension's low mean and modest predictability suggest that even when students perceive strong teacher support, their proactive instructional contributions remain limited. This may indicate that additional factors beyond teacher support—such as students' self-efficacy beliefs about their instructional competence (Bandura, 1997), their perception of the teacher's receptiveness to student input, or institutional norms regarding student–teacher roles—play a role in shaping this particular form of agentic engagement.

5.4 Autonomy Support as the Key Unique Predictor

The multiple regression analysis revealed that among the three teacher support sub-dimensions, only autonomy support emerged as a significant unique predictor of agentic engagement (β = .269, p = .005). Emotional support and competence support, while individually correlated with agentic engagement at comparable levels (rs = .505–.514), did not contribute unique variance when entered alongside autonomy support. This is likely because the three sub-dimensions are highly intercorrelated (rs = .70–.77), and autonomy support captured the shared variance most effectively.

Theoretically, this finding underscores the particular relevance of autonomy support for agentic engagement. By definition, agentic engagement involves students taking initiative and making constructive contributions to the instructional process—behaviors that are fundamentally autonomous in nature (Reeve, 2013). When teachers provide choices, respect student perspectives, and encourage self-initiated learning, they create the psychological conditions that make agentive action feel safe, valued, and self-congruent. This finding has direct implications for EFL pedagogy: instructors who wish to foster students' proactive engagement should prioritize autonomy-supportive practices such as soliciting student input on course content, offering flexible assignment options, and encouraging learners to set personal learning goals.

5.5 No Gender Differences, but Major Differences

The absence of gender differences in agentic engagement and perceived teacher support is consistent with some prior research suggesting that engagement patterns in L2 learning are shaped more by instructional context and motivational factors than by gender per se. The finding that engineering students reported higher agentic engagement and teacher support than arts students is intriguing and warrants further investigation. One possible explanation is that engineering students, whose curricula typically emphasize structured problem-solving, may perceive the relatively systematic nature of EFL instruction as more supportive, or that EFL courses within engineering departments are taught differently from those in arts departments.

5.6 Pedagogical Implications

Based on the findings, several pedagogical recommendations can be offered for EFL instructors teaching non-English major students in Chinese universities. First, teachers should actively create opportunities for students to exercise agency in the classroom, such as inviting students to suggest topics for discussion, co-design assessment criteria, or lead warm-up activities. These practices directly address the "helping teacher with instruction" dimension, which was identified as the weakest aspect of agentic engagement. Second, autonomy-supportive teaching behaviors should be prioritized, as this dimension was the only unique predictor of agentic engagement. Concrete strategies include providing meaningful choices in assignment topics, encouraging students to set their own learning goals, and acknowledging students' perspectives when making instructional decisions. Third, teachers should attend to building individualized relationships with students—the relatively low rating on "teacher knows students well" suggests room for improvement in this area.

5.7 Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the sample was drawn from a single university and consisted entirely of first-year students, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other institutions, grade levels, and educational contexts. Future research should employ multi-site sampling and include students from different academic years. Second, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inferences; although the regression analyses demonstrated predictive associations, the direction of the relationship between teacher support and agentic engagement may be bidirectional. Longitudinal or experimental designs would strengthen causal claims. Third, all data were collected via self-report, which is subject to social desirability bias and common method variance. Future studies could incorporate observational measures of agentic engagement or collect teacher-report data to triangulate findings. Fourth, this study examined only teacher support as a predictor; other potentially important factors such as peer support, self-efficacy,

classroom environment, and individual differences in motivation were not included. A more comprehensive model integrating multiple predictors and potential mediators would advance understanding of the mechanisms underlying agentic engagement in EFL learning. Finally, the relatively large inter-correlations among the teacher support sub-dimensions suggest potential multicollinearity concerns in the multiple regression; future research with larger samples might employ structural equation modeling to more precisely estimate the unique and shared contributions of each support dimension.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between perceived teacher support and agentic engagement among 287 Chinese non-English major freshmen in EFL classrooms. The findings revealed that students' agentic engagement was at a moderate level, with proactive contributions to instruction being particularly limited. Perceived teacher support was moderately high and significantly predicted agentic engagement, accounting for 28.6% of its variance. Among the three teacher support dimensions, autonomy support was the only significant unique predictor. No gender differences were observed, but engineering students reported higher agentic engagement and teacher support than arts students. These findings contribute to the growing body of research on student engagement in L2 learning and offer practical guidance for EFL educators seeking to foster more proactive and agentive forms of student participation. Grounded in self-determination theory, the study underscores the importance of autonomy-supportive teaching practices in nurturing learners' initiative, constructive contributions, and active engagement in the foreign language classroom.

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Once Upon a Timeline: Storytelling as a Pedagogy of Listening and Speaking for Generation Z and Generation Alpha Learners

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Abstract— *Listening and speaking remain the least systematically taught skills in many school English classrooms, precisely as they become the skills most demanded of a generation formed by voice, video, and participatory media. This conceptual article argues that oral storytelling the oldest of language-teaching technologies is uniquely suited to developing the aural–oral competence of Generation Z and Generation Alpha learners, provided it is redesigned around what is actually known about these cohorts rather than around popular myths of digital nativity and collapsing attention spans. The article first audits generational claims against the critical literature, retaining three defensible design constraints: multimodal habituation, participatory expectation, and an everyday vernacular of micro-narrative (stories, reels, streams). It then grounds storytelling pedagogy in narrative psychology and second language acquisition theory, synthesising evidence that live telling outperforms reading aloud for oral-language growth, and maps established techniques story-listening, dictogloss, retelling, fluency cycles, digital storytelling onto listening and speaking development. The article's central contribution is the Story Cycle for Screen-Native Learners (SCSNL), a six-stage pedagogical framework (Hook, Tell, Reconstruct, Remix, Perform, Reflect) that moves learners from scaffolded narrative listening to increasingly autonomous speaking and publication. A concluding research agenda specifies a mixed-methods quasi-experimental design, with validated instruments, through which the framework's claims can be empirically tested.*

Keywords— ***storytelling, listening, speaking, Generation Z, Generation Alpha, digital storytelling, oral skills pedagogy, ELT***

I. INTRODUCTION: THE OLDEST TECHNOLOGY MEETS THE NEWEST LEARNERS

Every language classroom contains a paradox. The learners in it belong to the most story-saturated generations in human history children and adolescents who consume and produce narrative continuously through short-form video, streams, games, memes, and the aptly named "stories" of social platforms and yet the skills through which stories primarily live, listening and speaking, remain the least systematically taught components of most school English curricula. Reading and writing dominate assessment and therefore instruction; listening is widely reduced to test-format comprehension exercises, and speaking to occasional, anxiety-laden performance (Goh & Burns, 2012; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). The result, familiar to teachers across English-as-a-second/foreign-language contexts, is the learner who can parse a passage but cannot hold a conversation, who has studied English for a decade and dreads being asked to speak it for a minute.

This article argues that the most promising response to this paradox is also the oldest technology in the pedagogical repertoire: the told story. Storytelling predates literacy as humanity's primary instrument for transmitting language, and a substantial pedagogical literature from Wright (2008) and Ellis and Brewster (2014) to Wajnryb

(2003) and Heathfield (2014) has long documented its power in the language classroom. What that literature has not yet fully absorbed, however, is the arrival of learners whose relationship to narrative, attention, and audience has been reshaped by the media ecology into which they were born: Generation Z (born approximately 1997–2012), now filling secondary and tertiary classrooms, and Generation Alpha (born from about 2010), now filling primary ones. Popular discourse about these cohorts oscillates between celebration (digital natives, natural multitaskers) and panic (eight-second attention spans, screen-ruined minds); neither pole, this article will show, survives scholarly scrutiny, and a storytelling pedagogy built on either would be built on sand.

The argument therefore proceeds in three movements. First, it audits the generational literature to extract design constraints that are actually defensible: multimodal habituation, participatory expectation, and fluency in a vernacular of micro-narrative. Second, it grounds storytelling in narrative psychology and second language acquisition (SLA) theory and maps its established techniques onto the specific mechanics of listening and speaking development. Third, it integrates these strands into an original framework the Story Cycle for Screen-Native Learners (SCSNL) and specifies the empirical research design through which the framework's claims should be tested. The article is thus conceptual in genre: it builds no new data, but it builds, from existing evidence, both a teachable model and a testable one.

II. WHO IS ACTUALLY IN THE ROOM? GENERATION Z, GENERATION ALPHA, AND THE MYTHS THAT MISLEAD PEDAGOGY

Any pedagogy addressed to “modern kids” must first decide what it believes about them, and here the scholarly ground is treacherous. The most influential framing, Prensky's (2001) declaration that a generation of “digital natives” had arrived whose brains and learning styles differed fundamentally from those of their “digital immigrant” teachers, has been comprehensively dismantled: reviewing two decades of evidence, Kirschner and De Bruyckere (2017) conclude that the digital native who learns differently, and the effective multitasker, are myths information-savvy behaviour does not follow automatically from growing up with devices, and multitasking measurably degrades learning for the young as for the old. The companion panic is equally suspect. The endlessly recycled claim that attention spans have collapsed to eight seconds traces to a misattributed marketing report, not to psychological science; Bradbury (2016) shows that even the venerable “ten-minute rule” for lectures rests on weak evidence, and that attention is a function of task design and engagement far more than of generational neurology. A storytelling pedagogy premised on either myth on effortless digital genius or on goldfish attention would misdesign itself from the start.

What, then, survives audit? Three characteristics appear robust enough to serve as design constraints. The first is multimodal habituation: whatever their cognitive continuity with earlier cohorts, Generation Z and Alpha learners have overwhelmingly formed their media habits in environments where sound, image, text, and interaction co-occur (Seemiller & Grace, 2016), which makes principled multimodality governed by the evidence-based principles of multimedia learning rather than by decoration (Mayer, 2009) a reasonable default. The second is participatory expectation: these learners have grown up inside what Jenkins (2006) calls convergence and participatory culture, in which audiences expect to respond, remix, and republish rather than merely receive; Gee's (2003) analysis of games reaches the same conclusion from a different direction the media that hold these learners position them as actors, not spectators. The third is vernacular micro-narrative competence: the daily genres of this cohort the story, the reel, the stream highlight, the meme-thread are narrative genres, compressed, serialised, hook-driven, and socially addressed. Far from arriving story-poor, the screen-native learner arrives with a tacit narratology; the pedagogical task is to transfer that competence from thumb to tongue and ear. Finally, the affective literature (Twenge, 2017) counsels care: reported rises in adolescent anxiety argue for speaking pedagogies that build performance gradually from low-stakes, well-scaffolded participation rather than demanding exposed solo display.

III. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS: WHY STORIES TEACH LANGUAGE

The claim that storytelling deserves the centre of oral-skills pedagogy rests on two converging bodies of theory. The first is narrative psychology. Bruner (1986, 1991) distinguishes narrative thought as one of the two irreducible modes of human cognition and argues that reality itself is largely constructed and communicated narratively; Fisher (1987) generalises the point into a paradigm of humans as *homo narrans*, evaluating all communication through narrative probability and fidelity; and Egan (1986) translates it into curriculum, showing that the story form binary tension, affective engagement, resolution is the child's most powerful native instrument for organising meaning. If narrative is the mind's default format, then narrative input and output are not enrichment

activities; they are language teaching conducted in the mind's own file format.

The second body of theory is SLA proper, and its classic constructs align with storytelling to an almost suspicious degree. Krashen's (1982) comprehensible input is delivered by the told story under near-ideal conditions: a live teller calibrates pace, gesture, repetition, and paraphrase to the faces in front of her, achieving the i+1 adjustment that no recording can. Swain's (1995) output hypothesis that learners acquire by being pushed to produce, noticing the gaps in their competence is operationalised naturally by retelling, which obliges precisely such stretched production within a supportive frame. Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development describes exactly the architecture of guided retelling and joint storytelling, in which narrative structure and peer collaboration scaffold performance beyond solo capacity. And the empirical record, though thinner than one would wish, points the right way: in the study most often cited, Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer, and Lowrance (2004) found that young children exposed to live storytelling outperformed a story-*reading* group on oral language complexity and comprehension suggesting that the telling itself, with its eye contact, prosody, and co-presence, carries measurable value over and above the text.

IV. STORYTELLING AND THE LISTENING SKILL

Listening pedagogy has moved decisively from testing comprehension to teaching the process of comprehending the metacognitive turn associated with Vandergrift and Goh (2012) and Rost (2016), in which learners plan, monitor, and evaluate their own listening. Stories are the ideal texts for this pedagogy for reasons intrinsic to their form. Narrative schema the tacit knowledge that stories have characters with goals, obstacles, attempts, and outcomes gives the listener a predictive scaffold that expository text lacks: the learner who loses lexical footing can re-anchor on structure, and prediction (What will the third brother do?) becomes both a comprehension strategy and a source of suspense. Repetition, formula, and refrain the deep grammar of oral tale-telling supply the natural redundancy that second language listeners need without the artificiality of a replayed recording. Prosody does organise work: the teller's voice marks episode boundaries, signals character, and carries emotion, training exactly the paralinguistic decoding that test-audio starves. And crucially, a told story is listening with a face: learners watch meaning being made with gesture and gaze, recruiting the visual channel in the disciplined way Mayer's (2009) principles endorse.

Technique translates these affordances into procedure. In story-listening, the teacher tells (never reads) a tale, supporting comprehension with board drawings and brief glosses, with no comprehension test to follow listening for the story's sake, building implicit competence and, no less importantly, rehabilitating listening as pleasure. In dictogloss (Wajnryb, 2003), learners hear a short narrative at natural speed, jot fragmentary notes, and then, in pairs, reconstruct the text an activity that converts listening into collaborative noticing and grammaring, and which sits precisely at the junction of input and output theory. In the circling techniques of story-based methods such as TPR Storytelling (Ray & Seely, 2015), the teller pauses to ask layered questions that recycle the story's language in comprehensible variation. Across all of these, the metacognitive cycle applies: learners predict before the telling, monitor during it, and evaluate after it turning each tale into a complete lesson in how to listen.

V. STORYTELLING AND THE SPEAKING SKILL

Speaking pedagogy's central problem is that fluency, accuracy, and complexity compete for limited attention (Housen & Kuiken, 2009), and that classroom speaking tasks too often maximise anxiety while minimising redesign of the learner's resources. Goh and Burns (2012) answer with a teaching-speaking cycle—focus attention, provide input, conduct speaking tasks, focus on language, repeat the task, direct reflection and storytelling populates every station of that cycle naturally. The told story provides rich input and a model of performance; retelling provides the speaking task; the narrative frame provides the repeatable structure that makes task repetition meaningful rather than mechanical. Nation's (1989) classic 4/3/2 procedure in which the learner tells the same story to successive partners in four, then three, then two minutes remains the best-evidenced fluency treatment in the literature precisely because narrative is its vehicle: familiar content frees attention for faster, smoother formulation, and the shrinking clock converts repetition into pressure toward automaticity.

Beyond retelling lies a graded repertoire. Story completion and alternative endings push learners from reproduction toward creation while keeping the scaffold of the received tale. Perspective retelling the wolf's version, the servant's version demands genuine reformulation, exercising complexity. Personal narrative tasks (a time you were brave; the story of your name) migrate the skills to the learner's own life, where storytelling becomes identity work and, in Swain's (1995) terms, output with the highest stakes of noticing. Story circles distribute performance across a

group, lowering the affective cost of the floor—an explicit answer to the anxiety profile of the cohort discussed above. Throughout, the story frame does for the speaker what schema did for the listener: it tells the learner what to say next at the level of structure, so that attention can go to how to say it at the level of language.

VI. THE DIGITAL TURN: FROM CAMPFIRE TO TIMELINE

The storytelling classroom does not have to choose between the campfire and the screen; the digital storytelling movement has spent two decades demonstrating their synthesis. In the classic model of Lambert (2013) and its educational elaboration by Robin (2008), learners script, voice, and assemble short multimedia narratives; the empirical literature, though heterogeneous, associates the practice with engagement and learning gains Sadik (2008) with engaged deep learning in ordinary school conditions, and Yang and Wu (2012), in a year-long experimental study, with significant improvement in achievement, critical thinking, and motivation among English learners. For oral-skills purposes, the crucial component is the voiceover: recording narration externalises the learner's speech as an editable object, inviting exactly the monitoring, re-recording, and self-evaluation that fluent speech requires but real-time speaking never permits. The class podcast and the narrated video are, in this sense, pronunciation and fluency laboratories disguised as media production.

Two further features of the current media ecology deserve pedagogical capture rather than prohibition. The first is the platform vernacular itself: the sixty-second story arc of the reel and the serialized episode of the stream are legitimate target genres compressed narrative forms whose discipline (hook fast, cut ruthlessly, land the turn) maps remarkably well onto the classical economy of the folktale, and whose social address gives classroom speech an audience beyond the teacher, the condition Jenkins (2006) identifies as the engine of participatory motivation. The second is the arrival of generative artificial intelligence as a story partner. Used with care, conversational AI can serve as an inexhaustible co-teller generating tale variants for remixing, playing a character for interview, or providing a low-stakes interlocutor for rehearsal before human performance; used carelessly, it can silently replace the very production the pedagogy exists to elicit. The design principle proposed here is therefore strict: machines may supply *input* and *interaction*, but the culminating telling—voiced, embodied, owned—must remain the learner's own.

VII. THE STORY CYCLE FOR SCREEN-NATIVE LEARNERS (SCSNL): A FRAMEWORK

The strands of the argument can now be braided into a single teachable model. The Story Cycle for Screen-Native Learners is a six-stage sequence designed to carry a class from scaffolded narrative listening to autonomous narrative speaking within a unit of two to five lessons, honouring the three design constraints established in Section 2 principled multimodality, participation, and micro-narrative form while embodying the theoretical machinery of Sections 3 through 6. Stage one, *Hook*, opens with a compressed multimodal prompt in the cohort's own vernacular an image, a six-second clip, a one-line mystery from which learners predict the coming story, activating schema and committing attention before a word of the tale is heard. Stage two, *Tell*, is deliberately counter-cultural: the teacher tells the story live, screens dark, with voice, gesture, and drawing as the only media—the stage at which comprehensible input, prosodic training, and the sheer novelty (for this cohort) of unmediated human narration do their work. Stage three, *Reconstruct*, converts reception into collaboration: through dictogloss, sequencing, or paired retelling, learners rebuild the tale from notes and memory, negotiating language in the zone of proximal development.

Stage four, *Remix*, hands the story over: individually or in groups, learners transform it new ending, new era, the villain's perspective, a genre-shift into news report or chat thread exercising the participatory reflex on narrative material and pushing output toward complexity. Stage five, *Perform*, returns the story to voice under graduated stakes: a 4/3/2 fluency cycle first, then a story circle, and finally, where feasible, publication a class podcast episode, a narrated video, a telling recorded for families so that speech acquires a real audience and the platform vernacular becomes a target genre rather than a distraction. Stage six, *Reflect*, closes the metacognitive loop: learners replay their recordings, compare early and late tellings, and set listening and speaking goals for the next cycle, making the process of oral learning itself an explicit object of attention (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Assessment across the cycle should triangulate: comprehension and reconstruction accuracy for listening; fluency measures such as speech rate and pausing, alongside complexity and accuracy indices (Housen & Kuiken, 2009), for speaking; and self-report of willingness to communicate (MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément, & Noels, 1998) for the affective dimension the framework claims to improve.

VIII. FROM FRAMEWORK TO EVIDENCE: A RESEARCH AGENDA

A conceptual proposal earns its place only by specifying its own test, and the SCSNL is designed to be tested. The natural first study is a mixed-methods quasi-experimental design in intact classes: an experimental group taught listening and speaking through the full cycle for one term against a comparison group receiving the standard coursebook treatment, with pre- and post-measures on three families of instruments standardised listening comprehension tests; elicited oral narratives scored for complexity, accuracy, and fluency (Housen & Kuiken, 2009); and the willingness-to-communicate scale (MacIntyre et al., 1998) supplemented by classroom observation and learner interviews to capture the participatory and affective processes that numbers alone will miss. Predictions are explicit and falsifiable: the framework predicts advantages in fluency and willingness to communicate first, comprehension gains second, and accuracy effects last if at all. Necessary refinements follow naturally: component studies isolating the live-telling stage against video-mediated telling (extending Isbell et al., 2004, to adolescents); age-graded comparisons between Generation Z secondary learners and Generation Alpha primary learners; and, urgently, studies in large-class South and Southeast Asian school contexts, where oral skills are most neglected and where the storytelling traditions available for classroom use are richest. Research with minors will require, throughout, parental consent, assent procedures, and careful handling of recorded voice data.

IX. CONCLUSION

The argument of this article can be told, fittingly, as a story. A generation arrived that lived inside narrative as no generation before it, narrating its days in stories, reels, and streams yet its classrooms went on teaching language as text, and its listening and speaking withered on the examination vine. The mistake was to believe two myths about these learners: that screens had made them either superhuman or broken. The truth was simpler and more useful: they were multimodal, participatory, and fluent in micro-narrative and there existed, in the oldest layer of the teacher's craft, a technology perfectly shaped for exactly such learners. The told tale delivers comprehensible input with a human face; the retold tale converts input to output under the gentlest of pressures; the remixed tale turns participation from distraction into curriculum; and the published tale gives the learner's voice what it never had in the classroom an audience. The Story Cycle for Screen-Native Learners formalises this sequence and hands it to research for judgement. If the framework survives that judgement, the conclusion will be a pleasing one: that the way forward for the newest learners was, all along, the way stories have always been passed on by someone who listened well, learning to tell.

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Prognosis without Verdict: Clinical Judgement and the Endings of Keats's Odes of 1819

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Abstract— *Criticism of Keats's odes has been overwhelmingly diagnostic. It asks what the poems know, and it reads their endings as limits of knowledge or of feeling. This essay argues that the endings are better described as prognostic. Keats was examined on semeiotics, the branch of the medical institutes that divided signs into the diagnostic and the prognostic, and he served as a dresser at Guy's Hospital, where the case report is a genre that by convention does not conclude. We reconstruct five terminal moves available to a Georgian clinical case, state a formal criterion for locating the terminal move of a poem, and apply that criterion to the six odes of 1819 and to a control set of five odes published between 1746 and 1820. Five of the six odes fall within the clinical repertoire. "Ode on a Grecian Urn" does not, and we argue that the long editorial quarrel over the quotation marks in its last two lines is a quarrel about who signs the note. The control odes end in maxim, benediction, or consolation. We propose prognostic suspension as a category of lyric closure absent from Barbara Herrnstein Smith's taxonomy: formal closure completed, judgement withheld.*

Keywords— ***John Keats, the 1819 odes, prognosis, lyric closure, Georgian medicine, semeiotics, predictive processing***

I. INTRODUCTION

Almost every influential account of Keats's odes is, at bottom, an account of how they stop. M. H. Abrams described the greater Romantic lyric as a round trip that returns the speaker to his starting place, altered. Helen Vendler read the six poems of 1819 as a developmental sequence in which each ending corrects the one before. Susan Wolfson found in their closing gestures a form under interrogative pressure, unable to settle the questions it has raised. Anahid Nersessian reads the endings as erotic rather than epistemological, the last movement of a discourse addressed to something that will not answer. These accounts disagree about a great deal. They agree that the endings are events in the history of knowing or feeling, and that what happens at the close of "Ode to a Nightingale" is that a mind reaches a limit.

There is another vocabulary for what happens at the end of these poems, and it was in Keats's hands before he wrote them. In a single page on Moneta in *The Fall of Hyperion*, Vendler notices that "the tone of the medical diagnostician is present," and that Keats offers "a diagnosis" and then "a prognosis" for a face he has just described (214). She does not pursue the observation, and she does not carry it into the odes. Nor has anyone else. The word prognosis occurs once in Vendler's book, in that sentence, and passes almost unremarked in Donald Goellnicht's and Hermione de Almeida's studies of Keats and medicine, both of which are otherwise exhaustive on pathology, therapeutics, and the physiology of the vital principle. The most heavily worked seam in Keats studies has an unopened branch running off it.

The branch matters because prognosis is not a subspecies of diagnosis. In the medical teaching Keats sat through between 1815 and 1816, the doctrine of signs, semeiotics, was conventionally divided into the diagnostic, which reads the signs to name the present state, and the

prognostic, which reads the same signs to say what will follow. The two are different intellectual acts with different risks. A diagnosis can be checked against the body in front of you. A prognosis is a judgement about an event that has not occurred, made from evidence that is always insufficient, and it was a point of professional discipline to withhold it when the signs did not warrant it. Ode criticism has been diagnostic all along. It has asked what state the poem is in. The odes, this essay argues, are prognostic, and the famous inconclusiveness of their endings is not a failure of knowledge but the observance of a rule about when judgement may be given.

What follows sets out five terminal moves available to a Georgian clinical case, applies them to the six odes of 1819, tests the result against a control set of odes from Collins to Shelley, and proposes a category of lyric closure that Barbara Herrnstein Smith's taxonomy does not contain. No claim is made that Keats consciously borrowed a professional genre. The claim is about a repertoire of endings that was available to him and to almost no other poet of the period.

II. METHOD

The procedure has three stages, and it is designed so that a reader can disagree with the results by rerunning it.

Stage one: reconstructing the terminal grammar of the case. Georgian case writing is a small, rule-bound genre. The Guy's reporting conventions Keats worked under as a dresser to William Lucas from March 1816, the semeiotic division of the medical institutes, and the practical instruction in Keats's own *Anatomical and Physiological Note Book* together yield a short list of ways a case may be brought to a stop. Cullen's *First Lines of the Practice of Physic*, the standard text of the period, supplies the terminology of crisis and of the constitutional predicate on which a prognosis is conditioned. Five terminal moves emerge:

1. **Crisis undeclared.** The note ends at the turning point, with the outcome unnamed.
2. **Prognosis declared.** A future-tense statement of outcome, conditioned on the patient's constitution.
3. **Regimen prescribed.** A course of treatment is set out and the outcome deferred to its observance.
4. **Discharge.** The patient is dismissed; the case is closed without a cure being claimed.
5. **Signs recorded, judgement withheld.** Observation continues to the last line and no inference is drawn from it.

These five were derived from the medical sources before the poems were consulted. That order matters: a grid fitted to six poems will always fit six poems.

Stage two: locating the terminal move. A poem's terminal move is taken to begin at the last change in dominant verb mood, and is classified by three features that can be checked without interpretation: the mood and tense of the final finite verb, the person addressed at the close, and whether an outcome is named. This is a deliberately thin criterion. It will misdescribe poems whose semantic drift runs against their grammar, and it is offered because it is falsifiable, not because it is subtle.

Stage three: control. The same criterion is applied to five odes outside the sample, chosen for formal comparability and spread across the tradition Keats inherited: Collins's "Ode to Evening" (1746), Gray's "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College" (1747), Coleridge's "Dejection: An Ode" (1802), Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" (1807), and Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" (written 1819). If the control odes distribute across the same five moves, the historical claim collapses into a description of the ode as such and the argument fails. So it does if three or more of the six odes resist classification. Quotations follow Jack Stillinger's edition of the poems.

III. RESULTS

Crisis undeclared: "Ode to a Nightingale." The poem is an act of listening to something that cannot be seen. "Darkling I listen" (line 51) states the situation exactly: the observer is in the dark, the source of the sign is hidden, and everything must be inferred from sound. What ends the poem is not the departure of the bird but the arrival of two questions. "Was it a vision, or a waking dream? / Fled is that music: Do I wake or sleep?" (79-80). The final finite verbs are interrogative and present-tense, the addressee has shifted from the bird to nobody, and no outcome is named. This is the note that stops at the crisis. The patient has turned; whether he has turned towards recovery is not stated, and cannot be, because the observer is the patient.

Prognosis declared: "Ode on Melancholy." This is the only ode of the six that names an outcome, and it names it in the exact grammar of a Georgian prognosis. The first stanza is a proscription, a list of things not to be done: not Lethe, not wolf's-bane, not the yew-berries. The third stanza then supplies a constitutional predicate, "him whose strenuous tongue / Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine" (27-28), and only for that constitution does it declare the sequel: "His soul shall taste the sadness of her might, / And be among her cloudy trophies hung" (29-30). A prognosis in Cullen's manner is never unconditional; it is

always predicated on the patient's idiosyncrasy. Keats's *shall* is the modal of a physician who has established the constitution first and will commit himself only that far. The trophy hung in the shrine is, in the same breath, a votive offering and a specimen retained.

Regimen prescribed: "Ode to Psyche." The turn comes at "Yes, I will be thy priest, and build a fane / In some untrodden region of my mind" (50-51), after which the poem becomes an inventory of provisions. What it provides is a regimen in the technical sense: a controlled environment, listed item by item, on which an outcome is made to depend. The last two lines are the most literal instance of it in Keats. "A bright torch, and a casement ope at night, / To let the warm Love in" (66-67) prescribes light, warmth, and ventilation, which is precisely the triad of Georgian hospital management of a convalescent room. Nothing is promised. The provisions are set out and the poem stops.

Discharge: "Ode on Indolence." The three figures are examined, characterised, and dismissed. "Vanish, ye Phantoms! from my idle spright, / Into the clouds, and never more return!" (59-60). The final finite verbs are imperative, the addressee is the object under observation, and no outcome is named for anyone. The speaker has not been cured of indolence, and the poem does not claim he has been. He has closed the case.

Signs recorded, judgement withheld: "To Autumn." The poem's one interpretive statement, "Think not of them, thou hast thy music too" (24), is made before the evidence rather than after it, and is not repeated. Everything that follows is a catalogue of signs with their locations and times: gnats in the sallows, lambs from the hilly bourn, crickets in the hedge, the redbreast in a garden-croft, and then "gathering swallows twitter in the skies" (33). Every reader converts the gathering into an omen of departure. The poem does not. The last finite verb is a third-person present indicative describing an observed event, the addressee has been dropped, and no outcome is named. This is the case note that runs to the end of the page still recording.

The unsigned note: "Ode on a Grecian Urn." The fifth ode does not fit, and its refusal is the most interesting result here. Its ending contains a declared judgement, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" (49), which ought to place it under move two. But the judgement is not the speaker's, and the poem will not say whose it is. Immediately before it the speaker has called the urn a "Cold Pastoral" and said it "dost tease us out of thought" (45, 44), which is a refusal of inference; immediately after it, the maxim is bracketed by "that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know" (49-50), which frames a verdict without endorsing it. The result is a note that carries a judgement and no signature. That the crux has been fought over for a century as a question of where the quotation marks belong is, on this reading, not an accident of Keats's manuscripts. Editors have been arguing about attribution of judgement, which is exactly what a case note exists to fix and this poem declines to fix.

Control. The comparison is not close. Gray ends in a maxim of general application: "where ignorance is bliss, / 'Tis folly to be wise." Collins ends in a hymnic declaration of the powers that own Evening's influence. Wordsworth ends in a declared consolation, thoughts lying too deep for tears, which names the outcome of the poem's whole crisis. Coleridge ends in benediction, a wish directed at the Lady and completed as a wish. Shelley's ode, written in the same autumn as "To Autumn," ends in a question, "If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?", which looks like Keats's terminal interrogative and is not: it is a rhetorical question with a fixed answer, a prognosis in interrogative dress. Four of the five control poems end by naming an outcome, and the fifth ends by naming one while pretending to ask. None of the five falls into moves one, three, four, or five.

IV. DISCUSSION

The immediate consequence is that the odes' endings stop looking like a symptom and start looking like a competence. A poem that ends at an undeclared crisis, or that records signs and draws nothing from them, is doing what a trained observer does when the evidence does not license a judgement. Vendler's developmental reading requires the endings to be stages in an education; Wolfson's requires them to register a pressure that form cannot contain. Both treat withholding as something that happens to the poem. On the present account it is something the poem performs, and performs from a repertoire.

The reading also does not require the six odes to be a designed sequence, which is fortunate, since that has been disputed for decades and cannot be settled from the manuscripts. Five terminal moves distributed across six poems is a paradigm, not a narrative. The poems need not have been written in the order of an argument for them to exhaust a set of options.

A corollary follows for negative capability, and it should be stated cautiously, because that phrase has attracted more commentary than it can bear and Li Ou has shown how much of it repeats itself. Keats described the quality as being "capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason" (*Letters* 1: 193). Read against the semeiotic training he had just completed, this is a recognisable professional description. The irritable reacher, in a hospital, is the practitioner who names the outcome before the crisis has declared itself, and who is wrong in a way that costs.

The letter has usually been read as aesthetics or as epistemology. It also reads as a description of prognostic restraint, transferred from a ward to a poem.

For lyric theory the contribution is a category. Barbara Herrnstein Smith's account of poetic closure distinguishes between poems that achieve closure and poems that resist it, and her devices of closure are almost all devices for signalling that a judgement has been reached: the maxim, the terminal repetition, the return to an opening term. The odes of 1819 do something her taxonomy has no name for. They complete their closure signals in full, the stanza filled out, the rhyme scheme discharged, the syntax resolved, while declining the judgement those signals conventionally carry. Call this prognostic suspension: formal closure completed, verdict withheld. It is not open form, and it is not irony. It is the shape of a document that has been properly finished by someone who is not yet entitled to conclude.

Modern cognitive vocabulary describes the reader's side of this well, and should be used for that and no more. Karin Kukkonen's account of probability design and Andy Clark's account of precision-weighting both describe a reader running predictions and adjusting them against error. Genre convention raises the precision of a reader's predictions sharply at the close of an ode, because the tradition Collins and Gray and Wordsworth had built promises a maxim there. Keats's endings arrive at that point of maximum expectation and supply no verdict to check the prediction against. The prediction cannot be confirmed or corrected, only held. That is an accurate description of the reading experience, but it is the period's own word, prognosis, that names what the poems are doing, and the modern terminology should stay in a subordinate position.

Three limits. First, "Ode to Psyche" is the weakest case: its closing inventory is also a hymnic peroration of the kind Collins writes, and a sceptical reader may reasonably classify it with the control set. Second, six poems and five controls is a small sample, and the criterion in stage two is coarse by design. Third, the historical warrant is circumstantial throughout. Keats's surviving case-related writing is thin, and no document shows him thinking about lyric closure in clinical terms. The obvious extension is to apply the stage-two criterion at scale, to the several hundred odes published in English between 1740 and 1830, which is the kind of question Ted Underwood's methods were built for and which would settle whether the distribution reported here is peculiar to Keats or merely peculiar to 1819.

V. CONCLUSION

In February 1820, after a night on the outside of the Hampstead coach, Keats coughed blood onto his sheet, asked Charles Brown for a candle, looked at it, and said that he knew the colour of that blood, that it was arterial, and that the drop was his death warrant. Nicholas Roe reprints Brown's account. It is the most exact piece of reading Keats ever did, and it is a prognosis: a sign, correctly identified, converted without hesitation into a statement about an event that had not yet happened. He was right. The six poems of the previous spring and autumn had been built, one after another, out of the refusal to do that.

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Epistemological Analysis of Multiple Representations in Secondary Mathematics: The Case of the Function Concept

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Abstract— *Mathematical concepts are inherently inaccessible to learners except through their representations. Yet what does it mean to "represent" a mathematical object, and why does the movement between different forms of representation constitute such a persistent site of difficulty? This paper presents a sustained theoretical analysis that integrates Duval's theory of semiotic representation registers with Bachelard's notion of epistemological obstacles, using Sfard's reification framework as a bridging construct. Taking the function concept in secondary mathematics as a case study, we argue that representation conversion is not a technical skill superimposed upon conceptual understanding but is constitutive of mathematical thinking itself. We analyze how the function is expressed across five semiotic registers (natural language, algebraic-symbolic, graphical, tabular, and dynamic-technological) and identify four epistemological obstacles that emerge during conversion: the variable obstacle, the graph-as-picture obstacle, the formula-function conflation, and the correspondence-dependence tension. We further ground this analysis in specific examples drawn from the Chinese People's Education Press (PEP) textbook series and the 2022 Chinese mathematics curriculum standards, examining how curricular choices generate particular epistemological conditions. The paper contributes an integrative theoretical framework and a series of philosophical reflections on the nature of mathematical representation, concept formation, and the irreducibility of semiotic mediation to mathematical knowing.*

Keywords— ***semiotic representation; epistemological obstacle; function concept; mathematics education; multiple representations***

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The Paradox of Mathematical Access

Mathematics presents a unique epistemological situation among the disciplines. Unlike physics, where the objects of study (particles, fields, organisms) have some form of independent physical existence, mathematical objects (numbers, functions, geometric figures) are, in a strong sense, nothing apart from their representations. A number is not something one can see or touch; it is accessible only through numerals, words, gestures, or other semiotic means. A function is not a physical entity floating in space; it exists only insofar as it is expressed, denoted, or displayed through some system of signs.

Such a situation generates what we might call the paradox of mathematical access: mathematical objects are at once wholly certain (in a way that physical objects are not) and wholly inaccessible (in a way that physical objects are not). The function $y = 2x + 1$ is not the function itself; it is a representation of the function. The graph of $y = 2x + 1$ is not the function either; it is another representation. Yet we speak of "the function" as though it were a unified entity, a "same" object that persists across

these different manifestations. What is this "same" that persists? And how does the learner come to grasp it?

These are not merely rhetorical questions. They are the foundational questions of a philosophy of mathematics education, and they frame the entire analysis that follows.

1.2. The State of the Literature

Mathematics education research has produced two largely parallel bodies of work relevant to these questions. The first concerns multiple representations in mathematics learning (Ainsworth, 2006; Arcavi, 2003; Goldin, 1998; Kaput, 1987). This literature examines how students work with different sign systems, including algebraic, graphical, verbal, and tabular, and how instruction might be designed to support their coordination. The second concerns epistemological obstacles in mathematics learning (Bachelard, 1938/2002; Brousseau, 1983, 1997; Sierpinska, 1985), which analyzes the conceptual barriers students encounter in their development of mathematical understanding.

Despite their clear relevance to one another, these two bodies of work have remained largely separate. Studies of multiple representations tend to treat conversion between registers as a cognitive skill, something that can be practiced and improved. Studies of epistemological obstacles tend to analyze conceptual difficulties without systematic attention to their semiotic dimensions. This separation, we argue, represents a significant theoretical gap.

1.3. Purpose and Approach

This paper addresses this gap by developing an integrated theoretical framework that brings together Duval's semiotic representation theory (Duval, 1995, 2006, 2017), Bachelard's epistemological obstacle concept (Bachelard, 1938/2002), and Sfard's reification framework (Sfard, 1991, 1992, 2008). We apply this framework to the function concept as it is developed in secondary mathematics, with particular attention to the Chinese curriculum context (Leung, 2006; Presmeg, 2006).

Our approach is purely theoretical. We do not present empirical data from classrooms or experiments. Instead, we offer a philosophical analysis, specifically a sustained reflection on the nature of mathematical representation, the obstacles that arise in learning, and the conditions under which genuine understanding becomes possible. This approach is appropriate for the questions we are asking, which are not empirical questions (what do students actually do?) but epistemological questions (what must happen for understanding to occur, and what prevents it?).

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 develops the theoretical framework, including philosophical reflections on the nature of representation itself. Section 3 constitutes the analytical core, examining the function concept across five registers and identifying four epistemological obstacles, grounded in specific examples from the Chinese curriculum. Section 4 offers a sustained philosophical discussion. Section 5 proposes pedagogical implications. Section 6 concludes.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. What Is a Representation? A Philosophical Inquiry

Before we can analyze the multiple representations of mathematical concepts, we must ask a more fundamental question: What is a representation? The term is used so freely in mathematics education that its philosophical complexity is easily overlooked. Yet the concept of representation is not unproblematic.

In the Western philosophical tradition, representation has been understood in at least two distinct ways. The first, stemming from the empiricist tradition (Locke, Hume), treats representation as a kind of copy or mirror, in which the mind (or a sign) mirrors or copies something that exists independently. In this view, a graph "represents" a function in the same way that a photograph represents a field: there is an original, and the representation bears some structural resemblance to it.

The second tradition, stemming from Kant and developed through phenomenology and semiotics, treats representation not as a copy of a pre-existing reality but as a constitution of the object itself. In this view, the mathematical object does not exist "prior to" its representation; rather, it comes into being through the act of representation. Duval (1995) firmly aligns himself with this second tradition when he argues that mathematical objects are never given directly but only through and in their representations (Duval, 2006, p. 107). The representation does not stand behind the object; it is the only access to the object.

This is a strong claim, and its implications deserve careful unpacking. If mathematical objects are constituted through their representations, then:

(1) There is no "pure" mathematical object behind or beyond its representations. The function $y = 2x + 1$ is not a representation of something else; it is a presentation of the function. Different presentations (the graph, the table, the verbal description) are not different windows onto the same object but different modes of the object's being-given.

(2) Conversion between representations is not translation of a pre-existing content into different codes. It is a cognitive act that requires recognizing the same object in semiotically heterogeneous guises, an act that Duval (2006) calls noesis, the apprehension of a mathematical object.

(3) Different registers afford different aspects of the object. A graph shows global properties (shape, continuity) that an algebraic expression does not; an algebraic expression shows exact structure (coefficients, degree) that a graph does not. No single register exhausts the object.

This philosophical grounding is essential for the analysis that follows. It means that when we speak of "multiple representations," we are not speaking of multiple copies of the same thing but of multiple presentations that together constitute the mathematical object. The movement between them is not a mechanical translation but an epistemological achievement.

2.2. Duval's Theory of Semiotic Representation Registers

Duval's theory of semiotic representation registers (Duval, 1995, 2006, 2017) provides the primary architecture for our analysis. Duval distinguishes three fundamental cognitive processes involved in working with representations:

• Formation: The production of a representation within a single register (e.g., writing an expression, drawing a graph).

• Treatment: The transformation of a representation within the same register, governed by the register's internal rules (e.g., simplifying an expression, completing the square).

• Conversion: The transformation of a representation from one register to another while preserving the same mathematical object (e.g., going from an algebraic expression to its graph).

Duval's critical insight is that conversion is cognitively more demanding than treatment, and it is in conversion that the deepest difficulties of mathematical learning arise (Duval, 2006). The reason, in the terms we have developed above, is that conversion requires the learner to recognize the "same" mathematical object across semiotically heterogeneous representations, a recognition that cannot be accomplished algorithmically but demands a kind of conceptual flexibility that Duval links to genuine understanding.

Duval introduces the concept of noesis, the act of apprehending a mathematical object, and argues that noesis requires the coordination of at least two representation registers (Duval, 2006). A student who can only work with a function in its algebraic form has not truly grasped the function concept; understanding requires the ability to move between registers.

For the function concept in secondary mathematics, the relevant registers include:

• Natural language register: Verbal descriptions such as "y depends on x" or "for each input, there is exactly one output."

• Algebraic-symbolic register: Expressions such as $y = f(x)$, $y = 2x + 1$, or $f: A \rightarrow B$.

• Graphical register: The visual depiction of a function as a curve or set of points in a coordinate system.

• Tabular register: Tables of input-output values.

• Dynamic-technological register: Interactive representations in software such as GeoGebra or Desmos.

2.3. Epistemological Obstacles: Bachelard, Brousseau, Sierpinska

While Duval's framework illuminates the semiotic field, it does not explain why certain conversions are so persistently difficult. For this explanatory layer, we turn to Gaston Bachelard's concept of epistemological obstacle (Bachelard, 1938/2002).

Bachelard (1938/2002), in his philosophy of science, argued that scientific knowledge develops not by accumulation but by rupture, that is, by breaks with prior ways of thinking that constitute obstacles to new forms of knowing. In his formulation: the problem of scientific knowledge must be posed in terms of obstacles, and it is in the very act of knowing that one will identify the causes of stagnation and even of regression (Bachelard, 1938/2002, p. 14).

A crucial aspect of Bachelard's concept is that obstacles are not external impediments but arise from within cognition itself. They are the products of ways of thinking that were once productive and adequate but have become inadequate for new tasks. This differs fundamentally from the notion of a "misconception" or "error." A misconception can be corrected by providing the right information; an epistemological obstacle requires a restructuring of thought, a rupture with a prior mode of knowing.

Brousseau (1983, 1997) adapted Bachelard's concept to mathematics education, distinguishing three types of obstacles:

• Ontological obstacles: Arising from the nature of the mathematical object itself.

• Instrumental obstacles: Arising from the tools or instruments (including representations) used.

• Epistemological obstacles (strict sense): Arising from the very process of knowledge construction.

Sierpinska (1985) and Artigue (1991) extended this framework in their analyses of the limit concept, demonstrating that obstacles are not random but follow identifiable patterns reflecting the historical development of mathematical ideas.

2.4. Reification: Sfard's Process-Object Duality

Sfard's theory of reification (Sfard, 1991, 1992, 2008) provides a crucial bridging construct. Sfard argued that mathematical concepts have a dual nature: they can be conceived as processes (dynamic, operational) or as objects (static, structural). Mathematical thinking develops through three stages:

(1) Interiorization: Familiarity with operations.

(2) Compression: The ability to think of a sequence of operations as a unit.

(3) Reification: The sudden ability to see the compressed process as a static, manipulable object.

The function concept is a paradigmatic case. Initially, students encounter functions as computational processes (input → operation → output). Later, the function must be reified into an object, a thing that can be graphed, transformed, and composed. This reification is where many students stall (Breidenbach et al., 1992; Dubinsky, 1991; Sfard, 1992).

Critically, reification is deeply entangled with representation. Different semiotic registers emphasize different aspects of the process-object duality. An algebraic expression can be read operationally or structurally. A graph presents the function as a visual object but may obscure the operational aspect. The tabular register emphasizes discrete computation. Reification is thus not merely a cognitive event but a semiotic achievement; it requires the coordination of multiple registers.

2.5. The Integrative Framework

We propose the following integration:

Representation conversion difficulties are epistemological obstacles rooted in the process-object duality of mathematical concepts and the semiotic heterogeneity of their representations.

The framework posits a triangular relationship:

• Semiotic dimension (Duval): The multiple registers through which mathematical objects are presented

• Epistemological dimension (Bachelard/Brousseau): The obstacles arising from within knowledge construction

• Cognitive-developmental dimension (Sfard): The process-object duality and reification

Each dimension informs and constrains the others. The semiotic registers shape the obstacles; the obstacles reveal developmental stages; the stages determine which conversions are epistemologically feasible.

III. METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

3.1. The Function Concept Across Five Semiotic Registers

We now examine how the function concept is expressed across five semiotic registers in secondary mathematics, analyzing what each register reveals, what it conceals, and, crucially, what this pattern of revelation and concealment tells us about the nature of mathematical objects themselves.

3.1.1. The Natural Language Register: The Primacy of Experience

In the natural language register, the function is typically described in terms of dependency and change. In the Chinese curriculum, this register is particularly prominent in the initial introduction of functions in Grade 8. The PEP textbook (People's Education Press, 2024, Grade 8, Volume 2, Chapter 22, §22.1, p. 90) introduces functions through a chapter introduction titled "Everything Changes" (万物皆变), noting that planetary positions change with time, the distance between China's Tiangong space station and the ground control center changes with time, temperature changes with altitude, and tree height changes with age, before presenting four concrete problems in its "Think" (思考) section:

• a car traveling at constant speed of 60 km/h, where distance $s = 60t$ as time t varies

• movie tickets cost 40 yuan each, where box office revenue $y = 40x$ as the number of tickets x varies

• circular ripples expand on water, where area $S = \pi r^2$ as radius r varies

• a rectangular prism with volume 1,000 cm^3, where height $h = 1000/S$ as base area S varies

These examples share a common linguistic pattern: one quantity changes as another changes (一个量随另一个量的变化而变化). This is the linguistic register

of experience, involving the observation of phenomena in the world and noticing patterns of co-variation.

What this register reveals: The natural language register captures the intuitive, experiential dimension of function: the sense that quantities are related, that change is patterned, that one thing determines another. It provides the motivational grounding for the concept.

What this register conceals: The natural language descriptions carry implicit ontological assumptions that are rarely examined. When we say "the circumference changes as the radius changes," we implicitly posit a causal or temporal directionality: the radius causes the circumference to change, or the radius changes first and the circumference changes in response. But mathematically, this directionality is arbitrary; mathematically, the relationship is symmetric. The natural language register thus smuggles in an ontological framework (causality, temporality) that is foreign to the mathematical concept of function. This is not a trivial matter; it constitutes the first epistemological obstacle we will identify.

Philosophical reflection: This example illustrates a broader point about the natural language register. Language is never a neutral medium for expressing mathematical ideas; it carries within it a whole metaphysics, a way of carving up the world into subjects and predicates, causes and effects, before and after. When we use natural language to speak of mathematics, we are already importing a philosophical framework that may or may not be compatible with the mathematical objects we are trying to grasp. The task of mathematics education is, in part, the task of making students aware of this importation and helping them to achieve a degree of critical distance from it.

3.1.2. The Algebraic-Symbolic Register: Precision and Its Limits

The algebraic-symbolic register expresses the function through formal notation. In the PEP textbook (People's Education Press, 2024, §23.1), after introducing functions through natural language descriptions of co-variation, students are asked to identify the common structure of the examples and express it symbolically:

The textbook then introduces the linear function in symbolic form, stating that a function of the form $y = kx + b$, where k and b are constants with $k \neq 0$, is called a linear function. When $b = 0$, this reduces to $y = kx$, a proportional function, which is treated as a special case of the linear function (People's Education Press, 2024, Grade 8, Vol. 2, §23.1).

This symbolic formulation $y = kx + b$ (with the proportional function $y = kx$ as a special case) is a powerful compression: it captures in a few symbols what the natural language descriptions expressed through multiple examples. It allows algebraic manipulation (treatment), such as substitution, simplification, and composition, that would be unwieldy in natural language.

What this register reveals: Precision, compactness, generality. The notation $y = kx$ makes explicit the dependency relationship and allows one to derive properties (e.g., if $k > 0$, then y increases with x) through formal manipulation.

The textbook's phrasing, presenting a function of the form $y = kx + b$ as the definition, subtly suggests that the function is the form itself. This is the formula-function conflation obstacle.

Further reflection: The symbolic register raises a deeper question about the nature of mathematical objects. When we write $y = 2x + 1$, what exactly have we created? A formula is a syntactic object, a string of symbols arranged according to rules. A function is, in the modern conception, a set-theoretic entity, namely a mapping between sets. How can these be "the same"? The answer, of course, is that they are not the same; the formula represents the function. But the symbolic register, by its very nature, tends to efface this distinction. The formula becomes so closely associated with the function that the difference between representation and represented vanishes from awareness. This goes beyond pedagogy; it is a structural feature of the symbolic register that has deep roots in the philosophy of mathematics (Carlson et al., 2001; Duval, 2006).

3.1.3. The Graphical Register: The Global View and Its Illusions

The graphical register depicts the function as a visual object, specifically a line or curve in a coordinate plane. The PEP textbook (People's Education Press, 2024, §23.2) introduces graphing of proportional functions, where students are asked to plot points for $y = 2x$ and connect them to form a line through the origin. Research on visual thinking in mathematics (Arcavi, 2003) highlights both the power and the pitfalls of graphical reasoning.

Affordances: The graphical register provides a global, simultaneous view of the function. The entire relationship between input and output is visible at once. It affords visual reasoning about properties such as monotonicity (is the line going up or down?), linearity (is it straight?), and behavior at extreme values (Arcavi, 2003).

Limitations: The graph presents a continuous, apparently complete object, but this is an illusion. The graph on paper (or screen) shows only a finite window of the function. The line "extends to infinity" in both directions, but this extension is not shown; it is imagined. Moreover, the graph can promote the misconception that a function must be a continuous curve, or that the graph is a physical "thing" rather than a mathematical representation (Goldin, 1998).

Broader implications: The graphical register introduces a fascinating tension between the visible and the invisible. The graph shows us something (a line, a curve), but what it shows is only a trace of the function, a finite excerpt from an infinite totality. The mathematical function extends beyond what the graph can display. This means that reading a graph always involves an act of transcendence, going beyond what is given to what is implied. This act of transcendence is itself an epistemological achievement, one that students often fail to make (Arcavi, 2003; Duval, 2006). When a student looks at a graph of a proportional function and sees "a line going up," they are seeing the trace but not the function. The function is not the line; it is the law that the line traces.

3.1.4. The Tabular Register: Discreteness and Computation

The tabular register presents the function as a set of discrete input-output pairs. In the PEP textbook (People's Education Press, 2024), tables are frequently used in the initial exploration of functions. For example, when introducing proportional functions, the textbook presents tables of input-output pairs for students to observe patterns.

Affordances: The tabular register makes the function concrete and computational. It emphasizes the operational aspect: specific inputs produce specific outputs. It connects directly to the concept of function as a "machine" or "rule" (Sfard, 1991, 1992).

Limitations: The table shows only a finite sample. The gap between the discrete table and the continuous function is a significant epistemological gap. Moreover, the tabular register tends to reinforce the process-conception of function (as a computation) rather than the object-conception (as a unified entity) (Dubinsky, 1991; Sfard, 1991).

Epistemological note: The tabular register is perhaps the most "empirical" of all the registers: it presents the function as a collection of observed data points, akin to measurements in a laboratory. This is both its strength (it connects mathematics to experience) and its limitation (it cannot capture the mathematical generality of the function). The movement from a finite table to the general function is an act of mathematical induction, an epistemological leap from the particular to the universal. This leap is not logically guaranteed (a finite number of data points cannot determine a function uniquely), yet it is essential to mathematical thinking (Artigue, 1991).

3.1.5. The Dynamic-Technological Register: Interactivity and Its Epistemology

Dynamic software environments such as GeoGebra introduce a new semiotic register: the dynamic-technological register. The 2022 Chinese curriculum standards (Ministry of Education, P. R. China, 2022) explicitly encourage the use of technology, noting that information technology can provide students with rich learning resources and powerful tools for mathematical exploration (Ministry of Education, P. R. China, 2022, p. 53). Studies of technology-enhanced mathematics learning (Kaput et al., 2008; Radford, 2003) suggest that dynamic environments afford unique forms of mathematical exploration.

Affordances: The dynamic register affords a kind of experimental mathematics: students can explore how changes in parameters affect the function, observe patterns of covariation in real time, and develop intuitions about properties through direct interaction (Radford, 2003).

Limitations: The dynamic register can create the illusion that mathematical truth is established by empirical observation rather than proof. It can also obscure the mathematical structure behind the visual display (Kaput et al., 2008).

Epistemological note: The dynamic register raises questions about the relationship between mathematics and technology. When a student drags a slider in GeoGebra and watches a graph change in real time, what kind of mathematical activity is this? Is it experiment (like a physics experiment)? Is it exploration? Or is it something new, a hybrid form of mathematical activity that blends the deductive certainty of mathematics with the empirical contingency of technology? This extends beyond pedagogy; it touches on the nature of mathematical knowing itself (Lesh et al., 1987).

3.2. Epistemological Obstacles in Representation Conversion

We now identify four epistemological obstacles that emerge when students attempt to convert between the representation registers described above. Each obstacle represents a point at which prior ways of thinking, supported by specific registers, become inadequate for the demands of cross-register conversion.

3.2.1. The Variable Obstacle: From Experience to Abstraction

In the natural language register, students encounter the idea that one quantity changes as another changes. The variable is understood as a changing quantity: time passes, temperature drops, a spring stretches. This is the register of the PEP textbook's introductory examples, where the distance s changes as time t changes (People's Education Press, 2024, p. 90).

When students move to the algebraic-symbolic register, however, the variable takes on a different status. In $y = kx$, the letter x is not simply "a changing quantity"; rather, it is simultaneously a placeholder for any value in the domain, an unknown that can be solved for, and a structural element in a relational expression. These are different modes of being for the variable, and they are not naturally compatible (Carlson et al., 2001; Sfard, 1991).

Analysis of the obstacle: This is an ontological obstacle in Brousseau's sense (Brousseau, 1983, 1997). The variable as a mathematical object has a different ontological status from the variable as an experienced quantity. The experienced variable is temporal, concrete, particular. The mathematical variable is atemporal, abstract, general. The movement from one to the other requires a rupture with the ontology of experience, a rupture of the kind Bachelard (1938/2002) identified as central to scientific knowledge formation.

Deeper analysis: The variable obstacle reveals something fundamental about the nature of mathematical abstraction. When we write $y = 2x$, we are not describing a particular instance of change; we are expressing a law that governs all possible instances simultaneously (Artigue, 1991; Sierpinska, 1985). The letter x does not stand for this value or that value; it stands for any value, and for all values at once. This is an extraordinary mode of thought, one that has no parallel in everyday experience. It is, in Bachelard's terms, an epistemological act: the constitution of a new kind of object that transcends the given.

3.2.2. The Graph-as-Picture Obstacle: From Perception to Mathematics

When students convert from the algebraic register ($y = 2x + 1$) to the graphical register (a line in the coordinate plane), they frequently interpret the graph as a "picture" of a physical situation rather than as a mathematical representation of an abstract relationship. A graph of temperature versus time is read as "a picture of the weather getting colder" rather than as a depiction of the functional relationship between two abstract quantities (Arcavi, 2003).

Nature of the obstacle: This is an instrumental obstacle (Brousseau, 1983, 1997). The graph, as an instrument of representation, is misused because students apply perceptual rather than mathematical reasoning to it. The graph-as-picture interpretation is natural, as it draws on well-developed perceptual capacities, but it is epistemologically inadequate for mathematical purposes.

Deeper analysis: The graph-as-picture obstacle illustrates a tension that runs throughout the philosophy of mathematics: the relationship between the sensible and the intelligible. A graph is a sensible object: it can be seen, touched, measured. But the function it represents is an intelligible object: it cannot be perceived but only thought. The act of reading a graph mathematically requires a kind of epoche (in the phenomenological sense), namely a suspension of the natural attitude toward the graph as a physical object, in order to apprehend it as a presentation of a mathematical entity. This epoche is not trivial; it is a significant epistemological achievement (Duval, 1995, 2006).

3.2.3. The Formula-Function Conflation: The Seduction of Notation

Students who have primarily encountered functions through algebraic expressions may come to believe that the expression is the function. This is perhaps the most pervasive and insidious of all the obstacles (Sfard, 1991, 1992).

Nature of the obstacle: This is an epistemological obstacle in the strict Bachelardian sense (Bachelard, 1938/2002). The identification of function with formula was once productive, as it enabled algebraic manipulation and computational competence, but it now becomes an obstacle to recognizing the function as an abstract object that transcends any particular representation. Research on concept images (Tall & Vinner, 1981) shows that learners' mental representations of mathematical concepts often diverge significantly from the formal definitions, and this divergence is particularly acute in the case of the function concept.

Deeper analysis: The formula-function conflation is not merely a student error; it reflects a deep-seated tendency in mathematical practice itself. Mathematicians routinely speak of "the function $y = 2x + 1$" as though the function and its expression were identical. This is a kind of metonymy: the part standing for the whole, the representation being identified with the represented. Such metonymy is pragmatically useful but philosophically problematic. It obscures the fundamental question: What is the relationship between the symbolic expression and the mathematical object? The answer, from our framework, is that the relationship is one of presentation (Darstellung),

not identity. The formula presents the function; it is not the function (Duval, 2006).

3.2.4. The Correspondence-Dependence Tension: A Historical Recapitulation

The fourth obstacle arises from the tension between two conceptions of function: the dependency view (函数是变量之间的依赖关系) and the correspondence view (函数是两个集合之间的对应关系).

In the PEP textbook (People's Education Press, 2024), the dependency view dominates the Grade 8 introduction. Students encounter functions through situations of co-variation, where one quantity changes as another changes. It is only in high school that the formal correspondence definition is introduced, as specified in the curriculum standards (Ministry of Education, P. R. China, 2020): a function is defined as a mapping from set A to set B such that each element of A is assigned exactly one element of B (People's Education Press, 2019, §3.1).

Nature of the obstacle: This tension is an epistemological obstacle (Bachelard, 1938/2002; Brousseau, 1983, 1997; Sierpinska, 1985) that mirrors the historical development of the function concept itself. The evolution from Euler's and Leibniz's analytic definition (function as an expression) through Dirichlet's dependency definition to the modern set-theoretic correspondence definition represents the kind of epistemological rupture that Bachelard (1938/2002) identified. Students, in their learning trajectory, recapitulate this history (Artigue, 1991; Carlson et al., 2001; Sierpinska, 1985).

Deeper analysis: The correspondence-dependence tension reveals something significant about the relationship between the history of mathematics and the learning of mathematics. The famous "recapitulation thesis" (ontogeny recapitates phylogeny) has been much debated in mathematics education, but our analysis suggests that it has a kernel of truth at the level of epistemological obstacles. The difficulties students encounter are not arbitrary; they mirror the difficulties that the mathematical community historically encountered. This is not because students are "repeating" history in any literal sense, but because the conceptual terrain they must traverse is structured by the same epistemological constraints that structured the historical development (Sierpinska, 1985). The dependency view is not "wrong"; it was the state of mathematical understanding for centuries, but it is inadequate for the demands of modern mathematics. Recognizing this inadequacy and moving beyond it is an epistemological achievement of the first order.

IV. DISCUSSION

4.1. Representation Conversion as Ontological Rupture

The central claim of this paper is that representation conversion is not a secondary skill but a constitutive act of mathematical thinking. This claim has far-reaching philosophical implications that deserve sustained reflection.

When a student converts from the natural language register ("y changes as x changes") to the algebraic register ($y = 2x$), what happens is not merely a change in notation. It is an ontological transformation: a shift from the ontology of experience (where quantities change in time, where causality reigns, where particular instances are given) to the ontology of mathematics (where relationships are atemporal, where all instances are co-present, where the particular is transcended in favor of the universal). This transformation is what Bachelard (1938/2002) called an epistemological rupture, a break with the immediacy of experience in favor of a mediated, constructed understanding.

The same can be said for each of the conversions we have analyzed. Converting from formula to graph is not merely "drawing a picture"; rather, it is an act of spatialization, of making visible a relationship that was previously only expressed symbolically. Converting from graph to table is an act of discretization, of extracting particular instances from a continuous whole. Each conversion is an epistemological act, a reconstitution of the mathematical object in a new register, with new affordances and new constraints (Duval, 1995, 2006).

4.2. The Irreducibility of Semiotic Mediation

A deeper philosophical point emerges from our analysis: semiotic mediation is irreducible to any non-semiotic substrate. There is no "pure" mathematical object behind or beyond its representations. The function is not something that exists independently and then gets "clothed" in various representations. The function is its presentations; it exists only in and through them.

Such a claim may seem counterintuitive. We speak of "the function $y = 2x + 1$" as though there were a single entity that persists across different representations. But what is this "single entity"? It is not the formula (that is one representation). It is not the graph (that is another). It is not the table (another still). If we subtract all the representations, what is left? Nothing; there is no pure, unrepresented "function-in-itself."

This is not to say that the function is merely its representations. The various representations are not arbitrary or interchangeable; they are constrained by the mathematical object they present. A correct graph of $y =$

$2x + 1$ is not just any old line; it is this particular line, and it would be wrong to draw a parabola. The mathematical object constrains its presentations, even though it has no existence apart from them (Duval, 2006, 2017).

This position, sometimes called structural realism in the philosophy of mathematics, has important implications for mathematics education. It means that we cannot teach students to "understand the function" by first giving them the "pure concept" and then showing them how it gets represented. There is no "pure concept" accessible apart from representations. Understanding the function is the ability to navigate its representations, to move between them, to translate, to compare, to synthesize (Ainsworth, 2006; Duval, 1995; Kaput, 1987).

4.3. The Historical-Epistemological Dimension

Our analysis has revealed a striking parallel between the epistemological obstacles students encounter and the historical development of the function concept. The dependency view (which students first encounter) corresponds to the pre-modern conception of function (Leibniz, Euler). The correspondence view (which students encounter later) corresponds to the modern set-theoretic conception (Dirichlet, Bourbaki).

The parallel is not coincidental. It reflects what we might call the epistemological topology of the function concept, the field of conceptual possibilities and constraints that any thinker (individual or historical) must navigate. The terrain is the same whether one is a 17th-century mathematician or a 21st-century student; what differs is the starting position and the resources available for navigation (Artigue, 1991; Bachelard, 1938/2002; Sierpinska, 1985).

This observation has a profound implication: the difficulties students encounter are not signs of individual failure but are structural features of the conceptual terrain itself. No student, regardless of intelligence or effort, can avoid these difficulties; they are built into the nature of the concept. The task of education is not to eliminate these difficulties (which is impossible) but to make them visible and navigable, so as to help students recognize them as obstacles rather than personal failings, and to provide them with the resources to move through and beyond them (Brousseau, 1983, 1997).

4.4. The Chinese Curriculum as an Epistemological Site

Our analysis of the Chinese curriculum context reveals something important: curriculum design is never epistemologically neutral. The choices made about which registers to emphasize, in what order, and in what contexts, have epistemological consequences that shape the obstacles students will encounter (Ministry of Education, P. R. China, 2020, 2022; People's Education Press, 2024).

The Chinese curriculum's emphasis on variation (变化) and co-variation provides rich motivational grounding but also strengthens the dependency conception, making the transition to the correspondence view more difficult (Ministry of Education, P. R. China, 2022; People's Education Press, 2024). The emphasis on symbolic manipulation (the "two basics" or 双基 tradition) ensures computational fluency but may strengthen the formula-function conflation (Schneider, 2014). The tradition of variation pedagogy (变式教学) has significant potential for supporting representation conversion, but only when the variation is directed at the semiotic-epistemological dimensions, not merely at procedural fluency (Ma, 1999).

These observations have implications beyond the Chinese context. They suggest that every curriculum creates a specific "epistemological profile", a configuration of obstacles and affordances, that shapes the conceptual journey students must undertake. Understanding this configuration, making its contours visible, is a crucial task for mathematics education research (Presmeg, 2006).

The PEP textbook's 2024 edition (People's Education Press, 2024; approved for classroom use beginning Spring 2026) represents a significant restructuring. The function concept is now introduced in Chapter 22 ("函数") through the chapter theme "Everything Changes" (万物皆变), using four diverse examples, including uniform motion ($s = 60t$), box office revenue ($y = 40x$), circular area ($S = \pi r^2$), and inverse variation ($h = 1000/S$), that deliberately include proportional, quadratic, and inverse relationships, not only proportional ones. Linear functions and proportional functions are then treated in Chapter 23 ("一次函数"), where the general linear function $y = kx + b$ is introduced first, with the proportional function $y = kx$ treated as the special case where $b = 0$. This "general to specific" approach differs from the prior edition's strategy of introducing proportional functions first. Investigating the epistemological implications of this curricular restructuring, particularly how the choice of introductory examples and the sequencing of general-before-specific shapes students' initial apprehension of the function concept, would be a valuable direction for future research.

4.5. Limitations and Future Directions

This study is a theoretical analysis and does not present empirical data. The obstacles we have identified are derived from philosophical reasoning and curriculum analysis rather than from systematic observation of student learning. While our analysis is consistent with the existing empirical literature (Ainsworth, 2006; Goldin, 1998; Kaput, 1987; Sfard, 1991, 1992; Tall & Vinner, 1981), the specific claims about epistemological obstacles would benefit from empirical validation through classroom-based research.

Additionally, while we have focused on the function concept as a paradigmatic case, the applicability of our framework to other mathematical concepts (limit, derivative, integral, probability) has not been explored here and represents an important direction for future research (Artigue, 1991; Sierpinska, 1985).

A further limitation is that our philosophical reflections, while drawing on the Western philosophical tradition (Kant, phenomenology, structural realism), have not engaged deeply with Chinese philosophical traditions or with the specific epistemological assumptions embedded in Chinese mathematics education. This engagement would be a valuable extension of the present work (Leung, 2006; Presmeg, 2006; Schneider, 2014).

V. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Drawing on our theoretical analysis, we propose five pedagogical implications grounded in epistemological awareness.

5.1. Make the Ontological Shift Explicit

Teachers should make explicit to students that the move from "the circumference changes as the radius changes" to "y = kx" is not merely a change in notation but a fundamental transformation in the kind of object being considered. Students should be helped to see that they are moving from the world of experience (where things change in time) to the world of mathematics (where relationships are atemporal and general). This is not a small step; it is an epistemological rupture in Bachelard's (1938/2002) sense, and it should be treated as such in instruction.

5.2. Teach Representation Conversion as Epistemological Work

Representation conversion should not be treated as a routine skill to be practiced. Drawing on Duval's (1995, 2006, 2017) distinction between treatment and conversion, teachers should recognize that conversion demands something qualitatively different from treatment: not the application of rules, but the recognition of a mathematical object across semiotically heterogeneous presentations (Duval, 2006). Teachers should explicitly discuss what each register reveals and conceals, and should design tasks that specifically target the epistemological dimensions of conversion.

5.3. Use Errors as Diagnostic of Epistemological Stage

Students' errors in representation conversion should be interpreted not as failures but as indicators of their current epistemological stage. A student who treats a graph as a "picture" is not making a trivial mistake; they are revealing a mode of thought that needs to be refined, not simply corrected. The concept of epistemological obstacle (Bachelard, 1938/2002; Brousseau, 1983, 1997; Sierpinska, 1985) provides a framework for understanding the productive logic of such errors, since errors are not random but reflect the learner's current position in the conceptual terrain. Tall and Vinner's (1981) concept of concept image versus concept definition is similarly relevant here: the gap between a student's mental representation of a function and the formal definition is not a deficit but a developmental stage.

5.4. Design "Bridging Situations"

We propose the concept of bridging situations, defined as instructional situations specifically designed to target the epistemological obstacles that arise during representation conversion. Drawing on Brousseau's (1983, 1997) theory of didactical situations, a bridging situation presents a task that cannot be solved within a single register but requires movement between registers, forcing the epistemological work of conversion. For example: "Find a function whose graph passes through the origin, whose algebraic expression has no constant term, and whose table of values shows equal increments." Such tasks require the coordination of graphical, algebraic, and tabular registers simultaneously, demanding the kind of noetic act that Duval (2006) identifies as essential for mathematical comprehension.

5.5. Leverage Variation Pedagogy for Epistemological Ends

The Chinese tradition of variation pedagogy (变式教学) has significant potential for supporting epistemological development (Ma, 1999). Teachers should use systematic variation not merely to vary procedural contexts but to vary the semiotic-epistemological dimensions of the concept, presenting the same function in different registers, asking students to compare and convert, making the process of representation conversion visible and explicit. This approach aligns with the broader goals of the 2022 curriculum standards (Ministry of Education, P. R. China, 2022), which emphasize core mathematical

competencies (核心素养) including mathematical abstraction, logical reasoning, and mathematical modeling.

VI. CONCLUSION

This paper has presented a sustained theoretical analysis of the epistemological dimensions of multiple representations in secondary mathematics, using the function concept as a case study. Our central argument is that the difficulties students experience when converting between different representations of a mathematical concept are not merely technical or cognitive obstacles; they are epistemological obstacles that arise from within the process of mathematical knowing itself.

We have developed an integrative framework that brings together three theoretical perspectives: Duval's semiotic representation theory (Duval, 1995, 2006, 2017), Bachelard's epistemological obstacle concept (Bachelard, 1938/2002), and Sfard's reification framework (Sfard, 1991, 1992, 2008). Through this framework, we have identified four epistemological obstacles in the conversion of function representations: the variable obstacle, the graph-as-picture obstacle, the formula-function conflation, and the correspondence-dependence tension. We have grounded this analysis in specific examples from the Chinese PEP textbook (People's Education Press, 2024) and curriculum standards (Ministry of Education, P. R. China, 2020, 2022).

Our analysis contributes several philosophical reflections that extend beyond the specific case of the function concept:

1. Representation is constitution, not copy: Mathematical objects are constituted through their representations, not merely represented by them (Duval, 1995, 2006).

2. Conversion is rupture, not translation: The movement between registers involves an epistemological break with prior modes of thought, not a mechanical transformation (Bachelard, 1938/2002; Duval, 2006).

3. Obstacles are structural, not accidental: The difficulties students encounter are built into the conceptual terrain of mathematics itself, not merely the result of poor instruction or individual deficiency (Bachelard, 1938/2002; Brousseau, 1983, 1997; Sierpinska, 1985).

4. Curriculum is epistemologically loaded: The choices made in curriculum design have epistemological consequences that shape the obstacles and affordances of the learning journey (Brousseau, 1983, 1997; Ministry of Education, P. R. China, 2022; People's Education Press, 2024).

These reflections have implications for both theory and practice in mathematics education. They suggest that the task of mathematics education is not merely to transmit mathematical content but to support students in the demanding epistemological work of constructing mathematical objects through, across, and beyond their representations.

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A Study of Female Identity Anxiety in Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* from the Perspective of Female Gothic

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Abstract— *Female Gothic—first defined by Ellen Moers in 1976—uncovers women's predicaments and resistance under patriarchy, with rich gender-political implications. Adopting this framework, this paper examines female identity anxiety in Virginia Woolf's Mrs Dalloway via protagonists Clarissa Dalloway and Lucrezia Warren Smith. It explores how patriarchy and war trauma erode female identities through Gothic elements: enclosed spaces, spectral imagery and self-division. Woolf internalizes Gothic horror into women's psychological reality, laying bare gender repression and identity crisis. Their ambiguous attempts at identity reconstruction reflect the inherent tension between resistance and compromise in Female Gothic.*

Keywords— ***Female Gothic; Identity Anxiety; Mrs Dalloway***

I. CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

The birth of the Gothic novel can be traced back to the first Gothic work, The Castle of Otranto, created by British writer Horace Walpole in 1764. With its subtitle, "A Gothic Novel," the emergence of the Gothic genre was formally announced. This work created the foundation for the basic model of Gothic literature: mysterious and terrifying castles, wandering ghosts, and inexplicable supernatural elements. In Gothic literature, beautiful yet fragile women are often entangled by evil men from whom they cannot escape. Gothic literature often aims to portray the dark side of human nature, including desire, violence, madness, and murder.

Female Gothic grows out of the soil of Gothic literature. Female Gothic is the product of the combination of the Gothic novel genre and feminist literary criticism and can be traced back to the 1790s. The term "Female Gothic" was first introduced by Ellen Moers in her 1976 work Literary Women, where she defined it as Gothic literature written by women since the 18th century (Ellen Moers. Literary Women [M]. New York: Oxford UP, 1976. 90-110.). This subgenre emerged in the late 18th century, characterized by themes of fear, oppression, and the supernatural, often through the lens of female experiences. In female Gothic works, women are no longer confined merely by supernatural entities in haunted castles, but

rather by a "haunting agency" that induces anxiety and fear in the female individual. This mechanism originates from the real world, manifesting specifically as gender-based constraints and restrictions imposed on women, such as patriarchal family structures and marital institutions (林斌. 西方女性哥特研究——兼论女性主义性别与体裁理论 [J]. 外国语, 2005(2): 70-75.). Therefore, female Gothic not only incorporates traditional elements of horror and mystery but also emphasizes a deeper expression of women's struggles and rebellion within a patriarchal society.

Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), a landmark work of modernist literature, portrays the identity struggles and personal crises faced by women in post-war British society through its distinctive stream-of-consciousness technique and profound psychological insight. The novel, often described as "capturing a woman's whole life in a single day," follows its protagonist Clarissa Dalloway as she prepares for an evening party, weaving together her reflections on youth, love, marriage, and death. On the 84th anniversary of Woolf's passing, this work remains profoundly relevant, continuing to shine with modernity through its portrayal of the female experience.

When Virginia Woolf states in her essay "Edith Birkhead's The Tale of Terror: A Study of the Gothic Romance" that "It is at the ghosts within us that we shudder" (Woolf, Virginia. *Gothic Romance, Collected Essays of Virginia Woolf: Ed. Andrew McNeillie* [M]. London: The Hogarth Press, 1986: 304-307.), she alludes to new sensibilities of the Gothic mode which emerge at the heart of women's Modernism and function as a narrative feature. This breaks away from the external spectacle of traditional Gothic, focusing instead on the inner anxiety of women within patriarchal society and the post-war context. This shift endows Female Gothic with modernist qualities: women's "Gothic fear" no longer stems from supernatural monsters, but from the fragmentation of self-identity, the forced imposition of social roles, and suppressed voices and desires—serving as a psychological mirror of women's resistance against patriarchal oppression.

II. CHAPTER TWO THE REPRESENTATION OF THE FEMALE IDENTITY ANXIETY IN GOTHIC ELEMENT

The Gothic setting is a core element of Gothic fiction. Traditional Gothic novels often use dark and mysterious settings such as castles, graveyards, and dungeons to create a sense of eeriness and dread. In contrast, female Gothic writers place greater emphasis on depicting enclosed spaces and uncanny supernatural phenomena to reveal the anxiety and helplessness of their heroines. As Juliann Fleenor notes in her edited essay collection The Female Gothic (1987): The "Female Gothic" uses traditional spatial images such as decaying castles or confined rooms to symbolize both culture and the heroine; as a psychological form, it evokes emotions like fear, anger, and awe, and at times triggers women's fear and aversion toward their own gender roles, female sexuality, physiology, and reproduction (Juliann Fleenor. *The Female Gothic* [M]. Montreal and London: Eden Press, 1987.).

2.1 Self-Imprisonment in Enclosed Spaces

In the tradition of Female Gothic literature, enclosed spaces often symbolize the restricted social status and psychological oppression experienced by women. In Mrs. Dalloway, Woolf constructs a geography of identity anxiety for Clarissa and Lucrezia through a series of spatial images. The upper-class London society in which Clarissa lives is a golden cage—seemingly open yet fundamentally confined. Within it, she plays the role of the "elegant politician's wife," yet is forced to "see things through his eyes—one of the tragedies of married life" (*Woolf,* Virginia. *Mrs Dalloway* [M]. London: Harper Collins Press, 1994.). Here, "he" refers to her husband, Richard Dalloway. Through marriage, Clarissa is incorporated into a symbolically enclosed space; her identity is submerged by her husband's, and even her own name is erased by the social title "Mrs. Dalloway."

When Clarissa climbs the stairs alone to her room for an afternoon rest, she feels:

"The core of life is hollow—like an empty little attic. Women must take off their fine clothes. At noon they must remove their makeup… Her bed, too, will grow narrower" (*Woolf,* Virginia. *Mrs Dalloway* [M]. London: Harper Collins Press, 1994.).

This scene is rich with Female Gothic imagery—the attic, the narrow bed, the removal of makeup—elements that together form a spatial metaphor for a middle-aged woman confronting the dissolution of her identity. The narrow bed symbolizes her diminishing presence within the social structure, while removing her makeup represents confronting the absence of her true self once societal masks are shed. This connection between spatial oppression and identity anxiety is a hallmark of Female Gothic literature.

Lucrezia's situation, on the other hand, reflects another form of spatial imprisonment—as a foreigner (Italian) and a war widow, she suffers dual marginalization in British society. She feels "trapped" even in London's public spaces like parks and streets: while walking, she wants to call for help but no one responds; when she mentions memories of her hometown garden in Milan, her "voice gradually fades." She cannot truly integrate into British society, nor can she alleviate her husband's mental suffering. "The whole world does not know how much she loved all this; at every moment…"(*Woolf*, Virginia. *Mrs Dalloway* [M]. London: Harper Collins Press, 1994.)

