



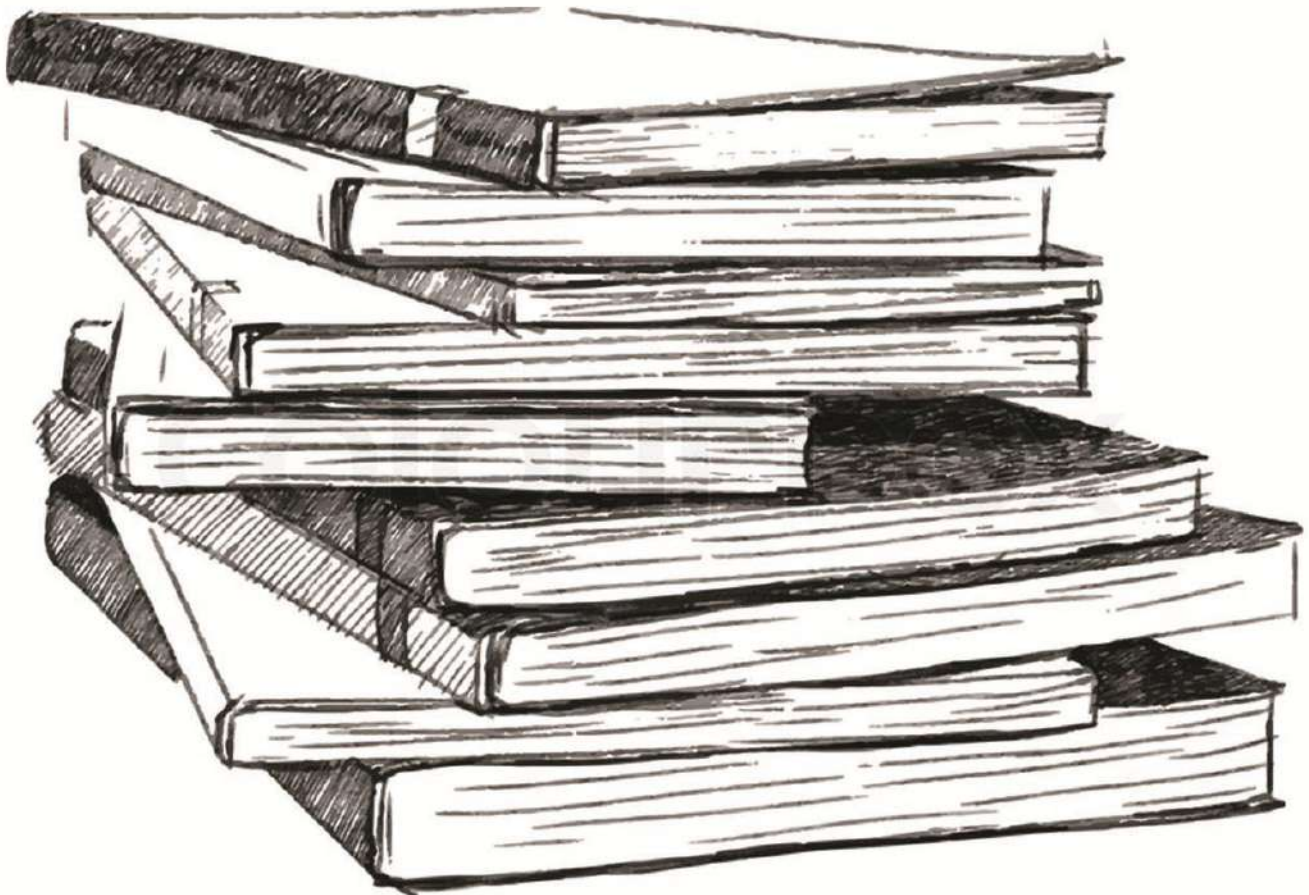
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FOREWORD

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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An Analysis of Xi Jinping's Diplomatic Thought from a Macro-Historical Perspective

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Abstract— Interpreting the theoretical origins and contemporary value of Xi Jinping's Thought on Diplomacy from the perspective of "macro-history" helps to deeply grasp its formative logic and historical context. This thought emerged at the intersection of global trends and the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, rooted in China's fine traditional culture, inheriting the essence of Marxist theory, drawing on historical experiences of modern national salvation, developing the diplomatic practices of New China, and innovatively proposing the concept of a "community with a shared future for mankind." It seeks to reshape the international order through the global governance principle of "wide consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits," while driving practical transformation via the high-quality co-construction of the Belt and Road Initiative. As the fundamental guideline for China's diplomacy in the new era, Xi Jinping's Thought on Diplomacy not only demonstrates strategic resolve and historical confidence but also contributes a theoretical paradigm to the reform of the global governance system.

Keywords— Macro-Historical Perspective, the Communist Party of China (CPC), Diplomacy, a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind



I. INTRODUCTION

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), General Secretary Xi Jinping has put forward a series of important expositions on the "grand historical perspective." This worldview and methodology, rooted in historical materialism, has gradually taken shape through the summation of revolutionary and developmental experiences and the inheritance of China's fine traditional culture. At its core, it views history as a dynamic and unified process, bridging the past and present with both historical depth and forward-looking vision. By grasping the laws of history and coordinating diplomatic practices, General Secretary Xi Jinping has developed Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy, which serves as the

fundamental guide for China's diplomatic endeavors in the new era. Since the 20th CPC National Congress, the essence of this thought has become even more solid, and its characteristics more distinct.

The academic community widely regards the grand historical perspective as a new development of historical materialism in contemporary China. It has been applied to analyze China's issues and explain the theoretical and practical logic behind Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy. The international community has also taken note. The Russian book Xi Jinping: Fulfilling the Chinese Dream centers on the theme of national rejuvenation, introducing General Secretary Xi Jinping's personal journey and the context of the "Chinese Dream," while highly praising his

innovative ideas and measures [1]. The American publication *The Age of Xi Jinping* reviews the general secretary's political career, with a focus on new strategies such as the "Four Comprehensives" [2].

Currently, the once-in-a-century transformation is accelerating, placing higher demands on China's diplomacy and its global positioning. This article aims to examine Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy through the lens of the grand historical perspective, exploring its historical foundations. By aligning with the strategic arrangements of the new era and analyzing global trends alongside China's national conditions, it will focus on the core concepts and elucidate their significance for our times.

II. THE HISTORICAL "ORIGINS" OF XI JINPING'S THOUGHT ON DIPLOMACY

2.1 The Fine Genes of Traditional Chinese Culture

Traditional Chinese culture has profoundly nourished Xi Jinping's thought on diplomacy. First, the Chinese nation has always cherished peace since ancient times. Confucianism advocates that "harmony is precious," Mohism promotes "non-aggression," and Daoism values "non-action," all prioritizing peace over war. Rulers sought "peace under heaven," while the common people longed for "living and working in peace and contentment," collectively forming the peaceful foundation of Chinese civilization. Second, the Chinese nation embraces harmony in diversity. Ancient wisdom held that differences foster exchange, and exchange drives progress—the vitality of civilization lies in mutual learning and enrichment [3]. Third, the Chinese nation has always been open and inclusive. From the integration of Central Plains and Chu cultures to the absorption of neighboring ethnic cultures, an open-minded ethos was cultivated. The Silk Road of the Han Dynasty, the fusion of Buddhism and Confucianism in the Tang Dynasty, Zheng He's voyages to the Western Seas, and the spread of the Four Great Inventions that spurred the Renaissance all demonstrate how Chinese culture thrived through exchange and contributed to world civilization. Fourth, the Chinese nation's pursuit of a "Great Harmony" society has deep historical roots. The *Book of Rites* states, "When the Great Way prevails, the world belongs to all." Sun Yat-sen

envisioned "a world shared by all" as his revolutionary ideal. This aspiration for a better society reflects the nation's spiritual pursuit and provides a profound cultural foundation for today's vision of building a community with a shared future for humanity.

2.2 Marx and Engels' Diplomatic Thought

While exploring the theories and actions for the liberation of the proletariat, the revolutionary mentors encapsulated the essence and core principles of handling international relations.

First, the Industrial Revolution in 19th-century Europe propelled a leap in productive forces. As capitalists expanded their markets globally, the proletariat was forcibly drawn into the industrialization process, with the surplus value of laborers continuously exploited. In response to this exploitation, Marx and Engels called for the unity of the proletariat to collectively oppose bourgeois oppression, stating: "The united action of the proletariat, at least in the civilized countries, is one of the first conditions for its emancipation." [4] They advocated replacing the illusory community of capitalism with an "association of free individuals," truly aligning with the fundamental interests of the vast majority.

Second, Marx and Engels championed peace and resolutely opposed unjust and unreasonable international relations. They condemned the capitalist powers' foreign policies, which "exploited national prejudices and shed the blood and squandered the wealth of the people in predatory wars for the pursuit of criminal ends." [5] They explicitly proposed that peace is the essential principle for correctly addressing national issues and interstate relations.

2.3 Historical Origins: The Wave of Globalization and China's Catastrophic Modern History

In the 15th century, advancements in navigation technology and commercial capital propelled Columbus's discovery of the Americas and Magellan's circumnavigation of the globe, opening new maritime routes for the West. Subsequently, Western nations, driven by mercantilism and the pursuit of wealth, accumulated capital through military expansion, maritime plunder, and fraudulent trade and are igniting a wave of colonization. Faced with these external pressures, the Ming and Qing governments, motivated by the need to maintain control

and economic self-sufficiency, adopted a policy of isolation, leaving only a few ports open. It gradually distanced China from the trajectory of global development, ultimately exposing its fatal shortcomings in modernization during the Opium War of 1840.

By the mid-19th century, Britain had taken the lead in completing the Industrial Revolution, leading to rapid growth in productivity. Eager to expand overseas markets and plunder raw materials, Britain sought to force open China's doors. To reverse its trade deficit with China, Britain smuggled vast quantities of opium into the country, triggering the Opium War. Due to the overwhelming disparity in strength, the Qing dynasty suffered a crushing defeat. This failure made enlightened individuals realize that the isolationist Qing Empire was no match for industrial civilization. China's natural economy began to collapse, national sovereignty was continuously eroded, and the country plunged into the abyss of semi-colonial and semi-feudal subjugation, forcibly drawn into the capitalist world market.

Some court officials and intellectuals gradually became aware of the vast gap between China and the world and began exploring ways to save the nation from peril. From the 1860s to the 1890s, the Self-Strengthening Movement, under the slogans of "self-strengthening" and "seeking prosperity," introduced Western technologies and established modern military and civilian industries, which to some extent spurred China's economic development. However, the movement only addressed superficial issues, failing to resolve deep-seated social contradictions, leaving China still passive amid global trends.

Subsequently, the Hundred Days' Reform and the 1911 Revolution erupted successively, completely ending the autocratic monarchy. As for where China's future lay, the nascent Communist Party provided an answer through practice. The dissemination of The Communist Manifesto and the victory of the Russian October Revolution brought new hope to China. A century of history has proven that only by actively aligning with historical trends can China truly achieve rejuvenation.

2.4 Successful Experiences in the Diplomatic History of New China

Over the past fifty years, New China has forged a path characterized by self-confidence, independence,

openness, inclusiveness, fairness, and justice. In the early days of the founding of the People's Republic, faced with the confrontation between two major blocs, Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai proposed the principles of "starting anew," "cleaning the house before inviting guests," and "leaning to one side," which aimed to eliminate imperialist privileges in China and prioritize relations with socialist countries. At the Bandung Conference, Zhou Enlai put forward the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, projecting New China as a peaceful and friendly nation onto the world stage.

In the 1960s, as national independence movements surged across Asia, Africa, and Latin America, China shifted its diplomatic focus to these regions, supporting liberation movements while improving relations with neighboring and European countries, ushering in a second wave of diplomatic recognition.

By the 1970s, the U.S.-Soviet rivalry had entered a phase of "Soviet offense and U.S. defense." Mao Zedong introduced the theory of the "Three Worlds," with China actively seeking support from the Third World, thereby expanding its international influence while ensuring domestic stability.

In the 1980s, Deng Xiaoping concluded that a major war was unlikely and explicitly identified "peace and development" as the themes of the era. China adhered to self-reliance while advancing reform and opening-up, proactively strengthening exchanges and cooperation with other nations and steadily progressing toward modernization.

After the 1990s, amid the dramatic shifts in the international landscape following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Communist Party of China, under the leadership of Comrade Jiang Zemin, responded with composure. It stabilized the foundations of domestic development, upheld peace and development, opposed hegemonism, advocated for a just and equitable new international order, and promoted global progress toward peace.

III. THE HISTORICAL "TRANSFORMATION" BEHIND THE FORMATION OF XI JINPING'S DIPLOMATIC THOUGHT

The era is the mother of thought, and practice is the

source of theory [6]. The diplomacy of the new era is built on the spatial horizontal coordinate of the current global trends and the temporal vertical coordinate of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, evolving with the times and circumstances.

3.1 The Major Trends in World Historical Development

General Secretary Xi Jinping's proposition of "profound changes unseen in a century" profoundly reveals the complex transformations the world is undergoing today. Unlike the "changes" mentioned by Li Hongzhang in the late Qing Dynasty, the current transformation is all-encompassing: the collective rise of emerging markets and developing countries has led to a more balanced international power structure; the accelerated advancement of a new round of technological and industrial revolutions is profoundly reshaping productivity and lifestyles; the global governance system faces adjustments, with multilateralism under pressure yet urgently needing reinforcement; and various global challenges continue to emerge, requiring nations to collaborate in response. This assertion provides crucial guidance for China to grasp the pulse of the times and formulate its diplomatic strategies.

As the technological revolution deepens, the intertwined development of productive forces among nations is rapidly reshaping the global economic landscape. Emerging countries, leveraging enhanced productivity, are achieving rapid growth, accelerating the trend toward multipolarity, gradually stepping onto the stage of global governance, and challenging traditional power structures. The international order is undergoing profound adjustments, with the traditional dominant framework being disrupted, a trend toward "de-Americanization" emerging, and nations increasingly pursuing independence. Peace and development remain the themes of the era, yet risks such as regional conflicts and bloc confrontations persist. The resurgence of protectionism and unilateralism, coupled with challenges like ecological crises and terrorism, collectively hinder global progress. This indicates that the current era presents both unprecedented opportunities and multidimensional risks.

Facing these profound changes unseen in a century, nations must transcend zero-sum games, deepen mutual trust and cooperation, and steer the world toward a more

peaceful, inclusive, and sustainable future.

3.2 A Critical Period in the Historical Development of the Chinese Nation

The "Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Further Deepening Comprehensive Reforms and Advancing Chinese Modernization," adopted at the Third Plenary Session of the 20th CPC Central Committee, highlights the pivotal significance of the current and upcoming period for building a strong nation and achieving national rejuvenation. The plenum introduced over 300 reform measures, with a focus on establishing a high-level socialist market economy system, sending a clear signal of expanding openness and driving high-quality development.

On the political front, China, as the largest developing country and a major contributor to the global economy, continues to see its influence rise, particularly in regions such as Southeast Asia and Latin America. The emergence of the so-called "China threat theory" also reflects, in a way, the growth of China's international discourse power and institutional influence. In diplomacy, China adheres to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, seeking common development on the basis of respecting other nations, thereby fostering a positive environment for external engagement. Culturally, China embraces openness and inclusiveness, promoting its fine traditional culture while actively absorbing achievements from other civilizations, creating a harmonious atmosphere for international exchanges.

Overall, China's developmental achievements are rooted in reform and opening up. Chinese modernization is continuously advanced through reforms and will undoubtedly open up even broader prospects amid comprehensive deepening reforms, propelling the nation toward prosperity and strength.

IV. THE CORE CONCEPT OF XI JINPING'S DIPLOMATIC THOUGHT

Building a community with a shared future for mankind is the core concept of Xi Jinping's diplomatic thought and the lofty goal pursued by major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics in the new era. Throughout history, this initiative represents China's

proactive engagement with the world through diplomacy [7].

4.1 Learning from History to Shape the Future: Building a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind

History serves as a mirror, revealing the rise and fall of nations. Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, General Secretary Xi Jinping has visited numerous countries, actively disseminating China's diplomatic philosophy and systematically articulating the core propositions of contemporary Chinese foreign policy. In 2013, he first proposed the vision of building a community with a shared future for mankind at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, marking China's diplomatic transformation from an important participant in the international order to an active leader in global governance. Addressing key issues such as reforming the global governance system, reshaping development models, and constructing a new type of international relations, the General Secretary introduced the "five-pronged" approach to global governance: advocating lasting peace, pursuing universal security, promoting common prosperity, fostering openness and inclusiveness, and building a beautiful world. This theoretical framework has enriched the architecture of major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics and provided systematic guidance for global governance reform.

Humanity shares one planet, and the destinies of all nations are interconnected. The 2008 financial crisis, which originated on Wall Street, quickly spread globally, leading to shrinking investments, sluggish trade, rising unemployment, social instability, and increasingly complex international relations. In the era of globalization, threats faced by any country can evolve into shared challenges, leaving no nation immune. Only by building a world of lasting peace and universal security can we provide a stable environment for the development of all countries—this is the right choice in the face of a changing world.

"All beings flourish without harming one another and all paths coexist without conflict." In the new era, China's diplomacy consistently follows the path of peaceful development, commits to forging a new type of

international relations, and stands ready to work with all nations to shoulder global development responsibilities. This approach aligns with the trends of the times, captures the momentum of human progress, and responds to the shared aspirations of people worldwide.

4.2 Upholding the Principle: A Global Governance Philosophy of Extensive Consultation, Joint Contribution, and Shared Benefits

Building a community with a shared future for mankind epitomizes President Xi Jinping's vision for global governance, with its core principle being extensive consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits [8][9].

Currently, hegemonic practices such as bullying and zero-sum games remain prominent, while deficits in peace, development, security, and governance continue to worsen. Some developed countries are neither capable nor willing to shoulder global governance responsibilities, nor do they relinquish power to developing nations, leading to prolonged stagnation in addressing global challenges and the unchecked spread of risks. Confronted with this predicament, China has proposed the governance philosophy of extensive consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits—an inevitable choice for tackling global challenges, reforming the international order, and building a community with a shared future for mankind.

Extensive consultation means "hearing all sides makes one enlightened"—global governance should not be dictated by major powers or any single party; issues concerning the development interests of nations and the direction of international rules must involve the participation of all stakeholders. Joint contribution embodies the spirit of "prosperity through hard work"—uniting all forces that can be united to maximize collective momentum for development. Shared benefits reflect the ideal of "the world belongs to all"—ensuring that the fruits of governance are enjoyed by all nations, enabling every country to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from global peace and development. Extensive consultation emphasizes equality at the starting point, joint contribution highlights solidarity and cooperation, and shared benefits focus on equitable outcomes—the three are inextricably linked.

Guided by Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy, the call for improving the global governance system is growing

louder. Establishing international mechanisms, adhering to international rules, and pursuing international justice are increasingly becoming the consensus among more and more countries.

4.3 Practical Achievements: High-Quality Co-Building of the Belt and Road

Building a community with a shared future for mankind epitomizes President Xi Jinping's vision for global governance [7] [10]. At its core lies the principle of "extensive consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits."

Today, hegemonic practices such as bullying and zero-sum games remain rampant, while deficits in peace, development, security, and governance continue to deepen. Some developed countries are neither capable nor willing to shoulder global governance responsibilities, nor do they intend to cede power to developing nations. As a result, global challenges remain unresolved, and risks spill over to more countries. Confronted with this dilemma, China has proposed a global governance approach centered on consultation, collaboration, and shared benefits, offering a necessary pathway to address global challenges, promote a just and equitable international order, and build a shared future for humanity.

"Extensive consultation" embodies the wisdom of "heeding diverse voices for clarity"—global governance must not be dictated by major powers or any single party; issues affecting nations' development interests and the direction of international rules require collective participation. "Joint contribution" reflects the ethos of "prosperity through action"—uniting all possible forces to maximize synergy for development. "Shared benefits" upholds the ideal of "the world for all"—ensuring governance outcomes are enjoyed by all nations, enabling every country to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from global peace and development. Consultation emphasizes fairness in initiation, collaboration highlights collective action, and shared benefits focus on equitable outcomes—all three are inextricably linked. Guided by Xi Jinping's diplomatic philosophy, calls for improving the global governance system are growing louder, with international mechanisms, rules, and justice increasingly becoming the consensus among nations.

V. THE PROFOUND SIGNIFICANCE OF XI JINPING THOUGHT ON DIPLOMACY

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core has taken over the baton of history, leading the entire Party and people of all ethnic groups across the country to forge ahead with determination and innovation, ushering in a new era of major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics. This reflects the epoch-making significance of Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy [11].

5.1 A Global Perspective: Defining the Historical Position

The CPC Central Committee, with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core, grounded in the diplomatic practices of the new era, has coordinated the domestic and international landscapes, systematically clarifying the historical orientation of socialism with Chinese characteristics. General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized that China will never seek hegemony or expansion and is willing to work with other countries to become a builder of world peace, a contributor to global development, and a defender of the international order [12].

In the new era, China has provided effective solutions. Economically, it has assisted developing countries in constructing key projects, promoted the Belt and Road Initiative and high-level opening-up, broken down trade barriers, and injected vitality into the global economy. Politically, in 2023, China mediated the resumption of diplomatic relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, demonstrating its constructive influence in addressing complex international issues and earning widespread acclaim [13].

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, China has achieved the goal of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects and is now advancing toward the goal of becoming a modern socialist country. Major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics has comprehensively bridged the gap between China and the world, continuously advancing Chinese modernization. General Secretary Xi Jinping adeptly employs a grand historical perspective, steadfastly serving as a force for peace, stability, and progress in the world. He continues to uphold the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and

shoulders the mission of building a community with a shared future for mankind.

5.2 Profound Reflection: Answering the Questions of Our Time

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, General Secretary Xi Jinping has stood at the crossroads of human development and proposed a series of Chinese solutions to the critical question of "what kind of world to build and how to build it." Practice has proven that these solutions provide a powerful response to the questions of our era.

The times have placed China at the center of the world stage. When guided by Xi Jinping's thought on Diplomacy: China is committed to safeguarding world peace and promoting a just international order. To date, China has dispatched over 50,000 peacekeepers to participate in United Nations peacekeeping operations across more than 20 countries and regions, making it one of the largest troop and financial contributors. Additionally, leveraging its talent pool, China sends a large number of technical personnel to developing countries each year to support infrastructure development and provide technological and intellectual assistance. China also actively promotes mutual learning among civilizations and supports people-to-people diplomacy and cultural exchanges.

These diplomatic practices are grounded in an accurate assessment of the direction of historical development. They not only chart the course for progress but also benefit the world while expanding the pathways to realizing Chinese modernization.

5.3 Visionary: Looking Towards the Future Trend

Marx envisioned the future ideal society as a "community," emphasizing human solidarity, cooperation, and shared interests. Although this ideal has not yet been fully realized, the world is evolving toward a "community" direction—an inevitable historical trend that transcends the will of any single nation.

As a steadfast practitioner of Marxism and a powerful driver of world history, the Communist Party of China actively engages with countries worldwide, building the largest global cooperation platforms. With an open and inclusive approach, it welcomes nations to join initiatives like the Belt and Road, working together to build a

community with a shared future for humanity. Simultaneously, China strengthens dialogue with political parties and developing countries, actively participates in multilateral cooperation mechanisms such as APEC, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and BRICS, and promotes an innovative, vibrant, interconnected, and inclusive global economy. China champions multilateralism, effectively integrating national interests with universal human values, aligning its people's aspirations for a better life with the creation of a brighter future for humanity, and fostering correct shared values for all [14].

As highlighted in the white paper *Working Together to Build a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind: China's Proposals and Actions*, humanity stands at a crossroads of history, where interdependence has become an irreversible trend. Global challenges require collective responses, and outdated notions like "the strong dominating the weak," "might makes right," or "zero-sum games" are no longer viable paths for human survival.

VI. CONCLUSION

"Fear not the clouds that block the view, for you stand atop the highest peak." To grasp the international situation, one must adopt a correct historical perspective, wielding the telescope of history to reflect on the past and discern its patterns while looking ahead to the future and seizing the broader trends.

Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy emerged during a pivotal era of profound global transformation and national rejuvenation. With a visionary outlook, General Secretary Xi Jinping adeptly discerns historical patterns, advancing the adaptation of Marxism to China's diplomatic context. By synthesizing the diplomatic experiences of successive generations of Chinese Communists and drawing upon the essence of China's fine traditional culture; he upholds the principle of putting the people first, driving China's progress and global development through diplomatic practice.

Today, China is striding confidently onto a new journey to build a modern socialist country in all respects. To further deepen comprehensive reforms and advance Chinese modernization, it is essential to enhance exchanges between China and the world across economic,

political, cultural, and other domains through diplomacy. As the fundamental guideline and action plan for major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics, Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy embodies the diplomatic aspirations of the entire Party and people of all ethnic groups across the nation, charting the course for China's foreign policy. With unwavering strategic resolve and historical confidence, it will steadfastly guide China's diplomacy forward, advancing resolutely toward the great cause of national rejuvenation.

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Psychic Struggles and Identity Formation: A Study of Student Mental Health in Contemporary Narratives

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Abstract— Literature has always been a medium of social exploration and articulation and through literary narratives such experiences and issues related to the psychology and mental health of students are explored and articulated. In contemporary time period students face issues such as academic competition, social expectations, pressure of making successful future, social comparison, identity conflict and anxiety related issues. Therefore students' mental health becomes very essential and significant concern in contemporary time period. This paper examines students psychological and emotional vulnerability, anxiety disorder and identity conflict in selected contemporary literary narratives and also reflects upon contemporary youth culture. This study argues that when students face pressure of social expectations that demand success and conformity, they go through anxiety, identity conflict and psychological disorder. Sylvia Plath's novel 'The Bell Jar' (1963) and John Green's 'Turtles All The Way Down' (2017) have been taken for this study. Both these literary narratives deal with the inner psychological conflict and anxiety disorder faced by the young protagonists of the novels. This paper articulates on the topic from the theoretical perspective of cultural and identity theory, particularly theory of Identity given by Erik Erikson and the concept of discourse developed by Michel Foucault. Through the characters of the protagonists, the author has tried to articulate on the negotiation of social expectations and the sense of self and identity. There is portrayal of stigma surrounding mental health. This paper depicts how literature plays a vital role in promoting empathy and awareness about psychological problems faced by students and emphasize upon the possibility of recovery and healing from mental health struggles. This paper also offers symbolic representation of isolation and depression and reflects upon conflict and anxiety disorder, created by too many life expectations and possibilities in student life.



Keywords— Mental health, identity conflict, contemporary literature, social and cultural expectations, anxiety disorder, contemporary youth culture.

Students mental health issues have become growing concern of today's time period. Literary narratives offer realistic presentation of the struggles that young protagonists have to face and reflect upon questions related to their identity, belongingness and purpose of life. According to Raymond Williams, "literature offers deeper insights into the emotional structure of society and remains connected to social experiences". (Williams 1958) While research provides data about the psychological and mental health issues of students, literature has become a very

significant medium of making readers feel the emotional and psychological experiences of students and develop better understanding of psychological complexities, faced by students in everyday life. These literary narratives negotiate cultural and social pressure and psychological and emotional vulnerability among students. There are many factors that contribute to the problem such as: academic competition, societal pressure, social comparison and family expectations. As a result students goes through emotional vulnerability and anxiety. This study explores

students' psychological and emotional issues and experiences in Sylvia Plath's novel *'The Bell Jar'* and John Greens' novel *'Turtles All The Way Down'*. Both these novels navigate issues related to student psychological and anxiety related disorder, caused by social and cultural pressures and expectations. It becomes essential to analyse these literary narratives from theoretical perspective for the better understanding of students' psychology. The famous cultural theorist Michel Foucault developed the idea of how normal behaviour and mental health norms are constructed by the society. According to Foucault: "Social institutions such as medical systems and schools play a vital role in giving shape to the roadmap of how psychological experiences are comprehended and interpreted". (Foucault 1978) In many cases all those students who go through anxiety and psychological disorders feel that their behaviour or purpose of life does not align with the prevalent normal cultural expectations of success and stability. The theory of psychological development given by Erik Erikson proposes the idea that early childhood and adolescence are critical stages of life when individuals try to establish a consistent and coherent sense of identity. Erikson has depicted this stage as "identity and role confusion". At this stage young individuals face the situation where they have to explore future possibilities and at the same time they have to define their social roles and personal values. (Erikson 1968) students feel pressurised by social comparison and cultural expectations as the society and educational institutions emphasise upon success, productivity and achievements which lead to anxiety and depression among students who fear future uncertainty and failure.

Literature has become a very significant medium of providing space to examine and criticize social expectations and pressures. By representing young individuals emotional experiences, literature poses challenges to the stigmatizing attitudes toward mental illness and motivates readers to reflect on those cultural conditions and different aspects that contribute to psychological distress.

The Bell jar by Sylvia Plath presents one of the most influential literary portrayals of identity crisis and mental illness among young women. This novel follows Esther Greenwood who is a highly talented college student and wins an internship at a prestigious magazine of New York City. Though from the outside, Esther Greenwood appears to be very promising and successful but internally she struggles with feelings of confusion, depression and emptiness. The metaphor of the "bell jar" is one of the most significant symbols in the novel. Esther depicts her mental condition as if she has been trapped inside a glass container that separates her from the outside world around her. She explains that life under the bell jar makes everything very

suffocating and distorted. Through this powerful metaphor of *the bell jar*, isolated nature of depression has been symbolised.

Esther Greenwood goes through psychological distress and this kind of distress is the result of all those expectations that are placed upon a young women in the 1950s. Although Esther is gifted with academic talent but her intellectual talent and ambitions are suppressed by the social expectations of marriage and domestic life. The society does not expects from her to be a brilliant academic and intellectual personality but gives priority to domestic sphere in the life of a young women in 1950s. This situation leads to the conflict of identity crisis. Esther's uncertain situation and conflict has been symbolized in the novel through the imagery of a fig tree. She connects her condition with the fig tree and imagines that different figs suggest different paths of life such as to be a wife, a mother, a professor or a poet. In this way the fig tree in the novel symbolises the uncertainty and identity conflict of a women's life. The misery of Esther's life is that if she choses one path, she will have to lose another one. She faces dilemma of uncertainty and indecision. The theme of anxiety and conflict, created by too many life expectations and possibilities, has been introduced through this moment in the life of the protagonist. This situation of conflict and uncertainty represents the uncertainty in the lives of so many students who are pressurized by too many expectations and possibilities and which path to choose that will determine their entire life and future. The novel also gives portrayal of stigma that surrounds mental illness. Esther has to undergo psychiatric treatment for her mental health problems and this kind of treatment appears to be very frightening and stressful initially. The novel highlights society's limited comprehension of mental health issues and provides a ray of hope about the possibility of recovery and healing. Through the experiences of the protagonist, the author has tried to suggest that by realisation and acceptance of mental health issues, one can cope with the psychological and anxiety related disorders. Esther recognises and accepts her problem and starts a gradual process of recovery and healing.

'Turtles All The Way Down' is another novel that attempts to highlight student anxiety and distress. This theme finds depiction in the novel from contemporary point of you. In this way, while the bell jar presents the conflict and social issues of the mid 20th century, *'Turtles All The Way Down'* focuses on providing contemporary depiction of students' psyche and anxiety issues. This novel is about Aza holmes, a 16 years old student who faces severe anxiety issues and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). Unlike many other traditional literary narratives of mental illness, this novel presents a detailed portrayal of Aza's internal thought

processes. Her mind often remains dominated by many intrusive thoughts about illness and germs. All such thoughts create a constant cycle of anxiety and fear that she always struggles to control. For example, Aza remains repeatedly worried about the thoughts that some harmful bacteria are present in her body. This fear and anxiety leads her to perform impulsive behaviours such as reopening a wound on her finger and cleaning it repeatedly. All these actions show how anxiety can manifest itself psychologically as well as physically.

The novel also explores how everyday experiences such as romantic relationships and friendships are affected by mental health. Aza's anxiety and fear make it very difficult for her to feel comfortable in such a social scenario. Many a times she has to face the fear that her mental health issues prevent her from making genuine relationship with others. However, the novel is also successful in portraying supportive relationships that help Aza cope with her fear and anxiety. Aza and Daisy are friends and this kind of friendship symbolises the importance of empathy and understanding in life. Emotional support is provided to Aza through the loyalty and patience, showed by Daisy in their relationship. Aza feels supported and empowered to navigate all her fears. The impact of contemporary youth culture has also been discussed in the novel. The experiences of the characters in the novel are shaped by social media, digital communication and academic expectations. Through the story of Aza, the novel emphasizes that anxiety is not merely the name of imperfection but a complex psychological problem that demands support and consideration.

Mental health struggles and youth anxiety found one of the most nuanced contemporary literary representations in *Turtles All the Way Down*. The novel revolves around the life of Aza Holmes who is a sixteen-year-old high school student and suffers from severe anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). Through Aza's first-person narration, the novel makes readers understand how anxiety and intrusive thoughts form her perspective about herself and the world that surrounds her.

Aza's anxiety finds expression through her recurring obsessive thoughts about illness and bacteria. She suffers from a constant fear that many harmful microbe exist inside her body. This fear overwhelms her so much that in order to disinfect a small wound on her finger, she repeatedly reopens it. This impulsive behaviour illustrates upon how anxiety leads to some physical actions that relieve psychological distress for a short-time period but eventually reinforces and promotes the cycle of fear.

The metaphor of "spiral thought" is used in the novel to describe Aza's mental condition. Aza feels herself trapped

in a continuous loop of anxious thoughts that is not in her control. She gives expression to her experience by saying:

"My thoughts were like a spiral going deeper and deeper, and I couldn't stop it." (Green, 2017)

Through this metaphor of spiraling thoughts the overpowering nature of anxiety disorders has been represented, where individuals get trapped within the thoughts of their own minds.

Another important aspect of Aza's anxiety disorder is her continuous struggle with self-identity. Because her mental life is dominated by her intrusive thoughts, she begins to introspect whether she truly has any power or control over her own identity. At one point she reflects:

"I was beginning to learn that your life is a story told about you, not one that you tell." (Green, 2017)

This statement presents the central theme of the novel: the tension between psychological constraint and personal agency. Aza realises that her thoughts control her identity .

The novel also investigates how friendships and social relationships get effected by anxiety. Daisy Ramirez, who is closest friend of Aza, plays a vital role in the narrative. Daisy's humorous , supportive and energetic personality provides emotional balance to Aza's too much anxious and introspective personality. However, through their friendship the challenges of living with mental health issues are also revealed. At many times Daisy gets upset as she feels that Aza's fear and anxiety makes her unable to fully participate in their friendship. Despite all such tensions, Daisy remains very supportive, demonstrating the significance of companionship and empathy in coping with the struggles related to mental health.

Another character in the novel is Davis picket. He is the son of a billionaire but his father disappears mysteriously. Relationship between Aza and Davis forms another narrative thread in the story. Both Aza and Davis share in common, psychological and mental health struggles as both passes through inner conflict and loneliness. It becomes very difficult for Aza to have romantic intimacy with anyone as she remains all the time obsessed with the thought of germs inside her body and it does not allow her to make physical intimate relationship. In this way it is illustrated in the novel that mental health struggles complicate everyday aspects of life such as: friendship, love and school life. Though the novel has given expression to modern youth culture, anxiety disorder and mental health issues, it has successfully navigated the issues related to contemporary youth culture and how it is shaped by social media, digital communication and pressure upon youth to achieve success but at the same time it gives a very optimistic message in a positive tone. In the novel Aza

realises that mental illness can be managed if not completely disappear. It can be managed with the help of understanding and supportive environment as she utters:

“Your now is not your forever.” (Green, 2017)

she gives the message that all emotional struggles are short lived and healing and recovery is possible. Thus the novel *Turtles All The Way Down* offers an optimistic view about anxiety disorder as a part of modern life not as an illness and promotes feeling of empathy for those individuals who goes through anxiety or psychological disorder.

The Bell Jar and *Turtles All the Way Down* illustrate a strong representation of anxiety and identity crisis in young individuals. Despite the fact that the novels were written before five decades, they offer shocking similarities in terms of emotional conflicts that young individuals have to resolve, in accordance with social norms, academic demands, and self identity. Experience of psychological isolation is one of the most important parallel in the two novels. In *the Bell Jar*, Esther Greenwood experiences alienation with the world surrounding her. Though she has academic achievements in her name and a bright future, she feels loneliness and anxiety. She has the feeling of alienation and isolation which does not allow her to find a meaning in the opportunities that she has. The isolation is well illustrated in the metaphor of the "bell jar" and there is a very strong indication that Esther is imprisoned in her own mind.