This unfinished sentence suggests the inexpressible loneliness and isolation within Lucrezia. The "openness" of public space stands in stark contrast to her internal "enclosure," highlighting the Gothic despair of women having "nowhere to escape" in post-war society.

2..2 Self-Division

Female Gothic literature often explores themes of schizophrenia and dual personalities to depict women's identity crises. In The Madwoman in the Attic, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar divide women into two categories: those who belong to the "angel in the house" due to their compliance with men, and those who are classified as "madwomen in the attic" because of their rebellion against patriarchy. The former are often regarded as models of introspection, obedience, and selflessness (Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic* [M]. New Haven, Conn. and London: Yale UP, 1979.).

Focusing on female characters, it becomes evident that the anxieties of the First World War forced the return of the figure of the "angel in the House." In this era filled with mourning and trauma, modernist women found themselves ultimately unable to escape the role of the "mother" inherited from their Victorian-era predecessors. Thus, the Gothic mode is expressed here through techniques of "haunting" and "spectral returns"—as Kelly Hurley observes, "The Gothic is rightly, if partially, understood as a cyclical genre that reemerges in times of cultural stress in order to negotiate anxieties for its readership by working through them in displaced (sometimes super-naturalized) form" (Hurley, Kelly. *"British Gothic fiction, 1885-1930". The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* [M]. Ed. Hogle, Jerrold E. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002: 189-208.).

2.2.1 Clarissa Dalloway: The Spectral Self Behind the Social Mask

The Angel lives in two other female characters in Woolf's novel Mrs. Dalloway: Clarissa Dalloway and Lucrezia Warren Smith. Clarissa faces a maternal ambivalence. Clarissa's haunted self appears through her complex maternal role because she seems to have a complex relationship with her daughter Elizabeth. For example, Clarissa exhibits a sense of jealousy and threat as she sees her daughter's close relationship with her history teacher Doris Kilman. Woolf expresses this threat through the Gothic themes of monstrosity and spectrality:

"For it was not her one hated but the idea of her, which undoubtedly had gathered in to itself a great deal that was not Miss Kilman; had become one of those

spectres with which one battles in the night; one of those spectres who stand astride us and stuck up half our lifeblood, dominators and tyrants … it rasped her, though, to have stirring about in her this brutal monster" (*Woolf*, Virginia. *Mrs Dalloway* [M]. London: Harper Collins Press, 1994.).

Clarissa's envy, hence, springs from her insecurity about her maternal position. It is not the physicality of her that Clarissa fears but "the idea of her" the specter. Miss Kilman's close relationship to Clarissa's daughter Elizabeth indicates Clarissa's maternal superficiality. She is not the ideal mother to Elizabeth, yet she fears losing her role to Miss Kilman. The latter is presented as a monstrous figure that "stuck up half our lifeblood" indicating a threat to Clarissa's maternal authority. The complexity of her maternal position occurs in the way that despite the sense of confinement that it offers, Clarissa still clings to it. The Angel figure lives "within" Clarissa as it veils and controls her hidden wishes. Like Mrs. Ramsay's, it is this Angel image which remains visible to her society. Indeed, "She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having of children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street, this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway" (*Woolf*, Virginia. *Mrs Dalloway* [M]. London: Harper Collins Press, 1994.).

As she walks outside her private sphere, she is like an apparition of herself. This apparition has the name of Mrs. Richard Dalloway. In order to achieve a unified identity, Clarissa needs to release herself from this apparitional entity. Jim Hansen argues that Clarissa represents the confinement of twentieth-century women. Woolf, he adds, used Gothic formulae "to reveal the unnoticed and unconscious structure of a cultural ideology that has confined modern women as fully as the castles of the eighteenth century had confined the young heroines of Gothic fiction" (Hansen, Jim. *A Nightmare on the Brain: Gothic Suspicion and Literary Modernism* [J]. Literature Compass, vol., 8, no.9, 2011: 635-644.). She is rather haunted by the likes of such Gothic heroines, her mother from the past which intrudes into the present disguising itself in the Angel. This figure has to be repelled in order for Clarissa to come to terms with her repressed desires.

2.2.2 Lucrezia Warren Smith: The Living Ghost Under the Shadow of War Trauma

Septimus and Rezia have been married for five years, and the reader first meets them as they are walking in Hyde Park. Rezia's struggles start to occur at this point of the narrative where she witnesses her husband's horrified and alienated self. Burdened with the responsibility to cure him, she starts to project a sense of marginalization akin to his. She brings to light the experience of women who had to bear with the physical and psychological chaos of their male relatives in a time of women's feminist prosperity. Septimus's trauma evokes the Angel within her. This Angel figure is characterized by being confined and subservient to her ailing husband. The imprisonment of the Gothic heroine in the underground vaults of Gothic castles becomes accurate in literary Modernism in that Rezia is trapped in the liminal passages of London's "Waste Land".

In addition, it is important to notice that Lucrezia endures a sense of confinement even when she is in the public sphere as she becomes a carer for her psychologically wounded husband. In this novel, the Angel finds its promotion in mothering the shattered male character Septimus. As she witnesses this shattered man who seems to be detached from reality, Lucrezia is thrust into the female space of liminality which seems to emerge as a characteristic of women's complex position in Modernism, particularly during and after the First World War. Therefore, the "feast of horror" that modern women "breakfast upon" originates from witnessing war atrocities as well as feeling the responsibility to appease the chaotic state of the male. Women's newly gained freedom is consumed by their reinforced performance of the maternal.

The spectral return of the "Angel in the House" shaped the Gothic mode in modernist narratives explored

in this study. Because the Gothic is capable of expressing "the unspeakable," writers used it to convey the hidden fears of women during and after the First World War. As Gina Wisker points out that "Women's Gothic writing deals with the domestic, with sex and sexuality, spaces, places, behaviours and norms which oppress women" (Wisker, Gina. *Contemporary Women's Gothic Fiction: Carnival, Hauntings and Vampire Kisses* [M]. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016).

Unlike Clarissa who portrays a sense of independence as she strolls in London streets as she thinks: "I love walking in London" (*Woolf,* Virginia. *Mrs Dalloway* [M]. London: Harper Collins Press, 1994.), Rezia unravels a sense of entrapment while she accompanies Septimus for a walk. This is made clear in the narrative: "Help, help! She wanted to cry out to butchers' boys and women" (*Woolf,* Virginia. *Mrs Dalloway* [M]. London: Harper Collins Press, 1994.) as Rezia listens to his war hallucinations of wanting to kill himself. It can be noticed that there is a sense of unhomeliness overwhelming both characters for their experiences appear to be analogous. Their mutual sufferance is dictated by foreignness and estrangement. Rezia is drawn to her husband's ghosted world which renders her as vulnerable; she reflects: "far was Italy and the white houses and the room where her sisters sat making hats, and the streets crowded every evening with people walking, laughing out loud, not half alive like people here" (*Woolf*, Virginia. *Mrs Dalloway* [M]. London: Harper Collins Press, 1994.). She describes people as "half alive"; this of course does not exclude Septimus. As previously noted, Rezia's inability to restore her ill husband to health gradually drained her energy. Thus, her marginalization stemmed not only from her status as a "foreigner," but also from Septimus's mental condition, which pushed her further into the periphery.

III. CHAPTER THREE THE ROOTS OF FEMALE IDENTITY ANXIETY IN MRS. DALLOWAY

3.1 Dissolution of Identity under Patriarchy

A fundamental source of female identity anxiety in *Mrs. Dalloway* stems from the systematic erosion of women's subjectivity within the patriarchal social structure. Through Clarissa's experience of marriage, Woolf reveals how women gradually lose their sense of self in traditional marital relationships, ultimately becoming extensions of their husbands. As the novel piercingly notes: Even though Mrs. Dalloway was twice as intelligent as her husband, she had to see things through his eyes—and that was one of the tragedies of married life. This cognitive reliance and subordination of perspective prevent Clarissa from understanding the world and defining herself in her own way.

The dissolution of female identity under patriarchy is achieved not through overt violence, but through the micro-level practices of power in everyday life: "Without noise, without shouting, there was only a slow sinking, as if submerged in water, until her will merged into his. Her smile was sweet; her submission swift" (*Woolf*, Virginia. *Mrs Dalloway* [M]. London: Harper Collins Press, 1994.). This "slow sinking" vividly captures how the female self is gradually eroded and replaced within seemingly harmonious marital relationships. Female Gothic literature often portrays this form of oppression as an invisible, permeating horror rather than explicit violence.

When she is a little girl, Clarissa is happy, imaginative, romantic, adventurous and has a perfect notion of what she wants. She admires Sally just because of her bravery and creativeness. She sees "a sort of abandonment" in Sally, "as if she could say anything, do anything" (194). Besides, she values Sally's willingness to experiment with flowers, to cut their heads off and make them swim on the top of water in bowls in a fashion that horrifies the stodgy Aunt Helena. However, at present Clarissa has become neither independent nor creative. In Peter's words, she has become a "prudish" victim of "the death of soul". Like most women in England, Clarissa

attaches herself to her husband and "see things" through her husband's eyes, even though she is armed "with twice his wits". In other words, Clarissa loses her identity after marriage. As she grows older, after giving birth to Elizabeth, she finds her useless, aimless, disoriented in her life (郭丽萍.《达洛维夫人》的暗恐研究[D]. 山东大学, 2016.). In Hansen's words, Clarissa "confronts how marriage and money stories that helped to shape her social class have restricted her even more profoundly than the castle walls" (Hansen, Jim. *A Nightmare on the Brain: Gothic Suspicion and Literary Modernism* [J]. Literature Compass, vol., 8, no.9, 2011: 635-644.). To be more precise, Clarissa's sense of fear is aroused because she has no idea what she can do in the future and nothing could bring her the sense of accomplishment. In her own words, she had the oddest feeling of being herself "invisible", "unseen", "unknown" and her body, "with all its capacities, seemed nothing-nothing at all". Therefore, she calls herself Mrs. Dalloway, "not even Clarissa any more"（*Woolf*, Virginia. *Mrs Dalloway* [M]. London: Harper Collins Press, 1994.）.

Rezia's experience as an Italian woman in British society reflects the dual oppression of patriarchy and cultural otherness. Not only is she subordinate as a woman, but as a foreigner, she also suffers from cultural marginalization. This dual identity places her in a more complex predicament of anxiety. As noted in the novel: "Miss Kilman did not try to make herself likable. She had always had to earn her own living" (*Woolf*, Virginia. *Mrs Dalloway* [M]. London: Harper Collins Press, 1994.). This remark indirectly reflects the social pressures faced by marginalized women like Rezia, who cannot conform to traditional feminine ideals.

3.2 War Trauma and the Distortion of Gender Roles

Mrs. Dalloway was written shortly after the First World War, a period when the disruption of traditional gender roles and family structures served as a crucial backdrop for the novel's exploration of female identity anxiety. Septimus's war trauma not only affects himself but also directly contributes to Rezia's marginalization and identity crisis as a war widow. Through the experiences of this couple, Woolf demonstrates how war indirectly shatters women's worlds and sense of self.

It can be remarked that war fictions are dominated by male writers and they often revolve around describing the male experience of the war. Women writers are consequently pushed to the corner of the other in this respect. This is because they did not take an actual part in the fight at the Western Front. Women, to compensate for their sense of burden and guilt regarding this matter, participated in the war aid serving in hospitals particularly. Apart from their physical participation as nurses, women had endured psychological trauma resulting from witnessing the anxieties of the war and mainly the breakdown of male figures. The psychological cost of this has cast women in the role of strangers. This means they become strangers to themselves because the atrocities of the war had compelled them to replay traditional roles which they thought they moved beyond. In Mrs. Dalloway, Lucrezia Warren Smith exemplifies the body of women who had not taken a physical part in war effort but endured an equal suffering to that of their male's counterparts.

The psychological cost of the war for women stirred the Angel figure to emerge and to spread her legacy of domesticity and entrapment. In that, the Angel that Lucrezia confronts emerges as a result of Septimus's trauma. After the First World War, Woolf states "we breakfast upon a richer feast of horror than served our ancestors for a twelvemonth we are impervious to fear". At this level, Woolf implies that women experienced a new sense of "horror" emblematic of war trauma in the trenches.

The war fostered a distorted form of masculinity that demanded men suppress their emotions and fight bravely—an expectation that ultimately led to the psychological collapse of soldiers like Septimus. The war left him emotionally numb; the death of his close friend Evans filled him with grief; a society complicit in

destruction fueled his anger; and his inability to care for his wife filled him with guilt. This breakdown, in turn, affected Rezia's experience as a wife—she could neither receive emotional support nor Security from her marriage, but was instead forced to shoulder the responsibility of caring for her traumatized husband.

The Angel's characteristics of being self-sacrificing and a subservient woman are found in the woman carer of returned veterans, meaning that the conditions resulting from the war have let women embrace the traits of a figure that they despise. Further to this, in a *Room of One's Own* (1929), Woolf has given an illustration of the silent and victim woman writer who lacks freedom in patriarchal society. Naming her Judith Shakespeare, Woolf argues that "she lives in you and in me, and in many other women who are not here tonight, for they are washing up the dishes and putting the children to bed" (*Woolf,* Virginia. *A Room of One's Own* [M]. London: Penguin Classics, Jovanovich, 2002.). Although it is beyond my focus, Woolf's expression about the woman writer evokes a Gothic ideology of haunting which is relevant to the character of Rezia. Miglena Nikolchina, in this respect, states that "both Shakespeare's sister and the Angel in the house are Woolf's allegories of female silence".

The liminal space of the trenches and the terror associated with it – often depicted in relation to male characters – becomes symbolic of women's nebulous position during this period. This means that despite the fact that women have had little physical experience of the fight on the Western Front as well as being in the trenches, they face an equal terror during the war as well as in its aftermath. Woolf developed a Gothic approach in staging the traumatic complexity of women's place during and after the Great War. In other words, the Gothic elements of spectral returns and haunting allow a better understanding of the anxieties of women in post-war Britain.

IV. CHAPTER FOUR AMBIGUOUS RECONSTRUCTION OF FEMALE IDENTITY

The transformation of the female character can, to some extent, be seen as a positive change. She undergoes a shift for the better, even though the ending of the novel *Mrs. Dalloway* remains rather ambiguous.

4.1 Clarissa Dalloway: Spatial Reconstruction and Self-Awareness

In traditional male Gothic fiction, women are often portrayed as victims trapped in castles, awaiting rescue. In contrast, Female Gothic is a narrative of resistance. It acknowledges fear—fear of marriage, childbirth, loss of self, and social discipline—yet its protagonists do not merely endure passively. Instead, they actively confront the sources of their fear (often the family, society, or their own subconscious), struggle against them, and ultimately achieve a kind of reconfiguration of self-awareness. This transformation seldom results in a clear victory but rather leads to a blurred, fluid, and contradictory new identity that refuses to be easily defined.

Woolf's London serves as a vast, modern Gothic setting. Its bustling streets and the precise chimes of clocks (symbolizing the patriarchal order of time and social expectations) act as invisible cages, while the inner worlds of the characters are haunted by ghosts (past selves, unlived lives), whispers of madness, and the dread of confinement.

In female Gothic literature, enclosed spaces (castles, mansions, rooms) are core images—they serve both as physical sites of confinement for women and as projections of their inner fears and anxieties. The drawing room, in the traditional sense, is precisely such a space: it is the "internal sphere" designated for women under patriarchy, the place where the "Angel in the House" fulfills her hostess duties, all ultimately in service of her husband's social status. Clarissa's subversion lies in the fact that while she accepts this space, she completely alters its function. The "Angel in the House" is an accessory to

the space; her existence is meant to reflect the respectability of her husband and family. In contrast, Clarissa proactively transforms the drawing room into a stage that she directs, creates, and controls. She is no longer a decorative object within the space but rather its director, playwright, and protagonist (李碧芳. 从身体空间争取看达洛卫夫人"他者"身份的自我突破尝试[J]. 北京化工大学学报(社会科学版), 2014(01):25-29.). As she herself reflects: "she had this feeling of being something not herself, and that every one was unreal in one way; much more real in another" (*Woolf,* Virginia. *Mrs Dalloway* [M]. London: Harper Collins Press, 1994.). Therefore, the queer and fastidious Professor compliments Clarissa on her successful party and Jim Hutton believes her house is nice and she "the best of the great ladies" (*Woolf,* Virginia. *Mrs Dalloway* [M]. London: Harper Collins Press, 1994.). As for Clarissa herself, she proves her worth, regains her sense of fulfillment and experiences a sense of relief and relaxation.

Furthermore, the party allowed her to establish a connection with a stranger, Septimus, and his story would remain in her memory forever, influencing her for the rest of her life. When Clarissa learned of the young man's suicide from Lady Bradshaw, she felt a resonance with Septimus: "She felt somehow very like him-the young man who had killed himself" (*Woolf*, Virginia. *Mrs Dalloway* [M]. London: Harper Collins Press, 1994.). By this empathy and identification she can face the terror of life and death and go through it to a greater affirmation of life. Additionally, Septimus's death made Clarissa aware of the brevity of life and the meaninglessness of her class-bound existence, meaning she must gather the courage to continue living and begin to cherish her own life: "He made her feel the beaty; made her feel the sun. But she must go back. She must assemble" (*Woolf*, Virginia. *Mrs Dalloway* [M]. London: Harper Collins Press, 1994.). Through this identification, she was able to face the fears of life and death, overcome them, and affirm the value of life more firmly. In that moment, she could free herself from the constraints of social conditioning—those forces that compelled her to play the role of an inauthentic self.

4.2 Lucrezia Warren Smith: Invisible Struggle

Woolf wrote about the Angel in her essay *Professions for Women* (1931): "Whenever I felt the shadow of her wing or the radiance of her halo upon my page, I took up the ink pot and flung it at her. She died hard. Her fictitious nature was of great assistance to her. It is far harder to kill a phantom than a reality. She was always creeping back when I thought I had dispatched her. Though I flatter myself that I killed her in the end, the struggle was severe; it took much time that had better have been spent upon learning Greek grammar; or roaming the world in search of adventures" (*Woolf,* Virginia. *Professions for Women" in Essays Virginia Woolf: Volume 6, 1933-1941* [M]. New York: Random House, 2011.).

We have seen the sort of ghosts that Septimus sees but Rezia's ghosts are not as detectable in the novel. Hers occupy part of herself that she is not aware of. This means, there resides within her a ghostly abject which is inherent in her invisibility as she strolls through the passages of modernity. Her invisibility stems from the fact that her inner terrors are unseen and her cries of horror and loneliness would go unobserved. An example of this can be remarked in the scene where she continues to express her estrangement from a place populated by "half alive" people; she says: "'For you should see the Milan gardens', she said aloud. But to whom? There was nobody. Her words faded" (*Woolf,* Virginia. *Mrs Dalloway* [M]. London: Harper Collins Press, 1994.). She is, then, like an Angel ghost whose task during this period is nurturing the returned soldier who is in a shattered condition. Woolf had referred to such intrusive ghosts in her review of Henry James's ghost stories where states that: Henry James's ghosts have nothing in common with the violent old ghosts—the blood-stained sea captains, the white horses, the headless ladies of dark lanes and windy commons. They have their origins within us. They are present

whenever the significant overflows our powers of expressing it; whenever the ordinary appears ringed by the strange.

This passage recalls the way in which the unknown invades the familiar and the ordinary. For instance, "The ordinary" marriage life that Rezia has desired appears to be "ringed by the strange". In other terms, her life is "ringed" by the terrors of her unknown and her neglected position. As such, her marriage only offers psychological entrapment. Although she is enabled to stroll in the city, she remains imprisoned as long as she acts as a nurturer for Septimus. The following quote from the text shows the way she opts for a temporary release from this entrapment that she feels: "Septimus!" said Rezia. He started violently. People must notice. "I am going to walk to the fountain and back", she said. For she could stand it no longer. Dr. Holmes might say there was nothing the matter. Far rather would she that he were dead! … She spread her hand before her. Look! Her wedding ring slipped—she had grown thin. It was she who suffered—but she had nobody to tell" (*Woolf*, Virginia. *Mrs Dalloway* [M]. London: Harper Collins Press, 1994.)

As she attempts to escape her role of nurse to Septimus, she ends up returning like she returns to him after her walk. Thinking that she might find him dead as "he threatened, to kill himself" (Dalloway 26), Rezia is surprised to see him "still sitting alone on the seat" (*Woolf*, Virginia. *Mrs Dalloway* [M]. London: Harper Collins Press, 1994.) where she has left him. This, in a way, symbolizes the way that the post-war modern world necessitated a return of women to domesticity and to the maternal. Furthermore, the scene of her "growing thin" is symptomatic of her sufferance with her traumatised husband. As seen earlier in this chapter, the Angel figure can act as an abject which causes the crisis in the proper. Hence, her act of growing thin is symptomatic of the threatening abject. Also, the scene where her wedding ring slips is indicative of her marriage repression and the element of estrangement that it brings with it. Moreover, her temporary retreat as she walks to the fountain and losing her wedding ring imply the fact that she wants to free herself from the inner confines that the Angel figure imposes on her: "I am alone; I am alone! she cried, by the fountain in Regent's Park" (*Woolf,* Virginia. *Mrs Dalloway* [M]. London: Harper Collins Press, 1994.).

Rezia's attempts to step back from her confinement is part of throwing off the Angel in her. When Septimus asks her about the reason why she has taken off her ring, she replies "My hand has grown so thin," she said; "I have put it in my purse" (*Woolf*, Virginia. *Mrs Dalloway* [M]. London: Harper Collins Press, 1994.). This scene of hiding her wedding ring in her purse could be symbolic of ejecting the domestic confinement of her marriage, thus ejecting the Angel. Refusing to be thrown away. Rezia is caught in the terror of the in-betweenness where darkness and uncertainty are its main components; she laments: "But I am so unhappy, Septimus" (*Woolf*, Virginia. *Mrs Dalloway* [M]. London: Harper Collins Press, 1994.).

Clarissa embodies the Gothic theme of women reaffirming the value of life by confronting death and nothingness. In Female Gothic literature, women often must face their deepest fears—death, madness, solitude—to find the strength to rebuild themselves. Rezia's inner dialogue, though quieter, is equally powerful.

V. CHAPTER FIVE CONCLUSION

This paper, through the view of Female Gothic literature, offers an in-depth analysis of the manifestations and roots of female identity anxiety in Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway. The study shows that although the two female characters, Clarissa and Lucrezia, come from different social classes and cultural backgrounds, they both face dual oppression from patriarchy and war trauma. Through the social ritual of hosting a party, Clarissa reconstructs her own space within the confined drawing room, achieving a certain degree of self-affirmation and identity reclamation. Meanwhile, Lucrezia, burdened by her dual marginal identity as both a foreigner and a war

widow, attempts to resist her assigned "Angel" role through subtle acts such as removing her wedding ring and seeking temporary escape—though her struggles remain largely internal and unseen.

By employing Gothic elements such as spectral imagery, enclosed spaces, and psychological fragmentation, Woolf not only reveals the invisible constraints imposed on women in post-war British society but also hints at their pursuit of self-liberation amidst fear and suppression. Such liberation does not constitute a clear victory; rather, it manifests as a blurred, contradictory, yet genuine reconstruction of self-awareness. Thus, Female Gothic is not merely a literary genre, but also a narrative strategy of resistance, allowing suppressed female voices to be heard through the "unspeakable" terror and anxiety.

This study further demonstrates that Mrs. Dalloway is not only a masterpiece of modernist literature but also a work deeply rooted in the Female Gothic tradition. Through its internalized narrative of terror, the novel closely intertwines women's psychological reality with external social structures, providing rich textual and theoretical insights for understanding the female identity crisis in the early twentieth century.

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The Posthuman Transformation: A Contemporary Study of *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils*

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Abstract— *This paper examines the animal world portrayed in The Wonderful Adventures of Nils (1906-7) by Selma Lagerlof, by transforming the protagonist's human body into a posthuman figure, arguing about Nils' reduction from a grown-up human to an elf-sized being, who travels across Sweden among geese. Post-humanism is a theoretical framework that questions classical humanism while highlighting human limitations. Following Rosi Braidotti's idea of "post-humanism" in her book called The Posthuman (2013), this paper attempts to show how Nils' posthuman body allows him to enter into the animal world, which questions the absurd assumption of humans to be superior. Through Nils' transformation, his adoption of animal language, and his becoming a part of a non-human community, the paper demonstrates how the book destabilizes the human/animal binary and creates a different world where animals are neither considered to be marginalized, nor excluded, nor different from the human world. By situating the children's narrative into a contemporary posthuman reading, the paper offers relational, non-hierarchical, and more ethical possibilities. Ultimately, by showing the limitations of conventional humanity, or a human, characterized by traditional definition, which defines the lines between humans and animals, the paper criticizes anthropocentric view, not only to blur the lines between human and animals, but also to create an appropriate channel, which does not only reframes human identity, but it also brings light to a world where human, animals, and nature can co-exist together.*

Keywords— ***Posthuman, Transformation, Human, Animal, Identity, Anthropocentric, Limitations.***

I. INTRODUCTION

Braidotti begins her book, The Posthuman (2013), with: "At the start of it all there is He: the classical ideal of 'Man', formulated first by Protagoras as 'the measure of all things'. (13) The classical definition of 'man' is something which becomes a measurement criterion for all. However, as contemporary times are marked by flexibility and fluidity, such a rigid definition of 'man' is not any functional entity. European enlightenment establishes 'human' in the higher pedestal, and anything other than 'human' is placed in the category of "other." The European, classical, and humanistic ideals have defined themselves in opposition to what is been marginalized, sexualized, and naturalized. It is much similar with the idea of 'Great Chain of Being, ' a medieval Islamic and a medieval Christian thought, which considers God at the top of the structure, and other angels, animals, plants are placed below God. When it comes to the culture of humanity, humans assume holding the superior position like God. However, the contemporary issues are subject to get represented by something which is more flexible in nature, and this delves to the subject matter of this paper *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils* (1906-7) by Selma Lagerlof.

The Wonderful Adventures of Nils is a Swedish fictional work by Swedish writer Selma Lagerlof. Lagerlof is known to be the first woman to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature. The text is published in two parts, respectively, in 1906 and 1907, and it is first published in English as The Wonderful Adventures of Nils (1907), and The Further Adventures of Nils (1911). Commissioned in 1906 by the Swedish Elementary School Teachers'

Association as a geography text for primary schools, this text aims to foster national identity. Although its main object is to make the children aware of their nation, however, Selma's use of anthropomorphism in the text has taken a different turn. Selma spent three years studying animal and bird lives before writing the book, which makes sense for her using fantastical elements in the book. The protagonist of the book named Nils Holgersson, a mischievous boy who loves tormenting animals. It talks about Nils' journey of flying over Sweden with a flock of geese, and how Nils gets to view the country from a different perspective, and ends up transforming himself into an enlightened being. Nils' transformation begins with his encounter with an elf, and as he captures the elf, it results into shrinking of his physical size. His adventure begins with a gander, through whom he joins a flock of wild geese on their migration across Sweden. As he travels by being a part of the animal world, he gets introduced to the world of "others," and to the absurdity of human world, which causes his transition from a selfish boy to someone who is caring and gentle towards other animals.

By highlighting human limitations, this paper attempts to draw the posthuman figure of Nils, which not only questions human hegemony but also presents a different world to the readers. As the target consumers for this book are children, Selma writes the book using her artistic creativity, employing tools such as anthropomorphism, which is the act of characterizing non-human entities with human qualities. Characterizing animals with human characteristics may raise ethical questions; however, it attempts to reduce the fixed boundaries between humans and animals. Reducing Nils from his bodily superior position to a posthuman figure, does not only provide him the agency to become a part of the ecological world, but it is Nils' posthuman figure through which the readers get aware of the power structure. This is done by using Rosi Braidotti's idea of post-humanism, through which the paper attempts to blur the differences between human and animals. Thus, while deconstructing the traditional definition of 'human', Nils' posthuman figure invites the possibilities of animals having 'human' like cultural, ethical, and communal values. This does not only help the children to resonate with the animal world, but it also helps the adults to escape the hypocritical human world, and to enter into a more meaningful world, where every species are interconnected and interrelated, rather considering animals as the 'other'.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study examines Selma Lagerlof's The Wonderful Adventures of Nils (1906-7) through the lens of posthumanism, while applying Rosi Braidotti's idea of post-humanism from her famous book called The Posthuman (2013). Posthumanism is a critical theory that is a response to the limitations of anthropocentrism. This positions humans as superior, while separating other species in a marginalized category. In her book, Braidotti ignores classical humanism, which marks "man" as white, masculine, and able-bodied. As Braidotti points out in her book: "The human is a normative convention, which does not make it inherently negative, just highly regulatory and hence instrumental to practices of exclusion and discrimination" (26), while keeping this in mind, it can be said that Nils' transformation does not place him in a hierarchical position, but replaces animals from the category of 'others' to an environment where their connection with other species is emphasized.

Braidotti begins by rejecting anthropocentric assumptions, while considering that the figure of 'human' is not only a conventional physical description but also about conventional ideologies that establish humans as exceptions. Unlike this, the posthuman is characterized by interconnection among different entities and species, and thus a more synthesized ecological world. In this light, the transition of Nils can be seen, who has lost his authoritarian position by leaving his physical size behind, which helps him become a part of a more broadened ecological world. Braidotti's posthumanism treats the human/animal binary as absurd and not functional in the contemporary world. This theoretical framework allows readers to look at the animal society portrayed in Lagerlof's novel, with their communal, ethical, and 'human' like values, and thus not excluded, or 'different' from humans. By taking this theoretical framework, the paper reads Nils' journey not only as growth, but also a posthuman turn, through which the readers can see themselves as a part of the broader ecological web, rather as superior.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Wonderful Adventures of Nils is been subject to several studies, as the text provides rich scope to read it through different lenses. Bjorn Sundmark has studied the text in "Of Nils and Nation: Selma Lagerlof's The Wonderful Adventures of Nils" (2011) as a work that helps to create the sense of nation building. "From Schoolbook to Love Story. Selma Lagerlof's The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson and Its TV Adaptation" (2020) by Eva Heggestad analyzes the book's TV adaptation. The book is also been studied by focusing on its relation to space, in "Sami Selves in the Northern Landscape" (2020) by S. Weld. "The Narrative Art of

Selma Lagerlof: Two Problems" (2016) by Erland Lagerroth, Selma Lagerlof, J. Muus, K. Thott focuses on characters and setting of the text. Although studies on this book situate it into different subjects, including children's literature, geographical educational book, folkloric, fairy-tale elements, however, unlike the existing scholarship, this paper focuses on one of the unexplored sides of this book, which is the study of posthuman. Although the human-animal relation has been studied regarding the book, however while focusing on Selma's use of anthropomorphism in the book. The posthuman angle is absent in the existing studies, and while offering the book a new theoretical framework, the readers can reconsider the book's engagement with the broader world.

IV. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The introduction of Nils Holgersson, a fourteen-year-old farm boy, is drawn as someone who is mischievous, lacks empathy, and lacks moral obligations. After a strange encounter with a tomte, a household spirit, a tiny human-like 'creature' with supernatural abilities, and Nils' cruel actions towards the tomte, he is shrunk into the size of an elf. Along with this tragic event, Nils is also gifted with the ability to speak and understand animal languages. In her influential work called The Posthuman (2013), RosiBraidotti does not accept the definition of 'human' in classical humanism. Here, the physical minimization of Nils' body reduces him to bodily inferiority, and thus, does not follow the conventional idea of "human." Thus, this 'metamorphosis' is not only a transformation of size, but with Nils' acquisition of animal language, it is an introduction to a posthuman figure as well, with the help of which the broader world, the existing power hierarchy, and especially the 'other world' can be recognized. This process of transformation is also a process of unlearning human hegemony. His transformed tiny size not only takes away the human superiority that Nils has, which allows him to mock and disturb other animals, but it also helps him in understanding the flaws of human world, and the vulnerability of the world of 'others'. This tragic event causes a disruption of human and animal hierarchy, as all the animals like the cows, the farm cat, who are once subjects to Nils' mock, now refuses to consider him as their rightful master. Thus, it is not only the use of anthropomorphism that provides rights to animals to make their voices heard by the readers, but it is also through posthumanism that drags Nils from the human ignorance to enlightenment, which allows Nils to understand the real issues regarding animal world. This does not only disfigure the boundaries between humans and animals, but Selma's use of fantastical elements in the text, and inclusion of various animal characters, helps the readers understanding the dynamics exist in the 'other world', and it also helps in becoming a channel for the adult readers to escape their 'higher world', and children to engage with the animal world.

The adaption of all these fantastical elements is not only to intrigue the readers, but it also highlights the limitations of human beings. Before his transformation, Nils had no difficulties in roaming within Sweden, and while being in the human form, he was never seen leaving Sweden. This is highlighted with the fact that there is no mention of any places outside Sweden in the text. By being in gooseback, it provides him a different viewpoint from the air, and the visual image of the broadened landscape questions the idea of national borders and capability of human beings. This delves into the fact how humans treat borders as national and political tools, which restrict human mobility. As Braidotti points out in her book, "Once the centrality of anthropos is challenged, a number of boundaries between 'Man' and his others go tumbling down, in a cascade effect that opens up unexpected perspectives". (66) Here in this text, this human rigidity is broken by the posthuman turn, which helps Nils in engaging with the ecological world, creating a different version of the country, which does not fix a nation into any borders, or limits a country into any static object, but transforms it into a narrative with vibrant traits. Thus, his shrunken size causes him going beyond human superiority and his physical existence. Another interesting element to note is that, with his all limitations, the human society accepts Nils to be a part of them; however, in order to become a part of the animal society, he needs to prove himself as useful and trustworthy. His human superiority does not allow him to become a part of the animal society. Thus his posthuman transformation encourages him to adopt certain values, which will help him in becoming an active participant, rather a passive one.

One of the significant episodes in the text is "The Great Crane Dance on Kullaberg." On this particular day, all the animals in the region gathered at Kullaberg; however, there was one condition: no human beings were allowed to attend the event. However, this time, the rule was broken with the presence of Nils. The animals allowed Nils to attend the event, as with his acts of service, Nils had won their hearts. Animals were prohibited from attacking each other on this day. All assembled at the place where the dance of various animals takes place, and the event is characterized by a great union of various birds and animals. Although performances by animals such as crows, hares, woo-grouse, black grouse, and brown grouse are interesting to watch, the crane dance is the most intriguing performance. Though Lagerlof's description of the event can be criticized saying that it is anthropocentric, and

animals involving in events like this, is not realistic. However, the paper here criticizes this assumption of animals having celebrations like this is anthropocentric, and through the anthropomorphic turn, Lagerlof creates a world which denies the conventional idea of animals cannot have their own community, with discipline, rules, and regulations. This event is an instance in which animals can have their own independent society, with discipline and relationships among them. It is not only Nils, who witnessed this, but it is the readers as well, who can have a view of this side of the animal world, through the posthuman figure of Nils. This shows the inability of humans to consider animals as a part of the same world; however, this limitation is erased through the construction of Nils' poshuman existence.

Through another example, this point becomes clearer, for instance, when Akka sets strict rules for the whole group, it shows an idea of communal rules, which are important to regulate and manage a group with discipline. This erases the rigid boundaries between humans and animals. Thus, though this anthropomorphic description is fictional, it does not only provide agency to animals, it also helps in showing the possibility of animals having their own individual life, and this is done through Nils' posthuman figure. Although Smirre Fox's hunting wild geese is his survival needs, however, for other species the more important thing is him violating peace, and rules set for the gathering at Kullaberg. Smirre Fox getting punished for his violent acts by other species, does not only show the moral obligation exists in the animal world, but it also shows that animals can operate their own community, with their own sets of conditions, outside the human control. Thus here, Lagerlof provides a separate political and moral autonomy to the animal world through the use of anthropomorphism. This shows the possibility of recognizing animals, and their societal, survival, and moral urges, with the human world. As it is stated by Braidotti, "In my view, posthuman ethics urges us to endure the principle of not-One at the in-depth structures of our subjectivity by acknowledging the ties that bind us to the multiple 'others' in a vital web of complex interrelations". (100)

During the end of this novel, Nil's change of desires is something that challenges the notion of humanity. From being desperate to go home to being willing to be in the world of animals, it shows Nil's journey of awakening. Although it can be considered a 'bildungsroman', unlike a traditional 'bildungsroman', here Nil's growth and his journey to maturity are the result of integrating with the animal world. Some of the values that are considered strictly 'human', ironically, Nil learns them through non-human guidance. Instances of Nil's acts of service are quite a few in this text, such as helping the exhausted Marten by dragging him to water, helping him collect dry grass and spread it on the ice at Vombs lake for Matren to sleep on, rescuing Sirle Squirrel's wife from humans, and so on. The transition gets more significant, showing how while being human, Nil is never liked by other animals of their farmyard, caused by Nil's cruel behavior towards the animals. However, after becoming a posthuman figure, as Nil learns to help others, he is celebrated by other animals. After rescuing Sirle Squirrel's wife, all the little birds are seen singing on Nil's bravery, showing gratitude through gifting him and carrying him on their backs. By being with Marten, while being a part of his journey, Nil starts loving that life, as Nil is seen admitting, "This is just the life for me" (Lgerlof 62). As Selma writes, "He wasn't afraid of anything – except being sent home". (62), his growing contentment with the outdoor life has made him feel a part of the animal world, as if restoration to the previous human form will mean re-entering the human world again. By showing Nil's change of desire about going home, Selma not only highlights the posthuman figure but also questions the idea of what it means to be human. Nils' statement "I don't want to be human" (Lagerlof 68), along with evoking the idea of Nil's feeling relatable more with the animal world rather than the human world, also becomes a threat to human identity, and this is highlighted through his posthuman form.

At the end of the novel, when Nils runs outside to bid farewell to Akka and the wild flocks, Nils, who becomes a full-grown human again, is left with grief on the ground. While by being a posthuman figure and with the help of non-human company, helps Nils to get connected with the ecological world, his retransformation into human form, separates him from the ecological world. Nils' restoration to human size is not exercising human authority over animals, but taking away his identity from him, which he is provided by the animal world. Throughout the whole text, although Selma tries to teach Nils' character the idea of 'humanity', however, by getting introduced to the absurdity of the idea of humanity through his posthuman form, Nils becomes estranged from the human society. One interesting thing to be highlighted is that the moment Nils regains his human form, his ability to understand animal language is lost. This shows the possibility for a posthuman form to recognize the animal world, which the human form fails to do. This may question the principle of human identity; however, it shows that human identity is subject to constant interaction with their surroundings, and thus, does not remain autonomous or static. As Braidotti says, "What I want to emphasize instead, in a more affirmative vein, is the

priority of the relation and the awareness that one is the effect of irrespressible flows of encounters, interactions, affectivity and desire, which one is not in charge of". (100)

It is important to understand that traditionally human beings are associated with nature; however, in recent times, the human-nature relationship has gone through phases of transition, and the boundaries between human and nature have become starkly visible. In one of the chapters, the land and the creatures on the land are described by the wild geese to Nils. Although Nils perceives it as a "checked cloth," the wild geese then explain the fields, the meadows, Lillgarde, Grainscarce, "Little-to-eat," moneyville, and so on. The constant cackle of the geese, commenting on the land below, calling out to creatures below, not only provides the readers with a beautiful imagination but is also a part of Selma's artistic strategy to draw a picture of the land below through geese, who are a part of nature. Thus, while being a human, Nils fails to enjoy the geographical beauty of the country, and his posthuman figure provides a channel for him, with the help of the anthropomorphic characters, to witness the country through a different lens. Thus, the deconstruction of the rigid human figure helps Nils to engage with nature and become a part of the ecological world.

While this study attempts to minimize the differences between humans and animals, it also shows the difficulties in doing this with a traditional human form, as it is limited in nature, and thus, it is done here by establishing Nils' posthuman figure. When Marten, the gander, is caught by high school students and is close to being eaten, Nils manages to fly away with the gander by using his wit, it emphasizes the binaries between human and posthuman. On one hand, it is shown how animals are subject to domestication, human consumption, and human brutality, and the lines between human and posthuman become more static; on the other hand, Nils, the posthuman, calls and addresses empathy for animals. Jhan Hochman shares his view in an essay called "Green Cultural Studies" (1998), that the environmentalists should represent animals and their rights, as they lack the ability to voice their issues. However, as the postmodern period is characterized by fluidity, the gaps between humans and animals are filled up with contemporary, postmodern creation of posthuman figure.

V. CONCLUSION

Though it may be argued saying it is Lagerlof's use of anthropomorphism that draws attention to the animal world, and the book is written way before posthumanism coming into the discussion, which cannot be a subject to question. However, without an appropriate channel, neither it is possible for the story's protagonist Nils to understand the broader world, nor for readers. In order to solve this problem, this paper situates a posthuman figure as a medium, which does not only focus on human limitations, but it also focuses on how the animal world is been considered as different, and thus "other". Thus, Nils' diminished physical size is not only his punishment for his cruelty, but it is a deliberate narrative strategy, which in the contemporary times can be studied through the lens of posthumanism. It helps him coming out of the privileged category of "human", encountering the vulnerability of the animal world. The classical concept of 'human' has made the lines between humans and animals as rigid, stagnant, and limited, however, more fluid concepts like post-humanism, which helps in the integration of human and animals, creates voice for the marginalized, and changes the conventional ideas about the world of 'others'. Thus this paper does not only dismantle the classical concept of "human", but it also deconstructs the human/animal binary. In this way, the paper shows how Lagerlof's book has a profound ground for contemporary posthuman reading, and how it plays a significant role in the academic field, while providing a place for the readers, which influences them to understand the absurd power dynamics, derogatory ideas about non-human beings, how the "others" are excluded from the mainstream, and how it is important to value a more balanced world.

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From Silence to Assertion: Representation of Caste Reality in Dalit Literature

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Abstract— *For centuries, Dalits have been carried an agony inside them, a pain born not out of fate, but out of a man-made system that chose to deny them their humanity. Their lives were not just limited; they were controlled—where they could walk, what they could touch, how they could live. They were made to feel that their very existence was impure. A child born into a Dalit family did not just inherit a name, but a lifetime of rejection, humiliation, and silent suffering. They were stopped at the doors of temples, turned away from schools, and forced into work that stripped them of dignity. Even their basic needs—water, food, respect—were often given with conditions or not given at all. The pain was not always loud; it lived in everyday moments—in the lowered eyes, the unheard voices, the spaces they were never allowed to enter. It was the agony of knowing that no matter how hard they tried, society had already decided their worth. And yet, what makes this journey even more poignant is that they continued to live, to endure, and to hope. Beneath years of injustice lies a quiet but unbreakable strength—a longing not just to survive, but to live with dignity, equality, and respect. Their journey reflects not only suffering, but also a deeply human desire to be seen, accepted, valued and treated as a human like anyone else. Dalit Literature has emerged as a significant body of Indian writing that explores the lives, struggles, and oppression of the Dalit community which they have been experienced for centuries. It goes beyond personal stories to portray the collective hurt and strength of the oppressed people under constant discrimination based on caste. The transition "from silence to assertion" reflects the historical journey of marginalized communities within dominant literary and cultural traditions. Rising as a literary expression of discrimination on the basis of caste, Dalit literature poignantly describes the suffering, poverty, and humiliation faced by the Dalits along with fighting for social justice and equality. It takes the forms of the poems, autobiographies, novels, and essays, broaching themes of freedom, revolt, and defiance of caste orders. It had its roots initially in Marathi but soon developed in other Indian languages such as Tamil, Telugu, Hindi, and Bengali. The authors like B. R. Ambedkar, Omprakash Valmiki, Bama, and Sharan Kumar Limbale, critically examined the narrative strategies that help to convert pain to political assertion and collective consciousness. This paper is an analysis of the agony of Dalits and the manner in which Dalit literature can be seen to express both the reality of caste discrimination and at the same time are coming out as a strong voice of opposition, identity, and social change.*

Keywords— ***Dalit, caste, injustice, agony, societal injury, trauma.***

In India the Caste System is a Hierarchical social structure, which is deeply inherent in Hinduism. It divides people into groups on the basis of birth and occupation, leading to social and economic inequalities. '*Manusmriti',* a metrical text on dharma topics such as duties, rights, laws and virtues of Hinduism, is regarded most important and authentic book on Hindu religion. This book separates caste system into four main categories: Brahimins who got

the first rank, believed to have created from Brahma's mouth (Brahama- is the creator of this universe), Kshatriyas who have been originated from Brahma's arms, ranked second, third place is of Vaishyas (traders) created from Brahma's thighs and the last one are Shudras, have created from the feet of Brahma so they are considered to do all degrading things or tasks. The caste system of India has been maintaining for centuries among the world's oldest existing forms of categorization. There were so many sub-castes in caste system. Dalits were considered acchuts and out of any rank or status. Indian castes have been governed on the basis of caste system for a long time. It was very disgusting experience for those who belonged to lower castes for infinite time, while this system facilitate many benefits for upper class.

Some early 11th and 12th century writers raised voice against caste hierarchies and Varna system. As Marathi Dalit Bhakti poets like Chokha Mela and Karmamela were also key figures in disrupting caste hierarchies. Chokha Mela of the Mahar caste wrote many *Abhangs*, among them the popular "*Abir Gulal Udhlit Rang,*" which were translated into English later by Chandrakant Kaluram Mhatre. His son, Sant Karmamela, revolted against the Varna system in his works. In Odia literature, the Panchasakha poets—Balarama Dasa, Jagannatha Dasa, Achyutanda Dasa, Jasobanta Dasa, and Ananta Dasa—during 1450-1550 AD made way for the employment of colloquial Odia literature, breaking with Sanskrit-chauvinist traditions. Sudramuni Sarala Dasa, born a Sudra and a forefather of social protest movements during 15th-century Odisha, portrayed the lives of lower classes in his compositions like Odia Mahabharata, Bilanka Ramayana, and Chandi Purana. These works criticized the preeminence of Sanskrit literature and royalty-based themesTelugu Dalit literature traces its origins to the 17th century with poets Potuluri Veerabrahmam and Yogi Vemana discussing such societal ills as caste injustice and untouchability in their works. This literary tradition is witness to a long-standing struggle against caste opressions in regional languages.

The term "Dalit" originates from the word "Dal" or "Dalan" (a Sanskrit word). It was in the late 19th century that Jyotirao Phule, a leading social reformer of Maharashtra, coined the term "Dalit" in Marathi to refer to the outcastes and untouchables who were subjected to systemic oppression and marginalization within Hindu society. The Sanskrit word "Dalit" means "broken" or "scattered," which represents the condition of these groups. Phule employed this term to bring attention to their difficulties and fight for their rights within the strict caste hierarchy. As Dalits always have oppressed by upper class so this word "Dalan" is given to them. Dalits are the people who fall outside (achhuta) from the Hindu caste system according to *Manusmiriti*, they often referred to as untouchables and now they are trying to seek their identity and empowerment. Dalits were banished from fourfold Varna (caste) system which consists of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisya, Shudras and they were scrutinized as forming a fifth Varna (caste), that is famous as Panchama, or Parihars (Harijans). They have faced severe social injustice due to their position in caste hierarchy. After facing discrimination for centuries, finally movements, revolts are emerged against these caste based oppression and discrimination. Mahatma Gandhi introduced the term Harijan, which means children of God, to spot the prior Dalits. Dalits have been considered polluted, impure, and excluded from society from the very beginning of the world so they have always been suppressed, exploited, and oppressed. The word Dalit expresses the people who are exploited, discriminated, tortured and never got social justice as we see poetry of Bijay Kant Dubey, an Indian poet and writer, known for his unique style and thought provoking poetry. In his poem "What does Dalit Signifies", he says-

"Dalit, Dalit is a word signifying

What is it trodden, suppressed, oppressed

And exploited and tortured…."

B. R. Ambedkar began a movement in 1956 as Dalit Buddhist Movemnet for empowering Dalits in India. It was both a political and religious movement. Ambedkar reinterpreted Buddhism to create a new school of thought called Navayana, which broke with conventional Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana philosophies. The reinterpretation put Buddhism on the forefront of social and political reform, opposing Hinduism and dismantling the caste system that excluded Dalits. The movement gained strength when almost half a million Dalits, who had been treated as untouchables in the past, converted to Navayana Buddhism following Ambedkar. This collective conversion was a protest against caste oppression and a claim of Dalit rights. Ambedkar considered Buddhism to be a tool for the remaking of society on the basis of justice, equality, and freedom, with elements of social protest incorporated into its practice. Navayana Buddhism stresses the overthrow of caste hierarchy and dignity for subjugated communities. It has been a source of inspiration for Dalit Panthers and other such movements and remains a source of inspiration for contemporary Dalit activism. Authors such as Arjun Dangle have explained Dalit identity in terms of common experiences of struggle and survival, promoting a revolutionary perspective that addresses inequalities in society. It denounced Hinduism, critiqued the Indian caste system and advocated Dalit rights. The

movement also dismissed Mahayana, Theravada and Vajrayana traditions of Buddhism teaching; however, the movement maintains itself as an engaged Buddhism according to the teaching of Ambedkar. The movement was a reaction to the oppression and discrimination against Dalits (once referred to as "untouchables") in the Hindu caste system. Dalits adopted Buddhism as a means of rejecting Hinduism and the caste system, in search of freedom and equality. The movement worked to advance the rights of the Dalit group and oppose social and political structures that maintained inequity. The movement caused a remarkable boost in the number of Buddhist communities all over India, especially in Maharashtra. It is regarded as a socio-political act of protest, representing a step towards freeing oneself from the omnipresence of caste. The movement remains to inspire and influence Dalit people in India, with numerous still referring to themselves as Ambedkarite Buddhists.

Contemporary Dalit literature, which started to develop in the late 1960s, is an expanding corpus of work that responds to caste domination and social injustice. It developed as a separate genre through the efforts of reformist intellectuals and writers like Jyotirao Phule, Sree Narayana Guru, B.R. Ambedkar, Iyothee Thass, Sahodaran Ayyappan, and others. Scholars such as Satyanarayana and Tharu contend that Dalit literature picked up pace following the Dalit Panther Movement, which carried on Ambedkar's vision, challenged Gandhian nationalism, and initiated a new social movement focused on Dalit rights and empowerment. Dalit writing gradually developed into a national phenomenon, focusing on issues of caste and re-questioning the effects of colonialism and missionary work. Some of the leading figures in contemporary Dalit literature are Mahasweta Devi, Arjun Dangle, Sachi Rautray, Rabi Singh, Bama, and Mangal Rathod. They have contributed significantly to the genre by writing on resistance, identity, and social justice. Their literature continues to provide insights into the lived reality of marginalized communities and promotes equality and empowerment.

The term Dalit Literature first used in the first Dalit literature conference, (Dalit Sahitya Sammelan), which was held in 1958 organized by Annabhau Sathe. Annabhau Sathe, a poet, writer and social worker, born in Dalit community is often considered founder of Dalit literature. He has significant contribution in Samyukta Maharashtra Movement (a samiti advocated for creation of Marathi speaking state as result Maharashtra created) Resolution 5 of this conference states that *"the literature written by Dalits and by others about Dalits in Marathi be accepted as a separate entity known as Dalit literature."* Firstly Dalit literature started in Marathi and then spread to other languages like Gujrati, Punjabi, Hindi, Telugu, Kannada and Bengali. Mulk Raj Anand was the first to take apart through his novels like Untouchable, when Bakha aware of his status as an untouchable; "Posh keep away, posh, sweeper coming, posh, posh, sweeper coming, posh posh, sweeper coming"! B. R. Ambedkar played a role of prominent leader for the depressed classes, his writings and speeches influenced movements like Dalit Panther Movement, founded by Namdeo Dhasal. Arjun Dangle, a writer and leader of Dalit Panther Movement writes; *"Dalit is not a caste but a realization and is related to the experiences, joys and sorrows and struggles of those in the lowest strata of society. It matures with a sociological point of view and is related to the negativity, rebellion and loyality to science, thus finally ending as revolutionary."* In recent years, new voices have emerged, broadening the scope and influence of Dalit literature such as "The Grip of Change", work by P. Sivakami is known for its insights into Dalit life, and Vijila Chirrappad, kerala writer, exposes the unique challenges facing by Dalit females. The founder of Apna Theatre Dev Kumar has also used drama to promote Dalit consciousness.

Dalits or Dalit writers have faced caste discrimination from their childhood. They faced cruel behaviour and bad treatment of so called upper class people. Dalits have always been labourers, untouchables and discriminated on their caste, they never got equality in social rights. They have always been tolerated worse than animals. Om Prakash Valmiki says in his autobiography "Joothan: A Dalit's Life" that *"Untouchability was so rampant that while it was considered all rights to touch dogs and cats or cows and buffaloes, if one happened to touch Churha, one got contaminated or polluted. The Churhas were not seen as human. They were simply things for use. The utility lasted until the work was done. Use them and then throw away."* Dalit writers have experienced that they are only known by their caste names in upper castes and it is cause of humiliation. They have not only expressed this caste experiences in their autobiographies but also realized to the world that how a community of upper class treats other lower class community. Dalit literature is the portrait of identity crisis and self-assertion of Dalits. Dalit literature raise voice for identity of Dalits, it speaks that Dalit are not meaningless in this society they also have dignity and self-respect. There are many autobiographies, poetry, short stories, and novels have written to explore the reality that Dalits are trying to overcome the difficulties and they interpreted that they can claim their identity as the respectable human being. Dalit writers tolerated suppression, and inhuman treatments, but gave a strong voice to their sufferings to assert their identity. Dalit literature protested to cast out the subalternity. They

revolted against demonic caste system and atrocities, and they claimed that they cannot tolerate anything anymore, they have realized that what is their place in society. Dalit literature represents the strength for fighting spirit against all odds in society. Dr. Narendra Jadhav's works ("Amma Baap Aan Amhi", "Outcaste", "Untouchables") tell story of his struggle for dignity with his family and their journey out of caste. In his most famous work Outcaste he realistically portrayed the struggling journey of his family as well as whole community. It is a memoire in which Jadhav puts three generations of his family together, his grandfather, father and himself. He shares his fathers' experiences as Yeskar worker, who is assigned village duties of guarding dead bodies. Jadhav characterized his father as Damu who was witnessed of many atrocities, social boycott, and excluded life because of hegemony in hierarchical society. He criticizes Hindu tradition saying that, *"what kind of tradition is this that treats Mahars worse than cats and dogs? I spit on these inhuman traditions, I am not going to abide by such traditions. I am a man of dignity and I will not go from house to house begging for Baluta, what are all of you going to do? Kill me?"* (Jadhav 10). These words of Damu show a painful criticism against Hinduism. The Dalit had been deprived of the possibility of expressing themselves over centuries. Social norms, religious restrictions and education barriers repressed their voices. Their voices were not always expressed in mainstream literature, which did not portray them in a true way and was rather stereotypical and sympathetic. Such silence was not the mere chance, but an outcome of systematic marginalization. Dalit could not even go school and hence they could not write their stories and publish them. They were usually translated in the context of dominant caste writers even in cases when their experiences were taken into consideration. Dalit literature silences this by giving voice to the marginalized voices. It will turn literature into a place where oppressed groups of people are able to write their own history and make their own identity. Dalit writers do so through storytelling, poetry, and biographies, which react against the histories of misrepresentation of the narratives. This silencing was largely facilitated by the denial of education, since it denied Dalit the freedom to write, publish, and portray their views. This situation is eloquently exemplified in *"joothan"* by Omprakash Valmiki, who writes, "*school was a place where I was constantly reminded of my caste"*, which also underscores how caste was used as a depiction of dignity and a depiction of the self. This marginalization was not only limited to the exclusion of social life but also an exclusion of the epistemic life as their knowledge and voices were devalued and de-epistemized on a systematic basis. People of upper caste can't tolerate the presence of Dalit, they often humiliate them because of their place in society, because of their poverty, and education on which they have no even single right. Not even the uneducated people do same but educated people even people who are fighting against such type of exploitation and discrimination, can't accept Dalit near to them. As Vijay Tendulkar shows in his work "Kanyadan" through his Arun Athwale who is Dalit exposes the hypocrisy of educated people who claim equality but feel uneasy in the actual presence of a Dalit person saying, *"you people ashamed of me… of my language, my habits, my very being."* Tendulkar further shows how Jyoti Devalikar's parents shows superficial modernity when they oppose her decision to marry a Dalit boy (Arun). She feels that their parents are educated but not free from caste thinking despite of believing in equality and liberalism, even they are working against caste exploitation. She confronts conflict between their ideals and their action, exposing educated families' bound by deep-rooted caste consciousness in these words, *"you taught me equality, Baba, but now when I live it, you cannot accept it."*

Aravind Malagatti, an indian prominent poet and writer of kannada language, in his autobiographical text *"Government Brahamana",* addresses the challenge of the paradox of identity in a caste based society. Its name alone is ironical, in that it implies how state institutional forms (such as education and reservation) seek to raise Dalits, but caste consciousness remains what makes them who they are and cages them. Malagatti tells about his experience of education by narrating how he acquires access to the institutional spaces only to always stay socially marginalized. Through his experiences, it comes out that education does not necessarily wipe out the caste discrimination. It rather reveals the subtle and systemic forms of this discrimination. Irony and reflective narration are employed in the text as an attack on the hypocrisy of the society and constraints of institutional reform. His most famous quote or line, "*Caste follows you like your shadow"* reinforces that even when Dalits gain voice through education, structures of oppression persist, making assertion an ongoing struggle. Similarly a Telugu writer named G. Kalayan Rao, who himself a Dalit, also tries to challenge such type of marginalization of lower castes in his renowned work "*Untouchable Spring"*. This novel restores the Dalit history in the form of memory, folklore and group narrations. It changes the erasure (silence) of history by the reclamation (assertion) of the culture of Dalit life as rich, multifaceted, and resistant. *"Our bodies were buried, but they were never dead",* this is a very strong symbolism of shift between erased histories into re-discovered voices. Thus it is both a historical text and

reminiscence that seek to bring to life the pain of several generations of a Dalit family in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana. It rewrites their history of art, literature, and of struggle for social justice and upliftment. Thus the novel reflects various types of Dalit struggles and their possibility of relative good. It also shows a person as a hero who is fighting against exploitation. But the forms of opposition pursued in the novel are antithetical to traditional types of revolution employed by the lower caste. It uses conversion to Christianity and boycotting Hinduism to liberate themselves of the label of untouchables.

Dalit rights movement has only talked about only Dalit men's sufferings, experiences and struggle while Dalit women also tolerated many challenges because of caste discrimination, lack of education, and poverty. The experience of Dalit women have been ignored in Dalit Literature written by men. Dalit women or feminist writings throw light on the problems of caste identity to Dalit feminist literature. Dalit women also suffer from violence at high rates, it include kinds of violence which are especially done for Dalit women. They were forced to prostitute as Devadasi or Jogini which are specifically reserved for Dalit women. They became the victims of violence like molestation, rape because they and their families were not aware of their rights. According to wiritnig of Kiran Kumar Boddu and Siva Nagaiah Bolleddu in English Studies International Research Journal, sexual violence is regular and routine issue of oppression against Dalit women. Indian women movements, which have been launched on a large scale by middle and upper-class women, have been criticized by Dalit women to ignore the problems that they uniquely faced. The caste issues faced by Dalit women have also ignored by Feminist academics. Dalit feminism challenges the idea of Indian feminism that all women have same problem as being the same. Dalit women have always endured dual oppression from caste and gender, which are not mutually exclusive but intertwined categories. Dalit women were actively involved in anti-caste and anti-untouchability movements in the 1920s. In the 1930s, they were engaged in the Non-Brahman movement, joining hands with efforts against social ills like child marriage and the system of dowry. Their activism persisted in the 1940s, with 25,000 Dalit women participating in the All India Depressed Classes Women Conference in Nagpur in 1942. The conference adopted important resolutions supporting women's rights to divorce, condemning polygamy, enhancing labor conditions, and encouraging education for lower-caste women. Dalit women also participated in social movements in the 1970s and early 1980s. The first Dalit women's national conference was organized in Bangalore in 1987, which was a major step towards organizing their collective voice. In the 1990s, some organizations headed by Dalit women came into existence, including the National Federation of Dalit Women and the All India Dalit Women's Forum. These organizations sought to solve problems particular to Dalit women while building alliances with Dalit men and non-Dalit women to further their cause for equality and empowerment. Dalit women started to write their biographies and testimonies based on their lives and experiences of caste, class, and gender. Writers like Urmila Pawar, Babytai Kamble, Bama, Mukta Salve wrote about the complextities of caste, gender in society.

Bama, a Tamil Dalit feminist, highlights the intersection of caste and gender discrimination in her autobiography "*Karukku",* where she writes, "*I had to suppress all my pain anger and pain with*in me", reflecting the internalized silence imposed by caste oppression. She is a teacher and novelist. She joined a nunnery but left because of bad conditions of Dalits. Her experiences of teaching found out that catholic nun oppressed the Dalit teachers and children. After that she began to write on Dalit experiences. Her works involves caste and gender discrimination in Christianity and Hinduism. She also shared her childhood experiences and wrote autobiographical novel "Karukku" in a dialect of Tamil.

Dalit literature often portrays the harsh realities of rural life where caste discrimination is deeply embedded in social and economic structures. Dalits are frequently denied access to education, clean water, temples and social spaces. These experiences are vividly depicted in Dalit narratives, making readers confront the uncomfortable realities of caste-based inequality. As Babytai Kamble was an Indian activist and writer, is universally acclaimed for her autobiographical novel *Jina Amucha* (The Prisons We Broke) published in Marathi, which is a strong description of caste domination, poverty, violence, and the triple discrimination experienced by Dalit women ("*We were treated worse than animals"*). Her work also condemns the violation of Dalit women by both upper castes ("*the upper castes kicked us and beat us as they pleased*") and Dalit men ("*even our men, drunk and broken, would vent their anger on us.*"), furnishing a distinctive discourse on gender and caste oppression. Kamble was an active part of the Dalit movement in Maharashtra and also a member of Mahila Mandal Phaltan. She made efforts toward social reform through writing articles and poems on Dalit issues and by managing a residential school for children belonging to vulnerable communities. Her memoir is one of the most powerful accounts of the lived lives of Dalit women, interweaving personal testimonies with critical understandings of India's socio-political history of

precolonial and postcolonial times. The rise of the Dalit literature signifies the culmination of this enforced silence to a strong assertion. Works like "*Karukku"* are such examples of this change as they give an unmediated narrative of caste oppression and experience. Equally in "*Sangati*", Bama predicts the common plights of Dalit women noting that "*our women have to work like beasts of burden"* thereby revealing meeting point between caste and gender exploitation. Similarly, "*The Grip of Change*" by P. Sivakami (a dalit-feminist writer predominately writing in Tamil.) accentuates the importance of opposition and agency asserting that, "*freedom is not given; it has to be taken,"* that explains the transformation from passive suffering to active assertion. Nevertheless, the novel progressively reveals that resistance is muddled up by internal patriarchy. The character Kathamuthu, who claims that he is fighting against injustice ends up supporting the power hierarchies since it proves that assertion must address internal domination. P. Shivkami, one of the first Tamil Dalit authors who highlight the dual marginalization of Dalit women by both Dalits and upper caste men on this basis of their caste and gender. Sivakami explains how discrimination in society has curbed progress of Dalit women in their own community. They have to pay much because of the gender bias they are being exposed to in their daily lives. By emphasizing on the persistence and never-say-die attitude of the Dalit women, Sivakami has not only brought into the limelight the negative sides of the issue but also its positive sides.

Conclusion- Thus, Dalit literature is being used as an instrument of empowerment in this shift of silence to assertion. It interferes with hegemonic discourses, reinstatement of literature canons, and provides space to other voices. After all, it is not merely a literature but a movement that attempts to rebuild history, confront social hierarchies, as well as enshrine humanness in those who were long deprived of it. The authors like Bama, kamble, Valmiiki, Sivakami and Aravind Malagatti illustrate the process of the shift between the forced silence to the active assertion. These authors reclaim their agency through autobiographical stories and socially engaged fiction and defy major literary traditions. Their texts are also documenting lived experiences of caste oppression, as well as situating literature as a place of resistance and identity formation, and epistemic justice. In this way, Dalit literature changes the role of literature itself, which has been an area of dominance of elite representation into a place where marginalized voices and lived experiences of existence are given a place. It also becomes a place of resistance where writers are not only writing about the oppression but also reclaiming identity, dignity and authority of the narrative. Therefore, Dalit literature manages to dismantle the silence of history in which the discriminated groups have been kept and reorganize literature as a social and political statement.

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A Comparative Analysis of Mental Health, Nature, and Sustainable Well-being through the Lens of Fredrik Backman

A Positive Psychology and Psychoanalytic Reading

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Abstract— *This paper provides a comparative literary analysis of four novels by Swedish author Fredrik Backman: A Man Called Ove (2014), My Grandmother Asked Me to Tell You She's Sorry (2015), Britt-Marie Was Here (2016) and Anxious People (2020) all of which depict mental well-being, human relationships and sustainable well-being. Although Backman is a multimillion-selling, internationally translated author, his fiction has received relatively little sustained academic attention, especially in terms of its psychological aspects. Two complementary theoretical frameworks are used in this study to highlight the unconscious processes and defence mechanisms in characters' experiences of grief, anxiety, and depression, and the strengths-based, future-focused processes they undergo to become more flourishing. Two complementary theoretical lenses are used in this study: Freudian psychoanalytic theory to highlight the unconscious processes and defence mechanisms in characters' experiences of grief, anxiety, and depression; and positive psychology to highlight the strengths-based, future-focused pathways through which characters move toward flourishing. This study employs a qualitative thematic content analysis to explore the similarities and differences in the themes that emerged from the four books: psychological disturbance protected against in various ways, displacement, reaction formation and sublimation of loss; psychological recovery that happens at the level of flow-inducing engagement, strengths of the characters, and making meaning; and the strong consistency of the story arc, one in which the individual flourishes through, and not apart from, the giving up of isolation in favor of collective life. Finally, the implications for literary study and the ways in which popular fiction models the beginnings of psychological suffering and the routes to psychological success are considered.*

Keywords— ***Fredrik Backman, Mental Health, Sustainable Well-being, Positive Psychology, Psychoanalytic Theory.***

I. INTRODUCTION

In 2012 A Man Called Ove caught on in countries around the world (2014 English edition), and now the Swedish author Fredrik Backman ranks among the top selling book writers of the last decade, with over 40 translations of his novels. Readers and critics alike praise Backman's fiction as a tale of heartwarming characters, vitriol-filled protagonists and fragile, lonely individuals who are transformed from isolation into a community of neighbors, strangers and children. Under this superficially charming and comforting layer, however, Backman's novels consistently portray serious psychological themes, such as suicidal thinking in A Man Called Ove (Backman, 2014), the loss of a cherished member of the family and the resulting grief in My

Grandmother Asked Me to Tell You She's Sorry (Backman, 2015), depression and isolation in Britt-Marie Was Here (Backman, 2016), and overall anxiety, panic and family disunity in Anxious People (Backman, 2020).

Although his fiction has been commercially successful, academic literary criticism on the books has not been extensive compared to that of many award-winning literary writers and to date, there has been little research that specifically examines his novels using a psychoanalytical framework and/or a positive psychology lens. This divide is striking, given that the two traditions have time-honored roots, but complementary methods to read through the written accounts of psychological distress and recovery of fiction. The psychoanalytical theories developed by Sigmund Freud offer a depth-based explanation of the influence of unconscious conflict, grievances and defense mechanisms on behavior (Freud 1923, 1917). Positive psychology, however, has a strengths-based, future-focused perspective on the positive role of engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment for human flourishing (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman, 2011). They, read together, enable a fuller story of Backman's typical narrative structure, where a character's documented and apparent dissatisfaction with his life is slowly shifted to a more vibrant life in which he is once again engaged and connected with others. Studies of Backman's novels in recent years have explored his texts from other angles that also attend to their psychological undercurrents, but none directly to the psychoanalytical or positive-psychological aspects that are the focus of this analysis: Fuller (2025a) examines his fiction through the lenses of heteropessimism and the body, and Fuller (2025b) does so with regard to his depiction of family and motherhood in contestations of Nordic gender equality.

This study aims at this gap by making a thematic analysis of four Backman novels in a comparative, analytical study. The guiding research question is: What are the representations of both the psychoanalytical origins of psychological distress and positive-psychological origins of well-being in Backman's novels and do they correspond to theoretical accounts of each of these processes? A second question would have to be what does the double reading entail about Backman's fiction for a general popular audience.

The study is organised in five additional parts.The remaining part of the study takes the following format. First, it creates a psychological and theoretical model that melds the literary and Freudian psychoanalytical theories with the positive psychology model. Secondly, it describes the qualitative research technique employed. Thirdly, it reports the findings in a way that includes three cross cutting themes. Fourth, it gives a theoretical discussion on these findings. Last but not least, it provides a summary and suggestions for future studies.

II. LITERARY FRAMEWORK

This paper compares and contrasts the two theoretical strands which have been applied to Backman's novels and which are usually regarded as opposing - Freudian psychoanalytic theory and positive psychology - and each is used to analyse the novels on its own.

2.1 Freudian Psychoanalytic Theory

According to Sigmund Freud structural psychological model, mental life in terms of human being is divided into Id, the location of the instincts of desire, Superego, the voice of prohibition of the social and parental life and Ego as a mediator between Id and Superego and external reality (Freud, 1923). The main theoretical concept of this study is Freud's (1917) description of the ways in which grief is expressed; ordinary grief is a progressive and painful process of distancing oneself emotionally from a lost object, while melancholia is characterized by a "reversion to the past effect" (p. 236) wherein grief moves inward and unprocessed. If the work of mourning is not allowed to proceed as it should, Freud and other psychoanalytic thinkers propose that the ego implements defense mechanisms to handle the "unbearable affect" that is not consciously processed, such as: repression, displacement, reaction formation, and sublimination (Freud, 1923; A. Freud, 1936). This account of arrested mourning has persisted in contemporary clinical psychiatry, with prolonged grief disorder added to the list of clinical syndromes in the last few years (Smid et al., 2021), and a desire to differentiate adaptive grief work from the defensive and unfinished kind of mourning described by Freud (1917). Finally, Freud's (1930) Civilization and its Discontents addresses the problem of a long-standing balance between individual instinctual desire and renunciations required by communal life, which he proposes is mediated partly by sublimation, the social accommodation of instinctual energy by engaging in something socially valuable, like work, care, or creative endeavor.

2.2 Positive Psychology

Positive psychology is a new specialty of Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) that is focused on states that facilitate human flourishing, whereas psychoanalysis is focused on the conditions and mechanisms associated with distress. Seligman (2011) argues that there are 5 dimensions of wellbeing: positive emotions, engagement, relationships,

meaning and accomplishment. In addition, Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) theory on flow is a state of effortless, self-forgetting absorption in an activity which is inherently rewarding and closely related to general well-being. Peterson and Seligman (2004) also suggested that flourishing occurs when people participate in daily life acting out in recognisable ways their gifts and abilities, such as persistence, fairness and kindness. More recent research has tried to expand and test this framework and not simply consider it as an "inventory". This stems from the understanding that, according to Donaldson et al. (2022), well-being is not just about internal psychological factors, but also physical health, mindset, environment, and economic security; hence, the PERMA+4 model was introduced, marking it as a deeper model than the classic one. Positive psychology provides, then, a vocabulary for describing recovery and flourishing as a part of psychoanalytic account of what characters may be recovering from.

Together, these two frameworks offer interpretive scaffolding for the subsequent thematic analysis, which highlights psychoanalytical theory to help see these protagonists' distress in the light of their unconscious origins and their defense mechanisms, as well as the positive psychology to see their distress in the process of their meaning, engagement, and relationships.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

This research is mixed qualitative through literary thematic content analysis method, which is appropriate to identifying patterns of meaning that can be found in literary works that are purposively sampled novels. The sample consisted of four novels written by Fredrik Backman, selected purposively because all four have a protagonist in a state of emotional distress, who have clear journeys towards re-engagement and relationships: A Man Called Ove (2014), My Grandmother Asked Me to Tell You She's Sorry (2015), Britt-Marie Was Here (2016) and Anxious People (2020). All four were read in their English translations, which are widely distributed.

Each novel has been read, and conducted in a manual manner, three a priori themes were coded: psychoanalytic (identified through the above mentioned literary framework as grief work, melancholia, displacement, reaction formation, sublimation), positive-psychological (identified through same literary framework above as flow, character strengths, positive psychology's relationships and meaning pillars) and the resolution of individual distress through collective or communal life (Freud's (1930) account of sublimation into civilization, as well as positive psychology's relationships and the meaning columns). The passages were identified and summarized in the researcher's own words within each chapter, used an iterative and comparative approach across the four texts and organized them under sub-themes to follow a standard qualitative thematic analysis procedure.

There are a few constraints provided by this approach which are discussed again below. Literary thematic analysis is always interpretive, however, because different readers would code the same texts differently by assigning different weights and groupings of themes and, especially, by making inferences about the unconscious motivations for which the texts could stand, which are not expressly stated but rather inferred from what is said. Secondly, the analysis is based on an English translation, and so may be some nuances in tone or word meaning lost in the translation. Thirdly, no data on reader's reactions or reader's response were collected, but rather the design analyzed how the story is represented by the text; the types of reader's experience data typically collected in recent research on novels and well-being within the field of fiction-and-well-being research (Currie et al., 2025) was qualitative interview data. Lastly, the four novels could not be expected to sample every work of Backman's; there are other novels, such as the Beartown trilogy, that were not included in the sample and the results are thus representative of this rather than of Backman's entire oeuvre.

IV. RESULTS

4.1 Table 1 summarizes the three cross-cutting themes as they appear across the four novels before each theme is discussed in turn.

Table1: Cross-Novel Comparison of Psychoanalytic and Positive Psychology Themes

Novel	Psychoanalytic Reading (Freud)	Positive Psychology Reading	Community / Collective Outcome
A Man Called Ove (2014)	Grief work following spousal loss; rigid routines as reaction formation and displacement defending against mourning	Handiwork and caretaking as flow-inducing engagement; strengths of persistence and fairness expressed through action	Reintegration into neighborhood restores relationships and meaning (PERMA)

My Grandmother Asked Me to Tell You She's Sorry (2015)	Childhood mourning processed through fantasy as symbolic wish-fulfillment and sublimation of loss	Storytelling and imaginative play as meaning-making and positive engagement	Elsa extends her grandmother's hidden network of mutual aid
Britt-Marie Was Here (2016)	Obsessive cleanliness as displacement/reaction formation defending against depression after divorce	Football coaching provides accomplishment, engagement, and renewed identity	Community sports program revived; collective morale improves
Anxious People (2020)	Anxiety and crisis read as eruption of repressed despair amid unconscious conflict between desire and social demand	Shared crisis produces positive emotion and new relationships among strangers	Hostages form a lasting support network beyond the crisis

4.2 Psychoanalytic Readings: Grief, Defense, and the Unconscious

In the four novels, Backman's characters demonstrate certain phases of distress which illustrate Freud's (1917) description of mourning and melancholia and the defense mechanisms he developed in 1923 and the later A. Freud's (1936). A Man Called Ove (Backman, 2014) contains a lot of reaction formation and displacement, a way for Ove to replace intolerable grief over his deceased wife with socially acceptable irritability and control, the ways to postpone the necessary and painful processes of the grieving period. Elsa's elaborate fantasy world in My Grandmother Asked Me to Tell You She's Sorry (Backman, 2015) is a symbolic sublimation that permits the ego to come to terms with her grandmother's passing and her family's cracks and fissures via acceptable story, rather than face them head-on. In Britt-Marie Was Here (Backman, 2016), Britt-Marie's hyper-cleanness is her reaction formation and her displacement from the depression and collapse of identity that ensued after her divorce, a hyper-cleanness that serves as a means for her to replace the emotional chaos she can't yet articulate. In Anxious People (Backman, 2020), the whole set of the characters' anxiety and the main character's desperate suicidal pitch are a rage of suppressed despair that mirrors Freud's (1930) description of how the strain is caused when instinctual need and social demand are placed in an unsustainable tension.

4.3 Positive Psychology: Engagement, Strengths, and Flourishing

A positive psychology reading helps to clarify the ways in which each character takes steps toward flourishing, while a psychoanalytical reading helps to explain the causes of distress in each of them. As Ove's careful work and attentiveness, essentially defensive, slowly transform into opportunities for flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) – a state of absorbing, intrinsically rewarding engagement – his character strengths of persistence and fairness (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) are transformed into renewed purpose. Elsa's storytelling is at times a symptom of unprocessed grief, but also, in this instance, one of the positive-psychological ways of creating meaning, which Seligman (2011) identified as one of five strands of the PERMA model. When coaching a kids' soccer team, Britt-Marie gets a sense of accomplishment and engagement, and it's a sense she's been lacking in her marriage. The crisis that the strangers face together brings out unexpected positive emotions and new relationships in Anxious People, which is a story about how well-being can emerge out of adversity, if it is approached together.

4.4 Community & Civilization: Transition to Collective Life

The people of the community and civilization are the ones who experience the sublimation into their collective life.

A third transversal pattern can be seen as a combination of both: In both the novels, the protagonist's progress from a position of isolation to a position of collective life is finished only by rejecting isolation and embracing collective life, similar to Freud's (1930) description of civilization as the transformation of individual instinct into social and collective life, and the dimensions of relationships and meaning as found in positive psychology (Seligman, 2011). Ove's raising of a young family and larger neighbourhood is a good example of how the loss is shared for the good of all. Elsa carries on her grandmother's covert network of mutual aid, a private symbolic resource that becomes a collective care. Britt-Marie's rejuvenated football team doesn't bring financial success to her alone, but to an entire dying town. In the midst of an emergency that brings them together, the strangers in Anxious People find that they become a group of people that supports each other beyond the emergency itself. For each, personal flourishing and collective belonging are not competing aspirations, but rather co-constitutive.

V. DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that, although freudian psychoanalytic theory and positive psychology have opposing convictions, they are complementary rather than conflicting in their interpretation of Backman's fiction. Each protagonist is the subject of an original grievance or loss, which is dealt with in different ways, such as through reaction formation and displacement in the case of grief, symbolizing or sublimating the loss in the case of the protagonists, and the anxiety experienced by each is a way of recognizing and avoiding their conflict between desire and social demand, which is repressed (Freud, 1917, 1923, 1930). Positive psychology speaks to those resources and structures through which that distress is ultimately turned into engagement (flow), the use of character strengths, and Seligman's (2011) model of positive emotion, positive relationship, positive meaning, and positive accomplishment, or PERMA. As each theory stood alone, it would only document portions of Backman's characteristic movement from an uneventful unhappiness to a thriving life, but as they are all read together, they document the entire journey.

The double reading also renders an account of how Freud's (1930) description of civilization is a fruitful connection between the two traditions. In psychoanalytic terms, the notion of individual instinctual satisfaction having to be partially denied and sublimated into collective life is anticipated by Freud, who anticipates the meaning and relationships pillars of well-being in positive psychology. In each of his novels, the bridge is the subject of a dramatic scene in which a protagonist's healing is inextricably linked to the healing of a community, or to the reconstruction of a community. This indicates that in Backman's novels the achievement of flourishing is not a purely internal or individual one, but is also a community effort.

A certain alignment of the two frameworks should yet be recognized. The psychoanalytical interpretation of literature characters is always inferential, because the unconscious motivation is never explicitly expressed in the literary work; and Freud's theoretical framework has been criticized for its ability to test its hypotheses empirically. Positive psychology, on the other hand, has been criticized for its individualistic focus and focus on positive emotions which can cause it to downplay the importance or need for negative emotions and experiences like grief and distress. These are not finalized concerns: Recent conceptual efforts in positive psychology itself have recognized that there is no empirical evidence that the PERMA framework's five factors are always observed in empirical research, and instead that it is a dynamic, contextually extendable theory of well-being (Donaldson et al., 2022). In fact, Backman's novels seem to skirt both constraints: they are not novels of "grief" or "defense," but rather of processes that are essential, not accidental, to the novel; they are certainly not novels of "flourishing" but novels of flourishing, in communal rather than simply individual terms.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study has focused on four novels by Fredrik Backman and explored the representation of mental health and sustainable well-being in these novels through a combination of the theoretical approaches of Freudian psychoanalytic theory and positive psychology. It was observed that both distress and its defense, were experienced through displacement, reaction formation and sublimation formation, characteristics of Freud's (1917, 1923) account of mourning and defense, and that recovery occurred through flow, character strengths and the PERMA pillars of well-being, characteristics of positive psychology (Seligman, 2011; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), and that there was a persistent narrative structure in which individual flourishing was realized, not rather than in, collective life, as outlined by Freud (1930) in his account on civilization. These results advance the current scant academic literary theories about Backman, which include a multi-disciplinary reading that connects with psychoanalytical and positive psychology approaches, but also provide a claim to their popular success as they dramatise the neededness of grieving and the potential for flourishing.

Future research in this vein could be expanded in a number of ways, however, mostly along empirical, reader-response lines to test whether readers of Backman's novels report psychological benefits that are congruent with either of the two presented frameworks, using a qualitative and/or mixed- methods approach developed for the study of fiction reading and well-being by Currie et al. (2025) and Monroy-Fraustro et al. (2021); comparative analysis which could include the extension of this analysis to the other novels in Backman's “Beartown trilogy” and perhaps to his other novels as well, and finally, translation studies that would investigate whether the psychoanalytical or positive-psychological themes identified here are equally present in the original Swedish novel.

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Design and Implementation of a Mental Health Service Model for College Students Based on the "Boundary-Crossing Wanderer" Project

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Abstract— *The mental health needs of college students are increasingly characterized by their everyday and diverse nature, highlighting the need for higher education institutions to strengthen support for students' emotional well-being, stress management, and ongoing personal development. Factors such as concerns about seeking psychological counseling, the relatively formal nature of existing services, and insufficient access to everyday support may discourage some students from actively seeking help when experiencing emotional distress. Meanwhile, existing mental health services tend to focus primarily on psychological assessment, counseling, and crisis intervention, with limited continuity among online resources, offline activities, and feedback on students' personal development. To address these issues, the "Boundary-Crossing Wanderer" project proposes a four-stage mental health support model consisting of emotion recognition, emotion expression, emotion regulation, and emotion feedback. The model integrates functions such as mood recording, anonymous sharing, virtual companionship, psychological exercises, and personal growth feedback into a continuous support process. By combining an online digital platform with offline immersive experiential activities, the project develops a comprehensive mental health support model for college students that integrates everyday emotional support, interactive engagement, and continuous support throughout the process of personal development.*

Keywords— ***Digital mental health, Emotion regulation, Help-seeking behavior, Online-offline integration, Psychological stress, Social support***

I. INTRODUCTION

With changes in the social environment and the development of higher education, college students' mental health has become an important issue requiring attention in the process of talent development in higher education institutions. As an important component of promoting students' all-round development, mental health education in higher education institutions plays a vital role in enhancing students' psychological resilience and promoting their healthy development. However, current mental health services in higher education institutions still primarily take the form of psychological assessment,

counseling, and crisis intervention, with services largely focused on students who are already experiencing significant psychological distress. There remains room for further improvement in areas such as daily emotional management, stress regulation, and continuous mental health support.

Existing research has actively explored the development of mental health education systems in higher education institutions, psychological crisis intervention mechanisms, and the application of digital mental health services, providing important references for improving the mental health service system for college students. However, from a practical perspective, existing service models still face challenges such as insufficient willingness among students to seek help proactively, limited service reach, and inadequate integration of online and offline resources, making it difficult to fully meet college students' diverse and continuous needs for mental health support. Therefore, how to promote a shift in mental health services in higher education institutions from "problem intervention" to "continuous support" and establish a more proactive, accessible, and sustainable service model has become an important issue in current practices of mental health education in higher education institutions.

Using the "Boundary-Crossing Wanderer" college student mental health service project as a practical platform, this study analyzes college students' needs for mental health services and existing problems through a questionnaire survey and explores a continuous mental health support service model. Centered on the stages of emotion recognition, emotion expression, emotion regulation, and emotion feedback, the model establishes a continuous support system covering attention to students' daily mental states, emotional guidance, and personal growth support, thereby enhancing the proactiveness, continuity, and accessibility of mental health services for college students.

II. GROWING DEMAND FOR MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS AND INADEQUATE SERVICE PROVISION

2.1 Psychological Stress Among College Students Is Becoming Increasingly Common

In recent years, with the combined effects of academic competition, employment pressure, and interpersonal relationships, psychological stress among college students has become increasingly common. To understand college students' needs for mental health services, the project conducted a questionnaire survey among college students and collected 208 valid responses. The survey results showed that more than 80% of respondents had experienced psychological stress to varying degrees, indicating that psychological stress has become a common phenomenon in college students' daily academic and personal lives.

Further analysis revealed that mental health problems among college students do not generally emerge within a short period but develop gradually through the accumulation of long-term stress and emotional fluctuations. The process ranges from negative emotions such as anxiety and feelings of loss to behavioral manifestations such as decreased sleep quality and reduced learning efficiency, and eventually to the emergence of more noticeable mental health problems. This process is characterized by a certain degree of continuity and subtlety.

2.2 Low Utilization of Traditional Mental Health Services

Although most college students experience psychological stress to varying degrees, the proportion of students who seek professional psychological help proactively remains relatively low. Among the valid responses collected in the survey, only 28% of respondents had used university psychological counseling services, while 18% were unaware of whether such services were available at their university. There remains a considerable gap between the utilization of mental health services and the actual needs of college students. The survey also found that when experiencing emotional distress, many students tend to cope with it on their own or confide in friends, rather than proactively seeking help from university counseling centers. This indicates that there is still considerable room

for improvement in students' acceptance and utilization of mental health services.

Further analysis revealed that the low utilization of traditional mental health services is mainly related to students' perceptions and service provision. At the perception level, some students still hold misconceptions about psychological counseling and worry about being labeled as having "mental health problems," resulting in certain concerns about seeking professional help. At the service provision level, traditional psychological counseling often involves relatively complex appointment procedures and formal service settings, which may reduce students' willingness to seek help proactively when their mental health problems have not yet become severe. This mismatch between existing service provision and college students' mental health needs limits, to some extent, the coverage and effectiveness of mental health services.

2.3 Mental Health Services in Higher Education Institutions Lack a Continuous Support System

As college students' mental health needs continue to grow, higher education institutions have continuously improved their mental health service systems. However, survey findings indicate that existing services still have certain limitations. Currently, mental health services in most higher education institutions primarily focus on psychological assessment, psychological counseling, and crisis intervention. Service provision is largely centered on intervention after mental health problems have emerged, while insufficient attention is given to students' daily emotional changes, stress regulation, and continuous mental health support. As a result, the existing service model remains relatively fragmented and reactive.

Furthermore, traditional mental health services still face limitations in terms of service formats and resource integration. Online mental health resources and offline services lack effective coordination, while service components such as psychological assessment, counseling, and activities operate relatively independently and have not yet formed a continuous support system. At the same time, in response to the diverse and individualized mental health needs of college students, existing services still have considerable room for improvement in terms of interactive experiences, digital applications, and continuous support, making it difficult to fully meet students' needs for everyday mental health management. Therefore, it is necessary to further develop a mental health service system based on the characteristics of college students' mental health needs and promote a shift in mental health services from crisis intervention to continuous support and from single-service provision to diverse and collaborative services.

III. "BOUNDARY-CROSSING WANDERER": DESIGNING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES TAILORED TO COLLEGE STUDENTS' NEEDS

3.1 Overall Project Framework

Addressing current issues in mental health services for college students, such as limited service coverage, low rates of proactive help-seeking, and insufficient continuous support, the "Boundary-Crossing Wanderer" project explores new pathways for the integrated development of online and offline mental health services in higher education institutions. It does so by establishing a mental health support system that combines an online digital platform with offline immersive activities.

As shown in Fig. 1, the project adopts a closed-loop service architecture consisting of emotion recognition, emotion expression, emotion regulation, and emotion feedback. During system operation, users first establish personal mental health profiles through daily mood records, psychological assessments, and behavioral data collection. The platform uses artificial intelligence algorithms to analyze and assess users' emotional states and provides targeted emotion regulation recommendations based on individual differences. At the same time, the system integrates mindfulness training, meditation courses, and emotional management tasks to guide students in self-regulation, thereby helping them enhance their emotional awareness and psychological resilience.

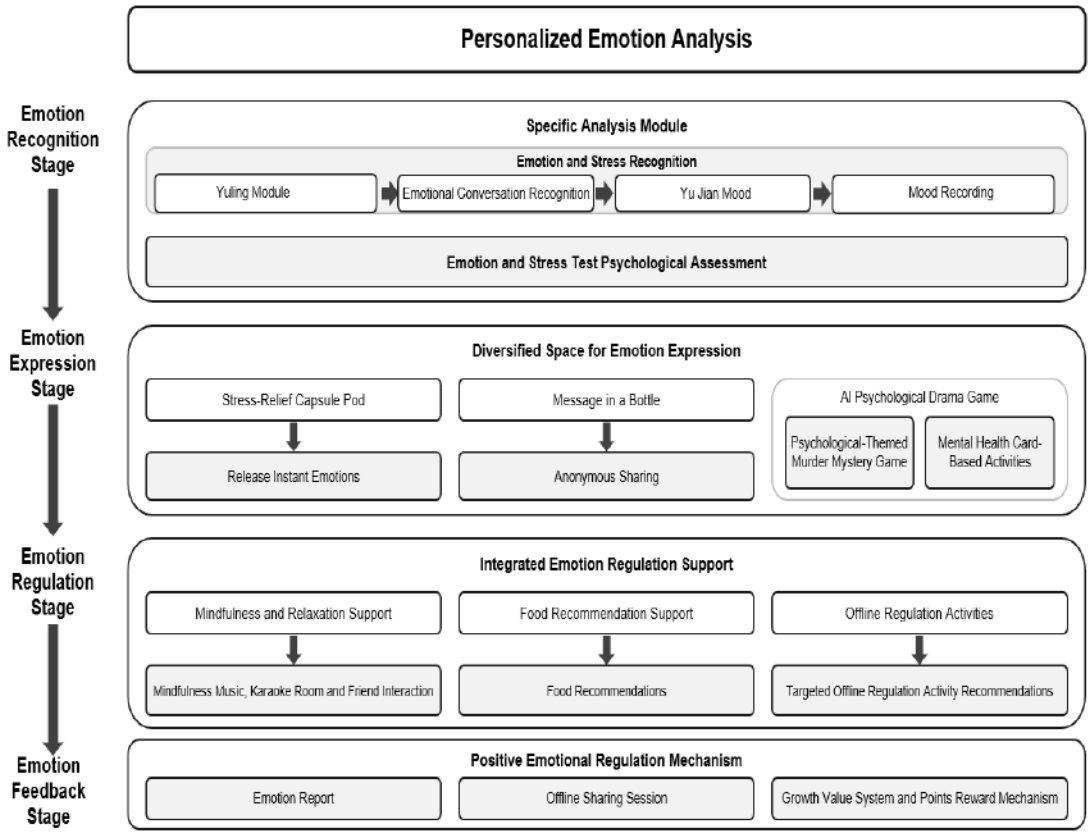


Fig. 1 Overall Architecture of the "Boundary-Crossing Wanderer" System

Unlike traditional mental health services, which primarily rely on psychological counselors, the "Boundary-Crossing Wanderer" project places greater emphasis on integrating digital technologies and social support resources. Through virtual pet companionship, online interest-based communities, and offline activities such as murder mystery games, card-based activities, yoga, and meditation, the project builds a multi-level mental health support network, enabling students to express their emotions and access social support in a relaxed and interactive environment. This service model, which integrates digital mental health support, community-based mutual support, and immersive experiences, helps overcome the limitations of traditional psychological counseling in terms of time, space, and human resources.

From a functional perspective, the project mainly consists of four components: the emotion management system, intelligent recommendation system, community support system, and offline practice system. The emotion management system is responsible for monitoring and assessing users' mental health states; the intelligent recommendation system provides personalized mental health support plans based on user characteristics; the community support system promotes interaction and communication among users; and the offline practice system reinforces personal growth and mental health support through experiential activities. Together, these components form an integrated mental health service ecosystem for college students.

3.2 Design of the Continuous Support Mechanism

Continuous support is the core philosophy of the "Boundary-Crossing Wanderer" project. Its purpose is to transform the linear model of traditional mental health services—"problem identification → counseling → intervention completion"—into a model that provides continuous support and dynamic assistance throughout the mental health development process of college students. Based on the basic patterns of emotional development

among college students, the project establishes a four-stage mental health support model consisting of emotion recognition, emotion expression, emotion regulation, and emotion feedback. Each module performs a relatively independent service function while remaining dynamically connected through platform data, thereby forming a continuous mental health support loop.

First, Emotion Recognition Establishes a Dynamic Emotional Monitoring Mechanism. Emotion recognition serves as the starting point of the continuous support mechanism of the "Boundary-Crossing Wanderer" project and provides an important foundation for delivering targeted mental health support. Traditional mental health education in higher education institutions relies primarily on periodic psychological assessments and manual interviews, making it difficult to monitor students' daily emotional changes in a timely manner. As shown in Fig. 2 the project develops an emotion recognition module that integrates emotion data collection, intelligent recognition, dynamic analysis, and risk warning. Through digital technologies, the module enables continuous monitoring of college students' mental health states and provides data support for subsequent stages of emotion expression, emotion regulation, and psychological intervention.

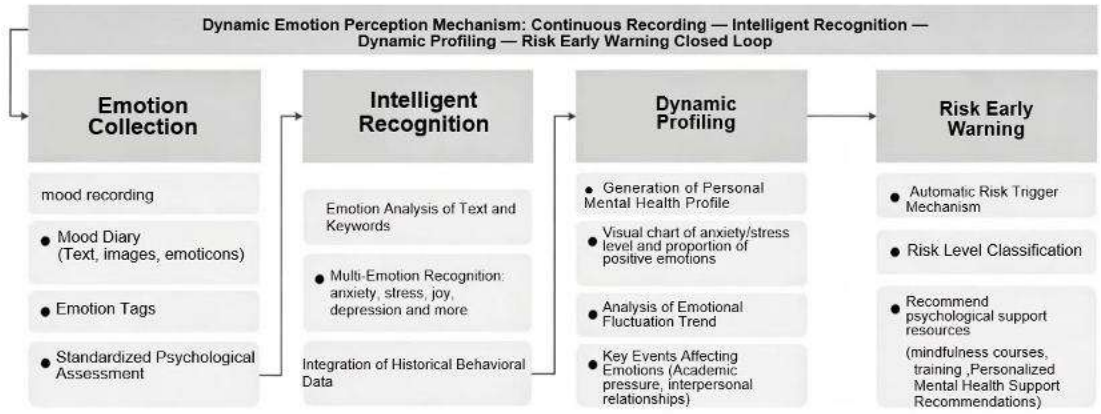


Fig. 2 Dynamic Emotion Recognition and Risk Early Warning Mechanism

Second, Emotion Expression Creates a Diverse Space for Emotional Release. To address the practical difficulties faced by college students, including unwillingness, reluctance, and difficulty in expressing emotions. As shown in Fig. 3,the project develops an emotion expression module that integrates situational experiences, anonymous sharing, intelligent interaction, and peer support. The AI Psychological Drama Game allows users to co-create card games and murder mystery scenarios with AI, enabling them to express their mental health needs more freely and engage in self-reflection with AI guidance. The "Message in a Bottle" feature allows users to express their emotions and anonymously share their concerns, providing an outlet for emotional expression and opportunities to receive warmth and social support. The Stress-Relief Capsule Pod provides users with a private space for emotional expression and incorporates various stress-relief tools and scenarios to help users express their emotions and relieve stress.

Third, Emotion Regulation Provides Personalized Mental Health Support Plans. As shown in Fig. 4, given the diverse sources of psychological stress among college students and significant individual differences, the project uses the results of intelligent analysis to develop an emotion regulation module that integrates intelligent companionship, psychological exercises, game-based incentives, and habit formation, providing personalized mental health support plans for different users. Based on users' emotional states, the platform automatically recommends emotion regulation content such as mindfulness training, relaxation music, and breathing exercises. At the same time, selected techniques from cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) are transformed into interactive activities, including card-based tasks, role-

playing, and situational challenges, making the process of emotion regulation more engaging and closely connected to students' daily lives. This design helps reduce college students' resistance to traditional psychological counseling and increases their willingness to participate in mental health support activities.

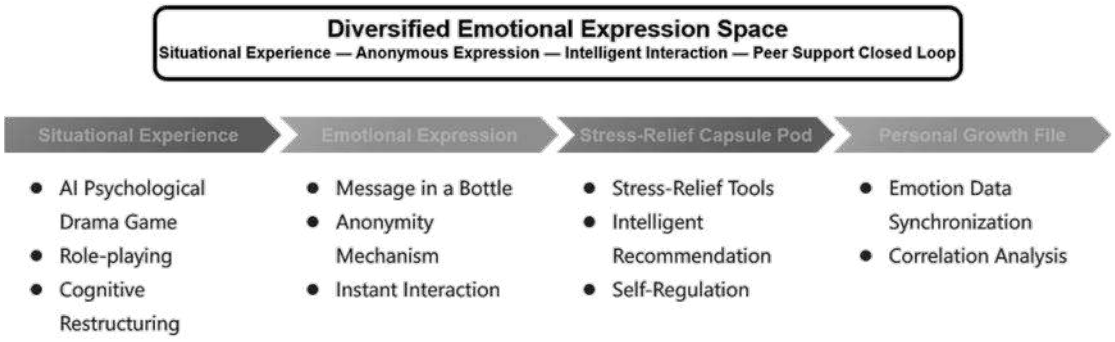


Fig. 3 Diversified Emotional Release Mechanisms

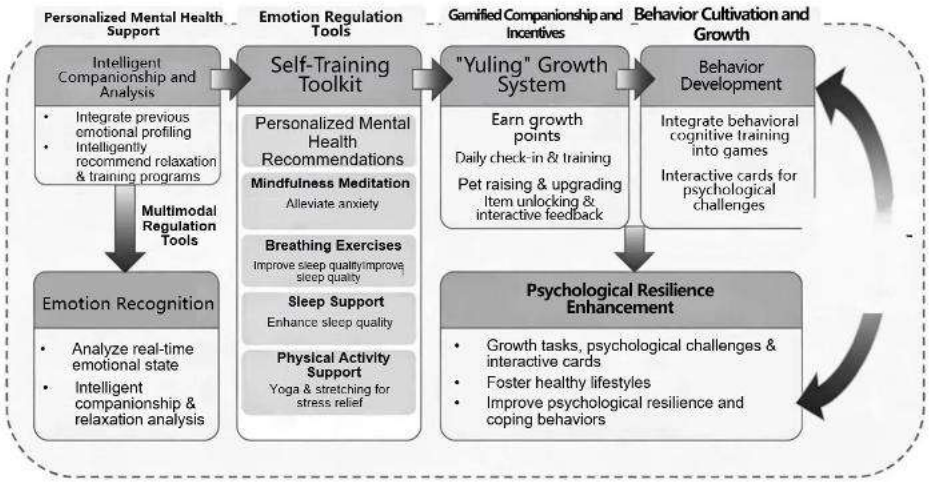


Fig. 4 Personalized Emotion Regulation Support Mechanism

Fourth, Emotion Feedback Establishes a Long-Term Growth Feedback Mechanism.As shown in Fig. 5, during the emotion feedback stage, the platform periodically generates emotional development reports that visually present changes in users' mental health states and provide personalized recommendations based on their growth trajectories. Through mechanisms such as reward points, growth badges, and stage-based goal feedback, the platform encourages students to gradually develop positive emotional management habits and facilitates a transition from short-term emotional relief to long-term personal growth.

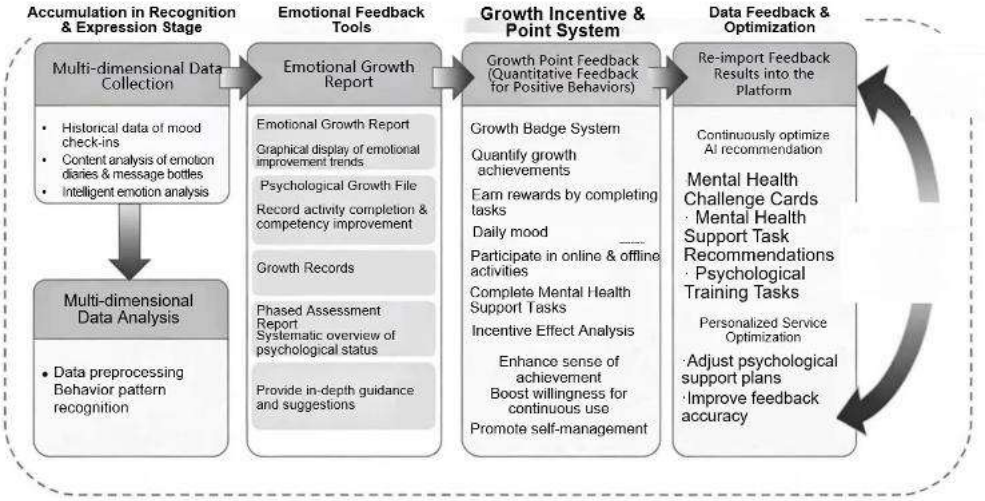


Fig. 5 Emotion Feedback and Personal Growth Mechanism

3.3 Online-Offline Integration Mechanism

The online-offline integration (OMO) model is an important innovative practice of the "Boundary-Crossing Wanderer" project, with the core objective of establishing a continuous mental health support system that connects digital spaces with real-world settings.

At the online level, the project relies on a mobile platform to create a digital mental health service space. Users can engage in self-regulation through features such as mood recording, emotion assessment, meditation training, virtual pet interaction, and community discussions. The system uses artificial intelligence to analyze users' mental health data and dynamically recommends appropriate mental health support content based on changes in their emotional states, thereby providing personalized services.

At the offline level, the project designs a series of immersive experiential activities based on the interests and characteristics of college students, including psychological-themed murder mystery games, mental health card-based activities, yoga sessions, and mental health growth salons. Compared with traditional lecture-based mental health education, these activities are more consistent with the participation preferences of young people and promote emotion expression and self-awareness through interactive experiences.

Furthermore, the project emphasizes the interconnection of online and offline data. Students' mood records, task completion data, and personal growth data generated online are synchronized with their personal growth profiles, while participation in offline activities and feedback are also fed back into the platform's recommendation system and serve as important references for optimizing subsequent services. By establishing a data-driven dynamic adjustment mechanism, the project enables the precise matching and continuous tracking of mental health services.

According to the social support buffering theory, a strong social support system can reduce the negative psychological effects of stressful life events[5]. Therefore, the "Boundary-Crossing Wanderer" project integrates online communities with offline activities, enhancing students' sense of belonging and social connectedness through shared participation, peer support, and continuous support, thereby improving the effectiveness of mental health support. This model not only expands the coverage of mental health services but also promotes a shift in mental health education in higher education institutions from a single counseling-based model to a diversified and collaborative service model.

IV. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES FOR THE COLLEGE STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE MODEL

4.1 Establishing a Low-Threshold Mental Health Support Service System

Although the mental health service system in higher education institutions has been continuously improved, students' willingness to seek professional help proactively remains relatively low. On the one hand, some students hold stereotypical perceptions of psychological counseling and believe that seeking such services indicates the presence of relatively serious mental health problems. On the other hand, traditional mental health intervention models in higher education institutions have limited coverage and lack targeted approaches, making it difficult to meet the diverse and individualized mental health support needs of contemporary college students[1]. Therefore, higher education institutions should explore more accessible and everyday forms of mental health support to lower the barriers to students' participation in mental health services.

Taking the "Boundary-Crossing Wanderer" project as an example, the project creates mental health support scenarios that integrate gamification, social interaction, and digital technologies, incorporating mental health education into activities popular among young students, such as murder mystery games, board games, and virtual pet interaction. This transforms the process of mental health self-regulation from "passive acceptance" to "active participation." For example, the mental health board games designed by the project transform techniques such as emotion recognition and cognitive restructuring from cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) into interactive tasks, helping students express their emotions and engage in self-regulation through enjoyable activities.

The online community and "Message in a Bottle" feature developed by the project provide students with an anonymous space for emotional expression. Users can record their emotions, share their experiences, and receive peer support in a relatively safe and open environment. Fostering an inclusive campus mental health culture and reducing the stigma associated with mental health services can effectively alleviate students' concerns about seeking help and increase their participation in mental health services[4]. Therefore, by reducing the formality and perceived professional barriers associated with traditional psychological counseling, the "Boundary-Crossing Wanderer" project brings mental health services closer to college students' daily lives and improves the accessibility and participation of mental health services.

4.2 Establishing a Continuous Mental Health Support Mechanism

In the past, mental health services in higher education institutions have largely relied on periodic psychological screening and individual counseling. Existing intervention systems may respond relatively slowly, with their focus largely placed on post-crisis intervention[2]. As college students' mental health needs have gradually expanded from crisis response to emotion management, stress regulation, and personal growth, traditional problem-oriented service models have become increasingly inadequate to meet these needs. Therefore, mental health services in higher education institutions should gradually extend from crisis intervention to daily support and establish a continuous mental health support mechanism, enabling early identification, early support, and continuous assistance for students experiencing mental health difficulties.

Guided by the concept of continuous support, the "Boundary-Crossing Wanderer" project establishes a continuous service system covering emotion recognition, emotion expression, emotion regulation, and emotion feedback. During project operation, the system continuously monitors changes in users' mental health states through methods such as mood diaries, psychological assessments, and behavioral data analysis. It also uses artificial intelligence algorithms to generate personalized mental health profiles and provide users with dynamic support plans.

In addition, the project's virtual pet system, "Yuling," provides differentiated interactive feedback based on users' emotional states and strengthens users' emotional connection through daily interaction. Online communities, peer-support groups, and offline experiential

activities together form a social support network. According to Gross's process model of emotion regulation, the sustained use of emotion regulation strategies such as cognitive reappraisal can help improve individuals' emotion regulation and overall psychological adaptation[3] This enables students to continuously access emotional support and mental health resources throughout their studies, daily lives, and interpersonal interactions. The project therefore helps overcome the limitations of traditional mental health services that often rely on short-term intervention, promoting the development of mental health services in higher education institutions toward a more preventive, developmental, and growth-oriented approach.

4.3 Strengthening Digital Technology to Promote Integrated Online and Offline Services

The development of digital technologies has provided new pathways for innovation in mental health education in higher education institutions. Higher education institutions can leverage digital technologies such as artificial intelligence and big data to integrate online mental health support platforms with offline experiential activities, thereby establishing a coordinated online-offline mental health service system, expanding service coverage, and improving the precision of service delivery. The "Boundary-Crossing Wanderer" project has established a smart mental health service system combining an "online digital platform + offline immersive scenarios." At the online level, the system provides personalized services through functions such as emotion recording, behavioral analysis, and intelligent recommendations. At the offline level, immersive activities such as mental health board games and murder mystery games enhance user engagement and participation, thereby creating an integrated online-offline mental health support ecosystem. Furthermore, the project explores the application of multimodal data integration in practice. By integrating users' emotional records, behavioral data, and activity participation data, the project enables dynamic monitoring of mental health states and more precise service recommendations, thereby improving the relevance and effectiveness of mental health education.

V. CONCLUSION

Psychological stress among college students is characterized by its everyday occurrence, continuity, and subtlety. Mental health services in higher education institutions should not only focus on psychological counseling and crisis intervention after mental health problems arise but also strengthen continuous support for students' daily emotional changes, stress regulation, and personal growth. The survey found that a gap remains between college students' needs for mental health services and their actual utilization of such services. Some students are reluctant to seek help proactively because of concerns about psychological counseling and the relatively formal nature of service delivery. At the same time, existing mental health services are largely concentrated on psychological assessment, counseling, and crisis intervention, while online mental health resources, offline activities, and subsequent feedback lack effective coordination, making it difficult to establish a continuous mental health support process.

To address these issues, the "Boundary-Crossing Wanderer" project relies on the OMO Mental Health Development System to construct a four-stage mental health support model consisting of emotion recognition, emotion expression, emotion regulation, and emotion feedback. The model integrates daily mood recording, psychological assessment, intelligent analysis, anonymous emotional expression, and virtual pet companionship into an interconnected service process. At the online level, the project provides students with daily mental health support through functions such as mood recording, meditation training, community interaction, and virtual pet interaction. At the offline level, activities such as psychological-themed murder mystery games, mental health card-based activities, yoga and meditation sessions, and mental health growth salons provide spaces for emotional expression, interactive experiences, and peer interaction. Online mood records, task completion data, and personal growth data are connected with participation in offline activities, allowing emotion recognition, emotion expression, emotion regulation, and emotion feedback to

form a relatively continuous mental health service process.

The project demonstrates that improving mental health service models in higher education institutions cannot rely solely on increasing the frequency of psychological counseling. It also requires adjustments to service formats, integrating mental health support into college students' daily learning and living environments and strengthening connections between online platforms and offline activities. In future practice, the project should continue to refine mood recording, content recommendations, growth reports, and offline activity arrangements based on student participation and actual feedback, while further evaluating the applicability of the model to different student groups. At the same time, greater attention should be paid to the integration of online services with existing mental health services in higher education institutions, ensuring that digital mental health support, offline experiential activities, and professional psychological services complement one another effectively. In this way, the model can better meet college students' needs for daily emotional management and continuous mental health support.

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Women's Voices Across Borders: A Feminist Standpoint Analysis of Jhumpa Lahiri's The Namesake

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Abstract— *The experiences of women in diasporic literature often reveal the intricate relationship between migration, gender, identity, and cultural negotiation. Jhumpa Lahiri's The Namesake (2003) offers a nuanced portrayal of South Asian immigrant women whose lives are shaped by physical displacement and psychological transformation across national and cultural boundaries. This study employs Feminist Standpoint Theory, primarily developed by Nancy Hartsock, Sandra Harding, and Patricia Hill Collins, to examine how women's lived experiences generate distinct forms of knowledge that challenge dominant patriarchal narratives. The paper focuses primarily on Ashima Ganguli and Moushumi Mazoomdar, whose contrasting experiences illuminate different dimensions of female identity within the South Asian diaspora. While Ashima represents first-generation immigrant women negotiating cultural continuity and familial responsibilities, Moushumi embodies the dilemmas of second-generation diasporic women seeking autonomy amidst competing cultural expectations. The research argues that migration does not merely displace women geographically but also transforms their perceptions of self, belonging, and agency. Through close textual analysis, the paper demonstrates that Lahiri portrays female empowerment not through overt rebellion but through subtle negotiations, emotional resilience, cultural adaptation, and quiet resistance. Feminist Standpoint Theory enables a deeper understanding of how marginalized women's perspectives expose the intersections of gender, migration, tradition, and identity. The study concludes that The Namesake challenges simplistic representations of immigrant women by presenting them as active creators of knowledge and identity whose experiences contribute significantly to contemporary feminist and diasporic discourse. Ultimately, Lahiri's novel redefines displacement as a site of both vulnerability and empowerment, emphasizing women's voices as central to understanding the complexities of transnational existence.*

Keywords— ***Feminist Standpoint Theory, Diaspora, Women's Agency, Identity Negotiation, Quiet Resistance, Migration, South Asian Women, Jhumpa Lahiri, Ashima Ganguli, Moushumi Mazoomdar***

I. INTRODUCTION

Jhumpa Lahiri's The Namesake explores the complexities of migration, cultural identity, and belonging within the South Asian diaspora. While the novel primarily follows Gogol Ganguli's journey of self-discovery, it also provides significant insights into the experiences of women who negotiate cultural displacement, family responsibilities, and changing identities across borders. The characters of Ashima Ganguli and Moushumi Mazoomdar represent two different generations of diasporic women whose lives reveal the challenges and possibilities of migration.

Through the lens of **Feminist Standpoint Theory**, this study examines how women's lived experiences become sources of knowledge and identity formation. Ashima's journey reflects the struggles of a first-generation immigrant woman who preserves cultural traditions while gradually developing independence, whereas Moushumi

represents a second-generation woman seeking autonomy, intellectual freedom, and self-definition.

The study focuses on themes such as **female agency, identity negotiation, tradition, quiet resistance, and psychological displacement** to understand how Lahiri portrays women's voices within the South Asian diaspora. By foregrounding the perspectives of Ashima and Moushumi, the novel challenges the representation of immigrant women as passive figures and highlights their resilience, adaptability, and active role in shaping their identities across cultural boundaries.

Research Objectives

The study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- To examine the representation of women's experiences in *The Namesake* through Feminist Standpoint Theory.
- To analyze how migration reshapes female identity and agency.
- To explore Ashima Ganguli's transformation from cultural dependency to independent selfhood.
- To investigate Moushumi Mazoomdar's negotiation between cultural expectations and personal freedom.
- To examine the role of psychological displacement in constructing female subjectivity.
- To analyze the significance of quiet resistance as a form of feminist agency.
- To understand how Lahiri challenges patriarchal assumptions regarding immigrant women.
- To contribute to feminist and diasporic literary scholarship by foregrounding women's situated knowledge.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Jhumpa Lahiri has attracted extensive scholarly attention for her exploration of migration, identity, and diaspora. Early criticism focused primarily on cultural assimilation, generational conflict, and immigrant identity. However, recent feminist scholarship has increasingly highlighted the importance of gender in understanding diasporic experiences.

Susan Stanford Friedman argues that migration fundamentally transforms identity by creating multiple cultural affiliations rather than replacing one identity with another. This perspective is highly relevant to Lahiri's portrayal of diasporic women, whose identities remain fluid and relational.

Avtar Brah conceptualizes diaspora as a "homing desire" rather than a simple longing for return. Ashima's attachment to India illustrates this emotional complexity while demonstrating that belonging can exist simultaneously in multiple locations.

Robin Cohen emphasizes that diasporic identities involve continual negotiation between homeland and host society. Lahiri extends this concept by demonstrating that women experience this negotiation differently because of gendered social expectations.

From a feminist perspective, Nancy Hartsock argues that women's social positions generate distinctive epistemological perspectives. Ashima's everyday experiences of domestic labor, motherhood, migration, and emotional resilience reveal forms of knowledge unavailable within dominant patriarchal narratives.

Sandra Harding develops the concept of "strong objectivity," suggesting that marginalized perspectives produce more comprehensive understandings of social reality. Ashima's experiences as an immigrant woman expose the emotional costs of migration often overlooked in traditional immigrant narratives.

Patricia Hill Collins further argues that lived experiences constitute legitimate sources of knowledge. Although Collins writes from Black feminist perspectives, her emphasis on situated knowledge provides a valuable framework for analyzing South Asian immigrant women whose experiences emerge from intersecting identities involving gender, ethnicity, culture, and migration.

Several scholars have examined Ashima's character as an embodiment of diasporic resilience. Critics observe that her initial dependence gradually evolves into independence without abandoning cultural traditions. Rather than portraying empowerment as radical rejection, Lahiri depicts transformation through adaptation, emotional endurance, and community-building.

Moushumi has received comparatively less scholarly attention, yet feminist critics recognize her as representing the complexities of second-generation diasporic identity. Her rejection of conventional marriage reflects broader questions concerning female autonomy, cosmopolitan identity, and the limits of cultural expectations.

Despite this growing body of scholarship, relatively few studies employ Feminist Standpoint Theory as the central analytical framework for *The Namesake*. Existing research frequently discusses gender alongside migration but often overlooks how women's social locations produce distinctive epistemological perspectives. This study addresses that gap by foregrounding women's lived experiences as sites of knowledge production and feminist resistance within the South Asian diaspora.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: FEMINIST STANDPOINT THEORY

This study employs **Feminist Standpoint Theory (FST)** as the primary theoretical framework to analyze the representation of women in Jhumpa Lahiri's The Namesake. Feminist Standpoint Theory provides an effective lens for understanding how women's lived experiences, particularly those shaped by migration, gender, and culture, produce distinctive forms of knowledge that challenge dominant patriarchal narratives. By focusing on the perspectives of Ashima Ganguli and Moushumi Mazoomdar, this study demonstrates how their experiences as immigrant and diasporic women reshape identity, agency, and belonging across cultural borders.

Origins of Feminist Standpoint Theory

Feminist Standpoint Theory emerged during the late twentieth century as an epistemological approach within feminist scholarship. Influenced by Marxist thought, the theory argues that knowledge is socially situated and that individuals' understanding of society is shaped by their material and social conditions. While Karl Marx emphasized that the working class possesses a unique understanding of capitalist society because of its position within economic structures, feminist scholars extended this idea by arguing that women, owing to their historical marginalization, possess distinctive perspectives on gender, power, and social relations.

The theory challenges traditional assumptions that knowledge is objective, universal, and value-free. Instead, it proposes that all knowledge is produced from particular social locations. Women's experiences within patriarchal societies therefore become valuable sources of knowledge capable of revealing inequalities that remain invisible from dominant perspectives. Feminist Standpoint Theory shifts attention from abstract generalizations to the lived realities of marginalized women, making it particularly relevant for literary studies that examine gendered experiences.

Nancy Hartsock and the Feminist Standpoint

The foundations of Feminist Standpoint Theory were laid by Nancy Hartsock in her influential essay *The Feminist Standpoint* (1983). Hartsock argues that women's participation in domestic labour, caregiving, and reproductive work provides them with unique insights into systems of power and inequality. She maintains that women's everyday experiences generate knowledge that differs from dominant male perspectives because women occupy different social positions.

Hartsock emphasizes that a standpoint is not merely an individual opinion but a collective perspective developed through shared experiences of marginalization. Women's knowledge emerges from their everyday interactions with social institutions such as family, marriage, and work. In *The Namesake*, Ashima's experiences as a wife, mother, and immigrant exemplify this standpoint. Her responsibilities within the household, her emotional labour, and her efforts to preserve Bengali traditions reveal dimensions of migration that remain largely invisible in conventional immigrant narratives.

Sandra Harding and Strong Objectivity

Sandra Harding expanded Feminist Standpoint Theory by introducing the concept of **strong objectivity**. Harding argues that beginning research from the perspectives of marginalized groups results in more comprehensive and reliable knowledge than approaches claiming detached neutrality. According to Harding, traditional research often reflects the interests of dominant social groups while presenting itself as objective. Strong objectivity requires scholars to acknowledge their own social positions and to consider marginalized experiences as essential rather than peripheral.

Within *The Namesake*, Harding's concept encourages readers to interpret Ashima's and Moushumi's experiences as central to understanding migration. Rather than viewing women as secondary figures supporting male narratives, the novel reveals that their perspectives expose the emotional, cultural, and psychological complexities of diasporic life. Their experiences challenge simplified narratives of immigration by highlighting loneliness, cultural adaptation, emotional resilience, and identity reconstruction.

Patricia Hill Collins and Situated Knowledge

Patricia Hill Collins further developed Feminist Standpoint Theory through her concept of **Black Feminist Thought**, emphasizing that knowledge is shaped by intersecting systems of race, gender, class, and culture. Collins argues that marginalized women produce valuable knowledge precisely because they experience multiple forms of oppression simultaneously. Although Collins focuses primarily on African American women, her concept of **situated knowledge** can also be applied to immigrant and diasporic women.

Ashima Ganguli and Moushumi Mazoomdar occupy multiple social positions as women, members of the South Asian diaspora, and participants in patriarchal family structures. Their experiences cannot be understood solely through gender or migration; instead, these identities intersect to shape their perspectives. Ashima's emotional isolation as a first-generation immigrant differs significantly from Moushumi's struggle for intellectual and personal freedom as a second-generation diasporic woman. Feminist Standpoint Theory enables these differences to be interpreted as distinct yet equally significant standpoints.

Dorothy Smith and Everyday Experience

Dorothy E. Smith contributed to Feminist Standpoint Theory by emphasizing the importance of women's everyday experiences. She argued that sociology traditionally privileges institutional viewpoints while ignoring domestic and emotional labour. Smith proposed that ordinary activities—such as caring for children, maintaining households, and nurturing relationships—should be recognized as legitimate sources of knowledge because they reveal broader social structures.

This perspective is particularly relevant to Ashima's character. Much of her life revolves around domestic routines: preparing Bengali meals, raising children, celebrating cultural festivals, and maintaining family relationships. Although these activities appear ordinary, Lahiri portrays them as significant acts of cultural preservation and identity formation. Ashima's everyday practices become forms of agency that sustain the family's connection to its cultural heritage while helping them adapt to life in America.

Donna Haraway and Situated Knowledges

Donna Haraway introduced the concept of **situated knowledges**, arguing that all knowledge is partial and shaped by the observer's location. Haraway rejects universal claims to truth and instead emphasizes that understanding always emerges from specific historical and cultural contexts.

Ashima's understanding of migration differs fundamentally from Gogol's because she migrates as an adult with established cultural roots, whereas Gogol is raised within American society. Similarly, Moushumi's experiences reflect her education, cosmopolitan lifestyle, and struggles with cultural expectations. Their identities remain fluid rather than fixed, illustrating Haraway's argument that knowledge is always contextual and relational.

Feminist Standpoint Theory and Diaspora

The application of Feminist Standpoint Theory to diasporic literature highlights how migration reshapes women's identities and perspectives. Migration involves not only geographical movement but also emotional, psychological, and cultural transformation. Women frequently experience migration differently from men because they are expected to preserve cultural traditions while adapting to unfamiliar societies. Consequently, immigrant women occupy liminal positions between homeland and host country, tradition and modernity, family obligation and personal autonomy.

In *The Namesake*, Ashima's migration from Calcutta to Massachusetts produces profound loneliness and homesickness. Yet these experiences also enable her to develop resilience, independence, and new forms of belonging. Her standpoint reveals migration as an ongoing process of negotiation rather than a simple transition from one country to another.

Moushumi's experiences demonstrate another dimension of diaspora. Born into a Bengali immigrant family but educated in Western institutions, she negotiates multiple identities simultaneously. Her dissatisfaction with conventional marriage reflects her desire for intellectual and personal freedom. Feminist Standpoint Theory interprets her decisions not merely as individual choices but as responses to the intersecting pressures of gender, culture, and migration.

Female Agency and Quiet Resistance

One of the strengths of Feminist Standpoint Theory is its broader understanding of agency. Rather than equating empowerment solely with open rebellion, the theory recognizes that women often exercise agency through subtle, everyday actions. Ashima's commitment to preserving Bengali traditions, building immigrant communities, and raising her children in a bicultural environment constitutes a form of **quiet resistance** against cultural erasure. Her gradual transition from dependence to self-reliance illustrates that agency can emerge through resilience, adaptation, and emotional strength.

Similarly, Moushumi resists prescribed gender roles by pursuing higher education, intellectual independence, and personal autonomy. Although her choices are controversial within her community, they reflect her attempt to define herself beyond conventional expectations. Her experiences demonstrate that feminist agency may involve questioning inherited identities and negotiating new forms of selfhood.

Identity Negotiation and Psychological Displacement.

Feminist Standpoint Theory also provides valuable insights into identity formation. Both Ashima and Moushumi experience identity as fluid and continually evolving. Ashima gradually learns to inhabit both Indian and American cultures without completely abandoning either. After Ashoke's death, she decides to divide her life between India and the United States, symbolizing her acceptance of a transnational identity.

Moushumi experiences psychological displacement differently. Despite her cosmopolitan education, she struggles to reconcile her personal aspirations with cultural expectations. Her inability to find complete belonging in either Indian or American society reflects the complexities of second-generation diasporic identity. Their experiences illustrate that migration transforms not only geographical location but also emotional and psychological landscapes.

Relevance to the Present Study

Feminist Standpoint Theory provides an appropriate analytical framework for this study because it foregrounds the voices of women whose experiences have often been marginalized within migration narratives. Rather than presenting Ashima and Moushumi as passive figures, the theory recognizes them as active producers of knowledge whose lived experiences illuminate the intersections of gender, migration, culture, and identity.

Through this framework, *The Namesake* can be read as a novel that challenges dominant representations of immigrant women. Lahiri demonstrates that women's voices emerge through everyday negotiations, emotional resilience, cultural adaptation, and subtle forms of resistance. Their standpoints reveal that displacement is not merely a condition of loss but also a space for transformation, self-discovery, and the reconstruction of identity. Consequently, Feminist Standpoint Theory enables a richer understanding of how Lahiri redefines female agency within the South Asian diaspora, emphasizing that the knowledge produced from women's lived experiences is central to interpreting migration, belonging, and transnational identity.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a **qualitative research methodology** based on **textual analysis** of Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*. The research uses a **descriptive and analytical approach** to examine the experiences of Ashima Ganguli and Moushumi Mazoomdar through the framework of **Feminist Standpoint Theory**.

The study focuses on close reading of the novel, analyzing characterization, narrative techniques, themes, and symbolic elements related to migration, gender, identity, and cultural negotiation. Secondary sources, including feminist literary criticism, diaspora studies, and scholarly works on Jhumpa Lahiri, are used to support the analysis.

The research explores key themes such as **female agency, identity negotiation, tradition, quiet resistance, emotional labour, and psychological displacement** to understand how women's lived experiences shape their identities within the South Asian diaspora. The methodology highlights women's perspectives as significant sources of knowledge and examines how Lahiri portrays female resilience and transformation across cultural borders.

Detailed Textual Analysis of Ashima Ganguli

Ashima Ganguli represents the experiences of a **first-generation South Asian immigrant woman** negotiating displacement, cultural identity, and family responsibilities in *The Namesake*. Her migration from Calcutta to the United States creates both physical and psychological challenges as she struggles with loneliness, unfamiliar surroundings, and separation from her homeland. Through a **Feminist Standpoint Theory** perspective, Ashima's experiences reveal the hidden emotional labour performed by immigrant women.

Initially dependent on her husband, Ashoke, Ashima gradually develops confidence and independence. She preserves Bengali culture through food, language, festivals, and family traditions, transforming the domestic space into a site of cultural continuity and agency. Her role as a mother and cultural caretaker demonstrates that everyday activities can become forms of quiet resistance against cultural loss.

After Ashoke's death, Ashima undergoes significant personal transformation. She learns to manage life independently, develops a stronger sense of self, and embraces a transnational identity that connects both India and America. Her journey illustrates that female agency can emerge through resilience, adaptation, and emotional strength. Lahiri presents Ashima not as a passive immigrant woman but as an active participant in shaping her identity across borders.

Detailed Textual Analysis of Moushumi Mazoomdar

Moushumi Mazoomdar represents the experiences of a **second-generation diasporic woman** struggling with questions of identity, autonomy, and belonging. Unlike Ashima, Moushumi grows up between cultures, influenced by Bengali traditions as well as Western education and values. Her character reflects the complexities of hybrid identity and the challenges faced by women who negotiate multiple cultural expectations.

Through her academic achievements and cosmopolitan lifestyle, Moushumi seeks independence beyond traditional gender roles. Her pursuit of higher education, interest in French literature, and desire for personal freedom demonstrate her resistance to restrictive cultural expectations. From a feminist standpoint perspective, her choices reveal the struggle of a woman attempting to define herself beyond marriage, family, and social conventions.

However, Moushumi also experiences psychological displacement as she feels disconnected from both her Bengali heritage and American identity. Her failed marriage with Gogol reflects her internal conflicts and search for selfhood. Unlike Ashima's quiet adaptation, Moushumi's resistance emerges through questioning traditions and pursuing individual autonomy.

Together, Ashima and Moushumi represent two generations of South Asian women whose experiences reveal different forms of female agency, identity negotiation, and resistance

within the diaspora. Lahiri shows that women's identities are continuously shaped by migration, culture, and personal choices.

Major Themes in *The Namesake*: A Feminist Standpoint Analysis

Jhumpa Lahiri's The Namesake presents migration as a deeply gendered experience in which women negotiate cultural expectations, personal aspirations, and changing identities. Through the characters of Ashima Ganguli and Moushumi Mazoomdar, Lahiri explores how women experience displacement not only as geographical movement but also as emotional and psychological transformation. Interpreted through **Feminist Standpoint Theory**, the novel foregrounds women's lived experiences as valuable sources of knowledge, demonstrating that agency and identity emerge through everyday negotiations rather than dramatic acts of rebellion. The following themes reveal how Lahiri redefines the experiences of South Asian diasporic women.

1. Female Agency

One of the central themes in *The Namesake* is **female agency**, which Lahiri portrays as a gradual process of self-discovery, resilience, and decision-making rather than overt rebellion. Feminist Standpoint Theory argues that women's experiences within patriarchal societies generate distinctive forms of knowledge that enable them to negotiate power in subtle yet meaningful ways.

Ashima Ganguli exemplifies agency through adaptation and emotional resilience. Initially, she appears dependent on her husband, Ashoke, after migrating from Calcutta to the United States. However, over time, she develops confidence in managing her household, raising her children, preserving Bengali traditions, and participating in the immigrant community. Following Ashoke's death, Ashima assumes responsibilities that she had previously shared with him, secures employment, and independently decides to divide her life between India and America. These decisions demonstrate her growth from dependence to self-reliance.

Moushumi Mazoomdar represents another dimension of female agency. Unlike Ashima, Moushumi seeks autonomy through education, intellectual pursuits, and personal choice. Her determination to pursue higher studies, live independently in Paris, and resist conventional expectations surrounding marriage reflects her desire to define herself beyond traditional gender roles. Although her decisions are often controversial, they illustrate her refusal to conform unquestioningly to cultural norms.

Lahiri's portrayal of female agency suggests that empowerment assumes multiple forms. Ashima's strength lies in resilience and cultural preservation, while Moushumi's agency emerges through intellectual independence and self-definition. Feminist Standpoint Theory recognizes both as legitimate expressions of women's autonomy because they arise from different social locations and lived experiences.

2. Identity Negotiation

Identity negotiation is another major theme that permeates *The Namesake*. Migration places women between cultures, compelling them to continually reconstruct their identities in response to changing social and cultural environments. Lahiri presents identity as fluid rather than fixed, emphasizing that diasporic women simultaneously belong to multiple cultural worlds.

Ashima's identity evolves gradually throughout the novel. Initially, she perceives herself primarily as an Indian woman temporarily living in America. As years pass, however, she develops emotional ties to both countries. She learns to navigate American society while preserving Bengali traditions within her family. By the end of the novel, Ashima embraces a transnational identity, dividing her time between India and the United States rather than choosing one over the other. Her journey demonstrates that identity can encompass multiple affiliations without requiring complete assimilation or cultural abandonment.

Moushumi's identity negotiation differs significantly. Raised within the Bengali diaspora and educated in Western institutions, she struggles to reconcile competing cultural expectations. She seeks freedom from fixed ethnic identities by immersing herself in European intellectual culture, particularly during her years in Paris. Yet she also recognizes that her Bengali heritage continues to shape her experiences. Her identity remains fragmented, reflecting the complexities of second-generation diasporic existence.

From the perspective of Feminist Standpoint Theory, identity is socially situated and continually reconstructed through lived experience. Ashima and Moushumi demonstrate that identity is not predetermined but negotiated through everyday interactions involving family, migration, education, and personal aspiration

3. Tradition and Cultural Continuity

Tradition occupies a central place in Lahiri's representation of immigrant women. Rather than depicting tradition as an oppressive force alone, the novel presents it as both a source of comfort and a site of negotiation. Women become the primary custodians of cultural memory, ensuring the survival of language, rituals, food, festivals, and family values within the diaspora.

Ashima plays a crucial role in preserving Bengali culture. She cooks traditional meals, celebrates religious festivals, speaks Bengali at home, and encourages her children to

remain connected to their cultural roots. Through these everyday practices, she transforms the domestic sphere into a space where cultural identity is maintained despite geographical displacement.

However, Lahiri does not portray tradition as static. Ashima adapts cultural practices to suit her American environment, demonstrating flexibility rather than rigid adherence to custom. She accepts that her children will inevitably develop different identities while still attempting to preserve meaningful aspects of Bengali heritage.

Moushumi approaches tradition differently. Although she respects her cultural background, she resists expectations that restrict her intellectual and personal freedom. She questions conventional assumptions regarding marriage and gender roles, illustrating that tradition can also become a site of conflict for educated diasporic women.

Feminist Standpoint Theory interprets these contrasting approaches as reflections of different standpoints. Ashima and Moushumi negotiate tradition according to their respective experiences, demonstrating that cultural identity is continually reinterpreted rather than simply inherited.

4. Quiet Resistance

Lahiri's women rarely engage in open confrontation. Instead, they practice **quiet resistance** through everyday decisions, emotional resilience, and subtle negotiations. Feminist Standpoint Theory expands conventional definitions of resistance by recognizing that marginalized women often challenge systems of power through ordinary acts rather than public rebellion.

Ashima's quiet resistance is evident in her determination to preserve Bengali culture despite living in a foreign country. She builds immigrant communities, maintains family traditions, and gradually develops independence without rejecting her responsibilities. Her resilience challenges stereotypes of immigrant women as passive or dependent.

Similarly, Moushumi resists prescribed gender roles through education, intellectual ambition, and personal autonomy. She refuses to define herself solely through marriage or family expectations. Her pursuit of academic excellence and cosmopolitan identity represents a quieter yet significant challenge to patriarchal assumptions regarding women's roles.

Quiet resistance also appears in Lahiri's portrayal of women's emotional endurance. Both Ashima and Moushumi negotiate social expectations without dramatic confrontation. Their resistance operates through adaptation, negotiation, and the continual assertion of personal identity within restrictive cultural frameworks.

By foregrounding these subtle forms of resistance, Lahiri suggests that feminist empowerment is not limited to visible political action. Everyday acts of self-definition, cultural negotiation, and emotional resilience constitute equally important expressions of agency.

5. Psychological Displacement

While physical migration forms the novel's narrative backdrop, Lahiri emphasizes that displacement is equally psychological. Migration transforms emotional landscapes, creating feelings of loneliness, nostalgia, uncertainty, and fragmented belonging.

Ashima experiences psychological displacement through persistent homesickness. Separated from her parents, relatives, and familiar surroundings, she initially struggles to establish emotional stability in America. Her loneliness illustrates the invisible emotional costs of migration, particularly for women whose domestic responsibilities continue despite geographical separation from their support systems.

Over time, Ashima adapts to her new environment without completely abandoning her attachment to India. Her decision to divide her life between two countries symbolizes her acceptance of a transnational identity, suggesting that psychological belonging need not be confined to a single homeland.

Moushumi's psychological displacement differs from Ashima's. Rather than longing for India, she experiences a sense of rootlessness that accompanies cosmopolitan mobility. Despite academic success and international travel, she struggles to locate a stable identity. Her emotional dissatisfaction reflects the challenges of navigating multiple cultural expectations without fully identifying with any one community.

Feminist Standpoint Theory interprets these experiences as products of women's specific social locations. Psychological displacement is not merely an individual emotional condition but a consequence of gendered migration, cultural hybridity, and intersecting social expectations. Ashima and Moushumi reveal that women experience migration through emotional and relational dimensions that often remain absent from dominant narratives centered on economic mobility or professional success.

Thematic Synthesis

Collectively, these themes demonstrate that Lahiri presents migration as a multidimensional process shaped by gender, culture, and lived experience. **Female agency** emerges through resilience and self-determination rather than overt rebellion. **Identity negotiation** reflects the fluid and evolving nature of diasporic selfhood. **Tradition** functions simultaneously as a source of continuity and a site of reinterpretation. **Quiet resistance** illustrates the subtle ways

women challenge patriarchal and cultural expectations, while **psychological displacement** highlights the emotional complexities of living between cultures.

Through the perspectives of Ashima Ganguli and Moushumi Mazoomdar, Lahiri challenges stereotypical portrayals of immigrant women as passive bearers of tradition. Instead, she presents them as active participants in shaping their identities, preserving cultural memory, and redefining belonging across borders. Feminist Standpoint Theory underscores that their experiences generate valuable knowledge about migration, gender, and diaspora because they emerge from marginalized yet insightful social positions.

Ultimately, *The Namesake* demonstrates that women's voices are central to understanding the South Asian diasporic experience. Lahiri reveals that across geographical and cultural borders, women negotiate not only physical movement but also emotional transformation, cultural continuity, and personal empowerment. Their lived experiences affirm that displacement can become a space of resilience, agency, and the continuous reconstruction of identity.

V. FINDINGS

The study reveals that Jhumpa Lahiri's The Namesake portrays women's migration as a transformative journey that reshapes identity, agency, and cultural belonging. Using **Feminist Standpoint Theory**, the research demonstrates that the lived experiences of Ashima Ganguli and Moushumi Mazoomdar provide valuable insights into the gendered realities of the South Asian diaspora.

The major findings of the study are as follows:

- **Migration transforms female agency**, enabling women to develop resilience, independence, and self-confidence despite cultural and social constraints.
- **Women's lived experiences generate unique knowledge**, supporting the feminist standpoint argument that marginalized perspectives reveal aspects of migration and identity often overlooked in dominant narratives.
- **Identity is fluid and continuously negotiated**, as both Ashima and Moushumi balance Indian traditions with Western cultural influences in different ways.
- **Tradition functions as both continuity and negotiation**, with women preserving cultural values while adapting them to new social and cultural contexts.
- **Quiet resistance emerges as an important form of empowerment**, where women assert their autonomy through everyday decisions, emotional resilience, education, and cultural preservation rather than open confrontation.
- **Psychological displacement is as significant as physical migration**, highlighting the emotional struggles of loneliness, cultural alienation, and the search for belonging.
- **Generational differences shape women's experiences**, with Ashima representing first-generation immigrant resilience and Moushumi reflecting the identity conflicts of second-generation diasporic women.
- **Feminist Standpoint Theory effectively explains the novel**, demonstrating that women's voices and lived experiences are central to understanding migration, identity formation, and the South Asian diasporic experience.
- Overall, the study concludes that *The Namesake* presents women not as passive victims of migration but as active agents who negotiate identity, preserve culture, and redefine belonging across borders. Their experiences challenge patriarchal assumptions and contribute significantly to feminist and diasporic literary discourse.

VI. CONCLUSION

Jhumpa Lahiri's The Namesake presents the complex experiences of South Asian diasporic women through the lives of Ashima Ganguli and Moushumi Mazoomdar. Through the lens of **Feminist Standpoint Theory**, the study reveals that women's lived experiences of migration become sources of knowledge, resilience, and identity formation.

Ashima's journey reflects the gradual development of female agency through cultural preservation, emotional strength, and adaptation, while Moushumi represents the struggles of second-generation women seeking personal freedom and self-definition. Both characters demonstrate that identity is continuously negotiated between tradition and modernity.

The novel highlights that women's empowerment often emerges through quiet resistance, everyday choices, and the ability to redefine belonging across cultural borders. Ultimately, Lahiri portrays immigrant women not as passive victims of displacement but as active agents who reshape their identities and contribute meaningful

perspectives to the understanding of diaspora, gender, and cultural transformation.

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Breaking "Rooster Coop" as Metaphor of False Liberation: An Ambedkarite Reading of *The White Tiger*

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Abstract— *The present paper examines The White Tiger as a story of Balram Halwai, who apparently claims to have broken free from the caste and class trap as a successful entrepreneur. An Ambedkarite reading of this social mobility to entrepreneurship reveals that, despite being rich, one cannot lose caste and class orientations. Informed by Dr B.R. Ambedkar's propositions to break free from the caste system as explored in Annihilation of Caste, the present study undertakes a close textual analysis of the conditions that make one an entrepreneur. By juxtaposing the metaphor "rooster coop" with Ambedkar's idea of graded inequality, the study foregrounds that fear and family ties compel one to adopt any means despite the general perception of economic liberty for all. Despite being free, the caste system limits such economic exposure. In other words, one has to resort to violence openly, as Balram confesses his crime in front of readers to become an entrepreneur. Interestingly, economic prosperity can land one in modern society but not in a caste-free society. The study confirms Ambedkar's warning that economic freedom is not enough to build a just, caste-free society. The study, thus, stresses the application of the Ambedkarite perspective to understand the nexus of caste and economic prosperity reflected in literary text.*

Keywords— ***Ambedkarite criticism, Annihilation of Caste, neoliberalism, economic exploitation, caste-capital nexus, Indian English novel, The White Tiger, Dalit chetna, graded inequality.***

I. INTRODUCTION

Social mobility is limited by the caste system in India, thereby limiting economic mobility. The social mobility of an individual is a core theme in the literary works of Aravind Adiga. In particular, the novel The White Tiger (2008) captures the phenomenon of economic mobility in a society that subtly practises the caste system. Claiming himself as a businessman, Balram Halwai recounts the life of a low-caste driver in the novel. The novel satirises the "India Shining" narrative by portraying Balram as a subaltern agent. Beneath his celebration of economic mobility lies a deeper continuity of caste as an enduring economic hierarchy.

Scholars read *The White Tiger for its emphasis on class conflict, postcolonial allegory, and the* moral ambiguities of neoliberal subjectivity (Shingavi, 2014). The application of the Ambedkarite lens has been rarely observed to uncover the treatment of caste issues under the graded system of economic exploitation by a few scholars. The graded system, like the caste system, survives and mutates under capitalism. In order to address this gap, the present study seeks to highlight how the caste system is the base of economic prosperity that compels an individual to undertake violent means to succeed in society.

Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste,* a speech to be delivered in 1936, is the foundational text to understand the caste system as a foundation of economic exploitation, arguably in a neoliberal and globalisation era.Adiga's novel illustrates Ambedkar's thesis: without the annihilation of caste, political democracy and market freedom remain hollow. Ambedkarite scholars such as Laura Brueck's concept of Dalit *chetna* (consciousness) as rhetorical resistance (Brueck, 2014), Toral Gajarawala's analysis of literary realism and the "crisis of caste"

(Gajarawala, 2013), and Raj Kumar's framework for Dalit criticism as praxis-oriented reading (Kumar, 2019) have elaborated the implications of caste on economic prosperity.One of the objectives, of this research study is to reveal neoliberal structures in the novel that aligns Ambedkar's "graded inequality"; to analyze Balram's "success" as a failed or partial annihilation of caste; and to establish relevance of Ambedkarite criticism in reading 21st-century Indian English fiction. Thus, the Ambedkarite perspective can be applied to text in order to interrogate representation of caste in the neoliberal era.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarsread Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*for exploring globalization, subaltern voice, and moral lapse. Snehal Shingavi, in his 2014 essay, exposes the caste system in the novel and offers an anti-capitalist critique. Shingavi notes, "If the transformation of a poor Bihari from the 'Darkness' to a rich entrepreneur from Bangalore is generative of a critique of a corrupt and exploitative capitalism that produces a caste-based poverty in the first place, then the transition of a middle-caste Halwai into a crypto-Brahmin undermines the very emotional resources of the anti-capitalist critique by relying on caste-bound representational politics" (Shingavi2014).He argues that Balram's success involves "linking caste to class" but does not produce cohesive or lead to resistive intentions. Its reliance on "passing" and "slumming" strategies appropriate annihilationof caste hierarchy.

Alexander Adkins (2019) focused on the novel's scatological rhetoric as a parody of neoliberal subjectivity. His descriptionbrings out "parodies how neoliberalism normalizes misanthropic self-interest as the truth of human nature" using neoliberal disgust.The inversion of traditional moral oppositions exposes the homo economicus of globalizationin India. This reading treated caste as secondary to class satire.In contrast, Ambedkarite and Dalit literary criticism offers more precise tools for dissecting the persistence of graded inequality. Laura R. Brueck's *Writing Resistance* (2014) attempted to theorise Dalit chetna or consciousness as a rhetorical strategy.His rejection of Brahmanical realism and assertion seeks to establish collective dignity. Brueck's emphasis on Dalit writing that created a counterpublic who challenged dominant literary aesthetics through socio-political perspectives.

Toral Jatin Gajarawala's*Untouchable Fictions* (2013) argued Dalit writing "Dalitizes" narrative time. His exposition of hidden aesthetics and politics of caste within progressive literary realism sets texts against mainstream realism.It is revelation ofprocess of how caste produces constraints and formal tendencies which are not attended by progressive narratives.

Raj Kumar's *Dalit Literature and Criticism* (2019) give a comprehensive perspective that moves beyond mere protest to aesthetic and ideological self-assertion. Kumar addressed the causes of Dalit exploitation, the reasons for emergence of Dalit aesthetics.By practicing Dalit criticism, he treats literature as a site for community identity formation following Ambedkar's thoughts and ideas.

Ambedkar scholarship uses *Annihilation of Caste* to contemporary economic realities. Anupama Kumar (2022) demonstrated the of caste as a "division of labourers".The text precludes worker unity in modern economic contexts. His argumentbased on scriptural and reformist approaches. In his opinion, the practice of caste leaves caste-Hindu structures intact. Caste traps groups in hereditary occupations while blocking access to higher-wage roles.It is a dynamic process that persists despite claims of economic prosperity.

It is evident that novel *The White Tiger* remained focus of discussion among scholars on economic prosperity, caste and class disgust.However, no major study undertook Ambedkarite readingof the text that centers caste as an economic system which survives and mutate in the neoliberal era. Majority of the critic's reduced their interpretations on the background of class exploitation or satire.On the other hand, an Ambedkarite reading focuses on to bring out the graded inequality, the failure of democraticpractices and economic mobility without social reforms. These aspects have been underapplied to literary texts. Hence, this argues that an Ambedkarite critique, grounded in *Annihilation of Caste*, exposes how neoliberal capitalism in *The White Tiger* perpetuates graded economic inequality.Seen from this perspective, Balram Halwai's individual freedom is a false annihilation of caste and class barrier. It is rather reinforcement of structures that Ambedkar sought to destroy.Hence, the Dalit *chetna*informed reading highlights literature's role to practice caste-class less attitude in the 21st century.

III. AMBEDKARITE CRITIQUE OF CASTE AND ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

An Ambedkarite perspective reveals caste and class nexus in *The White Tiger*.The attempt is to bring out role of caste and class in reconfiguringthe modern economic hierarchy.Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste* (1936/2014) offersa critique of caste as both a social and economic system. The text brings out caste as a benign "division of labour". His argued that caste functions as a

rigid "division of labourers" into graded, unequal compartments. He writes, "The Caste System is not merely a division of labour. It is also a division of labourers. Civilised society undoubtedly needs division of labour. But in no civilised society is division of labour accompanied by this unnatural division of labourers into watertight compartments" (Ambedkar 47). Prevention of associated living forms graded hierarchy. The conjoint experience is essential for true democracy. Justice and equality without the destruction of endogamy will be not be possible in political and economic freedom. Hence, education, agitation, and organization, in Ambedkar's opinion, must accompany economic change; otherwise, reforms merely modernize exploitation.

At present this perspective generates insights necessary to see India's post-1991 market reforms that opens social and economic mobility. Economic reforms in India have reconfigured rather than dismantled caste hierarchies. Upper-caste continue to dominate the access to capital, elite education, corporate jobs, and political power.On the contrary, Dalit labourareprecarious, and forced to low-wage job and importantly they remaintrapped in stigmatized occupations. Sociological studies confirm that neoliberalism has enabled upper castes to convert traditional social capital into economic advantage through exclusive networks, while lower castes face persistent exclusion even in the "new economy". Neoliberal individualismglorifies narratives of self-made success. It directly echoes Ambedkar's warning, "You cannot build anything on the foundations of caste. You cannot build up a nation; you cannot build up a morality. Anything that you will build on the foundations of caste will crack and will never be a whole" (Ambedkar 67). Market-driven freedom, thus,is a seductive illusion that persists structural violence of graded inequality.

Raj Kumar's *Dalit Literature and Criticism* (2019) form a methodological foundation of Ambedkarite lens to literary texts. Kumar advocate an Ambedkarite standpoint criticism.He treats literature not as neutral aesthetic object but as praxis. Dalit chetna (consciousness) awakened will expose and challenge the caste-capital nexus. The perspective allows an investigation of how even mainstream or non-Dalit texts unconsciously dramatize the persistence of caste under contemporary economic prosperity. In other words, instead of taken for granted the mainstream realism which foregrounds collective dignity, ideological self-assertion, and the demand for holistic social transformation, an Ambedkarite perspective strips illusions of a just society.

Applying the perspective to Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* reveals that the main character Balram Halwai emergence from bonded village labour to entrepreneurial success in Bangalore as a result of violence and betrayal. Apparently, this is a celebration of the disruptive energy of globalization. However, an Ambedkarite reading exposes how the text unwittingly confirms Ambedkar's diagnosis: the "rooster coop" of fear, family obligation, and graded hierarchy survives migration and market reform. Balram's "white tiger" status does not annihilate caste.Economic prosperity allows one to climb next levels but within the same hierarchical structure.In fact, it is replication of exploitation by becoming a new "master" who preys on those below him. The landlord-politician-business nexus in the novel illustrates the fusion of traditional caste power with global capital, where upper-caste families control resources while lower-caste bodies provide cheap, disposable labour. The study reveals that in an age where traditional caste, and class barriers seem dissolving given economic or market conditions to buy whatever one wants to, Ambedkarite criticism allows us to see the role of caste as a base of division of labourers, in mutatingdue to lack of education, agitation, and organized resistance.

The "Rooster Coop": Metaphor of Graded Inequality

An Ambedkarite reading of novel reveals that "rooster coop" as a precise literary embodiment of Ambedkar's concept of caste as a "division of labourers" as a graded watertight compartment.It prevent "associated living" (Ambedkar 47). The metaphor dramatizes how fear, family loyalty, and internalized hierarchy keep the oppressed passive even when they witness their own exploitation. This is evident when Balram says, "The greatest thing to come out of this country… is the Rooster Coop. The roosters in the coop smell the blood from above. They see the organs of their brothers… They know they're next. Yet they do not rebel. They do not try to get out of the coop. The very same thing is done with human beings in this country" (Adiga 147). "…But where my genuine concern for him ended and where my self-interest began, I could not tell: no servant can ever tell what the motives of his heart are… We are made mysteries to ourselves by the Rooster Coop we are locked in" (Adiga 160)."Servants have to keep other servants from becoming innovators, experimenters or entrepreneurs. The coop is guarded from the inside" (Adiga 166).

Thes lines indicate that Adiga unwittingly illustrates Ambedkar's thesis that caste is not a benign division of labour but a system that fragments the working class and blocks collective resistance. In the village economy of Laxmangarh, Balram's Halwai caste is locked into menial service for the landowning *Thekedaars*that is "Stork," "Mongoose," and Ashok family.Their presence reproduces hereditary servitude. Balram's migration to

Delhi does not dismantle this coop. Rather it merely relocates it within the global capital circuit wherein we find companies outsource services, luxury cars, and foreign investment remain caste-coded. Upper-caste run the companies who were once traditional landlords.They accumulate power in neoliberal economic conditions. Meanwhile the Dalits stay trapped in precarious roles. This confirms Ambedkar's warning that without annihilating endogamy and graded inequality, economic "reforms" only modernize exploitation rather than end it.

Balram Halwai's owing of business as a "freedom" but a false annihilation of caste. Balram murdered Ashok and rises as a Bangalore entrepreneur.Apparently, he is successful in escaping from the coop. An Ambedkarite reading exposes this as a false annihilation: Ambedkar demanded collective change through education, agitation, and organization, but not individual escape via violence and deception (Ambedkar 57). Balram merely replicates the hierarchy he fled. Adiga writes, "Eight months later, I slit Mr. Ashok's throat" (Adiga 173; the act is narrated as the culmination of his internal conflict). Further, Balram says, "I have switched sides. I've made it. I've broken out of the coop" (Adiga 285; Balram's triumphant declaration after establishing his taxi business in Bangalore). In addition, Balram's description of his new life running a fleet of taxis: he now employs drivers whom he treats with the same suspicion and control once directed at him, admitting he has become "another master" who exploits those below (Adiga 276–77).

From an Ambedkarite standpoint, Balram's "success" is illusory. His violence replaces personal goal for collective praxis.He does not dismantle caste but climbs within it.He is now a new "Big Belly" who preys on "Small Bellies." This mirrors Ambedkar's critique of liberal individualism built on caste foundations: "You cannot build anything on the foundations of caste" (Ambedkar 57). The novel's neoliberal celebration of self-making thus exposes its own limits—individual "freedom" leaves the graded structure intact and merely circulates exploitation.

Intersection of Caste, Class, and Consumption

The WhiteTiger portrays how economic prosperity setting where in caste is not dissolvedbut sustains and conceals it. For instance, the Ashok family's lifestyle, Pinky Madam's American-style individualism, and Bangalore's call-centre economy reveal how modern institutions reproduce graded inequality. It is clear in Ashok's dismissive comment on Balram: "He's half-baked. The country is full of people like him… And we entrust our glorious parliamentary democracy… to characters like these" (Adiga 30). In addition, Balram reflects, "The story of my upbringing is the story of how a half-baked fellow is produced… Entrepreneurs are made from half-baked clay" (Adiga 9).

In Bangalore, Balram observes the call-centre culture where "half-baked" Dalit/Bahujan workers power the global economy yet remain excluded from its rewards, while upper-caste networks control contracts and capital (Adiga 270–72).Ambedkarite reading exposes how the liberal markets and "democracy" function as new vehicles for graded inequality. The "half-baked" trope underscores Ambedkar's point that caste denies genuine education and social mobility, trapping the oppressed in partial knowledge while upper castes monopolize full access to capital and power. Even the digital economy reproduces caste networks: consumption (luxury apartments, foreign cars, American individualism) becomes the new endogamy that sustains privilege. Modern institutions—markets, education, parliamentary democracy—thus confirm Ambedkar's insight: without annihilating caste, they merely modernize the division of labourers.

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*unintentionallyconfirms Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's proposition in *Annihilation of Caste* that neoliberalism does not annihilate caste but modernizes it.Despite economic or financial growth, caste reconfigures "division of labourers" into graded, unequal compartments. The novel's central "rooster coop" metaphor dramatizes this with chilling precision. Balram declares, "The greatest thing to come out of this country in the ten thousand years of its history is the Rooster Coop" (Adiga 102), describing how roosters witness their brothers' slaughter yet remain passive, "trapped in the Rooster Coop" (Adiga 104). He adds that "We are made mysteries to ourselves by the Rooster Coop we are locked in" (Adiga 111) and that "Servants have to keep other servants from becoming innovators… The coop is guarded from the inside" (Adiga 115). His migration from Laxmangarh to Delhi and Bangalore merely relocates this coop within capital circuits.The landlord Stork-Ashok family and its rich status in terms of luxury cars, and investments keeps economic exploitation caste-coded. Balram is "half-baked" entrepreneur. This confirms Ambedkar's insight that caste denies genuine education and associated living but he as Dalit-Bahujan labour remain trapped in precarious roles.This doesn't matter wither it is digital economy or traditionally landlord owned labor family. Thus, the novel unintentionally proves that ability to buy things in market doesn't make one free from graded inequality.

This Ambedkarite reading highlights the urgent necessity of extending Dalit literary criticism beyond

Dalit-authored texts.As pointed out by Raj Kumar (2019) Ambedkarite reading perspective exposes limit of freedom assumed by a Dalit. Balram's entrepreneurial "freedom"as he say, "I have switched sides. I've made it. I've broken out of the coop" (Adiga 285) after murdering Ashok. He seems successful in annihilating the system, buthe, instead replicates the very hierarchy he escaped by becoming "another master" who exploits his own drivers with the same suspicion he once endured (Adiga 276–77). The satirical first-person voiceremains trapped in neoliberal self-making logic that Ambedkar critiqued as insufficient without collective education-agitation-organization.

The novel's ending underscores the limits of individual resistance and the imperative for collective Ambedkarite praxis in 21st-century literary studies. Balram's final monologue reveals profound isolation and paranoia despite material success (Adiga 280–81).His vision of freedom in terms of"even if they throw me in jail… it was all worthwhile to know… what it means not to be a servant" (Adiga 276)is contrast to Ambedkar's call for "associated living" based on liberty, equality, and fraternity. In want of Dalit *chetna*, the narrative ends in neoliberal individualism.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, read from Ambedkarite perspective shows that caste cannot be annihilated in modernisedsociety in 21st-century India. The paper pointed out that critics sawthe novel as a depiction of class and postcolonial views.Less attempts have been made to apply Ambedkar's ideas to read the text. Scholars such as Shingavi and Adkins focused on capitalism and individual success, this study adds Ambedkarite perspective. Holding *Annihilation of Caste*as foundational text for revealing of caste as a "division of labourers" that prevents associated living implies that market-oriented wealth and freedom is meaningless without social reform. The analysis of the "rooster coop" metaphor, Balram's false freedom, and neoliberal consumption further proved that individual entrepreneurship only moves caste exploitation from villages to cities.Ambedkarite criticism is a tool for reading Indian English novels and urges annihilation of caste through collective education, agitation, and organization.

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Translation, Meaning, and Revolutionary Voice: A Critical Study of Faiz Ahmed Faiz's Poetry in Urdu and English

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Abstract— *The paper explores the intricate process of translating the revolutionary Urdu poetry of Faiz Ahmed Faiz into English, and how linguistic change influences the meaning, emotion and politics of the poetry. This paper examines the conflict of fidelity and interpretation that is a part of poetic translation by closely reading four classic poems: "Mujhse Pehli Si Mohabbat, Subh-e-Azadi, Hum Dekhenge, and Bol Ke Lab Azad Hain Tere. Based on the theories of translation of Walter Benjamin, Roman Jakobson, and Eugene Nida, the analysis shows that English translations can be successful in transferring the political vision and thematic issues of Faiz, but frequently lose the musicality, the metaphorical richness, and the cultural depth of the Urdu originals. The paper will claim that there is neither a direct transference nor total betrayal in translation of the work of Faiz, but a creative re-enactment that opens up new interpretive possibilities and unavoidably alters the affective and aesthetic aspects of the original. This change especially affects the revolutionary voice that determines the poetry of Faiz as the transfer of the tradition of the ghazal in Urdu to the English verse changes the thin line between the lyricism of romanticism and the criticism of politics, which is the distinctive feature of the poetic success of Faiz.*

Keywords— ***Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Loss in Translation, Poetry, Translation Studies, Untranslatability.***

I. INTRODUCTION

Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911-1984) is one of the most important poets of South Asian literature of the twentieth century, whose poetry speaks beyond the borders of the nation to the global issues of love, resistance, and social justice. Faiz was a poet who wrote mainly in Urdu, during the turbulent period of partition, post-colonial nation-building and the Marxist political-awareness, creating a unique, poetical idiom that blended the classical tradition of ghazal poetry with modernist sensibility and Marxist political awareness. His poetry was the ode of the resistance movements throughout Pakistan, India, and the South Asian diaspora in general, but the issue of how his revolutionary voice can be translated to English is severely under-researched.