Furthermore, in *Turtles All the Way Down*, Aza Holmes feels psychological isolation due to her intrusive thoughts and anxiety disorder. Although she has supportive friends and family members, she tends to believe that nobody can really know her intense mental suffering. She defines her anxiety as a spiral of uncontrollable thoughts, which explains how mental illness can become an obstacle between the world and the mental sphere. Another notable parallel between the novels is the identity forming contest. The two protagonists are trying to establish themselves while they face contradictory expectations. Esther is trapped between her intellectual desires and the norms of society that requires women's priority to marriage and domestic life. The production of this conflict is a severe identity crisis, which is represented by the metaphor of a fig tree where Esther realizes all the possible futures but feels unable to commit to any of them.

Aza Holmes faces equally complicated but a kind of different identity crises. As her mental life is being dominated by her obsessive thought, she starts to wonder whether her identity is really her own or not. She is afraid that her illness showcases her existence, and she struggles to determine herself and her true self and the intrusive thinking that her anxiety disorder generates. Although there

are some similarities, yet the novels also portray some significant differences that show how social attitudes to mental health change. In *The Bell Jar* psychological distress, mental illness within a social background can be clearly seen. Esther confront medical interventions that seem detached and scary, which can be attributed to the lack of knowledge about mental health in the middle of the twentieth century. *Turtles All the Way Down*, on the contrary, introduces a more contemporary point of view on mental health. After proper therapy and medication of Aza, her situation is disclosed among her friends and family. Despite the stigma and lack of understanding she faces, the society that can be seen in the novel is just starting to acknowledge the significance of mental health awareness. The other disparity is in the tones of the narratives. In her novel, Plath tends to echo away a feeling of despair and existential insecurity, highlighting the repressive social systems that add to the mental health problems of Esther. Though the novel by Green still believes in the continuation of anxiety, the picture is more optimistic with aspects of resilience, friendship, and emotional turmoil.

Both *The Bell Jar* and *Turtles All the Way Down* demonstrate the importance of literature and its role in creating empathy and mental health awareness. These stories enable the reader to get a glimpse of the emotional facts of anxiety and depression, by showing the inner world of their protagonists. Arthur Frank believes that ‘narratives of illness enable individuals to transform personal suffering into meaningful stories that can be shared with others’ (Frank 1995). In this regard, literature plays a significant role in breaking the silence of mental health struggles. The novels also break social stereotypes of mental illness. They do not showcase anxiety as a state of weakness, contrary to what most people would do, but rather, as a human experience, influenced by social pressures and personal conditions.

Additionally, literature stimulates the readers to demonstrate the institutional arrangements that facilitate student anxiety. The competition and achievement aspects of the education system may result in a higher psychological strain on students. The emotional impacts of such pressures of literary narratives challenge the readers to rethink about the values and expectations that define the contemporary society.

The themes covered in these literary works are closely related to the present debate on student well-being. Studies have proved that most of the students live anxious lives due to stress about their career, future, social expectations and social comparison also troubles them. Therefore it has been realised by many universities and educational institutions that mental health support services should be provided to

students and initiative have been taken in this direction. Through some initiative such as peer support programs, counselling and awareness campaigns, psychological support can be provided to students. Literature highlights and discusses the mental health issues of students to carve out new ways of social improvement and better understanding of the issues faced by students. When the readers read the experiences of the characters in literary narratives about mental health issues, they develop a better understanding of such issues and psychological problems. In this way, literary narratives promote social understanding of psychological issues. These literary narratives do not just perform the task of being a medium of giving artistic expression but the presentation of student psychological issues in contemporary literature contributes to the development of better understanding of the emotional difficulties and social pressures, faced by the students. *'Turtles All The Way Down'* and *'The Bell Jar'* have proved powerful works of contemporary literature as both reflect upon burning issues of the time such as identity crisis, anxiety disorder and mental vulnerability. It has been indicated through these works that cultural expectations and the setup of institutions can be held responsible for promoting mental health struggles among students. By narrating the inner conflict that is experienced by the protagonist and the identity conflict that the protagonist has to undergo, these literary narratives promote empathy and compassion for psychological distress. Literature plays a very vital role in making readers' comprehension better about the issues related to anxiety, identity conflict and other psychological issues in contemporary society.

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“A Defeat of Knowledge”: Reinterpreting the French Collapse of 1940 through Marc Bloch

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Abstract— Marc Bloch's *L'Étrange défaite*, written immediately after the French collapse of 1940, remains one of the most powerful contemporary reflections on that event. As both a professional historian and a serving officer, Bloch diagnosed the disaster as fundamentally a defeat of knowledge—or more literally, a defeat of intelligence. This article revisits that formulation and argues that Bloch's insight should not be reduced to a criticism of tactical backwardness, technological inferiority, or individual misjudgment. Rather, it points to a deeper and more structural failure of cognition embedded in the French military system, command culture, strategic doctrine, and the political-social order of the Third Republic. France's defeat is thus interpreted not as a sudden and accidental breakdown, but as the culmination of a long-term process in which institutions, mental habits, and social structures failed to adapt to a transformed form and tempo of war. At the same time, Bloch's interpretation, while exceptionally forceful, also bears the marks of its author's position as both participant and witness. His analysis derived much of its strength from direct experience, but it was also shaped by the limits of a reserve officer's perspective during a moment of national trauma. This article therefore seeks both to deepen and to qualify Bloch's diagnosis. In doing so, it treats the French collapse as a case of structural cognitive failure in a modern state confronting the demands of mechanized warfare and accelerated strategic change.



Keywords— Marc Bloch, *L'Étrange défaite*, France 1940, defeat of knowledge, Third Republic, Blitzkrieg, structural cognitive failure, military culture

I. INTRODUCTION

The collapse of France in the spring of 1940 remains one of the most startling military and political disasters of modern history. Within only a few weeks, one of the

principal great powers of continental Europe—a state armed with a massive army, substantial fortifications, a global empire, and the prestige of victory in the First World War—was defeated by Nazi Germany, partially

occupied, and politically broken. Few events of the twentieth century produced such immediate shock among contemporaries. France was not a peripheral state. It was one of the historic centers of European civilization, a nation that had long regarded itself, and been regarded by others, as a pillar of continental balance and a bearer of political and cultural prestige. That such a power could collapse so quickly forced contemporaries to confront not only a military surprise, but a civilizational crisis.

The broader consequences of France's defeat were profound. The fall of France isolated Britain, transformed the strategic balance of Europe, emboldened the Third Reich, and set in motion the further globalization of the war. Basil Liddell Hart rightly observed that once German armored forces broke through the French front in May 1940, especially after the crossing of the Meuse at Sedan, the future of the Western world changed in ways that would reverberate for decades [1]. France's defeat did not simply alter one campaign. It helped ensure that Europe would no longer be able to rescue itself by its own resources. The old center of European power was exhausted, and the ultimate defeat of Hitler would require the intervention of the United States and the Soviet Union. In that sense, the defeat of France was also one of the historical pivots that led toward the Cold War order.

Yet what made the event especially troubling was not that France lost a war, but that it lost so quickly and so totally. On paper, France was not a helpless state. It possessed large armies, significant industrial resources, formidable artillery, and one of the most famous defensive systems in the world. It had access to imperial manpower and the support, at least initially, of powerful allies. The campaign that began in May 1940 should not, by conventional measures of raw military potential, have ended in such sudden disintegration. That it did so became one of the central problems of modern historical interpretation.

The question of why France collapsed in 1940 has therefore attracted a vast and varied historiography. Military historians have highlighted Germany's operational superiority, the concentration of armor, air-ground integration, and the shock effects of rapid maneuver. Others have stressed French failures in command, doctrine, communication, and deployment. Political historians have pointed toward the weaknesses of the Third Republic: cabinet instability, partisan conflict, and the inability to sustain strategic coherence across time. Social and cultural historians, meanwhile, have emphasized the deeper wounds of the First World War, the demographic and psychological exhaustion of French society, and the degree to which interwar France was internally fragmented by ideological and class divisions.

Each of these approaches captures part of the truth. Yet they often remain analytically separated. Operational history can become too narrowly technical; political history can understate the institutional culture of armies; social interpretation can diffuse military failure into general malaise without showing how one translated into the other. What is needed is not merely another single-cause argument, but an interpretive framework capable of connecting doctrine, institutions, political culture, and social order into a more integrated explanation.

This is precisely why Marc Bloch's *L'Étrange défaite* remains so important. Bloch was not a detached postwar scholar reconstructing the collapse through archives alone. He was one of France's most distinguished historians, a leading figure in the Annales movement, and at the same time a participant in the campaign. His book therefore occupies a singular place: neither simple memoir nor conventional military history, but an immediate, morally charged, historically informed effort to understand national catastrophe.

Bloch's most famous formulation—that France had suffered a *défaite de l'intelligence*, a defeat of intelligence

or knowledge—has been quoted repeatedly because of its elegance and force. Yet it is often cited without being fully unpacked. The phrase is sometimes taken as shorthand for doctrinal backwardness or for the inability of French generals to understand Blitzkrieg. That is not wrong, but it is incomplete. Bloch's diagnosis was deeper. He was not merely saying that French officers lacked certain information or that they failed to read the right military literature. He was pointing toward a broader breakdown in collective understanding: a failure by institutions, command systems, and political elites to think at the level required by a transformed age of war. Germany fought the war of the present; France, in Bloch's view, confronted that war with the intellectual habits of the past.

This article argues that Bloch's idea of a "defeat of knowledge" is best understood as describing a form of **structural cognitive failure**. France's defeat was not simply the result of one bad plan, one generation of conservative generals, or one German operational surprise. It was the culmination of a long process in which military institutions, strategic assumptions, command habits, and the wider social-political order failed to adapt to a transformed mode and tempo of industrial war. France still possessed power. What it increasingly lacked was an adequate way of thinking that power.

At the same time, Bloch's own account must be approached critically. Its great strength lies in immediacy and moral seriousness, but those same qualities also reflect the limitations of perspective under conditions of trauma. Bloch wrote as a reserve officer and witness to collapse, not as a participant in the highest level of grand strategy. His observations are therefore indispensable, but not sufficient on their own. To revisit Bloch is not to canonize him. It is to use his insight as a starting point for a more analytically precise reconstruction.

The article proceeds in six parts. First, it surveys the main historiographical approaches to the French defeat and clarifies Bloch's place within them. Second, it examines

Bloch as witness, historian, and soldier. Third, it analyzes his claim that Germany won a "victory of knowledge" by situating it within interwar military thought and the problem of doctrinal adaptation. Fourth, it explores the French army as an apparently powerful but internally brittle institution, emphasizing command culture, the Maginot mentality, and the organizational use of force. Fifth, it places the military collapse within the broader political and social crisis of the Third Republic. Finally, it considers both the strengths and the limits of Bloch's participant-witness perspective and reflects on the wider significance of his argument for the study of modern state failure under changing strategic conditions.

II. THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE FRENCH DEFEAT

The literature on the fall of France is large, and its explanatory models can be divided, for heuristic purposes, into several broad categories.

The first is the operational and military-technical explanation. In this line of interpretation, France was defeated because Germany had solved the problem of modern mobile war more successfully than its opponents. This view, associated in different ways with Basil Liddell Hart, J. F. C. Fuller, and later operational historians, emphasizes concentrated armor, close air support, speed of exploitation, and the psychological and material effects of a breakthrough strategy designed to paralyze rather than merely attrite [2]. The crossing of the Meuse at Sedan and the subsequent drive to the Channel became the emblematic proof that a mechanized army, properly employed, could destroy the strategic coherence of a much larger force.

A related but distinct explanation focuses on command and military culture. Here the issue is not simply that Germany had better ideas, but that the French military system had become rigid, slow, excessively bureaucratic, and resistant to innovation. According to this interpretation,

the problem lay in the structure of French command, the conservatism of senior officers, and the inability of the institution as a whole to respond flexibly once its assumptions were challenged. France did not necessarily lose because it had fewer tanks or poorer soldiers. It lost because its command machinery could not translate resources into coherent action under modern battlefield conditions [3].

A third lines of interpretation stresses the weaknesses of the Third Republic itself. Historians working in this vein point toward the instability of parliamentary government, frequent cabinet turnover, factional conflict, and the difficulty of sustaining long-term strategic priorities in a fragmented political environment. Foreign policy, rearmament, defense planning, and domestic social peace all became entangled in a republic whose political structure was often more adept at short-term maneuver than long-term statecraft [4].

A fourth explanatory tradition moves beyond formal politics and military institutions to consider the social and cultural condition of interwar France. The First World War had exacted a demographic and moral price so severe that the country entered the 1920s and 1930s already weakened in ways that were not always visible in statistics of production or armaments. Social conflict, ideological polarization, anti-parliamentarian movements, anti-Semitism, and a pervasive sense of decline all contributed to an atmosphere in which national cohesion was fragile. Such accounts argue that France's defeat must be understood as the exposure of a deeper national weariness [5].

Each of these approaches yields valuable insights, but they are often presented in isolation. The operational school can become too technical; the institutional-political school may understate battlefield logic; the social school can become so broad that it risks dissolving military causation into general national mood. Bloch remains essential because he forces these levels back into relation.

He was not satisfied with saying that the Germans were quicker, or that French politics were unstable, or that society was tired. He saw the defeat as the product of a more fundamental disjunction: France's institutions and elites had ceased to think historically enough to understand the war they were entering.

This is what makes his phrase *défaite de l'intelligence* so analytically fertile. If treated carefully, it can serve as a bridge concept—linking doctrine, command, politics, and civic life within one broader interpretation. The purpose of this article is not to reduce all explanation to Bloch, but to use Bloch's insight to restore a degree of coherence to a historiography that sometimes fragments what the event itself fused together.

III. MARC BLOCH AS HISTORIAN AND PARTICIPANT

Marc Bloch's authority on the subject of the 1940 defeat derives not only from his intellectual stature, but from the singularity of his position. Before the war, he was already one of France's most distinguished historians and, together with Lucien Febvre, one of the founders of the *Annales* school. His scholarship had helped redefine historical method by broadening the field beyond narrative political history and encouraging attention to structures, mentalities, and long-term processes. It is therefore significant that when Bloch confronted the collapse of 1940, he did so with precisely this kind of historically trained mind.

But Bloch was more than a historian observing events from afar. He was also a French officer. In *L'Étrange défaite*, he presented himself almost in juridical terms—as a witness summoned to testify honestly to what he had seen [6]. The tone is striking. He does not speak as a partisan trying to excuse his camp, nor as a memoirist flattering his own role. He speaks as someone who believes that disaster imposes an obligation of truth.

His self-introduction is also revealing in another respect. Bloch situated himself as a patriotic Frenchman from a Jewish family deeply attached to the nation. In doing so, he implicitly recalled the complicated place of Jews within French public life, especially after the long aftershocks of the Dreyfus Affair. The contrast matters. A historian whose belonging to France could never be wholly taken for granted by all of his compatriots emerged, in the hour of defeat, as one of the clearest and most morally serious defenders of French civic truth.

When the European crisis worsened in 1938, Bloch volunteered for military service and was assigned to various staff and logistical duties. He served in intelligence, mobilization, liaison, and ultimately in the First Army, where he worked in the domain of fuel and supplies [7]. That placed him in a position at once practical and revealing. He was close enough to command structures to observe their functioning, but not so high that his view was shaped by the abstractions of grand strategy alone. He saw how war was supposed to move through institutions—and how those institutions, once shocked, began to fail.

By the time the German offensive began on 10 May 1940, Bloch was therefore well situated to observe the dynamic of collapse. He saw command confusion, administrative overload, psychological paralysis, and the disintegration of military order. When the First Army itself came apart in June, he was forced into the same kind of improvisational survival that overtook so many French soldiers and officers. After escaping, he would soon move into the Resistance, and he was eventually executed by the Germans in 1944. That later martyrdom understandably shaped the reception of his text, but it should not obscure the fact that *L'Étrange défaite* draws its power above all from the clarity of his historical witness.

That clarity, however, had limits. Bloch did not write from the summit of strategic command. He was not party to every high-level debate, nor did he possess complete information about Allied operational intentions,

coordination with the British, or the internal constraints facing the French state. His account is therefore strongest when describing institutional mentality and the lived experience of breakdown. It is less complete as a total reconstruction of strategic choice. This duality—extraordinary force combined with unavoidable partiality—must accompany any scholarly use of his work.

IV. “A DEFEAT OF KNOWLEDGE” AND THE TEMPO OF MODERN WAR

The most famous and enduring sentence in *L'Étrange défaite* is Bloch's claim that Germany's victory was “in essence, a victory of knowledge. [8]” It is one of those formulations that seems at once simple and inexhaustible. But what exactly did Bloch mean?

He clearly meant more than “the Germans knew more.” Knowledge, in Bloch's usage, referred to the practical intelligence by which armies and states interpret reality. It included strategic imagination, doctrinal understanding, command judgment, and the ability to adapt inherited institutions to new conditions. The French disaster, in his view, resulted from the fact that German institutions had understood the transformed character of war more accurately than their French counterparts. Germany fought, as he put it, “the war of today.” France did not merely fight poorly; it failed to understand what the war had become [9].

At the center of this difference was tempo. Mechanized warfare altered not just weapons but rhythm. The First World War had taught lessons of artillery preparation, fortified defense, and attrition. Yet it had also generated the technological means to escape those very conditions: tanks, radios, motor transport, operational concentration, and air-ground coordination. In a new kind of war, the decisive question was no longer only where a front would break, but how quickly an army could reorganize once the front had been pierced. The faster the

tempo, the greater the premium on flexible command, communications, and initiative.

Bloch understood this with unusual acuity. He believed that French commanders had not only failed to keep pace with technical innovation; they had failed to internalize the new psychological and temporal realities of mechanized war. When German armored forces imposed a speed and unpredictability outside French expectations, the result was not just surprise but cognitive paralysis. Commanders trained for a more methodical war found themselves unable to interpret what they were seeing.

This point aligns with, and can be enriched by, interwar military theory. J. F. C. Fuller's 1919 Plan had already proposed that modern war would increasingly revolve around attacks on command systems rather than simple frontal destruction of manpower [10]. By using fast armored formations to penetrate deeply against headquarters, road junctions, and logistical nodes, an attacker could produce strategic dislocation before the defender fully grasped the situation. Basil Liddell Hart, though more controversial in the exact scope of his influence on German doctrine, likewise stressed indirect approaches, mobility, and the importance of upsetting the enemy's balance rather than grinding him down frontally [11].

Germany was not the sole possessor of such ideas, but it proved much more capable of incorporating them into doctrine and training. Officers such as Heinz Guderian understood that tanks should not merely assist infantry but operate in concentrated formations as instruments of operational rupture [12]. Communications technology, especially radios, allowed German armored units to maintain flexibility and momentum in ways that multiplied the effects of speed.

France, by contrast, remained intellectually divided. It was not wholly ignorant of armored warfare. Indeed, French officers such as Charles de Gaulle had argued for stronger mechanized forces. But such views did not prevail

institutionally. The command culture remained anchored in the assumptions of the previous war: the authority of artillery, the primacy of prepared defense, and the expectation that war could be methodically controlled through graduated, highly structured command [13].

The German victory in Poland in 1939 should have served as a warning. Bloch later lamented that the months between the Polish campaign and the German offensive in the West were wasted. Those months could have been used for doctrinal reassessment, organizational reform, and more serious preparation for the speed and force of German operations. Instead, French institutions remained largely within their inherited frame [14].

Why was adaptation so difficult? Part of the answer lies in the generation that dominated command. The senior leadership of the French army had been shaped by 1914–18. Their authority, careers, habits, and mental world all belonged to the previous war. Many of them had commanded with competence or distinction in the old conflict, which gave their assumptions not only prestige but emotional authority. To question those assumptions was not simply to propose reform. It was, in a sense, to challenge the meaning of their own professional identity.

Bloch recognized this. He believed the French command culture reproduced obedience, doctrinal orthodoxy, and overconfidence in inherited methods. Headquarters and military schools became spaces where abstract "lessons" from the old war were preserved and transmitted, even as the material and psychological environment of war changed [15]. The resulting system could still function under expected conditions, but it was brittle when confronted by strategic novelty.

By contrast, Germany's defeat in the First World War created a sharper imperative to rethink. It is true that the German military establishment also contained conservatism, hierarchy, and myth. Yet in the specific domain of operational adaptation, it was more willing in the interwar years to test new assumptions. Erich von

Manstein's role in reshaping the Western campaign plan illustrates this point. By shifting the Schwerpunkt toward the Ardennes and Sedan, German command chose surprise and speed over predictability. Once the attack succeeded, the advance to the Channel did more than cut off Allied armies in Belgium. It shattered the conceptual map by which the French high command had organized the campaign [16].

In that sense, Bloch's statement remains exact. Germany's victory was not just a triumph of machines or manpower. It was the triumph of a military system that, for that historical moment, better understood the kind of war it was fighting.

V. MATERIAL POWER, THE MAGINOT MENTALITY, AND THE CRISIS OF COMMAND

If Bloch's phrase is to be properly understood, however, it must not be collapsed into a mere contrast between German intellectual boldness and French backwardness. France did not lose because it lacked all the means of modern war. On the contrary, one of the most revealing aspects of the 1940 campaign is the degree to which material power coexisted with institutional and cognitive weakness.

French military resources were considerable. At the outbreak of the campaign, France had mobilized a large army, possessed extensive artillery, and fielded thousands of tanks and armored vehicles. French armor was not uniformly inferior to German armor; in several respects it was technically formidable. France also retained strong fortifications and significant imperial resources. Its weakness lay not in a simple absence of material means, but in the inability to integrate those means into a flexible and coherent operational system [17].

Bloch himself provides indirect evidence of this. Although he initially wrote in terms suggesting severe shortages, he later clarified that matériel often existed but

was not where it needed to be, or was trapped in administrative misallocation. In other words, France's problem was not merely production but distribution, use, and doctrine [18].

The most visible expression of interwar French strategic thought was the Maginot Line. It is important not to caricature this system. The Maginot Line was not irrational in a vacuum. France had been invaded in 1870 and again in 1914. The First World War had devastated French territory and society. In that context, a defensive strategy designed to deny another direct invasion had obvious appeal. It promised security, predictability, and the reduction of casualties. Politically and psychologically, it made sense.

Yet the Maginot Line embodied more than a set of fortifications. It represented a broader strategic mentality. It reinforced the belief that war could be stabilized spatially and methodically. It encouraged reliance on fixed positions, careful deployment, and deliberate battle. Even where French planners understood that the main German maneuver might occur through Belgium, the underlying expectation remained that the war would unfold according to familiar geometries and that prepared systems could absorb the initial shock [19].

Bloch's critique of this mentality was severe. He believed France had wasted immense resources not only in concrete but in the illusion that concrete could substitute for strategic imagination. The psychological investment in fortification became, in his account, part of a larger refusal to confront mobility, surprise, and dislocation as defining features of the new war [20].

The problem became acute once German forces forced the campaign outside the terms on which France was prepared to fight it. The line was not simply outflanked in a geographical sense. The entire strategic worldview behind it was bypassed.

French command culture deepened the resulting crisis. Bloch's descriptions of staff life suggest a military

machine burdened by too many layers of authority, too many intermediaries, and too much bureaucratic sediment. Orders moved slowly, responsibility diffused upward and downward, and rivalries weakened trust. The more complicated the structure, the easier it became for accountability to evaporate. In peacetime, such complexity may appear organized. In crisis, it can become paralysis [21].

Bloch's famous citation of the military saying—"Lieutenants, friends; captains, comrades; majors, companions; colonels, rivals; generals, enemies"—captures his sense that the officer corps had become internally corrosive [22]. Whatever the exaggeration, the broader issue is clear: an army cannot respond effectively to strategic shock if its senior culture is shaped by rivalry, caution, and bureaucratic self-protection.

This is one reason Bloch was so struck by the morale collapse among parts of the professional officer corps. He observed, with bitterness, that in some cases career officers seemed to lose their nerve earlier than ordinary soldiers. Whether one interprets this literally or as an expression of his outrage, the point is revealing. Bloch believed that the institutional center of the army had become psychologically brittle. Once the unexpected happened, it could not sustain its function as a source of coherence [23].

Air power intensified this weakness. Bloch was especially attentive to the psychological violence of German air attacks. He described the "scream" of the aircraft, the terror induced by dive-bombing, and the way this noise and unpredictability weakened morale well beyond the radius of direct destruction. In this respect he intuited something also emphasized by theorists such as Giulio Douhet: modern air power acted not only physically but psychologically, attacking the nerves and confidence of the enemy system [24].

Taken together, these elements reveal the full significance of France's condition in 1940. It was not a weak state in the simple sense. It was a state whose material assets were embedded in institutions that had become too rigid to interpret and respond to modern war. It was therefore vulnerable not because it lacked strength, but because its strength was cognitively and organizationally misaligned.

VI. THE THIRD REPUBLIC, SOCIAL FRACTURE, AND THE WIDER FOUNDATIONS OF DEFEAT

Bloch's analysis becomes even more historically ambitious when he connects military failure to the broader political and social life of the Third Republic. For him, France's defeat was not solely a military event. It was also a crisis of national cohesion and civic seriousness.

The first indispensable background factor is the First World War. France paid an enormous price in 1914–18. Nearly 1.4 million soldiers were killed, and many millions more were wounded, disabled, or psychologically scarred [25]. For a country whose population was already relatively stagnant compared to Germany's, this constituted not merely military loss but a demographic and moral catastrophe. One cannot understand French interwar policy without grasping the depth of that trauma.

This helps explain why defensive strategy had such appeal, why another war of attrition seemed intolerable, and why caution could present itself as rational patriotism rather than timidity. The French state and public alike had strong reasons to fear another prolonged bloodletting. That fear was not fantasy. It was a historical memory carried in bodies, families, and landscapes.

Yet trauma alone cannot explain the weakness of 1940. The political structure of the Third Republic also mattered. France had a rich parliamentary tradition, but it was one marked by intense factional conflict, frequent cabinet changes, and unresolved ideological antagonisms.

The revolutionary legacy of 1789, while a source of pride, had also bequeathed a political culture in which legitimacy was repeatedly contested. Left and right confronted one another not simply as opponents, but often as enemies of incompatible Frances [26].

Labor struggles, anti-parliamentary agitation, anti-Semitic currents, class tensions, and the afterlife of scandals such as the Dreyfus Affair all contributed to a public sphere thick with suspicion. The result was not constant chaos, but chronic instability. Such a system could govern, but often with difficulty. Long-term defense planning and consistent national prioritization were harder to sustain in an environment where governments fell easily and public discourse was heavily polarized.

Bloch's treatment of this problem is one of the most morally charged parts of *L'Étrange défaite*. He believed that too many social and political actors had lost the habit of thinking first in terms of national survival. Particular interests, ideological commitments, and class antagonisms crowded out a common civic seriousness. He was especially severe toward those he felt had failed to instill in the public a sense that, in a struggle against Nazi Germany, many narrower concerns had to become secondary [27].

His language here can seem harsh, and one should read it carefully. Bloch was writing not as a neutral sociologist, but as a patriot confronting national ruin. Yet his core insight remains strong: strategic failure is harder to avoid in a society whose political and social fabric has become deeply fragmented. Military institutions do not exist in a vacuum. They are sustained by a political order and a civic culture. If those are unstable, strategic adaptation becomes more difficult.

This wider political environment also shaped the officer corps itself. Civil-military relations, social hierarchy, distrust among political factions, and unresolved cultural tensions all entered the military sphere. An army formed inside such a society could hardly remain

untouched by it. Bloch's critique of command culture is therefore inseparable from his critique of the broader French elite.

In this respect, the defeat of 1940 was indeed, as Bloch implied, a kind of "check of conscience." It exposed the relation between military breakdown and a wider erosion of institutional seriousness. The French nation did not suddenly become weak in May 1940. Rather, May 1940 revealed the accumulated effects of weaknesses that had developed over decades.

VII. THE ALLIED DIMENSION AND THE LIMITS OF COALITION CONFIDENCE

Another aspect of Bloch's reflections, sometimes overshadowed in later accounts, concerns the uneasy relationship between France and Britain during the campaign. In standard military history, the Allied problem is often discussed in terms of command coordination and strategic deployment. Bloch adds another layer: the cultural and political fragility of the alliance itself.

In principle, France and Britain were united against a common enemy. In practice, the alliance contained mistrust, divergent priorities, and asymmetries of commitment. Bloch's observations suggest that this problem was not confined to high command. It extended into the everyday experience of local populations and soldiers. He recorded, with bitterness, cases of misconduct by British troops in France and described the resentment such behavior produced among French civilians [28]. Whether such episodes were typical or exceptional, their presence mattered because they undercut the emotional solidity of the alliance.

This does not mean that British behavior caused the defeat. It does mean that alliances are not merely technical arrangements. They are also social and political relationships, and in moments of crisis their strength depends partly on mutual confidence. Bloch believed that this confidence was weaker than appearances suggested.

The later phases of the campaign appeared to confirm that fear. Britain, possessing maritime mobility and strategic flexibility unavailable to France, was able to prioritize the extraction of its own core forces from Dunkirk and ultimately to preserve itself as an island power. From a British perspective this was rational. From a French perspective it could appear as abandonment. The divergence did not create the defeat, but it shaped the political meaning of defeat inside France. Once it became clear that Britain would survive separately while France disintegrated, the pressure for armistice naturally intensified.

Bloch's importance here lies not in offering a full diplomatic history of the alliance, but in reminding us that coalition warfare depends on shared assumptions that can rapidly erode under strategic stress. The French defeat, in this sense, was not only national. It was also the failure of an alliance to act as a fully integrated strategic system.

VIII. BLOCH'S STRENGTHS AND LIMITS AS A PARTICIPANT-WITNESS

Bloch's interpretation remains indispensable, but no serious historical analysis can stop with reverence. The value of his testimony must be considered together with its limits.

Its strengths are obvious. Few witnesses combined such intellectual power, moral seriousness, and first-hand experience. Bloch saw not only events but the institutional mentality surrounding events. He was able to grasp that the defeat of 1940 was not simply one operational disaster among others, but the revelation of a deeper malfunction in the French state and society.

At the same time, witness is not omniscience. Bloch's position as a reserve officer gave him intense visibility into breakdown at the levels he inhabited, but not full access to the strategic calculations of the highest leadership. He did not always see what was still being attempted above him, however unsuccessfully. Some commanders did try to

coordinate countermeasures and to work with the British to stabilize the front. Not every senior officer was simply inert or blind. Bloch's outrage, though historically meaningful, could sometimes transform structural failure into near-total moral condemnation.

His phrase "defeat of knowledge" also raises analytical challenges. It is powerful precisely because it is capacious. It includes military doctrine, institutional mentality, command judgment, political foresight, and even civic responsibility. This breadth gives it interpretive force, but it can also blur distinctions. If everything becomes "knowledge," then the specific causal mechanisms behind collapse may become less clear.

A productive way forward is therefore to treat Bloch's phrase as an entry point rather than a final category. His diagnosis can be disaggregated into several interrelated failures:

- **Doctrinal failure:** inability to grasp the implications of mechanized war.
- **Institutional failure:** excessive bureaucracy, weak flexibility, diffusion of responsibility.
- **Command-cultural failure:** hierarchical rigidity, rivalry, and caution in the officer corps.
- **Political failure:** instability and short-termism within the Third Republic.
- **Civic-social failure:** fragmentation, mistrust, and moral fatigue within French society.

Seen this way, Bloch's insight becomes not less powerful but more precise. He perceived the unity of these failures before later scholarship could separate them analytically.

IX. CONCLUSION

The French collapse of 1940 was not the simple product of German brilliance, French cowardice, or one dramatic breakthrough alone. It was the result of a much deeper and longer process: a failure of a modern great power to adapt its institutions, doctrines, command habits,

and civic order to the realities of transformed industrial war.

Marc Bloch grasped this with extraordinary clarity. His phrase *défaite de l'intelligence*—a defeat of knowledge or intelligence—remains one of the most powerful contemporary attempts to name the deeper meaning of the disaster. France did not merely lose a battle. It experienced the exposure of a system no longer adequate to the age in which it lived.

This article has argued that Bloch's insight is best understood as a diagnosis of **structural cognitive failure**. France possessed strength, but its strength was embedded in institutions too rigid to interpret and respond effectively to new conditions. Its army had matériel, but not enough conceptual flexibility. Its political system had legitimacy, but not enough coherence. Its society retained civilization, but not enough unity. The resulting collapse, when it came, was rapid because the underlying imbalance had been accumulating for years.

At the same time, Bloch's account should not be treated as beyond criticism. His position as participant-witness gave him unusual authority, but also inevitable limits. He saw the reality of breakdown with unmatched sharpness, yet not every level of decision was visible to him. His moral passion, though central to the book's greatness, can sometimes compress analytical distinctions. That is why the task of later historians is not to repeat Bloch unchanged, but to refine and extend him.

Even so, his central intuition endures. Modern states do not necessarily fail because they are weak in the ordinary sense. They may fail because they no longer understand the strategic world in which their power must operate. That insight gives *L'Étrange défaite* a significance well beyond the French case. It speaks to a recurring modern danger: the possibility that institutions may remain outwardly powerful while inwardly losing the capacity to think historically and adapt.

Bloch himself did not live to see France liberated. He joined the Resistance and was executed by the Germans in 1944, just before the country's renewal. Yet his faith that France could recover was not misplaced. Postwar France rebuilt politically, economically, and institutionally. Under the Fifth Republic it eventually achieved a new measure of stability and resumed its place as a major European power. The defeat of 1940 was therefore not the end of French history. But it was a moment of painful revelation.

That is why Bloch still matters. He understood that after catastrophe, honesty is more valuable than consolation. He wrote not to flatter France, but to make it capable of self-understanding. The enduring force of his work lies precisely there: in the conviction that historical truth is one of the few dignities left to a defeated nation.

NOTES

1. Basil H. Liddell Hart, *History of the Second World War*, trans. Niu Xianzhong (Taipei: Maitian, 1995), 133.
2. J. F. C. Fuller, *The Conduct of War, 1789–1961*, trans. Niu Xianzhong (Taipei: Maitian, 1996), 289; Basil H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy: The Indirect Approach*, trans. Niu Xianzhong (Taipei: Maitian, 1995).
3. William L. Shirer, *The Collapse of the Third Republic: An Inquiry into the Fall of France in 1940* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1969).
4. Roger Price, *A Concise History of France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 260–65.
5. Niall Ferguson, *The War of the World: Twentieth-Century Conflict and the Descent of the West* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 388–91.
6. Marc Bloch, *L'Étrange défaite* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990); Chinese edition: Marc Bloch, *Qiguai de Zhanbai*, trans. Lu Yuanchang (Taipei: Wunan, 2009), 55–56.
7. Bloch, *Qiguai de Zhanbai*, 55–57.
8. Ibid., 131.
9. Ibid.
10. Fuller, *The Conduct of War*, 289.