The issue of Faiz translation is not only a linguistic conversion but a voyage through the complex cultural, aesthetic, and political landscapes in which his poetry is written. The Urdu poetry exists in the context of an advanced tradition in which meaning is produced by layers of allusion, metaphor, and formality. The ghazal form, to which Faiz paid tribute and which he undercut, is based on the intricate interrelation of radif (refrain), qafiya (rhyme), and matla (opening couplet) that produces musical and semantic structures that cannot be translated into the English verse. Furthermore, the revolutionary subject matter of Faiz cannot be separated with the romantic expression; his love interest is not only a human love object but also the idea of justice, his separation (hijr) is not only personal, but political.

This paper explores the ways in which translation reconstructs meaning, emotional richness and political intensity in the poetry of Faiz. Using a comparative approach to the writing of the chosen poems in Urdu and English, this paper argues that, although translation allows Faiz to share his art with the world and keep his thematic issues intact, it essentially alters the register of affect and

the tone of revolution in his voice. Depoliticization of the form, the flattening of the metaphoric ambiguity and domestication of the culturally-specific imagery result in a distinctly different poetic experience: the one, which preserves the political vision of Faiz but alienates the readers to the aesthetic pleasure and emotional appeal that made his poetry revolutionary in its native linguistic and cultural frameworks.

The importance of this question is not limited to Faiz scholarship to more general questions about translation studies: What happens to revolutionary poetry when it crosses linguistic boundaries? Do the aesthetics survive the change of political content? What do translators compromise with faithfulness to the source text and target language feasibility? This paper, through the prism of the theory of translation, adds to our knowledge about how poetry translates between cultures and how political art travels in the global arena by analyzing the work of Faiz.

II. METHODOLOGY

This paper uses qualitative and comparative textual analysis to assess how translation re-discovers the meaning, emotion, and political intensity in Faiz Ahmed Faiz poetry. The study concentrates on the close readings of the chosen poems in their original Urdu and the English versions commonly available in the market, such as Mujhse Pehli Si Mohabbat, Subh-e-Azadi, Hum Dekhenge, and Bol Ke Lab Azad Hain Tere. These poems have been chosen because of being rich in terms of their subject matter, historical importance, and the existence of several English versions, which makes them appropriate to compare.

The approach is based on the study of translation and close reading. The poems are analyzed on various levels: linguistic (use of words, syntax), formal (rhythm, rhyme, form), thematic (love, resistance, exile, and revolution). Much thought is directed to the main aspects of the Urdu poetic tradition, including metaphorical stratification, ambiguity, the conventions of the ghazal genre, and how they are reproduced or lost in translations. Other concepts used in the study include those of major translation theorists like Walter Benjamin, especially the concept of the afterlife of a text, and Lawrence Venuti, especially his concepts of domestication and foreignization. It is these frames that are applied to assess whether translations of the poetry of Faiz are trying to retain the cultural and the linguistic specificity of the original text or modify it to suit the target language.

Moreover, a comparative framework is used to determine the changes in tone, imagery and emotional intensity in the original version and the translated version. The juxtaposition of selected lines is intended to point out the fact that some culturally entrenched expressions, idioms, and symbols cannot be directly translated into English. In this way, it is possible to make a subtle interpretation of how translation is a process that not only conveys meaning but also transforms it.

The research is conducted predominantly using the secondary sources in the form of published translations, critical essays, and works about Faiz and translation theory. There is no use of empirical or quantitative methods, and the research is interpretive and analytical in nature.

By using this methodology, the paper aims to prove that translation is not a disinterested activity but a creative and interpretative practice that is bound to transform the poetic and political nature of the work of Faiz.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Faiz Ahmed Faiz has become the subject of scholarship in recent decades, but critical analysis of the politics of translating his work is still relatively lacking. The groundbreaking effort of Carlo Coppola to write progressive Urdu literature reinstated Faiz in the wider context of the Progressive Writers Movement, which focused on his integration of classical Persian-Urdu aestheticism with socialist political allegiance (Coppola 89). To Coppola, what was innovative about the ghazal, as practiced by Faiz, was that the ghazal, which is also a genre with traditionally romantic mysticism, was used to serve directly political purposes without losing its musical and metaphorical depth.

The work of Frances Pritchett on Urdu poetry is a valuable source of information on the formal conventions that construct the meaning within the classical tradition. Pritchett shows that the ghazal works by a complicated system of stock images (saqi, sharab, gul, bulbul) the sense of which is not invented but generated by variation and juxtaposition (Pritchett 156). This point is essential to realize the difficulties of translation: these traditional images have centuries of literary echo in Urdu that cannot be directly translated into English analogs.

The translation collection of poems by Faiz by Victor Kiernan is one of the most prolific efforts to translate the work of Faiz into English. Kiernan as a translator and a political sympathizer is more concerned with the clarity of semantic meaning and political substance than with formal musicality. The translations of Daud Kamal, on the other hand, aim to give one some semblance of the rhythmic nature of the original, but thus far, according to critics, some of his versions have been at the cost of accuracy.

Agha Shahid Ali, the poet himself, is a distinguished Urdu-English poet, but even his translations admit that the basic impossibility of reproducing the formal effects of Faiz in English.

Theoretical Urdu poetic semantics Shamsur Rahman Faruqi has written a theoretically oriented treatise on the semantics of Urdu poetry which throws light on the difficulty of translating what he terms the multi-layered signification of classical Urdu poetry. According to Faruqi, Urdu poetry creates meaning, a multifaceted interaction of lexical, formal, and intertextual registers, which are difficult to convey in other words or simply translate. His theory of associative networks, groups of images and words that trigger particular aesthetic and emotional reactions, indicates that losing must be an inherent part of translation (Faruqi 203).

Poetry translation in particular translation studies has always been a conflict between form and content, between what Roman Jakobson was fond of calling rewording and interpretation. The statement by Jakobson that poetry by definition cannot be translated has been both powerful and provocative (Jakobson 238). More recent scholarship, though, has outgrown this dichotomy to investigate translation as creative change. The article by Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevere on translation as rewriting can be effectively used to analyze the way in which the poetry of Faiz is not merely translated, but re-created in English (Bassnett 11).

What is not yet explored in the literature is a comparative analysis of how certain formal and semantic characteristics of Urdu poetry by Faiz are translated into English and what the meaning of the translation is on the revolutionary voice that characterizes his work. This gap is filled in this paper by closely reading four major poems, discussing translation as a place where aesthetic, political and cultural meanings are negotiated and transformed.

IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper uses three theories in translation studies to examine how poetry by Faiz changed when translated to English. The essay The Task of the Translator by Walter Benjamin offers a philosophical basis of the interpretation of translation as a form of afterlife of the original text, as opposed to the act of reproduction of the same. According to Benjamin, translation is not directed to convey the identical meaning as the one in the original text, but it brings out the pure language, which is the basis of all linguistic expression. To Benjamin, the fidelity of a translation is not its semantic equivalence but its capacity to be harmonized with the mode of signification of the original (Benjamin 79).

When applied to the poetry of Faiz, the theory of Benjamin implies that English translations are successful not when they reproduce the exact meanings of the Urdu verses but when they are able to reproduce the manner of meaning the way in which the poetry is signified by the means of formal patterns, metaphorical density and affective resonance. This view enables us to judge translations not in terms of their accuracy, but in terms of their capacity to produce parallel poetic effects in English. But the material and political interests of translation might be undervalued in the philosophy of idealists, especially when it comes to revolutionary poetry in which political effectiveness requires clarity of communication of content.

The linguistic approach of Roman Jakobson provides another framework. Jakobson identifies three kinds of translation: intralingual (rewording in the same language), interlingual (translation between languages), and intersemiotic (translation between sign systems). His well known statement of saying that poetry by definition is untranslatable is based on the thesis of the fact that the meaning of poetry is found in the sound and form of the language as much as the semantic content (Jakobson 238). The signifier and the signified cannot be separated in poetry, there is no way to translate the meaning without losing the form, there is no way to retain the original meaning without losing the form.

Such framework by Jakobson can be used to describe the particular difficulties in translating the ghazals by Faiz, in which meaning is created through the complex interaction of rhyme, meter and refrain. It is not just an aesthetic, but a semantic loss of these formal elements in English translation: it alters the meaning of the poem. Nevertheless, translators can be compensating formal loss in other poetic means, such as metaphorical intensification, syntactic creativity, or rhythmic variation, which the formalist focus of Jakobson might fail to recognize.

The distinction of the concepts of formal and dynamic equivalence by Eugene Nida offers a convenient model of assessing translation decisions. Formal equivalence focuses on the faithfulness to the structure of the source text and literal meaning whereas dynamic equivalence focuses on the same effect on the target audience that the original had on the audience of its text (Nida 159). The majority of English versions of Faiz strive to achieve dynamic equivalence: they lose the formal elements of the work, such as rhyme and meter to retain the subject matter and emotional appeal.

But the framework of Nida, which was designed with biblical translation in mind, might not be entirely suitable to cover the needs of literary and political poetry translation. The revolutionary voice of Faiz lies in the

unity of form and content; the beauty of his poetry can never be isolated of its political effectiveness. Dynamic equivalence which retains content and abandons form can convey Faiz political message but not the revolutionary impact that enabled his poetry to be a source of social transformation.

All these three theoretical models of Benjamin, philosophical idealism, Jakobson linguistic formalism, Nida pragmatic functionalism can be considered as the complementary approaches to the study of the way translation changes the poetry of Faiz. They enable us to pose various yet similar questions: How does translation produce an afterlife of the revolutionary voice of Faiz? Which formal and semantic features are lost or changed during the process of translation? What are the impacts that translators gain out of their strategic decisions? These frameworks are applied to four big poems below, and the analysis of translation as the location of preservation and transformation of aesthetic, political, and cultural meanings is provided.

V. DISCUSSION

Analysis: Translation and Transformation in Four Poems

"Mujhse Pehli Si Mohabbat Mere Mehboob Na Maang"

"Mujhse Pehli Si Mohabbat" ("Don't Ask Me for That Love Again") represents one of Faiz's most celebrated poems, emblematic of his synthesis of romantic and political themes. Written in the aftermath of the 1947 partition, the poem addresses a beloved (mehboob) who is simultaneously a human lover and the metaphorical representation of youthful idealism. The opening lines establish this dual register:

Mujhse pehli si mohabbat mere mehboob na maang

Maine samjha tha ke tu hai to darakhshan hai hayat

Tera gham hai to gham-e-dahr ka jhagra kya hai

Teri surat se hai aalam mein baharon ko sabat

Victor Kiernan's English translation renders these lines:

Do not ask of me, my love, that love I once had for you,

How I believed your face would light up my days

If I had you, the pain of the world would be nothing to me

Your beauty keeps the spring alive in this world.

The Urdu to English transformation is the first to give out some major losses. The Urdu original is written in the tradition of ghazal, in each couplet (sher) of which a couplet is a semi-autonomous unit in relation to the overall thematic thread. The qafiya (rhyme structure) and radif "na maang" (don't ask) form a musical pattern which supports the insistent refusal of the speaker. This formality is completely dropped in the translation by Kiernan, which instead follows the free verse that places more emphasis on clarity of meaning rather than musicality.

More importantly, the figurative spaciousness of the Urdu is flattened in English. The line darakhshan hai hayat (literally, life is radiant/illuminated) has several echoes: it means both literal light and spiritual enlightenment, and refers to Sufi poetic traditions, in which the face of the beloved is used to symbolize divine illumination. Kiernan in his light up my days is more of the broad sensation than of the philosophical profundity and intertextual reverberation. Likewise, gham-e-dahr (the sorrow of the world/time) is a standard Urdu poetic term, which reminds the worldly existence of its transience and suffering; pain of the world is a semantically sufficient though metaphysically light phrase, compared to the original. The poem's political turn occurs in the later stanzas, where the speaker acknowledges discovering other sorrows beyond romantic love:

Aur bhi dukh hain zamaane mein mohabbat ke siwa

Rahatein aur bhi hain wasl ki rahat ke siwa

("There are other sorrows in the world besides love / There are other pleasures besides union with the beloved"). Here, Faiz transforms the traditional preoccupation of the ghazal, which is romance, into one that focuses on political struggle, in which the "other sorrows" are those of the oppressed, and the "other pleasures" are the joys of struggle as an individual part of the collective. It is in this political interpretation of the classical imagery that we find the revolutionariness of Faiz's poetic style.

When reading Faiz's poetry in English translation, we can feel how this transformation occurs, yet the revolutionary power of the poetry remains implicit in the English version because the complexity of Faiz's technique is reduced to mere statements. For the Urdu-speaking audience, this poem was both beautiful and surprising; the speaker turned out to be political and critical. But for the English audience, the poem is simply critical of society.

Further development of the poem is full of imagery representing the pains of social reality, which serve as the context for this political awareness of the poet. Faiz speaks about the selling of bodies on the market and the auction of beauty in the bazaar, as well as the omnipresence of exploitation. In translation, the political content survives, but the formal tension between classical convention and revolutionary content, the source of the poem's power is necessarily diminished.

"Subh-e-Azadi" ("Freedom's Dawn")

"Subh-e-Azadi," written in August 1947 to commemorate India's independence from British rule, stands as perhaps Faiz's most politically explicit poem. Where the British and Indian nationalist press celebrated independence with triumphalist rhetoric, Faiz's poem offered a devastating critique of partition's violence and the unfulfilled promises of freedom. The opening lines set the tone of disillusionment:

Yeh daagh daagh ujala, yeh shab-gazeeda sehar

Woh intezar tha jis ka, yeh woh sehar to nahin

Agha Shahid Ali translates:

This stained light, this night-bitten dawn,

This is not the dawn we waited for.

The expression "daagh daagh ujala," in Urdu language, means "stain-stained brightness." This is an oxymoron that represents the ambivalence that lies in the concept of partition era independence as represented by "polluted light" and "brightness that has been contaminated." The repetition of "daagh," which means stain, emphasizes the idea of impurity. The phrase used by Ali, "stained light," retains the oxymoron without the repetition and the specific literary connotation associated with "daagh" in Urdu poetry tradition.

In the phrase "shab gazeeda," "shab" means "night" while the second word refers to biting. In its literal sense, therefore, "shab gazeeda" could mean "night bitten." Although this is what Ali used, there is loss of the poetic style in the Persian compound used here.

The poem continues with imagery of suffering bodies and unfulfilled promises:

Yeh woh sehar to nahin jis ki arzoo le kar

Chale the yaar ke mil jayegi kahin na kahin

Falak ke dasht mein taron ki aakhri manzil

("This is not the dawn for which, longing, / Our friends set out believing they would find somewhere / The final destination of the stars in heaven's wilderness"). The imagery evokes the progressive political movement's hope for genuine liberation, not merely the transfer of power from British to indigenous elites. The "friends" (yaar) are political comrades who believed in revolutionary transformation.

In the process of translation, the political critique is preserved but the emotional tone changes. The Urdu of Faiz balances both anger and sadness, political condemnation and elegiac mourning. The ghazal form used is representative of longing and loss, but also grounds the political critique into an emotional space of grief. The absence of this formal structure in the English translations results in a more literal meaning of the poem as a political demonstration, losing a great deal of the affective complexity that distinguished Faiz's revolutionary voice.

The central section of the poem lists the ongoing suffering of everyday peoples as they navigate their lives post-independence. Faiz lists the lame people who must navigate challenging paths; workers who sell their bodies to work; women who have their beauty reduced to a commodity. Faiz asks, "Where did the dawn of freedom go?" This question is rhetorical and accusatory; freedom has not come to the common people, but rather to the wealthy ruling class. This critique of bourgeois nationalism resonates in many post-colonial societies today, making "Subh-e-Azadi" one of Faiz's most internationally relevant poems.

In addition, due the specific historical and cultural context of partition (mass violence, displacement, and anti-communalism), Urdu and English readers will respond to "Subh-e-Azadi" in different ways. For the Urdu reader in 1947, "Subh-e-Azadi" was a direct representation of the traumatic experiences they lived through at the time, and the critique of their experience was immediate and tangible. For contemporary English readers, the poem requires historical contextualization that inevitably creates aesthetic distance. Translation here involves not just linguistic conversion but temporal and cultural mediation.

"Hum Dekhenge" ("We Shall See")

"Hum Dekhenge," written in 1979 during General Zia-ul-Haq's military dictatorship in Pakistan, has become an anthem of resistance across South Asia and beyond. The poem draws heavily on Islamic imagery and Quranic references while articulating a message of revolutionary hope. Its opening refrain establishes the poem's prophetic mode:

Hum dekhenge

Lazim hai ke hum bhi dekhenge

Woh din ke jis ka wada hai

Jo lauh-e-azal mein likha hai

("We shall see / It is certain we too shall see / That day of which there is a promise / Which is written on the eternal tablet"). The phrase "lauh-e-azal" (eternal tablet) refers to the Islamic concept of al-Lawh al-Mahfuz, the preserved tablet on which God's decree is written. By invoking this theological concept, Faiz frames revolutionary change as divinely ordained, inevitable rather than merely hoped for.

English translations face particular challenges with "Hum Dekhenge" because its power derives from the layered deployment of Islamic imagery that resonates differently across linguistic and religious contexts. The phrase "Jab arz-e-Khuda ke kaabe se / Sab but uthwae jayenge" ("When from God's earth, from the Kaaba / All idols will be removed") evokes both the historical moment when the Prophet Muhammad cleansed the Kaaba of idols and the promise of future liberation from false gods, whether literal idols or metaphorical oppressors.

When Muslims who speak Urdu hear these allusions, their imaginations become alive with a broad array of religious, historical, and emotional connections. The Kaaba is more than just a physical structure; it serves as the heart of all spirituality for Islam. Its use of purifying represents the completion of monotheism and justice. When these references are translated into English, they necessitate explanatory notes, which detract from the lyrical flow found within the text. The revolutionary effect of the references is based upon the reader's immediate recognition and emotional connection; scholarly notes produce critical distance from the references.

The poem continues with images of reversal and divine justice:

Jab ahl-e-safa mardud-e-haram

Masnad pe bethaye jayenge

Sab taaj uchale jayenge

Sab takht giraaye jayenge

("When the pure of heart, expelled from the sacred mosque / Will be seated on the throne / All crowns will be tossed / All thrones will be brought down"). The reversal of social hierarchy the oppressed elevated, the oppressors cast down draws on Quranic themes of divine justice while articulating a Marxist vision of revolutionary transformation. This synthesis of religious and political discourse is characteristic of Faiz's mature work.

Also, "Hum Dekhenge" accomplishes its political power via its musical feature of collective recitation. Regularly sung at protests, this poem's repetitive structure and simple language provide a chant-like texture that aids groups of people in reciting the text together. Similarly, the line "Hum dekhenge" functions as a rhythmically repeated expression of hopeful resolution for change. The English translation maintains the meaning produced by the text; however, it cannot recreate this oral-performative aspect that is vital to the poem's use as a protest song.

The English translation provides a more clearly defined relationship between religious and political meaning than does the original no doubt due to differing interpretations of the imagery contained in the two languages. In the case of "Hum Dekhenge," the Urdu version leaves room for both religious and political interpretations to coexist, whereas the English translation does not accommodate for that. When a translator focuses predominantly upon the religion context, he/she may obscure the political implications of the text; conversely, when a translator emphasizes the revolutionary content of the text, he/she may make it difficult for certain readers who identify with an Islamic background to relate to the poem's message. This debate reveals that translation is not merely replacing words; rather, it also serves as an interpretational decision that influences how ideologically diverse groups perceive the text.

The poem concludes with the lines "Hum ahl-e-safa mardud-e-haram / Masnad pe bethaye jayenge." ("We, the pure, are excluded from the place of worship / And will be placed at the seat of authority"). The first-person plural "we" transforms the prophecy into collective declaration, positioning the speaker and audience as agents of revolutionary change rather than passive observers. This rhetorical shift is crucial to the poem's mobilizing power.

"Bol Ke Lab Azad Hain Tere" ("Speak")

"Bol" represents Faiz's most direct address to the reader, an imperative call to speech and resistance. Written as a nazm (non-ghazal poem) rather than in the ghazal form, it demonstrates Faiz's formal versatility and his ability to modulate his voice for different political purposes. The poem opens with stark simplicity:

Bol ke lab azad hain tere

Bol, zaban ab tak teri hai

Tera sutwan jism hai tera

Bol ke jaan ab tak teri hai

("Speak, for your lips are free / Speak, your tongue is still your own / Your upright body is your own / Speak, your life is still your own"). An urgent, repetitive drumbeat rhythm is created by "bol" (i.e. "speak"), emphasizing the imperativeness of the poem's message. The syntax of the poem is purposely straightforward, easily identifiable, allowing for instantaneous passage of information to its audience.

The English translation of "Bol" doesn't encounter the same challenges as the English translation of Faiz's ghazals because the original poem is already devoid of the classical Urdu poetic forms that create the greatest difficulty when translated. As such, the plain syntax, the contemporary word choice, and the explicit political nature of the poem all make relatively easy translations. Naomi Lazard's translation preserves the imperative urgency:

Speak, for your lips are free.

Speak, your tongue is still your own.

Your upright body is still yours.

Speak, your life is still your own.

However, even here, subtle losses occur. The word "sutwan" in Urdu (which means "vertical" or "upright") signifies not just a physical quality of being vertical, but also an attitude of morality (i.e., something that has a morally correct disposition) and resistance to oppression (i.e., standing tall against oppression). The use of the word "upright" in English maintains some of the moral meaning of the term "sutwan," but does not carry the same level of political connotation associated with "sutwan". Furthermore, the repetitive structure which creates a sense of rhythm and urgency in Urdu has been reduced to repetitive mechanical sequences in English; i.e., repetitions in English can come across more as redundant than they might in Urdu. The poem's central argument unfolds through a series of warnings about the consequences of silence:

Dekh ke aahan-gari ki dukaan mein

Tund hain shole, sulagti hai aag

Khuli har aik zanjir ki kari

Khatam badkar ki aala-o-taag

("Look, in the blacksmith's shop / The furnace burns hot and the fire rages / Every chain-link lies open / Now is the time, forge your armor and equipment"). The extended metaphor of the blacksmith's forge transforms the moment of political possibility into concrete, material action. The imagery suggests both opportunity (the forge is ready) and urgency (act now before the chains close again).

The blacksmith in South Asian cultures, an aahan-gar, is not just a craftsman but also represents a laborer or someone who transforms things into something new, making tools for the purpose of supporting and liberating others. The forge is also a place where the oppressed can create and shape their own tools for achieving freedom from their oppressors; therefore, it carries great significance as a site of revolutionary potential. The context is not as easily apparent to those in English-speaking cultures; therefore, a translator will need to explain this context or accept that some aspect will not be understood by English speakers. "Bol" concludes with an apocalyptic vision of the consequences of silence:

Bol yeh thora vaqt bahut hai

Jism-o-zaban ki maut se pehle

Bol ke sach zinda hai ab tak

Bol, jo kuchh kehna hai keh le

("Speak, this little time is enough / Before the death of body and tongue / Speak, for truth is alive still / Speak, whatever you must say, say it now"). The urgency reaches its climax with the stacking of imperatives and the acknowledgment of mortality. Faiz frames speech not as abstract right but as mortal necessity: speak before you are silenced by death, whether literal or political.

"Bol" is an accessible and straightforward poem that can be directly mobilized within a political context. By contrast, the ghazals require greater cultural literacy to be appreciated; therefore, they do not communicate easily across linguistic and cultural barriers. While "Bol" retains its meaning as a universal message to some degree when translated into other languages, other cultures will understand differently than would English speaking readers. The universality of "Bol" has resulted in it being one of Faiz Ahmed Faiz's most widely translated and anthologized poems.

When compared to both ghazals and "Subh-e-Azadi," the political message found within the poem "Bol" translates successfully due to its straightforward manner of communicating and how easily it can be understood due to its form and style. However, even with all of the success, translation involves transformation of the message from a performative (oral) culture into a written one (silent reading). Revenant prose can still be recited as a collective and thus have its meaning altered through translation; however the actual physical act of reciting the poem together cannot occur in English. Thus, while the revolutionary voice of the poem "Bol" can survive through the process of translation, it does exist in note form as opposed to verbal form.

Conclusion

This comparative study shows that Faiz Ahmed Faiz's poetry in Urdu and English has a complex relationship through the act of translation; that is, translation is neither simply replication nor total betrayal, but is a process of transformation, where some meaning is preserved while other meanings must be lost.

Using the theoretical frameworks of Walter Benjamin, Roman Jakobson and Eugene Nida it has been demonstrated that different translation strategies involve different trade-offs between form and content, and between aesthetic effect and political clarity.

The close readings of Mujhse Pehli Si Mohabbat, Subh-e-Azadi, Hum Dekhenge and Bol indicate that the English translations of Faiz's work have largely succeeded in conveying Faiz's political vision and thematic concerns. Specifically, Faiz's revolutionary critique of injustice, hope for social change, and need to resist oppression survive the translation process with a high degree of fidelity. Thus,

Faiz's political message has reached an English-speaking audience and continues to inspire progressive movements around the world.

What's even more significant is the things that are lost during the process of translation. The formal musicality of the ghazal - i.e., rhyme schemes, meter, and refrain(s) cannot be preserved in English verse without sacrificing the exact meanings of the words. This formal loss impacts both the aesthetic and semantic realms. Since the meaning of poetry - particularly Urdu poetry - exists in both sound and sense, therefore, there will be a significant diminishment of the emotional resonance (affective power) of Faiz's work due to the event of translating those works into English.

Furthermore, as a consequence of having been translated, the metaphorical richness and cultural specificity of Faiz's imagic content will no longer exist in the same form - meaning that all of the reference points which connect the Sufi mystics, Persian literary traditions, and the Qurʾānic motifs which create networks of may be missing for English readers. Also, what would appear to be a merging of romance and politics in Faiz's unique voice will be more overt in translation than would have appeared previously by virtue of this change from one language to another. The revolutionary affect - which is the emotional quality attached to and enhances that of the political aspect of Faiz's works - will be lost through the translation.

The results hold significant meaning for translation studies and the discipline of postcolonial literature. The results illustrate that translated Third World revolutionary literature in the English language goes through transformation processes in regards to political significance as well as aesthetic form. Faiz's poetry is translated from Urdu to English where it transforms from politically charged art examples into critical discussion, from oral performance to written text, and also from having geographical cultural closeness to geographical cultural distance.

Additionally, the transformation that occurs through translation is not wholly negative, but creates a "new life" of Faiz's works, on your behalf, allowing Faiz's work to reach "new" readers and new contextual uses. Translations allow readers without access to the original Urdu works of Faiz to encounter the political vision of Faiz and experience the poetic power of Faiz. Further, they allow for comparative studies between Faiz's works and those of writing from other cultures, the development of theoretical constructs surrounding Faiz's work, and investigating the correspondence/overlap of Faiz's writing and writing from other cultures. Therefore, translation serves the function of connecting people within cultures by both maintaining and transforming Faiz's works therefore allowing for global distributions of literature with the understanding that such provides benefits and consequences associated with the transfer of culture and language.

It is very difficult to answer the question raised by this article about how the revolutionaries' voice of Faiz, as a poet of the revolution, has been preserved through translations into English. The primary aspect of Faiz's voice to remain intact through translation is his revolutionary force, but in different ways; that is, the political (to a greater extent) of Fauzi's poetry may be retained in the translation, while the aesthetic; or emotional content may not be. Perhaps the most significant outcome of the translation process that occurs within Faiz's English translations is that, in recognizing their approximated or "incomplete" nature, they offer readers entry into Faiz's thoughts about the revolution, but do not represent faithful and complete renditions of these thoughts.

Future research opportunities are suggested by this analysis, as further analysis of Faiz's translations into various languages may shed light on whether or not these translation challenges are consistent across different language pairings, including other pairs in addition to Urdu/English.

Further work comparing Faiz until Kiernan, Ali and Lazard and other English translators may help identify translation approaches used and see how they succeed and/or fail. Further analysis of Faiz's poetry in performance contexts may provide more insight into how the rendering of Faiz through an oral recitation or via a musical form mediates the effects of the translations.

The conclusion of this investigation is that translation is not absolute; it has both potentialities and limitations, and should therefore be viewed therefore as complex. In English translation, Faiz's revolutionary voice does not completely replicate the original voice of Faiz nor is it wholly different; rather, it is a new product, shaped by both translator(s) choices and the restrictions of the TL, that respects Faiz's commitment to politics, yet also requires a transformation from Faiz's revolutionary poetry to the aesthetic of and emotion from Faiz's poetry found in translation. By acknowledging the transformation of revolutionary art during its movement across cultural and linguistic boundaries, we can appreciate both the strength and vulnerability of revolutionary art whilst being cognizant of the potential for success and risk inherent to making a work of art; however, we must recognize that

translating a work of art is likewise an inherently risky process.

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Sensory Reliquaries: Scent, Matter and Memory in SWANA (Southwest Asian and North African) Fiction

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Abstract— *SWANA isn't just a geographical map; it is a horizontal network of solidarity. It connects the writers in Tehran to the refugee in Syria, proving that across these artificial borders, people are fighting the battles to remember who they are. If a dictator can burn a book, he cannot burn a memory trapped inside a human sense, SWANA and South Asian writers delve deep into this and produced a brilliant way to keep their homeland alive, they turn the physical world into secret vault. This paper investigates how SWANA literature tracked memory through the stubborn stain of dried ink in Stationery Shop of Tehran by Marjan Kamali and the volatile drop of amber perfume in Book of Everlasting Things by Anchal Malhotra. They produced sensory-counter archive to prove that the material archive holds the past alive in it most uncompromised, unburn able form.*

Keywords— ***SWANA literature, Sensory-Counter Archive, Memories, Homeland***

I. INTRODUCTION

When geopolitical crises- such as 1947 Partition of India, the 1953 Iranian coup the devastating wars in Palestine and Syria- fracture the nation-state, official history books are inevitably censored, weaponized, or reduced to ashes. For writers operating within SWANA and South Asian exile literature, this structural deletion of the facts poses a vital question: *How do you preserve the truth of a homeland when the official paperwork has been erased?* The answer is found in a radical shift away from Eurocentric terms. For over a century, the label "Middle East" was used to unite this diverse culture together. The term was invented in 1902 by an American military strategist. To the British empire it was just a label – it literally meant "the land that is midway between London and the Far East.'' To fix this, writers and thinkers started using the term SWANA which stands for Southwest Asian and North African. This isn't just a label; it's a new way of regain control. SWANA describes the land by its actual geography, not by how far it is from Europe. More importantly, it acts like a big network. Instead of looking at countries like Iran, Syria, Cyprus, or Palestine as isolated problem zones, SWANA connects them. It allows us to see how people across these borders share the same struggles with war, leaving home, and trying to survive. Marjan Kamali and Anchal Malhotra construct a "material archive of memory.'' Using *Bill Brown's Thing Theory* (*Thing theory,2001)*– the idea that everyday objects become hyper-important "things'' when our world break down- these authors hide history where no empire can touch it: In a stubborn stain of dried ink on a diverted love letter, in a distilled essence of artisanal perfume that smells like a city before the bombs. These novelists prove that political powers can erase physical boundaries on paper, but they cannot destroy the people's real, living memories and culture. By archiving trauma through scent and letters, these writers ensure that the earth itself remembers what the politicians try to deny. They fill their writing with rich botanical and culinary anchors that function as a storeroom that hold on to history, traditions, and memories of home. In intertwining romance with history, the novel invites readers to consider how words-whether spoken, written or silenced- can bridge or break the distance between hearts.

II. UNLOCKING THE OLFACTORY VAULT IN STATIONERY SHOP OF TEHRAN

Mr. Fakhri's shop in Tehran is an intellectual romantic and affective asylum infused with the aromas of 'printing ink, thick paper and soothing dried herbs.' It is a space deliberately insulated from the turbulent streets of 1953 Tehran, where political unrest is taking place. Kamali uses the physical letters, the translation of Rumi and Hafiz, and the quiet corners of the shop to symbolize the democratic promise, cultural richness, and romantic hope of Iran's youth. In the Stationery Shop of Tehran, letters act as silent yet enduring witnesses to Roya and Bahman's love, preserving emotions that cannot always be spoken aloud.

Lord Byron once said "*Letter writing is the only device for combining solitude with good company.''* This aligns perfectly with the way letters in Kamali's novel serve as a bridge between separated lovers, preserving intimacy despite distance. Their romance begins in the quiet intimacy of the stationery shop, where handwritten words become a bridge between their hearts. Through letters, they share their dreams, hopes, and promises, allowing their love to flourish even in the shadow of social expectations and political unrest. "*In that shop she could breathe in the scent of paper and ink and feel the promise of words she could do." (Kamali,3)* This very sentence forms the novel's central theme. The stationery shop is not just a setting but a symbolic element of the intellectual and civic life that 1953 Iranian coup d'etat would attempt to destroy.

Drawing upon *Bill Brown's Thing Theory* in which he posits difference between "objects'' and "things''. He says we only truly confront the "Thingness'' of our world when the smooth flow of our life is interrupted. This usually happens in three ways: when it breaks down, when it hurts us and when it loses its social function. In books, and stories authors don't just include physical prop to make a scene look pretty. Under Thing Theory, the items in a story-like Roya's letters or the ink bottles in The Stationery Shop-are not passive background noise. When these items break, get lost or are physically touched decades later, they "act''. They carry emotional weight, disrupt the characters' lives, and force both the characters and the readers to stop and pay attention to the heavy, physical reality of the world. The initial description of the shop introduces it as a dense, sensory warehouse where history and literature are preserved in physical form. "*The shop smelled of standard printing ink, the pungent vinegar of glue, and heavy, thick, warm paper. To Roya, it was the most beautiful smell in the world. It smelled of potential, of words waiting to be built, of truths waiting to be told.'' (Kamali,11)* Under Brown's framework, this introduces the object phase of the material culture. The ink, glue, and paper have a clear, comforting socio-functional value: they are the building blocks of intellectual and romantic potential. The sensory focus shows that the archive is experienced bodily before it is analysed cognitively.

III. ITTAR AS A VESSEL FOR PRE-PARTITION MEMORY IN BOOK OF EVERLASTING THINGS

Anchal Malhotra an oral historian famously known for analysing the Partition of India through the material object refugees carried, used this methodology to her fiction The Book of Everlasting Things, the material world does not merely reflect the characters; it preserves their survival. Anchal Malhotra in an interview with Vivek Tuteja says;

"The little kernel of childhood memory became the beginning of the story about a family that are surrounded by perfume and imbued with perfume on everyday basis."

This idea of using perfume and ittars as a quintessential part of the story came from her childhood memory. The aromas helped her to form the storyline. The Book of Everlasting Things, a debut novel serves as an intentional experimental space for Thing Theory and Olfactory Materialism. Liquid perfumes (ittars), calligraphic ink, and physical surfaces do not merely reflect the characters inner lives-they become alternative sensory archives that survive the physical and geopolitical fracture of Lahore in 1947. Before 1947 Partition fractures the landscape, the perfume shop, *Ittar Kada*, functions as a storehouse where memory and geographical space are preserved as a liquid matter rather than lines drawn on paper. There is an instance in the story where Samir's initiation into perfumery under his uncle Vivek is filled with deep reflections on how scent serves as the spiritual and physical archive of the land.

"A perfume is not a string of smells one has merely blended together on a whim. A perfume has occasion and history. It has a landscape, a body, and a response." (Malhotra,88)

Scent acts as an unconventional, powerful way to store history and memory. Under the lens of olfactory materialism, Malhotra positions the fluid of *ittar* as an un-censorable, non-visual map. Perfume is not merely an essence or fragrance, it's a poetry; poetry of love and longingness. It is a poetic essence that is extracted from the heart of earth. Vivek Vij in the novel says; "*Agar zameen se koi shayari banti ho, to wahi mitti ittar ki Khushboo hai, if there were ever a poetic essence to be extracted from the heart of earth, it will be smell of mitti ittar." (Malhotra,141)*

Samir and Firdaus's love story unfolds through powerful language of scent. Fragrance plays a crucial role in building their relationship. The bottle is not merely a fragrance extracted from tuberose but a scent distilled from the very

soul of his beloved; a fragrance that helps both of them to remember their love. It is what brings them together- "*Bottle still in hand, he inhaled deeply with the closed* eyes *a new smell snaked around him. Everything about it was ordinary, yet something stood out so clearly that he was unable to ignore it. He smelled her before he saw her." (Malhotra,49)*

Firdaus's presence is always felt in the perfumes created by Samir. The perfume "*Khazin-e-Firdaus, the keeper of paradise''* is creation by Samir to remember his beloved offering a fragrance that allows him to dive into her very soul. As *Ralph Waldo Emerson* says "Happiness *[Love] is a perfume you cannot pour onto others without getting a few drops on yourself." Using Bill Brown's Thing Theory, Anchal* Malhotra shows how love, longing and grief can be preserved through material things.

IV. CONCLUSION

Destroying history books is an attempt to erase a culture and its people. As shown in the works of Marjan Kamali and Aanchal Malhotra, political powers and wars rely on making people forget the past. Using Bill Brown's Thing Theory and the concept of Olfactory Materialism, the paper shows how everyday items become secret vaults for human memory. In The Stationery Shop of Tehran and The Book of Everlasting Things, things like diverted love letters, calligraphic ink, and bottle of artisanal ittar (perfume) stop being ordinary objects. When political war disrupts normal life, these items become heavy, meaningful "things" that carry deep love, identity, and a real sense of home. Ultimately, Kamali and Malhotra prove that politicians can redraw borders on paper, but they cannot destroy people's living memories. By hiding history inside the scent of perfume and the stain of dried ink, these authors show that the physical world remembers what politicians try to deny, keeping the memory of home completely safe and unburnable.

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Stylistic and Thematic Diversity in Contemporary English Narrative Prose: Two Short Stories as a Case Study by: Lauren Groff and Lee Child

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Abstract— *This paper tackles two short fictional works of two contemporary novelists both of which categorized as best sellers, and award winners, the two belong to separate schools of writing. Lauren Groff is a realistic, sophisticated, accomplished writer, with a poetic, polished, elegant style. Lee Childs on the other hand is thriller crime fiction writer. His aim is to draw the suspense of the readers. The study deals in depth with the two fictional works and concludes by a comparison between the two styles of fiction which proved to be successful at the present time.*

Keywords— ***contemporary fiction, suspense, crime, thriller, mystery, figures of speech.***

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper studies a challenging idea of the diversity found in contemporary fiction thematically and stylistically. Two successful novelists are considered as prototypes for each genre, both are best sellers and award winners.

On the first hand there is Lauren Groff, born in 1978, a novelist and a short story writer. She obtained Masters in Fine Arts from the university of Wisconsin, she is classified by the Times magazine as one of 100 most influential people in 2024. Groff is amongst the finalist in 2018 for the National Book Award for Fiction. The Guardian commented on Groff "a heroic pushback against the way we live now, against waste, against the artificial environments in which we find ourselves maintained by corporations, but equally against the pressures on women to be flowless effortlessly excellent mothers, wives, sisters, lovers, friends within their dire state of affairs."

Groff has an insight into human's mind and soul through exploring human's relationships in their realistic communities. Groff's narrative style elevated to the rank of poetic style. Her prose is lyrical and figurative depending on figures of speech such as metaphor, simile, personification and so on. Her fiction is marked by contemporary themes as marriage, climate change, and feminism. Lauren Groff's themes "focusing on themes of empowerment, resilience, and self-discovery within distinct historical and cultural settings. (Razk, 2024)

On the other hand, there is Lee Childs, the pen name of James Dover Grant, born in 1954. He is best known for thriller novels, and by his Jack Racher's novel series. Grant's first novel *The Killing Floor* won the Anthony Award and The Barry Award for Best First Novel. Grant is marked by his commercial style, he said in an interview that many aspects of Racher's novels are meant to be profitable rather than for literary reasons. Grant's narrative is straight forward. The development of the plot mainly depends on suspense and fast past action. This style captured the attention of millions of readers, his mastery of this genre is demonstrated in his ability to capture the readers' interest from the first page. Within this fast tracking narrative Grant demonstrated issues like justice, morality and human condition.

Through this comparative analysis, we aim to illuminate the unique contributions both authors make to literature while

revealing how their differing approaches reflect broader cultural narratives. Ultimately, this exploration will provide insights into how literature can mirror societal norms while also challenging them, enriching our understanding of the human experience in all its complexity.

II. LAUREN GROFF'S 'THE MIDNIGHT ZONE'

Laurene Groff is a contemporary novelist and short story writer she is best known for her lavished language and extreme figurative speech. Her short story published in the New Yorker in 2016 ' The Mid night Zone' is exclusively narrated by an anguished mother of two trying her best to prove her ability to handle tough situations without her spouse.

> **The stories share a sultry Floridian atmosphere, where a dark wilderness poses a threat to emotionally burdened protagonists, often but not always women that happen to be mothers, who find themselves in situations which force them to face themselves.** (Brown, 2014)

The story is very familiar to the reader, a family spending their spring vacation in a friend's cottage in the forests of Florida. They are in distress because of racoons, panthers that might attack at any moment and the lack of communication with the rest of the world. The father leaves the mother and the two boys who are seven and five alone to finish some business back at home. The father promises to be back after three days and the mother, the narrator and the hero of the story, tries to prove her accountability to stay in the cottage with the boys without any additional support from the father who seemed to have managed every family affair so far. The mother has an accident trying to fix a bulb, she falls hitting her head and being unconscious for few minutes then she loses her memory because of the head trauma, she is the only narrator everything is told from her own perspective. The story ends happily when the father comes back to rescue the family.

> **"The Eyes of the Panther" and Lauren Groff's 2016 story "The Midnight Zone." Both stories place women in isolated wilderness spaces to probe the boundaries between nature and culture and to condemn human destruction of the nonhuman world. The stories also include Gothic tropes of entrapment and psychological trauma to expose restrictive cultural ideals that constrain women into passive roles. (Kelly,2022)**

What makes the simple short story worth reading and analyzed is Groff's mastery over language and dictions. And the paper will analyze the figurative language in details and comparing it to other contemporary writers who show the opposite tendency towards language. "Groff's style of writing could be described as dense but captivating, simultaneously conveying humor while offering a detailed portrayal of complex emotional states, rich with phantasmagorical imagery." (Ena, 2022)

The figurative language indulges the use of metaphor, simile, personification, and other literary devices.

III. THE USE OF METAPHOR IN 'THE MIDNIGHT ZONE'

The first-person narrator being the mother draws images for the readers to trigger their imagination to put them in the sphere and surrounding of her personal story this is done through the employment of figurative language. The Italian word "blanched" is metaphorically used to refer to the father's face turning pale delivering the news that one of his tenants died in his apartment. The mother and narrator used the expression "cut to the bone" to metaphorically imply that the lack of the father's reliability on her has reached the final limit. The use of the scientific metaphor, where raising her two sons is similar to growing two specimens of human beings in " petri dishes" this might refer to the experimental and anonymous process of motherhood. The feeling of guilt by the mother's side made her feel in dept because of her unfulfillment for her duties as a mother, this is un payable "dept". "there had been a weight on us as we played outside" the weight is that of the fear and worry because of the loose panther hoovering around the camp.

The climax of the story begins when the mother stood on a spinning stool trying to change the bulb to improve the light in the cottage, the dog caused her to fall on the back of her head.

The mother hitting her head on the flour causing her to "black out" and faint for moments, when she regains her consciousness, she forgets her sons' names so she addresses them as the older and younger "golden" boys accordingly one is as small as a bottle of water " water small" the other is bigger. She compares herself to a chicken and the bulb an egg, she says:

"The older boy bent over me, then lifted an intact light bulb from my armpit, triumphantly; I a chicken, the bulb an egg."

The bulb is smashed as an egg. The dizziness after she falls is compared to fireworks in that she started seeing flashes of light because of the head trauma. "Though fireworks went off in the corner of my eyes."

The mother feels sorry for her hair being very valuable to her when her boy rapes it with duct-tape in an attempt to mend the wound on the back of her head. She metaphorically compared her relation and love for her hair as if it has become a pet.

Moreover, the brain concussion caused her confusion of thoughts as if her mind is mixed like "scrambled" eggs. The figurative language continued in all its dimensions not a single line without an implied meaning, a metaphor or other figures of speech. A simple notion of her boys falling asleep is transformed into a sea with waves overwhelming the boys with drowsiness. Metaphorically the writer uses the image of the sea to convey a regular idea as sleep, as follows: " the waves of sleep rushing through their brains". The waves would take whatever bad experience the boys had, the night before, and might bring something worse the next day. The mother continues to use metaphor to show how the sound and noise of the rain would be like a barrier that could block every other sound outside the hut: "the rain's pounding on the roof, as if the noise was a barrier that nothing could enter, a stay against the looming night".

Groff might have been influenced by T.S. Eliot's metaphor in his poem ' The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' when he described the smoke and dust of the industrial city like a cat rubbing it back against the window panes trying to come in. Here the mother uses metaphor and personification, the wind is compared and becoming alive as a cat, it " rubbed" it self , it also "played in the corners", and "broke" tree branches from the trees and threw them on the roof which sounded like an animal with claws. “Groff’s text makes visible, through a story about a character caught between an obsolescent and an incipient self-narrative, a contest of ontologies in the culture of modernity, one parsimonious and one prolific when it comes to allocating possibilities for selfhood across species lines.” (David, 2018)

Time is metaphorically compared to a moving vehicle awaiting no one, as the mother explained, that if someone falls from the time train, it would not wait for him. Time is also personified where it is careless about human's needs and attempt to manage and control. The head ache is compared to thunder in its severity. The final conclusion of the story when the father arrives and sees his wife crowned with duct- tape she compares herself to a queen of chaos.

IV. SIMILE, PERSONIFICATION, AND OTHER RHETORICAL DEVICES

Simile goes hand in hand with metaphor, personification and other rhetorical devices. So, when the husband is metaphorically compared to a giant racoon walking on the roof, they all are "like burglars". The mother is somehow transparent or almost invisible because she has lost so much weight " as if I'd gone translucent". She used simile to compare her rejection to her husband treating her as incompetent to take responsibility, to an annoying fog that would never go away," like a sticky fog".

Personification determined the night being "bold" as being so dark while the outside nature is also personified. The narrator's feeling of insecurity and fear to what lies outside is emphasized after her husband has left them. The wind for example is deliberately making an inhuman sound that calls for everything else to wake up at night "the wind was making a low inhuman muttering", the word muttering gives the wind it's animate privilege.

The "head trauma" she got from the fall is personified to be like an old friend, in the sense that she is very familiar with and acquainted to. There is also, the use of hyperbole, it is very clear when she describes her mother, as she was young, to be influential in her life "a person who had blocked out the sun".

The expression "entered" is usually used with animate being, but here it personifies night "night entered". The mother felt fear and insecurity of what might happen if her condition became worse and this idea haunted her with every word she uttered "the unthinkable that I was skirting, like a pit that opened in front of each sentence" she employed simile, in the sense that, the unthinkable is like a pit that she fears to fall in. Anaphora is used to emphasize the upward direction of the swimming fish in the boys' stories of the sea world "way up up up to the birds". The mother after the head trauma fears that if she fell asleep, she might fall into a coma, so she decides to stay awake.

Time has become a living being so unsensitive to others, it's blind to human's urge to save it, thus, time is personified. "The first birds sent their question into the chilly air" the birds have become human since they are asking questions. The last line in the short story comes with a conclusion, the father is back and he takes charge of the situation, the mother is relieved from her watch she lets go knowing that the father has received his duty back, but the fear in his face is "like the wind itself" she sensed fear in his eyes, she uses simile to compare it to the wind and the cold sun.

Rhetorical devices have managed to give volume and richness to this piece, the narrator succeeded in using these devices at various stages of her narration. At the beginning of the story, she used them because she was sinical and sarcastic, after her head trauma when her children were awake, she was rather worried and scared of what is to come so everything was exaggerated and indulged with fear. Finally, when she was all alone her surrounding and being has changed into something ghostly, unrealistic and out of this world. Groff exceled in employing such lavished language to achieve her gool of revealing a woman's mental

and psychological status at certain moments of distress and challenge.

V. IMAGERY IN GROFF'S LANGUAGE

Imagery is basically the painting of images through words and language, the writer could achieve this by the use of various rhetorical devices. The imagery employs the senses as means of taking the reader into the writer's imagination. There are seven types of imagery: visual, auditory, Gustatory, Tactile, olfactory, Kinesthetic, and organic. These images appeal to various senses like sight, hearing, taste, touch, smell, movement, and internal senses. Graff's story is a manifestation of these senses to ensure the perfect understanding and indulgence of the interior and the surrounding of the main character. The reader is capable to feel and touch and hear everything with the heroine of the story but never having the chance to know her name or the names of her family members. So, instead of the names there is "my husband, the old boy and the young boy" maybe to generalize or perhaps to specify that it is only her perception that matters. The organic image reveals the chill of the weather "the chill of march seemed to blow through my bones", it provokes the reader to feel or even imagine the same sensations of the main character at that precise moment. The mother as well as the readers heard the father jumping on the roof with the racoons trying to find a mobile signal. "I heard him stepping on the metal roof" the music is specified to the readers to feel free to listen or imagine "the sound of cruise-ship calypso" the collaboration between the senses privilege the reader even to hear the music via the auditory images depending on the sense of hearing. The sound of the wind is heard as well, "The wind was making a low, in human muttering" the reader could almost picture the sound of strong wind as it is familiar to all, a clear auditory image.

While at night the light is dim to the extent that the mother could not see the patterns on the plates she is washing "I couldn't see the patterns on the dishes I was washing" the readers tend to feel the darkness of the setting through the speaker's visual image. To the mother's surprise the bulb she touched was so hot that made her juggle it from one hand to the other the image is Tactile since it employed the sense of touch "The old bulb was hot". The mother sensed the wet towel on her cheeks and smelled the chemicals from the broken bulb which made her feel nauseous. She hears her young boy's singing all her senses are manifested in a way to draw a sensation or a multi-dimension image that places the reader in the spire of that particular moment. Then she goes further to describe the hot hands of her child, thus, it is a tactile image as well. The readers hear the howling of the dog as well since the mother is experiencing the it. The sole narrator employing the facilities of the dramatic monologue technique enables the readers to see deep into her senses, ideas, and thoughts. The sense of cold beer can, which the old boy placed on his mother's wound, is a tactile image again.

The story takes a new curve in the narrative style, the readers are now experiencing a sort of 'stream of consciousness technique' when the two boys fell asleep leaving the mother alone to her own wonderings. She goes back in time to remember all the dangers which lie outside their safe shelter. Throughout that lonesome and critical hour, the hole sensation talks the reader inside the speaker's mind and soul the pain she feels, the passion towards her sleeping children, and her desires to calm herself through counting her breaths. Then, she enters into a state of separation her body from her conscious and senses. She leaves her aching body in the hut and wonders alone outside, every thing seemed to fit the picture of an after-rain forest. Multiple portraits are drawn by the flying spirit of the mother, first there is the racoons fiddling with the trash, then the image of the red-shouldered hawk and the nesting chicks. The image is never complete without the employment of sense of smell. The smell of the pine blossom. The sense of touch is mentioned also where the " palmetto's nails" scratched her body. Finally, dizziness took over her mind, it started spinning in circles, then her son's awakening brought her back gradually to her senses, and body.

VI. LEE CHILD 'THE PICTURE OF THE LONELY DINER'

Lee child born in 1954 in England. He finished law school in Sheffield England. His interest in Arts started in the theater, he began his writing career after being fired from his job as Television director. Lee's first work is *The Killing Floor*, the first of Jack Racher's thriller series. Jack Reacher, a fictional character created by Lee Child, embodies leadership and adaptability in complex situations, showcasing a unique approach to problem-solving and personal growth. (Bathurst & Chrystall, 2019) Lee Child's is the pen name of James Dover Grant, the name is inspired after a mispronunciation of the name "Lee Care".

'The Picture of the Lonely Diner' is a short story written in 2015 and publisher in in Child's Anthology *No Middle Name* the book is a collection of Jack Reacher's short stories. It includes 12 short stories published in 2017.

The title 'The picture of the Lonely Diner' is a name of an actual famous painting by the Artist Edward Hopper with same name. The painting as was described by Racher in the story is a scene of a diner's glass front showing the lonely people sitting at night at a counter of a diner a man wearing a hat sitting alone and a red headed women sitting beside

another man. The man behind the counter is bending forward to get something from underneath.

> **"I think I know that picture. Three people isn't it?"**
>
> **"Plus the counter man. He is kind of bent over, doing something in the well. There are two coffee urns behind him."**
>
> **"First there's a couple, close but not touching, and then one lonely guy all by himself. With his back to us. In a hat.**
>
> **"All the men wear hats."**
>
> **"The woman is a redhead. She looks sad. It's the loneliest picture I've ever seen." (Childs, P. 13)**

The glass front of the Flatiron building resembles the scene in Hopper's painting. Where loneliness is the prevailing tone. The setting of the story is a realistic one, at evening time in New York city. Reacher describes the scene being out of the usual.

> **He stepped up one stair and turned around and looked across Broadway's humped blacktop at the Flatiron Building. His destination. He looked left and right. He saw nothing. He saw less than nothing.**
>
> **No cars. No taxis. No buses, no trucks, no scurrying panel vans, with their business names hastily handwritten on their doors. No motorbikes, no Vespa scooters in pastle colors. No deliveryman on bikes, from restaurants or messenger services. No skateboarders, no rollerbladers. (Child, p.10)**

The setting of the story starts in the underground in New York where Reacher finds himself in total isolation surrounded by police duct tape with the sign of don't enter. The setting shows various angles of famous landmarks in New York, but to Racher's astonishment the whole landscape was void of people. There were only the police with their blue and red lights, Reacher headed towards on police woman. She started interrogating him about his German passport. He explained that he and his father were in the Naivy, but he has retired.

The plot of the story is revealed through the conversation with the police officer, she elaborated that there was a trap for a corrupted officer waiting for his complicit who seemed to be killed.

Reacher finally decides to walk to the criminal informing him of the trap and he walks away continuing his way. The plot is rather simple and short lacking action and suspense although the short story is classified as a crime thriller story.

The language on the other hand is that of a contemporary fiction fragmented, mundane and colloquial. the narrator is the third omniscient narrator.

> **He should have seen a hundred people. Or a thousand. Or ten thousand. Guys in canvas shoes and T-shirts, girls in short summer dresses, some of them strolling, some of them hustling, to clubs about to open their doors, or bars with the latest vodka, or midnight movies, (Childs, P.11)**

The sentences are "Or a thousand." is a hole sentence ill-structured and wrong in grammar, again the same sentence "Or ten thousand.". The reader might contemplate whether such mistakes are made on purpose or whether they convey the negligence of the writer. The suspense in the story springs from the mystery in the picturesque scenery where everything seems out of context and out of the usual. The figures of speech do not add any complication to the story. Child employed simple figures of speech such as simile as he resembles the Flatiron building to a piece of cake or to a prow of a ship.

> **Sharp at the front. Like a thin wedge, or a modest slice of cake. But to him it looked most like the prow of a ship. Like an immense ocean liner moving slowly towards him. Not an original thought. He knew many people felt the same way. Even with the cow-catcher glasshouse on the front ground floor, (Childs, P.12)**

He continues describing the empty setting "It was like walking through a ghost town." (P.12) "The cowcatcher had a triangular iron frame, a miniature version of the shape it was backing up against, like a tiny sailboat trying to outrun the liner chasing it. The frame was painted green, like moose," (p.12) again Child used simile to resemble the triangular building to a ship sharp edge.

The story concludes by the heroic gesture of Racher trying to save the man entrapped from an eminent death "Reacher said, " So here's my good deed of the day. If you want to turn yourself in to her, I'll walk with you. Every step of the way." "Similar to the ethical explorations in superhero narratives, Child's stories often grapple with themes of

justice, reflecting societal values and personal ethics." (Consani et al., 2020).

VII. CONCLUSION

This paper presents a comparative analysis of the literary works of Lauren Groff and Lee Child, two prominent authors known for their distinct narrative styles and thematic explorations. While Groff is celebrated for her intricate character development and poetic prose, Child is renowned for his fast-paced thrillers featuring the iconic character Jack Reacher. This juxtaposition of styles offers a rich ground for examining how each author engages with their respective genres and the broader cultural contexts that inform their writing. In concluding the comparative analysis of the short stories by Groff and Childs, it becomes evident that both narratives, while distinct in their cultural and thematic contexts, share underlying motifs that resonate with the human experience. This comparison not only highlights the unique storytelling techniques employed by each author but also emphasizes the broader implications of their narratives within the framework of local history and identity.

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Jallikkettu: The Film with Violence as an Archetype

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Abstract— *Jallikattu is a 2019 Indian Malayalam language film directed by Lijo Jose Pellissery with Screenplay by S. Hareesh and R. Jayakumar, based on the short story 'Maoist' by S. Hareesh. The term 'Jallikettu' brought to our mind the controversial ritual of Tamil Nadu, It is a traditional event, also known as 'Manju Virattu'. People run for a buffalo reminds us about the early human hunting for animals when he was a forest man. It points out that food is the priority when any living being is considered. The elements of vengeance, mob psychology, consciousness etc along with many other points included in this film is pointing towards the theory of archetype. The film also represents mob psychology. Buffalo becomes the common enemy of the people in that village. These leads to many disputes. JALLIKATTU is the sort of movie that gores through the present way and defence of human conscience as nothing more than a restrictive layer of restraints man or society created in order to keep at bay their instincts or animalistic urges. This Paper is an analysis of how violence plays as an archetype in this film.*

Keywords— ***Jallikattu, Power, anima/animus, Archetype, Mob Psychology.***

Jallikattu is a 2019 Indian Malayalam language film directed by Lijo Jose Pellissery with Screenplay by S. Hareesh and R. Jayakumar, based on the short story 'Maoist' by S. Hareesh. 'Maoist' satirizes the chaos unleashed in a high-range village after two buffalos brought for slaughter runs amok. While the story has two animals - a bull and a cow - we see only one in the film. Maybe he took only one animal to focus on the human behaviour more.

The term 'Jallikettu' brought to our mind the controversial ritual of Tamil Nadu, It is a traditional event, also known as 'Manju Virattu', in which a bull of some special breeds is released into a crowd of people. Multiple human participants attempt to grab the large hump on its back with both arms and hang on it. At this time, the bull has its continuous efforts to escape. They use sharp sticks, bite its tail, force to drink alcohol and rub chilli pepper on their eyes. Many of these elements were taken in the film 'Jallikettu' but is produced in an entirely different way. It is a mixing of the short story as well as the ritual.

The plot follows a bull that escapes from a slaughter house owned by Kalan Varkey (Chemban Vinod) in a hilly remote village and the entire village men gathering to hunt down the animal. But when they realise the animal is causing more destructions they called for Kuttachan (Sabumon). Antony (Antony Varghese) and Kuttachan had a rivalry in the issue of Sofia (Shanti Balachandran), Varkey's sister. Sofia had love only for a man who has manly powers. This resulted in the vengeance between Antony and Kuttachan. Later this caused the escape of the Buffalo killing one. When Antony confronts Kuttachan, his aim changed from the Buffalo to Kuttachan and stabbed him. But Kuttachan didn't reveal Antony's name because of his pride. The change of the people according to their situations and their level of vengeance is well portrayed in the film through various scenes. This change occurred from the starting itself as the people turned against Varkey. Till that time most of them tried to show their love for Varkey only for getting more meat. But suddenly they raised against him. It is the mob psychology (crowd psychology) that works there. The psychology of a crowd differs from and interact with that of the individuals within it. This gives them more power here than their individual ability.

Their run for a buffalo reminds us about the early human hunting for animals when he was a forest man. It points out that food is the priority when any living being is considered. This fact is again establishing through Kuriachan (Jaffer Idukki) who is describing about food that should be prepared for his daughter's marriage. His style of

food description also includes a point of lust. Even though man tries to be a social being he himself break all the norms he made. He is not ready to accept this. But the buffalloe broke his life style, politics and economy within seconds. This is symbolically represented through its destruction of stores, flag and bank. At the end man becomes a beast. He too fought for a piece of meat like a wild animals. Thus the inner consciousness of man evoke.

The elements of vengeance, mob psychology, consciousness etc along with many other points included in this film is pointing towards the theory of archetype. Archetypal criticism gets it is impetus from the psychologist Carl Jung, who postulated that humankind has a 'collective unconsciousness'. Collective unconsciousness (Racial unconsciousness) is something that is hidden inside our mind. Our ancestors, their culture and religion will have some elements sleepy in them. All these together created our mind. For example, Indians had a feel of anger when they came across an Englishman. This is the collective unconsciousness we got from our ancestors and history. Likewise the Britishers have an attitude of contempt for Indians. It is their collective unconsciousness. That means some of our beliefs and thoughts are set years before our birth. Every man is afraid of darkness. As grownups we may reject this. But there will be a small quantity of fear of darkness or a ghost will lay inside our mind. This fear of darkness, ghost, other materials and inferiority complex while seeing a person of high class that we are low class are got as collective unconsciousness.

Yung divided the human mind into three – Persona, Anima/Animus and Shadow. We created a mask to hide ourselves from our society. A society needs an educated, respectful, wealthy man of a good character and a man is trying to be so hiding some of his characters. Then he is the persona.

Every individual has an anima/animus in them. Anima/Animus means men and women. That means every man has a woman in him and vice versa. Power is something always related to men and meekness to woman. But this merged in them. Only the prominent quality is seen outside. The other is deep inside. This is because man and woman are living together from the time of origin. So, their qualities will mingle.

The third division of highly important – "Shadow". This element is the main theme of the film. Shadow is the animal instinct in us. That means our correct self, our real character. As we said earlier humans have hidden qualities. It is this hidden quality represented in shadow. It can be the happiness in our mind when seeing a cruelty or jealousy or can be anything. It can be good also. Animals may have good qualities also. But when animal instinct is concerned, it is mainly related to destruction. This element of human mind is very well portrayed in the film. What is the relation between collective unconsciousness and archetype as Yung considered is that both are originated from cultures, religions and myths. Yung connected collective unconsciousness with archetype. We made a try to pick out the elements of this reverse evolution by applying this theory. Other elements such the archetype theory is also seen in this film. It includes the threat for existence, loss of manners, etc. The wild instinct of man completely drawn out when it comes to the end of the film. It is the expression of human archetype of animosity.

The title "Jallikettu" is shown in a way as it is arising from fire. The origin of human civilization starts from the discovery of fire. It continued with the discoveries of wheel and iron. The controlled use of fire is one of man's first greatest innovation. Fire helped to get safety from animals, cold and also taught to cook food. Cooking food is something unknown to animals. That created the difference between man and animal. Gradually he thought himself as the superior one in the nature. The creativity of weapons increased his courage. Animals don't use weapons. At a point of time this film shows how the original wild nature comes out from a man by showing the killing of a cock with his hands. As what the theory said his mask fell down. He became the real beast.

The film begins with the close-up scene of individuals who are opening their eyes. It hints around the archetype of man. Camera then suddenly focused on various scene of nature such as caterpillars, spider in its web, group of ants etc. Then the spectator can see sunrise. It is a link scene, which connects 'the nature scene' to successive scenes. Sun rising scene is extended for 2 minutes, where camera moves from close up to long shot. The following scenes after this explains world of civilized man. It pictures rubber plantation, electricity, modern vehicles. But along with these civilized actions, there are many scenes highlighting the primordial instinct of man such as violence, wilderness, hunger, lust. There are many blended scenes of civilized features and uncivilized features of human. From nature man moves to civilization. But his basic instinct never changes, it lies hidden in man. 'The sun rising scene ' thus create a link between these two scenes and it also shows the evolution of human being.

Pallisery's narrative plunges into action from the get go, using the rhythm of human breath which is similar to that of beast. Like animals adapt to their environment human change their attitude to others for their own sake. The husband who speaks rudely to the wife seems to be calm and composed to buy meat from KalanVarkey. The tick tick sound in the background hints time lapse. It also

critises that there is no change in human behaviour as time passes. The wilderness of human still remains there without any change. It arose outside due to certain circumstances. Thus, humans are called social animals. Director presents a busy butchery from which, almost everyone in the village without any distinction of caste, religion or economy rushes to buy the meat. There is an instance where a Brahmin is hesitant to buy the meat. Then he orders the wife to cook it deliciously. Humans pretend to have good manners even though they have animal instinct in them. Hunger is one of the basic urge of all animals. But here we can also see the wilderness in enjoying slaughtering.

There is a long shot of the buffalo and the surrounding when the buffalo escape from the butcher. The whole village turns against Kalan Varkey and Antony including people who rushed for the meat. Finally, one of the characters utters that life is impossible here. Fire is a symbolic representation of evolution of human being. The control of fire by early humans was one of the first innovations. It was a turning point in the technology evolution of human beings. Fire provides a source of warmth, protection from predators, where to create more advanced hunting tools, and their method for cooking food.

Antony has a sexual urge towards Sofi. Sofi is looking forward for a powerful man. Sofi attracts towards Antony first seeing the masculine strength. There is no real love between Sofi and Antony. Lust is the real root of love. Film focuses on this aspect. Civilised man consider love as an elevated feeling but basically it is lust. There is a close up shot of bulb, headlight and torch light in the beginning. It represents Jung's idea of persona. It is the mask of men to hide his real self from the society. When the buffalo escapes, the real self of man comes out. According to Jung it is the shadow part or animal instinct in man. The escape of buffalo arose man's instinct of fear. It also questions his loss of power over other animals. It shatters the peaceful existence of human. Thus man's shadow becomes active in the rest of the film. Rope is a symbol. The same rope which is used to tie the buffalo is used by the old man to get up. The old man is waiting for death. Rope became a medium between birth and death.

Paul is a farmer in the village. He insists others to leave the buffalo alone as all living things are heirs of the land. But when his farmland was destroyed by the buffalo he speak arrogantly. The police quarrels with his wife suddenly he become quiet when Paul knocks the door. These are instance where the hollowness of man is revealed. Police constable also insist to kill the buffalo using a licence gun, pointing towards his wife. Here he compares his wife to the buffalo. It mocks the patriarchal society. He blinds the law and order by keeping mum.

The religious community leaders are careless, and orders fresh meat for themselves from somewhere else. They get concerned only when the buffalo destroys the plantation surrounding the church, which signifies that they are concerned about the wealth of the religious institution. Even the law of proactive for a moment in favour of them. A man hides inside the house from the mad buffalo. These are the example of primordial instinct of fear in human beings. Villagers also gossip about Sophie that she had immoral relation with the drill master during school days. The buffalo destroys in the same order a campfire, vegetation, a cotton candy shop on wheels, a local tea shop, a rural bank office, a political party flag post etc. This is the representation of reversion of evolutionary landmarks of the discovery of fire, agriculture, wheels, industrialization commerce and political revolution etc.

There is an announcement to be aware about the buffalo. It declares that no one should go out especially children and avoid shitting outside. This behaviour of ancient human which is still followed by the villagers. Kurichan give a description about cooking for the marriage ceremony. Hunger is a primordial instinct of man. Human are fascinated towards tasty and crispy food. He is not ready to comprise on the tasty food. Each and every individual have anima and animus inside them. Kuriachan's unconscious feminine side jumps outside when he describes how to cook the food.

Kuriachan insist her daughter not to speak through the phone but to speak inside without seeing others. Kuriachan is anxious about the society. He asks to an old man whose buffalo is escaped. He replies that it is Kalan's. It signifies the buffalo is belongs to Kalan Varkey. There is also a symbolic meaning that Buffalo represent Kalan or devil. It can also be considered as the vehicle of Yama. Buffalo becomes a medium to show the wilderness in man. The flag which blinds the buffalo hints the politics which blinds human. Buffalo destroys the communist flag post. Communism is a philosophical social political economic ideology movement to establish communist society. The destruction of the flag post hints the destruction human ideology. The complaint of the farmer is neglected, alluding the government's negligent towards farmers. The cutting down of trees hints the neglection of environment.

The tea shop owner satirises the ancestors of Kalan Varkey. It includes how his father Kalan Mathai settled in the village through his act of wilderness and how he became famous in his slaughtering. Hence wilderness is not only the behaviour of Kalan Varkey. It is also the behaviour of his forefathers. Really it is the collective unconscious in every man. Throughout the film we can notice this collective unconscious including fear, hunger, jealous etc. Vengeance

is another primordial instinct discussed in the film. It is expressed through the vengeance between Antony and Kuttachan. When people put forward the idea to call Kuttachan in order to catch the mad buffalo Antony rejects it. Kuttachan get a warm welcome from the village. He show off his power in front of Antony. He loads the gun and a yellow dressed man tries to help him and gradually he becomes a slave of Antony. A Bengali becomes the slave of Antony. Primitive man's master-slave relationship is shown here.

Kuttachan loads the gun and points towards Antony. This leads to the first flashback scene. Sofia is only fascinated towards the power of man. She laughs while Kuttachan tried hard to lift the beef. She is more attracted towards the masculine power of Kuttachan than that of Antony. Thus, Antony become jealousy over Kuttachan. So, Antony decided to cheat him in order to maintain the masculine power over Sofi. He plotted a plan against Kuttachan, accusing him for the theft of sandalwood in the premises of the church. Thus, Kuttachan is arrested by the police. Jealousy and revenge are both the side of a coin which accelerate the cruelty in man. Gradually Sofi falls into the hands of Antony. Arrival of Kuttachan in the village hints the beginning of vengeance. The mob divides to catch the buffalo under the leadership of Kuttachan and Antony.

Kuttachan does not even go to church for his baptizing. But he wears a cross. It hints that even though he is shown to be a brave man, he is a coward. He needs spiritual support. The film also discusses racial consciousness. Antony provokes the Christian believers in the village in order to found the thief who stolen the sandal wood in the premises of the church. He also give hints to identify Kuttachan. The root of scandal wood left behind represents the root of man. Man is basically an animal.

The film also represents mob psychology. Buffalo becomes the common enemy of the people in that village. These leads to many disputes. People from Poomala, the neighbouring village decides to catch the buffalo in order to eat it. Most of the people refer Kuttachan as the best man to solve the problem. So Antony wants to catch it by himself to show his power over Kuttachan.

Religion is the ever time creation which has more impact on human mind. The people in that area know that Kuttachan is engaged in sandalwood stealing. But they turned against him only when it became a problem for their religion. Kuttachan was sleeping in his hut when the mob circled him. When he heard a sound, he looked outside. Then the camera is showing only his eyes. That eye shows the observance of an animal when it hears a sound that feels dangerous. We also know that men's eyes are compared in films always to wild animals like lion, tiger, cheetah etc. And women's eyes are always compared with deer, fish and like. This is the striking similarity of man and animal. Man is not different from an animal.

As the crowd comes to catch him, we can hear the background score of hunting dogs. That means the mob is going to hunt its prey which it fixed before. Here the prey is Kuttachan. It explains the animosity of humans. These are the hints for the audience. Then Kuttachan had his vengeance look on Antony as the starting of enmity.

Fire is again portrayed. People moving with fire sticks on their hands reminds us of the early man. We may see pictures of early man in two forms – as the ape form and one with fire. Fire is always connected with first form of life. People with fire sticks are coming in group. When they group together, their individuality merge into that of the psychology of the group. Another example for mob psychology. This is establishing when one of the group members say loudly "Savicha, leave your wife and come down". He is encouraging Savichan to join them.

When man lived in forest, he constantly fought with animals for food and for his existence. But this ability is sleeping as he became a social being. When he moves back to forest the sleeping ability had its opportunity to regain its power. Here Kuttachan said that he could find the buffalo and kill it alone. That also shows a man's urge to establish his superiority and show his bravery. Man, first lived in forest, then he transformed as a village man and then constructed metropolitan cities. But as he is moving deep into the forest, he gradually changes into an animal.

Kuttachan was brought to kill the buffalo. But he is pointing his gun in a different direction by saying that the animal will come there. At that time he actually aimed at Antony. We can easily prove it through his words. He said that human flesh is the most delicious meat in the world. It depicts his urge to kill Antony. And also, the buffalo was behind him while he was aiming in the opposite direction. When he missed one shot a villager comments "one buffalo died". He actually mentioned a man. This is somewhat like man himself realizing who he is.

The buffalo fell into a well and that makes the interval. After the interval more people are joining them. Meanwhile Kuriachan was caught by another group for social immorality. This social norm was only a mask for them to collect food. They picked up cocks from there and Kuriachan was only a reason for that. An interesting fact is that one who came there for breaking the norms is ridiculing at another one. When Kuriachan went for meat, his daughter eloped with her boyfriend. It seemed to be a run away from the structured social life of man to the real man.

Animals have their claws and teeth as major weapons for hunting. A society man needs a weapon. But in

that forest man is killing that cock by only using his hands. That again pointing to the peeking out of existing wild nature in man. In order to show his domination, Antony is not allowing Kuttachan to kill the buffalo inside the well. He is grooming for taking it outside.

The movie goes on to a new direction from the ongoing one which the focus was on the inner changes of a human as a solo subject to focusing on the social changes in the society. The story is mostly focused on showing the mob psychology. The story takes a turn to analyse about the creation of the village and the society.

The way in which the village came to be is shown as the reenacting given by the villager. An old villager goes on to say how the village where the film is based on was actually a forest and the forest was later cleared and transformed into the village or the human society. The old man(villagers) declares that once the village was a forest inhibited by Porcupines, Elephant, Bears, so on. The people were first frightened by the animals so much that they wouldn't leave their homes at night. So how did they gather the courage they needed to clear the forest! The answer to that is also revealed. The old man says that his ancestor, the true migrant had enacted a huge HOLY CROSS and under it he gathered the belief of the people and mobilised them by using the mob phycology and that was how the forest was cleared. But it is worth noticing that he says that "Even now, with us here, this place belongs to animals" and the most important "though they walk on two legs……. they are animals…… real beasts".

The following scenes also help in supporting these statements. Antony when everyone was trying to pull the buffalo up. He was mostly concentrated on the fact to claim victory over Kuttachan, and for that when he lost sight of Kuttachan he immediately put down everything else and goes to find him in Kalan Varkey's house believing that he might be with Sofie, if so he lost and this further enrages him.

The film also shows how the females are being turned submissive in the society. In the this charged atmosphere, men do not merely speak, they shout, scream, howl, growl and spit words at each other and at the women. When one such brut (Antony) attacks a woman (Sofia), he buries his head in her body, hissing and snarling like a predator hungry for meat. She resists vehemently, but her subsequent calm conversation with him about a mundane matter is a cold metaphor for the normalization of sexual violence in our society and the manner in which women condition themselves to gather their wits about them in the face of male bestiality because of the frequency with which they are subjected to such savagery.

The movie further initiates the mob phycology in the scene where the death of a villager puts them in a state of crazed due to anger where they goes to hunt in the fits of anger and this makes them protest and fight against the authorities(police). They go as far as to burn the police van in protest when they were in the mob. All these actions are never done when they are alone but in a crowd they are daring enough to do all these. The mob action is very evident in the scene where a man, who at first hid at home fearing the buffalo takes up the hunt for the buffalo when the mob was initialized. The police inspector himself is dragged into the mob as he slowly loses his way as the official and enters the mob itself.

When the beast escapes for the second time, fellow locals became aggressive than earlier. The people were divided into three groups. People turned into three groups led by Kuttachan, Antony, and the police inspector. They adapt different methods to trap the beast. Antony doesn't want Kuttachan to capture the buffalo. In his head getting the buffalo would mean that he is better man than Kuttachan. They consider physical strength is more masculine than intellectual. Suddenly the animal is spotted, but all of their methods were in vain. Buffalo violently attacks the crowd and many were injured serious. The hunting continuous. Its nature becomes wilder. The brutality within them gradually awakening. The background music is more crucial here. Even humanly sighs turned to as animals.

Then Antony and Kuttachan began to fight together. They forgot their common threat and started attacking each other. The camera oscillates on screens and is invariably stationed near them. The camera movements were in-sync with the scene's pace. Their fight loses all human features and becomes completely animals. Their screams become animalistic. Kuttachan is more cannibalistic than Antony. His statement regarding human flesh is mentioned earlier. Only the sounds of crickets can be heard in the background. Their fight lasts about two minutes.

At that point Kuttachan reveals Antony that he actually came back not to capture the bull, but to settle the old score with him. In the midst of their struggle of their struggle the beast attacks Kuttachan. He begs Antony for help, but he stabbed him from the back. People find Kuttachan lying on the bed of death. He answered the people's questions that he was stabbed by the buffalo. What he really means here is Antony.

The hunt continuous under the leadership of Antony and the policeman. We can see a scene here were the buffalo stood staring at the crowd. The beast realises that the men around it is wilder than it. A tribal music is heard

from the background. Mob chases the beast led by Antony. Their grunts and snorts uncannily match the beast's and in quick succession. The man turns into a predator and the beast no longer wants fight to him. The animal stops in a group, tired. Antony reaches there and stabs it. The crowd reaches soon. He shouts out that he killed it. The wild mob runs to Antony flaming that they killed the animal. Their race is given importance here. The became completely primordial except that the clothes are worn.

It's stunning climax, where the hunter forms a human pyramid, madly throwing themselves on the pile, having forgotten what they are really chasing, ends on an ambiguous note. Did the buffalo escape and find itself outside the house of the bedridden Oldman? Or is it Antony who becomes the buffalo torn down by the hunters who can't distinguish between humans and animals anymore? There is hint of the later interpretation earlier than when Kuttachan tells one of the men that human meat is the tastiest much to the listener's horror.

In the end, the director leaves us the images of men in animal skins exulting over the meat that they have in their hands- is it that of another animal or have they killed one of their own? Is there an 'another' and an 'own' at all? The excellent soundscape here creates a frighteningly immersive environment were the audience is dragged into the screen to become a part of the sloughing of civilization.

JALLIKATTU is a Malayalam movie directed by LIJO JOE PULLIZZARY is a movie that is one of a kind which focus on the ARCHETYPE NATURE OF HUMAN BEINGS. Archetypes are innate universal pre-conscious psychic dispositions that form the substrate from which the basic themes of human life emerge. Jallikattu gives an on look into the truth of human emotions and life in the most basic form or what the life of complex human society is based on is the most primitive instincts of HUNGER, REPRODUCTION and SURVIVAL.