11. Liddell Hart, *Strategy: The Indirect Approach*, 284.
12. Heinz Guderian, *Panzer Leader*, trans. Niu Xianzhong (Taipei: Xingguang, 1994), 8.
13. Bloch, *Qiguai de Zhanbai*, 146.
14. Ibid., 139–41.
15. Charles de Gaulle, *War Memoirs, Vol. 1: The Call* (Beijing: World Knowledge Press, 1981), 5.
16. Erich von Manstein, *Lost Victories*, trans. Niu Xianzhong (Taipei: Xingguang, 1994), 119.
17. Christopher F. Foss, *World War II Tanks and Fighting Vehicles*, trans. Yao Qingzhong (Taipei: Maitian, 1997), 8.
18. Bloch, *Qiguai de Zhanbai*, 72–73.
19. Liddell Hart, *Strategy: The Indirect Approach*, 294.
20. Bloch, *Qiguai de Zhanbai*, 72.
21. Ibid., 116–19.
22. Ibid., 118–19.
23. Ibid., 128–29.
24. Giulio Douhet, *The Command of the Air*, trans. Cao Yifeng and Hua Renjie (Beijing: PLA Press, 2004), 102–3.
25. Shirer, *The Collapse of the Third Republic*, 82.
26. Michael Burns, *France and the Dreyfus Affair: A Documentary History* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999).
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Exploring the Feminist Narratological Aspects within “The White Tiger” by Aravind Adiga

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Abstract— *Indian Writing in English (IWE) is in a new phase now, a phase that is free from the British or English influence in its writings. IWE, though it has its origins related to British literature, has progressed in its own way and established itself as a distinct literature with its unique features, setting it apart from the world of English literature. Indian writers with their distinct themes, styles, and narration contributed to the enrichment of Indian English literature and thereby raised the status of Indian English Literature (IEL). Aravind Adiga is one of the most prominent writers in Contemporary English Writing. His debut novel, “The White Tiger,” bagged the most prestigious “The Man Booker Prize” in 2008. The novel is known for its narrative, as it is appreciated by Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung as “A brilliant Debut...A marvelous narrator”. He received universal acclaim for his captivating storytelling. This artistic excellence can be the result of exemplary implication of narrative techniques. At a superficial understanding, The White Tiger appears to be primarily concerned with the social injustices and class struggles prevalent in India. This research paper analyzes the feminist narratological aspects of Aravind Adiga's novel, “The White Tiger.” Through the critical lens of feminism, the research study aims to understand the novel by applying the concepts introduced by Lanser's feminist narratology. Though the story is primarily about Balram and his journey from being a chauffeur to an entrepreneur, the various female characters he came across in his life and the way they are narrated give a different perspective to the total impression that one gets by reading the novel. The detailed analysis of the novel, with a focus on the portrayal of characters, particularly female characters, the exercise of power by the characters, and intersectionality, reveals a different perspective on contemporary Indian society. Through this examination, the article contributes to a deeper understanding of the novel's portrayal of gender and its implications for feminist discourse.*



Keywords— *Narratology, Feminist Narratology, The White Tiger, Aravind Adiga, Narrative Techniques.*

CONTRIBUTION/ ORIGINALITY

This study is original in analysing the Aravind Adiga's novel “The White Tiger” from a totally new perspective, that is, a feminist narratological perspective. Unlike earlier studies, it examines feministic perspective of the author that facilitates a new kind of thought in exploring a novel irrespective of the gender of the author.

I. INTRODUCTION

Indian Writing in English is considered to be in a new phase, where it is free from the influence of British or English

writers. Earlier, it was like the offspring of British Literature in every sense, but now it can stand on its own in the canonical records as a distinct literary tradition. It has its flavour representing India in different aspects. Aravind Adiga is one of the most prominent writers in Contemporary English Writing. His debut novel, “The White Tiger,” bagged the most prestigious “The Man Booker Prize” in 2008. The novel is known for many aspects, among which the most unique aspect is its narrative. Adiga employs distinctive narrative styles, including interior monologue and discourse, in such a way that it transports the reader to

a different world. The paper attempts to explore the novel "The White Tiger" from a feminist narratological perspective.

The methodology of the study includes a close reading and critical analysis of the text, primary source, through the lens of feminist Narratology proposed by Lancer, as well as epistemology. This initial step is later followed by the discourse analysis to understand how language and narration are prominent in the construction of gender. This combination helps to explore even the subtle things related to the gender discourses. Employing an intersectional feminist narratology, the paper analyzes how gender, class, and cultural identity intersect within narrative elements such as voice, focalization, and temporality.

Even though Aravind Adiga has other works, the research mainly focuses on examining the novel "The White Tiger" through the Feminist Narratological aspect. Feminism as a movement was started to give equal rights to men and women. Feminist Narratology, as a concept, originated from Narratology, which has connections with French Formalism. The term Narratology was first coined and used by Tzvetan Todorov in his book *Grammaire du*

"*Décameron*." He defined Narratology as the systematic study and analysis of narrative texts. Narrative is nothing but the way the story is given in a text. Toolan (2001) described narrative as "narrative is a perceived sequence of non-randomly connected events, typically involving, as the experiencing agonist, humans or quasi-humans, or other sentient beings, from whose experience we humans can learn."

Seymour Chatman, in his work 'Story and Discourse-Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film', suggests a basic skeleton for analysing the elements of a narrative. The above diagram is an extract from the book 'Story and Discourse'. In the book, it is stated that narrative is divided into two Prominent components: Story (content) and Discourse (Expression). Events that include actions and happenings, as well as existents such as characters, settings, and people, come under the category of a story. In contrast, Discourse deals with the structure of narrative transmission and manifestation. This narrative can be studied to understand both the form and substance of content and expression.

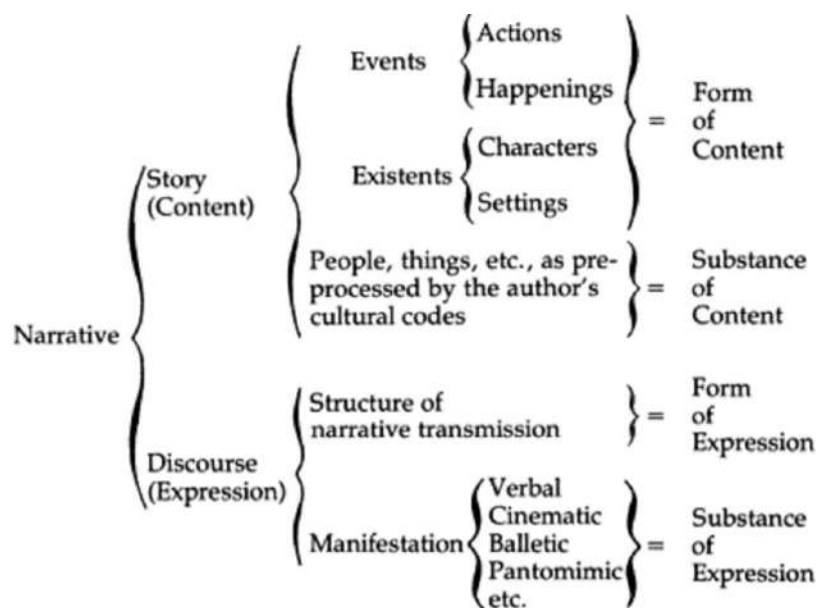


Fig. 1- Model of Narrative by Chatman

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the novel 'The White Tiger', the representation of women characters is limited, which reminds one of the words of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her book 'Can Subaltern Speak?' as marginalised people, particularly in the post-colonial society, are represented as "silent Victims" not allowing them to be involved in the main narrative. (1988, p. 45).

Todorov conceives narratology as a series of narratives that convey the content. The narratives can be analysed independently—their function as an independent form and their role and contribution to the main story. Todorov proposed a phenomenon in which all narratives contain equilibrium, disequilibrium, recognition, resolution, and a new equilibrium.

A lot of words have been introduced into the field of narratology by Gerard Genette in his book. '*Narrative Discourse: An Essay*'. Genette discussed five main aspects of narratology, which include: Order, Frequency, Duration, Voice, and Mood. Lanser S Susan, in her essay "Toward A Feminist Narratology," stated that bringing feminism and narratology together is like forcing the intersection of two lines drawn on different planes. Both these disciplines seem to be incompatible, but both might profitably join forces. The epistolary style is most commonly used by female writers. It is considered a female style. The reason behind this needs to be studied with a historical perspective. Women writers faced significant discrimination and restrictions on their writing. Virginia Woolf said that "Letters did not count": letters were private and did not disturb the male discursive hegemony.

Devina Rathore in her research article titled "Examining Women's Portrayal in "The White Tiger" through A Gendered Lens" analysed the feministic aspects and the role of women characters in the novel. It is stated that the "The crushing weight of tradition and cultural expectations stifles women of dreams."

Dr. G. Sharmely¹ & Mrs. A.S. Sivananthavalli² in their research article titled "Ambivalence and Power: The Complex Portrayal of Women in Aravind Adiga's The White Tiger" stated that the women characters of the novel reflect the conventional values that views women as a secondary grade creature. However, a kind of dominant nature has also been represented at some instances which showcases the ambivalence and ambiguity in the characters. The authors opine that the writing can be the output of the experiences that the author have in the society.

Prof. Sonba Salve in the research article titled "The Narrative Techniques in Aravind Adiga's The White Tiger" highlights the narrative techniques used by Aravind Adiga. The narrative was explained as an apt one to convey the content in the way the author wanted it to be conveyed. 'His narration oscillates between self-pity and grandiosity, as when he reflects, "I was looking for the key for years, but the door was always open," rationalizing his choices and moral compromises as necessary steps in a corrupt society. The usage of unrealistic, nonlinear, and dark humor makes the reader to question the authenticity of the explanations given by the narrator, which forms the base for the development of curiosity among readers.

The review of research till now highlights Aravind Adiga's work from the sociological, capitalistic, Post-colonial, Marxist, and Psycho analytical frame works. Not much analysis is done exploring the feminist narratological aspects. A little research has been done in analysing from this perspective, which constitutes the research gap. The

way in which the story of "The White Tiger" is narrated is unique, and the feminist narratological narrative can be clearly understood from his writing.

Feminist Narratology

In a general sense, feminist narrative theory refers to the unique or distinct kind of narrative that female authors generally employ in their writing. However, the term "feminist" does not simply refer to female writers; it can also refer to anyone with a feminist inclination. Thus, this literary theory can be applied to any book, regardless of the writer's gender, as long as the ideology is portrayed. In view of this ideology, the research tries to focus on the feminist narratological aspects in the novel written by the male author, Aravind Adiga.

Gayatri Spivak's idea of feminist narratology is different from the traditional perspective. It states that it is not the plot or character that is most important; what is most crucial is who narrates the story and how power dynamics alter the story.

Based on the principles of both feminism and narratology, "The White Tiger" by Aravind Adiga tells the story of Balram Halwai, a poor Indian villager who rises to become a successful entrepreneur in Bangalore. Through a series of letters to the Chinese Premier, Balram recounts his journey from being a servant to a wealthy landlord to committing murder and seizing his master's wealth to break free from the cycle of poverty and oppression.

Portrayal of Female Characters:

The characterization of women in the novel provides the reader with a scenic representation of the patriarchal society that is prevalent in contemporary Indian society. The novel portrays a variety of female characters from different backgrounds, providing the reader with an in-depth understanding of the status of women at multiple levels. The characters range from below-middle-class and poor women in Balram's village to higher-class women like Pinky Madam. However, mostly these characters play a supporting part or act as symbols of patriarchal oppression. For example, Balram's village women are shown as marginalized individuals caught in cycles of poverty and exploitation. Despite their economic crisis, not all the women of the face the same crisis. Different characters were portrayed in different dimensions. Kusum is portrayed as a courageous and dominant character, and the other women in Balram's family are portrayed as vulnerable and fragile. Kusum, the grandmother of the protagonist, was introduced as a brave woman leading the funeral procession of the mother of Balram.

"Kusum, my granny, was leading the procession. Sly old Kusum!" (pg no 16).

But Pinky Madam represents upper-class women in India. Even though she is from the upper class, she also has to face suffering at her level in the form of restraints imposed by her family members, including her husband, and also from the expectations of society. For instance, in the earlier part of the novel, Mr. Ashok asked Balram some questions and mocked him based on his answers, and called him 'half-baked'. He even involved Pinky Madam also in this, and when she laughs, Ashok can't take it normally. This is only the tip of the iceberg, notifying the restrictions that are being faced by upper-class women.

"She giggled when she heard this, but *his* face, which I saw reflected in my rearview mirror, was serious." (Pg no-10)

A lot can be explored by analysing the power dynamics employed in the novel.

Power Dynamics and Gender:

The most distinguishing aspect of the novel is how power dynamics are effectively employed to represent oppression at various levels within Indian society. Balram's conversations with the female characters in the novel reveal a lot about the status of women. Women, irrespective of their class or social strata they belong, are always expected to be subordinate to the corresponding male figure. This phenomenon is being observed in many instances in the novel. Pinky Madam belongs to the higher class or upper class and exercises her autonomy. However, this autonomy is only confined to some extent when it comes to certain family norms; she does not even have the autonomy to wear a dress of her own choice. Patriarchal attitude restricts the power of women. The other character, in contrast to Pinky Madam, is Kusum, Balram's grandmother. She belongs to a lower class but exercises greater control over family matters and over the family members. Her autonomy in ruling the family is evident in the voice of Balram. Adiga's representation highlights the complexity of characters and their interplay between power and gender.

Intersectionality of Gender, Class, and Caste:

The Cambridge Dictionary defines intersectionality as "the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage." In the novel, Adiga subtly throws light on how other factors, such as class and caste, play a role in worsening the plight of women further. The problems faced by the women are aggravated by many additional factors, which are represented in the novel. The two prominent characters, Kusum and Pinky Madam, are confined to their gender limits by patriarchal autonomy in their families. Though Kusum has autonomy

Narrative Level and Voice

in the family, she predominantly uses it to enhance the patriarchy in the family. She considers that it is for the benefit of the family. The yelling of the male members at the women of the family is a common phenomenon that is observed in both upper-class and lower-class families in the novel.

"One day, he lost his temper at home and began yelling at the women"(Pg No-27-28)

In another situation where Balram aims to gain credibility with his masters, he narrates an incident from his childhood regarding the kidnapping and killing of the master's son by the Naxals. The servant was shot dead immediately, and also the servant's brother and his wife, and his sister were horribly victimized. "That brother's wife was finished off by three men working together. A sister, still unmarried, was also finished off." (Pg No-67)

Adiga exposes how gender intersects with class and caste to replicate the existing power structures in society, relegating women to subordinate positions. While upper-class women like Pinky Madam enjoy certain privileges, they are also constrained by patriarchal expectations and societal norms. On the other hand, women from lower castes and marginalized communities face multiple forms of oppression, including economic exploitation and social marginalization. By examining how Adiga navigates these intersections within the narrative, we can gain insight into the complex realities faced by women across various social strata in India.

Narrative Techniques:

Adiga uses various narrative techniques to continuously involve the reader in the text. The novel employs the form of a confessional letter addressed to the Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao, which offers a unique narrative framework that allows Balram to recount his story in his own voice. This provides insight into Balram's inner feelings. By employing this letter or epistolary format, the writer made the reader a part of Balram's world. The reader identifies with the landscape of the novel and can have firsthand experience while reading. Moreover, Adiga employs a non-linear narrative structure, which can be a symbolic representation of Balram's mental state, by intelligently intertwining past incidents and present incidents throughout the narration. Aravind Adiga employs an intradiegetic narration, where Balram, the protagonist of the novel, recounts his story in the first person through letters addressed to Chinese Entrepreneur Jiabao. The first-person narration is employed and occasionally uses interior monologue to convey the protagonist's mental agony. A Homodiegetic private discourse, but it serves the purpose of a public narrative.

level	Person	Public	Private	Novel
Intradiegetic	Homodiegetic (first Person)	Meant for public readership	letters to another character in the novel(Jiabao)	The White Tiger

Narrative Structure of The White Tiger

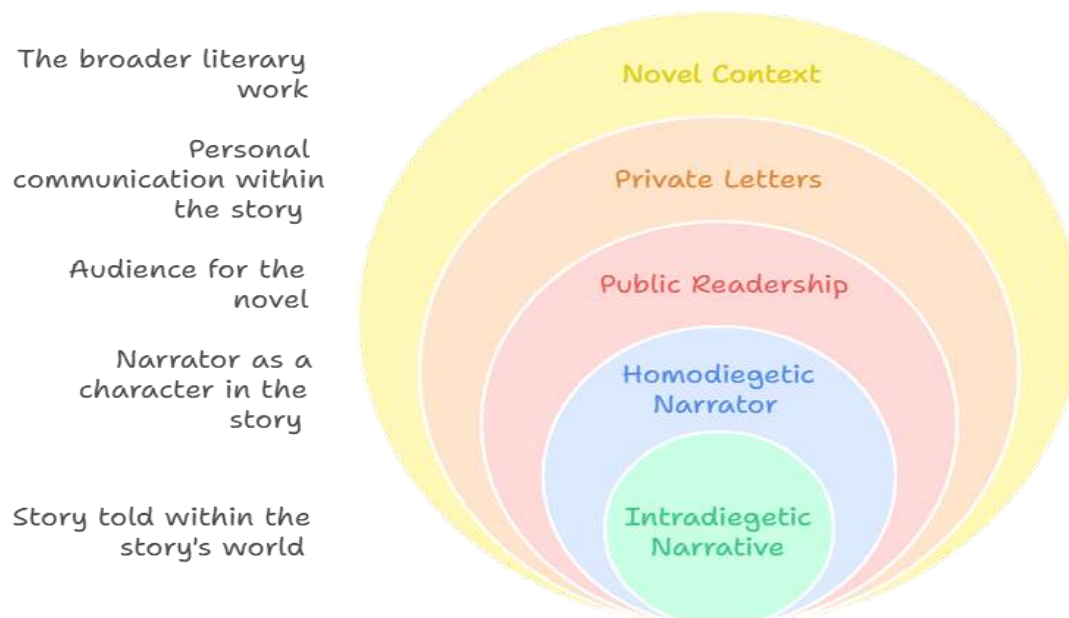


Image generated through Napkin.ai

The novel, 'The White Tiger', is written in an Epistolary format, which is often considered a feminist style of narration. Female writers used this epistolary model to convey their ideas amidst male censorship. This is the way women writers used to communicate to the public indirectly in the disguise of communicating with the addressee. Aravind Adiga, in his novel "The White Tiger", uses this technique to express explicitly the plight of the marginalized communities in India.

Susan S Lanser tried to identify whether there is any significant difference between the languages of women and men. Linguists thought that "Women's language or a discourse of the powerless" - a speech that is polite, emotional, enthusiastic, gossipy, talkative, uncertain, dull, and chatty, whereas men's answers are direct, rational, illustrating a sense of humor and strength.

Aravind Adiga uses voice carefully, so that even though no female character explicitly expresses their opinion or problems, the novel gives a clear picture of women of different classes in India and their quest for survival with self-respect.

Tropes:

The study of the novel from a feminist narratology perspective allows one to identify many tropes in the novel that directly and indirectly point out the plight of women.

Half Baked Indian

The term "half-baked Indian" was first used by Balram's owner, Ashok, in a conversation with Pinky Madam. This symbolism is used by the owner to mock his servant. However, the term "Half Baked Indian" probes the control of one over the other. Later it was used by Balram many times to refer to the condition of himself and other marginalized individuals. This highlights the notion of incomplete or compromised agency. The character of Balram was not happy and tried to challenge the notion. He proves himself in the latter part of the novel and reverses the trend, the plot. Though it is not mentioned or expressed directly in the novel, the term can best be suited to represent the situation of the majority of women in the country. The women also need to get an idea of the environment prevailing around them and should develop the potential to subvert the patriarchal dominance.

Rooster Coop (The Great Indian Rooster Coop)

In the **Fifth Night** chapter of the novel "The White Tiger", the narrator said, "he pairs narrative techniques and Tropes can be studied under the feminist Narratology. "The greatest thing to come out of this country in the ten thousand years of its history is the Rooster Coop." In the text, it is mainly used to represent the plight of the oppressed and marginalized communities of the country, but the other perspective is that it can be applied aptly to the women of the country. Women of the country are strong, talented, and intelligent in every way, but are trained to exist in perpetual servitude, and this is so strong that even if they receive the key of emancipation, they won't even think of using it and remain in the same coop.

III. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Aravind Adiga's "The White Tiger" offers a rich and complex ground for feminist analysis, as it deals with the complexities of gender and power prevalent in contemporary India. The paper explores how male writers can also be studied under feminist narratology. It focuses on the representation of the female characters, power dynamics, and intersectionality of gender and the form, Narrative techniques, and tropes. These aspects are analysed to some extent, which paves the way for future research in the field of Feminist Narratology and various dimensions of it.

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Otjize, Body Dyeing with Red Clay: Between Colorism and Cultural Identity in *Binti* by Nnedi Okorafor

Otjize, Teinture du Corps A L'argile Rouge: Entre Colorisme et Identite Culturelle Dans *Binti* de Nnedi Okorafor

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Abstract— This article aims to highlight the decentering of the hegemonic discourse of the colonizer by the colonized. The study focused on the crossed gaze of the otjize: the colorization of the Himba female body: between colorist opinions of the Khoush colonizer and Africans' cultural identity. With Afrocentricity as a theoretical basis, we first demonstrated that the otjize symbolizes authentic African feminine beauty. On the other hand, through the lens of postcolonial studies, we have indicated that the whitewashing of the female body with red clay is subject to colorist criticism on the part of the Khoush colonizer. Finally, we have observed that though in a diasporic situation, women succeed in resisting and subverting the process of subjectification set in motion by the global Kush civilization owing to the attachment to their cultural identity



Keywords— Himba, identity, colorists, cultural, otjize.

Résumé— Cet article ambitionne de mettre en évidence le décentrement du discours hégémonique du colonisateur par le colonisé. L'étude a porté sur le regard croisé de l'otjize, la colorisation du corps de la femme Himba : entre opinions coloristes du colonisateur Khoush et identité culturelle des Africains. Avec l'Afrocentricité comme base théorique, nous avons d'abord démontré que l'otjize symbolise la beauté authentique féminine africaine. D'autre part, avec la théorie postcoloniale en filigrane, nous avons signifié que le badigeonnage du corps féminin à l'argile rouge est sujet à des critiques coloristes de la part du colonisateur Khoush. Enfin, nous avons observé que quoiqu'en situation diasporique, les femmes parviennent à résister et à subvertir le processus de subjectivation mis en place par la civilisation globale Khoush du fait de leur attachement à leur identité culturelle.

Mots-clés— Himba, identité, coloristes, culturelle, otjize.

I. INTRODUCTION

L'homme, étant issu de la terre, continue toutefois d'entretenir des liens forts avec celle-ci. Ce continuum entre espèces humaine et tellurique est plus visible à travers l'attachement des hommes à l'argile, minéral se présentant

sous la forme d'une poudre souvent. De l'Europe à l'Amérique, en passant par l'Asie, la plupart des communautés ont gardé des attaches séculaires avec cette roche terreuse hydratée. Quant à l'Afrique, elle ne déroge pas à cette tradition. Ses peuples ont une expérience tout

aussi particulière que celle des autres régions du globe dans sa proximité avec l'argile. Les propos de Nathalie Cousin (2013, p. 9) sous-tendent ce postulat : « L'argile et l'homme entretiennent, il est vrai, un rapport très étroit. Il s'agit effectivement de l'un des matériaux naturels utilisés par l'être humain ».

Il est avéré que l'argile fait partie du quotidien gastronomique des hommes. Nicole Liewig, Michel Rautureau et Ceslo Gomes confirment cela dans leur article « Les argiles et la santé humaine : d'hier à aujourd'hui », où ils démontrent comment la glaise sert d'ingrédients alimentaires. Mais au-delà de la phagotechnie, l'argile sert d'outil à certains écrivains dans la construction de tropes, de sens, de métaphores et d'esthétique dans leurs œuvres littéraires. C'est le cas de *Binti* de l'écrivaine nigériane de fiction spéculative Nnedi Okorafor. Dans cette novella, l'auteure dévoile le pont culturel entre le peuple Himba et la pratique ancestrale de l'otjize, qui consiste pour les femmes à se badigeonner le corps d'un mélange d'argile rouge et de graisse florale.

Certaines critiques littéraires en ont fait un large écho dans des articles scientifiques. D. Crowley dans, « *Binti's R/evolutionary Cosmopolitan Ecologies* » (2019), présente l'otjize comme une pratique spirituelle animiste qui décentre les manifestations et les implications du monde matériel. Quant à « *Afrocarnival: Celebrating Black Bodies and Critiquing Oppressive Bodies in Afrofuturist Literature* » (2021) de S. R. Toliver, l'accent est mis sur *Binti* qui, en situation de déculturation sur une autre planète, tente de reconstruire son identité Himba avec l'otjize.

La différence entre ces deux études susmentionnées est que Crowley parle de la dimension spirituelle (religieuse) de l'argile rouge Himba, tandis que Toliver insiste sur l'agenda postcolonial des Africains à travers l'otjize. Dérogeant à l'aspect religieux défendu par Crowley, cette réflexion réitère la posture postcoloniale avec l'otjize. Seulement, elle ajuste le débat dans un contexte de discrimination à l'égard du badigeonnage de la peau de la femme Himba à l'argile rouge : le colorisme. Selon A. Devulsky (2023, p. 13) :

le colorisme touche les femmes et les hommes de façon distincte, et approfondit les inégalités entre elleux [sic] ; c'est une construction liée à l'idée de suprématie blanche, et qui ne provient donc pas des interactions endogènes des membres de la communauté noire.

Ici, le colorisme exclut les facteurs intra-raciaux. Il met en lumière les interactions exogènes, entre colonisateurs extraterrestres et colonisés humains. L'utilisation de l'ocre à des fins esthétiques et cosmétiques

est passible de critiques et d'incompréhensions. Ceci étant, cet article ambitionne non seulement de jeter un regard croisé sur l'otjize, mais surtout de montrer la posture décoloniale des africains contre les manifestations du discours qui stéréotypent l'otjize et le jugent sur la base d'une norme biaisée. Pour ce faire, nous recourons à l'Afrocentricité pour marquer la sécularité et l'authenticité de la pratique ancestrale de l'otjize : « Cette manière propre à l'homme de saisir le monde à partir de soi, [...] justifie la méthodologie et la finalité de l'Afrocentricité. » (2016, p. 2) selon T. L. R. Boa. Ensuite, nous aurons besoin de la théorie postcoloniale. Pour A. Mangeon (2012, p. 7), dans son combat contre les iniquités perpétrées par le colonisateur, cette approche théorique vise à atteindre « un décentrement épistémologique et politique, et brouiller les relations ou les représentations binaires qui prévalent dans les situations coloniales ». L'accent sera mis sur le processus de subjectivation et le combat pour s'en défaire. Avec cette base théorique en filigrane, l'article sera axé sur trois points. D'abord, nous étudierons l'otjize comme expression de la beauté authentique féminine. Ensuite, la campagne coloriste coloniale pour invalider l'otjize sera mise en exergue. Enfin, il sera impérieux de dévoiler le combat postcolonial des Himba pour résister aux assauts coloristes dans un contexte diasporique, de migration.

II. OTJIZE: EXPRESSION DE LA BEAUTE AUTHENTIQUE FEMININE HIMBA

Dans la plupart des communautés culturelles du monde, il existe des moyens en usage pour le maintien et l'entretien de la beauté corporelle. Pour ces peuples, l'un des procédés de la conservation de l'esthétique du corps est l'utilisation d'ingrédients naturels trouvés sur place, dans le milieu naturel. En Afrique traditionnelle, les intrants biologiques dont les femmes font usage pour bien garder et préserver leur beauté dermique sont entre autres le savon noir, le beurre de karité ou encore le kaolin.

Quant à la novella *Binti* de Nnedi Okorafor, elle fait plutôt l'apologie de l'otjize, mélange d'hématite avec de la graisse végétale à la senteur florale, comme produit de beauté chez la femme Himba. Pour être elle belle la femme Himba s'enduit tout le corps avec la pâte d'argile rouge, avec laquelle elles s'amidonnent toute la chevelure tressée. Au Namib, pays africain fictif, le processus d'esthétisation du corps féminin se fait essentiellement à travers sa colorisation à l'otjize. Cette technique esthétique se décline en ces trois étapes majeures que voici. Dans un premier temps, la beauté féminine exige l'hygiène corporelle à l'otjize. Cela implique l'utilisation de l'argile rouge comme produits désinfectant du corps contre les attaques microbiennes, bactériennes et toutes sortes d'impuretés.

Face aux interrogations de son chef de groupe (pour le voyage sur la planète Oomza) concernant son utilisation de l'otjize, Binti insiste sur son caractère antiseptique :

I come from a people who live near a small salty lake on the edge of a desert. On my people's land, fresh water, water humans can drink, is so little that we do not use it to bathe as many others do. We wash with *otjize*, a mix of red clay from our land and oils from our local flowers (N. Okorafor, 2015, p. 75).

Les propos ci-dessus mentionnés de la jeune fille indiquent clairement que, l'otjize, mélange d'ocre à l'huile florale, entretient l'hygiène corporelle de la femme Himba de Namib au même titre que l'eau et le savon servent de désinfectants dans d'autres espaces culturels. Cela transparaît dans la phrase : « We wash with otjize ». L'idée est encore corroborée et renforcée quand elle dit avec assez d'autorité que « my jar of *otjize*, some of which I used to clean my body as much as possible » (N. Okorafor, 2015, p. 36). L'utilisation de l'ocre, étant une activité de beauté, est fortement ancrée dans le quotidien des Himba à telle enseigne qu'elle intervient à plusieurs moments de la journée. Il semble que l'onction du corps à l'otjize n'est pas une pratique à réitération figée. Et c'est ce qui fait le charme de ce rite. L'application de l'hématite sur l'épiderme de la femme est une activité de beauté unique. La femme Himba ne se nettoie pas le corps à des moments déterminés dans la journée, à des fréquences prédéterminées. La particularité de l'otjize réside dans sa flexibilité, la possibilité que la femme à s'entretenir le corps autant qu'elle souhaite.

De ce qui précède, l'auteure nigériane Okorafor semble dire qu'en Afrique, les soins de beauté de la femme sont un fait unique. Si les femmes prennent constamment soin de leurs corps tout au long de la journée c'est bien parce que l'otjize a une centralité africaine. Le fait de s'enduire le corps avec de l'argile rouge, est aussi le fait que la femme Himba utilise essentiellement de la cosmétique de type endogène. Ainsi, il ressort que la coloration du corps au moyen de l'otjize à des fins hygiénique et esthétique est une pratique afrocentrique. Elle a pour base épistémologique, l'argile : un matériau africain, issu du terroir africain. À ce titre, ce postulat cadre bien avec les propos de M. K. Asante (2003, p. 80) qui dit ceci : « L'Afrocentricité réorganise notre cadre de références, afin que nous soyons au centre de l'analyse et de la synthèse. À ce titre, elle devient la source par laquelle nos valeurs et nos croyances se régénèrent ». En référence à Asante, l'otjize apparaît comme un vrai projet afrocentrique. Il remodèle nos valeurs culturelles en les plaçant au centre de toutes attentions, en faisant d'elles les normes à travers lesquelles les Africains s'identifient. Dans ce contexte, lorsqu'elles

utilisent l'argile rouge pour leur hygiène corporelle, ce matériau devient ainsi un canal par lequel l'ontologie africaine se revivifie et renaît. En s'attachant à l'ocre pour leur hygiène, les femmes Himba mettent l'otjize au centre de tout. Pour celles-ci, aucune autre valeur cosmétique ne saurait remplacer la coloration du corps à l'argile.

En plus de l'hygiène corporelle, la coloration du corps à l'hématite a un autre but : celui de donner un éclat de beauté à la femme africaine. L'otjize permet de corriger les imperfections plastiques qui empêchent le charme d'éclorre. En badigeonnant leur corps d'hématite, les africaines deviennent très attirantes. Binti confirme l'effet resplendissant de l'argile rouge qu'elle applique sur le corps lors d'une conversation avec son chef d'équipage pour Oomza : « I explained to him the tradition of my people's skin care » (N. Okorafor, 2015, p. 21). Le groupe nominal « skin care » démontre les efforts consentis par la femme à travers otjize pour améliorer son apparence dermique. En se badigeonnant le corps à l'argile, le caractère esthétique de la peau se trouve bien amélioré. Le corps scintille et miroite. Dans une réflexion sur les fonctions de l'otjize, B. Alvarez-Lora écrit ceci (2024, p. 14) : « it presents a celebration of Himba women's beauty ». La critique signifie clairement que la crème rouge argileuse ou l'otjize célèbre la beauté féminine en pays Himba.

Enfin, chez les Himba, l'otjize est un matériau de beauté utilisé pour améliorer l'apparence physique des femmes lors de cérémonies solennelles. À l'occasion d'événements fastes, l'otjize fait partie intégrante des atours féminins. Alors qu'elles s'endimanchent pour une commémoration culturelle ou sociale, elles prennent toujours le soin de se peindre le corps d'ocre. C'est dire que chez les Himba, l'otjize fait partie de la tenue d'apparat de la femme. La couche d'argile grasseuse éparpillée sur la peau est un élément indispensable du processus d'esthétisation féminine. Pour avoir un air majestueux lors de solennités culturelles, la femme doit nécessairement associer l'argile rouge à ses accoutrements. Dans la novella *Binti* d'Okorafor, alors qu'elle s'apprête à prendre part à un voyage interplanétaire (une occasion « unique qui nécessite une présentation physique soignée ») le personnage éponyme féminin s'obstine à appliquer une nouvelle couche d'argile rouge à son corps : « I quickly made my way through the many people in the terminal, too aware of their closeness. I considered finding a lavatory and applying more *otjize* to my skin and tying my hair back » (N. Okorafor, 2019, p. 15). Binti tient à se badigeonner le corps d'otjize avant son départ pour la planète Oomza car elle voudrait ajouter un plus à la tenue spéciale qu'elle avait portée. Pour cette fille Himba, la seule façon pour booster l'élégance de sa tenue d'apparat c'est de se coloriser le corps d'argile rouge comme cela est coutumier dans son

espace culturel: « Just before leaving, I'd rolled my plaited hair with fresh sweet-smelling otjize I'd made specially for this trip » (N. Okorafor, 2015, p. 11). Elle le dit avec fierté qu'avant son départ elle a douché ses cheveux d'argile rouge.

Il importe de dire ici que l'utilisation de l'otjize dans l'expression de la solennité du style vestimentaire chez les Himba a un caractère afrocentrique. Cela s'explique par le fait que la femme africaine n'utilise ni pommade exogène ni de lait de corps venu d'ailleurs pour augmenter son apparence. Pour soigner son allure lors d'occasions majestueuses la femme Himba n'a besoin que d'un maquillage à base de produits locaux, à base naturelle. Selon les hérauts de la pensée afrocentrique, cette initiative s'inscrit dans l'Afrocentricité qui, elle, fait la promotion « d'une approche intellectuelle fondée sur la centralité de l'expérience africaine » (A. Mazama, 2003, p. 24). Conformément à cette logique, quand Binti s'évertue à s'enduire le corps d'otjize avant son voyage interplanétaire, c'est parce qu'elle veut rester fidèle à la philosophie de l'Afrocentricité qui fait de la centralité des valeurs ancestrales africaines un principe fondamental. Ici, Binti est considérée comme un personnage afrocentrique car elle se contente des procédés cosmétiques, des techniques de beauté utilisées par les femmes Himba depuis la nuit des temps. Binti est perçue comme un personnage afrocentrique du moment où elle fonde ses méthodes de maquillage sur la centralité de l'expérience africaine: l'otjize.

Des analyses précédentes, il ressort que l'otjize contribue à la beauté féminine chez les Himba en leur apportant l'hygiène corporelle, l'éclat corporel et en augmentant leur apparence lors de solennités. Ce qui fait que la beauté en pays Himba n'a qu'une seule identité référentielle : l'argile. En pays Himba, la beauté se définit en l'associant à l'otjize. Cette pratique devient ainsi la seule norme de beauté, le seul canon de beauté que la femme connaisse. La beauté n'a de sens pour la femme Himba que lorsqu'elle a pour référent l'argile rouge. Cependant, pour un peuple étranger aux traditions Himba, le regard sur ce mécanisme esthétique pourrait être bien différent.

III. IMPERIALISME CULTUREL KHOUSH ET CAMPAGNE COLORISTE CONTRE L'OTJIZE EN AFRIQUE

Dans leur volonté de réinscrire le projet culturel de l'Afrique au centre de tous les débats actuels, les Africains se heurtent sur la posture hégémonique du colonisateur.

Bien qu'ils soient déterminés à faire de la centralité de l'expérience africaine une démarche inéluctable, les Afrocentristes sont freinés dans leur élan par les effets subversifs du discours hiérarchique du colon. Fort de leur ascendant culturel sur les peuples périphériques de la colonie, les communautés coloniales du centre produisent et maintiennent des préjugés dégradants à l'égard de leurs sujets. Ainsi apparaît-il clairement que le dominateur s'attèle à mettre en place un contre-discours qui annihile tous les efforts afrocentriques pour positionner les traits culturels africains au centre de toutes attentions.

Telle est la situation qui se présente dans *Binti* d'Okorafor. Malgré les actions du peuple Himba pour montrer au monde entier que l'otjize demeure l'unique moyen pour eux de faire éclore la beauté de la femme africaine, la civilisation colonisatrice extra-terrestre Khoush se montre sceptique. Le colonisateur Khoush remet en cause les astuces de beauté Himba par l'entremise de l'otjize. Stéréotypes et clichés sont les marques du discours khoushcentrique¹ tenu à l'égard de la colorisation du corps à l'argile rouge chez les Himba. Il apparaît ainsi que les Khoush entretiennent une campagne coloriste à l'endroit de l'otjize. D'abord, la vue d'une femme avec l'otjize sur le corps suscite un regard altéritaire des Khoush. En voyant une Himba maquillée à l'argile rouge, le colonisateur Khoush manifeste un regard dédaigneux à la limite. Lorsque Binti s'apprête à embarquer dans la navette interplanétaire Third Fish, son chef de groupe qui est un vieil homme de la race non-humaine, et les autres membres lui jettent un regard nauséux et répulsif: « He looked at me for a long time, the others in my group staring at me like a rare bizarre butterfly » (Okorafor, 2019, p. 21). La façon haineuse des Khoush de dévisager Binti est l'expression tangible du colorisme dont l'élément moteur est la discrimination fondée sur la variation d'intensité de la couleur de sa mélanine causée par l'application l'argile rouge. Ce regard dédaigneux en dit long sur la façon dont ils jugent la jeune Himba. Du fait de son corps badigeonné d'otjize, l'idéologie khoushcentrique l'assimile à un papillon bizarre rare selon ses propres termes « rare bizarre butterfly ». Le but de ce colorisme est d'établir une classification culturelle et raciale, plaçant la population coloniale Khoush au sommet de l'échelle et, installant la communauté colonisée Himba en dessous de la norme. A. Devulsky (2003, p. 12) écrit ceci à ce propos: « Le colorisme –qui hiérarchise les personnes en fonction de leur couleur de peau [...]– apparaît comme un cadre identitaire racial et politique qui fige les individus dans des archétypes prédéfinis ». De cette observation, il ressort que seul ce

¹ Ici, c'est un néologisme qui indique le discours absolutiste des Khoush.

regard dépréciatif à l'égard de la peau colorisée de Binti à l'argile rouge suffit à la faire appartenir à une hiérarchie dévalorisante. Elle appartient à une sous-classe d'individus, inférieurs à la civilisation supérieure Khoush. Ce colorisme définit l'otjize comme un prototype culturel barbare. Par ricochet, les Himba qui portent à bout de bras cette pratique sont perçus comme une population dévaluée.

Pour la critique postcoloniale, cette posture coloriste s'opère dans le cadre du discours colonial qui est un mode de pensées qui définit l'identité du colonisé sur la base des normes culturelles édictées par le colonisateur. Du moment où le sujet colonial est maintenu dans l'essentialisme culturel, il va sans dire que le discours colonial est ainsi conçu pour le discriminer. H. Bhabha (2007, p. 123) écrit à ce propos que : « C'est une forme de discours décisive pour l'agrégation d'une série de différences et de discriminations qui informent les pratiques discursives et politiques de hiérarchisation raciale et culturelle ». Pour tout dire, le regard réprobateur des Khoush à l'endroit de l'otjize est la marque même du discours colonial. La différence et la discrimination qui s'y attachent démontrent la volonté de la civilisation khoushique de déclasser l'otjize en la logeant dans les profondeurs de la réification.

D'autre part, la campagne coloriste est souvent exprimée à travers les railleries des traits culturels du sujet colonial par la communauté civilisatrice. Assurés de l'excellence de leur civilisation et de la position hégémonique de leurs réalités comparée aux pratiques barbares du peuple africain, les Khoush tournent en dérision la colorisation du corps à l'hématite. Dans *Binti* d'Okorafor, l'attitude des Khoush à l'égard de l'otjize se résume à des moqueries véhémentes qui tendent à discréditer la pratique ancestrale du maquillage de la peau à l'argile rouge chez les Himba. A la vue de l'argile grasseuse appliquée sur le corps de Binti, la population colonisatrice profère des quolibets désobligeants et répulsifs. Dans le rang pour s'installer à bord de la navette, les femmes Khoush ne se contentent pas simplement de toucher aux cheveux oints d'argile de Binti, mais elles en font des commentaires acerbes qui la déshumanisent à la limite. En voici quelques-uns: « Not shit? [...] I hear it smells like shit because it *is* shit » (N. Okorafor, 2019, p. 16). Une autre d'ajouter: « It is thick like shit » (N. Okorafor, 2019, p. 16). Le dernier commentaire soutient: « These 'dirt bathers' are filthy people » (N. Okorafor, 2019, p. 16). Le colorisme exprimé par ces femmes Khoush à l'endroit de la culture esthétique Himba se résume en des archétypes mélaniques qui identifient l'otjize comme une pratique peu hygiénique, malpropre et méphitique. Pour la civilisation Khoush, le fait que les femmes africaines utilisent l'ocre au lieu du savon et de l'eau prouve qu'elles ont une hygiène corporelle douteuse.

Pour cela, elles tiennent une description scatologique de l'otjize ; en le comparant aux fèces. En parlant du colorisme, P. Ndiaye (2009, p. 114) écrit : « Difficile d'y échapper, de ruser avec sa peau, de raser les murs mélaniques, de choisir son identité à son gré, selon le moment, le lieu, les autres ».

Pour Ndiaye, tant que les Himba sont sous domination Khoush, ils n'auront pas la latitude de définir leur culture, ils seront toujours jugés selon les stéréotypes construits par le colonisateur à leur endroit. Ils vont toujours subir les railleries de la communauté dominatrice comme c'est le cas de Binti avec les femmes Khoush. Tant que les Himba vivent sous la domination Khoush, ils ne sauraient échapper aux affres des cliqués du discours colonial tendant à rabaisser l'otjize, quitte à le comparer aux excréments. Tant que les Himba continueront d'être colonisés par les Khoush, leurs femmes vont toujours formuler des commentaires coloristes tendant à assimiler sa texture et l'odeur de l'argile rouge aux fèces. J. O. Alexander (2023, p. 9) écrit à ce propos: « Race is foregrounded to fuel cultural clashes, prejudices, and discrimination between the Khoush (the majority patriarchal clan) and the Himba, whom the Khoush look down upon and call filthy ». Cette auteure confirme le colorisme Khoush à l'encontre des Himba sur la base de la différence mélanique. L'assertion d'Alexander met évidence les relations clivées existant entre les Khoush et les Himba dont Binti s'en rend bien compte lors de son allocution pour apaiser les tensions Khoush-Méduses à Oomza: « It was the first time I'd received treatment similar to the way my people were treated on Earth by the Khoush » (N. Okorafor, 2015, p. 75). Curieusement, bien qu'elle œuvre à apaiser les récriminations qui enveniment les rapports entre ces deux factions rivales, elle essuie, quand même, des railleries.

Dans une perspective postcoloniale, la construction de stéréotypes par le colonisateur à l'encontre du colonisé explique l'existence du colorisme. La stéréotypisation des cultures indigènes par les communautés colonisatrices émanent de la représentation caricaturale, des idées reçues formulées en rapport avec le facteur mélanique. Les représentations préconçues à l'endroit des peuples dominés restent tellement vivaces qu'ils deviennent la norme à partir de laquelle on les juge sans fondement, sans base réelle. H. Bhabha (2007, p. 122) observe : « Juger l'image stéréotypée sur la base d'une normativité politique préexistante revient à l'écarter, non à la déplacer, ce qui n'est possible qu'en questionnant son *efficacité* ». Ainsi, en qualifiant l'otjize de Binti de nauséabond et détestable, les femmes Khoush le désintentifient conformément aux idées reçues sur cette pratique. C'est justement parce que dans la communauté Khoush, tout le monde s'accorde à dire que l'argile

appliquée sur le corps à des fins cosmétiques et esthétiques est détestable que ce discours devient parole d'évangile, et devient la norme épistémologique pour construire une identité à l'otjize. Mais, malheureusement en le faisant, les Khoush sont limités dans leur appréciation de la culture africaine. Sans chercher à comprendre la vraie essence de l'otjize, ces femmes ne font répéter et faire prospérer des logos qui tiennent « la population colonisée [...] emprisonnée dans le cercle de l'interprétation » (2007, p. 145) selon H. Bhabha. Ceci pour dire que le colorisme des femmes Khoush à l'égard de la colorisation du corps de Binti à l'ocre n'a pas de fondement ; il ne repose sur aucune vérité ontologique ; mais plutôt sur des allégations fallacieuses.

IV. OTJIZE ET MIGRATION : IDENTITE CULTURELLE ET RESISTANCE AU COLORISME SUR LA PLANETE OOMZA

Malgré les dénigrement de la culture africaine par les instances hégémoniques étrangères, selon les hérauts de la critique postcoloniale, les Africains restent impassibles et imperturbables. Ils ne cèdent pas aux attaques coloristes construites contre leurs faits culturels. Bien que sa culture soit sujette à des discours stéréotypés de la part des membres de la civilisation métropolitaine, le Noir ne se laisse pas influencer par cette manipulation. Au contraire, il fait montre d'un stoïcisme implacable pour endiguer les quolibets coloristes. Pour la pensée postcoloniale, l'un des instruments à la disposition du colonisé pour résister aux affres de l'impérialisme culturel de la métropole c'est son identité.

Dans *Binti* d'Okorafor, il est bien évident que les Himba sont victimes de clichés accablants de la part du colonisateur extraterrestre Khoush eu égard à l'otjize (utilisation de l'ocre) utilisé à des fins hygiéniques et esthétiques. Cependant, loin de s'assimiler à la civilisation de la métropole (le modèle par excellence), et surtout intraitable sur un renoncement à sa culture d'origine, ce peuple adopte une posture postcoloniale avec pour point d'ancrage l'identité Himba. L'unanimité culturelle se lit à travers le lien établi entre l'otjize et le terroir. Par la pratique de la colorisation de la peau à l'ocre, les femmes africaines se sentent connectées à leur terre d'origine, à leur pays. Partout où elles se retrouvent dans le monde, le simple fait pour elles de se badigeonner le corps à l'otjize, ces femmes ont l'impression d'être connectées au pays Himba. A travers le maquillage du corps à l'hématite, la femme a le sentiment d'effectuer un 'voyage' retour jusqu'à sa terre natale. Dans la novella d'Okorafor, bien que Binti se retrouve sur la planète Oomza pour ses études, à des milliers de son village, l'otjize est le cordon ombilical qui la lie à son espace

culturel. L'otjize lui permet de se sentir à la maison, chez les Bitolus, malgré la distance. Une fois essemblée dans sa chambre à Oomza, elle transcende le mal du pays en touchant à l'hématite grasseuse dans ses tresses :

I sat in the standing chair beside my window, hand-rolling *otjize* into my plaits. I looked at my reddened hands, brought them to my nose and sniffed. Oily clay that sang of sweet flowers, desert wind, and soil. *Home*, I thought, tears stinging my eyes (Okorafor, 2019, p. 38)

Le simple fait pour Binti d'humer l'effluve de l'otjize, elle se sent connectée à sa terre désertique de Namib. Rien qu'à sentir l'odeur de l'argile rouge, la jeune fille entre dans un lien fusionnel avec son terroir : « Home ». Pour la critique postcoloniale, cette idée du colonisé de maintenir une connexion forte avec sa terre d'origine, dans un environnement global hostile, suggère le concept de 'nation'. Dans *Binti*, l'otjize symbolise la nation : « *Otjize is red land* » (N. Okorafor, 2015, p. 13). B. Alvarez-Lora (2024, p. 14) en donne la confirmation quand, à propos de l'ocre, elle affirme qu'au-delà de sa signification esthétique, l'otjize symbolise une profonde connexion entre les Himba et leur terre. B. King (1980, p. 42) corrobore l'idée de l'argile comme métaphore de la nation mais il en exprime davantage : « Nationalism is an urban movement which identifies with the rural areas as a source of authenticity ». Binti s'identifie au nationalisme en ce sens que la senteur de l'otjize la transporte de sa terre de migration (planète Oomza) à son village africain. Par ce fait, elle montre que bien étant diasporique, elle confirme son appartenance à sa patrie. Elle se reconnaît comme faisant partie des communautés locales Himba, de l'authenticité culturelle des espaces ruraux africains.

En plus d'incarner l'identité culturelle, l'otjize suggère aussi la posture postcoloniale des peuples colonisés ; celle qui consiste pour eux de s'affranchir de l'hégémonie culturelle et politique de la métropole. Ainsi, l'idée d'appliquer la pâte argileuse rouge sur le corps et les cheveux va au-delà du simple sentiment d'appartenir à la communauté Himba. Mieux, l'otjize signifie la volonté des Himba non seulement à faire face aux critiques acerbes des Khoush mais aussi leur désir de répudier et de se libérer des diktats hégémoniques de la mégapole extraterrestre. Dans le corpus, Binti s'inscrit dans cette perspective. Malgré tous les préjugés dévalorisants construits à son égard, elle décide de contre-attaquer la civilisation coloniale Khoush en brandissant l'otjize comme arme de légitime défense. Dans sa chambre à Oomza Uni, la jeune fille affirme : « I opened my eyes; I was on my bed in my room, naked except for my wrapped skirt. The rest of my body was smooth with a thick

layer of *otjize*. I flared my nostrils and inhaled the smell of me. Home...» (N. Okorafor, 2015, p. 66). Malgré les quolibets des Khoush pour rabaisser l'*otjize* et l'en dissocier, Binti s'y arc-boute. A plusieurs occasions, elle effectue ce voyage transcendantal, au moyen de l'*otjize*, pour montrer au colonisateur Khoush qu'elle n'est pas disposée à leur faire des compromis. Quand elle renifle la senteur de l'argile de façon régulière, Binti démontre qu'elle n'est pas prête à se laisser influencer par les philippiques coloniales et se résout à la compromission de ses idéaux. En insistant sur la nécessité pour elle de toujours sentir les arômes des terres désertiques de Namib, la jeune fille établit clairement que les diatribes coloristes ne peuvent en aucun cas avoir raison d'elle. Pendant que les Khoush manœuvrent à diaboliser l'*otjize*, Binti aussi œuvre à leur opposer une résistance farouche et un contre-discours : «I held my *otjize*-covered hands to my nose and inhaled the scent of home» (N. Okorafor, 2015, p. 71).

En référence à la théorie postcoloniale, toutes ces actions subversives du protagoniste s'inscrivent dans l'idée de nation, le nationalisme. Pour bien appréhender cette situation, il convient de nous référer à B. King (1980, p. 42) qui dit : «Nationalism aims at [...] rejection of cosmopolitan upper classes, intellectuals and others likely to be influenced by foreign ideas ». De ce qui précède, nous pouvons affirmer mordicus que Binti est une adepte des idéaux nationalistes en ce sens qu'en faisant ce retour aux sources transcendantal, elle prouve que son expérience diasporique sur la planète Oomza ne saurait faire d'elle une affidée de la culture globale Khoush. Bien au contraire, Binti se positionne comme une nationaliste qui rejette les procédés assimilationnistes du colonisateur. En reconstruisant mentalement l'effluve du sol désertique de Namib, avec l'*otjize*, elle expose de façon explicite son désir de répudier les manifestations des cultures dominantes auxquels elle ne tient pas à se soumettre. Pour elle, être nationaliste c'est établir ce lien avec sa patrie tout en évitant les collusions avec la culture Khoush. S. Grosby (2005, p. 18) le dit distinctement : «Nationalism knows no compromise». Malgré les questions persistantes de son chef d'équipage relativement à l'*otjize* sur son corps à l'entrée de la navette interplanétaire Third Fish n'ont pu lui faire plier l'échine : «I told him that I was Himba» (N. Okorafor, 2015, p. 21). Lui rétorquer qu'elle est Himba comporte tout un projet nationaliste. Elle arbore fièrement l'*otjize* car elle est Himba et fier de l'être. Et personne d'autre ne pourra l'en dissuader. Aucune sensibilité culturelle ne peut lui imposer une autre identité autre que l'argile rouge; le nationalisme ne fait pas de compromis et ne tombe pas dans les compromissions.

Le nationalisme, avec l'*otjize* comme emblème, permet à Binti de résister et minimiser les effets du mauvais

traitement infligé par les Khoush lors de son allocution à Oomza : «One of the large insectile people clicked its madibles. I frowned, flaring my nostrils. It was the first time I'd received treatment similar to the way my people were treated on Earth by the Khoush» (N. Okorafor, 2015, p. 75). En transcendant cette décimation du fait de sa différence mélanique, la jeune fille s'engage dans un projet subversif contre «rémanence de l'assimilationnisme» (K. Aggarwal & V. Azarian, 2012, p. 32) qui continue d'asservir les populations colonisées diasporiques.

Le champ critique postcolonial établit un lien entre la posture nationaliste et la difficile intégration des sujets postcoloniaux dans un environnement diasporique. Selon la postcolonial studies, une communauté de migrants qui échappe à l'absorption culturelle de la métropole où elle vit, restera en tant que minorité périphérique insoumise marginale. Les Africains post-coloniaux qui, bien que vivant en Occident, se dérobent de l'acculturation dans la civilisation dominante, finissent par constituer une autre société (postcoloniale) qui émerge, grandit et se juxtapose à celle du monde global. Ce fait s'applique à Binti qui, avant d'embarquer pour la navette Third Fish, reste intimidable malgré les vêtements du style Khoush qui pullulaient autour d'elle. «I considered finding a lavatory and applying more *otjize* to my skin...Most of the people in the busy terminal wore the black and white garments of the Khoush people (N. Okorafor, 2015, p. 15). L'idée centrale développée ici est que Binti avertit à l'avance la communauté coloniale, à l'entame même de son séjour intergalactique, qu'elle vivra en marge de leur civilisation une fois à Oomza. Son attitude suggère qu'une fois résidente sur cette planète, elle ne va aucunement adhérer au style vestimentaire Khoush. Tout en vivant avec eux, elle est déterminée à arborer l'*otjize* à tout bout de champ. Les hérauts de la théorie postcoloniale estiment que cette attitude marginale s'apparente à ce qui convient d'appeler «parallel societies» (Facing History and Ourselves, 2008, p. 122). En vivant en marge de la communauté Khoush, Binti s'engloutit dans les limites épistémologiques d'une société parallèle. C'est un groupe de personnes dont les membres ne partagent aucune valeur avec la nation hôte car ils y vivent séparés des réalités de la terre d'accueil. Au lieu de s'y intégrer, ils vivent côte à côte de la vie métropolitaine.

Dans le cas de Binti l'un des avantages de la société parallèle est qu'elle protège la culture du colonisé de toute pollution culturelle de la part des idéaux de la mondialisation culturelle. Vivre dans la société parallèle à celle des Khoush permet à Binti de maintenir ses liens séculaires avec l'*otjize*. Vivre parallèlement à la société Khoush permet à Binti de facilement résister au colorisme orchestré par le régime extraterrestre contre l'*otjize*. Moins le contact est établi avec les Khoush, plus la jeune fille a la

latitude de résister aux campagnes coloristes contre ses valeurs culturelles comme les menaces dont elle a fait l'objet de la part des Khoush opposés à son admission en tant qu'étudiante boursière à Oomza Uni : « I was the first Himba in history to be bestowed with the honor of acceptance into Oomza Uni. The hate messages, threats to my life, laughter and ridicule that came from the Khoush in my city made me want to hide more » (N. Okorafor, 2015, p. 29).

V. CONCLUSION

L'objectif de cet article est de décentrer la construction altéritaire des modèles culturels du colonisé par le colonisateur. Notre étude a mis en exergue la pratique ancestrale de l'otjize en pays Himba sous domination coloniale. D'une part, cette colorisation du corps de la femme africaine à l'argile rouge est perçue comme un archétype esthétique et cosmétique à la lumière de la théorie Afrocentrique. D'autre part, avec la théorie postcoloniale en filigrane, l'otjize est sujet à des critiques coloristes de la part du colonisateur Khoush dans le dessin funeste de l'invalidier. Enfin, l'article a porté sur l'agenda postcolonial (nationalisme) des femmes en situation diasporique dans le processus de subversion du discours colonial Khoush ; ceci à travers l'attachement à leur identité culturelle. Cependant, avec la rencontre des cultures qui est de plus en plus plausible, les cultures les plus rigides ont du mal à maintenir leur pureté. La mondialisation a fait tomber les murs des citadelles culturelles en favorisant l'interculturalité.

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Odissi, the Cultural Crest of Odisha: A Historical Overview

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Abstract— The province of Odisha has carved a niche for itself in the global arena by virtue of three extraordinary things: (1) the sun temple at Konark, (2) Jagannath dham at Puri, and (3) Odissi, the classical dance form. While there's abundance of literature and discursive accounts about the first two, that way, the last one, Odissi, suffers from a dearth of knowledge portals. But for a few and far articles here and there, there's no substantive accounts available about this unique cultural art form and tradition. In spite of its prominent presence over a prolonged period of time, strangely enough, till late 20th century, many have made effort to undermine Odissi by considering it as a mere mimetic version of Bharatanātyam or kūcipūdi. Even though this point-of-view holds no ground in recent times, the lack of adequate credible accounts about the origin and history of this splendid dance form has somehow helped this view-point to score a point. Although pinpointing the exact origin of Odissi is nearly impossible, archaeological evidence confirms a tradition that dates back to over two thousand years. The Odissi dance of contemporary times may be less than a hundred years old in its present form, but the knowledge tradition of Odra-Magadhi dance and music has continued in various forms across the Odisha region. This chapter aims at offering an historical overview of this rich dance tradition. The focal length of this chapter ranges from the stone carvings of Konark to the stage of the Konark International Dance Festival.



Keywords— Odissi, classical dance-drama, Gotipua dance, Mahārī tradition, bhāba & rasas.

Since long, the cultural canvas of Odisha has been splendidly tinged with a strong and magnificent tradition of dance and music. This tradition has lent the Odia community with a distinct identity mostly along cultural and spiritual lines. The dance tradition is carved in the cultural history of Odisha. The walls of Konark Sun temple and many other temples predating the Black Pagoda are the standing testaments of it. For centuries, dance was a form of devotional ritual in the Jagannath temple and other temples as the Mahārī tradition up until its abolition and survived in the Gotipua practices. In the early twentieth century a Dance form was reimagined from the carvings of Kalingan temples and caves. The dance evolved from the centuries old Mahārī and Gotipua dance tradition woven in the Odishan cultural tapestry, giving it the name Odissi. The Odissi dance is one of the eight

classical dances of India recognized by the Sangeet Natak Akademi. The Odissi dance from its inception has been an icon of Odisha's cultural prowess. It took the Odishan identity to the global stage. The evident similarity in the nomenclature, both Odisha and Odissi advanced in the post-colonial world concurrently. From as early as 2nd century wall arts of Khandagiri and Udayagiri to as recent as the collaboration between American Popstar Michael Jackson and Odissi dancer Yamuna Sangarasivam, the Odissi dance has a vast historical and cultural background. So to understand the origin and advancement of Odissi, comprehension of Odisha's cultural history of around a thousand years becomes vital. This chapter traces the roots of the dance tradition of Odisha and how this very individual school of art unique to the eastern state survived

the test of time to ultimately took the form of Odissi in the twentieth century.

For many centuries, the geographical area of Odisha was the cultural capital of eastern India for its prospering maritime and pilgrim destination. Odisha, owing to the geographical position, had been the meeting ground of various cultural currents, all integrated into a harmonious synthesis (Pradhan 2022, 48). The history of the Odissi dance can be dated back to the 2nd century wall painting of the Khandagiri and Udayagiri near Bhubaneswar. These caves were built during the reign of King Khāravēla, post the Kalinga war. During his reign he conquered the geographical area spanning from the river Godāvari in the south to the Ganges in the north. He was a Jain king and the caves were built to give shelter to Jain monks. There were inscriptions in the Hāthīgumphā and other caves of Udayagiri and Khandagiri eulogizing and praising the thirteen year reign of Khāravēla. Dr. Manoranjan Pradhan (2022, 48) writes:

¹The inscription in the Hāthīgumphā at Khandagiri reveals that king Khāravēla arranged the performances of Tandava and lāsya dance and music for the enjoyment of his subjects. Ancient Jain caves inscriptions and friezes speak volumes about the presence of dance traditions during the times of Khāravēla. In one scene in Hāthīgumphā a girl is seen offering flowers in a dance pose. Another scene depicts men and women singing and dancing around a tree. They all have been shown in worship, holding musical instruments. Many scenes depict female figures in dancing poses.

These representations which are earlier than the writing of Nāṭyasāstra can be easily considered as one of the earliest archeological evidences of a dance style in India. Nāṭyasāstra also mentions 'Odra Māgadhī' as one of the four regional dance forms present at that time, which is associated to the current geographical region of Odisha. From the inscriptions also throw light on the fact that King Khāravēla himself was adept in dancing which made him a great patron of the art. During his reign the dancers were specially trained people whose profession was very highly regarded in the society (Pradhan 2022, 48). The epigraphic records also show the elaborate costumes, ornaments and jewelry used by dancers while the inscriptions suggest that dance was the part of cultural life of the people as the king organized dance performances on significant occasions. Though the Khandagiri and Udayagiri sculptures are the oldest evidence of dance in Odisha that could be found but

the complex and elaborate nature the sculptures prove that the dance predates long before the reign of Khāravēla.

After the reign of Khāravēla, politically, Odisha went through a stagnant period until the rise of Mahayana Buddhism till the 5th and 6th century BC. This period doesn't provide ample evidence of any kind of cultural advancement. But with the rise of Buddhism the culture of Odisha also flourished with monasteries, shrines and Buddha sculptures of great finesse and with it flourished the dance of Odisha. Lalitgiri and Ratnagiri were the² epicenters for Mahayana Buddhism in Odisha where beautiful Vihars were erected. Beautiful sculptures of dancing figures in stylized poses were carved in those Vihars which are evidences of the significant presence of dance and music during that time. It is believed that during those days Mahayana Buddhist believed in dance as a medium of meditation and players (Pradhan 2022, 48). Sculptures depicting Buddhist gods and goddesses in different dancing postures were found in large numbers. This culture resurgence became the corner stone for the artist development of temples in Odisha in later years. During the reign of Keshari Kings, Odisha saw a surge in more sculptural and ornamental architecture in temple building. The Keshari Kings were responsible for building many Shiva temples in Bhubaneswar during this period, adorned intricate carvings, motifs and dance postures. Natamandapa or the dancing hall became a significant part of temple architecture during the time of Kesharis, which signifies that by that time dance and music has become a part of the daily rituals of temple offerings. Under the patronage of kings like Jajāti Keshari where the natamandapas became the cradle where dance and music prospered for centuries in Odisha in the name of Māhārī tradition. Māhārīs or Devadāsīs were girls who dedicated their life in the service of temple deities as dancers. They performed every day in the natamandapas as their offerings to the deity. So, with the Māhārī tradition and its association with the temples, the dance of Odisha was first institutionalized around 10th century AD.

The history of Odissi is intertwined with the cultural and social ups and downs of the Odia society. With the rise of devadāsī system in the eastern and southern part of the country, and Jagannath becoming the principal deity of Odisha region, Devadāsīs who are called Māhārīs became part of the temple rituals of the Jagannath temple. Māhārīs were the women dancers, who performed only in front of the deities to show their devotion. They considered themselves as the wives of Prabhu Jagannath and

¹ Pradhan, M. (2022). Odissi dance in temple art of Odisha. Paripex - Indian Journal of Research, 11(10). <https://doi.org/10.36106/paripex>

² Pradhan, M. (2022). Odissi dance in temple art of Odisha. Paripex - Indian Journal of Research, 11(10). <https://doi.org/10.36106/paripex>

dedicated their lives for the deity. The expression "Mahārī" is a derivative of two Oriya words 'Mahan' and 'Nari', meaning divine maidens (Acharya, 2015). During the reign of the Ganga Dynasty, in the 12th century King Chodaganga Deva formalized the role of Māhāris in the temple rituals and arranged for their livelihood. This step established Māhāris as the sole custodians of the dance and music of the Odisha region. The Māhāris were generally divided into six different categories of saviators with different sevās assigned to different groups. Dr. Rahul Acharya (2015) describes the groups as following:

1. Bhitara Gauni: She sang in the inner precinct of the temple, in the sanctum sanctorum. Her service was reserved for the evening during the Badashingara Vesha of the Lord.
2. Bahara Gauni: She performed her seva beyond the inner precincts of the sanctum sanctorum. She was supposed to sing during the Lord's ³breakfast or Sakala Dhupa, and other festivals that were celebrated in the temple.
3. Nachuni: They were from the dancing community who performed their service through dance.
4. Patuari: They were the group that provided the Lord's costume or Patani and were supposed to wear it.
5. Raj Angila: She was the servant of the Gajapati Maharaja or King, who was considered Lord Jagannath in the flesh.
6. Gahana Mahārī: They were assigned special tasks only on special occasions and always performed the service in groups. There was no individual seva for them.

The dance rituals were complimentary to the daily temple rituals and usually performed twice a day and special performances were also curated for some special occasions.

The music has a significant role in the performances. The music that was recited during the rituals is unique to the region. The Māhāris performed to the songs of Geeta Gobinda, written and composed by Jayadeva. The songs were composed in the Odra Māgadhī style and there is a great story that links both the song and dance in a divine bond. The story goes like this, A childless Brahmin devotee of Jagannath, Devasharmā, who shares the village Kendubilwa with Jayadeva prayed the lord for a child so that he will offer the same to the lord. A daughter was born, he named her Padmabati and offered her to lord Jagannath as promised. But in his dream and in the dream of the

priests of the temple, Jagannath directed to offer Padmabati to Jayadeva, a young Brahmin living an ascetic life, unable to find his purpose of life. After the marriage was performed, Jayadeva wrote, what is considered one of the greatest poetic creations of Sanskrit in last thousand years, describing the Cupid of Radha and Krishna in the Spring. Both the husband and wife performed in front of the deities singing the verses of Geeta Gobinda, while Jayadeva played the Mardala, Padmabati danced to it. With this the tradition of Māhāris performing to the verses of Geeta Gobinda was started in the Jagannath Temple. Special Gurus were assigned to teach the girls in the most pristine and devotional dance and music for the deities. With the royal patronage and the social acceptance the Mahārī tradition prospered in Jagannathdham, Puri, until Odisha lost its freedom in the sixteenth century.

As the Mahārī tradition started to decline due to multiple factors, a new tradition of dancers emerged from the Akhadas (gymnasium) of Puri. During the reign of Pratap Rudra Deva (1497- 1540), Baishnava Saint Chaitanya came to Odisha and with him came the Bhakti movement. He propagated a cult of Sakhi Bhaba, which believes that Krishna is the only male and all others are females. With this idea, the Gotipua Dance tradition took its foremost steps in the sahi akhadas of Puri. Boys of the age of 6 to 12, dressed in female costumes performed on different special occasions a special dance which is very similar to the Mahārī dance with some gymnastic additions. Girls were not allowed to practice this dance and the Akhadas became the cradle of this dance form. The Akhadas or the gymnasiums were primarily built to foster physical strength among boys, so that they could protect the temple from any kind of external attacks. During the reign of Bhoi King Ramachandra Deva, he gave patronage to these akhadas and the dance form thus prospered under royal patronage. The boys performed a repertoire called Bandha Nrutya, characterized by acrobatic and physically demanding exercises that could only be mastered at a young age (Ojha 2024, 2).⁴ In the dance the boys form different formations by stranding on one another. These forms of Bandha Nrutya were described in details in texts like 'Abhinaya Chandrika' and 'Sangita Darpana'. As the Mahārī tradition started to wane, it is in Gotipua that the Odramagadhi dance form survived to become Odissi in the Twentieth century.

Gotipua played a significant role in the revival of the ancient Odramagadhi dance in the form of Odissi. It was the Gotipua dancers who in their adulthood took initiatives

³ Acharya, R. (2015, February 27). Mahārī - The one who dances with devotion. Padmaa. Retrieved April 3, 2025, from <https://www.padmaa.com.br/en/mahari-a-que-danca-com-devocao/>

⁴ Ojha, M. (n.d.). The evolution of Odissi dance: From temple rituals to modern revival.2. International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR). <https://www.ijfmr.com>

towards the revival, standardization and promotion of Odissi as a classical dance form. As the royal patronage dwindled towards Gotipua, the dancers struggled to survive, they joined Jatra groups and some even left the art for farming of daily labor. With the lack of opportunity, the number of new comers declined. During this crucial time, some visionary Gotipua gurus started thinking beyond the Akhada premises. By this time, the Mahārī tradition also remained just as a symbolic ritual, struggling with its last breaths. Mamata Ojha writes:

The tradition ensured a continuity of dance practices, keeping the essence of the art form alive during a period of cultural upheaval. Prominent Gotipua teachers like Basudeva Mahapatra of Khurda, Kartika Sahoo of Bhringarpur, and Somanath Mahapatra from the district of Cuttack were instrumental in maintaining this tradition. Their dedication and teaching significantly contributed to the revival and formalization of Odissi dance in the 20th century. These teachers were not only skilled dancers but also custodians of a rich heritage, passing down intricate dance techniques and styles to the next generation.⁵

The twentieth century saw a cultural shift in the dance tradition in Odisha, and in India. Throughout the country, the dance forms were democratized and came out of the temple premises and royal courts to find new audience. Artists, academics, and fans of dance and music made a concerted effort to investigate the origins and development of these art forms throughout this time. They did so with a sense of pride and a deep appreciation for the rich cultural heritage they inherited.⁶ With this renaissance in the field of art, the dance of Odisha underwent a series of transformations finally to emerge as Odissi, one of the most celebrated classical dance forms of India and the World. The Journey of Odissi starting from 5th and 6th century BC through Mahārī tradition and Gotipua tradition to ultimately the current structure of the dance is a true testament of Indian knowledge tradition, where a dance form survived for thousands of years without losing its originality. The classical Odissi dance of contemporary time is a structure of 60 years old, standing on the Odra Māgadhi dancing tradition. Up until the 20th century, the dance tradition was mostly in the oral tradition passing down through Guru Sishya Parampara.

The term "Orissi" (Odissi) was introduced by Kavichandra Kalicharan Patnaik in 1948, derived from "Odra Māgadhi".⁷ Before that in early 1940s the dance form was commonly known as Oriental Dance on the stage where dances were performed for ten to fifteen minutes with basic dance postures and music. From then the restructuring of the dance began by both scholars and practitioners of the dance incorporating elements from both Mahārī and Gotipua tradition. Most of them came from humble and non-dance traditions. However, through their talent, keen observation, assimilation, and relentless dedication, they revitalized the art form and evolved into true Gurus.⁸ The dancers with the revival found a new home and purpose in the theaters. The theaters which are famous for their open-air Jatra performances, played a pivotal role in shaping the future of Odissi. Accounts of prominent figures like Pankaj Charan Das, Mayadhar Rout, Kelucharan Mohapatra, and Debaprasad Das frequently emphasize their early affinity with these theatrical troupes or local akhadas. Figures like Mohan Sundar Goswami and Kalicharan Patnaik managed Ras Leela troupes, where renowned artists such as Kelucharan Mohapatra and Mayadhar Rout refined their talents.⁹

Among the theaters, Arnapura Theater took the center stage for the revival of Odissi in modern times. The prominent Odissi dance gurus like, Guru Pankaja Charana Das, Kelucharana Mohapatra, Mayadhara Rout and Deba Prashad Das were part of the Arnapura Theater by the late 1940s and early 1950s. While the fascination for the dance was rising among the public, Arnapura Theater's Mohini- Bhasmasura dance performance made Guru Kelucharana Mohapatra the leading figure of the revival movement of Odissi. Kelucharana's rendition of Mohini, performed by Laxmipriya, his wife etched its name in the history. The performance made Kelucharana-Laxmipriya duo an Odissi sensation overnight by also gaining international recognition. While Guru Kelucharana's straightforward style gained most of the popularity, Guru Pankaja Charana Das's style was a refined dance style, utilizing the Mahārī technique. Guru Deba Prashad Das on the other hand stuck to the Tantric tradition of Mahārī. Young girls from higher social class started to show interest in the dance form after watching Laxmipriya perform. Included in the group were notable individuals in

⁵ Ojha, M. (n.d.). The evolution of Odissi dance: From temple rituals to modern revival.2. International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR). <https://www.ijfmr.com>

⁶ Mishra, K. (2024, May). Resurgence of Odissi dance tradition in the 20th century. 431. The Academic: International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research, 2(5). <https://www.theacademic.in>

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the field of Odissi dance, including Sanjukta Mishra (later Panigrahi), who was the first to dedicate her entire career to Odissi, Minati Das (after Mishra), Jayanti Ghosh, Priyambada Mohanty (later Hizmadi), and Kumkum Das (later Mohanty).¹⁰ By 1950s many dance training institutions emerged in Cuttack under the guidance of different gurus. Among these Kala Vikash Kendra founded in 1952 has a significant role. Both Guru Kelucharana Mohapatra and Mayadhara Rout were associated to the institution in different times and both contributed significantly towards the revival of Odissi.