Archetype theory in literature is responsible for providing a proper theoretical form to the concept of archetype criticism is mainly credited to NORTHROP FRYE. Northrop Frye differentiate archetype mainly into five mainly HUMAN, ANIMAL, VEGITATION, MINERAL, WATER.

1. HUMAN- In comedies works for the fulfillment of wishes, and in tragedies it acts in a tyrannical way leading isolation and downfall.
2. ANIMAL- Gentle and Pastoral in comedies while Predatory in tragedies.
3. VEGITATION- In comedies it is represented by formations like gardens, parks and flowers in case of tragedies it's in the form of wild forest or barren land.
4. MINERAL- In comedies represented by cities, temples, precious stones etc and by deserts , ruins and the likes in tragedies.
5. WATER- water is represented in both comedy and tragedies in different interpretations for same forms like sea, flood so on.

JALLIKATTU mainly focus on the first two categories of HUMAN and ANIMAL, the film make full use of the fact that man is a human and animal and the features of both are shown on him. The film from the starts gives out clues of directions for self-assessment and self-interpretations of one as a whole.

JALLIKATTU is the sort of movie that gores through the present way and defence of human conscience as nothing more than a restrictive layer of restraints man or society created in order to keep at bay their instincts or animalistic urges. As the live beast is hunted down in the one-and-a-half-hour film running time, the film pulsates with an infectious, unrelenting energy that is both exhausting and exhilarating, enervating yet invigorating.

The film holds a lot of violence yet it is not a celebration of violence but rather a embrace and an enlightenment on the truth in the deepest and darkest depth of human understanding

JALLIKATTU the term in its purest form is the sport or rather the festival held in Tamil Nadu state is a wildly known activity where one can see the absolute release of a enraged and violent beast into a crowd but ironically the crowd in a sense is a excited beast itself, using physical means to subdue the released beast(bull). Pellissery and his colleague turns that description on its head as men in the film mines their basest instincts to defeat the buffalo that escaped from the butcher. Many of them seemingly uses this hunt as a outlet to vent their simmering internal conflicts, such that it becomes hard to distinguish the four-legged animal and the two-legged one hot on its tail.

The film gives an overbearing position to the maintaining of the fading line of humanity and animality. Each character in the film is a specific representative of a particular group or belief and they are used to display the conflicting character truth and the crumbling ideals the Police Officer, the Priest, the socialist Paul, the butcher Kalan Varkey (Chamban Vinod), and so on. Each character is a representative of different class also.

In this heated atmosphere, men do not merely speak they shouts, howls, screams, growls, and badmouth

each other and at the women also. The inherent dominator instinct of males are depicted perfectly here in many cases and also the instinctive submission to the strong through the characters of Antony and Kuttachan. These two male roles also represents the clash of males for female while showing their power.

The film not only provides a concentrated view on how men work in the society it also gives a perfect view on the females also. The females gossiping and their indifference to the social problems in most times are also shown. The most intriguing part is the fact that the women are made to be submissive in society this is shown mostly by Varkey's sister Sofia. Sofia is shown as someone who loves only the one who has manly power or the Alpha, which is depicted by the fact that when she was attacked by Antony a brute, he buries his head in her body, hissing and snarling like a hungry predator or animal. She resists vehemently, but her subsequent calm conversation with him about a mundane matter is a cold metaphor for the normalization of sexual violence in our society and the manner in which the women gather their wits to face humane bestiality because of the frequency with which they are subjected to such savagery sends a cold chill down the viewers.

Jallikattu remains focused on the ferocious male of the species, but not without reminding us in the briefest of scenes that women themselves may calmer but are not without a dagger to run through their resent and condemn.

There is no Hero or Heroine on the movie each character is transformed into the embodiment of EVIL in them. Though Kalan Varkey is the lead in the beginning, all others surpass him in the wild chase and even the spectators are pulled into the visual experience.

The story also deals with the ideas of religions, social parties and other welfare groups. The story reveals the formation of villages or society from the forest clearance to the transformation of humans. The story says of the use of the religious symbol the Holy Cross to gather the people or to be precise the belief under one and to control the direction of the flow. The social parties also shown in the film, and the most intriguing matter is that the film uses the buffalo being blinded by the social party flag that falls on its eye to show idea of being blinded by the party ideology of the society.

What singles out the film is the novelty of the film in the theme and the treatment. The use of ROPE to denote two contradicting ideas as well as the visual realization of the death is very interesting. The rope hanging from the head of the a man at his death's door gives him a comfort and easy breath, but the rope shown in the hands of Antony is to ensnare the buffalo. When one loses its breath one breaths. A plot which throws itself for diverse reading is very unique.

The movie goes on to show many situations where one is made to ask himself if what they are witnessing human or animal behavior, the question will give rise to idea which relates itself to the opening of the movie where the darkness in which the people open their eyes is the dark hidden truth of the human heart and the lights of different brightness are the different consciousness of the people which is visible to us. It's a pity that the mad scramble for flesh has devalued the humans to mere cannibals. Also worth noticing is when one says that "though they walk in …….two legs they……they are animals……..real animals".

Lijo Jose and his entire crew had turned the entire movie into the most favored among the intelligentsia. The way he had used the characters to recite and approach the base of human life covered in dirt and hidden in dark is one of the most commendable thins in the film making it more than interesting and intriguing.

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Stationary Resilience, Detached Communities: Assessing the Gap Between Local Government Recovery Operations and Household Flood Adaptation

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Abstract— *This study addressed the systemic disconnect between localized institutional operations and the active behavioral responses of local households within community-level disaster governance. Utilizing a quantitative, descriptive research design, the study investigated the alignment between the formal mandates executed by administrators and the actual grassroots cooperation, structural adaptation, and policy integration practiced by residents in Aduas Sur, Cabanatuan City. Data were gathered through structured surveys and institutional assessments, and analyzed using weighted means and correlation tests. The findings exposed a profound structural divide: while the barangay bureaucracy achieved functional, highly compliant baselines in pre-disaster planning and short-term crisis response, the general citizenry remained dangerously passive and detached, failing to participate in post-disaster assessments or safety clearances. Statistical analysis revealed no significant relationship between formal recovery actions and resident cooperation, confirming that institutional compliance does not automatically produce grassroots engagement. This alienation was further compounded by a critical breakdown in social inclusivity, where indigenous peoples were systematically omitted from sectoral consultations despite active outreach to other vulnerable groups. The study concludes that the village operates in two isolated realities: a legally compliant bureaucracy running official protocols, and a detached, stationary community that anchors itself by physically reinforcing their homes against rising floodwaters rather than relocating to a safer place. To heal this systemic divide, the study recommends replacing rigid, top-down bureaucratic walls with direct, localized public partnerships, specifically by institutionalizing text-based micro-reporting networks for immediate post-disaster data collection, shifting long-term flood planning to participatory, purok-level workshops, and mandating a permanent representative seat for indigenous peoples to secure true, climate-resilient inclusivity before the next climate hazard impacts the village.*

Keywords— ***Local Climate Governance, Public-Civic Co-ownership, Stationary Resilience, Marginalized Inclusivity, Post-Disaster Operations, Participatory Governance***

I. INTRODUCTION

The severe damage and systemic impacts caused by extreme weather events in a changing climate heavily undermine international development frameworks while eroding past economic milestones. From a public administration perspective, these recurring climate hazards directly hinder the execution of development administration policies, dismantle sustainable development goals, and erode hard-won civic gains across vulnerable administrative jurisdictions (Jiahong, 2023). To counter these escalating structural challenges, global governance frameworks have transitioned through distinct evolutionary phases to find a functional balance between centralized institutional mitigation and decentralized grassroots implementation. This evolution emphasizes that state mechanisms and localized public safety networks must strategically equip, fund, and organize their

operational assets well in advance to minimize post-disaster socio-economic losses and administrative inefficiencies (Das, 2023). Standardizing these proactive governance strategies on a global scale, the United Nations adopted the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 as an ambitious, action-oriented policy roadmap to systematically institutionalize risk reduction across all levels of bureaucracy (EVS.Institute, 2025). Driven by this global administrative directive, community resilience has emerged as a critical focal point within modern environmental policy and public management literature. Cultivating this localized adaptive capacity ultimately requires a comprehensive, multi-phase public policy model capable of translating grassroots data into effective, context-specific municipal legislation (Zaman, 2023).

At the national level, the institutional machinery of the Philippines faces unique operational demands due to its highly vulnerable geographical positioning. The state apparatus must constantly manage the administrative strain of recurring flash floods and severe typhoons because its territory lies directly along major tectonic plates and within the Pacific typhoon belt (Rivera, 2025). This persistent threat creates distinct regional disparities that test the limits of intergovernmental relations, localized governance structures, and equitable public service delivery. While decentralized governance has led to localized resilience improvements through community-based disaster risk reduction initiatives in select regions, socio-economic inequalities persist as lower-income groups consistently face severe resource deficits during administrative recovery phases (Chong, 2025). To legally address these structural vulnerabilities and reform the country's disaster bureaucracy, the legislature enacted Republic Act No. 10121, which legally mandated the decentralization of disaster response by shifting primary accountability and fiscal responsibilities directly onto local government units (LGUs). Within this statutory framework, the city government of Cabanatuan in Nueva Ecija stands out as a critical urban administrative hub facing immense operational pressures due to severe riverine and urban flash flooding triggered by its low-lying terrain and proximity to the Pampanga River stream. Historical disaster logs underscore these governance challenges, showing that massive typhoons like Typhoon Pedring caused heavy losses to public infrastructure and local agriculture across the province, overwhelming local emergency services and leaving thousands displaced (ReliefWeb, 2011).

At the primary baseline of public service delivery, Cabanatuan City experiences the direct operational impact of these severe environmental pressures. During extreme weather events like Typhoon Lando, rapid environmental failures caused floodwaters in the City to reach head-high levels, forcing local emergency responders to execute high-stakes rescue operations at dawn to preserve public safety (Radana, 2015). Empirical localized assessments confirm that Aduas Sur, one of the barangays in the city, represents a high-risk administrative zone, where intense rainfall combined with structural deficits, such as clogged canals, rivers, and poorly enforced solid waste management systems, repeatedly triggers severe flash flooding (Subia, 2019). While municipal administrators have invested in capital-intensive structural engineering solutions like earth dikes and river slope reinforcements, top-down infrastructure initiatives remain insufficient without functional, compliant community-level operational systems. Consequently, the local Barangay Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Committee (BDRRMC), as the frontline bureaucratic unit of the state must step in to execute localized mandates. However, as documented in public management literature, village-level disaster committees frequently encounter severe operational challenges, including inter-agency communication barriers, restricted local budgets, and a lack of total institutional commitment from local public officers (Nacaya, 2023).

This study seeks to address the systemic disconnect between localized institutional operations and the active behavioral response of the local households within community-level disaster governance. Specifically, the research aims to investigate the alignment between the formal mandates, relief systems, and participatory mechanisms executed by barangay administrators and the actual grass-roots cooperation, structural adaptation, and policy integration practiced by local residents. By evaluating this critical administrative and household intersection, the study will expose operational gaps in local disaster networks, determine where participatory barriers occur, and examine how effectively vulnerable or marginalized groups are incorporated into local planning processes.

Through this investigation, the research expects to provide an empirical foundation for transforming traditional, paternalistic disaster management systems into collaborative public administration models. The anticipated outcomes of this study include the identification of specific governance pathways that can enhance public-civic partnerships, bridge communication gaps between officials and households, and elevate local compliance from passive aid reception to an active co-ownership of disaster risks. To evaluate these dynamics, the study will statistically test whether a significant relationship exists between the institutional disaster recovery operations executed by barangay officials and the

level of active disaster response cooperation and structural adaptation practiced by the residents. This analytical framework operates on the premise that identifying such correlations will either confirm a systemic gap between administrators and the community or demonstrate that higher levels of structured, inclusive institutional preparedness directly drive enhanced civic cooperation and proactive household-level flood adaptation.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a descriptive-correlational research design to examine the relationship between institutional flood recovery operations and household-level resilience strategies. The target population comprised stakeholders from Barangay Aduas Sur, Cabanatuan City, categorized into two distinct respondent groups: 20 barangay officials who oversee localized disaster administration, and 380 local residents who experience the direct impacts of flooding incidents and execute domestic coping mechanisms. The survey was conducted in 2023. Data collection was executed using a structured, closed-ended survey questionnaire evaluated through a standard four-point Likert scale to eliminate neutral bias. To interpret the aggregated mean scores derived from the survey data, the researchers applied a strict statistical sequence consisting of four specific mean ranges: 1.00 to 1.74 corresponding to a verbal interpretation of Strongly Disagree; 1.75 to 2.50 indicating Disagree; 2.51 to 3.25 reflecting Agree; and 3.26 to 4.00 denoting Strongly Agree.

Statistical analysis involved calculating the weighted means for individual behavioral indicators across both respondent brackets to establish baseline perceptions of preparedness, relief efficiency, and community consultation. To determine the statistical relationship between the institutional recovery measures implemented by the barangay leadership and the collaborative, self-directed coping strategies of the community households, the researchers utilized Pearson's Correlation Coefficient. This correlational analysis directly tests the null hypothesis, which posits that no significant relationship exists between the institutional disaster recovery operations executed by barangay officials and the level of active disaster response cooperation and structural adaptation practiced by the residents. On the other hand, the alternative hypothesis asserts that higher levels of structured institutional preparedness and inclusive administrative recovery operations significantly correlate with enhanced civic cooperation and proactive household-level flood adaptation.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Institutional Preparedness and Systemic Disaster Mitigation Measures of Barangay Officials

Indicators	WM	Verbal Interpretation
1. Barangay officials establish preemptive operational protocols for immediate post-flood clearing operations to guarantee rapid community access and safety.	3.25	Agree
2. Barangay officials maintain a comprehensive, proactive inventory of equipment, infrastructure, establishments, facilities, and livelihoods vulnerable to flooding.	2.73	Agree
3. Barangay officials conduct regular safety and capacity assessments of evacuation centers and designated emergency relocation areas prior to the onset of the rainy season.	2.85	Agree
4. Barangay officials institutionalize coordination mechanisms with the C/MDRRMO and local government agencies to streamline post-disaster damage, recovery, and rehabilitation assessments.	2.58	Agree
5. Barangay officials regularly review and update the barangay's disaster prevention, mitigation, and recovery measures.	3.00	Agree
Overall Weighted Mean	**2.88**	**Agree**

Pre-Disaster Operations and Systemic Mitigation

This section focuses on the pre-disaster strategic planning, resource monitoring, and structural policies established by local public administrators before a flood hazard impacts the community.

Table 1 presents the empirical assessment of the institutional preparedness and systemic disaster mitigation measures implemented by the leadership of Barangay Aduas Sur, Cabanatuan City. The overall weighted mean settles at 2.88 (Agree), indicating that the local bureaucratic machinery possesses a functional and compliant capacity to organize disaster mitigation frameworks ahead of impending climate hazards.

The pre-disaster strategy is led by a strong focus on immediate operational readiness and local policy maintenance. Officials excel at establishing preemptive protocols for post-flood clearing operations to guarantee rapid community access and safety (3.25/Agree), which is structurally reinforced by the regular review and updating of the barangay's disaster prevention, mitigation, and recovery measures (3.00/Agree). Together, these indicators reflect a strong commitment to localized logistical planning and statutory compliance.

Pre-disaster infrastructure and resource planning also serve as reliable pillars of local governance. This operational baseline is maintained through the systematic conduct of regular safety and capacity assessments of evacuation centers prior to the rainy season (2.85/Agree), working alongside efforts to preserve a comprehensive, proactive inventory of equipment, infrastructure, and livelihoods vulnerable to flooding (2.73/Agree).

In contrast, the weakest link in this proactive phase occurs where internal planning must bridge into external administration. Officials struggle to institutionalize coordination mechanisms with the C/MDRRMO and higher local government agencies to streamline post-disaster damage, recovery, and rehabilitation assessments (2.58/Agree). While still matching the positive threshold of agreement, this borderline score identifies a vulnerable friction point where weak intergovernmental networks threaten to cause post-disaster administrative delays.

The data in Table 1 reveal that the local government unit demonstrates a well-structured foundation for internal disaster prevention. While village-level protocols, center assessments, and data inventories remain solid, the primary administrative weakness lies in external network governance and the lack of coordination with city-level disaster agencies.

Table 2. Post-Disaster Relief, Local Consultation, and Administrative Recovery Operations of Barangay Officials

Indicators	WM	Verbal Interpretation
1. Barangay officials conduct an immediate initial assessment regarding the flooding situation, evacuation status, casualties, and physical damage suffered by the barangay.	2.70	Agree
2. Barangay officials coordinate with higher Local Government Units (LGUs) and agencies to secure and distribute immediate relief packages and financial aid to affected residents.	3.02	Agree
3. Barangay officials organize local community meetings and post-disaster consultations with affected residents to gather grassroots feedback.	3.20	Agree
4. Barangay officials lead a comprehensive Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) one month following the flood event to measure mid-term community impacts.	2.35	Disagree
5. Barangay officials identify, formulate, and implement long-term recovery programs designed to restore, strengthen, and expand economic and livelihood activities within the barangay.	2.76	Agree
Overall Weighted Mean	**2.80**	**Agree**

Post-Disaster Operations and Administrative Recovery

This section evaluates the immediate crisis response and standard administrative recovery actions implemented by the local government from Day 1 to Day 30 following a flood event.

Table 2 presents the empirical assessment of the immediate post-disaster operations and recovery actions executed by the leadership of Barangay Aduas Sur, Cabanatuan City. The overall weighted mean settles at 2.80 (Agree), highlighting that, within the immediate 30-day post-disaster window, the local bureaucratic machinery operates with a functional and reliable capacity to manage crisis response and execute standard administrative recovery duties.

The post-disaster response is driven by a strong commitment to immediate public engagement and vertical

resource mobilization. Officials excel at organizing local community meetings and post-disaster consultations with affected residents to gather grassroots feedback (3.20/Agree), demonstrating an immediate focus on participatory governance. This localized engagement is tightly supported by consistent coordination with higher Local Government Units (LGUs) and national agencies to secure and distribute immediate relief packages and financial aid to affected residents (3.02/Agree).

Middle-range indicators confirm that the frontline bureaucracy maintains a steady operational grip on early recovery tasks. Officials successfully identify, formulate, and implement long-term recovery programs designed to restore, strengthen, and expand economic and livelihood activities within the barangay (2.76/Agree). This planning runs alongside their immediate fieldwork, as officials effectively conduct a swift initial assessment regarding the flooding situation, evacuation status, casualties, and physical damage suffered by the barangay (2.70/Agree) to map out early damage parameters.

In contrast, a critical administrative breakdown occurs when the timeline shifts toward long-term planning. Officials fail to lead a comprehensive Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) one month following the flood event to measure mid-term community impacts (2.35/Disagree), marking the lowest score in this section. This statistical drop points to a severe operational constraint where the transition from short-term emergency relief to structured, data-driven mid-term recovery planning completely stalls due to a lack of formal assessment continuity.

The local government unit proves highly effective at short-term crisis response, specifically in relief distribution and grassroots consultation during the first few weeks of a disaster. However, a significant administrative gap emerges at the one-month transition point, where the failure to conduct a formal Post-Disaster Needs Assessment paralyzes the data baseline needed to successfully bridge immediate relief into structured economic recovery programs.

Table 3. Household-Level Structural Adaptation and Environmental Coping Strategies of Residents

Indicators	WM	Verbal Interpretation
1. Residents repair flood-damaged roofs, walls, and floors of their houses.	2.84	Agree
2. Residents raise their house floor levels to mitigate the impact of future flooding incidents.	2.74	Agree
3. Residents seek to purchase alternative land in areas that are completely safe from flooding.	2.45	Disagree
4. Residents participate in cleanup operations, specifically in local canals, creeks, and drainage facilities.	3.18	Agree
5. Residents make structural improvements to their homes, such as reinforcing foundations or adding anchor bolts, to increase flood resilience.	2.56	Agree
Overall Weighted Mean	**2.75**	**Agree**

This section focuses on how individual families physically repair, modify, or cope with their houses to survive future floods during the mid-term recovery period spanning one to three months after a disaster.

Table 3 presents the empirical assessment of the household-level structural adaptation and environmental coping strategies practiced by the residents of Barangay Aduas Sur, Cabanatuan City. The overall weighted mean settles at 2.75 (Agree), indicating that the local populace actively exercises localized adaptive capacity and takes physical responsibility for reinforcing their immediate residential spaces against recurring climate vulnerabilities.

The adaptation narrative is led by strong grassroots environmental actions and basic property restoration. Residents actively participate in cleanup operations, specifically in local canals, creeks, and drainage facilities (3.18/Agree), showing a high level of civic cooperation to minimize immediate neighborhood flood exposure. This collective action runs parallel to individual efforts inside the home, where residents repair flood-damaged roofs, walls, and floors of their houses (2.84/Agree) to quickly restore basic domestic security.

Structural adjustments to local housing also mark a consistent trend in community-level adaptation. Rather than leaving the area, families invest in physical property

modifications, as seen when residents raise their house floor levels to mitigate the impact of future flooding incidents (2.74/Agree). This trend is structurally reinforced by residents making structural improvements to their homes, such as reinforcing foundations or adding anchor bolts, to increase flood resilience (2.56/Agree), showing a shared commitment to building upward and stronger against recurring floodwaters.

In contrast, a significant limitation in civic adaptation occurs when coping strategies require geographical displacement. Residents do not seek to purchase alternative land in areas that are completely safe from flooding (2.45/Disagree), marking the lowest score in this dimension. This statistical drop highlights a clear behavioral pattern among the population. Instead of seeking relocation or purchasing new property outside the flood zone, the community chooses to remain stationary, anchoring themselves to their current location.

The local populace in this section demonstrates strong self-reliance and active civic cooperation through localized maintenance and physical property upgrades. The overriding story of this dimension is one of stationary resilience, where residents consistently choose to retrofit and reinforce their existing homes to withstand future floods rather than relocate to unfamiliar or safer grounds.

Table 4. Community-Driven Engagement and Disaster Response Cooperation of Residents

Indicators	WM	Verbal Interpretation
1. Residents coordinate and cooperate with barangay officials and the city government in executing the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) to estimate losses, damages, and needs in service and trade.	1.92	Disagree
2. Residents provide barangay officials with a list of vulnerable individuals requiring immediate attention, including children, women, pregnant women, persons with disabilities (PWDs), senior citizens, and Indigenous Peoples (IPs).	1.93	Disagree
3. Residents communicate with barangay officials post-flooding to verify safety clearances before returning to their residences.	2.37	Disagree
4. Affected residents actively communicate with barangay officials to request and secure government assistance.	2.01	Disagree
5. Residents collaborate with barangay officials in designing and establishing community-level programs to manage flooding incidents.	1.88	Disagree
Overall Weighted Mean	**2.02**	**Disagree**

This section evaluates whether residents actively participate in the formal barangay recovery systems, capturing the long-term collaborative cycle and the central gap within local disaster governance.

Table 4 presents the empirical assessment of the community-driven engagement and disaster response cooperation practiced by the residents of Barangay Aduas Sur, Cabanatuan City. The overall weighted mean settles at 2.02 (Disagree), revealing a pervasive systemic disconnect where the general citizenry remains detached and passive within the formal disaster response framework, indicating a clear breakdown in public-civic collaboration.

The breakdown begins in the immediate aftermath of a flood, where even the highest-scoring indicators fail to reach positive agreement. Residents do not communicate with barangay officials post-flooding to verify safety clearances before returning to their residences (2.37/Disagree), and this disconnect persists as affected residents do not actively communicate with local authorities to request and secure government assistance (2.01/Disagree). Together, these behaviors illustrate a severe lack of formal communication between households and local leaders when crisis response is most critical.

This detachment extends directly into localized data collection and targeted vulnerability mapping. The narrative of isolation deepens as residents do not provide barangay officials with a list of vulnerable individuals requiring immediate attention, including children, women, pregnant women, persons with disabilities, senior citizens, and Indigenous Peoples (1.93/Disagree). This absence of grassroots data integration directly parallels the finding that residents do not coordinate or cooperate with barangay officials and the city government in executing the Post-

Disaster Needs Assessment to estimate losses, damages, and needs in service and trade (1.92/Disagree).

The most pronounced failure in this collaborative cycle occurs when the community looks toward the future. Residents do not collaborate with barangay officials in designing and establishing community-level programs to manage flooding incidents (1.88/Disagree), which marks the lowest point in the entire assessment. This critical drop highlights a total absence of civic co-ownership and participatory planning in the village's long-term disaster frameworks.

The local populace remains largely alienated from the formal administrative systems of the barangay. Across every measured phase, residents consistently demonstrate low engagement, failing to verify safety clearances, request assistance, protect vulnerable sectors, or participate in post-disaster assessments and long-term program design, which completely isolates the community from the government's formal disaster architecture.

Table 5. Level of Social Inclusivity and Sectoral Consultation in Barangay Disaster Management

Indicators	**WM**	**Verbal Interpretation**
Barangay officials consult with various community representatives to solicit recommendations for immediate and feasible solutions to the barangay's disaster impact, specifically involving:		
1. Children	3.05	Agree
2. Persons with Disabilities (PWDs)	2.85	Agree
3. Women	2.80	Agree
4. The Elderly / Senior Citizens	3.05	Agree
5. Indigenous Peoples (IPs)	1.77	Disagree
Overall Weighted Mean	**2.70**	**Agree**

Level of Social Inclusivity and Sectoral Consultation

This section provides a deep dive into the level of social inclusivity and sectoral consultation within local disaster governance, verifying exactly which sectors are actively integrated or systematically left behind during barangay consultations.

Table 5 presents the empirical assessment of the social inclusivity and sectoral consultation practiced in the disaster management of Barangay Aduas Sur, Cabanatuan City. The overall weighted mean settles at 2.70 (Agree), indicating that, on an aggregate level, the local bureaucratic machinery maintains a functional framework for sectoral representation during the planning and implementation of local disaster interventions.

The consultations are anchored by solid engagement with specific demographic sectors. Barangay officials successfully consult with representatives from the elderly and senior citizens sector (3.05/Agree) as well as representatives for children (3.05/Agree) to solicit recommendations for immediate and feasible solutions to the barangay's disaster impact. This inclusion is closely matched by active consultation with persons with disabilities (2.85/Agree) and women (2.80/Agree), proving that the core localized vulnerable groups are routinely given a platform within the barangay's standard administrative planning cycles.

However, a critical exclusion emerges within this policy check. Barangay officials do not consult with representatives of Indigenous Peoples (1.77/Disagree) when soliciting recommendations for immediate and feasible solutions to the barangay's disaster impact, marking the lowest score in the entire assessment. This sharp statistical drop exposes a severe gap in the local governance framework, showing that while mainstream sectoral consultations are well-established, the indigenous sector is systematically omitted from participatory disaster planning.

The data show in this section that the local government unit establishes a consultative foundation that successfully captures the voices of most vulnerable sectors, including children, senior citizens, women, and persons with disabilities. Yet, the overall narrative of inclusivity remains incomplete, as the absolute breakdown in consultation with Indigenous Peoples isolates this specific group from the formal disaster management architecture of the barangay.

Statistical Relationship between Institutional Governance and Civic Cooperation

The table below presents the correlational analysis measuring the strength and direction of the relationship between local institutional actions and household disaster response behaviors.

Variable A (Institutional Baseline)	Variable B (Household Responses)	Pearson's r	p-value	Statistical Significance
Institutional Recovery Operations (Mean: **2.80** / *Agree*)	**Disaster Response Cooperation** (Mean: **2.02** / *Disagree*)	0.215	0.084	**Not Significant** *(p > 0.05)*
Institutional Recovery Operations (Mean: **2.80** / *Agree*)	**Household-Level Adaptation** (Mean: **2.75** / *Agree*)	0.188	0.122	**Not Significant** *(p > 0.05)*

The correlational analysis reveals a weak, positive relationship that fails to achieve statistical significance. This means the null hypothesis cannot be rejected: the structured recovery operations and policies executed by the barangay leadership do not statistically translate into or drive the disaster cooperation and adaptation strategies of the residents.

This statistical insignificance highlights a deep structural wall between governance and the community. While the barangay operates effectively within its own official systems, the households adapt independently and remain detached from the formal government architecture, confirming that institutional compliance does not automatically produce grassroots civic engagement.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The disaster governance framework of Barangay Aduas Sur operates in two completely separate worlds. On one side, the institutional machinery functions with compliant baseline preparedness and effective short-term crisis management. On the other side, the community exists in a state of stationary, self-reliant resilience, physically retrofitting their homes to survive floods while remaining completely alienated from the formal administrative systems. The statistical insignificance of the correlation confirms this deep structural divide: the barangay's top-down compliance fails to trigger grassroots civic cooperation. This disconnect leaves a critical gap in data integration, vulnerability mapping, and participatory long-term planning, leaving the local disaster response architecture highly vulnerable to systemic delays when a major crisis hits.

Recommendations

To bridge this deep structural divide, the local government unit must first transition away from complex formal paper assessments and implement localized, text-based micro-reporting networks that allow residents to easily submit household damage and vulnerability listings during recovery phases. Furthermore, long-term disaster program designs must be moved directly into the community zones by institutionalizing participatory workshops at the purok level, giving residents a direct hand in co-authoring localized flood protocols to establish real civic co-ownership. Finally, the barangay must immediately correct the systematic exclusion of Indigenous Peoples from the governance framework by mandating a permanent, dedicated seat for indigenous representatives during all formal pre-disaster consultations, ensuring true administrative inclusivity before the next climate hazard impacts the village.

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Transcending Race and Gender in Zora Neale Hurston's "Sweat"

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Abstract— *Zora Neale Hurston is an eminent African American writer who is prominent in the Harlem Renaissance, a predominantly black cultural movement of the 1920s and 1930s. Being a respected African American author in 1920s America was no small feat. The black Americans faced routine discrimination in almost all aspects of life. On top of all that, Hurston mainly wrote about the experiences of southern African Americans — a segment of the population that remained largely disenfranchised until at least the late 1960s. She has written a number of award-winning plays, novels and short stories. Her short story "Sweat" is a female empowerment text about a woman overcoming her abusive husband. It portrays a story of domestically abused, religiously devout laundress, Delia and her adulterous, deadbeat husband, Sykes. Hurston's black female identity is clearly reflected in this story. Her gender and race have undoubtedly shaped the story, imbuing its content with a deep political statement on social inequality. As in many of Hurston's works, symbolism plays a key role in understanding the story. Hurston addresses a number of themes, such as the trials of femininity, which she explores with compelling and efficient symbolism. Zora Neale Hurston's work represents a noteworthy milestone in the fight for equality for black female authors, and will forever be celebrated in literature as a strong black female voice. While the content "Sweat" may have been influenced by her gender and race, her skill as a writer transcends both gender and race.*

Keywords— ***Women Empowerment, Black feminism, gender, race***

I. INTRODUCTION

Harlem Renaissance was an artistic and literary movement rooted in New York City's Harlem neighborhood during the 1920s. It marked the first major, centralized outpouring of African American creative expression in American history. Zora Neale Hurston served an influential role during this time period. It is important to understand the significance of this era in history and how African American people were able to develop and adapt their own ideals, morals, and customs through creativity and art. Hurston has written short stories and novels that managed to become a well-known presence in the Harlem social circuit. The Black Americans faced routine discrimination in almost all aspects of life. Hurston's works mainly focus on the life and experiences of Southern African Americans, a segment of the population that largely disenfranchised until at least the late 1960s.

In 1926, a group of writers from the younger generation of the "New Negro" movement in New York City, including Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston, decided to organize the quarterly magazine *Fire!!* Frustrated by the responsibilities thrust on them by Alain Locke and other leaders of the Harlem Renaissance, these writers wanted to express their own ideas without the artistic constraints of a political agenda. And, although they only managed to publish one issue because of a host of complications, the magazine left behind one of the most lasting legacies of the radical younger generation of black writers, still considered Hurston's best fiction of the period: a short story titled "Sweat."

II. DELIA JONES: STRENGTH, LABOUR AND SELF RELIANCE

"Sweat," a short story by Zora Neale Hurston, is a female empowerment text about a woman overcoming her abusive husband. The story is set in central Florida, near Orlando and is about Delia Jones, a Negro washerwoman whose struggles against society and her own husband, Sykes, finally erupt into an act of passive aggression, totally changing the complexion of her life. The story begins as Delia is sorting clothes on a spring night in Florida at her home. Being a washer woman, she has the habit of working late on Sunday nights to get start on her work for the week. Because she spends her day time in church. While working Delia is singing a mournful song and wondering where her husband, Sykes, has gone with her horse and working equipment. As she ponders his whereabouts, she feels something like a snake fall around her shoulders and screams, and later she finds her husband standing over her with the bullwhip he uses to ride the horses. Delia has a fear for snake and Sykes often takes advantage of her fear and frightens her. This very striking image of him portrays Sykes as an imposing and oppressive figure who enjoys the torment of his wife.

Delia is angry with Sykes and scolds him because he purposefully made the bullwhip look like a snake. But he doesn't seem to concern about her feelings but instead he yells her for having the white people's clothes at their home. He doesn't like her washing the white people clothes and he has already warned her regarding that but still Delia has to earn for her family so she doesn't heed to his words. As she tries to ignore him, he kicks the near pile she has made all over. He just wants to provoke her with his words so that she will erupt in anger and fights with him. Delia who has tolerated his abusive words so far, is very tired of it and she screams about how she has been working hard and how he has spoiled her hard labour in a fraction of second. In the verge of anger, she picks up an iron skillet from the stove as if to strike him. Though she tries to strike him, she hasn't: "It cowed him and he did not strike her as he usually did." This shows that Sykes not only verbally abuse her but physically too. Sykes is taken back by her action, as he never expects her to raise against him. She usually used to bottle up her emotions and anger.

III. GENDER AND PATRIARCHAL POWER

Left alone, Delia is pondering over her unhappy married life. Sykes used to spend all of her hard-earned money for buying gifts for another woman, Bertha, with whom he has illegal relationship. The only thing that gives her peace of mind is going to church and maintain her house. He usually comes back in around dawn and steals the covers before a new scene begins. Through this Hurston projects the troubled household of Delia and that her patience with her abusive husband is going to have some kind of resolution. She hopes that "whatever goes over the Devil's back, is got to come under his belly" which means that she knows eventually Sykes will get what's coming to him.

Hurston depicts Sykes as an ill-hearted monster and the people in the town pity for Delia for her suffering. Whenever Delia sets out to do her washing and passes by a group of men sitting at a store, they used to comment on how she used to be and how it is such a shame that she's beaten so often and lost her good looks. They talk about Sykes' behaviour with Bertha and they generally frown upon him. The author shows how the whole town seems to have a negative reaction against him and she creates the same effect in the minds of the readers too. One day on her way back, Delia sees Sykes out front of Bertha's telling her that he will buy her whatever she wants. Delia is so disheartened on seeing him spending her hard-earned money for some other women. He doesn't go for work but loots all her earning by just imposing his dominance of being a husband. Here Hurston makes a point on how the black women suppressed not only in the outer world but also in their own domestic world.

IV. RACE, GENDER AND CLASS: INTERSECTIONAL MARGINALISATION

Bertha's stay in the town has created rift between Delia and Sykes. They have fought all the time. Even though Delia has attempted to sort out the issues, she has been repulsed each time. As time passes the rupture in their relation widens. Tired of Delia and seeking out freedom with his mistress Bertha, Sykes hatches a plan to poison Delia by planting a rattlesnake in her washing clothes. But instead of Delia, it is Sykes who is poisoned by the rattlesnake, fatally, in the neck. In response, Delia sits meditatively below a chinaberry tree waiting for her husband to expire, and ignoring his pleas for aid. Through the ending of the story, Hurston explores the theme of freedom as Delia finally reaches a place where she can be released from the oppressive Sykes. The burden placed on Delia through her work and white society is heavy enough without having to endure the abuse inflicted on her by her husband. Delia is a religious woman and could never bring herself to inflict intentional harm, but she has been pushed to a place of no return when her last vestige of hope, her little house, is threatened. Through, Delia, Hurston throws light on how the grief and desperation which drive this woman to this point.

As in many of Hurston's works, symbolism is key to understanding the story. For instance, the rattle snake is

one example of symbolism used to represent Delia's fears and Sykes' inconsideration towards Delia's feelings. The Chinaberry tree symbolizing womanhood and fertility, has triumphed in the end. An interplay of white and black -- symbolizing clean and dirty, darkness and light, or even good and bad -- interplays throughout the short story.

Through "Sweat", Hurston digs out the problem of oppression within the black community. Sykes's ceaseless cruelty towards his wife is by far the most difficult part of Delia's situation, and she must seek emancipation from her tyrannical husband before she tries to address the wider system of racial inequality. This is not to say that Hurston oversimplifies Delia's problems; her poverty and hard work are inextricably connected with whites, for whom she must work. A major irony in the story is that Delia must work so hard to clean white people's clothes while her own clothes are dirtied with sweat and blood. It is precisely the combination of white racism and spousal abuse that leads Delia to a level of desperation not at all uncommon amongst black women attempting to carry the burden of two forces of oppression at once.

V. CONCLUSION

It is Hurston's exploration of the feminine experience that is the most overt component of the story, particularly the way in which women are objectified. Delia is seen as a strictly corporeal being. This is demonstrated when her husband, Sykes, defines her in strictly physical terms. He states, for instance, that he "hates skinny wimmen", defining her not in terms of her personal characteristics, but rather in physical terms. The suppressive nature of Delia's experience as a woman is exacerbated by the physical toll of both abuse and labour. Sykes abuses Delia physically, psychologically, and economically. Though Delia initially "seems as though she is manacled to certain gender stereotypes, she finds liberation through them and refuses to be defined as a victim" (Horn). She is, for instance, confined to the domestic sphere. Hurston makes this suggestion overt as she places Delia in the kitchen in the opening scene, and moreover, has Delia doing laundry. Both the kitchen and this chore are signifiers of the domestic sphere. However, it is by embracing her domestic duties that Delia is able to secure a degree of autonomy. Zora Neale Hurston not only represents a strong black female voice, but also ultimately creates meaningful, beautiful literature. Her writing skill transcends both gender and race.

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Large Language Models for Citation Context and Cited Content Recognition: From Boundary Detection to Evidence Grounding

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Abstract— *Citation analysis has traditionally been organized around citation intent, function, stance, citation context analysis, and cited text span identification. Recent large language models (LLMs) have been applied to these tasks through prompting, in-context learning, fine-tuning, annotation assistance, and retrieval-augmented generation. Yet it remains unclear whether these studies also develop a more explicit account of citation recognition. This survey reviews LLM-based citation analysis through a recognition-centered lens. We define citation recognition as the identification of the textual and semantic units needed for citation understanding, especially citation context, citation content, and cited content. We summarize pre-LLM assumptions about fixed context windows, interpretative labels, and cited text span grounding, and then synthesize five LLM-based method paradigms: prompting and fine-tuning, LLM-assisted annotation, long-context recognition, retrieval-augmented grounding, and multi-dimensional frameworks. We argue that the next stage of LLM-based citation recognition should give closer attention to boundary quality, content consistency, evidence faithfulness, and reproducibility.*



Keywords— ***citation analysis, citation context, cited content grounding, large language models, scientific text mining***

I. INTRODUCTION

Citation is a fundamental mechanism through which scholarly texts connect claims, methods, evidence, concepts, and research communities [29, 11, 13]. A citation is not merely a bibliographic link: it appears in a local textual environment, refers to some part of a cited work, and supports a scholarly act such as providing background, adopting a method, comparing results, acknowledging prior work, or challenging a claim. Understanding a citation therefore requires more than identifying the referenced paper. It requires recognizing the textual and semantic units that make the citation meaningful.

Computational citation analysis has traditionally been organized around tasks such as citation intent classification, function or purpose detection, stance and sentiment analysis, citation context analysis, reference scope detection, and cited text span identification [14, 4, 5, 22, 28, 27]. These tasks ask different questions: why a work is cited, how it is evaluated, where the relevant citing context lies, and what content of the cited work is invoked. Despite their differences, they share a common prerequisite. Before a citation can be interpreted, evaluated, or categorized, a system must recognize the relevant citing-side context, the semantic content expressed in that context, and, when available, the corresponding evidence in the cited document.

This survey uses **citation recognition** as an organizing lens for reviewing LLM-based citation analysis. We do not treat citation recognition as a single established benchmark task. Rather, we use it to denote the process of identifying the units needed for citation understanding. Three targets are central: **citation context recognition**, which identifies the relevant citing-side span; **citation content**

recognition, which identifies what the citing text says about the cited work; and **cited content recognition** or grounding, which identifies the invoked content or evidence span in the cited work. We formalize the relation among these targets in Section 2. Interpretative labels such as intent, function, stance, sentiment, and polarity remain important, but we treat them as downstream analytical dimensions that depend on recognition while also providing signals for recognizing context, content, and evidence.

Large language models (LLMs) make this recognition problem newly important. Recent studies have applied prompting, in-context learning, fine-tuning, annotation assistance, and retrieval-augmented workflows to citation-related tasks [3, 21, 17, 16, 15, 24, 10, 30, 19]. These methods improve flexibility and reduce dependence on task-specific architectures or large annotated datasets. They also create new opportunities to connect citing-side contexts with cited-side evidence. However, it remains unclear how far current LLM-based work has developed the ability to recognize citation context, citation content, and cited evidence in an explicit and verifiable way.

This uncertainty motivates the central question of this survey: **to what extent do LLMs contribute to citation recognition?** We address this question through three research questions: **RQ1:** how have citation context and cited content been operationalized before LLMs? **RQ2:** what exactly do LLMs contribute to citation recognition? **RQ3:** what unresolved problems remain in LLM-based citation recognition?

Existing surveys do not fully answer these questions. Earlier surveys on citation context analysis and NLP-driven citation analysis summarize pre-LLM tasks, techniques, and resources [11, 13], while recent surveys on LLMs and citation analysis cover broader topics such as citation recommendation, citation generation, citation-enhanced language modeling, and citation networks [31]. In contrast, this survey focuses specifically on how LLMs inherit, revise, or expose assumptions about citation context boundaries, cited content grounding, and interpretative label spaces.

The contributions of this survey are fourfold. First, we propose a recognition-centered lens for reviewing LLM-based citation analysis, distinguishing citation context, citation content, and cited content grounding. Second, we synthesize LLM contributions along an ability progression from flexible label recognition to boundary awareness, evidence grounding, and multi-dimensional interpretation. Third, we analyze how datasets and evaluation protocols shape what counts as successful recognition. Fourth, we identify unresolved challenges and future directions, including context-boundary instability, intent-content conflation, hallucinated cited content, weak evidence-level evaluation, prompt sensitivity, and human-LLM annotation reliability.

II. CITATION RECOGNITION: SCOPE AND PRE-LLM ASSUMPTIONS

LLM-based citation recognition does not start from zero. It inherits pre-LLM concepts, datasets, and modeling assumptions. This section therefore focuses not on the entire history of citation analysis, but on the assumptions that LLM-based work reproduces, revises, or must still overcome.

2.1 Recognition Targets and Their Relation

We distinguish three recognition targets, summarized in Figure 1. **Citation context recognition** identifies the citing-side span relevant to a target citation. This span may be a citation sentence, a neighboring window, a paragraph, an implicit context without a citation marker, or a narrower reference scope in a sentence containing multiple citations. **Citation content recognition** identifies the semantic content expressed by the citing-side span, such as a method, dataset, theory, result, limitation, comparison, or criticism attributed to or associated with the cited work. **Cited content recognition**, also called **cited content grounding**, identifies the evidence span in the cited document that supports or corresponds to that recognized content. In short, context recognition asks where to read in the citing document, citation content recognition asks what is being said there, and cited content grounding asks where the corresponding evidence lies in the cited document.

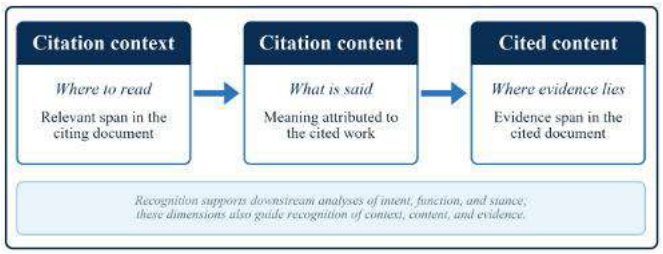


Fig. 1: A recognition-centered view of citation analysis.

These targets are related but not reducible to one another. In many workflows, context recognition provides the textual basis for content recognition, because the model must know which citing-side span to read before deciding what the citation says. Yet the relation is not a simple pipeline. A preliminary content judgment may revise the context boundary, and cited-side evidence may reveal that the chosen context is too narrow, too broad, or attached to the wrong reference. Citation recognition is

therefore an iterative relation among boundary detection, content typing, and evidence grounding. Interpretative labels such as intent, function, and stance become useful signals inside this relation rather than substitutes for it.

2.2 Pre-LLM Assumptions

Pre-LLM work contributed three assumptions that continue to shape LLM-based citation studies. First, citation context was often approximated by **fixed or weakly modeled boundaries**. Many systems used the citation sentence or a fixed window around the marker, although survey and framework work distinguished citing sentence, citation context, implicit context, and reference scope [11, 13, 29]. This established the importance of boundary selection, but many computational systems still assumed the input context rather than learning it.

Second, citation understanding was frequently operationalized through **interpretative labels**. Function, purpose, centrality, stance, and polarity became practical annotation and classification targets. ACL-ARC-style function annotation and SciCite made large-scale modeling possible [14, 4], but they also encouraged a view of citation recognition as label prediction over predefined contexts. Neural and pre-trained models improved performance within this formulation [4, 23, 25], while leaving boundary selection and evidence grounding largely outside the benchmark.

Third, cited content grounding emerged through **cited text span identification**. Cohan et al. formulated citation text and cited span matching as a search problem; later work treated cited text span identification as imbalanced classification and ensemble learning [5, 22, 28]. This line shifted attention from the citing sentence to the cited document and showed that citation understanding often requires cross-document alignment. LLMs inherit all three assumptions: given contexts, label spaces, and cited-span grounding tasks. The key question is therefore whether, and how, LLMs contribute to citation recognition itself.

III. LLM-BASED METHOD PARADIGMS FOR CITATION RECOGNITION

LLM-based citation recognition has not yet formed a mature family of task-specific architectures comparable to fields with many dedicated neural models. The current literature is better understood through five method paradigms: **prompting and fine-tuning**, **LLM-assisted annotation**, **long-context use**, **retrieval-augmented grounding**, and **multi-dimensional frameworks**. These paradigms show how LLMs contribute to recognition and where context, content, and evidence remain under-specified.

3.1 Prompting and Fine-Tuning for Label-Oriented Recognition

The most visible LLM-era method is the reformulation of citation-related recognition as **prompting or fine-tuning** over natural-language task descriptions. Instead of designing a task-specific architecture, researchers can describe the label scheme in natural language, provide examples, fine-tune an open model, or ask a general LLM to assign an intent or function label. This follows the broader prompting paradigm in NLP [21] and uses few-shot capabilities associated with large language models [3]. In this paradigm, the typical input is a citation sentence or supplied citation context plus a task instruction; the output is a label, verbalized category, or short rationale.

Existing work supports this paradigm. **CitePrompt** uses prompts and label verbalizers to elicit citation intent in zero-shot and few-shot settings [17]. **Prompting studies** compare how prompt design, context representation, and tuning strategy affect citation classification outputs [16]. Experiments with **open LLMs** further compare in-context learning and fine-tuning across shot settings [15]. These studies are methodologically important because they show that LLMs can adapt to inherited citation categories with less task-specific engineering.

The limitation is that many studies still evaluate a pre-existing label over a given context. The model is usually not asked to decide where the relevant citation context begins or which cited-document passage supports its output. If the dataset uses a fixed citation sentence, the LLM learns inside that boundary. If a label scheme conflates method-related intent with method-related cited content, the LLM may reproduce the conflation. Thus, prompting and fine-tuning improve access to inherited labels, but they do not by themselves make recognition boundary-aware or evidence-grounded.

3.2 LLM-Assisted Annotation for Recognition Decisions

A second method paradigm treats **LLM-assisted annotation** as a human-LLM workflow rather than autonomous recognition. In this setting, the model may propose labels, rationales, or candidate contexts, while human annotators validate, revise, or adjudicate the output. Nishikawa and Koshiba apply LLMs to citation context analysis and show that LLM-generated annotations can be useful but are not reliable enough to replace human annotation [24]. More general annotation frameworks such as **AnnoLLM** and **LLMaAA** similarly emphasize guided annotation, active selection, and human-LLM workflows [10, 30].

For citation recognition, annotation assistance is important because it can make boundary and content disagreement visible. If annotators disagree about whether the relevant context is a sentence, neighboring window, or reference scope, the disagreement itself reveals the difficulty of recognition. The remaining challenge is that LLM-assisted annotation requires explicit guidelines, records of human-LLM disagreement, and adjudication procedures.

3.3 Long-Context Methods for Boundary-Aware Recognition

Long-context use is another method paradigm. Earlier work already showed that citation context is not always identical to the citation sentence; it may include implicit context, neighboring discourse, or reference scope within a multi-citation sentence [11, 13, 29]. Compared with earlier models, LLMs can read longer contexts and use discourse-level information, which creates an opportunity to recognize broader or implicit citation contexts. Methodologically, this paradigm changes the input from a fixed citation sentence to a larger passage, section, or document-level window.

At the same time, current LLM-based work has not yet made boundary recognition a stable output target. In many studies, the citation sentence or context window is still supplied by the dataset or experimenter, so the model interprets a given span rather than selecting the span that should be read. This matters for multi-citation sentences, implicit contexts, and evaluative meanings that appear before or after the cited sentence. If an LLM reads a broad window without identifying which parts belong to the target citation, it may blend evidence across references or rely on irrelevant context.

Thus, the contribution of LLMs is best understood as an enabling condition rather than a solved capability. Their long-context and instruction-following abilities make boundary-aware recognition more feasible, but a stronger citation recognizer should still output the citing-side span that supports its interpretation and, where relevant, the reference scope that links that span to a particular cited work.

3.4 Retrieval-Augmented Grounding across Citing and Cited Documents

The most distinctive method paradigm for cited content recognition is **retrieval-augmented grounding**. A citation is a cross-document relation, and understanding what is cited often requires connecting the citing context with evidence in the cited work. Pre-LLM research formulated this problem through citedspan matching and cited text span identification [5, 22, 28]. LLMs make this line newly important because they can combine retrieval, semantic comparison, long-context reasoning, and natural-language explanation. In this paradigm, the system retrieves candidate cited passages, compares them with the citing context, and uses the evidence to generate or justify a recognition output.

In an evidence-grounded recognizer, the output would be a relation among citing-side context, cited-side evidence, and interpretative dimensions. Current work supports this direction while showing that it is immature. Li et al. construct cited text spans for scientific citation text generation and argue that citation generation should be grounded in the cited paper rather than relying only on abstracts [19]. Work on attributable generation and generative search shows that generated citations do not automatically guarantee evidential support: citations may be present but unsupported, irrelevant, or only partially faithful [9, 20, 12]. For citation recognition, this means that cited content grounding must be evaluated at the evidence level, together with the fluency and plausibility of generated explanations.

3.5 Multi-Dimensional Frameworks

Another LLM-era opportunity is **multi-dimensional recognition**. Traditional citation classification often asks one label to do too much. A label such as "method" may refer to the citing author's purpose, the cited work's content type, or a surface cue in the citation context. The need for separation predates LLMs: citation content analysis argues for syntactic and semantic analysis of citation content [29], citation concept analysis focuses on the concepts made useful by citations [2], and stance research shows that evaluative relations cannot be reduced to simple opinions [27].

In the LLM era, emerging frameworks such as **SOFT** can be read as attempts to operationalize this broader need by separating citation intent from cited content [6]. Because this line is still developing, it should be treated as an emerging attempt rather than a mature benchmark tradition. Its value is conceptual: it shows how LLM-based citation recognition can move from single-label prediction toward structured interpretation. Cited content can guide intent, intent can guide grounding, and stance can guide boundary selection. The challenge is that multi-dimensional annotation requires clearer guidelines, richer datasets, and evaluation of cross-dimensional consistency.

IV. EVALUATION AND REMAINING CHALLENGES

The decomposition of citation understanding into context, interpretation, and evidence suggests a clearer way to read existing evaluation practices. Recognition is not the whole

of citation understanding, but it supplies the observable units on which understanding depends: the citing-side span, the content or interpretation associated with that span, and the cited-side evidence. Existing resources usually emphasize one of these units. Taken together, this literature suggests four evaluation dimensions for LLM-based citation recognition: boundary quality, content and interpretation consistency, grounding faithfulness, and robustness.

4.1 Boundary Accuracy and Context Stability

The first dimension is boundary accuracy: whether the model identifies the citing-side span relevant to a target citation. Pre-LLM surveys and frameworks already distinguish citation sentence, citation context, implicit context, and reference scope [11, 13, 29]. However, many widely used resources provide the context as input. ACL-ARC-style resources, SciCite, and 3C-style purpose datasets are valuable for comparing citation function or intent systems, but they usually do not ask the model to select the context boundary itself [14, 4, 25]. For LLM-based recognition, this matters because longer input windows do not automatically produce boundary awareness.

Boundary evaluation should therefore include span overlap or boundary F1 for citation contexts, reference-scope accuracy in multi-citation sentences, and stability under changes in prompt wording or context window size. Prompting studies and LLM annotation work show that prompt design, context representation, and annotation setup can affect citation-related outputs [16, 24]. These findings suggest that boundary recognition should be evaluated not only by one selected context, but also by whether the model remains stable when surrounding discourse changes.

4.2 Content and Interpretation Consistency

The second dimension is content and interpretation consistency. Once a context has been identified, the model must recognize what content is being attributed to the cited work and how that content functions in the citing argument. This is where citation content analysis, citation concept analysis, and stance studies remain important: they show that citation meaning may involve syntactic scope, semantic content, useful concepts, and evaluative positioning rather than a single flat dimension [29, 2, 27]. Emerging schemes such as SOFT can be understood as attempts to separate intent from cited content, although this direction is still developing [6].

Evaluation should therefore check whether recognized content and interpretative dimensions remain consistent with the selected context and, when available, the cited evidence. For example, a method-use interpretation should correspond to a context that discusses use, adoption, or comparison, and the cited-side evidence should plausibly contain the invoked method, dataset, or procedure. Human-LLM annotation studies also imply that consistency must be evaluated through guidelines, agreement, disagreement records, and adjudication rather than through a single prompt output [24, 10, 30].

4.3 Grounding Faithfulness

The third dimension is grounding faithfulness: whether the cited-side evidence supports the recognized citation content. Cited text span identification directly addresses this requirement by matching citation text to evidence spans in the cited document [5, 22, 28]. Citation text generation resources such as CiteBench and recent cited-span work further connect citing contexts with cited papers, making evidence grounding central to generation and recognition [7, 19].

LLM-based grounding also inherits risks from attributable generation and generative search. Work on citation generation and verifiability shows that a generated citation can be present while its cited evidence is irrelevant, incomplete, or unsupported [9, 20, 12]. For citation recognition, grounding evaluation should therefore assess support correctness, evidence relevance, and the relation between cited evidence and the recognized content. This is especially important when evidence is distributed across multiple spans or when the citing author paraphrases the cited work.

4.4 Robustness, Bias, and Reproducibility

Finally, recognition-centered evaluation requires robustness and reproducibility checks. LLM outputs may vary with prompt wording, demonstrations, retrieval settings, and decoding choices [16, 24, 32]. Citation bias is another concern: LLMs may reflect and heighten human citation patterns, especially high-citation bias [1]. Although citation bias has been studied more directly in recommendation and generation than in recognition, it matters whenever models interpret or reconstruct citation relations. Reliable citation recognition should therefore report prompts, retrieval settings, evidence sources, and robustness checks. The central gap is that few resources jointly annotate citation context boundaries, citation content, cited evidence, and interpretative dimensions.

Table 1 summarizes the main LLM method paradigms discussed in Section 3 and the recognition gaps that motivate the evaluation dimensions above.

Table 1: LLM method paradigms and remaining recognition gaps

Method paradigm	Recognition target	Remaining gap
Prompting and fine-tuning	Intent/function labels and content cues in given contexts; represented by CitePrompt, prompting studies, and open-LLM adaptation	Context boundaries and cited evidence are usually assumed
LLM-assisted annotation	Context labels, rationales, and annotation decisions; represented by citation-context annotation, AnnoLLM, and LLMaAA	Human validation and disagreement analysis remain necessary
Long-context recognition	Broader citation contexts, implicit context, and reference scope	Long context does not guarantee boundary awareness
Retrieval-augmented grounding	Cited content and evidence spans across citing and cited documents	Evidence support and faithfulness remain immature
Multi-dimensional frameworks	Relations among intent, stance, citation content, and cited content	Needs richer annotation and consistency metrics

V. CONCLUSION

This survey has examined how LLMs contribute to citation recognition. Pre-LLM work established the main units that still organize the field: citation contexts, interpretative labels, and cited text spans. LLM-based studies inherit these units, but they also reconfigure them through prompting and fine-tuning, LLMassisted annotation, long-context use, retrieval-augmented grounding, and multi-dimensional frameworks. The main contribution of LLMs is therefore not a single new task or model family, but a set of method paradigms that make citation recognition more flexible, scalable, and potentially more connected across citing context, citation content, and cited evidence.

At the same time, this survey shows that flexibility is not the same as explicit recognition. Current LLM-based work still leaves several core problems open: identifying citation boundaries rather than relying on supplied windows, keeping citation content and interpretative dimensions consistent, grounding cited content in evidence, and making outputs robust to prompts, retrieval settings, and citation bias. Future work should therefore evaluate whether LLMs can expose the textual and evidential basis on which citation understanding depends, rather than only producing plausible labels, rationales, or generated citations.

Because LLM-based citation recognition is still emerging, relevant work is dispersed across citation annotation, citation generation, evidence grounding, and verifiability. This survey therefore focuses on studies most directly related to citation context, citation content, and cited evidence, without claiming exhaustive coverage of broader citation analysis, citation recommendation, citation networks, or bibliometric indicators.

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Decolonising Starvation in Postmodern Famine: A Re-reading of Bengal Famine of 1943 from Cinematic Lens

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Abstract— *Famines were a part of Indian colonial history. It is a condition of paramount shortage of food, or want of food, hunger and starvation in a defined area or part of a country. A famine can be an economic and social phenomenon characterised by the widespread unavailability of food resources which in the absence of external aid leads to the demise of those affected. Famine scholarship has taken a conceptual shift from pre-modern to post-modern famine with Stephen Devereux's(2007) publication of The New Famine. The Bengal famine of 1943 is one among innumerable post-modern famines that made its occurrence. It is estimated to have engulfed the lives of millions of people under colonial patronage. The famine unveiled the discriminatory politics, profit driven principles of East India Company (hereafter, EIC). The chapter aims to explore how the EIC systematically destroyed the Indian agricultural system, fuelling deindustrialization in the country and ultimately making the region vulnerable to famine. In doing so, the paper shall focus on parallel cinema or new indian cinema, a movement that originated specifically in Bengal around the 1950s. Against the understanding of parallel cinema, the paper attempts to decode the politics of representation that continuously engages in redefining famine, through cinematographic art forms, such as - Mrinal Sen's Baishey Sravana (The Wedding Day) 1960, Akaler Sandhane (In Search of Famine) 1980 and Satyajit Ray's Ashani Sanket (Distant Thunder)1973. The paper proceeds through four thematically entwined arguments. Firstly, to trace the Bengal famine of 1943 as a new famine. Secondly, to unearth the strategies of weaponisation of hunger and gradual rise of faminogenic practices in British colonial India. Thirdly, to grasp the progress of counter-cultural cinematic representation of the Bengal famine through selected films. And finally, through the meditative reading of the films, the paper tries to understand the films as an anti-imperialist force of artistic production. In doing so, the paper remains qualitative in nature, substantiated with scholarship provided by Marxist Film Theory, is employed to establish a theoretical framework. The paper therefore is divided into six interconnected sections, commencing with an introduction to famine studies and selected films and culminating with a suitable summation to support relevant claims.*

Keywords— ***Post-modern famine, hunger and starvation, famine films, food insecurity, representation.***

I. INTRODUCTION

Famine is a condition of paramount shortage of food grains, or yearn for food, resulting from hunger and starvation in a defined region or geographical area of a country. It is worthwhile to note that famine has been a part of the world in history immemorial and it is considered to reside in history, but as we broaden our perspective, famine continues to ravage the earth till present days. Some examples of recent famines are: Ethiopia, Sudan, South Africa (Malabi) and West Africa (Niger). The body of scholarship that claims, famine - a thing of the past, and present day technological improvement has brought down the chances of famine to next to nil. To counter argue that statement, The Sudan famine needs an immediate mention.

Officially recognised as the most recent famine, it is believed to have occurred in Sudan's North Darfur Region in the year 2024 as a result of prolonged war, conflict and human displacement. Both published in the year 2009, works like, *Six Months in Sudan* by James Maskalya and *War Child* by Emmanuel Jal, narrates the disturbing scenario of a war torn Sudan at the brink of famine. Diving into the paradox of persistent famine in the contemporary world, authors like Stephen Devereux(2007) in *The New Famines: Why Famines Persist in an Era of Globalization* makes a distinction between the 'old' and 'new' famines. In elaborating on the concept of old famine, Devereux alludes to the Malthusian theory of population growth. Thomas Robert Malthus, an English Economist in his renowned work *An Essay on the principle of the population*(1798) propagated population growth as geometric progression, while the food production as arithmetic progression. Therefore, the world witnesses a shortage of food supply with a rising population. Categorised famines, earthquakes, floods and other disasters as 'positive checks' by nature, in maintaining a balance. Although the theory was developed keeping in mind a pre-industrial Britain which did not undergo globalization, technical advances in food production, green revolution and enhanced mass transportation, a shortcoming persisted. While in the old famines the crisis happened due to disruption of the food system as a result of natural calamities (earthquake, flood, drought etc), resulting in unavailability of food, in the new famine, it was more access and entitlement prone. With an understanding that the natural calamities today, if not prevented, can be supervised and controlled more efficiently- with the progression of of industrialization and globalization, commencement of the Green Revolution in the mid-20th century, new farming technologies, high-yielding varieties, improvised irrigation systems which led to a substantial upsurge in food production providing a framework capable of combating hunger, wide-spread starvation and famines. Despite the success in agrarian field and food management, the causes of famine in the post twentieth century have undergone a paradigm shift, from-environmental vulnerability to political instability. Devereux's, New famines' or post-modern famines, are therefore, mostly political in nature, and hence, preventable. If one were to think that famines are preventable social and political phenomena rather than natural disasters then who should bear the accountability? Making both the Sudans' and the Bengal's famine (1943) as politically motivated and economically crafted *new famines*. Concentrating on the subject matter, why did such a momentous number of population, one of the largest in the annals of history of famines in the world, had to suffer and die in 1943?

Objective

The objective of the paper, therefore, is: (1) to look into the strategies of weaponisation of hunger and gradual rise of faminogenic practices in British colonial India. (2) to trace the Bengal famine of 1943 as a new famine. (3) to unearth the politics of representation of the Bengal famine through counter cultural cinematic art forms (4) And lastly, to see how select films challenge the established narratives and therefore, become an anti- imperialist force of artistic production.

The refusal to acknowledge poverty, starvation and famine in the everydayness of Bengali geography has been a part of a bigger narrative in colonial politics. Although Bengal has faced vulnerability repeatedly in the past, (1770, 1873) but the famine of 1943, popularly called *Panchaser Manwantar* (Famine of Fifty), alludes to the Bengali calendar year of 1350 has been the most recent one. While Bengal and independent India has been rescued from the clutches of recurrent famines post its independence, it is worthwhile to note India has shamefully ranked number 102nd out of 123rd countries in the Global Hunger Index 2025. Focusing on the subject matter, the Bengal Famine of 1943 under British imperialism; among many other things, was essentially a repercussion of the geo-politics of the second world war. Never recognised or labeled as a famine, until recently the dark chapter of the history remains unnoticed in pages of history textbooks. Rightly observed by British anthropologist Alex de Waal in *Coverup Playbook* (2025) where Waal opines that governments of powerful countries weaponise hunger and sustain starvation on weaker nations by deliberate political refusal in naming it, therefore barring the nation from global help. As a British colony, India witnessed the beginning of the Second World War in 1939 and its cumulative result of economic, social, and natural factors led to the outbreak of the 1943 famine. While Colonial governance performed at the peak to erase the 'slow violence' Nixon (2011) of the 1943 famine, writers in Bengali language such as Bijon Bhatacherjee, Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay, Kaji Nazrul Islam, Sukanta Bhatterjee, Bhowani Sen and anglophone writers and artists, such as: Ella Sen, Zainul Abedin, Bhabani Bhattarcharya, Freda Bedi, Somnath Hore, Sunil janah, Chittaprosad among many others offered counter discursive art that formed anti-imperialist cultural resistance.

The films as a medium were essentially moulded as 'counter-discourse', a term coined by Richard Terdiman(1985) in his famous work *Discourse/Counter-Discourse: The Theory And Practices of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth Century France*. Counter-discursive art forms showed resistance to dominant strains of established discourse posting an alternative, therefore,

they were popularly known as alternative cinema. Published in 1996, Susan Hayward in *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts*, traces the conception of the idea of counter-cinema to the 1920s, imbued in the practice of questioning Hollywood's hegemonic cinematic representations. To historically locate the beginning of counter discursive cinema in Bengal, mention should be made of Satyajit Ray's *Pather Panchali* (1955) which paved the way to a different kind of art form secluded from concepts of accepted entertainments. *Pather panchali* not only acknowledges the everydayness of Bengali poverty, but also paves way to death by starvation which later on flowers the blooming of famine films.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Published in 2016, Aamir Mufti's *Forget English!: Orientalisms and World Literatures* famously questioned the role of language as a means to reach the world stage. Mufti's dialogues became significant in the context of Bengal famine's cultural production as most of what came to be known as 'Bengal Famine literature' were written in Bengali, a regional language which does not enjoy the free mobility into world literature. On the other hand, Cormac O Garda's 2005 publication *Eating People Is Wrong* and Mike Davis's(2000) *Late Victorian Holocausts*, insignificantly address the same famine but somewhat enjoys a wider readership. While precious works by Bengali language authors and artists such as Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay, Sukanta Bhatterjee, Kaji Nazrul Islam, Bhowani Sen and others fail to grab attention in a broader spectrum.

In discussing the visual representation of Bengal famine, works on various poets and artists, mention should be made of Bhabani Bhattacharya's immediate publication of famine texts such as- *So Many Hungers!*(1947) and *He Who Rides the Tiger* (1954). While the former, questions the very fragmented meaning of the word 'hunger' and shows it not only denotes the want of food but also human dignity. In the later, Bhattacharya directly discusses the hegemonic dominance of caste in Bengal and greater India. While caste based experiences are explored in Bhatterjee's work, Ela Sen takes upon herself the responsibility of representing woman centric experiences in her story collection *Darkening Days*(1944). The collection also portrays the drawing of Zainul Abdin, a Bangladeshi artist famously called *Shilpachariya* or the Master of Arts. From the perspective of a poverty stricken artist, Sukanta Bhatterjee echoes the pain of a hungry generation in his famous poem *Hey Mahajibon* published in *Charpatra* (1947), a collection of poetry. The poem's immortality lies in the metaphoric comparison of the shape of the full moon to a scorched roti, while Nazrul Islam, the national poet of Bangladesh goes on to write various poems on the subject, such as *Daridrota* or Poverty, *Amar Koifiyot* or My alibi and *Mrityukshuda* or The Hunger of Dead.

From a Marxist economic perspective, groundbreaking work has been done by Nobel laureate Amartya Sen. Published in 1981, *Garibi Aur Akaal* (Poverty and Famines: An essay on Entitlements and Deprivation) puts forth his 'entitlement approach' In an Austenian tone, he ironically names the second chapter of his work 'Concepts of poverty' explaining, "To live in poverty might be sad, but to offend or [be] hurtful to society, creating problems for those who are not poor' is, it would appear, the real tragedy"(p 9). This is specifically true while looking at the 1943 Bengal famine. Because the hunger cries of millions in Calcutta were mostly ignored because helping the poor never served profitable to those in power. Sen rightly concludes, famines occur not from a direct decline in the availability of food but from what he calls "The failure of Exchange Entitlements", which signifies not a shortage of food in an absolute sense but rather a breakdown in the ability of the most vulnerable and marginalised section to provide for an adequate exchange value. The pain of hungry millions is heard while the logic of the socio-economic system determines that without entitlements , food can go to waste while people starve and die. Drawing on Sen's assessment of entitlements, other modern famine scholars, such as Sugata Bose(2009) in his, *Pondering Poverty, Fighting Famine: Towards a New History of Economic Ideas* , Mike Devis and Meghnad Desai opinions that same. Although other scholars such as Paul Greenrough's in his *Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal: The Famine of 1943- 44* refutes Sen's theory by stating the famine against the backdrop of a longer decline in the Bengal peasantry.

Historical Background of the Bengal Famine

Bengal has faced vulnerability repeatedly in the past, (1770, 1873) but the famine of 1943 among many other things, was essentially a result of the second world war. As British colonial India witnessed the beginning of the Marxist movement in the 1930s, the ideology got further intensified by the commencement of the Second World War (1939), Nazi invasion of Germany (1941), Quit India movement (1941), Japan's attack on India (1942), Bengal Famine (1943), and many mass uprisings in the post war period like the Naval Mutiny (1946), movement by INA (1945), Tebhaga and Telangana revolts (1946), and Indian independence coupled with the partition (1947). Published in 2019, David Lockwood records in *Calcutta Under Fire: The Second World War Years* a brief history of the political instability caused by world war II. By the end of 1942, Lockwood records, the city of Calcutta was under perpetual

threat of Japanese air strikes which eventually took place on 20th December. He elaborately details the happenings of the following months- frequent air raids, and subsequent migration of thirty lakh people in and out of the city. Reports of acute shortage of coal and paper. The sharply ascending prices of commodities and the utter chaos in the society. Nature's inconsistency worsened the existing situation with a devastating cyclone hitting southwest Bengal, particularly in Midnapore and the 24 Parganas. On top of which, Churchill's Denial policy was enforced. The cumulative result of economic, social, and natural factors led to the outbreak of the 1943 famine.While Colonial governance performed at the peak to erase the slow violence of the 1943 famine, artists like Bijon Bhatacherjee, Ella Sen, Kaji Nazrul Islam, Sukanta Bhatterjee among many others produced art as an anti-imperialistic force of artistic production.

Representation of strategies of weaponisation of hunger and gradual rise of faminogenic practices in British colonial India

Ashani Sanket, a masterful depiction by Satyajit Ray of the Bengal famine of 1943, is a brilliant cinematic adaptation of the literary work by the renowned Bengali author, Bibhutibhusan Bandopadhyay. In a strong sense, Ray portrays the binarism of old and new, at one end is the pre-famine golden Bengal while at the other, is post-apocalyptic dystopian famine. The opening shots of the film sets out a vivid picture of nature in its full glory, with lush greenery and abundance filling the countryside of Bengal. As Andrew Robinson highlights in *Satyajit Ray: The Inner Eye – The Biography of a Master Film-Maker* (1989), "Distant Thunder is more than just famine: it shows the eclipse of a whole way of life."(223). The protagonist, Gangacharan (played by Soumitra Chatterjee), along with his wife Angana (played by Bobita), moves to a new village, leaving behind a small, nameless town. Gangacharan quickly rises to prominence within the rural community due to his inherited caste privileges. As an upper-caste Brahmin, he exerts an ideological power and dominance on the minds of the villages.

The articulation of hunger takes place in part through the central character - Gangacharan. Gangacharan, settles in his new habitat with his beautiful wife Angana. The film opens with women folk of the village taking a dip in the nearby pond, creating a playful bond between and across caste barriers where Angana also participates being aware of her inherent superior strand. They laugh, gossip and share a delicate bond of female solidarity. Moti, Angana's close friend/acquitant from the past is introduced to the narrative through Angana's eyes. Even in distress, she finds a sympathetic listener in Moti as she shares the news of the recent birth of her daughter and her struggle with hunger and poverty. Though it is the first time the concept of poverty is introduced in the film, contemporary audiences of the 1970s would recognise and relate the hunger experience of Moti with their own memory of the famine.

Ashani Sanket, produced in 1973 directly criticizes the efforts of prioritizing the war. The film depicts the onslaught of famine and starvation with the character of Dinobondhu Mukherjee, an old frail brahmin from the neighbouring village, dressed in a dirty dhoti and a pair of sturdy shoes. Pertaining to age he fails to find work and depends on others' help for the means of existence. He invites himself in the domestic space of Gangacharan's household in his absence and declares his caste in the narrative, even before voicing his name.(*Ashani Sanket* 00:30:55- 00: 30.5). Providing the audience with a glimpse of the hegemony of caste in 19th century rural Bengal. Dinobondhu demands some food from Angala, whom he calls "Ma laxmi". According to the Hindu mythology, Lakhmi is the wife of Vishnu. She is the goddess of prosperity and fortune. By placing Angala as Lakhmi, Dinobondhu pushes her psychologically into a state/role of an ideological provider. The Brahminical patriarchal society conferred upon women a social responsibility to feed guests (Brahmin) in the household as long as he/they wishes to stay. Catering to their needs was believed to have brought prosperity in domestic space. In the background, Ray depicts the famine with a camera spanning out on human-like figures walking on foot with hunger cries of children and adults alike. The golden village steadily approaches the famine giving rise to starvation and deaths, while the Laxmi of the chatterjee household disperse food and help to the mass of migrating beggars.

The reference to the old Brahmin as Dinobondhu may allude to the idea of a faithful friend in vernacular Bengali. It is through his eyes that the camera records the famine. Ironically, Dinobondhu does not have any material offerings to Gangacharan, but to the audience he remains an encyclopedia of the 1943 famine. Patiently arguing and explaining the causes and results of it. The film uses Dinobondho as a mouthpiece to explain the inflation in rice price in the land of abundance. He talks about Japan's occupation of Burma in 1942. A year prior to the famine, Burmese was the largest supplier of rice for the rural populace of Bengal, because of their easy availability, cheap price and fatty texture, burmese rice supposedly took more time to get digested, making them ideal for physically hard working professionals. (labourers, unorganised peasants, tribals etc). Pertaining to war, the usual supply of Burmese rice was absolutely and abruptly cut off. Taken in context, Bengal also remained exposed and vulnerable for probable Japanese invasion, a "denial policy" was further

implemented in coastal areas such as Midnapur, Bakerganj, Khulna. All of these resulted in the birth of Bengal Famine.

The film spares no criticism of the government policies taken before the famine, through a conversation with Gangacharan after dinner, Dinobondho elaborates on the idea of "scorched earth policy" a common military strategy taken in times of crisis under which everything utilitarian is destroyed and systematically used by the government. The policy was renamed as boat denial policy to make it appear in Mukherjee's term 'less incendiary'(p 66) Dinobondhu realises that the colonial government places more value on feeding the soldiers fighting the war rather than the ordinary subjects directly alluding to the idea of weaponisation of food where some are prioritised over the other. The scene briefly cuts focusing on a pair of torn shoes won by Dinobondho, probably pertaining to the lost prosperity of the old brahmin and at large of Bengal. Reminiscenting the past where a person who once could afford a pair of shoes (which was a marker of luxury and not utility) was forced to beg for a living. While the famine did not paint the lives of the characters wholly, it nonetheless destroyed the financial capabilities of many.

A pivotal moment in the film sharpens our attention is the death of a character, Moti. As food becomes a political weapon, the film records the gradual journey of nameless beggars migrating to Calcutta in hope of food, although death touches the scene only through the character of Moti. As in her post-partum fragile health, she succumbs to starvation. Moti is not a typical migrant woman; she does not walk away from her "home", instead she is forced to dislocate under the circumstances like millions of others. In the process, she became a representative of an analytical outlook on the crisis in the life of Bengali peasantry and a victim of British colonial faminogenic practise.

The concept of 'border' plays a very crucial role in our understanding of Ray's work, as he portrays it as a socially constructed boundary which Moti crosses due to hunger. Driven by the need for food, she migrates from one village to another. Towards the end she pulls herself for help, with a glazed look she unwillingly tries to glance at the food. She manages feebly to raise her hand with five extended fingers gesturing she has not eaten a morsel for five days. Unfortunately due to malnutrition, exhortation and lack of rest she draws her last breath right in front of them. A poignant moment unfolds in the narrative when two naked, pot-bellied children, hiding behind a tree, quickly snatch the plate of food placed near her lifeless body. This iconic scene in Ray's film captures the fragility of human morality, illustrating how rapidly it dissipates when faced with a crisis.

Moti becomes the face of crisis as it is the only death caused by hunger that directly occurs in the film, serving as a harbinger of the countless others that are to follow. Ray's *Ashani Sanket* translates as "Distant Thunder" in English, a title that symbolically alludes to the looming storm of starvation-induced deaths. Here, 'thunder' symbolically signifies the innumerable deaths at bay. The devastation is taking place out of sight. Therefore, the film does not chronicle the death and destruction of famine as such, but palate out its causes.

From a Marxist perspective, *Ashani Sanket* serves as a cinematic critique of class hierarchy, economic disparity, and the structural violence of colonial capitalism. *Ashani Sanket*, offers a significant insight into the complexities of human desire and aspirations through the character of the greedy, scrupulous rational master. The character of Biswas Babu, the ration master is emblematic of the intermediary bourgeois subject who sustains the colonial-capitalist order. His scrupulous rationality and avaricious greed mirrors the ideological conditioning of the *petit bourgeoisie*, whose moral consciousness is subordinated to the imperatives of economic rationalism. Biswas Babu's insistent alignment with the structures of state-sanctioned distribution reveals how the colonial apparatus operates through localized agents ensuring the maintenance of class divisions. His eventual confrontation with the impoverished desiluted villages dramatizes a quintessential Marxist dialectic, the struggle of class antagonism between the *haves* and the *have-nots*, between those who control the means of distribution and those whose labor sustains the social order yet who are systematically excluded from its benefits.

From a Marxist economic perspective, groundbreaking work has been done by Nobel laureate Amartya Sen. Sen, in his essay *Poverty and Famines: An essay on Entitlements and Deprivation* (1981) puts forth his 'entitlement approach' providing a better framework to analyze the causes of poverty and the larger context of famine. In an Austenian tone, he ironically introduces the second chapter of his work *Concepts of poverty* by saying, "To live in poverty may be sad, but to 'offend or [be] hurtful to society', creating 'problems for those who are not poor' is, it would appear, the real tragedy(p 9). He concludes, famines occur not from a decline of available food but from what he calls "The failure of Exchange Entitlements", which signifies that a famine is not a shortage of food in a literal sense but rather an inability experienced by certain societal groups to afford the grains at the given market price.. So, millions starve and perish while the logic of the socio-economic rules constrain food to people in need. Even if it means the food would go to waste, it should not be distributed among the masses. With Sen's groundbreaking

analysis, the understanding of famine as a natural event has taken a step into a man-made disaster.

It is the film that raises some of the important questions: 'Why did the starving peasants attack the ration master?' While most scholarly work focus of peasant passivity, including the article by Rajender Kaur, titled: *The Vexed question of Peasant passivity: nationalist discourse and the debate on peasant resistance in literary representations of the Bengal famine of 1945* which talks about the lack of peasant agency to form a voice, the film *Ashani sanket* shows otherwise. The answer is well debated by Sen in *Poverty and Famines*. Failure to buy the basic necessities resulted from the absence of four entitlements mentioned by Sen in the essay, which are: production based, trade based, inheritance and transfer oriented, and labour based. Since, the marginalised section of the agrarian peasantry had neither of the entitlements, they perished to the famine. Interestingly, the labour oriented entitlement failed to suffice because of the implementation of the denial policy, which gravely restricted activities in rural Bengal, including the rice denial policy that exacerbated the famine. The government's insistence on procuring food grains for Calcutta, a decision that proved to be fatal for the rural poor. This led to the emergence of a monopolistic hegemony over rice-stockists called 'aratdar' and their agents 'faria' and a nexus between the grain dealers, ration masters, money lenders, land-lords and Mahajas. They absorbed the available rice from the entire country-side and stocked it in their households. The character, Biswas babu played by Ramesh Mukherjee, in the film is one such example of a self-absorbed individual in the exploitative system.

Progression of counter-cultural narrative of famine causation through Mrinal Sen's films: *Baishey Sravana* and *Akaler Sondhane*

The past does not return precisely as it was; it arrives in a different semblence. One of the many differences noticed while analysing *Asani Sanket, Baishey Sravana* and *Akaler Sondhane* against one another is its treatment of the famine narrative. While *Asani Sanket* hints at the impending catastrophe of famine, *Baishey Sravana* represents the famine in its entirety and the last, *Akaler Sondhane* unveils the process of producing a historical senario, constructed against the past and the present. One of the earliest works on the dystopian literary genre, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826) records an interesting buildup which inspired many writers of dystopian and disaster literary genre, including that of Amalendu Chakraborty and Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay from whose novels Ray and Sen makes their classic cinematic adaptations.

The dystopian and disaster literary genre, like that of famine testimonies, treat the imminent disaster, in three distinctive phrases. The first: disbelieve, the second: confrontation and the last: disillusionment. As famine-like conditions began to manifest, the illiterate peasantry and lower echelons of the rural villages failed to comprehend the magnitude of the impending danger. False consciousness, a key concept in Marxist theory, lay hold of a mode of misrecognising the true nature of the events. The distorted understanding of reality made it even arduous for people to survive and overcome the danger. With the hegemonic ideology of religion, with their sightless faith in the Almighty and the government, they wholeheartedly believed nothing so harsh can actually happen to them. In the immediate pre-famine phase, local brahmins and priests were called to perform miracles to rid the village of impending evils. There was also a popular myth that the city of Calcutta is an utopia locale where food and shelter abides, therefore Calcutta witnessed overnight migration of millions of desolites who came to be "saved" by the colonial government. The third and last phase, disillusionment happened after they came to terms with their existing scenarios, no relief no shelter dying on the streets like animals. Sen witnessed the Great Famine of 1943 from a very close range during a deeply formative and emotional period of his life. Dipankar Mukhopadhyay's *Mrinal Sen 60 years in Search of Cinema* (2009) records a detailed journey of the filmmaker's footing and gradual turn from a humanistic towards a more mature social-political film-making. At the tender age of twenty, he watched the heartbreaking deaths of hundreds on the streets of Calcutta. His acute sense of anger, frustration and helplessness has found its expression in films like *Baisey Sravana* and *Akaler Sandhane*.

The narrative of *Baishey Sravana* embodies a thematic similarity with Arthur Miller's greatest American tragedy, *Death of a Salesman* (1949). Like Miller's Loman, Sen's protagonist Priyonath's livelihood is threatened after an unfortunate train accident, he sustains fractures on his leg and realizes the company to which he has dedicated his entire career offers neither continued employment nor support. Upon losing his job under the pretext of disability, his marital relationship takes a major turn. The famine inexorably walks into his life in the second part of the film. With the deadly cyclone that hit Midnapore on 16th of October, 1942. The unsteady equilibrium of the already disturbed supply of food grains was further dismantled by the cyclone. Succession of three tidal waves hit the coastal regions of Western Bengal, primarily Midnapore and North 24 parganas, causing loss of 800 square miles. Livelihood of people directly affected, food grains completely destroyed.(Famine Inquiry Commission, 1945, pp. 32, 66)

The film beautifully captures the dangerous effects of the cyclone which momentarily separates the young couple, kills the mother, ravages the village carnival and brings death and destruction. The village carnival plays a significant role in preserving the pre-famine bliss where laughter of children, sounds of bangles, tinkling of jewelleries had an atmosphere of joy and festivity rightly described in the borrowed phrase from Rabindranath Tagore's famous poem, *Amar sonar bangla* (my golden Bengal).

Railway as a Troop to Fortune and Loss

One of the key icons in the film is the use of railway transportation. The Famine enquiry Commission of 1880 summarized:

"It is to the future extension of railways that we look the most complete justification of our belief that the trade of the country may be confidently left to provide for the supply of food in time of scarcity[...] with the growth of these means of communication and their continued use, all the requirements of every part of the country will be met by the natural operation of trade, without the necessity of interference on the part of the government." (1880, p. 63)

Despite the ornamental promises, the introduction of railways and modern transportation failed to rescue the remotest area from the grasp of poverty and recurring famines but as witnessed, it did not only failed to provide for those in times of need but also alleviated the regional imbalance in terms of material availability. The train imagery has been repeatedly used in the narrative trope exploring different scenarios: in the beginning of the film, the train journey is Priyonath's workplace as he is a local salesman (*feriwala*), bringing happiness, money and sustenance to the family. His success in selling *alta* drops significantly with the accidental death of his mother, after which he repeatedly misses the train. The train which is his workplace symbolically suggests the disappeared token of fortune for everlasting bliss. It is the same train journey which causes the accident and therefore the disability in the life of the protagonist making the family miserable. In the backdrop of 1943, the prices of rice sores the sky, military vehicles, airplanes replace the bullockarts and become a frequent scene of the broken roads. Beyond the direct relevance with the main plot, the happenings in the background constitute a very significant message that helps the audience figure the fate of the state and the country.

An inescapable part of hegemonic discourse of patriarchy is the bond of a man and his vehicle, which continues to the urban present. As Priyonath parts away with his beloved cycle, in it subtly hinted at the audience that the household has reached its financial limits, already having sold off Malati's gold jewellery and other valuables. With the cycle being sold off his hard earned sense of identity as a *feriwala* is also passed onto a defeated/dejected persona who not only failed at his work, but also failed as a husband/provider for his family. As he ironically questions the wife : "who is going to give work to a person with a disability?" (1:10:13) For ultimately, the narrative of questioning with Priyonath's situation as a point with which Sen's *bhadrolok* and middle class audiences are required to identify in order to recognise the helplessness.

The same scene puts forth the problem of hoarding, villagers protest for the unavailability of food grains to the local ration distributor, to which irritatingly the distributor remarks: "Are there no laws in the country?" as the scene concludes with priyonath's haunting question "which law has sanctioned the letting of citizens die of starvation, in the country?" (Baishey Sravana 1:13:06)

Akaler Sandhane

In *Akaler Sandhane* (In Search of Famine), Sen thematically tries a historical reconstruction of the starving masses. Ironic in its naming because post-independent India, itself was/is marked by constant poverty, sickness and underdevelopment. The film produced forty years postdating the famine of 1943, captures the horrors of the past, singing mournfully about the forgotten preys, who had been victimised in a political famine and were killed like animals on the streets of Calcutta.

The film uses literature as a weapon to mold public opinion. It presents a dual focus narrative, as it creates a famine-struck situation in a famine over-combed place, where the recreated past seamlessly blends into the constructed present. The narrative portrayal of the film through the lens of an omniscient narrator who forms an all present critiquing eye reading the scenes through the actors on the screen, on one hand and the audience on the other. Narrative interplays between reliability and un-reliability. Coupled with Sen's genius and the brutal depiction of famine-stricken Bengal the movie turns out to be one of the finest films the country has produced.

As the film opens with the director and his crew venturing to a village named Hatui, to film a movie on the great Bengal famine of 1943, almost forty years after its occurrence. Residing at a dilapidated mansion with twenty four individual rooms, of a former zamindar, the director along with the crew employs a frame narrative following the tenuous journey of reconstruction of real-life famine.The old dilapidated mansion has twenty-four to five rooms. Smita Patil, the lead of *Akaler Sandhane* while conversing with the character of the old zamindar woman played by Sen's actress wife Geeta Sen who lived in the dilapidated mansion mentions how she was married a year before the

famine and how the state of affairs were different back then. It is through the eyes of this character , it is understood how wealthy people were unaffected in famine times, such as the zamindars. Zamindars, a class that can be identified more clearly as an exploitative strata which controlled the agrarian section of rural India.

It is only after halfway through the shooting the crew, along with the audience epiphanies, that famine is an ever present reality in post-colonial Bengal countryside. Sen's fast moving narrative is laced with an irony, a pathos which only one who has seen it all is capable of recognizing. The film has all the tell-tale characteristics of a typical Sen movie : exploring poverty and complexities of human relationships; its backdrop as a sprawling dilapidated mansion, a feature that had a habit of returning to Sen's artistic canvas again and again.

Through these films, Sen disputes the dominant ideological narratives of Bengal famine by posting a challenge to over-simplified "historical facts".In the movie, the director introduces a guessing game to pass time by showing photographs of famine to the cast. Most of them assume the images are from the 1943 Bengal famine, yet the true context remains unvoiced. During the British Raj (1858–1947), there were around 25 major famines, and it is estimated that between 1770 and 1900, famines caused the deaths of 25 million Indians. This number far exceeds the 5 million deaths lost worldwide due to war.

Interestingly, the narrative of the plot that was supposed to be filmed portrayed a family of farmers owning a small plot of land who secured the lowest of the lowest in the hierarchy of class and power. The character of an old Brahmin comes and offers to buy the land off from the farmer family, so that the money can be utilised to go off to Calcutta where the government provides food. Though the incident is fictional, records of this cruel practices have been documented in various literature on Bengal where the farmers in the pre-famine phase were often forced to sell off the last scrape of land and join the army of landless agricultural migrants.

Reality of the past experience of the 1943 famine and the film blurs into a space marked by mutual experience of the two women, the actress and the domestic help, Durga who is hired to aid the crew. This crisscrossing of identities and experiences may be a part of Sen's intention to suggest that these movements are bound to overlap.When Sen's film captures the horror of famine and its gender specific experience, sex-work is often treated as a gateway to survival, overlooking its exploitative nature. Prostitution has well been accepted as a path of survival in any disaster narrative, the famine of 1943 being no exception. As in the narrative plot of the film, the actress plays the role of a village woman turned into sex worker as the only means of survival for her child and family. She barters her dignity for some rice and grains but remains at the threshold of social acceptability as her husband demands the source of utilities, being well aware of the situation. The husband's insistent hammering for an answer to a question she knows no answer to, is a narrative irony of experiences of women who were taken advantage of, remaining afresh in every famine scenario.

III. CONCLUSION

In attempting to decode the politics of representation that goes into redefining the Bengal famine of 1943, it is widely learnt in Amartya Sen's words that the Bengal famine was essentially a rural phenomenon. It is important to understand in the question of representation, how some lives have fallen outside the construct of 'worthy'. Coming from the most marginal sections of the society, these nameless victims of a postmodern famine failed to fit in the dominant framework of a life worth saving. Therefore, the imperial administration rightfully prioritized some over the other, making the deaths of millions invisible from the pages of history.Films like *Ashani Sanket, Baishey Sravana and Akaler sondhane* formed a part of counter-cultural production showing how some segments of the society remained untouched by the horrors of starvation.

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"Mad-Daughters": Dehumanization, Institutionalization and Intellectual Disability in Indian Short Fiction

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Abstract— *Intellectual disability has historically occupied a liminal position within the social imagination, often situated at the threshold between the human and the non-human. Literary representations of intellectual disability frequently reveal the anxieties, stigma and structure of power through societies regulate bodies and minds that deviate from the normative expectations of rationality, productivity and social interaction. Within the Indian literary context and disability scholarship, the experience of intellectually disabled women remain underexplored. Using interdisciplinary method of disability, and drawing concept from Lucia Carlson and David Livingstone Smith's dehumanization, this paper examines the representation of intellectual disability in the short stories Vishakha by Harshad Trivedi and Ties of Blood by Ishwar Petlikar. The characters of the two "mad-daughters" Chandudi and Mangu are framed through the language of animality, bodily excess, irrationality and social burden. Their intellectual disabilities are not merely biological anomaly, but socially constructed markers of normative "category violation". The study focusing on the intertwined dynamics of animalization, dehumanization, institutionalization and social exclusion. Consequently, the narratives expose how ableist society responds to intellectual disability through practices of segregation, surveillance, cure-oriented intervention, and institutional confinement.*

Keywords— ***Intellectual disability, Indian disability studies, institutionalization, animalization, care.***

I. INTRODUCTION

Intellectual disability has historically occupied a liminal position within the social imagination, often situated at the threshold between the human and the non-human. Literary representations of intellectual disability frequently reveal the anxieties, stigma and structure of power through societies regulate bodies and minds that deviate from the normative expectations of rationality, productivity and social interaction. Within the Indian literary context and disability scholarship, the experience of intellectually disabled women remain underexplored. Using interdisciplinary method of disability, and drawing concept from Lucia Carlson's dehumanization, this paper examines the representation of intellectual disability in the short stories *Vishakha* by Harshad Trivedi and *Ties of Blood* by Ishwar Petlikar. The characters of the two "mad-daughters" Chandudi and Mangu are framed through the language of animality, bodily excess, irrationality and social burden. Their intellectual disabilities are not merely biological anomaly, but socially constructed markers of normative "category violation". The study, focusing on the intertwined dynamics of animalization, dehumanization, institutionalization and social exclusion, critically exposes how ableist society responds to intellectual disability through practices of labelling, segregation and confinement. Additionally, the paper incorporates Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection to explore how intellectually disabled bodies disrupt symbolic order and provoke anxiety, disgust, and rejection. Chandudi and Mangu become abject figures because they expose the instability of bodily control, rational coherence, and autonomous subjectivity upon which normative social identity depends. Susan Wendell's reflections on the "rejected body" further illuminate how

disabled individuals become reminders of dependency, vulnerability, and corporeal fragility that the able-bodied seek to repress.

Underlying all concepts of intelligence is the conservative assumption that one cannot have order without hierarchy, either in society or nature. Mitchell and Snyder have also posited the conspicuous presence of hierarchies within their own (disabled)communities where some disabilities are viewed as less assimilable than others. Christopher Goodey located at the core of intelligence - comparativeness which is synonymous with biological hierarchy as such. That is because intelligence not only describes but, in some sense, also is, first, the place of humans in relation to other animals, and second, the place of some humans in relation to other humans (71). Consequently, intelligence becomes a determinant of individual's human value and social status, positioning those with intellectual disability at the lower end of the hierarchy. Intellectual disability has a long arbitrary history of repressive dividing practices such as segregation, forced confinement and rehabilitation. W. Trent elicited that it emerged as a social problem in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, educators, social reformers, physicians, psychologists, sociologists, and social workers have viewed intellectual disability in diverse ways: as a disorder of the senses, a moral flaw, a medical disease, a mental deficiency, a menace to the social fabric, mental retardation, and finally a disability (W. Trent Introduction). Wolfenberger, in the late twentieth century foregrounded his principle of normalization influenced by Goffman's theory of deviance. He advocated community as the sole locus of service for the disabled, thereby vouched for the discontinuation of institutionalisation in terms of asylum, rehabilitation, and special schools.

The paper also lay emphasis on the conceptual and relative invisibility of intellectual disability studies compared to physical disability. The discursive paucity of cognitive impairment in disability studies has hindered a legitimate broader vision of disability studies. In recent years, disability studies have been criticized for its lack of engagement with cognitive, intellectual or neurological disabilities. There is a conspicuous barrier in the field of disability studies between physical disability and intellectual disability. Cognitive disabilities, when juxtaposed with the increased theoretical, social, and cultural visibility of physical disabilities, have tended to remain disproportionately unseen (Fraser 29). The physicality, materiality and visibility of the physical disability translates to a cultural and social recognition of the disability over the type of disability that is invisible and more complicated to conceptualize or visualize. The discourse of disability as an interaction between a person and his environment is gaining currency. However, this change is not necessarily reflected in intellectual disability which continues to be portrayed as . . . 'an historically continuous, clinico-medical, thing-in- the world that can be "diagnosed"' (Mckenzie 2013). Mark Osteen suggests that this disciplinary gap has replicated a wide social avoidance, "thereby excluding the intellectually disabled just as mainstream society has done (Hall 2016). The paper's focus.

II. "MAD-DAUGHTERS": READING THE TEXTS

Vishakha is a story that centres around the eponymous character Vishakha who was a mother of Chandudi, a girl child who was diagnosed with 'mental retardation' or a profound intellectual disability. When Chandudi was born, Vishakha was warned even by close relatives that the responsibility of caring for the profoundly disabled child would be heavy, moreover, since there would be no one to share the burden with, the weight would that much heavier. Vishakha thus became the sole caregiver of a disabled daughter, alongside her role as the breadwinner. They 'had to struggle with society and with their conditions' (Sati 41). Chandudi's birth name was Chanda, but acquired the name because of repeated social attribution. After much deliberation, Vishakha complied with Leena Masi's advice to admit her to a special boarding school. In a series of sentimental maternal rumination of the lost childhood and girlhood, she made a resolution for the two to have a day out filled with "a lot of fun". She then clothed Chandudi with a new dress and led her out the door. The details of their experience from the moment they stepped out onto the street, to all their experience at different shops and public places became the vital junctions in the story, expositing the enormity of the social stigmatization of the disabled body and condemnation of the caregiver for foregrounding such experience into the normative realm. The story ends with the pair returning from the market after the horrible experience, and greeted with Pankti, a young girl from their neighbour waiting to play with Chandudi, an understated moment of acceptance in contrast to the harshness of the ableist reality.

Ties of Blood centers on the character Amratkaki who was condemned with the same 'destiny' as Vishakha as the caregiver of a 'mad daughter' Mangu. She had other children who were non-disabled, and often faulted by the sons and their daughters-in-law for focussing all her attention on Mangu. Mangu is a 12-year-old with multiple disabilities, she has not 'toileting sense' and is unable to dress herself. "Three specialist white doctors have diagnosed that Mangu could never be cured." Like

Vishakha, Amratkaki is alone in her loyalty to taking care of Mangu, her other children see Mangu as a burden, and are eager to send her away to a special institution. The mother is praised for her ritualistic devotion to Mangu, to a degree where people opined that Mangu would have already starved to death if she was born to another family. However, she is criticized by her children for pampering Mangu, which presumably worsened her dependence and childlikeness. At the age of 12, she had still not developed a toileting sense. This 'behaviour', according to the abled daughter, could be corrected with "two tight slaps". The societal intervention in the attempt of 'fixing' Mangu's condition includes faith and holistic healers, astrologers and bhuvas. Amratkaki implemented all the offered injunctions and remedies, which were all in vain. The story enunciates in more detail what was slightly connoted in *Vishakha*, that is the intersecting politics of social and institutionalized care and mental hospitals. Central to the story is Amratkaki's resistance against and negative perception towards the society's attempt to hospitalize her daughter. Pivotal to the narrative is Kasum, a girl of Mangu's age from the neighbourhood who "became mad" overnight and was successfully rehabilitated at the asylum. Her testimony inspired Amratkaki's compliance with her son's advice to hospitalize Mangu. However, her skepticism towards the concept of institutionalization burdened her with guilt after leaving Mangu at the hospital. Guilt-ridden, she too went insane by the end of the story.

The narratives lend a critical site for deciphering, to borrow Foucault's term, "the animality of madness" (Foucault, 1961) and Carlson's idea of "disability dehumanization". By definition, dehumanization is the evaluation of an individual or social group as lacking humanness or as being less than human…dehumanized people or groups may be ascribed both less positive and less negative human faculties (J. Sitruk et al, 2023). David Livingstone Smith, who has written extensively on dehumanization opined "We dehumanize others when we conceive of them as subhuman creatures…When people dehumanize others, they deny those others' humanity" (Smith, 1983). Disability dehumanization is the attribution of subhuman or nonhuman status to an individual, group, or "human kind" who is defined or self-identifies as having a disability. (Carlson, 2023).

Leena, Vishaka's mother-in-law made analogous link between Chandudi's body and that of animal to enunciate 'its' untamable and uncontrollable body that refused to be "civilized". Her blatant commentary of her granddaughter exposes the social anxiety around anomalous bodies- "This body is like an animal, it won't listen to anyone. It will become maddened by thirst and ferocious with hunger. At such times, it cannot think of anything else. It will demand its due. Be warned" (Sati, 2022). Despite the horrendous details and presumptuous warnings about "the body", Leena voiced the historical anxiety towards 'monstrous birth' or infants born with defective traits or impairments. Sometimes 'saliva started dripping from her mouth'. She had to wage a war with her own body-a body that kept moving all the time and was out of her control' (41). She had no sense of personal hygiene, was non-verbal and had no control over her bodily movement. The multiple disability of Chandudi, the cognitive deviancy and the corporeal difference positioned her at the lowermost strata of the disability hierarchy.

In *Ties of Blood*, Amratkaki's own understanding and perception of her daughter's ability or inability is sternly confined within the animalistic context, as she continually made comparision between Mangu and cattle. When the suggestion for asylum was brought up, she responded – "Putting her in the hospital would be similar to deserting one's infirm or disabled cattle in a panjrapol or animal shelter". In an attempt to offer comprehensive image of her daughter to the doctors, she stated, "She does not even have the sense that mute cattle have". When she was being taken away to be hospitalized, she obliged with docility when "even cattle protest when a new master tries taking them away". Additionally, the brothers' elucidation of Mangu's inability for answering nature's call which "even cattle understand" brought Mangu's disability into the ableist cultural silhouette of the animal.

Chandudi's animalistic trait was further foregrounded in the narrative through her 'animal-like whimpering' and 'horrified screech', which were her mode of communication. Henner and Robinson enquire into the social pathologization of forms of speech that deviate from the normative social expectation, such as -Stuttering, lisping, mumbling, stammering, slurring, or non-speaking, including 'whimpering' or 'screech'. They are all markers of difference that signify not only disability but lack of intelligence, capacity, and agency, and are subsequently used as a rationale for exclusion (Henner and Robinson 20). Such exclusionary nature is the ableist testament to Aristotelian conception of man as "animal with the capacity for language", and Mary Midgley's observation that "language is possibly "our favorite human distinguishing mark" (Louden 372).

Lucia Carlson posited that people with disabilities, including those who have historically been defined as "feebleminded," "mentally defective," and "mentally retarded," have been relegated to the realm of the animal, the subhuman, and the nonhuman, and has been subjected to the most extreme forms of oppression, violence, and abuse (2-3). She essentially contended the discursive link

between dehumanization and animalization in the context of intellectual disability. The social treatment of Chandudi and Mangu reveals what Carlson opined is one of the most pervasive and deleterious forms of dehumanization that people with intellectual disabilities have faced - being defined and treated as non-human animals (Carlson, 2023). Animalization has been used as a justified forms of abusive social and legal institutions and policies. Based upon beliefs about their animal, sub-animal, and non-human nature, people with intellectual disabilities were subject as a population to horrific abuses, both in and out of institutions (Carlson, 2001). Since the early Christian history, humans installed their supremacy on the grounds of the rational God's image prototype. The boundaries between man and animal have thus been defined absolutely and man's superiority to his inarticulate brothers and sisters made an article of faith. The two daughters' cognitive incapacity subjected them to the 'human gaze' which caused the 'rupturing of systematic order and sealed identity from within'. Vorhaus posited the individuals with profound cognitively impairment never acquired the capacity for rationality (Vorhaus, 2022). He further asserted that a human being "deficient in rationality" is "falling short of what…he ought to have been, given the species to which by nature he belongs" - that is the human species with reason and rationality. Chandudi and Mangu were victims of the social construct that designed the consequence of falling short of the foremost human trait as being likened to animals who are envisioned as lacking subjective and emotional lives (Filipczak 2023). Their existence becomes an insult to the society that had attached its supremacy to its capacity for speech, its ability to return the 'human gaze' (25), its civility. The inability to adhere to the human trait of speech and function within the human logic of rationality, pushed them into the social outhouse.

In the context of a pervasive belief that the tendency of the human race was to improve itself constantly, that barring something out of the ordinary humanity moved ever upward away from its animal origins and toward greater perfection, normality was implicitly defined as that which advanced progress (or at least did not impede it). Thus, according to Baynton, abnormality was sub-humanity. It was that which pulled humanity back toward its past, toward its animal origins (Baynton 2011). Mangu's abnormality and backwardness in the evolutionary track through certain standard evaluations. At one point, her mother realized she was soon to turn 15. At that age, her non-disabled normal mother had marry. But Mangu was unable to even feed or clean herself. Within the framework of Baynton's conflation of normality, progress and evolution, this discussion draws in the question of how "improvability" or the ability for progress and evolution define hierarchy within the human community as well as the disability community. This theory or question would underscore the difference in the disability experience of Mangu, Kasum and Chandudi who each suffered from 'insanity'. Kasum's acquired and temporal disability was literally and socially pitted against Mangu's congeniality in the story. The case of Kusum provides a critical ground for the possibility of a cure as the insanity was acquired. *She went mad*. Just like Mangu, she lost all sense of personal hygiene and of properly answering nature's call. Amratkaki tried to emphasise the normality of Mangu's disability at the backdrop of Kusum's acquired madness. 'If a perfectly normal girl can go mad and lose her sense of personal hygiene, then what's unusual about poor Mangu, mad from birth, not having such a sense' (51). This contends the varied experience of congenital intellectual disability and acquired disability – the distinction between born mad and becoming mad. The insanity of Kusum and her complete recovery become testimonial to the positive aspect of institutionalisation. She is the figuration of the ableist society's desire for cure, and the normative axiom to the abled citizens to never stop seeking for cure. The possibility of return into the normal world was motioned by Kusum. This imposed on Amratkaki the pressure to seek asylum for her mad daughter as well and achieve what Kusum's parents have achieved. Recovery remains the ultimate desire as disability is fundamentally a non-natural state of existence within the normal society, and Kusum becomes the affirmation of the credibility of the special institution.

III. ASYLUM FOR THE "ABJECT"

In tracing the history and development of insane asylum, Rothman made the polemic inference that asylums are "the immediate and inevitable response of an industrial and urban society (to insanity)". David Mechanic, in the 1960s had also contended asylum as the product of the urban society's intolerance for disruptive behaviour (Scull, 1977, p.339), which could mean any form of dispositional aberration that slows down or negatively interfere with the society's forward movement. The more industrialized and developed a society, the less is its ability to contain deviant behaviour within the existing social structure. The asylum thus, is a social and political outhouse, born at the social periphery 'with the aim of mitigating the deviant's 'disruptive' influence on the normal functioning of the normal society. It is the institutionalized symptom of the exercise of segregative control, as to relieve the normal society from the duty as much to provide 'care' for the those threating the stability and growth of the social structure. The whole purpose of the concept of a mental hospital was to segregate the mentally ill from the community and not treat

them as normal but rather detention away from the community. There is as Ben-Moshe adds, an interconnectedness between institutionalisation and imprisonment not only in the form but also 'their logic, historical enactment and social effects (Sati 2022, p.46).

Amratkaki's rebuttal towards institutionalization was echoed at the onset of the story through a declaration of a maternal obligation towards her daughter – "If as a mother I cannot be a caregiver to her, how can I expect the people in the hospital to look after her with love and affection? Putting her in the hospital would be similar to deserting one's infirm or disabled cattle in a panjrapol or animal shelter". This statement also foregrounds the problematic concept of animalization of disabled people by positing an analogy between an institution, asylum or hospital and animal shelter. Amratkaki's subsequent reflection upon her own decision to hospitalize Mangu, and her self- reflective monologue cast an extensive light on the asylums true function, as she painfully revealed she was deserting her daughter in the hands of other people. Amos Yong, a disability theologian has offered a critical indictment of the institutionalized care of people with intellectual disability. He extends Foucault's thesis of power exuded via asylums, to present the institutional history of developmentally disabled persons as oppressive. He refers to the continual scrutiny that disabled persons came under by being 'at the mercy' of a variety of experts — physicians, psychologists and scientists to name a few (Anand, 2020, p.42). The Indian history of the institutionalization of the mentally deficient children may be traced back to the 19th century. Colonial reports stated the presence of rat-like creatures at the shrine of Shah Daula in the Punjab region in the 19th century. The collection of "rat-like" human beings at the shrine was due to the benevolence of the Muslim saint Shah Daula who was kind to animals. Also, the microcephalic boys collected at the shrine and begged for a living because their human abilities were limited. Note that this explanation classifies the erstwhile rat-like creatures under a medical diagnostic category, microcephaly. Miles (2001) develops the idea that Shah Daula's shrine is probably evidence of one of the earliest care and rehabilitation centres for mentally retarded children in parts of South Asia. Shah Daula's shrine, in this case, was akin to a church-like institution that welcomed persons with limited physical and mental capacity as a charitable gesture (Anand 2020, p.53).

However, the industrialization and medical intervention in the system of the institutions was inevitable in modern era, such as the epoch where Mangu and Chandudi were born, brought up and hospitalized. The charity and theological reason as the foundation of the institution had been supplanted by the medical approach, encapsulated with the ableist and oppressive orientation against the disabled inmates. Thus it was no surprise that in the text *Ties of Blood*, as Mangu was readied to be taken to the mental hospital, the neighbours and passers-by were sceptical of the mother's decision. One person commented – "If you put such a healthy girl in the hospital, within a month she will wither away. It's enough if they manage to survive some way or the other like cattle over there…". This social commentary alongside that of Kasum's recovery elucidate the controversial and contrasting social perception of 'mental hospital'. It also demonstrates the unpredictability and the conflict within intellectual disability treatment. Institutions can be characterised as a means of observation and surveillance or of safety and knowledge; individualisation and totalisation, isolation and transparency. The post-institutional era after the 1970s transformed institutional power practices in group homes, from sovereign- to disciplinary power, from reprimanding- and visible power to moralising- and invisible power. Isolation as the logic of institutional segregation has been studied variously as a historical form of oppression shown to disabled persons such as lepers, lunatics and poor people (Anand, 2000).

In *Ties of Blood*, Kusum went 'mad' and was sent to a mental hospital where she fully recovered and lived a normal life again. This becomes a testimony to the societal defence of institutionalisation, thnuckBuckat it is able to take care of the disabled and cure it. Kusum is released into society again after she regained her sanity, and was segregated while she lost sanity. The aim of rehabilitation has an apparent motive, that is to take care of the disabled; and an underlying motive, segregation from the non-disabled community. This 'would allow the abled world to live in peace. Like prisons incarcerate criminals not (necessarily) to rehabilitate, but to keep them apart from society, institutions like the ones Mangu and Kasum (and Chandudi) are sent to are meant to keep the social weakness and deviancy "hidden from view" (Scull, 1990, p.

310) and from the normal social trajectory, to segregate for the sake of the segregation.

Foucault explored the writings of institutional confinement and postulated that the history of madness shows the "great confinement." *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1973) begins by describing the exclusion and confinement of lepers. Leprosy and lunatic asylums were among the first medical institutions to receive attention from the historians of India. Asylums for the confinement of leprosy afflicted and the mad, both in Europe and India, have provided historians of British India with fertile subject matter over the last two decades. In the early twentieth century, 'Mental hospitals', as Albert Deutsch puts it, became "the shame of the states",

a set of institutions characterised by "Inadequacy, ugliness, crowding, incompetence, perversion, frustration, neglect, idleness, callousness, abuse, mistreatment, oppression" (Wright, 123). The 1950s saw the decline in numbers of mental institutions and the role of community care and social care in treatment of mental illness and madness was wilfully predicted. However, the late 1900s saw theorists and activists made the inference that the resultant outcome was instead a "wholesale neglect" of the deviants, mentally ill and deinstitutionalized (Scull, 1990, p.307).

Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection offers a compelling lens for understanding Chandudi and Mangu's social position and unstable social legitimacy. The abject, for Kristeva, is that which disturbs identity, system, and order, provoking horror and rejection precisely because it exposes the instability of boundaries (*Powers of Horror* 4). The "untameable bodies" of the two "mad-daughters" are excessive, offensive, and threatening to the symbolic integrity of the family and the social order. The cultural perception located them as subjects that must be expelled, excluded, placed in the "no man's land" beyond the community of the living subject. Hughes emphasizes that the abject body reveals the "uncontrollable materiality" that destabilizes the coherence of subjectivity (Hughes 405). Thus, they are a reminder of what the abled seek to repress—the inevitability of decline, disease, and dependency. Susan Wendell's reflections on disability deepen this point. She argues that disabled people function as "constant reminders to the able-bodied of the negative body—of what the able-bodied are trying to avoid, forget, and ignore" (*Rejected Body* 406). Chandudi and Mangu's violation of category thus established their social position as what Mary Douglas termed "placeless", which the ableist society translated and materialized into institution. As Oliver reminds us, exclusion arises not from individual pathology but from structural devaluation of those who cannot conform to standardized norms of productivity (102).

Social conception and treatment of disability has long been mobilised between two polarities: cure and accommodation. Within the experience of intellectual disability, however, this conjecture acquires a more nuanced dimension because such conditions are widely regarded as congenital and incurable, rendering it to the boundary of monstrosity. Oliver has theorised disability as a state of oppression and a locus of stigma, shaped less by the impairment itself than by the social structures that interpret and respond. In the case of intellectual disability, the permanence of the state, the impossibility of rehabilitation, concealment, or return to normative society deepens the intensity of stigma. The sense of incurability is one of the primary forces underpinning the relegation of intellectually disabled persons to an inferior social status, and suffered systematic dehumanization and animalization. Unlike many physical disabilities, which may be mediated through prosthetics, surgical interventions, or the strategy of "passing," intellectual disability resists concealment, and does not reveal any hope for improvement. Its presence is inscribed in behaviour, cognition, and social interaction. While its severity may vary, its permanence is fundamentally presumed. This permanence provokes despair and its attendant emotions, disgust, fear, and hatred, rendering intellectual disability not simply a medical condition but a cultural marker of irredeemability. Thus, Chandudi and Mangu, as bodies with congenital disabilities, are pathologized without being pardoned, doubly stigmatized for failing to meet the obligations of recovery while simultaneously being denied the rights of exemption.

The literary narratives under discussion dramatise the dynamics by contrasting congenital and incurable disability with conditions that are curable or transient. In *Ties of Blood*, the juxtaposition between Mangu's intellectual disability and Kasum's acquired insanity illuminates this distinction. Mangu's condition, profound and permanent, positions her beyond the bounds of cure and establishes her 'unimprovable' inferior status. By contrast, Kasum's impairment followed the socially desired trajectory from disability to cure. She returned to the normal society as the success of social rehabilitation where communal care has failed. Her recovery underscores a systemic compulsion to seek remedy and the cultural valorisation of correction. The text thereby exposes the ableist orientation that disability must either be hidden, rehabilitated, or eliminated. Mangu, lacking the possibility of cure, becomes the figure who justifies institutionalisation, Kasum, in her curability, becomes the emblem of societal reassurance.

When the two stories *Vishakha* and *Ties of Blood*. are read together, a common arc of exclusion emerges. The narratives demonstrate the different intensities of stigma attached to congenital, incurable and unimprovable disability. Yet they converge in showing how intellectually disabled individuals are rendered problematic in their contact with normative society. Solutions to this "problem" are repeatedly imagined through segregation and elimination, formalized in the concept of institutionalisation under the guise of care. These acts of institutionalization signify more than individual desperation: they reveal the failure of community and kinship networks to sustain care and the abled society's 'love for the same' which concomitantly seeks to remove disabled lives from public visibility. By sending disabled individuals away into institutions, society simultaneously displaces responsibility and conceals what it deems disruptive or burdensome. The

narratives thus expose institutionalization less as a solution than as evidence of a collective moral and communal failure, where exclusion is disguised as benevolence and the disabled subject is made to embody social discomfort rather than social belonging. Quinn further illuminates how society's approach to disability "problematizes" the individual, framing them as the origin of their own suffering and their deaths, whether through neglect, institutionalization, or suicide, as naturalized outcomes (Quinn, 2025). The culturally sanctioned erasure of intellectually disabled individuals sustains the illusion that society can maintain order and moral clarity by relegating deviant or dependent lives to the margins.

IV. CONCLUSION

Disability, in the context of these narratives, is both a lived corporeal reality and a site of societal anxiety. It exposes the limits of communal care, the failures of moral responsibility, and the destructive logic of ableism. The societal perception of the intellectual disability as well as the corporeal incapacity of the "two mad-daughter" is explicated within the concept of dehumanization and animalization. The abled community's avoidance of the responsibility of care and coersive institutionalization of the disabled subjects expose a culture in which intellectual disability is not only stigmatized but actively managed through exclusion. In this framework, caregivers themselves occupy liminal positions, negotiating guilt, obligation, and societal expectation, while the disabled are simultaneously infantilized, marginalized, and subjected to erasure. The recurring thread is that intellectual disability, particularly in its incurable and congenital forms, marks the individual for systematic devaluation. The inability to "pass" or to be normalized intensifies social rejection, rendering socially precarious lives vulnerable to literal or symbolic death.

The critical synthesis of *Vishakha* and *Ties of Blood* explicate intellectual disability as a category perpetually marginalised, dehumanised and animalized. Whether through fear, disgust, abandonment or institutionalisation, these narratives testify to a social order that cannot reconcile disability with normative life, and which the normative society desire to keep hidden, invisible and silenced. Ultimately, the study argues that the exclusion of intellectually disabled individuals reflects a broader failure of communal ethics and social responsibility, where institutionalization becomes less an act of care than a mechanism for maintaining normative comfort through segregation.

DECLARATION

The author confirms the research is original and not a funded study. She declares no conflict of interest.

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Africa Under Western Eyes: The Colonial Gaze and the Narrativization of Otherness in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*

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Abstract— *This paper offers a postcolonial reflection on the role of the gaze, in relation to narration, in the process of representing and narrativizing the Self/Other dialectic in Joseph Conrad's* Heart of Darkness. *The central argument is that the European gaze, as articulated through Marlow's narrative and focalization, is deeply embedded in the West's will to power and its desire to render the colonial Other visible, knowable, and, consequently, governable. More importantly, I argue that Marlow's gaze does not merely observe the African Other but also participates in constructing his identity, restricts his agency, and determines the conditions under which he can become visible and intelligible within the narrative. In this sense, the gaze functions as a narrative technology through which knowledge, visibility, voice, spatiality, and agency are unequally distributed between the European Self and the African Other. Nonetheless, this framework does not seek to reduce Conrad's novella to a simple or totalizing colonial discourse. Rather, it seeks to lay bare the mechanisms through which colonial power is reproduced within the narrative while remaining attentive to the instability and ambivalence of Marlow's position as narrator and focalizer.*

Keywords— ***gaze, discourse, empire, representation, surveillance, narration, Otherness, negation, Manichean allegory, Heart of Darkness***

> "To gaze implies more than to look at—it signifies a psychological relationship of power, in which the gazer is superior to the object of the gaze" (Schroeder, 1998).

I. INTRODUCTION

The issue of representation is of paramount significance as an integral part of Western colonial discourse. The very aim of representation has been to "make the Orient visible [and] clear," as Edward Said (1978, 22) argues in his seminal work *Orientalism*. At this juncture, the discursive representation of Otherness in literary works remains a convoluted concern, largely because of the wide range of techniques, strategies, and rhetorical devices through which imperial power has historically produced and organized knowledge about the cultural Other. Among these strategies, the gaze and surveillance occupy a cardinal position. Surveillance, as Roxanne L. Doty suggests, functions as a technique through which the non-Western subject is rendered a knowable and visible object of disciplinary power (1993, 11). The gaze, therefore, does not simply allow the observer to see; it establishes a particular relationship between the observer and the observed, transforming visual perception into a mechanism of knowledge and authority.

The importance of the gaze becomes particularly evident in colonial representations of Africa, where the European observer frequently occupies the position of the seeing and knowing subject, while the African Other is reduced to an object of observation. The writer/narrator 's eye, while representing Otherness, is never innocent in so far as it is already preconditioned and restructured to view reality in terms of binary oppositions, or what Abdul Jan Mohamed labeled the Manichean allegory. David Spurr maintains that

"To gaze means to dominate … to look and to speak implies a position of authority" (1993, 14). Western gaze is closely related to a "commanding view," through which the unknown is rendered visible and consequently brought within the conceptual and ideological framework of the observer. In this sense, to look and to speak are not innocent acts. They presuppose a position of authority and establish a hierarchy between the one who sees and the one who is seen.

Such a relationship between vision and power can be detected in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902), a novella whose representation of Africa and Africans has generated considerable controversy within postcolonial criticism. The text has been interpreted both as a critique of European imperialism and as a work that remains deeply embedded in the Western colonial discourse and typifies the West's *will to power* alongside the West's *will to truth*. This tension prevents us from reducing the novella to a simple ideological interpretation. Rather than assuming a direct equivalence between Conrad and Marlow, this paper focuses primarily on the narrative operations through which Marlow's gaze constructs the African Other. Marlow is simultaneously a character, narrator, and focalizer, and his knowledge is therefore partial and mediated rather than genuinely omniscient.

I argue that through what may be described as a colonial or panoptic gaze, Marlow exercises considerable authority over the narrative space and participates in the cultural construction of the Other. His gaze does not simply record the African presence; it selects, organizes, describes, categorizes, and interprets it. Through this process, African bodies are frequently fragmented, dehumanized, and associated with wilderness, primitiveness, disease, and temporal backwardness. At the same time, African voices are marginalized, and African space is repeatedly represented as empty, mysterious, and available for Western exploration and appropriation. The gaze thus becomes a dynamic mechanism through which the identity of the Other is narratively constructed. The narrator not only controls the narrative space but also enacts a kind of cultural hegemony on the Other through narration by appropriating his existence and negating his agency. More importantly, this gaze becomes a dynamic mechanism of mapping and constructing the identity of the Other. Ultimately, the aim is to unearth the mechanisms of power and hegemony employed by the colonial and orientalist discourse.

II. SURVEILLANCE: THE GAZE AS NARRATIVE AUTHORITY

To begin with, Marlow's narrative structure in *Heart of Darkness* is "homodiegetic," since the narrator is present as a character in the story he tells (Genette 1980, 245). Marlow is therefore not an external observer standing outside the events. He participates in the narrative and simultaneously controls how those events are presented to the reader. The bulk of the story is recounted and seen from Marlow's I/Eye. As a focalizer, he occupies a privileged position from which he selects what becomes visible and what remains outside the field of representation.

Marlow's gaze is significantly situated and partial, yet it produces an effect of authority. His narrative repeatedly transforms his perceptions into the principal means through which the reader encounters Africa and its inhabitants. The African Other is therefore not encountered directly but through a European narrative consciousness that determines the dynamics of visibility. Marlow enjoys authority, and has the agency to construct the identity of the natives. Throughout the narrative, the natives are silenced, denied, muted, and obliterated, and their subjectivity is confiscated and eclipsed by the narrator's essentialist, totalizing, and Eurocentric gaze or what Genette has qualified as "the conquest of the I" (249).

Through Marlow's initial encounters with the Other, the process of Othering becomes increasingly apparent. His narrative can be understood in relation to what Said describes as an "overmastering" narrative (1978, 23), in which the authority of the narrator allows him to organize and interpret the cultural Other. Narration consequently becomes a process of selection. Marlow sheds light on particular scenes, bodies, landscapes, and gestures, rendering them visible within the narrative and thereby subjecting them to the imperial gaze. This idea can be observed in the following passages:

> A boat from the shore gave one a momentary contact with reality. It was paddled with black fellows; you could see from afar the white of their eyeballs glistering, they shouted, sang, their bodies streamed with perspiration; they had faces like grotesque masks - these chaps; but they had bone, muscle, a wild vitality, an intense energy of movement, that was as natural and true as the surf along their coast. They wanted no excuse for being there; they were a great comfort to look at. (1902, 19)

> And, This scene of inhabited devastation: a lot of people, mostly black and naked, moved about like ants (1902, 22)

The verbal texture of these passages reveals how Marlow's gaze produces the African Other as a visible object. The Africans are not presented primarily as individualized subjects with histories, interiorities, or voices; instead, they are perceived through their bodies,

movements, and physical appearance. The description of their "wild vitality" associates them with nature and wilderness, while the comparison of the people to "ants" reduces individual human beings to an undifferentiated collective. Marlow's representation of the African Other thus becomes a process of reification and objectification. The Other is transformed into something that can be seen, classified, and interpreted by the European observer. Khalid Bekkaoui similarly argues that colonial fiction can dehumanize natives by depriving them of psychology and history and rendering them as decontextualized objects" (1998,19). In *Heart of Darkness*, this tendency is visible in the narrator's repeated reduction of African individuals to bodily forms, movements, and visual impressions. In another significant passage. Marlow writes,

> Clinging to the earth, half coming out, half effaced within the dim light, in all the attitudes of pain, abandonment, and despair. Another mine on the cliff went off, followed by a slight shudder of the soil under my feet. The work was going on. The work! And this was the place where some of the helpers had withdrawn to die. 'They were dying slowly—it was very clear... These moribund shapes were free as air—and nearly as thin. (1902, 24).

The Africans appear here as "shapes," almost indistinguishable from the landscape in which they are located. The representation of their bodies through pain, exhaustion, and disappearance reinforces the process through which the colonial subject is deprived of individuality and historical specificity. Marlow's gaze therefore produces not only visibility but also a particular form of visibility wherein the African is visible as an object of suffering, primitiveness, and physical decline. This process becomes even more explicit when Marlow observes: "I noticed that the crowd of savages was vanishing without any perceptible movement ... as if the forest that had ejected these beings so suddenly had drawn them in again" (1902, 86). The African figures are conceptually absorbed into the natural environment. The forest appears to produce and consume them, making them seem less like historical subjects than extensions of the landscape. The association between African identity and wilderness consequently becomes a powerful element in the production of Otherness.

III. THE GAZE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF DIFFERENCE

The representation of the African Other through Marlow's gaze is therefore closely connected to the construction of difference. Marlow's descriptions repeatedly establish a distinction between the European Self and the African Other through a system of implicit binaries: civilized/savage, rational/irrational, historical/prehistoric, human/animal, and observer/observed. This process recalls JanMohamed's (1985) concept of the Manichean allegory, according to which colonialist discourse organizes cultural difference through a series of oppositions that privilege the colonizer and subordinate the colonized.

The word "comfort" in Marlow's description of the African boatmen is particularly significant. Marlow states that the men "were a great comfort to look at" (Conrad 1902, 19). The expression deserves a closer examination because it suggests that the African presence provides Marlow with a particular psychological reassurance. The Africans are represented as "natural," physically energetic, and visually available to the European observer. Their presence consequently becomes part of the colonial landscape through which the European Self recognizes itself. The Other's existence, whether in reality or in fiction, thus becomes a functional element in the construction of the Self. The African is required to appear as different so that the European identity can appear coherent and superior. This is precisely where representation intersects with power. The Other is not simply described; he is made to occupy a particular ideological position within the narrative.

In this sense, Marlow's commanding view echoes the Foucauldian dialectic of knowledge and power. The gaze presupposes knowledge, while knowledge creates the possibility of authority over its object. In a way reminiscent of the Foucauldian idea, Said argues that "to have knowledge of a thing is to dominate it and to have authority over it" (1978, 32). It is at this juncture that the ideological binarism comes to the fore; while the European self is represented as the knower, the observer, the powerful, the African Other incarnates the known, the observed, and the powerless. In *Heart of Darkness*, the European Self consequently appears as the knower, observer, and interpreter, while the African Other is repeatedly positioned as the known, observed, and interpreted. The power of Marlow's gaze and commanding view is pretty much evident in the subsequent quote,

> Glancing down**,** I saw a face near my hand; the black bones reclined at full length with one shoulder against the tree, and slowly the eyelids rose, and the sunken eyes looked **up** at me. A kind of blind …. which died out slowly ...with great weariness and all about others were scattered in every pose of contorted collapse as in some picture of a massacre

> or a pestilence. One of these creatures rose to his hands and knees and went off on all fours towards the river to drink (1902, 25)

Marlow's utterance above invites no further explanation given that the power of the gaze is beautifully captured within the precincts of Marlow's quote. Marlow's act of glancing down, not above, reflects a psychological relation of power in which the White is uninterruptedly in a position of superiority and domination, looking down at the inferior Other. To put it in David Spurr's terms, Marlow is endowed with "a commanding view (and) a sense of mastery over the unknown and over what is often perceived by the western [narrator] as strange and bizarre" (1993, 15). By so doing, he allows no prospect of freedom and the interplay of differences. Conversely, this Other /the black is denied the capacity to look back since he is represented as a pathetically weak creature whose "sunken eyes" are "kind of blind". Marlow's act of negating the Other's ability to gaze can be put in opposition to his imperial representation of a white man whose commanding gaze is confirmed and reasserted. In fact, the physical arrangement of the bodies becomes a visual representation of the colonial hierarchy. The African is placed below the European not only geographically but symbolically.

This unequal asymmetry becomes more evident when Marlow describes a white man: "He was commonplace in complexion, in feature, in manners, and in voice ... his eyes of the usual blue ... and he certainly could make his glance fall on one as trenchant and heavy as an axe" (1902, 30*)*. It appears clearly then that the juxtaposition between the differentiated representation of the "black" and the lofty portrayal of the white man echoes the Western system of binarism which Marlow futilely attempted to eschew. The juxtaposition between the representations of the African and the European reveals the operation of a racialized visual hierarchy. The African is associated with weakness, darkness, disease, and physical fragmentation, while the white man is associated with a powerful and penetrating gaze. The ability to look therefore becomes a form of symbolic power. In this framework, Abdul Jan Mohamed asserts that "Some of the works of even the "most enlightened and critical colonial writers eventually succumb to a narrative organization based on racial/ metaphysical oppositions" (1985, 80).

IV. LOOKING AT THE OTHER: BODY, VOICE, VISIBILITY, AND DEHUMANIZATION

The natives are not only denied the ability to gaze at the white men, but also their very humanity is confiscated and negated through Marlow's tautological determination to address the natives not as full human beings but as parts of the body, and as mere organs. Instead of being presented as individualized subjects, they frequently appear as parts of bodies or as collections of physical features: "bare feet," "pairs of eyes," and "a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hand clapping of feet stamping of bodies swaying of eyes rolling" (1902, 28–51). Furthermore, they are repeatedly described as "shadows," "black shapes," and "figures," terms that diminish their individuality and reinforce their status as objects within Marlow's field of vision,

> "Black shapes crouched, lay, sat between the trees leaning against the trunks." (1902, 24)
>
> And
>
> "They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now— nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom." (1902, 24)
>
> "I made out deep in the tangled gloom naked breasts, arms, legs, glaring eyes, human limbs in movement glistering of bronze color". (1902, 64)

The language of shadows and shapes contributes to the process of dehumanization because it transforms human subjects into visual impressions. This reverberates with Abdul Jan Mohamed's assertion that, "Just as imperialists 'administer' the resources of the conquered country, colonialist discourse 'commodifies' the native subject into a stereotyped object and uses him as a 'resource' for colonialist fiction" (1985, 82-83). Joseph Conrad, in this respect, commodifies the natives by negating their individuality and subjectivity, so that they are now perceived as generic beings that can be exchanged for any other native.

Besides denying the humanity of the Other, there is also what Johannes Fabian calls "the denial of coevalness". Throughout the novella, the natives are not only spatially separated from Europe but also temporally displaced. The African is represented as belonging to an earlier stage of human development and consequently excluded from the contemporary time of European civilization. The Other is a "prehistoric man (1902, 51), and clearly outside the contours of time. Marlow adds, "I don't think a single one of them had any clear idea of time as we at the end of countless ages have. They still belonged to the beginning of time" (1902, 58). Such temporal displacement reinforces the colonial binary between civilization and primitiveness.

The gaze also operates at the level of language. The African Other is frequently spoken about rather than allowed to speak. Even when African characters speak, their speech is presented as limited, fragmented, or linguistically marked. A revealing example occurs when an African servant reports the death of Kurtz: "Mistah Kurtz, he dead" (1902, 100). The sentence is grammatically simple, but its representation within Marlow's narrative is significant. The African voice enters the narrative only briefly and remains enclosed within Marlow's larger act of narration. The issue, therefore, is not simply whether the Other speaks, but whether the Other possesses narrative authority over his own speech and experience. The gaze consequently operates together with narration. To control the representation of the Other is also to control the conditions under which the Other becomes intelligible. The colonial subject may be visible, but his visibility does not necessarily grant him agency. He may appear within the narrative while remaining excluded from the authority to narrate himself.

V. MAPPING THE OTHER: SPACE, EMPTINESS, AND COLONIAL APPROPRIATION

The technique of surveillance through the narrator's gaze extends beyond the bodies of the natives to the representation of African landscape and space. The terrestrial space of the Other is frequently depicted as a massive and unexplored emptiness, thereby creating an ideological justification for exploration, occupation, and appropriation. As Marlow puts it, "There were many blank spaces on the earth ... there was one yet the biggest, the most blank, that I had a hankering after" (1902, 11). He later describes Africa as "The empty immensity of earth, sky and water" (1902, 20). The repetition of "blank," "empty," and is significant because it constructs Africa as a space that lacks inhabitants before the arrival of the European observer. The land becomes visible as an object of Western desire and exploration. The terrestrial space of the Other is frequently depicted as a massive empty space, rationalizing therefore occupation and appropriation. Hence, the space of the cultural Other becomes a fertile ground to project onto Western anxiety and fantasies and anything that Western civilization and psyche is not. Pratt's discussion of the "monarch of all I survey" is particularly relevant here, since the colonial gaze frequently transforms geographical space into something that can be visually possessed before it is materially appropriated. (1992, 201).

Finally, the gaze in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* functions at multiple levels. *Darkness*. It not only observes the African body and places African culture in contradiction to the West but also renders African space available for power projection and occupation. Thus, the African Other is consequently produced through a complex system of visual, narrative, spatial, and temporal distinctions.

VI. CONCLUSION

By way of conclusion, this paper has sought to reflect on the gaze as a vital element in the representational technique of surveillance. As argued above, the gaze of the European writer/Self when narrativizing the African Other seems to be deeply imbued with the West's *will to power* and inspired by the Western process of constructing Otherness. Through surveillance at the level of the narrative structure of *Heart of Darkness,* Joseph Conrad exerts his hegemony and ascendancy by confirming White men's authority, negating the Other's identity, and commodifying his ontology and space. The gaze does not simply describe the African Other; it determines the conditions under which the Other becomes visible, intelligible, and narratable.

Through the narrative gaze, African bodies are frequently objectified, African voices are marginalized, and African space is represented as blank, empty, primitive, or outside the temporal framework of European modernity. The gaze may consequently be understood as a narrative technology of colonial representation. It establishes an asymmetrical relationship between Self and Other by privileging the European capacity to look, speak, classify, and narrate. The African Other may enter the narrative as a visible presence, yet this visibility does not necessarily translate into subjectivity or agency. What emerges, therefore, is an unequal economy of looking in which the European retains the position of the observer while the African is repeatedly confined to the position of the observed

For further research, it should be noted that this gaze can be reversed and displaced, thus constituting the possibility of resistance. It is important in this regard to refer to the Algerian critic Malek Alloula and his thought-provoking book *The Colonial Harem* (1986), in which he initiated a fascinating discussion and tried to dismantle the colonizer's gaze by articulating the gaze of the colonized. In this connection, the observer in this case becomes the observed, thus changing and destabilizing the mainstream rules of power relations and, by so doing, subverting the colonial authority. The possibility of such a reversal suggests that the gaze, although historically implicated in relations of domination, may also become a site from which those relations can be questioned and destabilized.

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Gender, Labour and Resistance in Baby Halder's *A Life Less Ordinary*: Reconstructing Female Agency Beyond Domestic Hegemony

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Abstract— *Baby Halder's A Life Less Ordinary presents a compelling autobiographical account of gendered oppression, domestic labour, and female resistance within the patriarchal family. While the memoir narrates Baby's extraordinary journey from an abused child bride to an acclaimed writer, it simultaneously portrays numerous women who remain imprisoned within the ideology of domesticity. This paper argues that the memoir constructs two contrasting models of womanhood: one represented by housewives who normalize patriarchal domination through silence and obedience, and the other embodied by Baby, whose transformation into an economically independent domestic worker and author challenges the hegemonic structures governing women's lives. The study demonstrates that Baby's resistance emerges through economic autonomy, mobility, literacy, and authorship. Ultimately, the memoir reveals that liberation is achieved not merely by escaping domestic violence but by reconstructing one's identity outside patriarchal definitions of womanhood.*

Keywords— ***Baby Halder, domestic labour, patriarchy, resistance, memoir, gender***

I. INTRODUCTION

Women's autobiographical narratives have increasingly become important sites for understanding how gender oppression intersects with labour, class, and social mobility. Baby Halder's *A Life Less Ordinary* occupies a distinctive position within this tradition because it not only narrates the author's painful experiences but also exposes the ideological mechanisms through which patriarchy sustains itself inside the household. Unlike fictional representations of female suffering, Halder's memoir derives its political strength from lived experience, revealing that domesticity itself functions as an institution of exploitation. More importantly, the narrative juxtaposes Baby's remarkable journey of self-reconstruction against the lives of several housewives who continue to accept patriarchal domination as natural. The memoir therefore invites a comparative reading between women who internalize oppression and one who actively resists it.

II. GENDER HIERARCHY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF FEMALE INFERIORITY

Gender hierarchy constitutes one of the foundational mechanisms through which patriarchal societies institutionalize women's subordination. In Baby Halder's *A Life Less Ordinary: A Memoir*, gender discrimination is neither incidental nor confined to isolated instances of familial injustice; rather, it emerges as a deeply entrenched socio-cultural system that regulates women's access to education, labour, mobility, and selfhood. Halder's autobiographical narrative demonstrates how patriarchal ideology constructs female inferiority from childhood by assigning differential value to male and female children. Within this framework, girls are systematically socialized to internalize domesticity, obedience, and self-sacrifice, while boys are positioned as economic and social assets. The memoir thus moves beyond personal testimony to expose the structural nature of gender inequality, revealing

how patriarchal institutions reproduce women's marginalization through everyday familial practices. By foregrounding the lived experiences of a working-class woman, Halder illustrates that gender hierarchy operates not merely through physical coercion but also through ideological conditioning that normalizes unequal social relations.

The family serves as the primary institution through which patriarchal values are inculcated and legitimized. In *A Life Less Ordinary*, the family constitutes the earliest site in which Baby encounters emotional instability and gendered insecurity. Her recollection that members of the household "never lived happily" and "always quarrelled and fought with each other" reveals a domestic environment marked by persistent conflict. Such instability is significant because the family, which should ordinarily provide emotional security, instead becomes a space in which violence, neglect, and unequal power relations are normalized. Baby's childhood experiences demonstrate that patriarchal domination does not operate only through explicit restrictions on women but also through the everyday atmosphere of fear and conflict within the household. The family thus becomes the primary institution through which gendered vulnerability is experienced and reproduced.

Education occupies a significant place in the memoir because it offers Baby an alternative vision of identity beyond domesticity. Despite the poverty and instability of her childhood, she remains deeply committed to schooling. She recalls, "I never missed a day of school, and often, people did not know that I'd come to school without having eaten a thing" (Halder 4). Her determination to attend school despite hunger demonstrates that education represents more than formal learning; it provides her with a sense of possibility beyond the constraints of her domestic circumstances. However, this aspiration is gradually undermined by patriarchal expectations that prioritize marriage and domestic responsibilities over female education. The abrupt transition from childhood to marriage becomes evident when Baby recalls:

> One day I saw Baba and my Mami coming back from the bazaar with bags full of vegetables. They gave the bags to me to empty out and I did that carefully. As I came out, I noticed a suitcase lying nearby. I asked Baba about it and he told me it had things for my wedding. (Halder 31)

The suitcase becomes a symbolic reminder of the future being prepared for her: instead of continuing her education, Baby is being directed towards marriage and domesticity. Her experience therefore illustrates how patriarchal structures restrict female aspirations by transforming girls from students into wives and domestic workers.

Domestic labour in the memoir functions as more than a household responsibility; it becomes a mechanism for disciplining female identity. Through repetitive chores, girls are socialized into obedience, self-sacrifice, and silence, learning to accept domestic service as their primary social role. The invisibility of this unpaid labour further entrenches gender inequality, as women's contributions remain unrecognized despite sustaining the household. Halder's experiences therefore reveal domesticity as a socially constructed institution that regulates women's lives rather than a natural expression of femininity.

Patriarchal control also extends beyond the household through community surveillance and social expectations. Halder recounts that her mother, Ganga, constantly worried about "what would people say?" (Halder 1), illustrating how women's behaviour is governed by concerns over family honour and social respectability. The fear of public judgment compels women to conform to prescribed gender roles, ensuring that patriarchal norms are reinforced not only within the family but also through the collective pressures of society.

The structural nature of this gender hierarchy can be effectively interpreted through Sylvia Walby's theory of patriarchy, which conceptualizes patriarchy as a complex system of interconnected social structures that organize and sustain male dominance (20-37). Rejecting explanations that attribute women's oppression solely to individual male behaviour, Walby argues that patriarchal power is institutionalized within the household, paid employment, culture, sexuality, and the state. Her concept of household production is particularly relevant to Halder's experiences, as it explains how women's unpaid domestic labour becomes a central mechanism through which patriarchal relations are reproduced. Baby's exclusion from education, her assignment to domestic responsibilities, and her treatment as an economic liability illustrate the operation of these structural mechanisms within the family. The memoir thus corroborates Walby's argument that patriarchy functions as an institutional system that systematically restricts women's access to resources, autonomy, and opportunities while simultaneously naturalizing their subordinate social position.

Rather than portraying gender discrimination as isolated familial incidents, Halder's memoir locates it within a broader patriarchal structure that shapes social relations through unequal distributions of power, labour, and opportunity. The devaluation of daughters, denial of education, and normalization of unpaid domestic labour reveal that female inferiority is socially constructed and

sustained through institutional and cultural practices. By narrating these experiences from a working-class woman's perspective, Halder exposes the structural foundations of gender inequality and critiques the patriarchal mechanisms that perpetuate women's subordination.

III. INTERNALIZING PATRIARCHY: HOUSEWIVES, VIOLENCE, AND CONSENT

While physical violence is one of the most visible manifestations of patriarchy in *A Life Less Ordinary: A Memoir*, Baby Halder demonstrates that patriarchal domination is sustained equally through ideological conditioning. Women are socialized to perceive violence as an inevitable component of married life, thereby normalizing inequality and silencing resistance. Through the experiences of Baby, Panna's wife, and Sushila, Halder reveals how patriarchal ideology becomes internalized, transforming oppression into an accepted social reality. Violence in the memoir extends beyond physical abuse to encompass cultural expectations of honour, obedience, and sacrifice, exposing the ideological foundations that legitimize women's subordination.

Marriage emerges as the primary institution through which these patriarchal values are reinforced. Upon entering her marital home, Baby strives to become a humble and decent daughter-in-law, willingly embracing obedience as an essential feminine virtue. She soon accepts the role of a submissive daughter-in-law, treating silence and compliance as moral obligations. This conditioning is further reinforced through cultural symbols such as the veil, when Sandhya advises Baby to cover her head in the presence of Sandhya's husband (Halder 35). Chakravarti argues that patriarchal societies maintain social order by regulating women's sexuality and behaviour through ideals of chastity, modesty, and obedience which is considered to be a mark of distinction (71). The veil functions not merely as attire but as a disciplinary symbol regulating female behaviour and reinforcing ideals of modesty and respectability.

Once obedience is normalized, violence acquires social legitimacy within the marital household. Baby's experience demonstrates how patriarchal conditioning compels women to endure abuse even when they recognize its brutality. Recalling an incident of sexual violence, she describes how her husband began to press his body against hers: "I started to cry out in fear. But then, I thought, what's the points? I just endured everything" (Halder 35). Her response reveals the psychological consequences of prolonged patriarchal domination. The movement from fear to resignation suggests that violence has become so pervasive that resistance appears futile. Endurance is therefore not evidence of consent but a consequence of a social structure that denies women meaningful control over their bodies and choices. Baby's experience demonstrates how patriarchal power operates simultaneously through physical force and psychological conditioning, making submission appear to be the only viable response to abuse.

The consequences of patriarchal violence extend beyond the immediate victim to the entire family, particularly children who witness violence within the household. Baby recalls the distressing account of a five-year-old child who described the violence inflicted upon his mother: "Do you know Dadu, that for three or four days now Baba had been fighting with Ma and beating her. Yesterday he locked the door of the room and beat her up very badly" (Halder 63). The child's recollection exposes the repetitive and systematic nature of domestic violence rather than presenting it as an isolated incident. The fact that the violence is witnessed and remembered by a young child further demonstrates how patriarchal domination becomes embedded within family life and reproduced across generations. Domestic violence therefore affects not only women as direct victims but also children who grow up within an environment where male authority is expressed through fear and physical force.

A significant transformation occurs when Baby begins to question the unequal distribution of blame and punishment within marriage. Her repeated experience of violence leads her to challenge the assumption that the woman alone must bear the consequences of male misconduct. Reflecting on her husband's abuse, she states, "My husband beat me up time and again and I tried to ask him why it was I who was getting beating, and why not the man who was harassing" (Halder 76). Her question marks an important movement from passive endurance towards critical awareness. She no longer accepts violence as an inevitable feature of marriage but begins to recognize the gendered injustice underlying it. This questioning becomes a crucial stage in her transformation because resistance begins intellectually before it becomes materially possible. By challenging the logic that holds women responsible for men's actions, Baby destabilizes the patriarchal ideology that had previously justified her suffering.

Pierre Bourdieu describes this process as symbolic violence, where domination becomes so deeply normalized that the oppressed come to perceive it as legitimate (1-2). The housewives in the memoir embody this condition, accepting violence and silence as markers of a good wife. Baby, too, initially conforms to this ideal by trying to become a submissive, decent and obedient daughter-in-law (Halder 61). However, unlike the other women, she eventually refuses to normalize abuse. Her decision to leave

her husband marks a decisive break from the cycle of silent endurance, transforming victimhood into an act of resistance.

IV. LABOUR, ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE, AND FEMALE AGENCY

A Life Less Ordinary reconceptualizes women's labour by exposing the distinction between unpaid domestic work and remunerated employment. While patriarchal society confines women to invisible household labour that reinforces dependence, the memoir demonstrates that economic independence can become a crucial means of challenging gendered subordination. Halder's experiences reveal that labour is never a neutral economic activity; rather, its value is determined by the social structures within which it is performed. The transition from unpaid domestic servitude to paid employment enables Baby to redefine her identity beyond the roles of wife and daughter-in-law, illustrating how financial autonomy creates possibilities for dignity, self-determination, and resistance.

Within marriage, Baby's labour remains largely invisible despite sustaining the household. Cooking, cleaning, and maintaining the domestic space are treated as natural feminine obligations rather than as forms of productive labour. The gendered expectations attached to domestic work are evident when Sandhya states, "…I don't need to see for myself. This is what happens when there is no woman in the house." (Halder 45). The statement appears to concern cleanliness, but it also reveals the gendered assumption that the responsibility for maintaining the household belongs to the woman. Domestic labour consequently becomes a mechanism for reproducing patriarchal relations because Baby is expected to maintain the household while receiving neither recognition nor autonomy in return. Her experience demonstrates that domesticity is not simply a private arrangement but a social structure through which women's labour is appropriated and their subordinate position is maintained.

The memoir marks a decisive turning point when Baby refuses to return to her abusive marriage and begins to imagine an independent life for herself and her children. Although her father continues to insist that she should return to her husband, Baby firmly rejects the expectation: "Baba still thought I would go back to my husband. He kept insisting I should go back and I kept insisting that I would not. I told him I wanted to live on my own now, wanted to see if I could manage to feed and look after my children" (Halder 112-113). Her repeated refusal is significant because it transforms resistance from an internal realization into a conscious decision. By expressing her desire to live independently and provide for her children, Baby challenges the patriarchal assumption that a woman's security depends upon her husband. Her decision also establishes the foundation for her later economic independence, as paid labour becomes a means through which she can sustain herself and her children outside the marital household.

However, leaving the marital household does not immediately free Baby from patriarchal social expectations. Her decision to live independently produces a new form of social exclusion, particularly within her extended family. Recalling her experience in her brothers' homes, she observes that "my sisters-in-law were behaving as if I was a great burden to them" and that "there was no one even to talk to me politely in my brothers' homes" (Halder 120). These reactions reveal that a woman who separates herself from an abusive marriage may continue to be judged according to patriarchal expectations of dependence, respectability, and marital conformity. Baby's struggle for independence therefore involves more than economic survival; it also requires her to negotiate the social stigma attached to a woman who refuses to return to her husband. Her mobility becomes an act of resistance precisely because it challenges the expectation that a woman's rightful place is within a marital household.

Economic self-reliance also enables Baby to challenge the belief that a woman's identity and her children's future necessarily depend upon a husband. When others argue that living independently would be disastrous for her children's education, Baby refuses to accept this assumption, when she states:

> After all, there are women without husbands who get on with their lives, aren't there?... Then there were others, among whom I count my father, who insisted that if I lived alone that would be disastrous for my children's education. To them my answer was: I'll see to it that they study. (Halder 113)

Her response demonstrates a growing confidence in her own capacity to provide for her family. Education, which had been denied to her in childhood, becomes something she is determined to secure for her children. Baby's resistance is not simply a rejection of marriage but an assertion of her ability to assume responsibilities traditionally associated with male authority. Her economic independence consequently becomes inseparable from her reconstruction of herself as an autonomous mother and decision-maker. Simone de Beauvoir's argument that women's liberation is inseparable from economic independence. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir contends that dependence on men perpetuates women's subordination, whereas access to productive labour enables them to emerge as autonomous subjects rather than passive objects (813). Halder's experiences

strongly affirm this proposition. While unpaid domestic labour confines her within oppressive marital relations, paid employment provides the material conditions necessary for self-respect, decision-making, and independence. The memoir therefore demonstrates that labour acquires emancipatory potential only when it frees women from patriarchal dependence and grants them control over their own lives.

Unlike the housewives, whose unpaid labour reinforces their dependence, Baby's paid work becomes a source of dignity and self-determination. The memoir thus suggests that resistance begins not by rejecting domestic labour itself but by reclaiming ownership over one's labour and the agency it can create.

V. WRITING THE SELF: LITERACY AS RESISTANCE

Autobiographical writing in *A Life Less Ordinary* functions as a site of resistance where the marginalized female self acquires voice, visibility, and agency. The memoir traces Baby's journey from an illiterate domestic worker to a published author, revealing literacy not merely as the acquisition of reading and writing skills but as the recovery of voice and subjectivity. Through autobiographical narration, Halder transforms experiences of marginalization into a discourse of self-representation, challenging the patriarchal structures that had long confined her to silence.

For much of her life, Baby's identity is defined by others as a daughter, wife, servant, and domestic worker. Her experiences remain invisible because they are restricted to the private sphere, where women's suffering is often dismissed as a personal matter rather than recognized as a social issue. A decisive change occurs when Prabodh Kumar encourages her to write about her life. What initially begins as a personal exercise gradually evolves into an act of reclaiming agency, enabling Baby to narrate her experiences in her own words rather than through patriarchal interpretations.

Writing also disrupts the traditional association between literacy and social privilege. Despite limited formal education, Baby demonstrates that lived experience constitutes an equally significant source of knowledge. Her narrative resists literary conventions that often marginalize working-class women, foregrounding instead the authenticity of everyday struggles. The publication of her autobiography transforms what she describes as her agonized life into a publicly acknowledged narrative (Halder 162). Private suffering thus acquires collective significance, exposing domestic violence, exploitation, and gender discrimination as structural realities rather than isolated personal experiences.

The political significance of Baby's autobiography lies in its refusal to remain silent. By documenting the realities of domestic abuse, economic exploitation, and gendered discrimination, she contests the patriarchal culture that expects women to endure suffering without protest. Her narrative challenges dominant representations of working-class women as passive victims and instead foregrounds resilience, reflection, and self-expression. The act of writing therefore becomes inseparable from the assertion of identity, allowing Baby to emerge as both the subject and author of her own history. Hooks argues that speaking from the margins is not simply an act of communication but a political gesture through which marginalized individuals reject imposed silence and claim authority over their own experiences (5-6). Baby's autobiography exemplifies this process. By articulating her lived realities, she resists the erasure historically imposed upon poor and working-class women and reclaims the power to define herself beyond patriarchal labels.

The memoir transcends the boundaries of personal life writing to become a feminist counter-discourse that interrogates and destabilizes dominant patriarchal ideologies. Halder demonstrates that literacy enables marginalized women not only to document oppression but also to reinterpret their identities on their own terms. Her autobiography thus positions self-writing as an intellectual and political practice through which silenced lives enter public discourse, transforming individual memory into collective feminist testimony.

VI. HOUSEWIVES AND BABY: DIVERGENT RESPONSES TO PATRIARCHAL HEGEMONY

A Life Less Ordinary presents two contrasting responses to patriarchy. The housewives accept domestic labour, marital violence, and economic dependence as inevitable aspects of womanhood, reproducing the gender norms that restrict their lives. Their identities remain confined to the roles of wives and caregivers, leaving little scope for selfhood beyond the household.

Baby's journey follows a different trajectory. Although she initially conforms to the same expectations, she gradually challenges them through paid labour, economic independence, and literacy. Her refusal to remain in an abusive marriage and her emergence as a writer distinguish her from the other women in the memoir. By transforming domestic labour into economic agency and personal experience into public testimony, Baby redefines what it means to be a woman within a patriarchal society.

The memoir thus suggests that while patriarchy is deeply entrenched, resistance becomes possible when women reclaim control over their labour, their voice, and ultimately, their identity.

VII. CONCLUSION

A Life Less Ordinary presents two contrasting trajectories of female existence under patriarchy. The housewives internalize domestic ideology, normalize violence, and reproduce patriarchal values through silence, obedience, and unpaid labour. Their lives illustrate Gramscian hegemony and Bourdieu's symbolic violence, revealing how domination persists because it becomes accepted as natural.

Baby Halder, however, chooses a radically different path. By rejecting domestic servitude, embracing wage labour, resisting marital violence, reclaiming literacy, and writing her autobiography, she reconstructs an identity beyond patriarchal definitions of womanhood. Her transformation validates Walby's understanding of domestic labour, Beauvoir's insistence upon economic independence, Millett's critique of sexual politics, Foucault's theory of disciplinary power, Hooks's politics of self-representation, and Woolf's vision of female intellectual autonomy.

The memoir ultimately demonstrates that resistance is not merely the rejection of oppression but the creation of an entirely new self. While the housewives remain confined within the ideological boundaries of domesticity, Baby swims against the current of patriarchal hegemony and emerges as an economically independent worker, an intellectual, and a writer. Her life becomes a testimony to the emancipatory potential of labour, literacy, and self-articulation.

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The Double as Other: Alterity, Doubling, and the Crisis of Identity in Edgar Allan Poe's Tale "*William Wilson*"

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Abstract— *The relationship between the Self and the Other has occupied a central position in philosophical, psychoanalytic, and literary theories of identity. This paper will advance beyond the classical conception of Otherness as a process whereby societies construct Otherness to subordinate and legitimize the exclusion of an external Other. Edgar Allan Poe's "William Wilson" offers a more inward and psychologically complex configuration of alterity which is localized within the contours of the schizophrenic Self through the figure of the double. The second William Wilson is simultaneously a rival, a moral counterforce, a reflection, and an unsettling counterpart to the narrator's identity. Drawing on concepts from Freud and Lacan's psychoanalysis and theorization of the uncanny, Sartre's philosophical insights, and Derrida's thoughts on difference and alterity, the paper examines how Poe destabilizes the opposition between Self and Other. It shifts attention from what the double represents to what the double does to the narrator's conception of identity. The double repeatedly interrupts the narrator's autonomy, appearing whenever the protagonist attempts to pursue his desires without moral or social restraint. His eventual attempt to eliminate the double consequently becomes an attempt to eliminate a constitutive part of himself. The final mirror scene makes this paradox explicit: in destroying the Other, the narrator discovers that he has destroyed himself. Poe's tale thus suggests that identity is neither autonomous nor self-contained but emerges through an unstable relationship with alterity. The ultimate aim of this paper, however, is to read Poe's story as a celebration of the idea that despite being a 'hell', the Other is always part and parcel of the Self's identity.*

Keywords— ***Alterity, Edgar Allan Poe, uncanny, identity, psychoanalysis, Doubling, literature***

I. INTRODUCTION

The distinction between the Self and the Other is fundamental in the philosophical, psychoanalytic, and literary discussions of identity. The Self is not constituted in isolation but rather becomes decipherable through difference, reflection, recognition, and interaction with what it perceives as the external Other. The concept of Alterity/Otherness has been approached differently among scholars and theorists, be they philosophers like Emanuel Levinas (1969), Friedrich Hegel (1977) and Jean Paul Sartre (1989), psychoanalytic theorists like Sigmund Freud (1955) and Jacques Lacan (1977), or post-colonial theorists like Edward Said (1978) and Homi Bhabha (1994). Having been mobilized and applied in different intellectual frameworks, the common postulation as regards the concept of alterity/Otherness is that it is indubitably a process of signification. That is to say, there is forever a process of negotiation and dialogue between the self and the Other insofar as the very act of departure from the Self towards the Other is *per se* an infinite process of signification and meaning-construction. In literary and cultural studies, for example, the Other has been examined as an external figure against whom the Self establishes its identity. Such approaches have been particularly vital in studies of race, colonialism, gender, and belonging. Yet alterity can also be located much closer to the subject. The Other may emerge not outside the Self but within it, as an internal difference

that destabilizes the subject's attempt to understand itself as unified and autonomous.