While Guru Kelucharana is attributed to popularize the dance form, Guru Mayadhara Rout and Guru Pankaj Charan Das were associated with systematizing Odissi by giving it a proper structure and literature. Guru Mayadhara taught the gurus participating in the revival about Mudra Viniyoga, which is the use of hand gestures, and Sanchari Bhava abhinaya, which is the expression of emotions through movement. He choreographed many astapadis from the “Geeta Gobinda” including “Pasyati Disidisi”, “Priye Carushila”, and “Chandana Charchita”. He also orchestrated several popular Mangala Charanas and Pallavis. The Jayantika Project was a significant development towards the standardization of Odissi. Formed by prominent Gurus and scholars, dance gurus like Pankaj Charan Das, Kelucharan Mohapatra, Debaprasad Das, and Mayadhar Rout played pivotal roles in this endeavor. In this project a consensus was finalized on the syllables and choreography. The syllables (Bols) were composed by Balbhadra Sahu and Agadhu Moharana, and the choreography by Kelucharan Mohapatra and Pankaj Charan Das. In her research paper titled “The Evolution of Odissi Dance: From Temple Rituals to Modern Revival” (2024), Mamata Ojha writes:

The Jayantika project sought to align Odissi with the principles of the Natya Shastra while integrating elements from the Gotipua and Mahārī traditions. This standardization involved refining the dance's technical aspects, including its movements, postures, and expressions. The project also focused on creating a standardized costume and jewelry style, contributing to the dance's cohesive aesthetic.¹¹

Another significant figure in the revival movement was Kalicharan Patnaik. He played a crucial role in researching

Odissi's historical connections to the Natya Shastra and presenting his findings at the 1958 All India Dance Seminar in New Delhi. All these dedicated efforts became significant pillars for the establishment of Odissi as a major classical dance tradition of India.

Odissi is famous for its grace and elegance. The subtle expressive movements of the dancers give Odissi a unique identity. Rooted in the guidelines of Nāṭyasāstra, Odissi has three main elements: Nritya (pure dance), Nritya (expressive dance), and Natya (dance drama). The performances were characterized by their geometric symmetry of the body movement called Bhanga. The Bhanga is the symmetrical body bends and stances. These harmonious blends of lower, mid and upper body movements are central to the Odissi dance aesthetics. The dance features distinct postures and movements, such as Bhumis (foot movements) and Charis (body movements), which have roots in the Mahārī tradition. The Abhinaya Chandrika, a key text for Odissi, mentions various mudras (hand gestures) and pada bhedas (foot positions) that are essential to the dance (Ojha 2024, 3). Another important feature of Odissi is Abhinaya. In Abhinaya, the dancers were storytellers who present the story and its emotion through body language, facial expression and hand gestures. This intricate style distincts Odissi from other dance forms. A dancer has to master the literature and grammar of the dance before performing Abhinaya on the stage. Abhinaya performances were deeply rooted in the rich poetic and music tradition of Odisha. Especially Jayadeva's “Geeta Gobinda” has a significant influence. The intricate spiritual romance depicted by Jayadeva gives the dancers a vast canvas to imagine and experiment with their art.

The repertoire of Odissi dance is comprised of different components such as invocation (Mangala Charan), pure dance (Pallavi), expressive dance (Abhinaya), dance drama (Natya), and the climax (Moksha), which is a symbolic process towards liberation. The process is backed by traditional Odissi music, which is very unique to the region and different from the Hindustani and Karnataki music traditions. There are specific Ragas (melodic patterns) and Talas (rhythmic patterns) unique to this tradition. The tempo of the music is neither too fast and nor too slow and flows in a proportional and soothing pace. The subtle wave like ornamentation (gati andolita) is another unique trait of Odissi music tradition. Mardala is the most vital instrument of Odissi. It has a unique playing style; sound and rhythm that add to the dance performance.

With the standardization, Odissi gained momentum. Gurus like Kelucharana Mohapatra and his celebrated Protege Sanjukta Panigrahi popularized the dance both in India and

¹⁰ Mishra, K. (2024, May). Resurgence of Odissi dance tradition in the 20th century. 434 The Academic: International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research, 2(5). <https://www.theacademic.in>

¹¹ Ojha, M. (n.d.). The evolution of Odissi dance: From temple rituals to modern revival. International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR). <https://www.ijfmr.com>

around the World. They travelled around the world enchanting audiences with their performances. Guru Kelucharana's Pallavis and Astapadis have achieved the status of timeless masterpieces reflecting sophistication, beauty, and an overarching aesthetic that define his hallmark.¹² Guru Deva Prashad Das preferred Odia song over Sanskrit for his performances. He emphasized waist movements which were unique to the region and his incline towards the traditional style of Mahārī and Gotipua was evident in his compositions. Guru Surendranath Jena is famous for his element of poetic lethargy (Alasa) in Odissi which gained him a small but significant popularity. The significant influence of these gurus made them essential figures of Odissi. The first and second generation disciples of these legendary gurus are the true bearers of contemporary Odissi. Significant figures like, Minati Mishra, Priyambada Mohanty, Hazmadi, Sudhakar Sahoo, Dhuleswar Behera, Ritha Devi, Yamini Krishnamurthy, Ramli Ibrahim, Ganendra Kumar Panda, Sonal Mansingh, Kumkum Mohanty, Aruna Mohanty, Ileana Citaristi, Sharmila Biswas, Gangadhar Pradhan, Ratikanta Mohapatra, Sujata Mohapatra, Bijayini Satpathy, Madhavi Mudgal developed the dance with their experience and knowledge adding contemporary themes. For the efforts of these great dancers Odissi gained popularity globally. Dancers and dance enthusiasts from around the globe are showing interest in learning the dance form. These contemporary dancers are responsible for keeping the two thousand years old dance alive. Besides, their role in upkeeping the Indian Knowledge tradition of arts is vital as well. While experimenting and developing the dance form they are also contributing towards building a new generation of Odissi Dancers, following the footsteps of their prominent gurus.

The Odissi dance of 21st century is a result of a meticulous reconstruction of the Odra Māghadhī dance tradition mentioned in the Nāṭyasāstra. It also incorporates elements from the Mahārī legacy, Gotipua lineage, Chhau, and martial art. Moreover, it draws inspiration from temple sculptures and visual imagery. The journey of Odissi from the wall murals and carvings of the bygone era to the become an international sensation is a true certificate to the resilience and adaptability of this dance tradition. It prospered in the Mahārī tradition, survived with the Gotipuas of Puri Akhadas, until becoming Odissi of the 20th century for the efforts of many visionary gurus. Those gurus are no more around, but their legacy survived through their generations of students, those who come after them. The revival of Odissi is an undisputed

testament to the Guru Sishya Parampara of India, where the tradition of unwavering flow of knowledge continues from teachers to disciples defeating the test of time. With the changing times, Odissi dancers are experimenting with new grounds while sticking to their roots dip in the thousands of years old tradition. While Odissi dance masters the relationship between divine and devotion in the dance, the contemporary dancers are experimenting with new themes of societal changes. These new domains of Odissi are great signs of brighter future of Odissi. The introduction of Odissi as a Bachelors and Masters course in different universities fuels the progress of Odisha as it confirms a secure future for the art. Research centers like “Guru Kelu Charana Mohapatra Odissi Research Centre” in Bhubaneswar are initiatives towards a deeper understanding of the art form to take it further. These institutions’ steps help build new generation of Dancers to keep the tradition alive for the posterity, just like our ancestors preserved it for us.

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Walls of Rebellion: Graffiti as Counter-Culture

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Abstract— *Graffiti has evolved from acts of vandalism to expressions of cultural resistance and political commentary. As an art form and a social discourse, graffiti represents a counter-narrative to the dominant ideologies that shape urban spaces. This paper examines graffiti as a counter-cultural practice that challenges established structures of power, aesthetics, and spatial control. Drawing upon Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*, the study interprets graffiti as a tactical expression within the strategic systems of the city. By situating graffiti within the global, Indian, and Kerala contexts, the paper demonstrates how acts of wall writing, stenciling, and street art become everyday practices of resistance. Through theoretical frameworks of counterculture and resistance—drawing on thinkers such as Marcuse, Hebdige, Hall, and Lefebvre—this analysis positions graffiti as an evolving site of negotiation between the governed and the governing, the visible and the erased, the dominant and the subaltern.*



Keywords – Counter-Culture, Cultural Defiance, Political disruption, Street rebellion, Urban resistance.

I. INTRODUCTION

Urban spaces are repositories of power, identity, and memory. The walls, signboards, and public surfaces of a city are not merely structural components; they are semiotic terrains where ideologies are inscribed and contested. In this context, graffiti emerges as an alternative discourse that defies the sanitized, commodified, and regulated image of the city. Often dismissed as vandalism, graffiti resists the dominant narrative of urban order by reclaiming the walls as a site of expression for marginalized and voiceless communities.

The term *counterculture* refers to cultural movements that oppose or critique the values, norms, and ideologies of mainstream society. Graffiti, by virtue of its illegality and subversive content, becomes an emblematic countercultural form—speaking from the margins and against institutionalized power. In the modern city, where space is increasingly privatized and surveilled, graffiti performs a vital role in reasserting the “right to expression” in public space.

This paper seeks to analyze graffiti as a form of countercultural resistance through Michel de Certeau's theory of tactics and strategies. De Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* conceptualizes how individuals navigate and subvert the systems imposed by institutions. Within this framework, graffiti is read as a tactical practice—a creative and transient act that reclaims the city's surfaces. The study begins by tracing the historical evolution of graffiti from its global emergence to its localized manifestations in India and Kerala, before moving to a theoretical discussion of counterculture and resistance.

II. THE EVOLUTION OF GRAFFITI: FROM GLOBAL TO LOCAL

2.1 Graffiti in the Global Context

The origins of graffiti are ancient, with inscriptions and wall markings discovered in Pompeii and ancient Egypt. However, modern graffiti as a political and cultural act emerged during the 1960s and 1970s in the United States, particularly in New York City. The era was defined by civil rights movements, youth rebellion, and anti-

establishment sentiments. Subway trains, alleyways, and city walls became the canvases of urban youth who sought to make their presence visible in a society that rendered them invisible.

Graffiti in this period symbolized both resistance and belonging. The act of writing one's tag or pseudonym on city surfaces was an assertion of identity in spaces dominated by corporate and state power. Over time, graffiti developed stylistically—migrating from tags to elaborate murals and political statements. European cities like Berlin, Paris, and London soon adopted graffiti as part of their countercultural ethos, particularly following events like May 1968 in France and the fall of the Berlin Wall. In these global urban landscapes, graffiti became intertwined with protest, freedom, and memory.

2.2 Graffiti in India

Graffiti in India functions as a potent visual language of resistance that cuts across political, gendered, and ecological struggles. It is often seen as an import from the West, essentially as a form of youthful expression giving voice to their spirit of rebellion generally experienced at their age.

During the Anti-CAA/NRC protests (2019–2020), the graffiti that emerged on the walls of Delhi's Jamia Millia Islamia and Shaheen Bagh turned ordinary public spaces into arenas of political articulation. Slogans such as "*We the People Resist*" and "*No NRC, No CAA*" blurred the boundaries between art and activism, reclaiming the wall as a democratic text. In regions like Kashmir and the Northeast, graffiti gains further subversive resonance—inscriptions of "*Azadi*" and "*Go India Go Back*" become recurring acts of defiance against state power. The cyclical erasure and rewriting of such slogans mirror the continuous negotiation between authority and dissent, making the wall itself a palimpsest of political memory. These practices exemplify Michel de Certeau's notion of "*tactics*"—ephemeral, everyday acts through which the powerless momentarily reclaim visibility within structures of dominance.

Parallel to these political interventions, feminist and environmental graffiti extend the scope of resistance beyond direct politics into the realms of social and ecological justice. Movements such as Shilo Shiv Suleman's *Fearless Collective* reimagine public walls as spaces of healing and empowerment, particularly after the Nirbhaya case, where murals celebrated women's resilience and bodily autonomy. Similarly, slogans from grassroots movements like *Why Loiter* and *Girls at Dhabas* inscribe the right of women to occupy and move freely within urban spaces, challenging patriarchal spatial codes. Environmental graffiti in Mumbai's Dharavi and

Goa's coastal belts critiques unchecked urbanization, pollution, and corporate greed, giving aesthetic form to ecological consciousness. Across these contexts, graffiti becomes an inclusive and spontaneous form of counter-discourse—an art of resistance that democratizes public space, translates collective anger into visual form, and transforms silence into speech.

2.3 Graffiti in Kerala

Among the prominent graffiti in Kerala are works by "Guess Who," in Kochi which appear to critique the organized festival Kochi Muziris Biennale. These works were a clever mash-up of Western pop culture with indigenous icons, influenced by British street artist, Banksy's style. Guess Who uses street art as a subversive medium of expression to practice and participate in the creation of an ever-changing culture of a city's visual landscape and experiment through ironic commentaries on social and political issues.

Guess Who represents a group of graffiti artists who doesn't wish to reveal their identity. They can connect and communicate with the image and subject while being scheming political. It is also about using public spaces as a platform to spread the foxy image of social issues prevalent in society. They use subversive tactics as potent means for speaking about realities of the society. For them it's an effort as a visual artist to start looking for new and meaningful ways to engage wider audience and inspire more people to take up this as a powerful medium of free expression.

The graffiti works of Guess Who artists shows a clash between Western culture and traditional ones. It acts as a mockery against authoritarian policies. Colonel Slanders, the founder of Kentucky Fried Chicken, flipping parottas; Che-Guera wearing a traditional Kerala attire with shirt and mundu; Marilyn Monroe holding an oil lamp etc. shows the influence of Western culture in India. Revolutionary political figures such as Karl Marx and Frederick Engels are portrayed as meditating on a tiger skin, representing the culmination of oriental philosophy with western ideologies. In some works, the evergreen actor of Malayalam cinema, Prem Nazir is depicted as James Bond holding a gun in one hand. The Lady in the famous painting Mona Lisa of Da-Vinci is sketched as a delicate pot bearing village belle. A classical Bharatanatyam girl with the attire of Michael Jackson and a modern Shakuntala wearing heels etc. shows a derision that is used to scorn the authority. A joker playing Ottamthullal with dollar in one hand and knife on the other shows the vital influence of Western ideologies and figures in molding the minds of common folks. All these graffiti works are purely intended as a reaction against the

organized festival that is marked by its postmodern integrity

A notable installation titled “Attention Please” extends the “Guess Who” graffiti from Kochi to Thiruvananthapuram. These pieces satirize the rule requiring moviegoers to stand for the national anthem in theaters. This regulation, passed by the Supreme Court, sparked serious debates at IFFK and among the public about whether nationalistic pride is infringing on civil liberties.

The “Attention Please” graffiti works seems to depict the influential film makers in the cinema history such as Alfred Hitchcock, Quentin Tarantino, Akira Kurosawa, Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu and Ang Lee dressed in patriotic attires used by prominent Indian political figures. It drives the onlookers attention towards the pillars of Modern Cinema standing in attention for the Indian National Anthem. It was made to ridicule the regulation propagated by the authoritarian institutions to develop a false sense of nationalism. It is placed with a special note that “Attention: Everyone must respect this artwork”. This shows the invincible power formulated by the authority to exert control over the nationalistic pride of the citizen. It is a tactics that is used by the artists to express their thoughts freely to the audiences.

In Kerala, graffiti thus operates as both cultural memory and political performance, reflecting a state that has historically valued literacy, activism, and dissent.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: COUNTERCULTURE AND RESISTANCE

3.1 The Concept of Counterculture

Counterculture, broadly defined, refers to cultural movements that reject or challenge dominant social values. Emerging prominently during the 1960s, countercultural theory aligns with the idea that art and expression can resist hegemonic control. Scholars from the Frankfurt School, the Birmingham School, and postmodern theory have examined how marginalized groups use symbolic forms to resist power.

3.2 Herbert Marcuse: Repressive Tolerance and Liberation

Herbert Marcuse viewed advanced capitalist societies as systems that create conformity through repressive tolerance—allowing limited dissent to maintain control. He argued that genuine resistance arises through aesthetic and imaginative forms that disrupt this one-dimensional order. Graffiti, as a non-institutional art form, becomes such an aesthetic refusal—a radical gesture of visibility

against the homogenized visual culture of advertisements and consumerism.

3.3 Stuart Hall and the Birmingham School: Subculture as Resistance

Stuart Hall and the Birmingham School theorized that subcultures produce semiotic resistance through symbolic practices. Just as punk or reggae cultures used fashion and music to signify dissent, graffiti writers use visual codes to reclaim voice and identity. The “encoding/decoding” model developed by Hall explains how graffiti encodes messages of resistance that are decoded differently by institutions (as disorder) and by subcultural communities (as empowerment).

3.4 Dick Hebdige: Style as Resistance

In *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, Dick Hebdige argued that style itself is a form of protest. Through everyday symbols, subcultures create alternative meanings. Graffiti embodies this idea—its distinct fonts, colors, and anonymity function as visual acts of defiance. Hebdige also noted that subcultural styles are eventually commodified, a fate that graffiti encounters when it is absorbed into mainstream art markets or corporate branding.

3.5 Henri Lefebvre: The Production of Space

Henri Lefebvre’s theory asserts that space is socially produced and ideologically constructed. The urban environment is a product of capitalist power structures that determine who can occupy, design, or represent the city. Graffiti enacts Lefebvre’s “right to the city”—an attempt by ordinary citizens to rewrite spatial meaning. Each mark or mural is a reclaiming of visibility in spaces dominated by commercial imagery and surveillance.

3.6 Certeau’s Resistance and Everyday life

At the core of this study lies Michel de Certeau’s theory from *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). De Certeau distinguishes between strategies—systems of control employed by institutions, such as governments and corporations—and tactics, which are the everyday maneuvers of individuals who lack structural power.

Graffiti exemplifies tactical creativity. The city’s strategic order—its laws, surveillance, and zoning—is momentarily subverted by the act of writing or painting. The graffiti artist operates within the cracks of control, using transient opportunities to assert presence. This aligns with de Certeau’s notion that everyday practices such as walking, speaking, or writing can become acts of resistance. Graffiti transforms these ordinary gestures into spatial speech acts, rewriting the city’s visual text.

IV. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION: GRAFFITI AS EVERYDAY RESISTANCE

4.1 Urban Space and Power

Urban spaces are strategic constructs—regulated through architecture, surveillance, and policy. Billboards, advertisements, and signboards dictate visual order, transforming the city into a site of consumption. Within such a framework, graffiti acts as counter-writing, inscribing alternative narratives that destabilize the official discourse. It turns walls into public texts of dissent, where power, identity, and creativity intersect.

4.2 Graffiti as a Tactical Practice

Drawing on de Certeau, graffiti functions as a tactic of occupation. Unlike institutional art displayed in galleries, graffiti is unsanctioned, ephemeral, and collective. Each act of writing is temporary—erased, repainted, or layered upon—yet it asserts autonomy in the fleeting moment of creation. This temporality is its strength: the resistance lies in repetition, not permanence.

In cities like Delhi, graffiti artists tactically use flyovers and metro pillars—spaces otherwise uninhabitable—to project voices of dissent. In Kerala, wall art near universities and social hubs becomes a tactic of reclaiming ideological space, expressing solidarity with feminist, environmental, and political causes.

4.3 The Kerala Experience: Manaveeyam Veedhi and Beyond

In Trivandrum's Manaveeyam Veedhi, the transformation of an ordinary street into a cultural corridor exemplifies the dialogic tension between state-endorsed art and spontaneous graffiti. While official murals reflect institutional narratives of civic beauty, informal graffiti often comments on gender rights, migration, and climate anxiety. Similarly, in Kochi, graffiti artists blend global street aesthetics with local symbols—creating hybrid forms that critique urban consumerism and tourism-led gentrification.

In Thrissur and Calicut, political graffiti continues to function as visual debate. The walls serve as democratic spaces where ideological differences are publicly performed. Each slogan and mural becomes a spatial argument, a material trace of Kerala's participatory culture.

4.4 The Paradox of Commodification

Despite its subversive potential, graffiti faces the paradox of institutional absorption. As cities begin to recognize graffiti's aesthetic and touristic value, it risks losing its oppositional edge. Murals commissioned by governments or festivals reframe resistance as decoration. Yet, even

within this domestication, spontaneous acts of wall writing persist, reminding us that counterculture continually renews itself in new forms and spaces.

V. CONCLUSION

Graffiti, as a visual and spatial practice, stands at the intersection of art, politics, and everyday life. It challenges the sanitized image of the city and asserts the presence of voices excluded from mainstream discourse. Through the theoretical lens of Michel de Certeau, graffiti emerges as a tactical practice of everyday resistance—a means of counterculture through which individuals navigate and momentarily subvert the strategies of power.

From New York subways to the walls of Kerala, graffiti's evolution reveals a persistent desire to reclaim visibility and agency. It embodies the principles of counterculture articulated by thinkers like Marcuse, Hall, and Lefebvre—celebrating creativity, dissent, and the right to the city. Even as graffiti oscillates between illegality and institutionalization, its essence lies in its ephemeral defiance.

Every mark on the wall becomes a statement of existence, a whisper against silence, and a declaration that the city belongs to all who inhabit it—not just those who plan it.

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Ecoprecarity and Necropolitical Sovereignty in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*

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Abstract— *The escalating environmental crisis is frequently framed through a universalized lens of “global threat,” a discourse that obscures the uneven distribution of ecological vulnerability. This article examines Amitav Ghosh’s The Hungry Tide (2004) as a sophisticated counter-archive that challenges abstract narratives by documenting the intersection of ecological degradation and structural abandonment in the Bengal Sundarbans. Using concepts such as Achille Mbembe’s ‘Necropolitics’, Rob Nixon’s ‘Slow Violence’, and Judith Butler’s notion of ‘Grievability’, the study argues that the Sundarbans acts as a “State of Exception” where the postcolonial state decides whose lives are allowed to be lived and whose are allowed to wither. The concept of Ecoprecarity is central to this analysis. It captures the entanglement of damaged environments with the corporeal vulnerability of the subaltern body. This article analyses how conservation and development have been weaponised as necropolitical tools, as well as the historical Morichjhapi massacre and the struggles of characters like Fokir. The state naturalizes systemic neglect by privileging endangered species over marginalised settlers. The state also frames death as inevitable “acts of God” rather than outcomes of political choice. Ultimately, Ghosh’s novel resists the erasure of ungrievable lives, offering a visceral critique of an environmentalism detached from social justice.*



Keywords— *Ecoprecarity, Ecological Vulnerability, Environmental Justice, Grievability, Necropolitics, Slow Violence, Subaltern Studies*

Introduction

In the contemporary imagination, the environmental crisis is frequently portrayed as a spectacular, dramatic, sudden-onset catastrophe- a singular event of “hypervisibility” that calls for urgent, though temporary, worldwide focus. However, this preoccupation with the ‘spectacle’ of disaster flattens the intricate socio-political landscapes where environmental harm truly occurs. In the Indian context, environmental degradation seldom serves as a “great equalizer”; instead, it acts as a magnifying glass for the existing structural inequalities. Amitav Ghosh’s 2004 novel *The Hungry Tide* acts as a significant contribution to this discourse, moving beyond the simplistic clichés of climate fiction to map what can be termed a “topography of abandonment.” By placing the shifting silt of the Sundarbans at the heart of a postcolonial conflict, Ghosh reveals that the tide country is not merely a site of natural

volatility, but an experimental ground for handling “disposable” human life.

To understand the systematic nature of this neglect and abandonment, this article places Ghosh’s narrative at the theoretical intersection of Achille Mbembe’s “Necropolitics” and Rob Nixon’s “Slow Violence.” While Michel Foucault’s biopolitics focuses on the “power to foster life,” Mbembe’s necropolitics theorizes the “The ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die” (Mbembe 11). In the Sundarbans, this power is not consistently enforced with violence- although Morichjhapi massacre remains as a grim historical exception- but through the intentional construction of “death-worlds”. These are social and geographical spaces where individuals endure life conditions that give them the “status of the ‘living dead’.” This governance of

necropolitics is made possible through what Rob Nixon terms "Slow Violence": a type of violence that is "...incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales" (Nixon 2). In contrast to the sudden brutality of war, the slow violence of the tide country- the deteriorating embankments, the lack of medical infrastructure, and saltwater encroachment on farmland- occurs out of sight and off the ledger of "official" history. The convergence of these two frameworks, we can observe how the state utilizes the temporal invisibility of slow violence to enact a necropolitical strategy and agenda, effectively delegating the "elimination" of marginalized communities to the unpredictable forces of the environment.

Central to this study is the concept of Ecoprecarity. While "precarity" usually signifies a condition or state of political and economic instability and uncertainty, ecoprecarity describes the specific situation where bodily and physical survival is closely tied to a collapsing or hostile ecosystem. It signifies the "biological tax" (India, Supreme Ct.) paid by the subaltern for existing in an environment and landscape that the state has systemically neglected and abandoned. In *The Hungry Tide*, ecoprecarity is a corporeal reality not an abstract concept; it is inscribed on the skin of the fishermen, felt in the hunger of the settlers, and marked by the persistent, normalized danger of the tiger. Ecoprecarity highlights the connection between environmental harm and physical vulnerability, emphasizing how illness, exhaustion, and displacement are not "accidents" of nature, but outcomes of a socio-ecological hierarchy.

This article argues that *The Hungry Tide* rather than being a mere work of "cli-fi" it constitutes a rigorous critique of the "Environmentalism of the Rich." Using a multifaceted narrative of scientific inquiry, historical recovery and subaltern survival, Ghosh illustrates how the postcolonial government dictates who is "allowed to wither" in the changing silt of the Sundarbans. The novel acts as a counter-archive by exposing the state's role in naturalizing the deaths of the marginalized people as "acts of God," thereby reinstating the political dimension of ecological suffering. This study ultimately argues that the environmental crisis in the Sundarbans reflects structural violence, where the distribution of "grievability" is governed by the ruthless logic of necropolitical sovereignty.

The Necro-Geography of the Tide Country: Maps, Silt, and Sovereignty

The Sundarbans, as depicted in *The Hungry Tide*, serves not just as a setting or backdrop for human conflict and drama; it is a necro-geography, a space where the land's physical traits are utilized by sovereign authority to control and manage the surplus population. This section examines how

the state employs the "intractability" of the archipelago to justify the suspension of civic protections, effectively transforming the tide country into a "State of Exception". The conflict between various perspectives on "seeing" the is central to the novel's critique of necropolitics. Piya, the cetologist, arrives in the Sundarbans with advanced high-tech GPS monitors and scientific charts. Her maps symbolize the "State's Eyes," a vision that emphasizes data, conservation figures and metrics, and the protection of species. However, as the story unfolds, it becomes evident that these "official" map, serve as instruments of erasure. By designating large areas of the archipelago as "forest reserves" or "protected zones," the state renders the long-standing human communities or settlements within them illegal. This cartographic or map-based violence transforms indigenous and refugee populations onto "encroachers." In the framework of necropolitics, if a community is absent from the official map, their subsequent "disappearance"—whether through forced eviction or environmental catastrophe—does not register as a loss. The map, therefore, becomes a tool of pre-emptive ungrievability.

A key and significant expression of necropolitics in the novel is the strategically calculated denial of infrastructure. The "badh" (embankments) acts as the thin and fragile, porous line between the *Bios* (political life) of the town and the *Zoe* (bare life) of the tidal region. The continuous neglect by the state to uphold these embankments is not mere negligence; it constitutes a type of structural violence. The fragility of the mud walls serve as a material metaphor for the precariousness of the subaltern's right to life and their existence. By allowing the settlers to face the wrath of the "hungry" tide, the state "outsources" its violence to the environment and surroundings. Similarly, Nilima's struggle to sustain and maintain the hospital at Lusibari underscores the absence and lack of the state's "care-giving" system. The hospital stands and serves as a weak bulwark against death in an area where the state and government has decided that life is not worth the investment of permanent brick and mortar.

By keeping and maintaining the Sundarbans in a continuous state of underdevelopment, the government guarantees that any environmental event—a cyclone or a tidal surge—will result in mass mortality. This allows the sovereign to frame these deaths as "acts of God." This naturalization and normalization of death is the ultimate necropolitical achievement: it frees the state from accountability. When the environment is presented as the primary killer, the political choices that contributed to the vulnerability of the victims—the lack of storm shelters, the lack of early warning systems for the poor, and the weak embankments—are successfully obscured. In this necro-geography, the "hunger" of the tide represents not just a

biological or ecological power, but also a political one. The tide consumes what the state has already marked as disposable. As the next section will argue, this logic reached its most violent zenith in the historical memory of Morichjhapi, where the “environment” was explicitly used as a weapon of the state.

Conservation as Execution: The Morichjhapi Massacre as a Necropolitical Archive

While the “slow violence” of eroding banks defines the daily life of the tide country, the historical core of *The Hungry Tide*—the Morichjhapi massacre of 1979—embodies a “punctual” and clear expression of necropolitical sovereignty and authority. In this section, the analysis focuses on how the state’s drive for “green” conservation was weaponized to justify the liquidation of a marginalized Dalit refugee population. The Morichjhapi incident, recovered through the “counter-archive” of Nirmal’s journal, reveals a chilling hierarchy of life. The postcolonial state, eager to project an image of ecological responsibility to the global community through “Project Tiger,” designated the island of Morichjhapi as a protected forest reserve. When thousands of Dalit refugees escaping caste-related persecution from Bangladesh arrived on the island to create a self-sustaining community, they were framed not as citizens in need of protection, but as ecological pollutants. The necropolitical decision was stark and clear: the life of the *Panthera tigris* was granted international “grievability” and legal protection, while the lives of the refugees were deemed “ungrievable.” As Nirmal notes in his journal: “The government had decided that the refugees had to go . . . the tigers had to be protected . . . It was a struggle between those who had everything and those who had nothing” (Ghosh 216).

The state’s approach to evict the settlers was a masterclass in the intersection of slow and spectacular violence. Through the implementation of an economic blockade, cutting off food and water supplies, and destroying the settlers’ basic infrastructure, the state utilized ecoprecarity as a weapon. The refugees found themselves in a condition of “bare life,” where their biological survival and existence were systematically undermined. When the state eventually intervened with physical force—burning huts and firing upon unarmed settlers—it signified the last step in a journey that had previously “killed” them socially and legally. This incident epitomizes the “Environmentalism of the Rich”: a mode of conservation that views the subaltern as an obstacle to a “pristine” nature. The state did not merely safeguard the environment; it used the discourse of the environment to sanitize a massacre.

In this context, literature serves as a counter-archive to developmental narratives, and in the novel, Nirmal’s

notebook represents this counter-archive in a literal sense. The “official” history of West Bengal has mostly overlooked the Morichjhapi massacre, treating it as a minor “police action.” Focusing on Nirmal’s eyewitness account, Ghosh performs a “Necro-archiving”—a retrieval of the names, the poems, and the revolutionary hopes of those the state intended to silence. The journal forces the reader to acknowledge that the “pristine” Sundarbans enjoyed by tourists and scientists like Piya is built upon a foundation of subaltern bones. It exposes the “structural abandonment” of the marginalized, proving that the environmental crisis is inseparable from the history of state-sponsored displacement and the selective distribution of the right to exist.

Ecoprecarity and the “Bare Life” of the Subaltern Body

If Morichjhapi embodies the state’s necropolitics at a structural scale, the character of Fokir symbolizes the lived experience of ecoprecarity on an individual, corporeal level. This section examines how the subaltern body becomes the primary site where ecological and political violence intersect, moving beyond abstract theory into the physical reality of flesh and bone. Throughout the novel, Fokir exhibits a profound silence and deep ‘ecological literacy’; yet, this intimacy with the environment is never romanticized; rather, it is presented as a condition of extreme vulnerability. Fokir’s life is a localized cycle of exhaustion and exposure, embodying the hallmarks of ecoprecarity where his body serves as a literal buffer between the “civilized” world of urban visitors and the “hungry” tide. This corporeal vulnerability reaches its allegorical peak during the storm at the novel’s climax, which serves as the ultimate necropolitical test. In the hollow of a tree, Fokir uses his own body as a physical shield to protect Piya from the wind and debris. In this moment, the hierarchy of life is rendered physical: the *Bios*—embodied by Piya as a protected citizen with global influence and agency and a passport—survives only because the *Zoe*, or the unprotected “bare life” of Fokir, absorbs the mechanical violence of the environment.

Fokir’s death is not viewed as a tragedy by the government or the scientific community at large; rather, it is sanitized as a “casualty of the storm”. Because Fokir exists outside the formal structures of the state—lacking a “**juridical presence**”, documented property, or political standing—his death is rendered fundamentally ungrievable. Although Piya personalizes her grief for him, the broader “developmental narrative” of the region remains undisturbed by his absence. His death perfectly illustrates the “differential exposure to harm” (4) inherent in the Sundarbans: the scientist and researchers eventually return to her world to translate her experiences into a scientific

report, while the subaltern remains in the silt, reduced to a biological footnote of a natural event. In the end, Fokir's death represents the inevitable outcome of a life spent in ecoprecarity—a life destined for neglect by a system that sees no worth in the existence of the marginalized.

Negotiating Survival: Myth, Agency, and the Environmentalism of the Poor

Although the state exerts necropolitical influence via systematic neglect, the marginalized residents of the Sundarbans do not remain passive victims in the face of erasure. This section explores the way in which the subaltern community utilizes traditional knowledge and communal myths as a robust form of “social infrastructure” to counter state-sanctioned precarity, highlighting “contested survival” as an active, lived condition. Without state protection, the settlers turn to the myth of Bon Bibi, the guardian spirit of the forests, which serves as a profound “counter-archive” of local ecological ethics. Unlike the state's exclusionary conservation laws, the legend of Bon Bibi establishes a “moral ecology” that serves as a social contract for the poor. It provides a stringent code of conduct that allows humans to survive in a hostile landscape by respecting the “limits of the forest,” effectively governing human-environment interactions where formal law fails or oppresses. Furthermore, this myth acts as a syncretic archive, bridging Hindu and Muslim identities to create a unified subaltern front against both the metaphorical “hunger” of the tide and the literal “violence” of the state. This indigenous biopolitics represents a communal way to “foster life” even when sovereign power has marked the population for death.

Complementing this spiritual infrastructure is the institutional resistance found in Nilima Bose and the Badabon Trust, which represent a pragmatic, secular response to structural abandonment. While Nirmal's revolutionary focus was fixed on the spectacular and tragic failure of the state at Morichjhapi, Nilima's work emphasizes “resistance through persistence,” focusing on the “slow” work of building clinics and cooperatives. The Trust functions as a material alternative to necropolitical neglect; by providing micro-loans and healthcare, it attempts to pull the subaltern body out of the realm of “bare life” and reintegrate it into a sphere of “political life” and agency. This institutionalization of resilient biopolitics also highlights a critical gendered dimension of survival. The “widow villages” of the Sundarbans demonstrate a specific form of ecofeminist precarity, where women are left to navigate the intersection of ecological risk and social marginalization. Through the Trust, women like Moyna seek to transform their “ungrievable” status into one of economic and social agency, illustrating that survival in the

tide country is not a static state of victimhood, but a constantly negotiated and contested process of reclamation against the forces of abandonment.

CONCLUSION

Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* does not offer a romanticized solution to the environmental crisis; instead, it provides a visceral documentation of the systemic cost of exclusion. By applying the lenses of necropolitics and ecoprecarity, this article has demonstrated that the Sundarbans is a space where the environmental and the political are indistinguishable, functioning as a site where nature is weaponized to manage marginalized populations. The novel reveals that the “crisis” is not merely the impending cyclone or rising sea levels, but the pre-existing condition of structural abandonment that renders the subaltern body vulnerable to these events long before they occur. The Morichjhapi massacre serves as the historical proof that the state's “green” narratives and conservation efforts are often built upon necropolitical foundations that prioritize territory and species over human life. Fokir's death, meanwhile, serves as a contemporary reminder that the distribution of “grievability” remains deeply uneven in the postcolonial state, where some deaths are sanitized as natural accidents while others are mourned as national tragedies.

Ultimately, this study contends that contemporary Indian literature—and Ghosh's work in particular—functions as a vital counter-archive. It records the “differential exposure to harm” (4) that developmental and state-centric narratives seek to from erase official history. By forcing the reader to witness the “ungrievable” life of the subaltern, *The Hungry Tide* demands a new more inclusive form of environmentalism: one that does not separate the preservation of the “pristine” forest from the fundamental right of the “precarious” human to exist. Ultimately, these texts reveal environmental crisis not as a future threat, but as a lived condition of structural abandonment. They urge a necessary shift in academic and political focus from the “Spectacle of Disaster” to the “Slow Violence of the Everyday,” ensuring that the voices and histories of those marked for erasure are finally brought to the center of the environmental discourse.

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The Philosophy of Inner Energy and Self Realization in the Verses of Kabir

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Abstract— Energy is usually evaluated in terms of scientific and environmental parameters. These parameters shape the surroundings around us and influence the socio-cultural aspects of our life. Inner energy is also one of the essential parameters of energy which is a matter of concern in the current scenario. The teachings of one of the most prominent 15th century Indian poet and singer, Kabir are well incorporated with the elements of nature in the form of literary devices such as metaphors, satire, irony, paradox and others in a rather straightforward and a direct approach. The study would explore and analyze how the nature elements used as literary devices in the verses of Kabir can be instrumental in diverting and directing one's energy from the negative or materialistic aspects of life towards something that in reality may contribute towards self-realization, inner-peace, contention and a joyful perception of life for one and all. The select study would cover areas which were not only essential during the era of Kabir but also hold timeless appeal and relevance even at the times at present.



Keywords— nature, energy, truth, inner-self, realization, awakening, enlightenment, transformation.

Kabir is listed among the prominent poets of India. He was one of those personalities who despite not writing any of his works but only through oral traditions has widely contributed towards the individual and social awakening by challenging, advocating, opposing, propagating, warning, suggesting and advising on the essential aspects of life which contribute towards the realization, awakening and attaining inner peace in the fabric of society which is the need of the hour at present. Some of the aspects which might help in realization and enrichment of the energy within the individuals are listed as follows:

On Intrinsic Nature:

Kabir has emphasized on the unwavering ability of good and evil in his teachings. Kabir notices that there can be two conditions for a particular situation. When a person or an object with pure or positive attributes comes across with someone having the exact opposite or evil characteristics or intentions, then in the first scenario it is only a true soul or a pure and virtuous person or people remain unshaken, unaffected by such negative influences

and continue to maintain their originality and purity. They don't tend to pollute themselves or try to grasp or acquire the opposite or negative attributes from the opposite person. Purity and authenticity continue to prevail and exist despite the malicious people or objects around it.

On the other hand, Kabir also insists on the second scenario that if goodness or purity around us remains unaffected despite the existence and influence of evil, evil also holds a very determined ability not to change itself despite the positive influences around. The same behavior or ability is observed in the people around us the ones we come across with. Someone good would continue to hold onto one's goodness no matter how much the person is distracted, tempted or forced to change and evil also continues to persist despite the different positive influences around it. Although, the degree of evil in something may vary with the demands of situation or time but it never frees itself from its intrinsic nature. It is a well believed fact that humans tend to change with situation or

time but still the intrinsic nature of a person or an object always remains the same.

Kabir also imparts us the wisdom of keeping the right people around us or being in the company of right people. Kabir suggests that no matter how much we try to impart the goodness to something bad, it hardly changes and despite every effort made by a bad person or an object to learn from the good and change oneself turns out to be futile as evil continues to hold on to its true characteristic.

Therefore, Kabir through the usage of nature as personification has attempted to shed light on this theme to awaken and enlighten about both the conditions which prevail around us. He proclaims:

“Snake coiled around the sandal tree, what can the sandal do?”

Every pore choked with poison- where can nectar go?”

The above verses very well emphasize on the idea that snake which is symbolic of evil, continues to be the same no matter how long it keeps itself coiled or wrapped around sandal tree which represents the goodness that prevails around us. Just the way the snake continues to be a poisonous creature and cannot acquire the properties of a sandal tree in the same way sandal tree continues to hold on to its aromatic properties and remains unaffected by the snake's poison.

On nurturing the inner-self:

Having shed light on one's intrinsic nature Kabir has also shed light on the theme of inner-self which highlight the deeds and karma of one's life. Each one of us has his own dreams and expectations from life but not everyone is able to put in the right amount of effort, dedication or hard work required to achieve them. It is also observed that sometimes people aim high and hope to achieve the best that life can offer to them but are not ready or willing to put in the required amount of time, effort or dedication for the same. Kabir suggests to the world that if anyone wishes or hopes to achieve the best in our life maybe in terms of family, career, lifestyle or other aspects then one should be truthful and loyal towards his own efforts otherwise the result would not meet the expectations. Kabir also advises:

“To get your fill of flowers and fruit, water the root.”

This verse also attempts to teach all that if one wants to have a beautiful and a happy world around them then one should be virtuous and one's deeds should align with one's consciousness. With an impure soul and malign intentions every effort put into work remains half-hearted. Everyone dreams to acquire the best out of everything but fails to realize the ultimate reality that only a true soul aligns one's deeds with the universe. The phrase 'water the root' refers

to the efforts required to make on the very fundamental aspects of life such as one's core characteristics, mental state and spiritual well-being. Once the fundamental characteristics of the individuals are properly nurtured and nourished it naturally results in a strong foundation of one's personality traits and identity. It eventually paves way for the adequate effort, time, strategy and other aspects required to achieve the desired fruit or the desired goal of life. Therefore, Kabir advises us to trust the inner strength of ability of oneself which develops through a true soul and is the seed of all fulfillments. He encourages all to work on the same and not worry about the result or the negative aspects of life.

On Self-Reliance:

Apart from the emphasis on nurturing the inner self, Kabir also attempts to instill in everyone the idea of self-belief, self-love and self-reliance. He advises us not to depend on others for anything. He emphasizes on the idea that each one has one's own capability, strength and wisdom to be responsible for oneself and act accordingly to acquire and attain one's goals, dreams and aspirations. Kabir proclaims:

“Use the strength of your own arm, stop putting hope in others;

When the river flows through your own yard, how can you die of thirst?”

The above verses highlight the powerful message of self-reliance. Kabir attempts to make us realize that one should not depend on others or any other source of external help but should be capable enough to take responsibility. The word river in the above verse refers to the abundance of opportunities and other useful resources present around oneself which one fails to recognize and avail. Therefore, it is through self-realization one can attain or achieve anything one puts his mind and heart into through the means of one's own responsible actions and efforts without depending on others. The verse also imparts the wisdom that the time and efforts required to accomplish something may vary from person to person but with right efforts, consistency, dedication, and willpower one can achieve anything on one's own.

On Authenticity over Conformity:

In the current scenario we are at times enchanted or captivated by what others around us believe, practice or follow and we might wish to follow their footprints. Our emotions at times completely empower and control us and one tends to be anxious, jealous or ruled by other negative factors. It affects one's heart and mind as a result of which one's decision making makes us suffer. Kabir warns us of such situation and proclaims,

*“What’s the world like? A flock of sheep;
One falls in the ditch, the rest jump in.”*

It is usually observed that one tends to participate in the rat race where everyone else wants to pace up and win. People join without analyzing its relevance, emphasis and impact on their life. We are deluded by the fact that everyone is doing it and following the race then we might be at loss if we act the opposite. Kabir, therefore warns us to be insightful enough to properly analyze its role in our life and then plan to act accordingly. At present, we are highly influenced by the ongoing trends of cuisines, fashion, curriculum and other commodities we across through social media or other sources of information technology around us. In the terminology of logical reasoning the instance of following or practicing something that every other person is doing is known as bandwagon fallacy. It also occurs when we blindly tend to follow something after being influenced from the promotional activities or endorsements done by popular celebrities on different platforms without utilizing one’s insights and critical thinking but through core misconception.

We should be brave and intelligent enough to explore, analyze, plan and execute as per our requirements, ability and dreams. We should not impulsively just begin to exercise what the others around us are doing, asking us to do and expecting out of us. The similar lesson has been taught in the poem ‘*The Road not Taken*’ by one of the prominent American poets, Robert Frost. The poem presents a situation where a person reaches at a point where he sees the pathway diverged into two; one frequently travelled while the other rarely or less travelled. The poem not only presents a situation of choice for the protagonist but also for the readers to explore, analyze and reflect how our choices influence our decision making and eventually our lives. The poem concludes by giving the impression that choosing the less travelled road made all the difference. Emerson, one of the prominent American essayists has emphasized on this instance in a unique manner. He proclaims:

“Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.”

On fake identities:

There are instances of coming across with people with a masked identity when one is on the quest to attain the best in life. Speech is also one of the vital tools one can utilize to extract the best out of the world. It holds a crucial value in almost every person’s life irrespective of one’s age. No matter if it is infancy or the old age, the speech is somewhat the reflection of our soul. Throughout our life we are advised to use kind and appropriate words as per the situation demands. It is also a believed and accepted

fact that one can win over a person, society nation and the world through our speech. Kabir attempts to represent his perspective over a situation. We are times caught up in a situation when we find the words chosen or the speaker or the appearance of the person pleasing or impressive. But the moment that person starts to speak, his words reflect the exact opposite of his outer appearance. Kabir warns and advises us not to be fooled or misguided by these temptations. Kabir declares:

“Into a lion’s coat, rushes a goat, you’ll recognize him by his talk, the word reveals.”

Kabir also warns and advises us about a second situation we might face. Sometimes we are also influenced by the person’s speech or words but are unable to examine the underlying agenda or hidden motive behind the same. One might appear with a masked identity to fool, deceive or negatively affect us but through our insightful analysis one can prevent such a situation and beware of such fake people.

On Pride and discrimination:

Ups and down, success and failure are part and parcel of one’s life. Each one of us embarks on the journey to acquire the best in one’s life and the path towards the same may be smooth or duntrodden. The ones who reach the ladder of success earlier than the others sometimes tend to look down upon the ones who either are on the way to the top or have given up analyzing the efforts required to reach the top or due to some other reasons. Kabir warns the ones on the peak of success not to look down upon the ones on the bottom as life is full of uncertainty and time is powerful. It is highly unpredictable that in no time the gears of time and time may be reversed resulting in the one at the top suddenly reach the bottom and vice-versa. Kabir advises us all not to hold any bias towards someone facing crisis or a difficult situation in their life. Kabir also suggests that each one of us irrespective of social, cultural, regional, economic disparities and diversity has one’s own commendable qualities and drawbacks. Therefore, Kabir advises us not to hold any negative emotions towards someone due to any such factor. He warns:

“Kabir don’t be arrogant; never laugh at other’s plight.

The boat is still in the sea and its unknown what may betide.”

On criticism:

During the pursuit of success and happiness one is likely to face criticism, self-doubt, hopelessness and other factors which tend to shake our morale and confidence as a result of which one also starts to look down upon the critics and also upon oneself. It is a human tendency to be affected by the criticism one faces during different phases of life but

the more one is affected from it, the more it prevents a person to perform well. In that state one knots oneself into the ties of self-doubt of under-capability, under-confidence, low morale and other factors which may result in inconsistency, procrastination, low concentration, affected decision making, poor planning and execution and thereby undesired or unexpected results. Kabir suggests us not to divert our energy into something negative and continue with a positive approach. According to Kabir, criticism is mainly the voice that shapes us. He advises:

“Keep your critics near at hand- don’t let them out of sight;

They, without water or soap, keep you spotless and bright.”

Kabir advises us to perceive the situation of criticism faced with a different outlook and with a positive energy. He suggests that one can accept the critics as the guiding light who can help us realize our flaws and shortcomings so that we can work on ourselves accordingly. This can also help in one’s refinement through reflection. At times we tend to be affected by the criticism faced which may somehow lay impact on one’s relationship with the critics. Kabir advises not to have a bone of discontent or other negative emotions towards the critics and should keep them closer as criticism in one way or the other brings the best out of the people.

On Tolerance:

Kabir has also addressed on the willpower and unwavering spirit required to endure the harsh words or criticism from others during the times of adversity. He proclaims:

“Earth can bear being dug up, forests can floods endure;

God’s own can bear harsh words- no one else does, for sure.”

Kabir has also highlighted on the theme of selfless love showered by nature on everyone by using nature metaphors. Nature at present or the environment is facing a major crisis. Different biotic and abiotic elements of nature are getting deteriorated or exploited by man-made factors. Despite all this nature and its different byproducts selflessly serve the mankind and help in the sustainability and existence of life on earth. Nature’s selfless love and devotion towards all is highly praiseworthy, commendable and also a source of inspiration to all. Despite of all the vulnerable and threatening conditions it comes across and the harshness it suffers due to human’s benefits, nature continues to serve the mankind with same energy and spirit.

Nature faces and endures all the natural and man-made calamities occurring due to human interventions. The world is prone to a number of disasters due to these

influences. Nature has been worshipped by people since the early-vedic period and even at present before the idol worship and other religious rituals came into existence.

Kabir propagates to the world that the harsh words or critical conditions require high level of patience, tolerance and most importantly a pure heart and soul which is truly virtuous. These qualities highlight a person’s true spirituality and devotion towards God and that is the reason why not everyone but only a few people who instill these qualities in themselves are able to bear such situations in life with a positive energy.

On Detachment and solace:

It is a human tendency to seek happiness, contention or peace of mind through external factors may it be from social validation or from other worldly possessions. With changing pace and time, our dependency on others also tends to increase. When the outcomes don’t meet the expectations the peace of mind is at stake. In the journey of life, people are tempted by the materialistic possessions which somewhat makes them self-centered. Putting up one’s hopes, dreams and aspirations on others turns out to be futile as almost everyone is tied up in the knots of worldly ties. Every other person has one’s own set of priorities and expectations to fulfill which hardly leaves any time and space to help out others.

Kabir says that despite every self-centered approach or efforts for oneself, one’s peace and happiness is beyond reach. It is mainly one’s selfish aspirations that result in a troubled state of heart and mind which blurs the ultimate reality. It is only through self-realization one can attain this wisdom. Kabir attempts to make us realize that peace of mind is not attained through external factors but from a pure soul. Every other effort to attain it turns in vain. The teachings of Kabir are an outcome of his own wisdom and realization attained through his own experiences in life and also the lessons he himself acquired after witnessing the sufferings faced by the inhabitants of the places he travelled during his lifetime. Kabir realizes:

“I found no balm for my heart- all those I met were selfish;

Kabir says, when the very sky is torn- how will the tailor stitch.”

The phrase ‘sky is torn’ in the above verses is symbolic of our heart which is in a troubled state due to worldly desires and aspirations. Kabir preaches that unless we are able to let go or detach oneself from the same, we would not be able to feel contented. The tailor here is God who can only be attained or reached when one has a pure soul.

CONCLUSION

Elements of nature as literary devices in the teachings of Kabir cover one of the vital facets of life for one and all. Kabir has imparted to the society, nation and the world on the themes such as fake identities; intrinsic nature of individuals; criticism; indifference in behavior, tolerance; on pride and discrimination; detachment and solace; self-reliance and most importantly a true soul which contributes towards discovering our inner energy which thereby These themes not only held relevance during the era of Kabir in the 15th century but hold universal relevance and timeless appeal even the times at present. Kabir, through his words of wisdom has attempted to emphasize on the fact that the core values and the inner reality of the individual build the foundational aspects of the individuals. These values contribute in channelizing one's energy towards the self-realization, awakening, inner-peace and contention to one and all. This may eventually contribute towards the betterment and well-being of the society, nation and the world.

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Ideology Portrayal of Women's Oppression in Joshi's Selected Novels

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Abstract— One of the multifaceted topics in the literary tradition is women's oppression as it is associated with social female issues such as marginalization, self-determination, inequality, rights ...etc. The novelist, Alka Joshi, dealt with the issue of women's oppression in her novels, particularly *The Henna Artist* (2020) and *The Secret Keeper of Jaipur* (2021). Hence, the main job of this paper is, through the application of Jeffries' toolkit, to investigate the linguistic and stylistic constructions of women's oppression in these novels. Based on qualitative and quantitative research procedure, thirty extract are drawn from these two novels and analyzed in terms of Jeffries (2010) conceptual-textual functions. The study concludes that in the two novels, women struggle to stand against negative aspects in a society, such as gender inequality, patriarchy, women discrimination, marginalization. The writer, through her female characters, tries to depict women as feeble creatures who undergo male control and power.



Keywords— Alka Joshi, Gender Studies, Stylistics, Literary Criticism, *The Henna Artist*.

I. INTRODUCTION

The issue of women's oppression is tenacious, multilayered, worldwide entrenched in past, economic, and communal constructions that restrict women's self-determination and fairness. For centuries, the employment of women has been diminished and subjugated through slighter or no salaries; dangerous and unfettered working circumstances; the nonattendance for all-embracing and appreciated national work; and being involuntary to offer all salaries to male partner. In other words, women are less salaried than men but go in for the majority of the domestic exertion at home; they are frequently entombed into economic dependency on men. Further, they are enforced to depend on a sexist scheme for economic assistance. This help is quite under-subsidized and does minute to help women in economic requirement. In certain cases, women are enforced to go in into sex labor — an additional-legal scheme of sexual and commercial corruption (Nabila, 2020).

Through history, women were found to struggle for their rights since they were the "sufferers of "social and

economic discrimination. Upper and middle-class women's choice were limited to marriage and motherhood, or spinsterhood" (Cruea, 2005, p. 187). Women were forced to depend on their spouses in their living. Their rights were restricted and this "brought about domestic dependance. In this respect, Smith-Rosenberg (cited in Cruea 2005, p. 187) expounds that women were disheartened to make money by themselves; therefore, marriage was an essential strategy to continue in life. This, in return, leads women to increase consciousness so as to arise from male-controlled society. Nevertheless, numerous feminist movements concerning the issue of women's struggle, "women from around the world still experience challenges and oppression even in the present day" (Nabila, 2020, p.2).

The theme of women's oppression is grounded in the historical standing of women as private belongings, and their unequal connection to men in the establishment of a family. Legislation keeping the standing of women as assets still exists nowadays. These legislations restrict women freedom by engaging limitations on their sexualities and

their bodies. although some multiplicative rights, like abortion and birth control, are lawful for most women in the US, the right to abortion and birth control are still legally and extra-legally restricted to women in general and frequently these rights are out of the economic reach of working and poor women. These rights, which were struggled by generations of women and associates, are now under outbreak (Walby, 1990).

The issue of women's oppression is not a newly-born; it arose in centuries with various forms and took different shapes. Going back to the history of Roman and Greek, women were observed to be recognized as male's belongings. Hence, women were found to obey their husband's orders and almost had no independence to perform their own wishes. Women's oppression has become one of the somber problems that extended even to the current days. Various topics in societies are every so often conferred and represented in literary works, dramas, novels and poems. One important topic in societies that is depicted via works of literature is women's oppression. Alka Joshi is one of the novelists who tackles the topic of women's oppression in her novels, particularly *The Henna Artist* (2020) and *The Secret Keeper of Jaipur* (2021). The current paper intends through the application of Jeffries' toolkit to investigate the linguistic and stylistic constructions of women's oppression in these novels.

These two novels reflect and replicate gendered power relations within a social framework shaped by patriarchal principles and cultural prospects. The emphasis, here, is on how language itself becomes the mechanism that encodes and maintains these power relations rather than just the thematic presence of oppression (Fairclough, 1995). Utilizing Jeffries' (2010) critical stylistics, as the methodological foundation, the present paper inspects the language patterns that frame, transport, and ideologically underpin gender inequality. Essentially, critical stylistics attempts to provide a description of the writers' ideologies through their linguistic choices in regard to their ideational perspectives, thoughts and implications. Through the use of Jeffries' (2010) ten textual-conceptual functions, the paper attempt to disclose what the text is doing. Jeffries' choices, although subtle, carry significant ideological heaviness and help naturalize hierarchical gender relations (Lazar, 2014).

Essentially, this paper tries to detect how ideological assumptions are entrenched in the novels through various elements, such as presupposition, implication, assumption and the organization of textual information (Fairclough, 1995; Jeffries, 2010). These elements work together to either foreground or background certain ideas, thereby influencing how readers engage with the underlying social meanings (van Dijk, 1998). They have become the

theoretical apparatus for the investigation of ideology. They imply the idea that all texts (including novels) are ideologically loaded, whether covertly or overtly. Hence, the main concern of this paper is to unveil these ideologies by means of Jeffries' textual-conceptual functions.

II. WOMEN'S OPPRESSION

One of the challenges that has persisted for generations without a workable remedy is women's oppression. Women have even been seen as men's belongings throughout history; they hardly have self-determination to track their own welfares, and therefore, are required to follow their husbands' directions. The theme of women's oppression has entered many fields of life, politics, social affairs, media and literature. In literature, it has occupied a lot of spaces, particularly those works which are concerned with women's agonies and struggles.

Women's astuteness seeks to improve women's identities in society, address their problems, and alter long-standing attitudes surrounding them. Feminism has been arisen to clash with marginalization and oppression that women experience in all fields of life. As well, it attempts to empower women by granting them the same opportunities and rights as males in society. In general, feminists believe that women are subjected to discrimination and oppression, and that society is structured to favor males over women. Mills (1995, p. 2) affirms that feminists consider society as patriarchal in which men's share of benefits is not equal to women's: "there is a general difference in the way that men and women are treated in society as a whole and in the way that they view themselves and others view them as gendered beings". Therefore, feminists through history are observed to speak out against the inequalities they have experienced due to their gender. They believe that patriarchy permeates most civilizations. And women's jobs have been restricted to being exploited as sexual objects and staying at home (Mills, 1998, p. 2).

Wodak (1997, p. 42) expounds that, through European and American history, women are mistreated and that society is preoccupied with matters of economic dominance while ignoring women. This explains why some radical feminists believe that society needs to be rebuilt because it is a corrupt and irreparable system. Furthermore, researchers believe that women in most societies are fraught and that women's oppression of women is surely an act of injustice directed specifically at women in order to force them into doing something in a punishing manner. This is due to the fact that women in society have no equality, freedom, or rights. This act of unfairness may cause woman to feel depressed or under additional mental strain.

Barker (2003) offers a more detailed and all-inclusive explanation of oppression, stating that oppression is often reflected as:

“the social act of placing severe restrictions on an individual group, or institution. Typically, a government or political organization in power places restrictions formally or covertly on oppressed groups so they may be exploited and less able to compete with other social groups. The oppressed individual or group is devalued, exploited, and deprived of privileges by the individual or group who has more power (p. 307).

It is clear the whole discussion concerning the issue of oppression revolves around the key concepts ‘privilege, mistreatment, and devaluation’. In domestic domain, oppression occurs in a specific household when a husband mistreats his wife by hitting, fronting, or slapping her, which can negatively impact her physical or mental well-being. Restricting women's involvement in the workplace or other public opportunities, such as in law, education, politics, society, research, technology, and so on, is a common type of oppression in the public realm. Then, feminism, as a reaction movement, becomes an instrument to attain equality of rights between men and women when oppression is instigated by manly supremacy. Feminism prioritizes the valuation of women's and men's social stance so as to endorse knowledge for the accomplishment of a better life for women. In addition, feminism helps the development of appropriate explanations to the oppression and acumen against women in a society.

Researchers offer an awareness that oppression is universal, rooted in society on the whole. Payne (1998) maintains this perspective is radical and socialist-collectivist, as it aligns with the ethics and standards of social actions. Numerous social workers encounter strong social services that face progressive change in the course of their change ingenuities. Relationally, Robbins (2011) affirms that oppression concept is resulting from manifold disciplines and shares theoretical frameworks with “feminist theory, critical social theory, sociological conflict theory, and the empowerment method”. Oppression theory is concerned with the interconnected systems of privilege and domination, the exploitation of feeble people by the rich who become richer, and the alienation of employees.

In his survey of types of oppression, Young (1990, pp. 45–56) recognizes “five categories of oppression: cultural imperialism, marginalization, violence, exploitation, and helplessness”. He infers that women's oppression is an

intricate issue that is still worth discussing in the up-to-the-minute period. However, there was a feminist movement at the 19th century, a lot still do not completely hold “the idea that men and women should be treated equally. The feminist movement still needs to fight to convince people, particularly men, that women have equal rights”.

Coping with Young, Soest (2008) explains that oppression is preserved by “ideology and violence or the threat of violence”; it delivers authority and benefit to some while rejecting it to others who are observed as the standard and others who are conceived as diverse. van Soest (2008) adds that other characters of oppression embrace the institutionalization of oppressive directions by society and the anonymity of members of the persecuted minority. Nevertheless, a characteristic “society has in-groups and out-groups”, and what is privilege in one setting could be oppression in another” (Samuels & Ross-Sheriff, 2008, p.6).

III. JEFFRIES' TOOLKIT

Before embarking on explaining Jeffries' toolkit, or what is known as conceptual-textual functions, it is important to give an idea about “what is meant by critical stylistics” and “what does it include? Critical stylistics is a newly-born branch developed by Lesley Jeffries who attempts to integrate stylistics and critical discourse analysis. It is an approach to the study of language where the main focus centers on ‘ideology and style’, that is, the description of ideology and power in a language. Critical stylistics is a reply to CDA by “returning the text to its central position in the analysis and to move away from politically motivated nature” (Ras, 2020, p. 197).

Due to the imprecision and the absence of the apparatuses of literary studies, Jeffries depends on stylistics which on condition that the vocabulary required to designate literary influences. Critical stylistics is used to refer to stylistic “work studying how social meanings are represented through language, this stylistic tendency is motivated by critical linguistics and CDA” (Nørgaard et al., 2010, p. 136). It can be employed to examine “literary and non-literary texts” as it offers critical stylistics with a scheme of discovering ideology in texts. (Jeffries, 2014a p. 410). Thus, it is known as “a text-based methodology (Jeffries, 2014b, p. 476).

For Jeffries and Walker (2012, p. 214), the aim of a text analysis is the uncovering and explanation of “ideology in texts”. Yet, the conceptual analysis is concerned with the manners of elucidating those ideologies and giving senses to ambiguous and regular expressions, “through the denotational and connotational meaning of words within

context". Hence, the conceptual meaning is influenced by "the world around us" (Saeed, 2016, p. 24), and thus influenced by "people's ideology". Contextual meaning and textual meaning are prone to various interpretations, basically determined by the context of situation. In terms of critical stylistics, there is a recognizable "level of meaning between the linguistic, systematic or literal meaning and the contextual meaning of words". This textual meaning is unlike the meaning of the text, and also different from the creator's and receiver's meaning and has a less obvious "form-function relationship than linguistic meaning" (Jeffries, 2015, p. 380).

Basically, Jeffries' model of critical stylistic seemed to be a response to the nebulousness owing to depend on typically on contextual traits and absence of the analytical tools of literary studies within the realm of CDA. Therefore, she established her critical stylistic model of study which consists of ten tools which extend from ones which focus on examining how texts name and describe things around people ("naming and describing") to how "they represent time, space and society" (the way texts construct concepts such as time and society) (Jeffries, 2014a, pp. 413-419). These tools are summarized in the following table:

No	Toolkit	Clarification
1	Naming & Describing	It analyzes how English texts and their makers employ a variety of linguistic means to "name and describe someone or something". That is writers/ speakers choose particular words and expressions to "name/ describe" what is around them (Jeffries, 2010, p. 17). For example, a writer/speaker uses "the referent's proper noun" (e.g. John), selects a more friendly phrase " <i>my best friend</i> or <i>my brother</i> ". This possible manner of referencing to the same object, and "each of which is employed to serve a specific goal".
2	Representing Actions/ Events/States	This tool focuses on a tool that is concerned with the English verbal elements. It investigates "how actions, states, and events are presented"; it centers on the verbal element of the sentence which is an underpinning component of the sentence. Writers/speakers may choose a verb that suits their intents, simply because a verb is the element that indicates the relationship among the elements of the sentence. Consider the following examples: <i>The building collapsed.</i> (event) <i>The driver crashed the building</i> (action) <i>The building is down</i> (state) Each sentence has a particular type influence on the listener/reader. "Events represent what is happening; actions represent what is being done; and states what is being only a state" (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004). Jeffries (2022, p. 55) relies on Halliday's transitivity rooted founded in how to categorize verbs in terms of whether "they express acts, states of mind, behavior, states of being, or just verbalization processes" (Tabbert, 2015, p.48). That is, the four key classes are recognized: 1) Material Action Processes (<i>The policeman ran to the station</i>); 2) Verbalization Processes (<i>He said that he would come early</i>); 3) Mental Cognition Processes (<i>She recognized it was so precise</i>) and 4) Relational Processes (<i>She is a black women</i>).
3	Equating & Contrasting	'Equivalence and contrast' is found in a text through verbal processes and stylistic procedures. Through the linguistic choices a writer/speaker attempts to "compare and contrast" things which disclose ideologies. Text producers use various words or phrases (such as synonyms and antonyms) to identify an object (Jeffries, 2010, pp. 51-52). Equating can be achieved via 'x is like y' (e.g. <i>Men are like lions</i>) or x is y (e.g. <i>Women are ungrateful</i>). Here, the verb <i>be</i> links two equal elements in each sentence. Opposition can be produced by employing a variety of stylistic devices (e.g. <i>Men are strong: women are weak</i>).
4.	Exemplifying & Enumerating	Exemplifying focuses on one or more examples of the memberships of a particular class without having to designate them all; while Enumerating deals with listing every participant of a particular class. Examine the following (A. Exemplifying B. Enumerating): A. " <i>Mum, Dad, Uncle Sam and the twins all came to greet us</i> ".

		<i>B. "Everyone in town was present, including the mayor and his spouse, city council members, and representatives from every industry and company you can think of".</i> (Jeffries, 2022, p. 125)
5	Prioritizing	It is a syntactic practice that writers/speakers employ to highpoint the most central element of a sentence: it allows sentence elements to be organized in the anticipated sequence. Then, it allows writers/speakers to emphasize on some features while paying less consideration to others. Consider these two examples: <i>A. The police imprisoned a few protestors.</i> <i>B. A few protestors were imprisoned by the police.</i>
6	Implying and Assuming	It specifies how "texts implications and presumptions make ideologies appear to be common sense". That is, it focuses on implicatures and presuppositions (Tabbert, 2016, p. 113). It investigates aspects of meaning that are regularly assumed to be less direct than lexical items and phrases and may hence help in the regularization of specific ideologies. Consider <i>A. My friend drives a red Toyota.</i> The example assumes that "my friend and his car exist". Stubbornly, "logical presuppositions" are much more complicated, perhaps more ideologically alleged, and, as the name hints at, can be inferred (logically). Implying, is more complicated and challenging to interpret. It is mainly based on the writer's/speaker's intention and context of situation.
7	Negating	Jefferies (2022, p. 141) explains that the formation of "what is not" is one way that writers/speakers prefer to offer their readers an astounding understanding. Via negation, the reader's minds can create "an alternate interpretation of the circumstance that appears to be at odds with the original message sent by the text". Negation can emphasize "what might have been, creating a hypothetical version of the world described in the text". Jefferies (2010, p. 106) proclaims that negation is critical in "helping readers comprehend and conceptualize the world in terms of what does not occur".
8	Hypothesizing	Hypothesizing is characteristically obviously specified by the writer, who conjectures "what has occurred, is occurring, or will occur" (Jeffries, 2010, pp. 114-130). It is initiated through modality which involves the representation of the writers/speaker's awareness of "the possibility or desirability" of a certain situation. It is significant to notice that creating a hypothetical scenario encompasses not only the utilization of "modal verbs (or other linguistic elements), but also contexts and intonation". Consider: <i>Emma may have indicated she would be there next week.</i>
9	Presenting Others' Speech & Thoughts	Writers often have the capability of explicitly or implicitly quoting or transferring the words and expressions of others. Jefferies (2010, p. 131) maintains that the capability of depicting "other people's words and/or thoughts in writing has the potential to be very manipulative for both the readers and the people whose words and/or thoughts are being portrayed". Consider these two examples: <i>A. Isabella said, "I'm terribly sorry".</i> (Direct Speech) <i>B. Isabella said that she was terribly sorry.</i> (Indirect Speech)
10	Representing Time, Space & Society	It intends to categorize and observe how writers/speakers produce "text worlds, or mental images" for their readers/addressees. For instance, a writers/speakers employ deixis to build the "temporal and spatial dimensions of a text" so as to produce a text situation that will influence readers/audience. Deixis is concerned with utterances that "make reference to a person, a location, or a time" (Yule, 2010, p. 128). Consider these examples: <i>Suha will meet you tomorrow.</i> (Temporal deixis) <i>She will attain the task.</i> (Personal deixis)

IV. METHODOLOGY

The paper utilizes an amalgamation of qualitative and quantitative procedures. With the intention of providing a more exhaustive and precise inspection of the representation of women's oppression in Joshi's *The Henna Artist* and *The Secret keeper of Jaipur* in terms of critical stylistic analysis, the qualitative practice is used to provide an in-depth explanatory inspection of the novels. The critical stylistic tools allow the researcher to discover implied meanings ideologies linked to 'gender, power dynamics, representation of agency or its denial'. they critically highlight how meanings are produced via language rather than just what is said. The qualitative practice is reinforced by the quantitative procedure through the discovery of the commonness of linguistic elements (naming, negation and prioritizing), representing recurring linguistic forms rather than relying only on individual examples.

Thirty extracts are drawn from Joshi's *The Henna Artist* (2020) and *The Secret Keeper of Jaipur* (2021) to be the data of this paper. These novels are selected due to their representations of societal norms, traditions, and beliefs. Women's oppression appears to be the chief issue theme; these novels hold women's depiction and oppression (concerning women's subjugation, right, patriarchy, violence, gender discernment, and disparities). In particular, these novels offer ideological and linguistic illustration of women's oppression under male-controlled social and cultural principles. Jeffries' (2010) model of critical stylistics focusing on the text conceptual-textual functions (mentioned above) is employed as where it addresses ideology in the novels by discussing numerous modes of analysis and merging them to construct a frame of analysis (Tabbert, 2016, p. 37). Consider this proposed model drawn from Jeffries (2010).

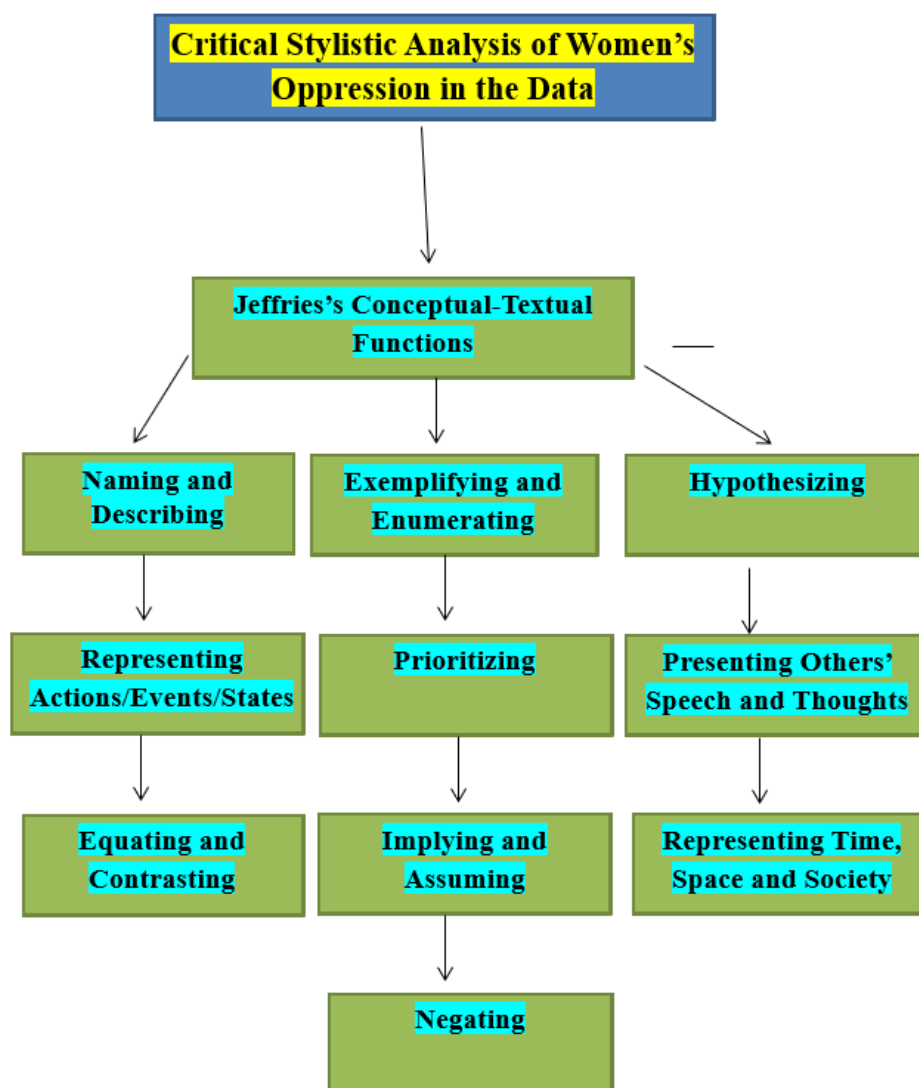


Fig.1: Proposed Model of Analysis

V. DATA ANALYSIS

As mentioned earlier, thirty extracts are taken from the nominated data, eighteen from *The Henna Artist* and twelve from *The Secret Keeper of Jaipur*. The data analysis takes two directions, qualitative and quantitative analysis. Thirty excerpts are qualitatively analyzed, yet, for the sake of space and limitation of this paper, two extracts (3 and 23) are given, as examples of the qualitative practice, from the two novels.