In this paper, nonetheless, the Other, particularly envisaged as an entity, will be broadened to include not only the Other localized outside the Self but also Otherness that exists within the Self, epitomized predominantly by the Alter ego and/or the double Self. In other words, this paper will advance beyond the commonly simplistic conception of Otherness as a process whereby societies construct Otherness to subjugate a particular community or legitimize the exclusion of another through mainly recognized mechanisms of stigmatization and Othering. This paper sets out to bring to light another type of Alterity, one that is not peripheral and remote from the Self but rather localized within the contours of the Self, conjuring, thus, Freud's theorizations concerning the apparatuses of Self as being made up psychologically of the ego, the id, and the alter/super ego. Edgar Allan Poe's "William Wilson" provides a creative literary representation of this inward form of alterity. First published in 1839, the tale narrates the life of a man who encounters another individual who bears his name and resembles him in appearance, manner, voice, and temperament. The paranoid and schizophrenic narrator, William Wilson, encounters William Wilson, his mirror image/Alter ego/Double self/Big Other, in childhood, and spends the rest of his life trying to escape from him, from one school to another and from one country to another. The second William Wilson repeatedly appears at moments when the narrator strives to exercise his freedom, pursue his desires, or engage in morally questionable conduct. He interferes with the narrator's ambitions and repeatedly jeopardizes his individuality and agency. Eventually, in a masquerade in Rome, the narrator attacks and apparently kills his double. Yet what seemed to be a destruction of the Other ironically turns out to be the narrator's own destruction.

Recent scholarship has explored Poe's "William Wilson**"** from several perspectives. Jones (2018), for example, interprets Poe's double as a figure associated with conscience and psychological struggle. Kennedy (2018) examines Poe's construction of terror as an analytical and psychological process. His approach is useful for "William Wilson" because the terror generated by the double does not depend solely on physical threat. Oliveira and Indrusiak (2019) approach "William Wilson" through Freud's concept of the uncanny, emphasizing the disturbing relationship between familiarity and strangeness. Building on this scholarship, the present paper strives to ask a somewhat different question: what does the double do to the relationship between the Self and the Other? Rather than treating the second Wilson simply as a manifestation of conscience, a psychological projection, or a supernatural antagonist, this article understands him as a figure of internal alterity. The double appears outside the narrator, but ironically his very existence incessantly returns the narrator to himself. He embodies an alterity that the narrator cannot successfully place outside his own identity. That said, we cannot help but raise a spectrum of inquiries such as: can the super/alter ego be regarded as an Other insofar as it curbs the self and limits its freedom and agency? Is the blaming voice we hear oftentimes from our inner self/alter ego whenever we are on the verge of a wicked act, a mere Other that seeks to annihilate, efface, and incarcerate the Self? Can we, put differently, live without the Alter ego and hence without the Other? How important is the Other for constructing and forging the identity of the self? Does the effacement of the Other entail the end of the Self? If no, can we, then, deem the very existence of the Self as being inherently and dialectically tied up to the very existence of the Other?

The article therefore argues that Poe's double transforms the conventional relation between Self and Other. William Wilson represents alterity as constitutive rather than merely oppositional. The Other is initially experienced by the narrator as a barrier to agency, superiority, and desire. Yet the narrative gradually unearths the way this Other is inseparable from the narrator's own identity. The attempt to eliminate the Other consequently becomes an attempt to establish a completely autonomous Self, an attempt that can ironically culminate in the annihilation of the self.

II. ALTERITY AND THE RELATIONAL CONSTITUTION OF THE SELF

To analyze Poe's *Williams Wilson* requires working with different theoretical frameworks. Hegel, Sartre, Freud, Lacan, and Derrida provide the conceptual and analytical vocabulary for understanding the philosophical problem dramatized by the tale. To begin with, it should be noted that Alterity is like meaning in that it makes no claim to fixated signification and finitude but rather celebrates non-fixity and infinitude. Given that its meaning is intrinsically surplus, in a Ricoeurian sense (1976), Alterity can also be viewed as an 'empty signifier' or 'floating signifier', deploying Levi-Strauss's neologism (1987), to indicate that the meaning of Alterity is incessantly changing and hence is not fixed. In the most general of terms, Alterity refers to the condition of being other or different, wherein the Self becomes recognizable through distinctions between itself and what it is not.

For Hegel (1977), the Other is not merely a mirror reflecting an already existing identity; rather, self-consciousness emerges through a struggle for recognition in which the subject becomes aware of itself through another

consciousness. That is to say, it is the Other who essentially sparks off the awakening of the self-conscious subject and the making/reaffirming of his identity. Therefore, there is a form of reciprocity, negotiation, and dialectic between the self and the other, entailing that the Self cannot exist without the Other and vice versa. This principle becomes particularly obvious in Poe's "William Wilson" when the narrator encounters his double. He does not encounter someone radically different but someone who resembles him so closely that the dissimilarity between Self and Other becomes blurred.

Hegel's popular "master-slave dialectic" posits that the Self only becomes fully conscious through recognition by the Other. He maintains, "Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged" (1977, 111). Emmanuel Levinas (1969; 1985), however, pushes this ethical framework further. For him, the interaction with the Other is not just a site of mutual formation, but the very basis of ethics. Alterity, for Levinas, is thus inherently irreducible and always beyond the grasp of the Self.

Levinas's ethical philosophy challenges the dominance of ontology and epistemology by arguing that responsibility toward the Other precedes knowledge and comprehension. He posits that ethics serves as the foundation of the relationship between the Self and the Other, and argues that this relationship is irreducible, as it cannot be quantified or understood. Levinas' understanding of Alterity is further underpinned by the concepts of '*exteriority'* and '*transcendence*' towards the Other. (1969). This perspective emphasizes the idea that the transcendental Other remains perpetually beyond the self's grasp. Regardless of the Self's efforts to comprehend and grasp the Other, this Other remains an enigma, perpetually eluding the grasp of the Self.

Derrida extends this problem of irreducible difference through his theory of *différance.* Derrida asserts that '*diffèrance'* is an inherent characteristic of all human signifying systems and practices, as language itself is inherently grounded in a system of free play and differences. Hence, signification, including the meaning of the Other, is intrinsically unattainable and unstable. The meaning of the Other constantly evolves beyond the boundaries and contours of time and space. Influenced by Levinasian ethics, what is noteworthy in Derrida's ideas in relation to Otherness is his contention that we are all Others to one another. As he puts it, "every other is every other other, is altogether other." (1995, 68). Poe's narrative dramatizes this problem precisely. The narrator tries to establish an absolute distinction between himself and the second Wilson, but the more he attempts to do so, the more the narrative reveals their connection. Sartre offers another influential account of the Other by focusing on the conflict between self-consciousness and external perception. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre argues that the gaze of the Other transforms the subject from a free consciousness into an object of perception. The Other is therefore both necessary for self-awareness and threatening to personal autonomy. This tension is famously expressed in Sartre's play *No Exit*, where the character Garcin declares, "L'enfer, c'est les autres" ("Hell is other people") (1949, 47).

Psychoanalytic theory further complicates the relationship between self and Other by locating alterity within the subject itself. Freud's concept of the uncanny provides a different but complementary perspective. The uncanny arises when something familiar becomes strange or when what has been repressed returns in an unsettling form (1955, 217–256). The double is one of the most important embodiments of this process. A duplicate of the Self is simultaneously familiar and alien. Following Freud, Lacan confounds the problem by emphasizing that subjectivity itself is constituted via relations of identification and alterity. Lacan upholds that there are two types of Other; one is labeled as the Big Other (*Autre*) and the second is the little Other (*autre*); (Lacan 1977, 1–7). The Little Other is "the other who is not really other, but a reflection and projection of the Ego", while the Big Other designates 'radical Alterity', an otherness which transcends the illusory Otherness of the imaginary because it cannot be assimilated through identification''. This distinction is important because the second Wilson should not simply be identified with Lacan's "Big Other." The Big Other refers primarily to the symbolic order—the field of language, law, and social structures within which the subject becomes intelligible. The second Wilson is better understood as a figure through whom the narrator encounters the instability of his own subjectivity. He is an embodied counterpart who repeatedly exposes the limits of the narrator's fantasy of autonomy.

Through these theoretical underpinnings, Poe's "William Wilson" can be understood as a narrative of failed self-mastery and agency. The double represents not merely a psychological anomaly or supernatural figure but a philosophical confrontation with alterity itself. Together, these approaches demonstrate that Poe's tale anticipates modern theories of identity by portraying the self as relational, fragmented, and inseparable from the presence of the Other.

III. THE SELF BEFORE THE GENESIS OF THE DOUBLE

From the very outset of the tale, the narrator, William Wilson, who seems to undergo a kind of paranoia and psychosis (a particular mental status qualified as neurosis to utilize a Freudian word) takes us back throughout his childhood and depicts his personality with a set of negative images and associations which he says are inherited from his parents. The narrator constructs himself as an individual characterized by willfulness, ambition, passion, and a desire for domination to the extent that even his parents failed to curb his evil propensities. As he retrospectively puts it,

> I gave evidence of having fully inherited the family character. As I advanced in years it was more strongly developed; becoming…a cause of serious disquietude to my friends, and of positive injury to myself. I grew self-willed, addicted to the wildest caprices, and a prey to the most ungovernable passions. Weak-minded, and beset with constitutional infirmities akin to my own, my parents could do but little to check the evil propensities which distinguished me. (1839, 1)

These negative characteristics of the Narrator as the Self go hand in hand with the Self's desire for freedom, independence, and domination. Accordingly, the school was the space in which this identity is performed and wherein he could project his evil propensities. By so doing, he earns not only power and despotism but also a sense of superiority over his fellow students. These characteristics establish a conception of the Self based upon autonomy. The narrator wants to act according to his own desires rather than submit to external authority. His identity is therefore constructed through freedom and superiority. Nonetheless, William's sense of freedom, superiority, and authority is threatened and rather destabilized by the sudden appearance of a rival, an Other whose name is, like the narrator, Williams Wilson. The second William Wilson therefore does not simply introduce competition. The double thus appears at the precise point where the narrator's conception of himself as singular begins to fail.

IV. THE IDENTICAL OTHER AS A THREAT TO THE SELF: *THE OTHER IS HELL*

The paranoid narrator, having fully recognized the existence of a competitor and imagined Other, felt that his freedom, superiority, and power were at stake of being annihilated by this Other. For the narrator/self, this Other signifies rebellion, resistance, and a source of embarrassment; hence the narrator is intimidated by this Other who, put it differently, jeopardizes the superiority of his Self. In fact, this feeling of being endangered by the existence of an Other who possesses the same qualities as the Self, and who is the emblem of resistance, epitomizes the perpetually eternal struggle between the Self and the Other. In this regard, the narrator maintains, 'Stepped he (the Other) in between me and my ambition!" *(*1839, *12).* This structure resembles Sartre's conception of the Other as a challenge to the subject's freedom. What is significant about this Other, as we shall find out later on towards the end of the tale, is that this Other is but the double Self or the unconscious of the narrator who, as above-mentioned, suffers from neurosis. This Other is different from other Others insofar as this Other is not different from the Self, but equal and identical to the Self. The narrator describes the uncanny similarities:

> The same name! the same contour of person! the same day of arrival at the academy! And then his dogged and meaningless imitation of my gait, my voice, my habits, and my manner! Was it, in truth, within the bounds of human possibility, that what I now was the result, merely, of the habitual practice of this sarcastic imitation? (1839, 8)

The narrator's response unearths the fact that identity is already rooted in difference. He wants the name "William Wilson" to identify him uniquely. The existence of another William Wilson makes that uniqueness impossible. The significance of the double lies in the fact that the narrator cannot simply dismiss him as another person. The resemblance is rather excessive. He shares the narrator's name, appearance, manner, and many characteristics. The narrator therefore encounters not an ordinary Other but an Other who threatens the very basis upon which he distinguishes himself from others. To confront the menace inflicted by this Other/ Williams Wilson/double self, the narrator/Williams /the Self maintained that he used to tell superficially funny jokes about the Other so as to induce pain in the Other. This later idea reflects how the Self is always seeking to demolish the Other before the Other can destroy the Self, thus signifying perpetual conflicts. The second Wilson is represented as being powerful with no 'Heel of Achilles', and this even renders the effacement of the Other almost an impossible endeavor. The double therefore reverses the conventional structure of alterity. The Other is normally imagined as someone whose difference allows the Self to recognize itself as distinct. In *William Wilson,* however, the Other is threatening because difference cannot be secured and maintained. This unstable position produces the tale's central paradox.

V. THE AMBIVALENT OTHER AND THE CRISIS OF IDENTITY

The narrator's relationship with his double is not simply one of hatred, but profoundly ambivalent. He fears the second Wilson because he cannot defeat him easily. Yet he also recognizes qualities in the double that he does not possess himself. Given the sameness and startling congenialities between the Self and the Other, the second Wilson will undeniably 'thwart, astonish, and mortify the self' and hence serves as an obstruction for the Self in its endeavors to attain its ambitions and desires. The narrator helplessly utters, "I secretly felt that I feared him, and could not help thinking the equality which he maintained so easily with myself, a proof of his true superiority; since not to be overcome cost me a perpetual struggle" (1839, 4).

Nevertheless, despite the Other bringing about an incessant anxiety for the Self through rivalry, the Self "couldn't hate him altogether" (1839, 5). Ambivalently enough, the dignity of the Other is ubiquitous throughout the tale. This dignity is somewhat patent when the Narrator senses that although he has triumphed in more or less all quarrels, which gives him a sense of pride, satisfaction, and domination, unequivocally it is the second Wilson who deserves to triumph. Moreover, the narrator cannot bring himself to hate this Other, although it is a source of terror and like 'hell', as Sartre claims. The narrator cannot simply hate him because the qualities that make the double threatening are also qualities that the narrator cherishes and celebrates. This attraction and repulsion dialectic foregrounds the ambivalent relationship between the self and the Other/double Self. Freud's theory of the uncanny helps explain this emotional contradiction. The uncanny is not simply the unknown. It is the familiar defamiliarized. The second Wilson is frightening because the narrator recognizes something of himself in him. The double therefore represents the return of an identity the narrator cannot acknowledge. This also explains why the narrator repeatedly attempts to flee. "I fled in vain. My evil destiny pursued me" (1839, 12).

Williams admits, while referring to the second Wilson, that it is "difficult, indeed, to define or even to describe my real feelings towards him (1839, *5).* This quote is very much telling of how the Self's exteriority towards the Other, in Derridean sense, is deferral, mysterious, and out of reach in the sense that despite the self's desire to know and apprehend the Other, this Other is always irreducible and mystifying. The narrator goes on to say that "He…was, for many anxious months, a riddle I could not resolve" (1839, 5*).* This language of uncertainty is central to the tale. The narrator seeks to identify the Other, but the Other resists definitive identification. As he asks, "But who and what was this, Wilson? and whence came he? and what were his purposes? Upon neither of these points could I be satisfied" (1839, 9). To mobilize Levinas and Derrida, this lack of final resolution is significant. The second Wilson cannot simply be transformed into an object of knowledge. The attempt to know the Other always encounters something that escapes complete conceptualization and understanding.

Williams Wilson, the narrator, loses his personal identity when he discovers a classmate, who later on turns out to be his Double Self, shares not only his name but also his physical appearance and manner of speaking. A name signifies and establishes individuality. It distinguishes one person from another and provides a symbolic marker of identity. In Poe's tale, however, the name is duplicated. The narrator is deeply troubled by this duplication: "I felt angry with him for bearing the name and doubly disgusted with the name because a stranger bore it. (1839, 5*).* The second Wilson's possession of the same name therefore produces a symbolic crisis.

This inexorably foregrounds how the identity of the Self is radically affected by the mere presence of the Other. Williams continues to reject any congeniality between his Self and the second Wilson in terms of identity; he emphasizes, "the feeling of vexation, thus engendered grew stronger with every circumstance tending to show resemblance, moral or physical, between my rival and myself" (1839, 5*).* The imagined Other, who is ironically the Self, in his imitation of the self induces the self with an overwhelming feeling of embarrassment that affects the identity of the self negatively. He writes, "Wilson's rebellion was to me a source of the greatest embarrassment*'' (1839, 4).* This is where the tale's treatment of alterity becomes sophisticated. By demonstrating that identity cannot be reduced to uniqueness, the Other does not merely threaten the Self from outside but from within.

VI. THE DOUBLE AS MORAL COUNTERFORCE

As it will be obvious towards the closing scene of the tale, the second Wilson, whom the Self considers as a threat, an impediment, and a rival, is not bona fide in the sense that the congenialities existing between the Self and the double Self are recognized only by the Self. As the narrator maintains,

> How greatly this most exquisite portraiture harassed me, (for it could not justly be termed a caricature,) I will not now venture to describe. I had but one consolation —in the fact that the imitation, apparently, was noticed by

> myself alone, and that I had to endure only the knowing and strangely sarcastic smiles of my namesake himself. (1839, 6)

This thrust us to regard this Other not as an external character but as a mere construction of the paranoid imagination of the Self to protect himself from the irrepressible behaviors of his dark side. Drawing on psychoanalysis, the formation of a double self is a strategy for the Self to defend himself from the destruction of the ego. In this creational process, the double Self serves as the manifestation of the ego's repressed desires and fantasies, finding eloquent expression in a human form, which is but the Other.

Poe's tale evidently draws our attention to how the imagined Other is but the Alter ego and the Big Other in the Lacanian sense. The concept of alter ego is of great significance in this symbolic tale. It denotes the part of the Self that curbs the ego's malign desires. In *William Wilson*, the narrator, as the embodiment of the ego/Self, maintains that the second Wilson, as the incarnation of the Alter ego, interferes in the will of the Self in the form of hinted advice. Jones (2018) identifies precisely this dimension of Poe's doubles, emphasizing their function as conscience or an inner judge. The second Wilson's interventions are ethically crucial because they occur when the narrator is on the verge of morally destructive behaviors. The double does not merely follow the narrator at random; rather, his appearances coincide with moments when the narrator is about to violate moral or social boundaries. As the narrator observes: "This interference often took the ungracious character of advice; advice not openly given, but hinted or insinuated." (1839,6). Furthermore, the narrator acknowledges that his life would have been better had he listened to the whispers of the Other/Alter ego, which highlights the role of the Other in the survival of the Self, and bears witness, as well, to the ambivalent stance of the Self towards the Other who is both a source of menace and a source of wisdom and morality.

Alterity and the Limits of the Autonomous Self

The last scene in *Williams Wilson* is tremendously emblematic and enthralling, in which the narrator/Self unexpectedly encounters the second Wilson in a masquerade wearing a similar costume. The setting becomes symbolic insofar as the masquerade serves as a space of disguise and performance. In the ending's visual climax, and while feeling intense anxiety, the narrator drags the Double Self into a room, then stabs him, assuming the death of his antagonist, whereas ironically and tragically the narrator, after looking at the mirror, realizes that he had murdered himself. While dying, the Double Self incongruously addresses the Self and says "You have conquered, and I yield. Yet, henceforward art thou also dead-dead to the World, to Heaven and to Hope! In me didst thou exist-and, in my death, see by this image, which is thine own, how utterly thou hast murdered thyself'' (1839, 14). The mirror is therefore not merely a decorative Gothic object but rather it becomes the material symbol of the Self/Other relationship. This climactic tragic scene can be understood symbolically as questioning and hinting at the key role of the Other in the formation of the Self and subjectivity. It appears to postulate that the Self cannot live without the Other, and that the effacement of the Other will lead inevitably to the death of the Self. The article therefore proposes that the final destruction of the double should be read not simply as the destruction of conscience or the triumph of evil but as the collapse of the distinction between Self and Other. Poe's final mirror scene demonstrates the impossibility of an autonomous Self by showing that the attempt to eliminate the Other results in the destruction of the Self. Poe's tale therefore challenges the idea that freedom means complete independence from others. It is in this sense that Hegel's (1977) account of recognition is useful. It suggests that self-consciousness cannot be achieved in complete detachment from others. The Self requires another consciousness through which it can recognize itself.

Ultimately, the tale consequently complicates Sartre's formulation of the Other as a source of conflict. The Other can indeed be experienced as "hell," but Poe suggests that the absence of the Other would not necessarily produce freedom and agency. It could instead lead to the annihilation of the Self. The narrator discovers too late that the Other he experiences as hell is also the Other through whom his identity has been sustained. Significantly, the existence of the double makes the issue of identity impossible to understand through individuality alone. It is in this sense that Identity therefore becomes relational, echoing the Derridean approaches of identity and difference.

VII. CONCLUSION

In the light of all that has been said thus far, E.A. Poe's tale *William Wilson* remains undoubtedly a fascinating story of Alterity and the split of identity. It offers a complex philosophical and literary perspective on how the double Self and Alter ego sparked off by the paranoid Self can essentially be viewed as but the Other of the Self, thus breaking the conventional conception of the Other as an entity that exists principally outside the Self. Poe transforms the conventional opposition between Self and Other into a relationship in which the Other is ambivalent; simultaneously external and internal, rival and reflection,

threat and necessity. William Wilson, the hero, is in dialectical tension between the wicked Self and the alter ego; a conflict which led eventually to the annihilation of the Self, symbolizing the significance of the Other for the survival of the self. The present article has extended the debates on Poe's tale by conceptualizing the double as a figure of internal alterity. If the narrator attempts to establish himself as an autonomous self by excluding the Other, the latter continually becomes omnipresent. This perspective becomes significant when considered through theories of recognition and alterity.

The final mirror scene thus becomes the ultimate symbol of Poe's conception of identity. The Self sees itself only through an image that is simultaneously itself and another. The mirror does not simply confirm identity; it destabilizes and problematizes it. Poe's tale suggests that identity is never completely independent, that difference is internal to selfhood, and that the desire to eradicate the Other may ultimately lead to annihilation of the Self.

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Saint Mavji of Vagad and 'Mini-Kumbh' Beneshwar in Rajasthan

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Abstract— *Rajasthan is the sacred land of valour and illustrious rulers such as Maharana Pratap, Rana Sanga, Sawai Jai Singh, and Udai Singh, whose courage, resistance, and contributions left an enduring mark on medieval Indian history. However, alongside it is developed a rich and influential tradition of saints, devotees, and spiritual gurus. As a result large numbers of devotees has emerged and begin to follow their spiritual paths. This Guru- Shishya tradition has flourished across different regions, attracting and giving rise to diverse forms of religious and devotional expression. The Bhakti movement emerged as a powerful spiritual and social force in Southern Rajasthan to counter and suppress religious orthodoxy, social inequalities, and political upheavals. Saint tradition especially in Vagad region flourished by Saint Mavji (nishklank sampradaya), Swami Swatantratanand, Guru Baleshwar Dayal, Guru Govind Giri, Surmal Das and Gavri Bai (meera of Vagad) emphasized on personal devotion, faith and the divinity through three forms Saguna, Nirguna and Mishrit Bhakti etc. It contributed considerably to the religious, cultural, and social aspects of Southern Rajasthan hitherto.*

Keywords— ***folk, moksha, vagad, spirituality, divinity, mythology, saint tradition.***

In Indian philosophy, *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama* and *Moksha* are considered to be the four *purusharthas*. Any human being can achieve *moksha* by achieving these four *purusharth* and living a virtuous life in the society, this has remained the basis of spiritual life in Indian tradition.

In the ancient time, Indian culture has been attacked and tainted by foreign invasions. India, rich in knowledge and science, could not keep its shining image intact during the period of slavery of various invaders and as a result our knowledge and science got damaged and with the passage of time all this remained stored in limited hands or almost disappeared and the public mind became confused and bewildered.(Pandya 2)

At such a time, as always, the era of many reformers came in the country and in this country the saint -tradition took the soul of the country; played an important role in awakening the culture in public life and spreading vigour. Some people called it a religious reform movement, while some called it a movement for public awakening. Whatever may be the case; many saints and priests became a ray of light in the fog and worked for the upliftment of the people. In this, the saints and sages worked as motivators in various fields.[1]

Saint Mavji :

In current scenario Saint Mavji of Vagad in southern Rajasthan shines as a great poet, saint and divine element. Even three centuries could not dim it. This essence itself brings Mavji from the ordinary to the special category. This is the reason that today Beneshwar has emerged on the national map as another v*rindavan*. In the form of a collection of twenty tiny and huge articles has emerged in this divine *Kumbh* of Vagad region's Beneshwar. Guru's grace, his preaches and the feelling of mavostsav rejoices in Vagad's heart. Similar to *tulsidal*, *harimandir gokul*, *benka braj*, and *triveni saket*. Hence, this credit goes to Peethadheeshwar ji because he performed the triple duty of being a disciple, successor and religious guru with

[1] Pandya, Ashok. *Mavamreet*. Mavji Foundation. Sabla, 2024. p.4.

indomitable courage to make the Mav literature preserved for centuries accessible to all and limitless.

Saam Sagar, *Megh Sagar*, *Prem Sagar*, *Ratan Sagar* and *Anant Sagar* are handwritten and illustrated five epics composed with emotions, which are the unique literary heritage of the Vagdi dialect. In these texts, *krishna leela, mav saurabh, kalidaman, rasleela, virah-vedana*, s*wadham gaman* and b*havishya darshan* are written chapter by chapter in different verses and ragas. *Kalenga Prakaran, Shiv Samar, Ganesh Tadan* are unavailable. *Dharti Vivah* and *Samvad* are also invaluable treasures of *Mav* literature. Similarly, *Moongal Purana* is also the creation of Mavji. This style painted and described on cloth amazes the human mind. This Purana, preserved for centuries wrapped in cloth in a long hollow bamboo node, is a visible sight. This is the maternal home of Mavji's prophecies. Relevant coloured paintings show his art and skill, while his musical practice is revealed through his melodiousness. This diversity of Mavji makes him completely different from other poets, artists, musicians, thinkers and saints. The devotee and the man of the age experience an unforgettable experience in his creations, and this is what too resonates the extra-human divine part in him. This is the reason why he is called a special incarnation of Lord Krishna. His scattered creations include seven hundred and fifty booklets and many vanis.[2]

Mavji's writing style is unique and unusual. His ability to express the voice of his inner self through writing is exceptional. He wrote small letters with his eyebrows, large letters with his fingers, and also used his thumbs, toes, and braided hair to create pictures. It is sais that he used twelve bundles of paper while making these *chopda*. Mavji's original writings are rare and mostly not understood by his disciples, who added their own content when transcribing. The writings by the disciples based on Mavji's originals are known as Mavji's *Chopda*. Mavji composed more than seven hundred texts, mostly prophetic predictions called Mavji's *Bhakhani*. The number of these prophecies is said to be 7.166 million. The sayings collected in the Chopads were written by Mavji in three and a half days. (Bhanawat 94)

Sant Mavji is undoubtedly exceptional example of social reform, St. Mavji established the Nishkalank community and done unique work in the field of devotion, knowledge, wealth, preaching, social reform. Divine soul St. Mavji was born in Sabla town of Dungarpur district of Rajasthan state in *Samvat* 1771, but Mavji himself has mentioned his birth in some lines of Agamvani written by him. On the basis of Agamvani, Sant Mavji was born on Monday, Samvat 1784. Sat Mavji was born in a poor Brahmin family. His father's name was Dalam Rishi and mother's name was Kesar Ba (mother). Shri Mavji used to perform leelas like Lord Shri Krishna since childhood, due to which the people of the village were impressed by Mavji and started chanting his name. The birth of Sant Mavji is clear from these lines of *agamvani*-

(1)

jyaare dashamen naaraayanajee nu nikanlakee naam re,
kshetr sabalaapuree paatan gaam re.
uttam nyaat re maata keshar maat re,
jyaare pita daalam rshi nikalankeejee ne taat re,
sanvat satrahaso ne chauraasee (1784) no saal re,
maagh re maas may ujalo paakh re,
tet ekaadashee hari ne vaar somavaar re,
shunk lagn mein amarat jog re,
makar lagn no malyon sanjog re,
sahaje guroo hari ne satiya sur re,
kaaya kalp hari ne mukhade tambol re, jyaare hanumant bhaav pragato nij dhaam re,
tyaare tya dhaneeye dharyon dashamon avataar re.

(2)

Beneshwar se benako,
Som Mahi ko ghat,
abudaron che aad no,
tya jo jo mari vaat

(3)

Ane are samariyaji kahan gaya re,
amne aay hata re nirvaan,
ane arek amne aay hta re,
pal me alap thya re nirvaan.
ane arek kudam na Jaad ne,
sankhiyo pusan lagi vaat.
ane jani vaate maro valo gayo re
teni vaate maro walo gayo re,
teni vaate kankav na pagla.
ane arek abudare jaiye re,
sankiyon bhakti kariye ne apaar.[3]

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[2] Pandya, Ashok. *Mavamrit*. Mavji Foundation, 2024, p.15

[3] Upendra *saad. Raas Raseshwar Saint Mavji. p.3*

Mav Manohar Mavji became the source of spreading the *vaishnav* devotion in the entire region and spread Hinduism and Hindu culture. People started considering Mavji as a deity, according to popular belief, Mavji was the form of Nilanka incarnation, hence Saint Mavji was a man of great stature, an expert in Lord Krishna's literature, art, prophet, astrology and astronomer. Saint Mavji had made many predictions which are coming true in the present times. Whatever Mavji wrote is proving to be true. Sant Mavji's predictions were written down by his then disciples and communities and not only this, many self-composed Krishna Bhakti Padma Govind songs and kirtans sung in various ragmalas were also written down. The same Beneshwar Dham became the main center for the creation and sadhana of these texts of Saint Mavji. Today Beneshwar valley is known as a holy pilgrimage in the form of Vrindavan Dham.

It is present here and it has become the ultimate pilgrimage. Beneshwar Dham has been the place of penance of Saint Mavji. Where there is the *Triveni Sangam* of three rivers Som, Mahi and Jakham. According to popular belief, in *Dwaparyug*, Shri Krishna disappeared while playing Raas with Radhikaji and all the *Gopiya*. In this Kaliyug, Lord Shri took the form of Mavji and Mavji met Goddesses Radhika and Gopiya at this *Triveni* Krishna *Sangam* and completed the incomplete Raas on *Sunaiya* Mountain. The people of Vagad region are fortunate who are living their lives at the birthplace of Lord Mavji. Saint Mavji wrote down 72 lakh 66 thousand on paper with ink and bamboo pen.

Shri Hari Mandir is situated at this holy confluence area of Som, Mahi and Jakham which was built in 1850 by Janakunwari, daughter-in-law of the famous Saint Mavji Maharaj. Mavji Maharaj established the throne of his Maharas-Panth in this monastery. The illustrated copy of Maharas Leela Granth written by Sant Mavji is preserved in this Hari Mandir. Manuscripts of texts related to Sant Mavji are preserved in Mavji temple of Punjpur, temple located in Banswara town and Hari Mandir of Sheshpur village, 5 km away from Salumbar district of Mewar. Sant Mavji spent the last days of his life in this Sheshpur village. His last rites were performed on the bank of the pond of this Sheshpur village. Lord Nishkalk temple was also built at the Samadhi Sthal of Mavji. Another Hari Mandir related to Sant Mavji Maharaj has also been constructed in this village. According to popular belief, there is a self-created idol of Lord Nishkalank in this temple. Every year on Magh Purnima, a grand fair is held at the Triveni Sangam of Som Mahi and Jakham. This is called 'Vagad Ka Kumbh' in which devotees from states like Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and foreign tourists come in large numbers to witnessed the grand fair. They praised the environment and culture of Vagad. The birth of Sant Mavji (Mav Manohar) has been clarified in Agamvani. Mavji Maharaj, the incarnation of Lord Krishna, had four marriages; the first marriage was done by Mavji in a dream. Sant Mavji had received the light of d*ev Vaani*. Due to which Mavji did a lot of penance, Mavji Maharaj had two great disciples whose names were Jeevandas and Kehridas, it is said that with the help of disciple Jeevandas, he got 420 kg of paper and composed the texts. Mavji Maharaj wrote about 750 Chaupadas (texts), in which there were 5 main Chaupadas, in these Chaupadas the complete Aagamvani is written.

According to popular belief, Saint Mavji Maharaj went to a small village named Bhitwata near Surpur Gram Panchayat of Dungarpur, where he worshipped the self-manifested Shivalinga of Lord Mahadev and established a dhuni and started penance there. There is also a confluence of two rivers in the same Bhitwata village. Mavji Maharaj performed many miracles, due to which the king of Dungarpur imprisoned Mavji Maharaj. But due to penance, he disappeared from there and went to Bhitwata, and again he was imprisoned and asked to go to Gap Sagar. The face of the incomparable Hanumanji is towards the north, which is located on the embankment of Gap Sagar of Dungarpur. After this, Mavji Maharaj heard insulting words about the king. There he cursed famine by dropping his two footwear on the bank of Gapsagar. Thereafter he settled on the Dholagarh Mountain situated in Sheshpur village of Salumber district and Mavji's prophecies were written. Mavji Maharaj got 42 *mun* of paper from Sheshpur village by his two great disciples Jeevandas and Kehridas and the paper was loaded in a bullock cart by the residents of Sheshpur and taken to Dholagarh. In this way, today everyone is familiar with the prophecies of Chaupadas. He use a flag which has seven types of colors. These seven colors indicates prosperity and unity not only the vagad region but also the entire world. Every year on the spring season, the seven-coloured flag is worshipped and it is hoisted on the temple at *beneshwar dham*.

Mavji's Five Epics: Saint Mavji wrote prophecies while living in the Cave of Dholagarh Mountain in mewar region, which is called *agamvani* meaning 'miracles to happen in future'. Mavji maharaj had his two disciple's jeevandas and kehridas bring 42 *mun* of paper from Sheshpur village of mewar and the holy writing was transported to D*holagarh* Mountain with the help of bullock cart by the people residing in *sheshpur*.

After this, Mavji Maharaj wrote a total of 750 Gutkas and 5 huge main Chaupadas from 42 maunds of paper. The

main five Chaupadas (texts) written by Saint Mavji are as follows-

1. Sam Sagar: This is the largest text among the Chaupadas written by Lord Mavji Maharaj, which is still safe in Sheshpur village of Mewar region of Rajasthan state of India, which is called Hepor in Wagdi. This Chaupad (scripture) describes the Dholagarh Mountain situated in Sheshpur village of Mewar, which contains the knowledge of divine speech. According to popular belief, Mavji Maharaj built Shri Hari temple, Shiv temple and Brahmaji temple on Dholagarh Mountain for his penance and wrote all the texts while living in the caves of the mountain. Just as the temple is decorated on Dholagarh Mountain, on the same lines a temple is situated on Beneshwar Dham.

2. Prem Sagar: This is the second largest text among the Chaupadas written by Lord Mavji Maharaj which is safe in Punjpur village of Dungarpur. In which Lord Mavji has given symbolic information about religious sermons, geography, historical and future events. Mavji Maharaj has written about religion.

3. Megh Sagar: This is the third major book among the *Chaupadas* written by Bhagwan Mavji Maharaj, is preserved in Shri Hari Mandir in Sabla village of Dungarpur. In this book, Mavji has written many predictions along with Geeta Updesh and geographical changes.

4. Ratan Sagar: This is the fourth major book among the *Chaupadas* written by Bhagwan Mavji Maharaj, which is preserved in Vishwakarma Mandir situated on Tripolia Road in Banswara district. In this book, Mavji Maharaj has given a beautiful description of colorful paintings, scenes of Raasleela and Krishna Leelas.

5. Anant Sagar: This is the fifth largest book among the Chaupadas written by Bhagwan Mavji Maharaj. Bajirao Peshwa was taking this book with him during the Maratha invasion. But when the British came to know that there was a saint named Mavji who had written many miraculous books, among them Anant Sagar was written in which all the innovative plans of knowledge and science are written. As soon as the Britishers came to know about this, they defeated the Marathas and took this book with them to London. It is believed that Anant Sagar is still safe in a museum in London.

His Prophesies:

Saint Mavji has told many prophesy which is turned out to be correct. some of his prophesies are mentioned below:

- *jameen aasman no pardo tutsi*.

Mavji Maharaj has pointed towards the degradation of ozone layer and depicts that it will go weaker in near future.

- *Bhet me bhabhuka footasi*

Saint mavji has explained that the water has been flown out from the walls which is true as the water suppplied from tap and showers in houses. Due to this people have no requirement to go to the river and wells for water collection.

- *Doriye deeva barasi*

He indicates that the electricity will flow through wires and cables.

- *purab paschim vayra bajsi sarve vaani farsi re.*

He states that cultural shift will occured and the distance among continents and east west zone will follow each other.

- *vayre vaate thayga maharaj.*

He aslo predicted that two and more people can able to contact each other wirelessly which is true after the invention of mobile devices.

- *paravat gari ne pani hosi.*

He stongly argues that the iceberg will shattered and the sea level will rise due to extrem heat, global warming and al-nino effect.

- *bada ni sir thaki bhar utarasi.*

Mavji has explained that the scientific inventions and machinery will took place of traditional ways of farming by bulls and cultivators.

- *dharti tamba varni hosi.*

It means the color of mother earth will change due to severe heat, temperature rising and extreme weather conditions.

So, there are many more prophesies has been found in his *chaupadas* which is remarkble to read.

Painter:

His paintings are present in the form of books of *Ragamala*, *Ragaragini*, *Geet Govind*, *Raasleela*, *Cheerharan*, procession, gods and goddesses are mesmerizing.

Reformist: Saint Mavji tried to make education easy for the fallen, Dalit and deprived sections of the society. He established a Peeth in Beneshwar. It is known from the scriptures that he was only 14 years old at that time. He gave the title of 'Saad' meaning 'pure and dear to God' to his followers. He himself worked to eradicate the evils, bad customs, untouchability, widow remarriage and inter-caste marriages etc. prevalent in the society through his

message. Many of the marriage related folklore told by them gives an idea about its prevention. The geography related Phads written by him are known as 'Bhungal Purana', is a subject of research for the present modern science.

Philosopher: Saint Mavji was also a great philosopher. According to him, divine realization is very complex. After meeting God, the soul becomes one with Him and cannot take rebirth. He has indicated the world as a web of illusion. All the passion, hatred, attachment and material things prevalent here are all useless. The proximity of God is the eternal truth. Liberation from worldly affection is possible only by worshiping and loving God. Monotheistic: According to him, there can be many ways of devotion but there is only one God. He is the creator of all living beings and ultimately all living beings have to merge in Him.

Ethical: Mavji stressed on the renunciation of eating living beings and consuming meat and alcohol. According to him, those who do this act are liable for bad consequences. He supported the feeling of compassion towards living beings and kindness towards all human beings. He called such people 'Bhagat'. He made many efforts for the upliftment of women in the society. He also worked in this field to end the evil practices like polygamy, purdah system, child marriage and buying and selling of girls. He himself also worked to give direction to the society by marrying a widow.

Devotive: Examples of Nirgun Bhakti stream are found in the verses composed by Sant Mavji. But he used to send the path of knowledge, devotion and good conduct to the uneducated common people through Sagun Bhakti. By getting absorbed in God, he used to forget all the experiences and get lost in himself. He had separated himself from the material things through yoga and meditation and used to spend most of his time in devotion, religious preaching and social work. Addtition to these being a yogi, he was a strong opponent of superstition. In his devotional works and thoughts, the confluence of Bhagwat's incarnation, Upanishads' monism and Geeta's selfless Karmayog is also visible.

Untouchability Preventor: Many classes adopt different works to earn their livelihood, like Harijan class does the work of cleaning garbage, leather workers remove the skin of dead animals, cobblers do the work of making shoes, but in the society, such disgusting work was considered untouchable and impure. Weavers do the sacred work of making clothes on their looms with pure yarn, yet the upper caste people used to touch the woven clothes made by them only after sprinkling water and purifying them. Bhils (tribals) were also considered inferior and were looked upon with evil eyes and were oppressed. They did not have the right to worship. Saint Mavji gave the right to these weavers (Balaiyas) to worship and perform Raas Leela and blew the trumpet of new hope, new consciousness for the upliftment of backward, downtrodden castes, social reform. He gave them the right to wear Hathkanthi, Janeu Mala and called them Saad (devotees). These 'Saad' wear white turbans and wear white clothes. They do not drink alcohol, smoke, eat meat and worship the pure Magwan. The sect established by Mavji Maharaj about 300 years ago is still running in the same form. Hari Mandir is also present in Saint Mavji's Sabla, which is present at the foothills of Sunaiya mountain. Where Dhuni has been established. Penance and Raas Leela were also performed here.

Beneshwar Dham:

Beneshwar the tribal pilgrimage is located in navatapara village near Sabla town in Dungarpur district, which is the confluence of *mahi*, *som* and *jakham* rivers. This has been the place of penance of Mavji, who is also considered to be the incarnation of Lord Krishna during *kalyug*. The prophecies made in the *Chaupada* of Mavji seem to be true today. St. Mavji is worshipped like a god by the tribals of vagad and disciples are made *mahant* under the *Gadi* tradition. Currently, Shri St. achyutanand is seated as *Gadipati*. His residence is located in *hari* temple of sabla town. Earlier, the gurukul was also in operation here. He is carrying out the tradition as the ninth *Gadidhar* under the Guru-disciple tradition of Saint Mavji.

The importance of *magh* poornima in Vagad is according to Hindu religion. It falls on the full moon day of *magh* month. On this special day, people of vagad worship Lord Vishnu and Lord Satyanarayan. It is believed that diving in the G*anges* on this occasion leads to salvation. The fair of beneshwar is a symbol of *sanatani* sentiments, tradition and prestige. Lord Shiva temple is prominent here. The temple of Lords *radha-krishna* is also situated here. Triveni Sangam, Asthi Visarjan and holy pond are situated in Vagad as the folk history of Sanatan culture and the unity of the whole society.

According to Hon'ble Mannalal Rawat, the importance of *magh poornima* in Vagad is the same as that of Hinduism. On this special day, on the full moon night of *magh* month of Hindu calendar, people worship Lord Vishnu and Lord Satyanarayan. It is believed that taking a bath in the Ganga on this occasion leads to salvation. The fair of Beneshwar Dham encompasses this Sanatani sentiment and prestige. The continuity here is Mahakal, Shri Hari Triveni, Asthi Visarjan, holy pond, folk history of *Sanatan* culture and the feeling of unity of the whole society.

With the sunrise of Magh Purnima, the Vagad devotees take a dip in the Triveni Sangam and offer water to the Sun God. They go to the temple and have praised the Lord. The *Palki* and *Shahi* of Mahant Achyutanand Maharaj are the centre of attraction. Lakhs of devotees participate in the fair here. The people of Vagad offer *tarpan* to their ancestors and pray for the peace of their souls.

After offering prayers at the fair's *ghat*, the devotees visit Radha Krishna temple, Shivalaya, Brahmaji temple, Valmiki temple. Agricultural tools and equipment are purchased in large quantities in the fair here because these are specially manufactured.

A Shiva temple is built in Beneshwar Dham, whose idol appears to be fragmented. There is a popular belief that Mavji Maharaj's cow had placed its hoof on the idol because his beloved cow used to anoint him with her milk. This name Beneshwar is derived from 'Baliswar'. The said name can be considered to be derived from the word *Ven* which means 'island'. A 15-day fair is held here on Shivratri in the month of Phalgun, in which the art and culture of the tribals are displayed. The borders of Dungarpur and Banswara also meet at the confluence situated here. Since the Bhil community has great respect for this fair, it is also called the Kumbh of the tribals and the Prayagraj of Vagad. Thus, it is no less than Prayag or Kashi for the tribes. About five to seven lakh people from Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Rajasthan participate in it. Many devotees are happy to complete the journey to the Dham on foot. The fair is a symbol of tribal beliefs and it is believed that the souls of the dead get salvation here. In Vagad, the ashes of the dead are immersed here, just like people do in the Ganges river for the peace of their soul. Thus, it can also be called the Ganga of the tribal communities. A total of nine rivers meet at Beneshwar. At present, there is a lot of evidence available at the Triveni Sangam located in Abudarra, in which there are evidences of metal idols, jewelry and temples. This shows that in the past, grand temples and idols must have been located here.

A temple of tribal sage Valmiki is also present in Beneshwar. 'Bhiludi Ramayan' was composed by him. The people of Vagad have unwavering faith and devotion towards him. he wrote 17 poetic verses according to Hon'ble Mannalal Rawat.

Beneshwar Fair: The most popular fair among the major fairs of Vagad state is Beneshwar Fair. It is held every year from Magh Shukla Ekadashi to Purnima. Beneshwar Dham is a beautiful place located in Navatapara village, about six kilometers away from Sabla village. This place is situated on the border of Banswara-Dungarpur district. Here the three rivers Som, Jakham and Mahi have a confluence i.e. Ven. Therefore, like Prayag, this confluence place has great religious significance among the tribes. This place is also called Abudarra. The Shivalinga here has the mark of the hoof of Saint Mavji's favorite cow, due to which the idol appears to be broken and divided into some parts.[4]

Beneshwar is the *karmabhoomi* and *tapabhoomi* of Saint Mavji. Presently Achyutanand is seated here as *Gadipati*. Who is carrying out the tradition as the ninth *gadipati*. This place is famous as the *Kumbh* of the tribes. Here, along with the immersion of remians, the tribes also pray for salvation. Here, a pledge to quit addiction is also taken and all sins are eradicated, such is the public belief. The temple of saint Valmiki is also present in Beneshwar. It is a symbol of special faith in the tribal community. It is believed that the sage had composed 'Bhiludi Ramayana' in which many lyrical verses are present. This place of Vagad is also considered to be the land of demon king *bali*. There is a way to go to Patal Lok in Abudara situated here. It is believed that the private palace of Mavji is also situated in *Abudara*. Currently, a search has been conducted in the reservoir. In which evidence of old temples and idols has been found. In the idols obtained from them, the earrings and ornaments were found to be very ancient.

CONCLUSION

Saint mavji is *peer,* Astrologer, visioonary and a reformer. His preaches and Knowledge is wide spread in Vagad and al over Rajsthan as well. Vagad, the land of sage and saints has been flourished and nurture by these kind of spiritiual bodies time after time. He is well know as incarnation of Lord vishnu here and his preachers was said to be arrived from Mathura district of Uttar pradesh. His queen were also from the diffrent part of the india. as they dreamt about him and get to know the reality check which is went true by all sources.

Vagad is rejuvenate with saint like Mavji, Baleshwar Dayal, Guru Govind Giri, Surmal Das, Swami Swantrata nand, Baba Laxman Das. etc.

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From Pride Rock to the Rendering Engine: An Observation-First Pedagogy for Teaching New-Age Adaptation through The Lion King (1994) and Mufasa: The Lion King (2024)

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Abstract— *Adaptation pedagogy has tended to introduce theoretical vocabulary before students are asked to analyse a text-pair, on the assumption that concepts such as fidelity, medium-specificity, and intertextuality must be taught before they can be applied. This article proposes an alternative, observation-first sequence: students first complete a structured comparison exercise recording concrete production, narrative, and performance differences between a source and its adaptation, and are introduced to interpretive framing only afterwards. The model is illustrated through Disney's The Lion King (1994) and its 2024 prequel Mufasa: The Lion King, a text-pair whose contrasting production technologies make adaptation choices unusually visible to students encountering the field for the first time. The article outlines the two-stage classroom design, reports on its transfer to a second, technologically minimal text-pair (Twelve Angry Men), and reads the sequence retrospectively against established learning theory, drawing on Kolb's experiential learning cycle, cognitive load theory, Vygotsky's account of scaffolding, and the revised Bloom taxonomy, to explain why observation-before-theory sequencing supports undergraduate analytical writing. The article closes with a discussion of the model's implications and limitations.*

Keywords— ***adaptation pedagogy, cognitive load, experiential learning, scaffolding, virtual production***

I. INTRODUCTION

Adaptation studies occupies an uneasy place in undergraduate literature curricula. Students arrive with strong, often unreflective opinions about films "ruining" or "doing justice to" a book, but rarely possess the conceptual vocabulary to explain why an adaptation succeeds or fails on its own terms. This difficulty has intensified rather than eased in the current moment, as adaptation itself has changed shape: today's adaptations are as likely to be produced through virtual-production stages and computationally assisted animation pipelines as through a screenwriter's fidelity to a printed page, and they are as likely to circulate across games, merchandise, and social media as through a single theatrical release. Teaching adaptation in this environment requires a pedagogy that treats technology, production process, and platform as primary objects of analysis in their own right, not as background detail to a purely literary comparison.

This article documents a pedagogical sequence built around exactly that shift, developed for an undergraduate literature classroom and refined through repeated use. It uses the pairing of The Lion King (1994) and Mufasa: The Lion King (2024) as the primary case study, because the two films share characters, setting, and thematic concerns while differing sharply in production technology and narrative position (sequel/prequel), making adaptation choices unusually visible to a first-time student of the field. Rather than anchoring the sequence in a single named theoretical

framework, the model is organised around four practical questions that any technologically driven adaptation raises for a classroom: what has technology changed, what does the newer text assume the audience already remembers, how does showing differ from merely telling, and how should students evaluate change without treating it as automatic failure.

II. A PRACTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR CLASSROOM ANALYSIS

In place of a single theoretical authority, the teaching sequence organises discussion around four practical questions, each translated directly into a classroom task.

- Technology as narrative choice. What has changed technologically between the source and the adaptation — animation style, rendering, motion capture, sound design — and what does that change make possible or impossible for the story?
- Intertextual memory. What does the newer text assume its audience already remembers from the earlier one, and how does it use that memory to create meaning it could not create on its own?
- Telling versus showing versus immersive experience. Is a given story beat narrated in passing, dramatised at length on screen, or extended into interactive and transmedia forms — and what does each mode add to or subtract from audience engagement?
- Change as design decision, not deviation. Rather than asking whether the adaptation is "faithful," what specific effect does each point of departure from the source achieve, and for which audience?

These four questions are deliberately practical rather than doctrinal: they can be asked of any adaptation produced in a digital or transmedia environment, and they do not require students to first absorb a scholarly vocabulary before they can begin analysing. The classroom sequence maps each question onto a corresponding task — noticing technological and design differences; tracing how the newer text depends on memory of the older one; comparing narration against dramatisation against interactivity; and evaluating change on its own terms rather than as automatic loss.

III. PEDAGOGICAL RATIONALE

Three design considerations guided the choice of case study and shaped the sequence overall.

3.1 Shared cultural fluency

Nearly all students in the cohort had seen The Lion King (1994) and a large proportion had seen Mufasa (2024) on release, which meant class time could be spent on analysis rather than on establishing basic narrative comprehension — a persistent obstacle when the source text is unfamiliar or requires extensive plot summary before discussion can begin.

3.2 A visible technological shift

Mufasa was produced using an extensive virtual-production pipeline in which performers in motion-capture suits drove a quadruped capture system mapping human movement onto the lions' anatomy, while the director and cinematographer previewed and adjusted scenes in real time using a virtual camera within a real-time rendering engine before any shot was finalised (Failes, 2025). The 1994 film, by contrast, relies on traditional hand-drawn animation. This contrast makes production technology perceptible rather than abstract: differences in lighting, texture, camera movement, and facial expression become concrete evidence students can point to, rather than a theoretical claim they must take on faith.

3.3 A prequel structure that foregrounds "showing"

Because Mufasa dramatises a backstory that the 1994 film only narrates in passing, the pairing offers a clean, low-friction illustration of the difference between telling and showing: students can identify a specific moment that exists as brief exposition in one film and as an extended, visualised sequence in the other, and can then discuss what that shift in mode adds to, or subtracts from, the story. The franchise's parallel life across games, theme-park attractions, and social media further allows discussion to extend, where useful, into the transmedia and interactive dimension of adaptation.

IV. DESIGNING THE LEARNING SEQUENCE

The assignment is sequenced in two parts, on the principle that undergraduate students generalise more confidently once they have first been trained to observe closely. Part A withholds abstract vocabulary and asks only for structured comparison; Part B introduces the four framing questions from Section II and asks students to apply them to the same material.

4.1 Part A — The Observation Exercise

Before any framing questions are introduced, students complete a comparative observation exercise structured around five categories: narrative structure, character adaptation, performance elements, technical elements, and theme. For each category students complete a short

comparison table and answer a brief reflective question. An abbreviated version of the grid is reproduced in Table 1.

Table 1: Abbreviated observation grid used in Part A of the assignment

Aspect	The Lion King (1994)	Mufasa: The Lion King (2024)	Student Observation
Narrative	Simba's story	Mufasa's origin	
Animation	Hand-drawn	Photorealistic CGI	
Engagement mode	Backstory implied	Backstory shown	
Production tech	2D animation	Motion capture, RT rendering	

This stage is intentionally kept free of abstract terminology: students are asked to notice and record differences before being told what those differences might mean. The category of "performance elements" additionally supports assessment of performance-analysis skills common to adaptation and drama courses, asking students to compare voice acting, emotional expression, and physical gesture across the two films.

4.2 Part B — Applying the Framework

Once the observation grid is complete, students apply the four framing questions from Section II to their own evidence: identifying moments where Mufasa repeats a motif from the 1994 film in a new technological register; evaluating whether the prequel's photorealistic aesthetic enhances or constrains the story's emotional and fantastical register; and considering what the shift from a hand-animated classic to a motion-captured prequel says about how adaptation itself is changing as a creative practice.

Because students have already generated their own comparative evidence in Part A, they are able to answer these framing questions with specific textual reference rather than generality — for example, using their own notes on lighting and colour grading to discuss how production technology shapes meaning, rather than reproducing a claim about medium abstractly.

4.3 Assessment Rubric

Each section of the observation exercise is weighted equally and assessed against a shared rubric spanning five criteria, condensed in Table 2.

Table 2: Condensed marking rubric applied to each section of the assignment

Criterion	Excellent (4)	Basic (2)	Limited (1)
Comparison	Specific examples	Few examples	None
Characterisation	Insightful	Basic	Minimal
Technique ID	Named/explained	Named only	Missing
Reflection	Thoughtful	Descriptive	Minimal

V. CASE STUDY: WHAT MUFASA MAKES VISIBLE

5.1 Technology as the primary entry point

Classroom discussion consistently begins with technology rather than theme, because it is the most immediately legible difference between the two films. Industry reporting on Mufasa's production describes several thousand motion-capture performances and a year-long virtual-production shoot conducted on a real-time rendering stage (Failes, 2025), giving students concrete, nameable evidence for a claim that might otherwise remain impressionistic: that a shift in production technology is never neutral, but actively reshapes what a story can express. Discussion then moves productively into critique — students frequently connected the film's photorealistic rendering to a perceived reduction in the exaggerated facial expressiveness available to traditional animation.

5.2 Intertextual memory in practice

Because Mufasa is a prequel rather than a remake, it cannot rely on direct repetition of scenes; instead it must evoke the 1994 film through motif, framing, and anticipation — moments designed to be recognised retrospectively by an audience who already knows what Simba's story becomes. This gives students a clean example of adaptation as

intertextual memory work: the newer film's meaning is legible only in dialogue with the audience's memory of the earlier one.

5.3 Fidelity reframed as a design choice

Rather than asking whether Mufasa is "faithful" to The Lion King, the sequence asks students to treat every point of departure as a decision with an identifiable effect — expanding a minor character, reworking a theme of leadership and legacy for a contemporary audience, or restructuring the timeline as a frame narrative. This consistently shifts student writing away from evaluative statements about betrayal or disappointment and toward analytical statements about function and audience design.

VI. TRANSFERABILITY

The same two-stage design was subsequently adapted for a text-to-film pairing at the opposite end of the technological spectrum: Reginald Rose's play Twelve Angry Men and its 1957 film adaptation. Despite the very different register of the material, the underlying structure held: students first complete a comparison grid before being asked to evaluate the specific cinematic techniques — camera angle, lighting, sound — that the play cannot deploy on the page. The transferability of this model across a technologically maximal contemporary franchise and a technologically minimal, mid-century stage-to-screen adaptation suggests that the underlying framework in Section II does not depend on any particular production era or budget.

VII. LEARNING THEORY IN RETROSPECT

The observation-first sequence was not originally derived from a specific learning theory; it was arrived at through classroom trial and refinement. Read back against established learning theory, its design choices align closely enough with several well-established models of how learning is structured that those models offer a useful retrospective explanation of why the sequence works.

7.1 Experiential learning

The two-stage structure maps closely onto Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle, in which a concrete experience is followed by reflective observation, then abstract conceptualisation, and finally active experimentation. Watching and comparing the two films supplies the concrete experience; Part A's observation grid operationalises reflective observation; Part B's framing questions supply abstract conceptualisation; and the transfer of the same method to a second, unrelated text-pair (Section VI) constitutes active experimentation.

7.2 Cognitive load and sequencing

Cognitive load theory (Sweller, 1988) suggests that learners with limited working-memory capacity struggle when required to acquire new vocabulary and apply it to unfamiliar material at the same time. By deferring theoretical vocabulary until after the observation stage, the sequence reduces this extraneous load: students are not asked to hold an unfamiliar conceptual framework in mind while simultaneously trying to notice basic differences between two films.

7.3 Scaffolding and the gradual release of structure

The observation grid and shared rubric function as external scaffolding in a sense consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) account of the zone of proximal development: they provide enough structure that a novice can complete a genuinely analytical task before being able to do so unaided. The later transfer of the method to Twelve Angry Men (Section VI) is conducted with a comparable but not identical grid, requiring students to adapt the method themselves rather than simply repeating a fixed template.

7.4 Moving up the cognitive-skills hierarchy

The sequence also tracks the standard progression, in revised taxonomies of cognitive skill (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001), from lower-order tasks such as identifying and describing to higher-order tasks such as analysing and evaluating. Part A confines itself to identification and description; only in Part B are students asked to analyse the significance of what they identified and to evaluate the effect of specific adaptive choices.

None of these frameworks was used prospectively to design the sequence, and the fit described above should be read as a retrospective, explanatory alignment rather than as evidence that the sequence was built according to any one theory.

VIII. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

8.1 Implications

The sequence suggests three broader implications for the teaching of adaptation studies. First, sequencing matters: postponing generalisation until after a structured observation task appears to produce more evidence-based student writing than introducing framing questions first. Second, production and technical vocabulary functions as a low-stakes entry point for students hesitant with literary theory. Third, a shared, popular, technologically self-conscious case study reduces the preparatory burden of plot summary and frees class time for analysis.

8.2 Limitations

Several limitations qualify these claims. The model depends on students having prior familiarity with the source and adapted texts. The observations reported here are drawn from classroom assignment design and instructor reflection rather than from systematic assessment data, and the claims made about improved analytical writing should be read as provisional rather than empirically validated. The alignment with learning theory offered in Section VII is similarly retrospective rather than predictive. The heavy weighting toward technical and visual noticing also risks encouraging students to stop at description of technique without moving on to cultural and ideological questions. Finally, the case study's reliance on a globally circulated, English-language franchise raises the question of transferability to source material that is less commercially dominant or less uniformly familiar across a cohort.

IX. CONCLUSION

Teaching adaptation to undergraduates works best when generalisation follows observation rather than replacing it, and when the classroom vocabulary keeps pace with how adaptations are actually being made. By pairing a widely known, technologically self-conscious case study with a structured observation exercise and only then introducing framing questions about technology, memory, mode, and design, students are able to build analytical claims out of evidence they have generated themselves. Read retrospectively against established learning theory, this sequencing follows a pattern of concrete experience before abstraction, reduced cognitive load through careful ordering, scaffolded structure that is gradually withdrawn, and a progression from descriptive to evaluative skill. The resulting model is portable and offers both a method for classroom analysis and a foundation for further refinement grounded in how students actually learn to think theoretically about adaptation.

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From Refusal to Renunciation as Saying: Heidegger's Changing Interpretation of Stefan George's "The Word"

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Abstract— *In his 1939 reading of Stefan George's "The Word," Martin Heidegger excludes renunciation in order to foreground the self-refusal of the event of appropriation. In his later lecture, however, he redefines renunciation as a mode of Saying. By comparing these two interpretive moments, this article argues that the shift differentiates the word's refusal from the poet's renunciation. The former withdraws in advance from complete availability; the latter withdraws the demand to control names. Together they form an asymmetrical claim–response structure in which poetic speech is neither the sovereign production of meaning nor a passive conduit for language. It is a responsive agency whose measure is received from language yet whose task of articulation remains the poet's responsibility. This reconstruction clarifies why renunciation could re-enter Heidegger's later thinking without displacing the priority of linguistic withdrawal. It also redefines the relation among poet, language, and Saying, revealing the finite yet irreducible place of human speaking in Heidegger's later philosophy of language.*

Keywords— ***Heidegger, refusal, renunciation, Saying, Stefan George, "The Word"***

I. INTRODUCTION

Heidegger's later reflections on language repeatedly return to Stefan George's poem "The Word," especially its final line, "Where word breaks off no thing may be" (George, 1919/1971, p. 60).[1] Yet his readings assign strikingly different roles to the poet's renunciation (*Verzicht*). In the 1939 seminar notes published as *On the Essence of Language*, Heidegger interprets the breakdown of the word as the self-refusal (*Sichversagen*) of the event of appropriation (*Ereignis*) and adds an emphatic qualification: "no 'renunciation'" (*kein 'Verzicht'*; Heidegger, 2004, p. 61). In the later lecture "Words," by contrast, he maintains that the poet must relinquish control over names and redefines this renunciation as Saying (*Sage/Sagen*): "As self-denial, renunciation remains Saying" (Heidegger, 1959/1971, p. 147).

Existing scholarship provides a substantial conceptual basis for addressing this tension. Backman (2011, pp. 63–66) argues that the disappearance of the nameless "jewel" teaches the poet that human beings depend on language without being able to master language itself as an object; renunciation therefore marks a passage from subjective control to releasement (*Gelassenheit*). Ziarek (2010) emphasizes that language withholds itself even as it makes speech possible, so poetic language can answer this withdrawal only through listening and restraint. Centering on Heidegger's proposition that "language speaks" (*die Sprache spricht*; Heidegger, 1959/1971, p. 124), Wu (2022, pp. 159–171) shows how the ontological approach changes the point of departure from which language is questioned: human beings must experience language's own occurring through listening, the relation between poetry and thought, and an entry into the Saying of language. Sun (2022, pp. 37–41) further describes Heidegger's later view in terms of Saying's disclosure of

[1] Unless otherwise indicated, quotations from Heidegger's 1939 seminar follow Wanda Torres Gregory and Yvonne Unna's translation (Heidegger, 2004). Quotations from "The Nature of Language" and "The Way to Language" follow Peter D. Hertz; quotations from "Words" follow Joan Stambaugh (Heidegger, 1959/1971). The English translation of George's "The Word," printed on pp. 60 and 140 of the same volume, is by Peter D. Hertz (George, 1919/1971). German terms are supplied where conceptually decisive.

world and things, to which human speech listens and which it brings into sound.

Less attention has been paid to the altered status of renunciation between the 1939 notes and Heidegger's later interpretation. Why did he initially need to exclude renunciation in order for the word's failure to disclose the self-refusal of *Ereignis*? Why could renunciation later return as a mode of Saying? I argue that this shift reconfigures the relation between the agency of language and human agency. The word first refuses to become an object or instrument subject to exhaustive command; the poet then responds by withdrawing the demand that words function as representational names available on command. These movements form an asymmetrical structure of claim and response (*Anspruch–Entsprechung*). Human speaking accordingly appears neither as the sovereign production of meaning nor as simple submission to language.

II. THE EXCLUSION OF RENUNCIATION: THE WORD'S REFUSAL IN 1939

Heidegger's 1939 notes begin from George's final line, "Where word breaks off no thing may be" (George, 1919/1971, p. 60), and advance three propositions: only the word can let a being be; the word must be understood as name or naming; and the essence of the word is intrinsically equivocal (Heidegger, 2004, pp. 60–61). This equivocity prevents the word from being treated as a sign appended to an object already constituted in independence from language. The word grants a being the determinacy through which it can appear as this particular being. The word itself, however, cannot in turn be grasped as one more determinate thing. The breakdown of the word thus raises the question of the source of linguistic determinacy.

Heidegger next speaks of the "word 'of' *Ereignis*" (Heidegger, 2004, p. 61). The genitive dislodges the human speaker from the position of linguistic origin: the decisive word belongs to the event of appropriation, whose self-disclosure occurs through the word. When the word breaks off, *Ereignis* refuses itself. Yet in this occurring of refusal (*Versagung*), it also shows itself in its refusal—as stillness (*Stille*), as the in-between (*Zwischen*), and as the there (*Da*; Heidegger, 2004, p. 61). What is shown is the inseparability of concealment and disclosure. Stillness names its nonpropositional mode; the in-between names the open region in which *Ereignis*, beings, and the human speaker can enter into relation; and the there names the site at which withdrawal can be encountered. *Ereignis* comes nearest to its essence when the failure of naming is experienced as its refusal of complete presence, not when it is captured by a successful name.

Heidegger then imposes the emphatic restriction "no 'renunciation'" (Heidegger, 2004, p. 61). George's poem presents renunciation as something the poet learns in sadness (George, 1919/1971, p. 60), which readily encourages a psychological reading: the poet desires a jewel, loses it because no name can be found, grieves, and finally accepts his deprivation. Such an account locates the decisive event in the poet's consciousness. Heidegger's restriction provisionally brackets the poet's own formulation and redirects interpretation. What occurs first is the self-refusal of *Ereignis*, not the poet's retreat. The speaker's sadness may register a loss, but it neither produces nor explains what happens in the breakdown of the word. The word fails because what is encountered cannot be placed entirely at one's disposal through naming. Psychological loss concerns a subject confronting what can no longer be possessed; the self-refusal of *Ereignis* concerns a more originary withdrawal that first determines whether something can appear and be possessed as a being. The latter is ontologically prior to the former.

Excluding renunciation therefore preserves the asymmetry between the event of language and the poet's response. If interpretation begins with renunciation, the human speaker may once again become the poem's organizing center. Beginning with refusal allows the word's failure to be heard as an event that addresses the poet in advance and unsettles the poet's subjective position. Heidegger accordingly calls George's language "transitional" and remarks that the poet speaks in this way while scarcely recognizing its import (Heidegger, 2004, p. 61). The restriction nevertheless leaves the human response conceptually underdeveloped. It establishes that the word's refusal cannot be reduced to resignation, but it does not yet explain how the poet can answer refusal without resuming a position of mastery. The later interpretation retains the priority of linguistic withdrawal while reversing the earlier exclusion: renunciation acquires philosophical force once it no longer means psychological surrender and is instead understood as a nonassertoric mode of Saying.

III. III. RENUNCIATION AS SAYING IN THE LATER INTERPRETATION

In the later lecture, Heidegger places both of the poem's final lines at the center of his reading. In Peter D. Hertz's translation, the stanza reads as follows:

> So I renounced and sadly see:
> Where word breaks off no thing may be. (George, 1919/1971, p. 140)

The colon dividing the lines is decisive. Its force becomes clearer when compared with the colon in the fifth stanza. There the punctuation introduces an indicative utterance: the Norn's declaration appears in quotation marks and states that no name can be found. At the poem's close, the quotation marks disappear, while the verb hovers between subjunctive and imperative force. The poet acknowledges that a thing enters poetic appearance only through the word and at the same time binds himself no longer to admit into poetry what has not been granted a word (Heidegger, 1959/1971, pp. 140–143). The colon thus marks a turn from demanding a name to accepting the measure of language and entering what Allen (2007, pp. 176–179) describes as the realm of language's withdrawal.

Heidegger's apparently paradoxical claim that renunciation as self-denial remains Saying means first that renunciation does not terminate speech. The poet neither abandons poetry because he cannot name the jewel nor bids farewell to words. He relinquishes a demand formerly directed at language: whenever he presents a thing, language should supply an apt name at his discretion. As self-denial (*Sichversagen*), renunciation changes the relation between subject and language. The poet ceases to act as the sovereign producer of meaning and becomes a participant in linguistic disclosure.

This transformation suspends a familiar form of linguistic subjectivity while making another mode of speech possible (Bartoloni, 2009, pp. 67–74). Renunciation is active because the poet must genuinely withdraw the demand to command language. It is receptive because the measure of speaking can be received only from the word's prior giving and refusal. The poet's action consists in making himself answerable to the disclosure of language.

This is why Heidegger calls renunciation Saying and distinguishes it from ordinary statement. He suggests that renouncing, although not a statement, may still be a mode of Saying (Heidegger, 1959/1971, pp. 142–143). If the poem's ending is reduced to the universal proposition that words are necessary for things, the poet's experience is compressed into a linguistic theory available for subjective possession. The relation opened by the failure of naming would then close again in a univocal judgment.

Saying means showing (*zeigen*). The poem's final sentence is Saying because it does not explain renunciation from outside; it performs renunciation through its grammar and punctuation. The line after the colon both articulates the thing's dependence on the word and determines how the poet will henceforth treat what has not been granted a word. Renunciation becomes renunciation only in this act of Saying. The poet's position, the relation between word and thing, and the limits of naming are shown together in the poem's ending. To say that renunciation speaks itself means that the poet cannot control its significance in advance from a position outside the saying. Only by actually uttering the line does the poet enter the linguistic region opened by renunciation (Heidegger, 1959/1971, pp. 147–152).

The poet's sadness now also acquires a new meaning. It concerns the jewel's disappearance, yet it also marks the loss of certainty about language. The poet must accept that the word can withhold itself and that a thing cannot be forcibly preserved apart from the word. Sadness becomes an affective attunement that allows him to undergo giving and withdrawal as a single structure. It does not culminate in despair. Although the poet cannot carry the jewel back into his own domain, he thereby experiences the word more deeply. The word's refusal is a withholding: it declines to deliver the name while preserving what is withheld, and in this refusal its normally concealed power of bestowal comes near (Heidegger, 1959/1971, pp. 146–151). Formerly the poet saw the word only in successfully named things; he now experiences the word itself in the absence of a name. Heidegger thus preserves the poem's loss and vulnerability while reinterpreting them as a receptivity to language (Nowell Smith, 2013, pp. 174–180).

The later reading consequently reverses the 1939 exclusion of renunciation without relinquishing the priority of linguistic withdrawal. Reconceived as self-denial, renunciation becomes a nonpropositional Saying that answers the refusal of the word. The word initiates the experience; the poet responds.

IV. LANGUAGE'S REFUSAL AND THE POET'S RENUNCIATION

Language's refusal and the poet's renunciation occupy two sides of the linguistic relation. The former names language's letting things appear without fully objectifying the process of showing. The latter names the poet's changed posture of naming: he withdraws the demand that language serve representational purposes. Together they form an asymmetrical claim–response structure (*Anspruch–Entsprechung*). The word's refusal both occasions the response and sets its measure. The poet cannot decide upon withdrawal in advance and then use it to force language to reveal itself, for that would reinstate the sovereignty he seeks to relinquish. Nor can he predetermine what an adequate response must say. He can only preserve the word's unavailability without seeking to overcome it. Refusal and renunciation correspond without becoming equivalent: linguistic refusal belongs to the

event of disclosure, whereas poetic renunciation is the posture of speech that answers this event.

The priority of language does not reduce the poet to pure passivity. Heidegger's proposition that "language speaks" (Heidegger, 1959/1971, p. 124) may seem to transfer agency wholesale to an abstract linguistic force, and Duranti (2023, pp. 296–302) rightly identifies the attendant risk of linguistic determinism. Yet if the poet were merely an instrument, he would have no need to learn renunciation and could bear no responsibility for the form of his response. Renunciation shows that human beings can comport themselves toward language in different ways: they can reduce words to information and tools, or they can listen to language's claim.

Heidegger accordingly understands speaking as listening. Speaking is first a hearing because human expression always receives its measure from an already opened field of significance (Heidegger, 1959/1971, pp. 123–125). The poet must discern what calls to be said and bring what is heard into concrete words. Meaning is not fabricated ex nihilo by the poet, yet without human articulation it does not enter an audible or readable form. Human speaking therefore performs an irreplaceable mediating function.

Sun (2022, pp. 37–41) describes this process as the way-making of Saying: soundless showing is brought into voiced human speech, while human beings transform Saying into determinate utterance through listening. Such transformation is not the mechanical transmission of ready-made content. In a concrete situation, the poet must choose rhythm, tone, and words, and must answer for the possibility that these choices may either conceal or open meaning. Responsive speech thus receives its measure from language while retaining a human judgment that language cannot exercise in the speaker's place. Here the poet's renunciation diverges from passive obedience: what he gives up is sovereignty over language, not the tasks of discernment, expression, and responsibility.

Poetic agency is therefore responsive agency. The priority of language does not cancel human responsibility; it supplies responsibility's condition. The poet does not create disclosure, but he must decide whether to close it through mastery and simplification or to sustain its openness through restrained speech. The shift from 1939 to the later reading can now be stated more precisely. Heidegger initially excludes renunciation to prevent the word's breakdown from being reduced to human lack. He later affirms renunciation to explain how human beings participate in language without becoming its origin. The word's refusal retains priority; the poet's renunciation gives human speaking a finite yet irreducible place.

V. CONCLUSION

Heidegger's movement from excluding renunciation in 1939 to recasting it as Saying supplements the event of language with a dimension of response. The refusal emphasized in 1939 shows that linguistic disclosure depends on language's resistance to complete availability. The later account of renunciation shows how the poet can withdraw the sovereign demand for names and answer this withdrawal through nonpropositional speech. Their correspondence neither restores sovereignty to the poet nor demotes the poet to a passive instrument. Human Saying is a responsive agency: it receives its measure from language while still requiring the speaker's attentive and situated articulation. Heidegger's later interpretation thereby grants the poet a finite yet irreducible role. The poet does not originate linguistic disclosure, but language does not enter voiced saying apart from human response. Saying occurs within this unequal relation: the word withholds itself, and the poet answers that withholding by renouncing mastery.

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White Settler Culture on Hill Societies of India: A Comparative Study of Selected Works of Indra Bahadur Rai and Ganesh Saili

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Abstract— *The aim of this study is to discuss the impact of white settler culture (or British colonial power) on two indigenous hill societies of India, Darjeeling and Mussoorie. It investigates how the white settler culture entered India and its establishment in hill societies of India. Through a postcolonial reading of Indra Bahadur Rai's There's a Carnival Today and Ganesh Saili's Mussoorie Medley, focused on the two hill stations of India, Darjeeling and Mussoorie. The white settlers faced the heat and the diseases of Indian plains, which were unsuitable for them. They were looking for a climate that felt closer to Europe. They chose the hill stations to escape the heat and different diseases of the plains area. With the passage of time, these places gradually developed into spaces where British institutions, lifestyles, architecture, education, administrative practices, and economic systems were established over existing indigenous social structures. The study argues that the creation of colonial hill stations transformed these regions into spaces of cultural hierarchy, economic exploitation, social differentiation, and political control.*

Keywords— ***White Settler Culture, Hill Stations, Darjeeling, Mussoorie, Postcolonialism***

I. INTRODUCTION

Postcolonialism focuses on the impacts of colonial rule on the nation, society, and people after imperial or colonial power is no longer dominating those regions. Postcolonialism is not just about the political freedom of the colonized countries, but rather also about the ways in which the colonizer's power still had an impact on the culture, language, identity, education, class system, and other aspects of people's lives after leaving. The legacy of colonialism was alive and well in most of the countries that were once colonized. Edward W. Said, a prominent philosopher who is acknowledged as the originator of postcolonial ideas, his work "Orientalism" was published in 1978, in which he says that the West constructed a wrong perception of the Orient. As per Said, the Oriental societies were usually presented as irrational, primitive, and enigmatic to justify colonization. The representation of knowledge played an important role in keeping the colonial dominance over the colonized societies. Power and knowledge were interrelated since the colonizers determined the way the colonized societies were being represented. There is also Frantz Fanon, another prominent figure among postcolonial thinkers. In his book, 'The Wretched of the Earth', he analyses the psychological impact of colonialism. According to him, colonialism undermined the sense of self-respect and identity of colonized communities because they were always treated as inferior. Furthermore, he also describes the role of violence, resistance, and nationalism in anti-colonial activities. For Fanon, political freedom is not sufficient unless there is mental and cultural liberation as well. The subalternity theory was elaborated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her essay titled "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Spivak raises the question of whether the marginalized voices of peasants, tribal societies, and women can effectively speak out against the oppressive forces that dominate their societies. Spivak's argument is based on the idea that marginalized groups are silenced by colonialism and elite society.

White settler culture refers to the social, cultural, and institutional life created by European settlers, primarily British, in colonized territories where they established long-term or semi-permanent residence. White settler culture was never limited to India; it also arrived in other parts of the world such as, the USA, Africa, Australia, Canada etc. This is not only about governance, but also about the reproduction of European lifestyles, values and hierarchies in foreign lands. The white settler culture did not enter India in a single moment or through one event, it developed gradually through trade and political expansion. Countries such as Australia and Canada, where Europeans settled in large numbers. In India, it was a controlled, selective kind of settler presence. This makes the Indian case distinctive, the settler culture was not born out of demographic hegemony, but of institutional and spatial control. The term White settler culture can be defined as the values, lifestyle and systems that were brought in by the European settlers during the colonial rule. In the Indian context, the white settler culture was particularly evident in hill stations which were constructed by the British as places of leisure, governance and escape from diseases of plain areas of India. Later these places became sites of cultural encounter, where native traditions confronted colonial modernity. But the interaction was not equal. White settler culture describes a kind of colonisation, in which Europe exercised not just political control of a land but settled permanently. It was related to the spread of European language, schooling, religion (especially Biblical), architecture and lifestyle often exalted over traditions of plain peoples. For countries like Australia, this had involved the widespread. However, in India, white settler culture manifested in a much more regulated and organized manner. The British did not settle all over the country but carved out separate spaces like hill stations, cantonments and civil lines where they lived and maintained a European way of life and controlled the territory. The significance of white settler culture in India is its long-term impact, particularly through institutions, rather than through population. Education is one big example. With Thomas Babington Macaulay's Minute on Education (1835), English became the medium of higher learning and Western ideas began to have an impact on Indian intellectual life. It was the reason for the collapse of the Gurukul system in India. It created a new class of Indians influenced by European thought, which still has an impact on India today.

II. HILL SOCIETIES UNDER COLONIAL INFLUENCE

There are many hill stations in India, which was developed by white settler culture in the colonial period of India. The British developed many hill stations in India mainly for health, administration, and recreation during the colonial period. These places were cooler than the plains and later became centers of "white settler culture". In the northern India, there have many prominent hill stations, such as 'Shimla' which was summer capital of British India, 'Mussoorie' which was popular mainly for resort for British officers, 'Nainital', famous for lake town developed by the British, 'Dalhousie', which was named after Lord Dalhousie, 'Dharamshala', a prominent place for British military settlement, 'Kasauli' a cantonment town, 'Almora' an administrative center under British, 'Ranikhet', a British cantonment, 'Lansdowne', a military hill station, and 'Chail', a summer retreat after Shimla. In the northeastern India, there are also many hill stations, such as, 'Shillong,' which is called Scotland of the East, 'Darjeeling', famous for tea and British sanatorium, 'Kalimpong', which was a trade and missionary center, and 'Haflong', the only hill station of Assam. In the western India, there are many prominent hill stations, such as, 'Mount Abu', the only hill station in Rajasthan, 'Mahabaleshwar' the summer capital of Bombay Presidency, 'Panchgani' mainly an educational hub, and 'Matheran', which was developed as eco hill station. In southern India, examples of some hill stations are 'Ooty (Udhagamandalam)' can be called as queen of hill stations, 'Kodaikanal', which was developed by missionaries, 'Coonoor', a tea plantation center, and 'Yercaud' famous for coffee plantation hub. And in the eastern & central India, also have few hill stations, such as 'Netarhat' the 'queen of Chotanagpur', 'Pachmarhi', a British cantonment hill station, 'Ranchi', a summer retreat of British officials. The British established these hill stations mainly to escape the heat of the plains, and to recreate European lifestyle in India. Places like Shimla and Ooty (Udhagamandalam) became symbols of colonial power and administration, while others served as military, missionary, and recreational centers. 'Darjeeling' and 'Mussoorie', these two hill stations are selected for this research, to highlight the impact of white settler culture, through studying two texts, Indra Bahadur Rai's fictional novel 'There's a Carnival Today' and Ganesh Saili's non-fictional work 'Mussoorie Medley'.