5.1 Extract (3), p. 83

Radha said, "Maa never talked about you. Never spoke your name. I didn't even know you existed until the gossip-eaters told me you disappeared the same year I was born. As soon as I learned to read, I realized it was your letters Maa was burning whenever they arrived. The only letter of yours I read was the one you sent about the train tickets to Jaipur. You didn't mention me in the letter at all. I knew then that you didn't know I existed, either".

Lakshmi and her younger sister Radha meet after a long separation. Following her union with Harry and then fleeing an abusive marriage, Lakshmi made the decision to leave her family. This resulted in her total separation from the family home. The mother made the decision to stop an emotional communication with Lakshmi during that time, refusing to accept her presence and burning the letters she wrote. As a result, Radha did not realize she had an older sister growing up, and she did not learn about her existence from any member of the family—rather, it was via chats with the locals. The family's desire to remove Lakshmi from their memories and present her departure as something shameful that should not be spoken; it is reflected in this forced silence. The background demonstrates how Lakshmi's absence affected Radha's early years and contributed to the breakdown of family ties, highlighting the profound emotional impact of this exclusion.

In this extract, naming and describing is observed through two NPs (*your name* and *gossip-eaters*); the first specifies Lakshmi's name which has not been mentioned while gossip-eaters are used here to illustrate the idea that Lakshmi's name was hidden until gossip-eaters declare it. Negating is repeated when giving references to speech and knowledge in the following statements "*Maa never talked about you ...*" and "*never spoke your name ...*", confirm complete exclusion which reflects the absence of communication and a complete breakdown in the relationship. Further, the statements "*I didn't even know you existed ...*", "*you didn't know ...*" and "*You didn't mention me ...*" reveal mutual ignorance that deepens the sense of separation and also reinforce the idea of marginalization and lack of acknowledgment. Assuming function is found in "*your letters Maa was burning*", proposing that Lakshmi's

communication was unacceptable and not worth keeping by her family. Personal deixis *I/me* in "*I didn't...*", "*I was born...*", "*I learned...*", "*I realized...*", "*I read...*", "*You didn't mention me...*", "*I know...*", and "*I existed...*", indicate Radha's personal experience and suffering, highlighting her feeling of marginalization and lack of recognition. The pronouns *you/your/yours* refer to the addressee, emphasizing her absence from Radha's life and illustrating a relationship built on distance and ignorance in "*Maa never talked about you ...*", "*Never spoke your name*", "*you existed...*", "*your letters ...*", "*The only letter of your...*", "*You didn't mention me...*", and "*you didn't know ...*". For transitivity, material processes are shown in a verb *burning* where the mother is the agent of the action of burning. The verbs *realize* and *know* represent mental processes where they demonstrate awareness and knowledge about Radha and her disappearance which influences her psychologically and emotionally. Additionally, the verbs *talk* and *spoke* show verbalization processes, expressing her ideas and feelings. Moreover, the negation *never* is used to enhance the oppression of Lakshmi's identity and hides her existence within her family. For priority, the NP "*the only letters of yours*" is fronted to emphasize the message she wanted to pay attention to. The fronting strategy is employed to disclose that the mother's speech is more essential and conspicuous than the rest of the message in order to accomplish a certain ideological impact. These linguistic choices expose the ongoing powerlessness type of women's oppression, which is founded not only on actions but also on intentional silence.

5.2 Extract (23), p. 97

"But he might come to Niki and tell him that he was adopted. That his son is Niki's father. What do we do then?"

Being afraid that Samir Singh would take Nikhil (Niki), the narrator, Lakshmi, tries to reassure Kanta that she and her husband, Manu, are the lawful adoptive parents of Niki. Kanta's concern is not entirely reduced by this assurance. She worries that Samir would meddle in another way by disclosing Niki's true origin rather than by forcibly removing the youngster. If Samir reveals to Niki that he has adopted him and that Ravi, Samir's son, is actually his real father, this might have a profound impact on the youngster and upset the stability of the family.

Naming and describing appears through the labels *Niki*, *his son*, and *Niki's father*. The use of *Niki* identifies the child and centers on the discussion in this dialogue; the expression *his son* indicates Ravi (Samir's son), while the name *Niki's father* refers to the child's real father. These characters' identities are made clear by the narrative's

context, even though their names are not stated explicitly in the extract. The personal deictic pronouns *he*, *him*, *his*, and *we* are employed to refer to different persons. The pronoun *he* alludes to Samir, a man who might get involved in Niki's issue, although this man is Samir; his name is implied but not found in the excerpt. Regarding *him*, it indicates Niki, whilst *his* denotes the paternal connection between Samir and his son Ravi. In addition, the pronoun *we* in the question "*What do we do then?*" shows how Kanta is concerned for Niki's future and how she and her husband Manu share a sense of responsibility. By referring to significant individuals in the child's life without specifically naming them, the use of these pronouns helps to emphasize the worry and uncertainty that Kanta is going through. The use of *we* also conveys Kanta's sense of needing help and support to deal with this challenging situation. This worry is connected with the societal pressures that women encounter in a sever society. The modal verb *might* in "*But he might come to Niki and tell him that he was adopted*" serves as a hypothesizing tool; it is used to convey the possibility of something would probably happen (Samir's approaching Niki and telling him the truth) in the future instead of expressing a definite event. This presumption also captures Kanta's tense and unstable state, as she worries that disclosing the truth could cause social or familial troubles. As a result, Kanta's anxiety about the potential disclosure of the truth seems to be evidence of the social pressures women encounter in these situations. The use of implying and assuming is demonstrated in this extract by Kanta's supposition about Samir's future action: "*But he might come to Niki and tell him that he was adopted.*" Although it hasn't happened yet, Kanta considers it a possibility because she is afraid of the social repercussions of adopting an illegitimate child. This presumption serves as an example of how society puts pressure on women and forces them to cope with a social stigma that could negatively impact both them and their children's life. Priority is also observed in *That his son is Niki's father*; the phrase '*that his son*' is fronted to lay emphasis on the unpleasant state of this child. The statement "*What do we do then?*" is considered as a tool of representing other's speech, thought, and society that directly displaying people's inner

thoughts in a conversation to convey their voice or thoughts. Kanta's internal worry and her approach to handling the situation are expressed in this statement. Transitivity appears thru verbs that represent different actions and states such as *come*, *tell*, *was*, *is*, and *do*. The verb *come* is represented as a material process as it indicates a movement or action that can happen in reality—specifically, the person's approaching Niki. The verb *tell* also appears as a verbal process because it refers to the act of speaking or conveying information. The verb emerges as a relational process since it makes the characters' parental relationship clearer. In a similar vein, the verb *was* in phrase "*was adopted*" is a relational process which expresses the child's condition and identity as an adopted child. Concerning the verb *do* in the question "*What do we do then?*", it is a material process referring to a potential action or behavior that can be performed in the future. The use of these verbs contributes to showing the tension and anxiety that Kanta is experiencing, as she imagines a series of possible actions, such as someone approaching and revealing the truth. Indirectly, this extract assumes that this dread is intimately linked to the social shame associated with children who are born outside marriage; a situation frequently has more social repercussions for women. At long last, through linguistic choices employed, this extract conveys a feeling of worry and fear of a family's secret being revealed, which could have negative social repercussions. In these situations, women are frequently subjected to social criticism and limitations, which is a reflection of the patriarchal society's oppression of women. Placed differently, this excerpt discloses the powerlessness aspect of women's oppression.

VI. RESULTS ANALYSIS

A quantitative analysis seems to be important to account for the frequency and percentage of each conceptual-textual function, focusing on the purpose of the number of occurrences of each function. The following table summarizes the frequency and percentage of each function, followed by a figure illustrating the percentages of each function.

Table 1 : Jeffries' Toolkit used in the Novels

NO	Toolkit	Frequency	Percentage
1	Naming & Describing	74	16.01%
2	Representing Actions, Events & States	120	25.97%
3	Equating & Contrasting	10	2.16%
4	Exemplifying & Enumerating	1	0.02%
5	Prioritizing	6	0.12%

6	Implying & Assuming	35	7.57%
7	Negating	45	9.74%
8	Hypothesizing	9	1.94%
9	Presenting Others' Speech& Thoughts	3	0.06%
10	Representing Time, Space & Society	159	34.41%
	Total	462	100%

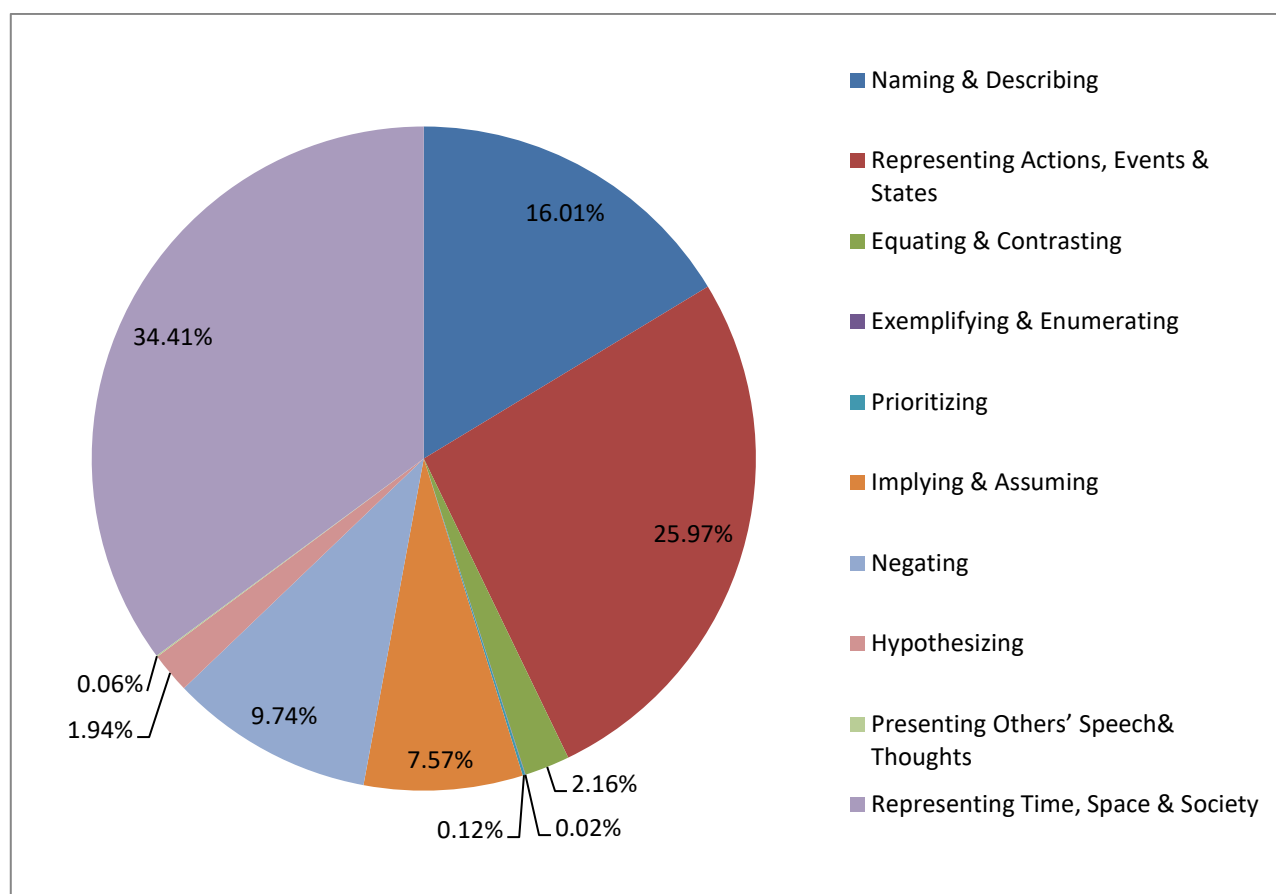


Fig.2: Distribution of Conceptual-textual Functions

VII. FINDINGS

The critical stylistic investigation of the two novels has led to the findings that the two novels deal with feminist ideologies that disclose how women are starting new conservative standards that do battle with patriarchy, gender inequality, and discrimination. The two novels depict gender distinction in several extracts. For instance, the heroine, a henna artist, was underpaid and overworked. Consequently, the writer is efficacious in producing a persuasive idea that seeks for a change to achieve gender equality. Among the most commonly occurring linguistic components in the data are representing actions, events&

states, naming and describing, negation, as well as, implying and assuming. Utilizing naming and describing, women are negatively portrayed as feeble, controlled, or socially constrained. Transitivity through verbal is employed to reflect the writer's ideology; the most frequent verbal process is the material which helps the novel attain its goals of representing women in society. Personal deictic expressions are employed to directly address women and to transfer power and authority to male-dominated society. The paper infers that language is decisive in revealing unequal social power relations and depicting women's oppression as a negative aspect in society.

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The Quantified Child Under Biopolitical Surveillance: Disability and Maternal Responsibility in Jodi Picoult's *Handle with Care*

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Abstract— Jodi Picoult is an American novelist, renowned for her negotiations with clinical hegemony. Her novel, *Handle with Care* (2009), could be deemed a poignant entry point into the labyrinthine of clinical ethics, disability studies and the pragmatic management of family politics by mothers. Hence, this article is an investigation of the narrative through the lenses of clinical surveillance. It is an examination of the protagonist's intense legal and medical negotiations. Willow O'Keefe, who is the protagonist, is the quantified child, born with Type III Osteogenesis Imperfecta. Central to the examination is the wrongful birth lawsuit initiated by Willow's mother, Charlotte, against her own family doctor. This is the quintessential issue addressed in this article. Thus, the idea of the quantified child stays pivotal in the progression of the novel. This article also attends to those consequences of the legal process that systematically reduces Willow's existence to a series of economic liabilities, incorporated by medical cost and familial limitation. This article is one adamant argument that clinical hegemony demands the commodification of Willow's disability. This quantification reduces the child to the fragmentation of self and, eventually, to the loss of identity. Obviously, the child is stripped of her inherent personhood; she is transformed into a data point within the clinical framework. Hence Michel Foucault's theory of biopolitics is utilized in this article, in order to investigate the clinical surveillance of the disabled Willow and the maternal performance by Charlotte, the mother. In *Handle With Care*, Picoult advances the point that the familial sphere is no longer private. The article closes with the finding that *Handle With Care* exposes the dehumanizing gaze of clinical hegemony, which readily views an individual disability through the lens of risk management.



Keywords— *Handle with Care*, disability, biopolitics, wrongful birth lawsuit, quantified child, Type III Osteogenesis Imperfecta, economic liability, personhood, fragmentation of self, hegemony, maternal performance, gaze, risk management.

Jodi Picoult, a renowned American- Jewish writer was born on May 19th, 1966 In Gong Island, New York. This place might be conceived of a landscape that enriched her evolution as character and more specifically a novelist. She is recognised today as a highly acclaimed and bestselling American author known for her exclusive fictional works that resonate with complex ethical dilemma as against like the backdrop of a techno-scientific American white centrist system. She is an educated literary artist.

As of date, Picoult is the New York Times bestselling author of twenty-nine novels, including most recently, the record-breaking recent bestseller *By any other Name* (2021). *Handle With Care* (2009) and *House Rules* (2010) reached number one on the New York Times bestseller's list. Some of her novels, namely, *Playing True* (2004), *The Tenth Circle* (2008) and *My Sisters Keeper* (2009) are but a few of her books adapted for film and T.V. adaptations.

Jodi Picoult's *Handle with Care* (2009) is an emotional novel that deals with family struggles and ethical dilemmas. The novel also deals with medical ethics and legal battles as seen in most of her novels. The story revolves around Charlotte and Sean O' Keefe whose daughter Willow is born with osteogenesis imperfecta OI a severe breaking of the bone disease.

Charlotte and Sean O' Keefe's lives completely take a turn when their second daughter Willow is diagnosed with type 3 OI. She was born with seven broken bones where even the simplest of actions like moving her could break more of hers. Charlotte and Sean find it very difficult to financially support her treatments as she needs constant care due to frequent breakage of bones. Charlotte's best friend, Piper Reece and Obstetrician was the one who oversaw the deformity.

While the family is away on a trip which was unusual due to Willow's illness, Willow breaks one of her bones accidentally, which in turn creates a commotion which leads to a short conviction of Charlotte and Sean. This infuriates Sean who is determined to sue the department after his return home. After approaching a local lawyer, they learn that such an action is not possible but if they want to sue someone for money it could be Piper Reece, Charlotte's friend for wrongful birth. Which implied had she known earlier about Willow's condition she would have terminated the pregnancy.

The decision Charlotte takes to sue her friend shatters their strong bond of friendship and it puts pressure on Sean for lying and it devastates Amelia, the elder daughter who suffers mentally which results in self-harm and bulimia.

Willow is an intelligent child. On learning that her mother might have terminated her pregnancy, if she was aware of her disability, feels unloved. Unable to handle his emotions Sean separates from his family. The trial goes on in the courtroom where each character goes through extreme emotional torment. Charlotte, Sean, Amelia, Piper Reece, her husband and daughter suffer through this equally in their own way.

Finally, Charlotte wins the case but loses everything else. The victory is very short lived as Willow drowns in a frozen pond nearby. Ultimately the money she gains from the victory of her trial for Willow, goes unused. The novel concludes the letter from Charlotte to Willow expressing both her love and regret. The novel ends with a central idea making the reader ponder if the lawsuit was worth suing.

The increasing medicalization has profoundly reshaped understandings of disability and parental responsibility. The contemporary biomedical technologies including prenatal diagnostics have enabled the early

detection of potential abnormalities thereby transforming the unborn child into an object subjected to risk management. Within this framework disability is not a lived experience but a deviation to be measured or monitored.

The existing scholarship on Picoult's work often focuses on ethical dilemmas and legal narratives and there is a critical gap in analyzing the intersection of biopolitics, disability and maternal responsibility. This study argues that *Handle with Care* reproduces biopolitical governance by framing disability through quantification and risk while simultaneously recasting motherhood as surveilled and accountable practice. It also reveals how deeply clinical hegemony penetrates both public and private domains.

Michel Foucault's concept of biopolitics refers to the mechanisms through which modern states regulate populations by managing life processes such as health reproduction and mortality. Central to this framework is the idea of biopower which operates not through overt coercion but through normalization commerce surveillance and production of knowledge. In the context of disability, biopower manifests through the classification and measurement of bodies. As Leonard J Davis argues the concept of normalcy itself is a statistical construct against which all bodies are evaluated. Similarly, Nicholas Rose extends Foucauldian thought by emphasizing how individuals internalize biomedical norms becoming active participants in their own regulation.

This paper introduces the concept of quantified child to describe how Willow's body is constructed within the novel. She is not just represented as a child with disability but surrendered as a collection of medical data points based on her fracture rates prognosis and treatment costs. This quantification reduces Willow's existence to measurable variables aligning her identity with the logic of biomedical governance.

This study employs a qualitative textual analysis grounded in Foucauldian discourse analysis. It also focuses on key narrative sites within the novel. Such as medical consultations judiciary proceedings and maternal reflections.

At the outset, Willow's body is framed through the language of medical classification and statistical risk. Through the novel she is described not as a child in experiential terms but through diagnostic labels and prognostic expectations. Willow is situated within a biomedical taxonomy rather than a living identity. From her birth until her death, Willow gets admitted to the hospital several times due to her fragile bones. Charlotte and Sean struggle to settle the hospital bills. The hospital management does not provide any choice to them, the hospital shows its power over them by pointing to Willow's

fragility of existence, as they keep siphoning money out of their purses. As Charlotte the mother observes:

The treatment was four hours each, for three days in a row. After two hours of multiple nurses and residents coming in to get your vitals... then you'd give a urine sample. After that came the blood draw -- six vials while you clutched my hand so hard you left tiny half – moons with your fingernails on the canvas of my skin. Finally, the nurse would administer the IV-- the part you resisted the most. (83)

These words encapsulate the transformation of Willow from a person into a medico construct. The child's existence is reframed as evidence rather than experience.

In this novel surveillance extends across both clinical and juridical domain. Willow's body is continuously documented and evaluated transforming her into a subject of institutional scrutiny. This is explicitly seen in the courtroom when the argument goes as that the issue is not Willow is loved but how that love is legally represented (Picoult 171) here we find that the legal system appropriates medical authority converting life into a matter of calculation and judgement. The courtroom functions as an extension of the clinic, reinforcing the logic of surveillance.

Charlotte undergoes serious maternal conflicts and the depth of the bio political pressure is seen when she articulates "I love my daughter. But I wish she had never been born" (306). This paradox reflects the fragmentation of maternal identity under the weight of biomedical rationality. Charlotte is positioned as both a caregiver and an accountable subject within a regulatory framework.

We also see that Charlotte justifies her legal action by stating "I need to make sure that Willow was taken care of for the rest of her life" (305) while this appears protective it also reinforces the reduction of life to financial planning and liability. Through the novel, Willow's existence is repeatedly translated into cause thereby aligning her value with economic metrics.

This paper has demonstrated how *Handle with Care* constructs the disabled child as a quantified subject within a biopolitical framework. Through the interplay of medical and legal discourse, Willow's identity is reduced to data risk and economic liability. Familiarly motherhood is configured as surveillance practice governed by expectations of rational decision making and accountability. By applying the theories of Michel Foucault, this study highlights the pervasive influence of biopower in shaping both individual identities and social norms. The novel

reveals how deeply clinical hegemony penetrates the privacy sphere transforming intimate relationships into sites of regulation.

Ultimately, the paper contributes to ongoing discussions in disability studies and literary analysis by foregrounding the ethical implications of quantification and surveillance. It calls for a reevaluation of how disability is represented an understood urging a shift away from reductive frameworks towards more nuanced and humane perspectives.

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Recreational Linguistics and the Dynamics of Discourse: An Interdisciplinary Approach

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Abstract— This paper explores the potential of recreational linguistics as an innovative and interdisciplinary tool for discourse analysis in literary studies. Traditionally perceived as a domain of playful language activities such as puns, anagrams, palindromes, and linguistic humour, rebus puzzles, recreational linguistics is re-examined here as a meaningful analytical framework that reveals deeper cognitive, cultural, and ideological dimensions embedded within texts. Drawing on principles from linguistics, cognitive science, and cultural studies, the paper argues that language play is not merely ornamental but constitutes a significant mode of meaning-making that shapes reader interpretation and engagement. The study situates recreational linguistics within contemporary approaches to discourse analysis, demonstrating how playful linguistic structures can uncover implicit power relations, social identities, and cultural narratives in literary discourse. It further highlights the relevance of recreational language practices in the digital age, where memes, hash tags, and online humour function as dynamic forms of discourse. Through selected literary and media examples, the paper illustrates how linguistic creativity operates as a site of negotiation between authorial intent and reader response. Additionally, the paper underscores the pedagogical implications of incorporating recreational linguistics into English language teaching, particularly in enhancing critical thinking, interpretive skills, and student engagement. By bridging the gap between entertainment and analysis, recreational linguistics emerges as a valuable multidisciplinary approach that enriches discourse analysis and redefines the boundaries of literary interpretation in the 21st century.



Keywords— Recreational Linguistics, Discourse Analysis, Interdisciplinary Studies, Literary Theory, Language Play, Digital Humanities, ELT

I. INTRODUCTION

The 21st-century academic study of literature has seen a radical shift from traditional, text-centric analyses to more flexible, discourse-led methods of analysis. Discourse analysis is a useful methodology for examining language within a variety of social, cultural and ideological contexts, as well as the growing complexity of global systems of knowledge have resulted in increased interest in interdisciplinary and multimedia engagement, allowing literary scholars to use sources from linguistics, psychology, sociology, media studies and digital humanities. Under this changing framework, recreational linguistics—often viewed as only playful or amusing—

offers an extensive but under-investigated area for discourse analysis. Language play through puns, word play, jokes and stylistic play have far more meaning than surface level; they carry a wealth of meanings deeper than those associated with these practices, represent the ideological values of their languages, and provide opportunities for different forms of interpretation. This paper suggests that recreational linguistics is a valuable interdisciplinary resource for investigating contemporary literary discourse.

II. DISCOURSE ANALYSIS IN LITERARY STUDIES

Discourse is the use of language and the way in which that language creates and conveys meaning. For example, Foucault has shown that there is a connection between discourse and the distribution of power. In addition, Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis has demonstrated that language reflects and reinforces ideology. In the discipline of literature, an analysis of the discourse extends beyond an examination of narrative content to include an examination of how the text engages with the broader social discourse related to social class, gender, and politics, among other issues.

III. RECREATIONAL LINGUISTICS AS DISCOURSE

Recreational Linguistics includes many types of playful ways to use language, including: puns, riddles, crosswords, scrabble, hangman word games, palindromes, anagrams, initialisms, acronyms, eponyms, retronyms, oronyms, aptronyms, blending words, oxymorons, collocations, tongue twisters, rebus puzzles etc. While often considered a side interest, Recreational Linguistics can also be used as a legitimate way to examine how we think, how we create and how we express our culture.

3.1 Language Play and Meaning-Making

Language play serves not only as an embellishment to enhance a text's message, but also to help construct that message through the strategic use of punning, whereby the multiple meanings and ambiguities of words encourage readers to participate in the creation of meaning. This approach agrees with the perspective of discourse analysis, which holds that meaning is negotiated rather than static. For example:

a) Puns

While frequently associated with "dad jokes" or light-hearted, silly humour, puns have a long history in literature, with William Shakespeare using over 3,000 of them in his plays to indicate intelligence, wittiness, or to create comedic relief in serious scenes

- "Time flies like an arrow; fruit flies like a banana."
→ Shows syntactic ambiguity and dual interpretation
- In literature:
 - Shakespeare uses puns in *Romeo and Juliet*:
"Ask for me tomorrow, and you shall

find me a grave man."
→ "Grave" = serious + dead

- Classroom example:
 - "A bicycle can't stand on its own because it is two-tired."

From a discourse perspective, puns reveal that meaning is inherently unstable and depends on context for interpretation.

b) Palindromes (Structural Play)

- "Madam"
- "Race car"
- "Able was I ere I saw Elba"

In literary contexts, this device symbolizes symmetry, reversal, or the cyclical nature of time.

c) Anagrams (Hidden Meaning)

- "Listen" → "Silent"
- "Dormitory" → "Dirty room"

In literary contexts, it is often used in mystery or symbolic texts, while from a discourse perspective, it suggests that meaning can be rearranged and reinterpreted.

d) Alliteration & Sound Play

- "She sells seashells on the seashore"
- "Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers"

In literary contexts, it creates rhythm, emphasis, and memorability, while from a discourse perspective; sound patterns influence perception and interpretation.

e) Anagrams:

Anagrams, as a form of recreational linguistics, involve the rearrangement of letters within a word or phrase to generate new meanings.

In Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets: "Tom Marvolo Riddle" → "I am Lord Voldemort"

3.2 Cognitive Linguistics Dimensions

Recreational linguistics stimulates mental processing and requires one to recognize patterns and think through inference from a cognitive point of view. Thus, it is through decoding layers of meaning that the reader has a more interactive relationship with the text. The relationship between cognition and language is the foundation upon which the interdisciplinary nature of discourse analysis lies. Examples:

a) Conceptual Metaphors

- “Time is money”
- “Life is a journey”

Literary example:

- “All the world’s a stage”

From a discourse perspective, readers interpret abstract ideas by relating them to familiar concepts.

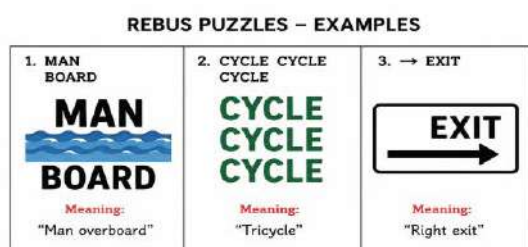
b) Wordplay and Mental Processing

- Riddles:
 - “What has keys but can’t open locks?”
→ Piano
- Classroom:
 - Encourages inference and interpretation

From a discourse perspective, meaning emerges through the active cognitive participation of the reader.

c) Rebus puzzles:

Examples:



3.3 Cultural and Ideological Implications

Culturally-based values and beliefs are frequently expressed in language by means of humour or wordplay (e.g., satire used as a type of critique), while also encoding both social statuses (by naming something in an amusing way) and reinforcing individual and collective aspects of cultural identity (through various forms of recreational linguistics). The result is an intersection between discourse, culture, and ideology. Examples:

a) Satirical Wordplay

- Political satire:
 - “Democracy” instead of “democracy”

Literary example:

- George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* slogans:
- “All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others.”

From a discourse perspective, language play can expose underlying power structures and reveal instances of hypocrisy.

b) Identity through Naming

- In children’s literature:
 - a) “Diagon Alley” → diagonally
 - b) “Knockturn Alley” → nocturnally

In literary contexts, cultural coding is evident in the way names reflect character traits or the nature of settings. From a discourse perspective, naming functions as a powerful tool that shapes perception and influences how characters and contexts are understood.

3.4 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

CDA looks at power relations and social inequalities as they are represented through language. By exposing the ways in which language can both reinforce and undermine ideology through humour and wordplay, recreational linguistics provides an important complement to CDA. For example:

a) Humour as Resistance

- Cartoons mocking politicians
- Satirical headlines

Example:

- “Breaking News: Nothing Happened Today”

From a discourse perspective, humour serves as an indirect means of challenging authority and questioning dominant power structures.

b) Euphemisms and Wordplay

- “Collateral damage” instead of civilian deaths
- “Downsizing” instead of firing employees

From a discourse perspective, language can be used to conceal or soften harsh realities, often shaping how situations are perceived and understood.

3.5 Digital Humanities and AI

Today literature interacts with various other media. Recreational language can be found in films, advertising, and social media; as a result, there are blurred boundaries between different types of discourse, specifically those that are considered literary/non-literary. New technology created by the digital age has allowed for greater analysis of language, such as through corpus linguistics and AI language analysis tools. New forms of contemporary discourse include recreational linguistic elements,

such as memes, hash tags and viral wordplay. Thus, these contemporary forms of discourse require new analytic frameworks and tools.

Examples:

a) Memes

- “Expectation vs Reality”
- “I can’t adult today”

Memes typically combine humor with cultural references and rely on shared social understanding, and from a discourse perspective, they function as compressed units of meaning.

b) Hashtags as Language Play

- #MondayMotivation
- #JustSaying
- #NoFilter

In linguistic terms, hashtags condense meaning and signal identity or stance, while from a discourse perspective, they help create communities and foster ideological alignment.

c) Internet Wordplay

- “LOL” → Laughing Out Loud
- “BRB” → Be Right Back
- “Sus” (from gaming culture)

From a discourse perspective, language evolves dynamically through digital interaction and online communication practices.

3.6 Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Approaches

In both interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches to literary texts through the lens of discourse analysis, researchers can create a deeper understanding of what is being communicated by including information from different fields of knowledge (cognitive science, cultural studies, and digital media). This allows for a more complete understanding of the content of the text and how it is perceived by those who read or view it. For Example:

a) Linguistics + Psychology

- Tongue twisters improve cognitive flexibility

b) Literature + Sociology

- Slang reflects social identity:
 - “Lit”, “Savage”, “Ghosting”

c) Literature + Media

- Film dialogues using wordplay:
 - “Why so serious?” (*The Dark Knight*)

From a discourse perspective, meaning is constructed and shaped through the interaction of multiple disciplines.

IV. CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

The use of recreational linguistic strategies in discourse analysis presents many different issues including: One possible way to perceive recreational linguistics as not being serious or having no academic credibility. The subjective nature of individuals interpreting the wordplay used. There is the need for methodological certainty in devising a mixed methodology. Nevertheless, systematically exploring and developing a theoretical framework for recreational linguistics will help to address each of these areas of concern.

V. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

There are multiple ways that adding recreational linguistics to English Language Teaching (ELT) can improve student engagement with the language, the ability to critically think and interpret, and discourse/contextual knowledge. Activities like meme analysis, forming puns, and interpreting wordplay will also help to make literary studies more relatable, accessible, and engaging; these activities may be particularly helpful in the literary studies of engineering students.

VI. CONCLUSION

Linguistics, they provide a strong basis for discourse analysis in the context of 21st-century literary studies. By providing a link between creativity and critical inquiry, this method demonstrates that playful uses of language convey multiple complex meanings as well as cultural values and different ideological orientations. Insights from linguistics, cognitive science, and digital media are combined to enhance the ways in which literary works are studied and to advance current trends in higher education. Furthermore, the use of recreational linguistics in educational settings further affirms its potential impact on current pedagogical practices and how students experience literary studies today. In light of the rapid changes occurring in literary discourse as a result of the digital revolution, recreational linguistics provides positive indication that it will be a fruitful area of study for both scholars and teachers moving forward.

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Gender-Fair Lexicon: From Biased to Inclusive Language

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Abstract— Despite policy frameworks mandating gender equality in Philippine education, masculine-centric linguistic defaults persist in classrooms. This study assessed Senior High School students' awareness of Gender-Fair Language (GFL), their attitudes toward its classroom use, its perceived impact on inclusive culture, and the interventions needed to support a Gender-Fair Language Lexicon at Colegio de San Rafael Arcangel, Inc. A quantitative design was employed using random sampling; a researcher-developed, expert-validated sixty-item Likert-scale survey was administered and analyzed through mean, standard deviation, and rank. Findings reveal that students are Moderately Aware of Gender-Fair Language and hold a Somewhat Positive attitude toward its use, strongest for institutionalized occupational substitutions and weakest for non-binary honorifics. Attitudinal endorsement was strong at the normative level but inconsistent in habitual application. The study concludes that the school community exists in a state of "passive readiness" — adequate cognitive understanding without the structural mechanisms for consistent practice. In response, *In Fairness: A Lexicon for Inclusive Communication* was developed as a localized, faith-aligned instructional resource.

Keywords— Catholic education, gender-fair language, inclusive communication, lexicon, linguistic recalibration



I. INTRODUCTION

Language is the primary medium through which human beings organize social reality, transmit cultural values, and construct systems of meaning. Gender-fair language (GFL) — also called inclusive or non-sexist language — refers to linguistic practices that avoid bias and stereotyping, representing all persons with equal dignity and respect (Mills, 2020; UNESCO, 2022). The movement to standardize GFL gained momentum during the mid-twentieth century, driven by Second-Wave Feminism and the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, which argued that language actively constructs human consciousness and social perception.

In the Philippine context, Republic Act 7192 (1992), Civil Service Commission Memorandum Circular No. 12 (2005), and DepEd Order No. 32 (2017) laid the institutional groundwork for inclusive language in education. Despite these mandates, a persistent gap remains between policy and actual classroom practice. This gap is particularly significant at Colegio de San

Rafael Arcangel, Inc. (CSRA), a member of the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (CEAP), which upholds the JEEPGY framework — Justice and Peace, Ecological Integrity, Engaged Citizenship, Poverty Alleviation, Gender Equality, and Youth Empowerment. Empirical data on how Senior High School students internalize Gender-fair language in daily practice remain scarce, creating an urgent need for locally grounded research and instructional tools.