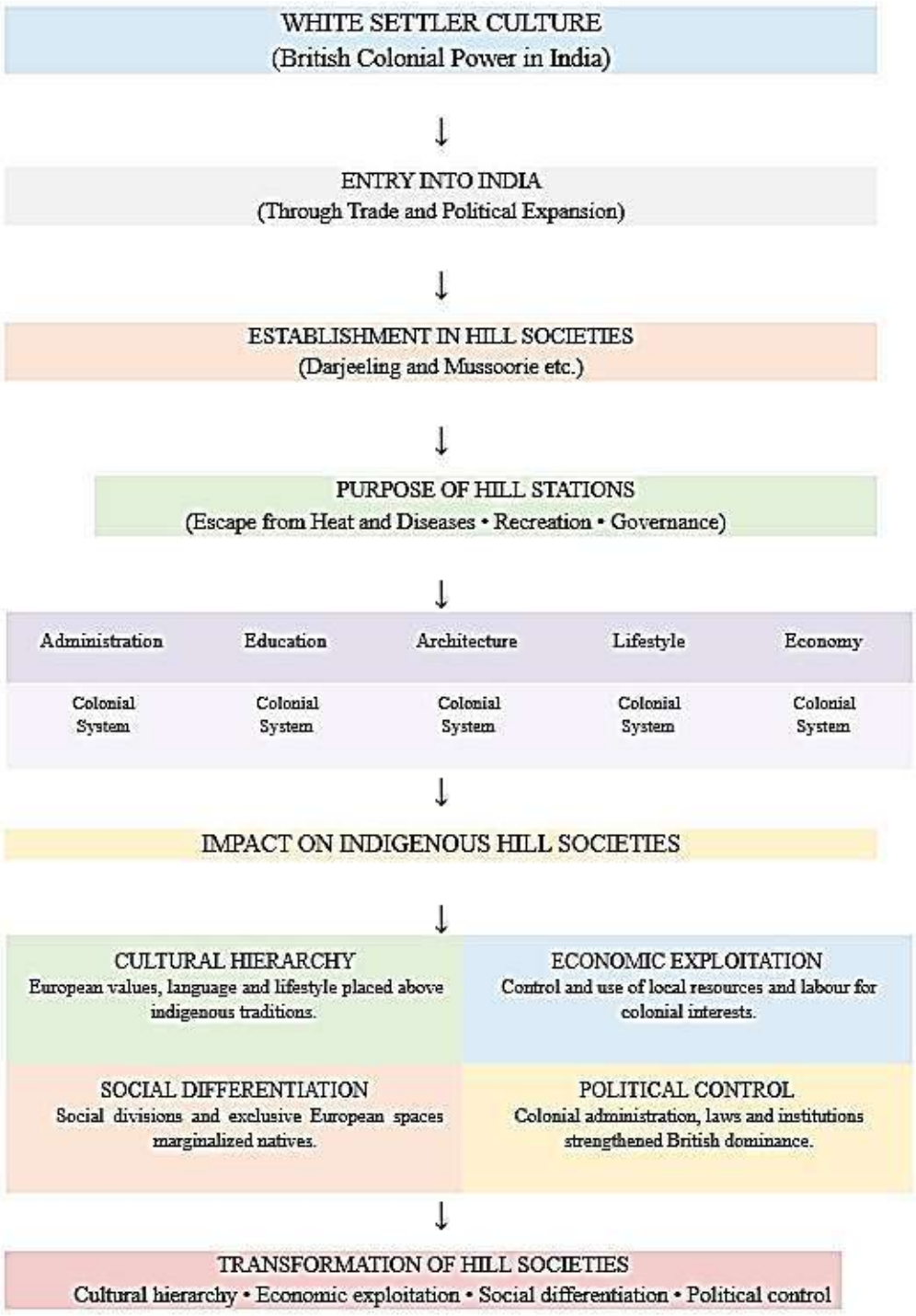


Fig 1: The Impact of White Settler Culture on Hill Societies of India

III. WHITE SETTLER CULTURE IN DARJEELING

Darjeeling is a most important hill station of India, which has a very interesting history. The name ‘Darjeeling’ was coined in Tibetan language, Dorj means ‘thunderbolt’ and ling means ‘land or place’. It literally means ‘land of thunderbolt’. The name 'Darjeeling' came from ‘Dorje Ling Monastery’, which was founded by the ‘Denzongpa tribes’ in 1765. Before the invasion of ‘Gorkhas' of Nepal in the 1790s, the area was with the part of the state of Sikkim, and the local tribes were called Lepchas. After the Sugauli Treaty was signed in 1815 made Nepal give away one-third of its territory to the British, Darjeeling became a sanatorium. Tea planting in the region was initiated by Dr. Arthur Campbell of the Indian Medical Service in 1841. This led to the establishment of several tea estates in the

area. The British and the Sikkim had differences, which led to the annexation of Darjeeling to the British Empire. In the 19th century, Nepalese immigrants were brought in to work on tea plantations and in construction. It became a noted resort and was named the 'Queen of the Hills'. In 1827, there was a conflict between Sikkim and Nepal. The Sikkimese King wanted help from the British Governor-General in India as the Treaty of Titalia, which was signed in 1817. British then sent two of its officers Captain Lloyd and Mr Grant to settle the dispute. That time Caption Llyod went to Darjeeling for a few days in February 1829. That time it was called the 'Old Gorkha Station of Darjeeling'. The place was nothing like what it is today. It was a lonely land of mountains and dense forests. Caption Llyod saw Darjeeling as a great sanatorium or health resort for the British officers. Soon a proposal was sent to the British Governor-General and was soon approved. Llyod was now promoted to the rank of General. He was again sent to negotiate with the Chogyal (King) of Sikkim the transfer of Darjeeling to them. General Llyod was successful in his mission and finally in 1835 Chogyal was persuaded to give Darjeeling as a gift to East India Company as a friendly gesture. In return the company gave an allowance of Rs.3000 to Chogyal which was later raised to Rs 6000 per annum. That sounds like a small amount now, but it was big money back then. In 1839, a British officer Dr. Archibald Campbell, he was a resident in Nepal was brought to Darjeeling and later he was given the charge of administration. At that time, he was mainly responsible for the initial development of Darjeeling. His responsibilities were to construct roads, began hill corps to maintain law and order. He also did away with bonded slavery in Darjeeling. In the years preceding there were still minor skirmishes between the Sikkimese and the British. Finally, after 1866 Darjeeling became much more peaceful and that brought an all-round development of the hill station. Later farming was improved and communication improved. The Darjeeling Himalayan Railways, which was launched in 1881 and later it provided easy access for the people who usually travel to the plains. Finally, the town of Darjeeling was developing and prospering. The British changed Darjeeling from a quiet mountain area into a hill station mainly for Europeans. They made it a place for rest and relaxation, where British officers could escape the hot weather of the plains. Because of this, many European-style buildings, churches, schools, and clubs were built, which gave Darjeeling a strong Western look. This is how it became known as the ‘Queen of the Hills’. Economically, the British started tea plantations, which made Darjeeling famous for tea. They brought many Nepali workers to work on these plantations and in construction. This changed the population of the region and created an economy controlled mostly by the British, where local people often had fewer rights and lower status. On the social and cultural front, the dominant culture of the white settlers brought in English-speaking schools, languages, and lifestyles that became an integral part of Indian society. Many institutions for education have been built, like St. Paul’s School Darjeeling which was set up in 1823 but shifted to Darjeeling in 1864, Loreto Convent Darjeeling founded in 1846 by Loreto Sisters, St. Joseph’s School North Point which was started in 1888 by Jesuit missionaries and was formerly called St. Joseph’s College, Mount Hermon School Darjeeling, which was founded in 1895, St. Robert’s Higher Secondary School Darjeeling founded in 1934 and was run by missionaries, and it continued British-style education system, ‘St. Teresa’s Girls High School Darjeeling’ established during colonial period by Roman Catholic nuns, ‘Maharani Girls’ High School Darjeeling’ founded in 1908, supported by Indian elites but influenced by colonial education model, ‘Ghoom Boys Higher Secondary School’ founded in 1910, ‘St. Michael’s School Darjeeling’ etc. The British also improved infrastructure by building roads, administrative systems, and the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, which connected the hills with the plains and helped trade and tourism grow.

The novel ‘There’s a Carnival Today’ is a piece of literature, which portrays its characters within a real location and a specific era might provide insight into the underlying social and political aspects of that era. The book focuses on the setting of ‘Darjeeling’ in postcolonial India. In this context, the term “carnival” in the book means a protest held by some Darjeeling locals against any discrimination experienced by some workers in a tea plantation. Workers in the concerned tea plantation were involved in an altercation with the plantation manager due to their demands for higher wages and shorter working hours. These workers were then prosecuted in court for assaulting the plantation manager in an attempt to murder him. The novel captures the socio-cultural setting in Darjeeling around Janak Man Yonzan and Sita Shrestha. Sita, who comes from Dhankuta, visits Darjeeling for studies and falls in love with Janak, whom she meets after his return from studying in Calcutta. The two get married and settle down in Darjeeling. The community in which Janak and Sita live depicts the lifestyle of different kinds of people living in Darjeeling. Most of the people depicted as inhabitants of Darjeeling are speakers of the Nepali language, and their culture and religion are very much linked with that of hilly areas of Nepal. Janak’s creditor is a Marwari, while one of his friends and neighbour is a Bengali man named Ajoy Das. Pasang-la who operates a restaurant nearby belongs to Tibetan descent. During the time of Janak’s youth, which coincides with recent independence of India from the British rule, most old people had mixed feelings towards the

British. Janak's mother wonders: "Would they really quit a Raj that they made through their own so much warfare, intelligence and effort, just because people demand it?" (Rai, 2017, p.4). Janak replies: "Our country is our home. You tell me, Aama, what would you do if a thief were to enter our house?" (Rai,2017, p.4). In a similar way, the members belonging to the generation of Janak also differ considerably from the previous generation with respect to the observance of tradition. The point here is that Ratna Bahadur disagrees with his wife during Amrita's marriage ceremony regarding the replacement of old instruments known as pance-bajas (the five instruments) by loudspeakers and poor observance of the strict rules of religion by the new generations. The political situation of Darjeeling in its earlier days can be deduced from the political views and activities of Janak and Bhudev. Thus, for example, Janak's engagement in politics is driven by the concept of a revolutionary transformation resulting from peaceable protests organized by prominent personalities, such as Mahatma Gandhi. Such political views of Janak are a result of the impact made on him during his teenage years by the process of gaining independence. Unlike Janak, Bhudev frequently advocates resistance bordering on violence, which Janak considers outrageous. He calls on people to react to violence with equal violence.

IV. WHITE SETTLER CULTURE IN MUSSOORIE

'Mussoorie', also known as 'Queen of the Hills', has a fascinating history that shows how hill stations in India changed over time. Before it became a popular tourist spot, the area was mostly covered in thick forests and small, scattered settlements. There was no real town or organized structure, and the area was mostly known for the people who lived there, who used it for grazing and small-scale living. The name Mussoorie does not originate from any religion or historical event. Despite having a variety of views, it is the historians' opinion that the sole reason behind this name is due to abundance of mansoor plants found in these hills, hence, it was named 'Massura'. Consequently, the name Mussoorie came into existence. It is a fact that the original name was Messorie but later it got distorted, and thus Mussoorie gained popularity. The name Mussoorie in English address whereas 'Mansoorie' in local address. Another reason is that the Doon Superintendent Captain F.J. Shore visited this place in 1825 during his vacation when he learned about Mussoorie because bushes named 'Mansoor' were plenty in Mussoorie. The hill residents used to graze their livestock on those bushes. Because of these plants, the name Mussoorie became popular. Prior to the British regime, there were names of hills in the present Mussoorie town. But before 1825, the original names of Mussoorie town were Kumaitri (Kumaiti), Joorapani, Dunkol, Satrawadi, Johar, Kholri, Bijotri, Kolri, Sitari ki Tonkri, Kingad and Surada Pani, etc. Besides these, Hathi Paon, Tibba, Jabar Khet, Bhilhadu, Binog, Bata Khat, Suwakheli, Landhor, Bhadraj Hubli, etc., continued to be used even after the arrival of the British, owing to which the natives also refer to Pari Tibba as Achhari Banda. During the Gorkha Raj period (1803-15) the easiest route for the British to visit Mussoorie from Badbal was through Kalsi, Shailakui and Premnagar area. There is another reason to visit it and that is the presence of a Bhadraj Temple at the hill range above the Doon Valley and a temple of Surkanda in the east parallel to the hill range. The period of modern history of India starts from 1707 when the East India Company started establishing political domination on the nation. The East India Company maintained its economic and political domination from 1757 till 1857. In case India continued to be under the control of the company, then it facilitated urbanization of the coastal regions, but when the entire nation was brought under the rule of the British government, then there was a special emphasis on city development. The urbanization during British era was affected by the conditions prevailing in Britain. In the 19th century, some cities of Uttarakhand had vanished since the British government attempted to create hill stations within these regions. From 1814 to 1816, the chances of development within the Himalayas became available through the people from Britain. The town of Dehradun was an unusually big city within the Himalayas, which appeared since 1966. Within the 19th century, the British government used hill stations for military camps, summer camps, and administration.

'Mussoorie Medley: Tales of Yesteryear' by Ganesh Saili is a nostalgic historical account of the "Queen of Hills" during colonialism. It tells the story of Mussoorie and Landour how they changed over time, using careful research, local stories, tales of colonial charm, and 146 old pictures. It includes people like Captain Young and famous places like the Savoy Hotel. There are three sections in the book, every section explores the history and nostalgia of the hill station Mussoorie, through three distinct sections: the main narrative of tales are described in section one, archival research and records are described in section two, and a visual picture diary is described in section three, which captures the transition from British summers to modern times. In the first section, there are eleven chapters, which depict from the creation of hill station and its growth to transformation. Ganesh Saili describes Mussoorie Medley as a rich, nostalgic recreation of Mussoorie and Landour, not just as hill stations, but as living cultural landscapes shaped by colonial history, migration, memory, and change.

The book doesn't go in a straight line. Instead, it moves through stories, places, people, cemeteries, schools, bazaars, and forgotten buildings to create a picture of a town that used to be elegant but is now stuck between the past and the present. In the first few chapters of the book, Mussoorie comes out as a settlement created during the colonial era; that is, it was created by the British as a place to take refuge from the heat and dirtiness of the plains of India. It was designed to be like England in the hills, with the same institutions, such as clubs, churches, and cottages. Initially, the chapters explain the efforts of the British to make the place habitable through the construction of roads and institutions. This colonial Mussoorie was deeply structured by clubs and institutions like the Happy Valley Club and Himalayan Club reflected exclusivity and hierarchy. Cemeteries and memorials recorded lives cut short, often those of young soldiers, administrators, and settlers who never returned home. Schools and churches reinforced British cultural continuity in an unfamiliar land. At the same time, the narrative does not ignore the presence of Indians. Local workers, traders, and service communities quietly sustained this colonial world. Over time, bazaars like Landour Bazaar grew organically, representing a parallel, indigenous economy and culture alongside the colonial elite. In the second section of the book Saili describes John Northam's 1884s' guide. He describes how Mussoorie and Landour were transformed from an untamed wilderness to a leading colonial resort. The story starts with the 'hillward flight', whereby the travelers had a tough task of getting to Mussoorie from the Saharanpur railway station. Their journey would involve negotiating the Siwaliks range and Mohan Pass, a very difficult route which would require one to swear profusely as well as exert oneself greatly in order to overcome. After reaching the staging post in Rajpur, the travelers would leave their horse-drawn conveyances behind and move on to ponies, jhampans or dandies to ascend the final seven miles in a tortuous zigzag path. The ascent is described by the author to be a "kaleidoscope" of people who would use the services of local carriers who would help transport not only luggage but also such heavy items as pianos. Historically, the station traces its origins back to 1823, when Captain Young and Mr. Shore first visited the area on a hunting trip. Captain Young is credited with building the first small hut. By 1827, he established the first permanent residence, naming it "Mullingar" after his Irish home. Around the same time, Landaur was developed as a military sanitarium to help European soldiers recover from the heat and diseases of the plains. The text explores the stark geographical contrast of the station, noting that the southern slopes were pleasant and wooded, overlooking the Dehra Dun valley, while the northern cliffs were rugged and bare, offering awe-inspiring views of the snow-capped Himalayan peaks. Socially, this guide presents a busy society with focus areas such as the Library, the Himalaya Club, and the Whymper & Co. Brewery. The third section, titled "Mussoorie Memoirs: A Picture Diary," offers a nostalgic journey, through the evolution of Mussoorie and Landour, shifting from their days as British social hubs to their modern roles as educational and administrative centers. The story is based on the changes that happened to big estates, especially the Charleville Hotel. The grounds were once a literary retreat, where Rudyard Kipling spent time in the late 1800s. In 1959, it became the site for administration, Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy, where India's civil service officers now start their careers. There are many stories of "Fancy Fairs" and grand balls at the Savoy and the Skating Rink on Camel's Back Road that show what life was like back then. These events weren't just fancy parties; they were also important ways to raise money for local groups like Woodstock School. The stories also show how 'modern' technology was at the time. For example, the Electric Picture Palace had projectors and ventilation that were as good as the best theatres in London.

V. CONCLUSION

However, even in the post-colonial era, these dynamics continue to evolve. In the fictional novel 'There's a Carnival Today', which was written by Indra Bahadur Rai presents that Darjeeling continues to bear the structural imprint of colonialism even after political independence. The plantation economy, which was introduced under British rule, emerges in the novel as a central site of exploitation and inequality. Similarly, Mussoorie Medley by Ganesh Saili offers a historically layered and emotionally resonant account of Mussoorie's transformation from a colonial enclave to a modern urban space. Saili's narrative, grounded in memory, archival detail, and personal observation, reveals how colonial influence persists through physical structures such as buildings, roads, cemeteries, and institutions. These two texts have shown both colonial and postcolonial life.

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From the World of Words to the Realm of Images: Reimagining Krishna in Indian Graphic Narratives

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Abstract— *Krishna, the 'myth and legend,' is delineated in classical Hindu scriptures such as the Mahabharata, the Bhagavad Gita, and temple iconography as a luminous forerunner and eighth incarnation of Vishnu. In recent decades, Indian graphic narratives have changed the way Krishna is explored through traditional symbolism and modern narrative techniques, letting modern audiences perceive Krishna not only from a limited perspective but also as a vibrant, charismatic strategist. Previous research studies particularly emphasize spiritual enlightenment, education, and moral values, and often overlook the pathways in which graphic narratives reinterpret mythological figures. This paper explores how graphic narratives reimagine Krishna from a mythological avatar to a cultural icon, drawing on Roland Barthes's theory of semiotics, Stuart Hall's theory of cultural representation, and Linda Hutcheon's adaptation theory through a qualitative visual semiotic approach. The study concludes that Indian graphic narratives not only retell mythological stories but also represent Krishna, making him more familiar to modern generations.*

Keywords—***Semiotics, Mythology, Spiritual, Indian graphic narratives, Cultural icon***

I. INTRODUCTION

In Devavāṇī, or the language of gods, divine figures are depicted as being calm, distant, and celestial. This is reflected in the verse —

"शान्ताकारं भुजगशयनं पद्मनाभं सुरेशं,

विश्वाधारं गगनसदृशं मेघवर्णं शुभाङ्गम्" (Bhagavad Gita, 2007)

Where Lord Vishnu, the supreme deity, is imagined as a serene, universal presence resting in cosmic stillness. However, this notion has changed in the contemporary storytelling form, such as modern Indian graphic narratives, which act as a bridge between mythological heritage and contemporary cultural identity. The manner in which the mythical figure is perceived is often influenced by the media that are used to depict them. While the classical texts mainly employ the use of language and symbolism, the visual narratives rely on the use of images and space. The shift from the use of texts to the use of images opens a new dimension of engagement with the characters.

Indian graphic narrative, growing as a popular cultural mirror, reorganizes mythological stories through the eye of the visual. So, aspects of visual narrative techniques and the way characters are demonstrated start to play a crucial role. Indian graphic narratives are not only simplified children's literature but also redefined Indian mythology through modern narrative structure.

By analyzing four graphic narratives such as *Krishna* by Amar Chitra Katha, *Krishna: The Defender of Dharma, Krishna: A Journey Within*, and the *Mahabharata* by Amar Chitra Katha, this paper examines how traditional representations of Krishna are reconstructed as a modern

visual icon to make him accessible to diverse audiences. The primary purpose is to analyze how this new understanding of Krishna aligns with modern cultural identities while still preserving the traditional meaning.

This study unveils a set of questions regarding the visual reconstruction of Krishna through Indian graphic narratives and how these representations of Krishna differ from traditional depictions. Ultimately, how do these portrayals act as a bridge between Indian scriptures and modern audiences?

This existing research shifts its focus from mythological meaning to the way it is depicted visually, using images as active producers to enable a new interpretation of mythological stories. This demonstrates the ability of visual storytelling to change how the audience perceives the material. In integrating graphic narratives into the study of mythology, the research addresses a relatively understudied area.

The paper unfolds with an image of Vishnu, followed by modern depictions of Krishna in quintessential Indian graphic narratives. After that, it moves to a detailed reading section of the texts. Finally, through a vivid comparative discussion, the study concludes that these graphic narratives are not merely retellings but also serve as an interpretation of contemporary media.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent studies on mythology in graphic narratives follow Sarkar's (2021) *Indian Graphic Narratives: The Politics of Representation*, which examined the politics of representation, interpreting power, and ideology in Indian graphic narratives through the framework of history, nationalism, and feminism. Sharma (2024), *The Graphic Representations of Mahabharata: Negotiating the Sacred,* discussed how graphic adaptations of some epic heroes like Krishna, Karna, Arjun, and Bhishma help reform them into modern superheroes through a semiotic approach. Significantly, Rathod and Gohel's (2025) *Decoding Culture Through Panels: A Visual Semiotic Analysis Of Society And Identity In Indian English Graphic Novels* analysis of society, identity, culture, and caste in Indian graphic novels shows the theme of representation theories and panel structures. In contrast, Thakurta (2021) in *Graphic Narration of Indian Pasts: A Study of Selected Indian Comics, 1969-2019,* proposed how Indian graphic media foreground Indian politics of history, ideology, and representation on a global level. Finally, Sanil's (2016) *From Gods to Superheroes: An Analysis of Indian Comics through a Mythological Lens* study stands apart by applying Campbell's and Jungian models to Indian superheroes through a psychological and mythological-religious lens. Collectively, these studies offer a wide perspective on mythology and the Indian graphic literary world, shedding light on adaptation, representation, ideology, caste, and politics. However, areas like visual semiotic analysis of mythological figures remain underexplored. This paper, "*From the World of Words to the Realm of Images: Reimagining Krishna in Indian Graphic Narratives,"* is a visual analysis of Krishna's portrayal in graphic narratives through the selected theoretical lenses from previous studies.

III. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK: ANALYSE KRISHNA IN INDIAN GRAPHIC NARRATIVES

Framing Krishna: Visual Semiotics in Indian Graphic Narrative

Visual Semiotic elements like panel composition, typography, color symbolism, camera angle, and sequential art help to study the implicit meaning and cultural representation in visual narratives. In panel composition, a borderless panel structure can convey cosmic abyss and infinity, placing Krishna as an infinite universal presence. Following the second element, fonts like 'sans-serif' symbolize modernity and moral clarity, making Krishna's words perceptible. Through color, like the blue complexion suggests, Krishna's divine and infinite nature. This also expresses emotion and cultural identity, carrying psychology, history, and tradition. In opposition, camera angles show how readers perceive power, emotion, and distance in visual storytelling, i.e., using extreme wide shots to enlarge Krishna's presence. Finally, sequential art, as the name suggests, unlocks the meaning through sequence and rhythm, such as the ultimate war between Kangsa and Krishna, and so on.

Decoding Images: A Barthesian Analysis of Krishna

While visual semiotics explicitly examines how images create meanings, Roland Barthes's theory of semiotics explains how these meanings operate across numerous levels. According to Barthes, a sign consists of two elements: the Signifier and the Signified. The Signifier indicates the physical form of a sign, whereas the Signified suggests the deeper meaning that is associated with it. In the case of Krishna, elements like the flute, posture, and peacock feather denote his identity, but there is a deeper meaning underneath. At the denotative level, the image simply shows Krishna as a cowherd boy who is playing the flute; however, at the connotative level, these elements suggest qualities such as affection, mesmerizing playfulness, or transcendental charm. Thus, the portrayal of Krishna in the realm of Indian graphic narratives becomes more symbolic.

Recontextualizing Krishna in Contemporary Culture: Stuart Hall

In the words of Stuart Hall, Cultural Representation is the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged in culture through language, signs, and images. In other words, meaning is not already fixed in objects or characters but is created by the culture and the way people represent them. It does not simply represent the world but constructs the world in the way the human mind thinks about it. In Indian graphic narratives, Krishna is not just represented as an icon of traditional mythology; the aspiration is to conform to the cultural sensibilities of the modern era. Meaning is produced through concept and sign systems, and this is achieved through the application of cultural codes. However, the interpretation of the produced meaning is open to the audience for their own interpretation, allowing different audiences to connect with Krishna in various ways.

Adaptation Beyond Imitation: Through Linda Hutcheon's Framework

According to Linda Hutcheon, an Adaptation is not just a replica of the original work but a re-creation of the content, which offers the audience a new version of that subject matter. In other words, she explains that an Adaptation can be both a process and a product, which involves the transformation of the content from one medium to another, notably from classical textual depictions of Krishna to more visual portrayals in graphic narratives, which would highlight their creative reimagining of the source material. Such transformation occurs due to the requirements of the new medium, as well as the influence of cultural and historical contexts. Epics like the *Mahabharata* or the *Ramayana* are adapted into films or graphic narratives, and visual media gracefully alter the events along with the characters. Similarly, novel adaptations often tastefully transform the plot for the contemporary audience.

IV. A COLLAGE OF COLORS: SIMPLICITY OF AMAR CHITRA KATHA'S KRISHNA

Krishna by Amar Chitra Katha is one of the earliest titles of the ACK series, which opens with a clear and rigid narration of Krishna's formative years. Krishna, the defender of moral values, lived with all his problems, putting up a smile on his face, as his saying goes—

उद्धरेदात्मनात्मानं नात्मानमवसादयेत् |

आत्मैव ह्यात्मनो बन्धुरात्मैव रिपुरात्मनः || (Bhagavad Gita, 2021, 6.5)

which means one must deliver himself with the help of his mind and not degrade himself. The mind is the friend of the conditioned soul and his enemy as well. In this graphic text, Krishna is represented as a simple figure relevant to kids, from his childhood antics to reclaiming Mathura from the demonic Kangsa.

"In nature, light creates the color. In the picture, color creates the light." (Hofmann, as cited in Rose, 1975, p. 117) In the Putana vadh and the restoration of Ugrasena, color theories are depicted beautifully, as well as Hall's and Hutcheon's theories. In the law of simultaneous contrast (Chevreul, 1872, p. 71) by Chevreul, Putana's green saree (Pai, 1970, p. 9) symbolizes both serpents and greenery. By chromatic subtraction[1], that green vanished into a warm domestic panel for her death indirectly (Pai, 1970, p. 10). Whereas in the restoration period, lilac-grey prison (Pai, 1970, p. 31) displays suppression; the contrast between grey and blue depicts Krishna entering as a savior. Finally, the gold crown is relocated from Kangsa to Krishna (Pai, 1970, p. 31), shifting the meaning, with Albers' (2006) theory, that color carries no fixed value but relational meaning (p. 13). This is an understated organizational factor that determines both visual transparency and moral understanding. The panels maintain a rectangular, equally spaced, and linear structure so the progression of the story remains intact. For example, the beginning series of scenes involves the birth of Krishna, where Vasudeva ferries the baby Krishna across the Yamuna River through the separation of the waterways, ending with the quiet transition to Gokul, all presented in individual frames (Pai, 1970, pp. 4-7). Through Stuart Hall's theory of representation, such an opening can be read as a process of stabilization; simplicity here performs an introductory function, easing the reader into a mythological world by removing ambiguity and excess. Furthermore, the Kaliya-daman episode presents a large central panel of Krishna taming the snake with two smaller reaction panels of distressed villagers around it (Pai, 1970, pp. 18-20).

In summary, the mythological text Krishna by Amar Chitra Katha is delivered in a visual discourse that is concise, organized, and specifically structured to educate through an appropriate utilization of color and a simple paneling technique, which provides clarity throughout the story. Consequently, this disciplined and accessible retelling preserves cultural meaning while enhancing readability.

V. PORTRAYING THE PROTECTOR: VISUAL NARRATION IN KRISHNA: THE DEFENDER OF DHARMA

As the title suggests, Krishna, who upheld dharma, taught the world how to go beyond for the sake of dharma —

"स्वधर्मम् अपि चावेक्ष्य न विकम्पितुम् अर्हसि।

धर्म्याद्धि युद्धाच्छ्रेयोऽन्यत् क्षत्रियस्य न विद्यते॥" (Bhagavad Gita, 2021,

2.31)

Which follows, considering your own dharma; you should not waver from it. For a warrior, there is nothing better than a righteous war. In the novel, the rendition of Krishna as a divine strategist was not only through the tone of dialogues but also by keeping the culture using the panel framing and typography, two primary focuses of this text.

"The artwork is powerful, with flourishes that help… Krishna's legendary charisma is aptly portrayed." (Russell, 2013) Krishna's visual presence elevates throughout the storytelling, using panel compositions like rectangular standard grids that create the flow of the plot, sovereignty, and inevitability, as in the prison scene of Vasudeva and Devaki (Taneja, 2013, p. 16). Curvilinear panels in Ras-leela scenes unveil emotional calmness (Taneja, 2013, p. 52), while symmetrical confrontation panels were sketched to eradicate the mighty Kangsa (Taneja, 2013, p. 61), developing dharma and winning over adharma. Alongside, typography embodies Krishna's ideology through title and chapter display, elliptical pause typography, inset symbolic emphasis, antagonist typography, etc. Narrative captions lend epic-like importance to the Yamuna crossing scene (Taneja, 2013, p. 25), which carries mythic exposition, scenic transitions, and time jumps. Sound-effect typography in battle scenes brings out the impact, fear, urgency, and motion on the page. Like "Hissss" in the Kaliya serpent war scene, it is an example of visual aggression in typography (Taneja, 2013, p. 41). Applying Hall's theory in the Govardhan-lifting scene (Taneja, 2013, p. 51), Krishna is visually created as a protector of life, where the splash and crowd panorama technique and the upward gaze of villagers toward the centrally visualized Krishna embody trust, faith, and unity, which reveal his ethical leadership. This transforms the divine cowherd into a symbol of resilience and communal responsibility. Wrapping up with Barthes, where teenage Krishna plays the flute in Vrindavan (Taneja, 2013, p. 39). In the context of this scene, the signifier flute is not only an instrument but also acts as a signified meaning of attraction, divine intimacy, and harmony. Whereas myth centralizes Krishna as an idol of devotion, this theory marks how a simple object transforms into a cultural sign with mystic presence.

Finally, this study reshapes Krishna in *Krishna: The Defender of Dharma* not as a cultural deity but as a culturally authoritative sign. Typography and framing, along with theories of Roland Barthes and Stuart Hall, helped to bring out modern visual language from the graphic narrative, where Krishna becomes accessible to contemporary audiences while preserving dharma, devotion, and ethical leadership.

VI. WHEN COLOR BECOMES COSMOS: VISUAL REINTERPRETATION OF KRISHNA IN JOURNEY WITHIN

Krishna: A Journey Within by Abhishek Singh is a mythological graphic novel that reinterprets philosophical and spiritual themes and blends ancient myth with modern storytelling to create a colorful experience for gathering knowledge about cultural foundations. Here, the author constructs Krishna's narrative by employing a shifting visual movement between abstraction and structuring sequential art, allowing meaning to be inferred through form rather than narrative content. The technique of abstraction is one of the most crucial ones used by the author, which helps in reducing complexity and evokes readers to reflect on their thoughts and ideas. In the opening section, the absence of traditional panel borders creates an expanse that mirrors the cosmic infinitude and also denotes the eternity of Lord Vishnu (Singh, 2012, pp. 9-11). However, the presence of a peacock along with a single feather and the minimalism in the depiction of his face take on more the role of signifiers rather than representations in their literal sense (Singh, 2012, p. 14). According to Roland Barthes, the theory of semiotics refers to something being represented by the signifier in the form of cultural connotations of the signified. This is clearly seen in Biswarup Darshan, in which the overwhelming number of multiple images takes away from the literal meaning towards abstraction, implying the concept of eternity. (Singh, 2012, p. 141). This is further developed through sequential art, where the arrangement of panels creates a sense of movement and continuity. In the 'Makhan Chori' episode, the story unfolds across multiple panels that depict anticipation, action, and reaction (Singh, 2012, pp. 16-17). Every panel portrays bits of the story, but the completeness appears after connecting the dots. For instance, the transition from the initial portrayal of Krishna approaching someone to the moment he steals butter and then to the reactions of the other characters necessitates making the reader become part of the story as well. Similarly, for the depiction of Radha-Krishna's affective encounter, several panels are used to compose a slower pace and subtle gestures such as exchanged glances, spatial closeness, and background dissolving into an emotional spectrum that blurs the boundaries between figures and space, intensifying their sense of divine union. Hence, meaning is not directly stated through words but conveyed with visual rhythm (Singh, 2012, pp. 87-97). Color performs a very sophisticated role in communication, language that goes even beyond images to backgrounds that contribute to creating certain emotions. While Krishna himself is dissolving into the red, fluid expanse, which suggests both cosmic sacrifice and the essence of life, his calm, floating

posture reflects transcendence rather than suffering (Singh, 2012, p. 187). Afterwards, his presence becomes an eternal symbol of the idea that the divine is omnipresent, moving beyond form, only existing as a guiding force within the universe. In addition, the environment becomes symbolic of the divine presence, where the deer represents the gentle, sensitive, and harmonious side of Krishna, while the dark and entangled trees with birds symbolize the devolution of consciousness.

VII. THE EVOLUTION OF ROLES: MULTIDIMENSIONAL KRISHNA IN AMAR CHITRA KATHA'S MAHABHARATA

In the Amar Chitra Katha adaptation of the *Mahabharata*, Krishna is presented as a multidimensional figure whose character is constructed through visual storytelling, strategic dialogue, moral philosophy, and the tension between his human emotions and divine detachment. Across the narrative, he evolves from a mediator to a moral guide, a strategic advisor, a philosopher, and finally, a metaphorical witness, consequently tracing the human ability to face the hardships of the world. While the *Mahabharata*, the Hindu epic, had already mirrored these fine qualities of Krishna before, the Amar Chitra Katha adaptation traces these qualities through various visual elements like panel composition, color, camera angle, dialogue, sequencing, etc. In the Kaurava court scenes, Krishna's central position in the panel symbolizes authority (Bhagwat, 2019, p. 18). In comparison to Krishna, other figures appear tense and uneven in their positioning. This contrast in the panel draws the reader's attention toward Krishna and makes his calm presence stand out. This arrangement does not merely depict authority but constructs it. As Roland Barthes suggests, visual elements like position and framing work as signifiers that produce meaning. The sense of control becomes more focused in the moment when Krishna offers Arjuna and Duryodhana a choice between himself and his army. The panel separates Krishna from the army of war, creating a clear visual difference between moral guidance and physical power. The balanced framing emphasizes the symbolic importance of the choice. Even the dialogue of this scene represents Krishna in a non-combat role, as he states, "I love you both! One of you must choose me. The other will have my army" (Bhagwat, 2019, p. 18). Ultimately, the image represents ethical clarity over physical strength. Moving from the stillness of a peace messenger to the kinetic energy of the battlefield, the visual style changes through dynamic sequential art. Within this section, low camera angles and tight framing create a smooth transition with urgency. Krishna's role as Arjuna's charioteer marks his active presence and provides a unique static energy (Bhagwat, 2019, p. 19). This reflects Stuart Hall's idea that meaning depends on context. By entering into the role of a charioteer, Krishna intentionally subverts the class barriers. Here, authority is not about social rank but about providing ethical clarity and moral duty when it is needed most. An evident pause appears during Arjuna's moment of hesitation, where the panels slow down, creating space for a transitional suspension. In the Bhagavad Gita discourse, dialogue and typography become more important, as they guide the reader's attention to the philosophical teachings. In contrast, Krishna embodies visual stillness within the frame (Bhagwat, 2019, pp. 20-21). As Krishna begins, "अशोच्यान्वशोचस्त्वं प्रज्ञावादांश्च भाषसे" (Bhagavad Gita, 2007, 2.11)—consoling Arjuna for grieving what is not worthy of grief—the emphasis moves to understanding rather than impulse. Meaning develops through this pause, presenting Krishna as a guide. As Barthes explains, meaning can work beyond what is immediately visible. Here, both text and image work together to create a deeper semiotic level. When the battle recommences, Krishna's role changes according to the context. With quick transitions, the panels carry the momentum of the fight. Amid this, the shifting angles follow the intensity of the battlefield, yet repeatedly return to him. Color schemes play another crucial role here. Krishna is often displayed as a lighter shade of blue that separates him from the brutality of the battle, presenting him as a strong guiding force rather than an extraordinary superpower (Bhagwat, 2019, pp. 21-23). In the final sequence, the panels open up, and the narration flow gets slower, making a clear distinction between action and reaction. The medium camera angle suggests Krishna's role as an observer rather than an active participant, while the absence of rapid movement reinforces an act of closure. This transition reflects Stuart Hall's concept of cultural representation, where meaning is produced according to a specific context, as Krishna's role shifts from active participation to a reflective presence in the aftermath of the war (Bhagwat, 2019, p. 29).

Through these visual shifts, the graphic adaptation of the *Mahabharata* shows how Krishna's identity actually lives and breathes in our modern world. In the abovementioned panels, the artist does not just state his identity but expresses it through color, camera angles, and the flow of the panels to highlight his different roles. As Linda Hutcheon argues, a good adaptation does not repeat an old story but redefines it. Here, the visual method creates a nuanced version of Krishna that feels both divine and human. Ultimately, Amar Chitra Katha brings ancient myths back to life for the new generation, turning the complex structure into something exciting that helps younger readers to connect with their

own cultural roots.

VIII. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: VISUALISING KRISHNA ACROSS GRAPHIC NARRATIVES

Through the four texts, Krishna is represented through distinct visual features that reshape his portrayal in Indian graphic narratives. In *Krishna* by Amar Chitra Katha, he is introduced as a simplified character where color and minimal detailing play a major role in drawing the reader's attention. While *Krishna: Defender of Dharma* relies on typography and framing to emphasize authority, *Krishna: A Journey Within* moves toward abstraction, using sequence to portray an introspective Krishna. In contrast, Amar Chitra Katha's *Mahabharata* depicts him through a combination of visual narrative elements. This variation reveals a shift in how visual storytelling discusses mythological stories. While *Krishna* (ACK) creates identity through clarity, *Defender of Dharma* structures it through authority, and *Journey Within* transforms it into a more introspective way. The *Mahabharata* stands apart by combining these features, presenting Krishna as both immediate and evolving. Rather than creating his identity, this discussion allows it to develop across contexts, where each visual shift contributes to a deeper understanding. Therefore, the difference lies not only in style but also in narrative intention: from simplification to authority and introspection and, finally, unification. The texts collectively demonstrate how visual form does not merely illustrate mythology but actively constructs its meaning.

IX. CONCLUSION

The paper aims to examine how Krishna is not merely imitated but gradually reshaped through visual storytelling techniques in Indian graphic narratives. By analyzing the four prototypical graphic narratives, it becomes clear that Krishna's identity is not fixed, but it changes across these texts using different visual strategies. By focusing on the form, Indian graphic narratives not only act as a passive recipient of meaning but also actively build meaning through engagement with images and structure. These texts encourage a deeper way of reading mythology and portray complex characters like Krishna more recognizably.

The growing interest among modern readers in graphic narratives indicates that visual storytelling holds cultural significance. This study explores how contemporary India reinterprets its ancient symbol within a globalized, image-saturated world, drawing on Hall, Barthes, and Hutcheon as well as visual semiotics theory. Post-independence publishers like Amar Chitra Katha present Krishna as a symbol of moral clarity and cultural pride, elevating Hindu mythology in these visual narratives for a global audience.

A similar framework could be used in future research to examine other divine figures, such as Durga or Rama, and compare Indian graphic stories with Western adaptations of classical gods. Questions such as how non-Hindu or non-Indian audiences decode these visual signs and what new meanings emerge in that encounter might arise at a deeper level. Ultimately, as storytelling evolves, Krishna will continue moving from the world of words into whatever realm of images awaits him next.

X. NOTES

[[1]Chromatic Subtraction- "it includes colours mixed with physical materials like paint pigments, printing inks and dyes. It is 'subtraction' because of the absorption or subtraction of a certain wavelength from white light. Subtractive primary colours are Cyan, Magenta, and Yellow (CMY)" (RMIT University, n.d.)]

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Integrating the teachings of Bhagwat Gita with Modern Education

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Abstract— *Education is not about acquiring knowledge only rather it's the comprehensive process that leads to the holistic development of an individual. In today's fast growing world, it becomes a necessity to deal with the academic stress , competitions for the jobs , the changing demands for studies and vocations, declining motivation, increasing distractions like social media etc. The Bhagwat Gita, an important scripture gives us many valuable insights that may help us addressing these issues. The present paper aims to throw some light on the wisdom present in Bhagwat Gita and their relevance in academic life. It will focus on some key aspects like nishkam karma, role of consistency, perseverance, self regulation etc. The present paper aims to throw some light on the corresponding relationship exist between the Bhagwat Gita and the principles of education psychology. The paper also highlight the similarity between Teacher student interaction and that of krishna and Arjuna. Using a conceptual and analytical approach, the paper seeks to Identify the potential relevance of Bhagwat Gita in holistic development of student. By emphasizing self awareness, balanced action, etc.*

Keywords— ***Bhagwat Gita, academic life, holistic development, Educational Psychology, teacher student interaction, socio cultural theory, monitoring and acceptance theory, self-regulated learning theory.***

What is educational psychology?

Educational psychology is the branch of psychology that includes learning, motivation, intelligence, personality. Memory teaching methods, individual differences. It also includes learning processes and other factors that can affect education. With the fast evolving World, it becomes necessary for focusing on education and its core areas for which educational psychology serves the purpose. The educational psychology, came into limelight in 20th century. Educational psychology concerns itself with scientific study of learning, intelligence, motivation, Self regulation etc.

Bhagwat Gita-

Bhagwat Gita is a Hindu scripture that is the part of Mahabharata's Bhisama parva. It contains the teachings Of supreme personality of Godhead Lord Sri krishna that the lord delivered to Arjuna, His disciple. Bhagwat Gita is considered as our life manual that finds its relevance in every aspect of our life.

The Psychological Principles and the related Bhagwat Gita verses that are relevant for the academic life are explained as below –

Emotional Intelligence-

The concept of emotional intelligence was given by Daniel Goleman. It's a cluster of traits or abilities related to the motional side of life abilities such as recognizing and managing one's own emotions, being able to motivate oneself and restrain one's impulse, recognizing and managing others emotions and handling interpersonal relationships in an effective manner. In Bhagwat Gita, we find-

āpūryamāṇam acala-pratiṣṭhaṁ
samudram āpaḥ praviśanti yadvat
tadvat kāmā yaṁ praviśanti sarve
sa śāntim āpnoti na kāma-kāmī (2.56)

A person who is not disturbed by the incessant flow of desires – that enter like rivers into the ocean, which is ever being filled but is always still – can alone achieve peace, and not the man who strives to satisfy such desires. For the student, it's very much needed to have a peaceful mind and to be emotionally intelligent so as to deal with the situations efficiently.

Mindfulness –

It is the intentional , non judgmental practice of paying attention to the present moment rather than unnecessarily worrying about the future. The student should practice mindfulness in the sense that she should focus on her efforts only and not be worrying for the results. This concept is similar to the concept of nishkam Karma yoga as given below Krishna in Bhagwat Gita in the following verse-

karmaṇy evādhikāras te

mā phaleṣu kadācana

mā karma-phala-hetur bhū

mā te saṅgo 'stv akarmaṇi(2.47)

You have a right to perform your prescribed duty, but you are not entitled to the fruits of action. Never consider yourself the cause of the results of your activities, and never be attached to not doing your duty. Also, hankering upon the results shows the increase in mode of passion that itself is not good , as Krishna says in Bhagwat Gita –

lobhaḥ pravṛttir ārambhaḥ

karmaṇām aśamaḥ spṛhā

rajasy etāni jāyante

vivṛddhe bharatarṣabha (14.12)

O chief of the Bhāratas, when there is an increase in the mode of passion the symptoms of great attachment, fruitive activity, intense endeavor, and uncontrollable desire and hankering develop. The **monitoring and acceptance theory based on mindfulness approach** is given by- David K. Creswell and Emily K. Lindsay in 2017. The focus of the theory is we should be monitoring where our attention goes and also we should accept the changes and the unfavorable circumstances without any judgement. I.e. we should be concerned only about our actions and not get attached with the results. Also, we should accept the outcomes as they are. This kind of thinking can prevent the unfortunate suicidal tendency in adolescents. NCRB data 2024 shows that India recorded 14,488 student suicides in 2024, marking nearly 80% increase from 2014. **Self Awareness-**

Both the mindfulness and self awareness are seemingly similar concepts but self awareness is our tendency to recognize our own thoughts, emotions feelings , capacities. This is also discussed by Howard Gardener in his concept of Intrapersonal Intelligence. Similarly in Bhagwat Gita,

śreyān sva-dharmo viguṇaḥ

para-dharmāt sv-anuṣṭhitāt

sva-dharme nidhanaṁ śreyaḥ

para-dharmo bhayāvahaḥ (.3.35)

It is far better to discharge one's prescribed duties, even though faultily, than another's duties perfectly. Destruction in the course of performing one's own duty is better than engaging in another's duties, for to follow another's path is dangerous. For the student, it's very much needed that she must be aware about her potential and her duties.

Self Regulation

True academic Growth requires self regulation.This involves eating, sleeping, co scholastic activities, discipline, focused and goal oriented actions, self control i.e. no allurement for the limelights etc. It also includes handling oneself in unfavorable situations. Instead of reacting automatically or letting impulses take over, it means choosing a constructive and thoughtful response. As per the **self regulated learning theor**y by Barry zimmerman , it's a cyclic process where students take control of their own education by managing their thoughts, feelings, and actions to reach academic goals. It includes Planning ,Monitoring, Evaluating. In bhagwat gita, few verses speak about the self regulation as follow-

anudvega-karaṁ vākyaṁ

satyaṁ priya-hitaṁ ca yat

svādhyāyābhyasanaṁ caiva

vāṅ-mayaṁ tapa ucyate (17.15)

Austerity of speech consists in speaking words that are truthful, pleasing, beneficial, and not agitating to others. Similarly

yukta-ceṣṭasya karmasu

yukta- yuktāhāra-vihārasya

svapnāvabodhasya

yogo bhavati duḥkha-hā (.6.17)

He who is regulated in his habits of eating, sleeping, recreation and work can mitigate all material pains by practicing the yoga system.

Perseverance

This is one of the most needed and most significant attribute in student life. It's the mental and emotional drive to keep going when you face failures and obstacles. In student life, there may be times when the student faces failures so it's very much needed that the she keep going with the positive mindset. In Bhagwat Gita also

karmaṇy evādhikāras te

mā phaleṣu kadācana

mā karma-phala-hetur bhūr

mā te saṅgo 'stv akarmaṇi (2.47)

You have a right to perform your prescribed duty, but you are not entitled to the fruits of action. Never consider yourself the cause of the results of your activities, and never be attached to not doing your duty.

sa niścayena yoktavyo

yogo 'nirviṇṇa-cetasā

saṅkalpa-prabhavān kāmāṁs

tyaktvā sarvān aśeṣataḥ (6.24)

One should engage oneself in the practice of yoga with determination and faith and not be deviated from the path. The student should keep going towards her goals with full faith and determination.

Self Improvement-

In academic life, there are numerous situations where we need to self improve ourselves. This is very much needed as the following verse says –

jyesthatvam janmanā naiva,

guṇairjyesthatva ucyate guṇāt gurutvamāyāti, dugdham dadhi ghṛta kramāt

Superiority or greatness is never attained merely by birth; rather, greatness is determined by one's virtues and qualities. Greatness is acquired by personally walking the path of virtue and by putting to good use what we have. Even if we get everything on our table, still we need to make some efforts to get the best results. This self improvement can be achieved when the student demonstrates traits like - resilience, integrity, dedication, self confidence etc.

Need for Guidance

Guidance in student life is necessary to help young people understand their strengths, navigate high academic and social pressures, and make informed choices about their future. The same approach was shown by Arjuna when he surrendered himself to the lord Sri Krishna. Similarly the student should not get hesitate in seeking guidance or help from the teachers and confidential people. The attitude shown by Arjuna towards Krishna that the students should follow is mentioned in the following verse –

kārpaṇya-doṣopahata-svabhāvaḥ

pṛcchāmi tvāṁ dharma-sammūḍha-cetāḥ

yac chreyaḥ syān niścitaṁ brūhi tan me

śiṣyas te 'haṁ śādhi māṁ tvāṁ prapannam (2.7)

Now I am confused about my duty and have lost all composure because of miserly weakness. In this condition I am asking You to tell me for certain what is best for me. Now I am Your disciple, and a soul surrendered unto You. Please instruct me. There are many scenarios where the student might get confused and may need some sort of guidance. So it's highly recommended that the students should approach for guidance.

Gratitude

The more gratitude the student has in her behavior towards those who help her, the more positive attitude she will develop. It helps lower down the grudge, stress, and help in building mental resilience and improve academic focus. Showing gratitude helps the student to deal with their lower phases more efficiently and to bounce back faster. The same concept is mentioned in Bhagwat Gita in the following verse -

arjuna uvāca mad-anugrahāya paramaṁ

guhyam adhyātma-saṁjñitam

yat tvayoktaṁ vacas tena

moho 'yaṁ vigato mama (11.1)

Arjuna said: By hearing the instructions You have kindly given me about these most confidential spiritual subjects, my illusion has now been dispelled. Infact there comes the days like teacher's day celebration and Guru Purnima where the students show there gratitude for the teachers.

Need to Control Anger-

There are situations where the student might get angry and this may cause her to a greater loss. But more than this, Bhagwat Gita gives very interesting yet fantastic equation of anger and its impact on our intelligence as follows-

krodhād bhavati sammohaḥ

sammohāt smṛti-vibhramaḥ

smṛti-bhraṁśād buddhi-nāśo

buddhi-nāśāt praṇaśyati (2.63)

From anger, complete delusion arises, and from delusion bewilderment of memory. When memory is bewildered, intelligence is lost.

Equanimity

A calm state of mind which means that you do not become angry or upset, especially in difficult situations. The student life is filled with all the roller coasters of success and failures. So it becomes very necessary for the student to have equanimity. The following verse of Bhagwat Gita also reflects the same principle –

mātrā-sparśās tu kaunteya

śītoṣṇa-sukha-duḥkha-dāḥ

āgamāpāyino 'nityās

*tāṁs titikṣasva bhārata (*2.14)

O son of Kuntī, the nonpermanent appearance of happiness and distress, and their disappearance in due course, are like the appearance and disappearance of winter and summer seasons. They arise from sense perception, O scion of Bharata, and one must learn to tolerate them without being disturbed.

yaṁ hi na vyathayanty ete

puruṣaṁ puruṣarṣabha

sama-duḥkha-sukhaṁ dhīraṁ

so 'mṛtatvāya kalpate (2.15)

O best among men [Arjuna], the person who is not disturbed by happiness and distress and is steady in both is certainly eligible for liberation.

Overcoming Procrastination

Procrastination is one of the most important thing that a student should never do. Even the famous couplet of Kabir das ji speaks about it as –

Kaal kare so aaj kar, aaj kare so ab;

Pal mein pralay hoyegi, bahuri karega kab.

The same point is stressed in Bhagwat Gita as follows-

ayuktaḥ prākṛtaḥ stabdhaḥ

śaṭho naiṣkṛtiko 'lasaḥ

viṣādī dīrgha-sūtrī ca

kartā tāmasa ucyate (18.28)

The worker who is always engaged in work against the injunctions of the scripture, who is materialistic, obstinate, cheating and expert in insulting others, and who is lazy, always morose and procrastinating is said to be a worker in the mode of ignorance.

Consistent Practice –

It's undoubtedly the most important aspect of student life. One is always advised to be consistent and to be disciplined in her studies. The same concept is mentioned in Bhagwat Gita as follows - *śrī-bhagavān uvāca*

asaṁśayaṁ mahā-bāho

mano durnigrahaṁ calam

abhyāsena tu kaunteya

vairāgyeṇa ca gṛhyate (6.35)

Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa said: O mighty-armed son of Kuntī, it is undoubtedly very difficult to curb the restless mind, but it is possible by suitable practice and by detachment. Things that seems to be difficult at one point of time can be easily done by constant practice and by getting detached from the distractions. Also, one famous couplet by poet Kavi Vrind says-

Karat karat abhyas ke, jadmati hot sujan,

Rasri aavat-jaat te, sil par parat nisan.

Just as a soft rope rubbing repeatedly against a hard stone can leave a mark on it over time, consistent effort and practice can turn any impossible task achievable.

Teacher-Student Relationship

A positive teacher-student relationship builds trust, mutual respect, and emotional safety, which directly improves academic performance and personal growth. The open dialogues between the teacher and student, the question answer sessions help a lot the student in their overall development. The same notion is used in Bhagwat Gita where Krishna is the teacher and the Arjuna is the student who asked the questions. Similar concept is highlighted by Lev Vygotsky in his **socio cultural theory** that learning can occur through social interaction, dialogues and guidance from others.

In conclusion, Bhagwat Gita provides valuable insights for the holistic development of the student and the principles present in this scripture aids the student to deal with the situations in a healthy manner. The thoughtful integration of Bhagwat Gita with the modern education system may strengthen the student emotional and mental well being, motivation, self regulation, and other positive developments as well.

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Scarcity, Survival, and Environmental Justice: An Ecocritical Reading of Paolo Bacigalupi's "The Tamarisk Hunter"

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Abstract— *This article examines Paolo Bacigalupi's short story "The Tamarisk Hunter'" through the lens of ecocriticism, political ecology, and environmental justice. Given that this is a story set in a future where water serves as the fundamental limiting factor, the narrative explores the ways in which environmental degradation alters work, the way we live, and the nature of power. As Lolo is a tamarisk hunter, the story is used to explore the relationship between the control of natural resources and issues of economic survival and the exercise of institutional power. Drawing on Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence", it is revealed that the effects of ecological crisis are not distributed equally, since the poor and the disempowered are the ones who suffer the most. The story is a potent example of the way in which the political economy of climate change is inextricably linked to questions of inequality and the very nature of survival in an age of ecological crisis.*

Keywords— ***Climate fiction; ecocriticism; water scarcity; environmental justice; political ecology; climate precarity.***

This is a study that brings together literary analysis, ecocriticism, and political ecology to argue that water scarcity is not simply an environmental problem but a system which produces unequal power and vulnerability. Bacigalupi's "The Tamarisk Hunter" is used to demonstrate how the resource crisis is exacerbated by unequal control and distribution of power. Since Lolo's position as a tamarisk hunter is a position of extreme precarity, it reveals important truths about the link between environmental destruction and social issues, such as economic survival, class, and institutional power. The dystopia serves as a critique of the social and economic systems that produce such vulnerability in the face of an ecological crisis. The thesis is situated at the intersection of the ecological (drought and scarcity), the socioeconomic (the precariousness of labour and class), and the literary (dystopia and climate fiction as a form of critique). The analysis is based on a close reading of language, character, setting, and conflict.

Climate change is a hugely complex issue, spanning the scientific, the political, the economic, and the cultural. Literature has responded to the environmental crisis by looking at its impact on people, landscapes, and society. Climate fiction (cli-fi) is a genre of fiction that focuses on the human and ecological consequences of climate disruption. It is not pure science fiction, in that it is rooted in a plausible future, with the goal of making environmental predictions and the social consequences of those predictions real. Paolo Bacigalupi is an American speculative fiction writer. "The Tamarisk Hunter" is set in a dried-up American Southwest, in which Lolo's work as a tamarisk cutter provides a clear reflection of how water scarcity changes the nature of work, the nature of livelihood, and the nature of social relations.

This study's central research question asks how environmental scarcity is linked to social and economic inequality. To answer this, the study makes use of ecocriticism, political ecology, and environmental justice to

interrogate the ways in which "The Tamarisk Hunter" portrays the unequal management of resources and its resulting consequences. While there is a considerable body of work already in existence dealing with the Anthropocene, the environmental crisis, and the commodification of nature, this study is primarily concerned with the contradiction lying at the heart of the situation, whereby ecological restoration is pursued in tandem with economic dependency, such that Lolo's very survival becomes an indicator of the failure for any such restoration to be truly sustainable or just. The close reading thereof reveals that market-based solutions to environmental problems are frequently inadequate in producing either sustainable or equitable outcomes, while also showing how the very nature of the crisis is shaped by the exercise of economic and institutional power.

The analysis is informed by the theoretical frameworks provided by Glotfelty, Garrard, Nixon, and Robbins. Glotfelty's ecocriticism is used to examine how the story treats nature and the relationship between humans and the natural world. Nixon's concept of "slow violence" is relevant in terms of the insidious, gradual damage that is done to the poor. Robbins' political ecology focuses on the ways in which power and institutions control resources and determine who has to bear the environmental costs of industrial projects. These approaches inform one's efforts to read the text in terms of how it presents water scarcity as both an ecological and a socio-economic crisis, how it links resource management to class and power, and how it uses the genre of dystopia to question issues of accountability, commodification, and ownership of resources.

Environmental justice is about asking who benefits from environmental change and who bears the cost thereof. Nixon's concept of "slow violence" is particularly useful in this regard, because it helps explain why the gradual degradation of the environment disproportionately impacts the most vulnerable within society. This story is a good illustration of this idea, in that the experience of slow violence and normal hardship is very much a function of social class and position. It is only when the burden of environmental harm is distributed unequally that it becomes a political issue. The landscape in Bacigalupi's story is both a metaphor for and a consequence of environmental devastation. Under "Big Daddy Drought", the world appears as a place in which water is a commodity to be controlled, not a resource to be shared. California holds the senior legal rights to 4.4 million acre-feet from the Colorado River Basin, and the state's power is exercised via the federal agencies, such as the Department of the Interior and the Bureau of Reclamation (BuRec), which are in turn backed up by the state's own militarised forces. Against such insurmountable odds, the local communities simply lose out in this struggle, as the process of "evaporating" the towns is a systematic one. Water is treated as a commodity and is monetised through bounties and via infrastructure, such as "The Straw", which is a massive pipeline that sends water to California and leaves the upstream areas bone dry.

Access to water is tightly controlled by BuRec via digital surveillance. Lolo has to photograph and GPS tag every tamarisk removal in order to be credited with his work and receive his share of water. Any unauthorised use of water is met with severe penalties. In fact, if the reserves fall too low, then the well is simply blown up. Lolo works the system by reseeding tamarisk in the hope of getting future bounties. With "The Straw" pipeline completed, human labour becomes redundant, and the bounty programme is subsequently terminated, with the people being forced out and given small buyout payments. Although water is a necessity for life, in the story, it is only wealth and historic legal entitlement that determine who gets access to it. Since only the rich cities of L.A. and Vegas have their rights to the water enforced by the authorities, the towns further down the line are all destroyed. As a result of this inequality, the upstream communities (the ones living right up the river) are legally precluded from using their own water. The locals have to live by the strictest of rationing, surviving by hauling water in or by using their hidden cisterns.

Diverted river water is the very basis of California's lifestyle, but the people upstream have absolutely no say in the matter, as the water simply flows past them. Environmental value is reduced to a legal and economic proposition, with the traditional concept of property rights completely wiped out. Without water, towns become ghost towns and the people in them are reduced to "water ticks" who eke out a living through petty crime and by living in the shadows, proving that scarcity destroys solidarity in a community. Lolo keeps his tamarisk reseeding a complete secret, as he doesn't want to risk himself. The neighbours go along with the security forces in order to secure the water rights for their own families, turning on their former friends in the process. Land attachment means absolutely nothing, since it's all about who has the water. When Lolo gets his $500 buyout, he is reminded that it's all about access; it's all about survival. It doesn't matter what your claim is or what your history is, if the legal system can arbitrarily grant rights to the wealthy but deny them to the poor.

The story's dystopia is very much a reflection of actual environmental practice and consequence, the main difference being that in the story it is the structural barriers rather than the physical scarcity that are the real problem. In the "Big Daddy Drought" scenario, the environmental collapse is made worse by the priorities of the law and the

power of the state, rather than simply originating in the environment. The regional devastation is less a result of drought and more a result of California's legal entitlement to 4.4-million-acre feet from the Colorado River, which causes the upstream communities to just watch the water go by, completely unused. Federal agencies deal with the displacement of the civilian population through a series of calculated administrative procedures, drawing on the techniques of industrial liquidation to prevent any kind of social unrest from erupting. Protests over water cuts are met with force, including the destruction of water treatment plants. BuRec enforces the shortages by sealing the wells when the reserves are low. Lolo's job of cutting tamarisk is a gruelling one and is heavily monitored. He receives a very low wage and has to log his work digitally in order to get any water at all.

The restoration economy is a paradox, though, in that full ecological recovery equals unemployment and the loss of water for the workers (Lolo being a case in point). To survive, he has to reseed tamarisk in secret for the future bounty. When California finishes "The Straw" pipeline, all human labour is effectively eliminated and the bounty scheme is over. Lolo gets a non-negotiable $500 buyout. This is a very clear illustration of how rights and livelihoods can be eroded away through a series of small, incremental policy changes, rather than through one vividly dramatic disaster. This underlines the political nature of environmental management, raising questions about the issue of who controls things and who is considered disposable in the face of such management. The story is about the human impact on the environment and the deep-seated social inequalities which are inherent in the way environmental damage is both created and managed. The Anthropocene is, of course, a concept which recognises the scale of human impact on the planet, but it is a concept which can be very misleading, in that it implies that all of human beings share that impact equally. "The Tamarisk Hunter" serves as a critique of that very idea, since it shows that water scarcity is a crisis of extreme stratification, a crisis which is created and maintained by legal monopolies, state surveillance, and class exploitation. The very act of managing and engineering the environment is shown to be a mechanism of consolidating economic power. It is a process which grants the right to survive to the few but takes it away from the many.

Ecological change in "The Tamarisk Hunter" is portrayed as the result of human action, botanical management, and technical infrastructure. Drought is exacerbated by what is effectively a "botanical war" on the tamarisk, which is a massive water guzzler. Under BuRec, the environmental restoration becomes a piece-rate gig economy, with people like Lolo getting paid a pittance to go out to cut and poison the tamarisk. The piece-rate system puts labour under the microscope, with GPS photos required to prove that one's work has been done before any water can be released. Paradoxically, if Lolo and the others are successful in getting rid of the tamarisk, they lose their income. To survive, they have to secretly re-seed the tamarisk in order to get the next bounty. That is the perverse incentive created by the market mechanism. The whole system is, of course, rendered obsolete by "The Straw", which is able to pipe the river and remove the need for human labour altogether.

Bacigalupi's story is one that actively dismisses the notion that environmental destruction is a universal failing of humankind. It goes on to demonstrate how environmental degradation is, in fact, a product of power and privilege. The distribution of water is governed by a system of historical legal entitlements, which in effect favours only the coastal elites – California's senior claim to 4.4 million acre-feet of the Colorado River water being the most obvious example of this corruption. The people upstream are legally prohibited from taking their own water and are thus rendered completely powerless, as it simply flows past them. The story is about the "water ticks" (the dispossessed rural class) who are stuck in a state of mere subsistence, in stark contrast with the coastal elites who are able to maintain their lavish lifestyles thanks to the diversion of river water. When the people from the interior who have been displaced attempt to go west with the water, they are kept out by the military and armed forces, so that the elite interests can be protected.

Above all, environmental destruction in "The Tamarisk Hunter" is portrayed as the direct result of state-monopoly capitalism and bureaucratic violence. The agencies go in with the same calculatedness as the industrial liquidations of the past, carrying out regional water cut-offs with no resistance. If any resistance is encountered, it is met with force, in the form of the destruction of water treatment plants and the sealing of wells in order to drive the people out. Structural oppression comes to a head when the National Guard turns up at Lolo's house. They don't come to arrest him for subversion; they come to tell him that his labour is now redundant. "The Straw" is complete and the water bounty is cancelled. As a result, his headgate is locked and he is evicted with a $500 buyout. Individual agency is of no consequence in the face of the state's infrastructure. Likewise, "The Tamarisk Hunter" is very much a challenge to the notion that ecological crisis is a universal experience that is the same for all people. The text instead demonstrates how the crisis is mediated by capitalism and the state via legal monopolies, the exploitation of labour, and the use of violence, all of which defend the interests of the wealthy and disenfranchise the poor. The economic and political

systems determine who gets the resources and who gets left out. Climate fiction enables people to imagine the actual human cost of resource inequity and forces one to ask the hard questions about justice and survival.

When water is treated as a commodity, its value is derived from the legal monopoly and its infrastructure, not from the water itself. Under "Big Daddy Drought" California has the senior rights to 4.4-million-acre feet of the Colorado River water, which gives it enormous political clout. The Bureau of Reclamation runs a transactional water system that coerces people like Lolo to do the hard work of clearing tamarisk while getting paid peanuts to do it and having to record their work and being subject to a whole raft of other controls. Unauthorized wells are plugged and National Guard troops are stationed to protect the infrastructure and to enforce the state's control.

This is a transactional regime which treats water as a basic human need and as a commodity subject to the control of financial power. Under such conditions, the rural people are reduced to the status of "water ticks" who are left to survive on the margins, whilst the diverted water is used to support the luxuries of others from the wealthy, urban classes. Property and entitlement are meaningless, and the towns effectively become ghost towns as the population is driven out. When "The Straw" is complete and the bounty is over, Lolo is bought out and survival becomes just a matter of endurance in a system which was designed for extraction.

Control of the natural resources is therefore proven to be the same as control of the conditions of living and working. The Department of the Interior, BuRec and the state's monopoly on river flow are all the product of a militarised, techno-bureaucratic regime. Wells are capped when the water table drops, compliance is enforced through surveillance, and resistance is met with force. The regime is one which systematically dispossesses the interior of its people, whilst the coastal elite maintain their monopoly. The working-class survivors are dehumanised and rendered powerless as the resources are diverted. State water management has Lolo trapped in the precarious world of gig work, getting paid peanuts to remove tamarisk. Total restoration would kill him, so he's quietly sowing new tamarisk as a back-up. After they lose their well, they are forced to go completely illegal in their survival. This serves as a vivid case study for how environmental policy perpetuates inequality. When "The Straw" makes human labour obsolete, the bounty stops and Lolo is bought out. The point is that the entitlement belongs to the capital, not to the worker.

By presenting water shortage as a class crisis, the story mounts a challenge to the notion that environmental crises are equalisers. Lolo is reduced to the status of a "water tick" working for a pittance under the watchful eye of the company, while the elites are allowed to keep their legal entitlements to water and remain quite comfortable with the status quo. This is a case of scarcity dividing the population, since the people upstream are being starved as the water is taken away to fund the luxuries of the few. This inequality shows that "who gets the water and who doesn't" is arbitrarily determined by "who has the power and who has written the policy".

The ability to buy, litigate, or militarily seize water access is what protects the privileged from the environmental hardships, which the disempowered just can't avoid. "Vegas and L.A. put in their calls" (Bacigalupi) and the interior towns go to dust. State enforcers like Hale Perkins are part of the "Supplementary Assistance Program" to get their families California residency permits. The story presents the environmental justice picture as an image of the utterly unequal distribution of ecological risk. The disempowered rural workers are the ones who take the full brunt of it, as their municipal water treatment plants are destroyed, their private wells are filled with "Quickcrete after the water table drop[s] below the Minimum Allowable Reserve", and the river is enclosed in a concrete pipeline that leaves the canyon "bone dry". When "The Straw" makes human weed removal obsolete, the state just cancels the bounty program and liquidates Lolo's livelihood with a non-negotiable "$500 buyout check". When Lolo protests, "but this is my patch", he is told that entitlement is the property of state capital. All of these examples prove that ecological risk is systematically shifted onto the poor worker, who is left as a dispossessed refugee.

The story is also about how an environmental crisis can become self-reinforcing, if the very economic mechanisms created to deal with scarcity also serve to perpetuate dependence and inequality. The economic model at the heart of Lolo's work is one of managed scarcity. He gets $2.88 a day plus a water bounty to go out and kill the invasive tamarisk. It's a piece-rate restoration scheme, which creates a very real tension between survival and insecurity. The fact that completely eradicating the tamarisk would lead to his own personal bankruptcy is the very reason Lolo maintains a secret "insurance policy" in the form of seeding new patches of tamarisk in the remote canyons in order to prevent himself from running out of work. The point is that market-based solutions simply won't work in the face of an ecological crisis, if the underlying rights to the resource are so fundamentally unequal. California's senior claim to 4.4-million-acre feet of water is effectively starving the upstream communities. Although "Big Daddy Drought" serves as the physical constraint, it is the human-made economic system which determines the social consequences of that scarcity. The bureaucracy

systematically evaporates the interior towns. When the technological efficiency of "The Straw" pipeline renders human labour redundant, the authorities just walk away and end the bounty with a one-way "buyout" of $500. This is the ultimate expression of market logic in action: an environmental crisis becomes a crisis of class dispossession.

Lolo's labour is a case in point of the environmental crisis being not just one of degraded landscape but of unstable employment and a total lack of options in life. He is a piece-rate restoration worker for the Bureau of Reclamation, earning "2.88 a day plus water bounty" to go out and kill the water-guzzling tamarisk. He is forced to accept a life of physical grind and economic vulnerability, with the landscape itself being in a state of degradation. He has to hike down into the canyons to do the work, carrying "jugs of tamarisk poison" while his own well is full of "Quickcrete" from the state. To survive, he must compete against the other workers by doing a bit of subversive sabotage and by "seeding new patches of tamarisk" in order to have a future crop to hunt. Despite his efforts, he remains completely at the mercy of the system; his helplessness is put on display when California finishes "The Straw" pipeline the state just unilaterally ends the bounty and liquidates his home with a "500 buyout check" which he can't negotiate. This is the essence of climate precarity, as the environmental breakdown and the state's hoarding of resources leave the dispossessed worker with no other options except to become a parasitic "water tick" and migrate to some new location.

The tamarisk serves as the very embodiment of the conflict between the complexity of the natural world and the human desire to control that world in the interests of the economy. It lies at the very heart of the ecological conflict, commodified labour, and the utilitarian approach to nature. It is presented as the ultimate water guzzler (a "big tamarisk can suck 73,000 gallons of river water a year") and the Bureau of Reclamation is out in full force to get rid of it on a piece rate basis of "$2.88 a day plus water bounty". This is a paradox in itself, as the complete eradication of the tamarisk would result in the worker going personally bankrupt, forcing Lolo to be in the position of having to "seed new patches of tamarisk" as an "insurance policy" against the threat of working himself out of the job. The tree is the symbol of a system in which nature is considered to have value only insofar as it is seen as a threat to or a form of utility for human interests. Lolo's question "why should one of those damn plants get the water?" captures the very essence of this dilemma.

Bacigalupi complicates the issue of environmental morality by showing how people can become participants in destructive systems, simply because their very existence is predicated on those systems. Lolo's struggle to survive in the face of the "Big Daddy Drought" creates a very real moral dilemma. In order to protect his piece rate-water bounty, he is forced to perform an act of ecological waste by secretly planting invasive tamarisk trees. This situation proves that there is no easy moral solution presented; instead, the text simply presents the reader with a series of difficult moral choices. This shows that in the face of systemic dispossession and the imposition of a piece-rate work system, people simply can't choose to be environmentalists. When one's "water ticks" are in such a position, one can't afford to be concerned about saving nature.

The language of the story is very much the language of the environmental crisis as it is understood through the competing vocabularies of ecology, economics, and survival. "Big Daddy Drought" takes the reality of the environment and turns it into the language of management. The sheer physical effort of the task is described in terms of vegetation as a hydrological consumer: Lolo is "boot-skiing a gully" and carrying "tamarisk poison" and the tamarisk is described as a "big tamarisk that can suck 73,000 gallons of river water a year". The reality is made very tangible through the use of hard facts and figures (California's legal entitlement of "4.4 million acre-feet", a piece rate of "2.88 a day"). In the end, it all comes down to the language of resource management, as ecology is reduced to a series of costs and outputs, with disproportionate focus on "seep and evaporation control" and the simple calculation of "how many cities, how many people they could evaporate".

The ending makes absolutely no moral sense whatsoever, as it simply shows the state infrastructure smothering the individual. Lolo's subversive reseeding is completely irrelevant when California goes ahead and completes "The Straw" pipeline (which removes the need for any human labour at all) and liquidates his patch with a non-negotiable $500 buyout cheque. When Lolo protests, "but this is my patch", Hale just responds by telling him that entitlement is only for state capital under "Big Daddy Drought". In the end, Lolo is presented as a dispossessed refugee, with the river flowing away to California. The state infrastructure has won, proving through a case of market-based environmental management that in the face of such extreme power imbalances, the working-class labourer will always end up being commodified, exploited, and discarded.

"The Tamarisk Hunter" shows that the effects of climate change cannot be separated from the economic and political systems, which regulate the distribution of natural resources. In "The Tamarisk Hunter", water scarcity is both an ecological drought and a socio-economic crisis in which California's legal water monopoly dispossesses the people

upstream. Lolo's piece-rate tamarisk clearing is a textbook example of market-based environmental management leading to a very precarious mode of existence, in which the workers are forced to participate in subversive reseeding just to avoid starvation. The short story is read through the lens of ecocriticism, political ecology, and environmental justice to show the commodification of both nature and the labourers, the use of state power to dispossess through control of resources, and the ways in which the risk of ecological damage is borne by the poor. Climate fiction is vital, in that it makes the abstract reality of environmental data real by allowing the reader to see the human cost of the systems of resource management. This is most vividly put on display in the image of Lolo removing tamarisk trees in order to survive, as his very livelihood is based on the very activity which this piece is supposed to be eradicating. That contradiction is what allows the reader to interrogate the ways in which market incentives can work against the very environmental objectives they are designed to achieve.

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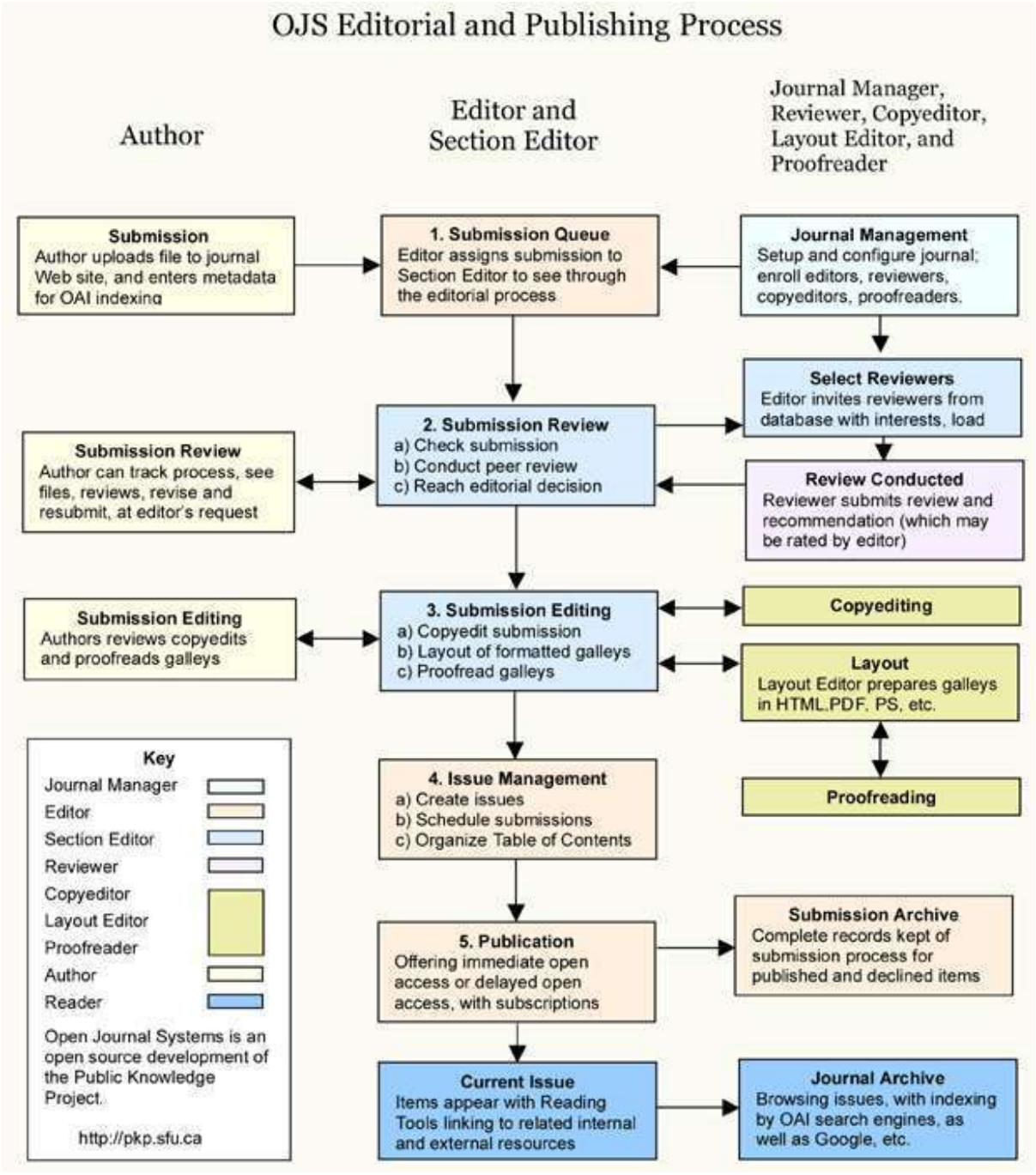
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