The study is anchored on four interdisciplinary theories synthesized into the Theory of Linguistic Recalibration (Temporal, 2026). Linguistic Relativity (Sapir-Whorf) establishes that biased language creates "cognitive invisibility," making it difficult to conceptualize women or non-binary persons in leadership roles (Lange, 2025). Gender Schema Theory (Bem, 1981) explains how inclusive language acts as a "schema disruptor," breaking automatic gendered associations (Morgenroth & Ryan, 2021). Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) posits that students adopt GFL through observational learning

from teachers. Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles, 1973) explains how institutional standard-setting drives widespread Gender-fair language adoption. Together, these frameworks reveal that linguistic change is simultaneously cognitive, behavioral, and social.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND STUDIES

Language both reflects and reinforces social hierarchies, particularly those rooted in gender. Historically, 18th-century grammarians institutionalized the "generic he" and male-as-default conventions, rendering women linguistically invisible (Mills, 2020; UNESCO, 2022). Gender-fair language (GFL) seeks to dismantle these structures through neutral alternatives, as research confirms that masculine generics distort mental imagery and constrain learners' perceptions of gender diversity in professional and leadership roles (Lange, 2025; Silveira, 2022).

The cognitive basis for GFL reform is rooted in the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, which holds that language shapes perception, producing "cognitive invisibility" in masculine-default environments (Lange, 2025). Gender Schema Theory further explains how gendered linguistic cues become internalized as mental frameworks, while Morgenroth and Ryan (2021) establish that sustained exposure to inclusive vocabulary disrupts these schemas and fosters more equitable cognitive patterns. At the behavioral level, Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory confirms that students adopt inclusive language primarily through teacher modeling, yet inconsistent faculty application persists across Philippine schools due to limited training and the absence of standardized resources (EPRAJ, 2025; Tarrayo, 2022).

In the local context, Tarrayo (2022, 2023) found that GFL challenges gender asymmetry in Philippine higher education, while Mendoza et al. (2024) noted that most existing learning materials default to masculine language. Within Catholic institutions, framing Gender-fair language within human dignity frameworks significantly increases acceptance among students and faculty (Fernandez, 2021; Medeiros, 2021) — an approach consistent with CEAP's JEEPGY framework, which positions Gender Equality as a core pillar of Catholic formation and provides the institutional grounding for inclusive communication as an expression of faith.

III. METHODOLOGY

A quantitative research design was employed. Respondents were 187 Senior High School students from

STEM, GAS, ABM, and HUMSS strands at CSRA, San Antonio, Pili, Camarines Sur, selected through proportional random sampling using Slovin's Formula. A researcher-developed, expert-validated sixty-item Likert-scale survey instrument was distributed across three thematic sections: Awareness, Perceptions and Attitudes, and Perceived Impact of Gender-fair language. Data were analyzed through mean, standard deviation, and rank. The study was conducted during the Second Semester of Academic Year 2025–2026.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Level of Awareness

Students demonstrated a Moderately Aware level of GFL ($M = 4.178$, $SD = 0.820$), indicating adequate but not yet mastery-level understanding. Five indicators reached Extremely Aware status, all involving institutionalized occupational substitutions: 'Police Officer' for 'Policeman' ($M = 4.299$), 'Chairperson' for 'Chairman' ($M = 4.241$), and 'Firefighter' for 'Fireman' ($M = 4.230$). Awareness was weakest for non-binary honorifics ('Mx.', $M = 4.070$), the singular 'they' ($M = 4.080$), and 'Manufactured/Synthetic' for 'Man-made' ($M = 4.080$) — forms with the least institutional exposure.

This bifurcation confirms that Gender-fair language awareness is proportional to the degree of institutional normalization. The statistical equivalence between policy-level awareness and active linguistic detection (both $M = 4.128$) further establishes that policy exposure alone does not generate application-ready competence.

3.2 Perceptions and Attitudes

Students hold a Somewhat Positive overall disposition toward Gender-fair language ($M = 4.186$, $SD = 0.746$). Eight indicators reached Very Positive status, concentrated in normative and ethical endorsement: the belief that GFL should be universally practiced by teachers and students ($M = 4.513$), that it reflects genuine commitment to diversity and dignity ($M = 4.213$), and that it is consistent with Catholic values of human dignity ($M = 4.438$). The lowest mean was recorded for the singular 'they/them' as a classroom referent ($M = 3.978$) — the only indicator below 4.00 — suggesting attitudinal reservation toward non-binary linguistic forms.

Teacher role-modeling ($M = 4.165$) and practical ease of application ($M = 4.144$) both fell within the Somewhat Positive range, identifying the gap between attitudinal endorsement and consistent behavioral application as the primary structural concern.

3.3 Perceived Impact on Inclusive Culture

Students perceive GFL's impact as Somewhat Positive ($M = 4.178$, $SD = 0.820$). The five Very Positive Impact indicators were concentrated in institutional dimensions: consistent GFL use fostering mutual respect ($M = 4.358$), and the availability of a Gender-fair Lexicon deepening awareness ($M = 4.299$). The weakest perceived impact was for inclusive language in textbooks and learning materials ($M = 4.070$, $SD = 0.880$), identifying curricular materials as the primary structural gap.

The convergent pattern across all three dimensions — Moderately Aware ($M = 4.178$), Somewhat Positive attitudes ($M = 4.186$), and Somewhat Positive Impact ($M = 4.178$) — confirms that structural barriers, not cognitive or attitudinal resistance, constitute the primary obstacle to consistently integrated Gender-fair language practice.

V. CONCLUSION

This study establishes that CSRA Senior High School students possess genuine but moderate Gender-fair language awareness, favorable attitudinal dispositions, and a recognition of Gender-fair language's institutional benefits — yet remain in a state of "passive readiness" due to the absence of formalized linguistic resources, inconsistent faculty role-modeling, and lack of uniform policy standards. The primary barriers are structural, not motivational.

In response, *In Fairness: A Lexicon for Inclusive Communication* was developed as a localized, faith-aligned instructional tool organized across five domains: professional titles, universal terms, pronouns and honorifics, collective nouns, and relational language. It serves not as a prescriptive correction of speech but as a cognitive scaffold — a schema disruptor that makes inclusive communication a natural institutional standard rather than an effortful exception (Morgenroth & Ryan, 2021).

Complementary institutional interventions are proposed: (1) formal integration of GFL standards into all official school documents; (2) structured faculty capacity-building programs including orientation, guided practice, and peer observation; and (3) a student-led GFL Advocacy Committee embedded in existing student government structures. These interventions are grounded in Republic Acts 7192 and 9710 and operationalize CEAP's JEEPGY Gender Equality pillar.

The advantage of this study lies in its empirical grounding and its provision of a ready-to-implement institutional resource. Its primary limitation is its single-institution, student-only scope. Future research should

extend to faculty perspectives, cross-institutional comparisons, and longitudinal evaluation of lexicon effectiveness post-implementation.

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Hedging Strategies in Transparent Peer Review: A Genre-Based Analysis

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Abstract— This study investigates the use of hedges in the emerging genre of academic writing known as Transparent Peer Review (TPR). Unlike traditional blind review processes, TPR Writing Process, characterized by its open and inclusive nature, reveals the entire peer review process publicly, and thus allows academic readers to access reviewer reports and authorial responses along with the published article. Drawing on a corpus of twenty TPR reports from various Publications, this study aims to explore the role of hedges in transparent peer review. Using qualitative methods to explore several dimensions of hedging in this genre, it seeks to understand whether researchers and scholars participating in TPR employ hedges, what types of hedging strategies are used by reviewers and authors, how prevalence differs between these participant groups, and what functions hedges fulfil in the transparent review process. Drawing on a corpus of twenty TPR reports from Publications—an international quarterly peer-reviewed open-access journal—this investigation employs qualitative methods to explore several dimensions of hedging in this specific genre. The findings revealed that even though both authors and reviewers employ hedging techniques in their correspondence during the TPR process, the former use fewer hedges than the latter. It was also found that lexical hedges are predominate over strategic hedges. On the other hand, the functions of hedging in the TPR reports we have analyzed remain the same as their functions in other academic genres as to softening the truth value of the claim, showing the writer's commitment to be a responsible and informed member of the scholarly community, and demonstrating awareness of one's audience etc.



Keywords— English for Academic Purposes, Transparent Peer Review, Hedges

I. INTRODUCTION

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a broad and multi-dimensional field in English language studies. Unlike General English, ESP mainly focuses on teaching, learning, researching, and using English according to the specific needs of a particular group of learners. ESP is designed for learners who need English for clearly defined specific academic, professional, occupational, or technical purposes. Unlike the traditional English language pedagogy which sees the language as a somewhat natural phenomenon molded by those socio-cultural factors that shaped the history of England (and later on, the British

Empire), ESP sees English as a “tool,” a means to an end not an end in itself (Paltridge & Starfield, 2013).

In this sense, ESP's approaches to teaching and learning English are heavily dictated by the reality that necessitates the demand of the language, the real-life situations in which the language is practically put into action in the users' day-to-day activities. The functional nature of ESP has led to the emergence of various sub-branches within the field. The sub-fields of ESP include English for Occupational Purposes (EOP), English for Vocational Purposes (EVP), English for Medical Purposes (EMP), and English for Academic Purposes (EAP), to

mention but a few examples, and “[t]ypically (although not always) ESP students are adult learners” (Paltridge & Starfield, 2013: p.14). This demographic or occupational characteristic of ESL necessitates that ESP pedagogy be shaped according to adult learning requirements and needs.

The unparalleled status acquired by English as a global language of teaching and learning as well as research and publication gives rise to a branch of ESP known as English for Academic Purposes (EAP). “A major research field in its own right, EAP is concerned with researching and teaching the English needed by those who use the language to perform academic tasks” (Charles, 2013: p.145). While this definition broadens the scope of EAP, it also brings with it another distinctive feature of the field. An interesting peculiarity of EAP that distinguishes it from all other subfields of ESP is that it concerns non-native speakers and native speakers (Charles, 2013, p.145). As Charles (2013) points out, the vast area of EAP could be reduced or instead approached from one of these “three angles, each based on a different approach: corpus-based work, genre analysis, and investigation of the social context (p.245). In EAP, writing skills occupy a central position in all academic activities and it is an inherent and integral part of both learners’ and scholars’ academic lives. This requirement stems from the deep-rooted tradition of academia: scholars and researchers are requested by the tradition of academia to put their ideas and findings in black and white to document and communicate them across the audience.

Academic writing is strictly formal in the literal sense of the word and it brings with it strict writing conventions and standards. It is governed by objectivity and controlled by clarity of purpose. It involves the communication of ideas and research in a clear, concise, and structured manner. It follows a well-organized structure, typically including an introduction, thesis statement, body paragraphs, and conclusion. Each section has a specific purpose and contributes to the overall coherence of the piece.

One of the fundamental principles of academic writing, which is objectivity, makes it almost impossible to use one's personal opinions, and whenever used, they must be supported by evidence and logical reasoning. As a result, academic authors are expected to avoid emotional, biased, or subjective language and present their arguments in a balanced and verifiable manner. In this sense, objectivity strengthens the credibility of academic texts and helps readers evaluate ideas based on facts rather than personal judgments.

Another important feature of academic writing is that it has a genre-specific nature. Not only do different

academic disciplines have different conventions and expectations; but even within a particular field, rules, format and conventional styles used for a research article may vary substantially from those needed to write a thesis in the same discipline. Consequently, understanding the genre conventions within a particular field is crucial for understanding and practicing academic writing.

Genre Analysis (GA) emerges as an offshoot of the pioneering work of Move Analysis carried out in the 1990s by Swales. As Hyland notes “Genre approaches in ESP, therefore, attempt to explicate particular genres’ lexicogrammatical and discursive patterns in order to identify their recognisable structural identity. (Hyland in Paltridge & Starfield, 2013: p.108). Also, Swales (1990: 58) defines genre as “a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes” (in Charles, 2013: p.149). Building on Hyland's definition that this study aims to investigate the use of hedges in transparent peer review, one of the newly emerging genres of academic writing.

Hedging refers to using certain linguistic and rhetorical elements in academic writing to lessen/soften the truth value of a particular claim or statement. This could be achieved using certain vocabulary items, phrases or even particular syntactic structures. “In academic writing,” writes Ken Hyland, “hedges signal a writer’s anticipation of the possibility of opposition to his or her statements” (2005: p.100). In this sense, Hyland enumerates three roles of hedging: 1) helping writers state “propositions with greater precision” or make “uncertain statements with appropriate caution,” 2) assisting “writers to avoid personal responsibility for statements in order to protect their reputations and limit the damage which may result from categorical commitments” and 3) creating a cordial “writer-reader relationship” built on mutual respect and cooperation (2005: p.102).

According to IOP Publishing (n.d.), Transparent Peer Review “shows the complete peer review process from initial review to final decision when both authors and reviewers opt-in. This means that readers can see a full peer review history, alongside the published article, including reviewer reports, editor decision letters, and the authors’ responses” (TPR). Contrary to the traditional method of review used by academic research publishers in which the entire review processes take place behind closed doors and the potential author is only informed about the outcome, whether his research paper is accepted or rejected, and about what kind of corrections are necessary in the case of conditional acceptance, TPR involves authors in the review process by sharing both the reviewers’ comments—through which authors may be

asked to revise or improve their manuscripts—and the editors' decision letters, thereby ensuring clarity and active participation throughout the evaluation process. Authors are then requested to provide explanations for those critical aspects of their work about which there might be disagreement or incongruity or which might have fallen short of the journal's and/or publisher's standards. Ultimately, at the end of this tedious, rigorous review process, when the paper is accepted for publication, the entirety of correspondence between the author(s) and their reviewers is made public as it is published side by side with the article: This is a practice that deservedly qualifies the new method of reviewing scientific research papers as transparent. This gives TPR a universal trustfulness, which all publishing houses, journals, reviewers and researchers ought to strive to maintain (Beynon, 2023). This commitment to openness is also one of the key assumptions underlying the philosophy behind TPR (TPR, 2022). Therefore, TPR can be described as a newly emerging genre of academic writing, constituting a critical scholarly discourse between authors of research articles and their reviewers. In light of this, this study examines twenty transparent peer-review reports of articles published in *Publications*, an international, quarterly, peer-reviewed, open-access journal.

1.2 Research Questions

This study attempts to provide answers to the following research questions:

- 1) Do researchers/scholars who engage in transparent peer review process use hedges?
- 2) What type of hedging do reviewers and authors use?
- 3) Who uses hedges more frequently between authors and reviewers?
- 4) What functions do hedges serve in the transparent review process?

1.3 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in the fact that even though there are numerous studies investigating the use of hedges in EAP, to the best knowledge of the researcher, no research has been conducted on this particular genre "transparent peer review reports". Thus, this study fills a significant gap in the literature related to academic hedging by examining a new genre that embodies a unique dialogic correspondence between authors and reviewers.

II. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Type of Study

This is a qualitative study as it does not attempt to offer any numerical (i.e., quantitative) analysis of its

findings. Instead, after conducting a content analysis of twenty transparent peer review reports, identifying the use of hedges, the types of hedges used by the authors and the reviewers and the purposes the hedging served, the researchers present their findings and discuss them qualitatively. As Klaus Krippendorff (2004) puts it, "Qualitative researchers support their interpretations by weaving quotes from the analysed texts and literature" (p.103). Accordingly, in order to align this study with the essential requirements of the qualitative methodology, the researchers thrust the entire weight of his explanations into words (rather than numbers) during both the presentation of the research findings and the discussion.

2.2 Data

Since this study concerns content analysis of written texts, it does not have humans as participants. Rather, the review reports of twenty research papers published through the TPR process in the journal *Publications* were analysed with a view to exploring the use of hedges by both the authors and the reviewers. Consequently, these reports serve as the data sources in this study.

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The data of this research came from a journal called *Publications*. *Publications* is an international, peer-reviewed, open-access journal on scholarly publishing, which is published quarterly online by MDPI (Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute) Switzerland. MDPI publishes 433 journals across a wide range of disciplines and sub-disciplines. However, the data of this research was collected from only one of those journals, *Publications*, which met the researcher's criteria: being an open-access journal, being multidisciplinary in its contents coverage and being published through the TPR process. The research articles and the transparent peer review reports of the twenty papers were accessed online and later downloaded in PDF by the researchers. Following this, each report was subjected to a rigorous content analysis in which the use of hedges was critically examined and documented.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used in this study was originally developed by Ken Hyland (1999). Specifically, Hyland's taxonomy of hedging offers the diverse ways in which writers hedge their statements in academic discourse. The use of hedges allows authors to strike a delicate balance that must be maintained between asserting claims and acknowledging the inherent uncertainties in research or academic discussions. In addition to the establishing the rhetorical relevance of hedging, this theoretical framework highlights the social/interpersonal functions of hedges as they enable authors to acknowledge

the invaluable contribution of their audience. This social (interactive) aspect of Hyland's theory of hedges makes it very relevant to the present research because authors and reviewers are considered as "equals" in the TPR process, which is the focus of this research. According to this theory, even though hedges are mainly lexical items, hedging can also be achieved through the employment of certain sentence structures (Hyland, 2005, p.102). This hedging strategy that goes beyond the lexical level (and involves the sentence as a whole) is herein referred to as strategic hedging.

III. FINDINGS

After critically analysing twenty TPR reports and examining the use of hedges by the authors and the reviewers, the researcher found that in TPR, hedging follows a certain pattern/order. Both the authors and the reviewers seem to be highly conversant with the logic and also with the conventions governing their intellectual transaction and each group applies that logic dutifully, as is demonstrated in the following sections. It was also found that in TPR hedges are mainly employed to achieve one of the following five communicative goals:

3.1 To Correct a Mistake

"The Paper's title should be revised." When reviewers identify errors or deficiencies which require correction, they consistently employ modal verbs and tentative language to soften the directive force of their suggestions. This hedging strategy maintains collegial rapport while still conveying required necessary changes clearly: "The Introduction should include some essential concepts such as academic publishing or scholarly communication and highlight the connection between open peer review (and its benefits) and open science." "The introduction should also be redesigned." These examples illustrate how the modal verb "should" functions as a hedge as it is transforming what could be perceived as an authoritative command into a collegial recommendation.

3.2 To Express Criticism, Preserving Face

Perhaps the most prevalent function of hedging in TPR is to express critical evaluations without threatening the authors' professional face. Reviewers use a wide range of hedging devices, including epistemic stance markers, personal attribution, and attitudinal qualifiers in order to frame criticisms as subjective impressions rather than objective judgments:

"Therefore, the presenter requirements seem unrealistic."

"I find it quite annoying when I read "one of the reviewers noted,..."

"However, I feel that the text has been carelessly edited."

"Thirdly, although the themes are interesting, I still find the analysis a bit too descriptive."

"The overall purpose of the article appears somewhat confused." In these instances, verbs such as "seem," "find," "feel," and "appear" function as hedging devices that attribute the criticism to the reviewer's perception rather than stating it as an absolute fact. The phrase "I feel that" is particularly noteworthy as it frames even harsh criticism ("carelessly edited") as a personal response, thereby softening its impact.

3.3 To Pose Questions Indirectly

Reviewers frequently use hedges when requesting clarification or additional information, framing direct questions as tentative inquiries. This approach encourages dialogue rather than interrogation.

A reviewer writes: "I was wondering whether participants were native-speakers working in those English-speaking countries."

A reviewer writes: "Line 390 Can the authors be more specific about how OpenBiodiv relates to Bouchot, for example, could it be used to measure compliance with the goals of that declaration? The verb "wonder" transforms a direct question into a tentative musing and it positions the reviewer as curious rather than demanding. In the same way, the use of "can" and "could" presents requests for information as possibilities rather than requirements.

3.4 To Express (Dis)agreement

Both agreement and disagreement expressions are hedged in TPR, but for different rhetorical purposes. When expressing disagreement, reviewers use hedges to avoid confrontation. When expressing agreement or praise, they employ hedges to prevent their endorsements from appearing uncritical:

"I don't think that requirements label [143-145] will really have any use."

"This is an extensive revision of the previous draft. All the issues I've raised have been sufficiently addressed. Thus, I recommend publication."

"The paper looks great and has been very much improved."

"Here, references to Paltridge prevail (I find it very correct to refer to Paltridge's works), but I miss some other relevant references that deal with the language of reviewing/review reports."

"I can't see a clear connection between these two parts."

The phrase "I don't think that" exemplifies negative polarity hedging in which disagreement is

couched in terms of the reviewer's cognitive state rather than the manuscript's deficiencies.

The verb "looks" suggests appearance rather than confirmed quality, while "sufficiently" implies adequacy rather than excellence. The expression "I miss" is particularly subtle; rather than stating "the paper lacks," the reviewer frames the absence as a personal experience, thereby reducing the critical impact.

These examples demonstrate how hedges like "might," "perhaps," "could," and "if possible" communicate varying degrees of obligation. Unlike the stronger "should" we have previously observed, these hedges indicate optional improvements rather than necessary corrections. By doing so they establish a hierarchy of revision priorities that respects author autonomy while still providing guidance.

IV. DISCUSSION

As demonstrated in our analysis, we have attempted to answer all of the questions to be investigated. Regarding the first question worded as "do authors and reviewers use hedging in their correspondence during the review process of TPR articles?" our study answers this question in an affirmative way as it revealed numerous instances of the use of hedges in reviewers' comments and authors' responses to them. However, in light of our findings, it is evident that reviewers employ more frequent use of hedges compared to authors. This attitude might be attributed to the fact that even though reviewers are believed to be established experts in their fields, they find it more professional to criticize and/or correct authors without being presumptuous. Probably, they find it more professionally prudent to criticise and correct authors without projecting an air of superiority. This is one of the beautiful functions of hedges: they "not only carry the writer's degree of confidence in the truth of a proposition, but also an attitude to the audience" (Hyland, 1998, p. 350).

Genre-based studies of hedges (Myers, 1992; Slaga-Meyer, 1994 & Fahnestock, 1986) as cited in Hyland (2005) highlight an interesting fact: in academic writing, even within the same discipline, the use of hedges is not evenly distributed. More specifically, some genres such as research articles/papers and theses use hedges more than others such as textbooks. A probable reason for such a variation is that unlike authors of research articles, textbook authors do not need to convince an expert audience of a new interpretation or anticipate the consequences of potential inaccuracies, as most claims are presented as established facts (Hyland, 2005, p.103). Similarly, Arzu Ekoç (2008) investigated the use of hedges

in abstracts and found out that because of their determined effort to get acceptance into the scholarly/scientific community, writers of theses and research articles tend to use hedges more frequently than book writers. Therefore, the findings of this study are in line with the findings of the previous genre-based studies of hedges in respect to the discrepancy between the reviewers' and the authors' use of hedges. As mentioned earlier, reviewers' use of more hedges could be attributed to their strategic attempt to make their suggestions and opinions more persuasive and convincing to authors. By employing hedges, reviewers make it clear that the TPR process involves a scholarly dialogue between authors and reviewers as "[c]ategorical assertions leave no room for dialogue and are inherently face-threatening as they suggest that the arguments need no feedback and relegate the reader to a passive role" (Hyland, 2005, 102). That could also explain reviewers' commitment to ensure that authors (who are active intellectual producers of the articles) have not been relegated to a passive subordinate position within the evaluative dialogues.

Furthermore, when it comes to the typological distribution of hedging devices, it is evident that lexical hedges are by far more utilized than strategic hedges although both lexical and strategic hedges were presented in the findings. The vast majority of the hedges are lexical in nature as they are manifest in almost all types of content word classes such as nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. An observation worth mentioning here is that the findings also showed that the use of passive voice tended to be the dominant sentence structures used by the reviewers when they employed strategic hedging, whereas, the authors opted for the active voice structures in their construction of strategic hedges. One plausible explanation for this is that when authors use active voice in their response to reviewers, they tend to show more commitment and own the responsibility of what they have done in terms of implementing the necessary corrections and so forth. It gives them back their agency as the key players without whom reviewers will have nothing to review. Simultaneously, the use of active voice conveys their sense of humility, with the undertone that they are neither above mistake, nor too big to make corrections. By doing so, authors manage to subtly communicate that they acknowledge their fallibility and remain receptive to constructive feedback.

TPR articles reviewers' and authors' use of hedges seemed to be targeted towards achieving one of the five main functional goals namely: 1) asking a question/clarification, 2) offering a suggestion 3) expressing agreement or disagreement, 4) expressing criticism and 5) correcting a mistake. Questions were

usually asked more directly using either modals or wh-structure. Such direct questions of this nature serve their purpose efficiently as they don't give room for any ambiguity. They fit well in the context of scientific/scholarly discussion, which demands more seriousness and formality. Similarly, suggestions were given in a similar fashion using more direct words such as suggestion/suggest: "A suggestion is that author provides...; "recommendation / recommend: "I would recommend authors to structure this section into thematic (sub)headings;" and sometimes with the occasional help of modals, while agreements and disagreements were expressed via numerous structures and word choices. However, with (dis)agreements, the findings make it clear that the use of modal auxiliaries is very rare. The use of lexical/main verbs is largely factive and non-factive; in the same way, adjectives and adverbs are equally common here. Likewise, expressing criticisms was achieved mainly through the use of factive and non-factive verbs: "I can't see a clear connection between these two parts," (factive verb 'see' used in the negative to show disagreement); "I find it quite annoying" (factive verb 'find' & adjective 'annoying' used to show disagreement); "I feel that the text has been carelessly edited" (non-factive verbs 'feel' used to show disagreement); "All the issues I've raised have been sufficiently addressed;" (adjective 'sufficiently' used to express agreement). Finally, mistake corrections were done almost always using the modals as in the following: "The introduction should also be redesigned;" and "...the author may want to improve the transparency of his data analysis..." (should & may).

V. CONCLUSION

As a modest contribution to genre-based research in ESP, this study investigated the use of hedges in a newly established sub-genre, Transparent Peer Review (TPR) which is a relatively new sub-genre of academic writing domain. More specifically, this study investigated the use of hedges in twenty TPR reports in order to explore how the authors and reviewers used hedging in their scholarly exchanges during the review process. The findings revealed that even though both authors and reviewers employ hedging techniques in their correspondence during the TPR process, reviewers use hedges considerably more than authors. Also, lexical hedges are by far more common than strategic hedges while the functions of hedging in the TPR reports that we have analyzed remain the same as their functions in other academic genres such as softening the truth value of the claim, showing the writer's commitment to be a responsible and informed member of the scholarly discourse community, and acknowledging

the active place of one's audience. One limitation of this research is the fact that it did not focus on papers written in any particular research field. Although this approach provided the present research with breadth in terms of covering as many fields as possible, it also means that we can't say much about hedging practices specific to a certain field. Therefore, future research could look from that angle to find out whether reviewers in the hard sciences hedge the same as or differently from those in the humanities?

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The Architecture of Absence: Childhood Trauma, Borderline Personality Disorder, and the Fragmented Narrative in English Literary Representations

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Abstract— This paper investigates the causal link between childhood trauma and the development of borderline personality disorder (BPD), as portrayed through the formal and thematic structures of 20th- and 21st-century English literary representations. By synthesising Marsha Linehan's biosocial theory and Mary Zannarini's multifactorial model with contemporary trauma theory, the analysis elucidates how early environmental invalidation triggers the structural instability of the "fragmented self" (Linehan, 1993; Zannarini, 1997). Moving beyond a broad thematic survey, the study anchors its micro-close reading in a stable theoretical frame to analyse how narrative techniques—such as temporal disjunction, unreliable narration, and somatic metaphors—reflect the cognitive and emotional dimensions of BPD, specifically within the context of Theory of Mind (ToM) deficits (Balaev, 2012). Crucially, the paper theorises that behaviours such as sadomasochistic behaviour are derivative consequences of childhood trauma, functioning as maladaptive re-enactments aimed at achieving mastery over past injury (Freud, 1920). By analysing a justified corpus of five major works, the report establishes the "trauma text" and the practice of scriptotherapy as mimetic equivalents to clinical realities of identity diffusion and emotion dysregulation (Plath, 1963; Kaysen, 1993).



Keywords— Borderline Personality Disorder, Childhood Trauma, Biosocial Theory, Narrative Identity, Fragmented Self, Literary Trauma Theory, Emotion Dysregulation, Sadomasochistic Behaviour, Scriptotherapy, Theory of Mind.

Introduction

This paper investigates the causal link between childhood trauma and the development of borderline personality disorder (BPD), as portrayed through the formal and thematic structures of 20th- and 21st-century English literary representations. By synthesising Marsha Linehan's biosocial theory and Mary Zannarini's multifactorial model with contemporary trauma theory, the analysis elucidates how early environmental invalidation triggers the structural instability of the "fragmented self" (Linehan, 42). This paper moves beyond a broad thematic survey to conduct a critical analysis of representational strategies, focusing on how narrative identity is constructed and deconstructed within a "trauma text" (Balaev, 12). The findings indicate

that these literary representations serve as mimetic depictions of fractured autobiographical reasoning and identity dispersal, where narrative techniques such as temporal disjunction, unreliable narration, and somatic metaphors reflect the cognitive and emotional dimensions of BPD.

At the heart of this inquiry is the sharpened thesis that the structural instability of the borderline self, as portrayed in these texts, is a direct mimetic equivalent to the clinical reality of chronic developmental invalidation. This analysis further theorises that behaviours often framed as "deviant", such as sadomasochism and repetitive self-harm, are not opposed to the trauma narrative but are derivative consequences—adaptive, if dysfunctional, re-enactments

aimed at reclaiming agency over past violations within a controlled framework. By examining the text of Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, Susanna Kaysen's *Girl, Interrupted*; Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*; Hanya Yanagihara's *A Little Life*; and Gillian Flynn's *Sharp Objects*, this report demonstrates that the "trauma text" provides a phenomenological link between clinical diagnostics and the lived experience of emotion dysregulation, social alienation, and the quest for narrative resilience (Yanagihara 2015; Flynn 2006).

Broad theorisation of Trauma: From Universal Disruption to Developmental Injury

To establish a stable theoretical frame, trauma must be defined as an experience that overwhelms an individual's existing defences against anxiety and causes lasting adverse effects on functioning (Garland, 2002). Classical trauma theory posits that trauma is an occurrence that "disrupts consciousness and obstructs direct linguistic expression" (Caruth, 11). Traumatic memories often persist as "unassimilated fixed ideas" that act as foci for alternate states of consciousness, including dissociation and chronic

helplessness (Janet, 75). This results in "belatedness" (Nachträglichkeit), where the trauma returns at a later time because it could not be fully integrated during the event (Caruth, 153).

It is essential to distinguish between adult trauma and childhood trauma to understand the etiology of BPD. Adult trauma, which typically results in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), involves a psychological response to an event that "intrudes" upon a previously stable identity. In contrast, childhood trauma occurs during critical neurobiological development, meaning the trauma often becomes the architect of the self rather than an external intrusion (Zanarini, 1997). While PTSD is often linked to a single catastrophic event and external triggers, BPD involves chronic dysfunction rooted in early environments where internal thoughts and feelings become unpredictable triggers (Linehan, 1993).

The following table differentiates the psychological and narrative consequences of trauma based on the developmental timing of the injury:

Dimension of Impact	Adult Trauma (PTSD)	Childhood Trauma (C-PTSD/BPD)
Identity Structure	Pre-existing stable identity; trauma is an "alien" intrusion.	Identity is formed around or through trauma, resulting in "identity diffusion".
Memory Processing	Flashbacks are specific to the event; narrative coherence may be largely intact elsewhere.	Pervasive atemporality; "fragmented memory" across the life story.
Relational Schemas	May involve fear of specific triggers; attachment is often previously secure.	Fundamental "attachment wounds": fear of abandonment vs. fear of intimacy.
Neurobiology	Impacts a fully developed brain (often affecting the limbic-cortical balance).	Alters the development of the HPA axis, limbic system, and white matter connectivity.
Diagnostic Triggers	Primarily external cues reminiscent of the event.	Primarily internal cues (emotions, thoughts) that are unpredictable.

The Biosocial Framework and the Etiology of the Borderline Self

The primary theoretical framework used to analyse the literary representations in this paper is Marsha Linehan's biosocial theory. This model posits that borderline personality disorder is a disorder of emotional dysregulation that arises from the transactional relationship between a biologically predisposed child and an invalidating developmental environment (Linehan, 42). This biological vulnerability is characterised by three dimensions: heightened sensitivity to emotional stimuli, extreme reactivity (high intensity of response), and a prolonged duration before returning to the emotional baseline.

When this "emotional thin skin" is met with an invalidating environment—where primary carers consistently ignore, ridicule, or punish the child's emotional expressions—the child fails to learn how to label, regulate, or trust their own internal states. This environment "reprograms" the child's head, conveying the message that their emotions are "incorrect" or "manipulative" (Linehan, 1993). The long-term consequence is "self-invalidating", where an adult with BPD views their own feelings as untrustworthy, leading to chronic self-doubt and the "structural instability" of the fragmented self (Linehan, 1993).

Mary Zanarini's multifactorial model supplements this by identifying a wide range of childhood adversities that

contribute to the BPD profile. While childhood sexual abuse (CSA) is highly correlated with BPD (with prevalence rates ranging from 30% to 90%), Zanarini emphasises that no single type of trauma is "necessary or sufficient" for the disorder (Zanarini, 1997). Instead, it is the cumulative effect of emotional abuse, physical neglect, and "caretaker-caused traumatic stressors" that compromises the capacity to regulate affect.

ACE Dimension	Primary BPD Symptom Outcome	Statistical Correlation (r or β)
Emotional Abuse	Affective instability, self-image distortion, fear of abandonment.	$r = 0.788, p < 0.01$
Sexual Abuse	Dissociation, chronic self-harm, and relational distrust.	Significant predictor of dissociation
Physical Abuse	Impulsivity, aggression, relational instability.	Significant predictor of high-risk behaviour
Emotional Neglect	Identity diffusion, chronic emptiness, and alexithymia.	Linked to executive function impairments.
Paternal Invalidation	Relational dysfunction, identity disturbance.	Positive predictor of BPD symptoms

The structural instability of the borderline self is therefore not a random outcome but a neurobiological reality. Trauma-induced changes, such as hyperactivity in the limbic system and diminished activation in the prefrontal cortex, result in a "blind spot" in emotional awareness. This necessitates the use of dissociation and self-harm as survival mechanisms to manage overwhelming, unassimilated affect.

Corpus Selection and Justification

The corpus for this research was selected according to transparent principles of communicative function and internal linguistic mimesis. Each text serves as a representative example of how literary representations mirror the "atemporal modes of existence" and identity diffusion associated with BPD (Plath, 1963; Kaysen, 1993).

1. **Representational Precision:** The chosen texts portrayed characters whose psychological profiles align with specific BPD criteria: identity disturbance, affective instability, and chronic feelings of emptiness.
2. **Formal Innovation:** Selection prioritised works that employ "trauma text" mechanics—temporal disjunction, fragmented chronology, and narrative dissociation—as these devices serve as mimetic equivalents to clinical features (Yanagihara, 2015; Flynn, 2006).
3. **Thematic Depth:** The corpus includes works that explore the "materiality of suffering" (Feminist

Quantitative Correlations of Psychotraumatic Events

In representational strategies, authors often employ specific types of childhood trauma to ground the behavioural manifestations of their characters. Clinical research establishes a "graded dose-response relationship" between these experiences and BPD symptoms:

Disability Theory) (Schalk, 2018), moving beyond metaphors of "madness" towards a grounded depiction of the lived experience of psychiatric disability.

By focusing on these five diverse representations, this paper provides a sustained micro-close reading that connects psychological theory with literary form.

Micro-Close Reading: Sylvia Plath and the Linguistics of Polarised Experience

In Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963), protagonist Esther Greenwood's psychological decline is portrayed as a response to an "invalidating social environment" characterised by the rigid gender roles of the 1950s (Plath 1963). A micro-close reading of Plath's linguistic strategies reveals a statistically significant overuse of polarised, categorical language—words like "always", "never", "everyone", and "nothing". This "black-and-white" thinking is a hallmark of the borderline self (Abrams 2016), reflecting a world viewed in stark contrasts where nuance is lost to the intensity of emotional reactivity.

The 'bell jar' itself serves as the primary metaphor for Esther's dissociative experience. She describes it as a "choking cage of distorted vision"—a glass enclosure that makes the world seem distant and unapproachable (Plath 1963). This metaphor captures the phenomenological experience of "depersonalisation" and "derealisation" that occurs when the self is under extreme stress. Esther's description of her existence as a "bad dream" or her feeling

"stopped as a dead baby" further portrays the "chronic feelings of emptiness" that underpin the BPD identity.

Maternal Invalidation and the Father-Colossus

Esther's trauma is rooted in the "compounding effect" of a mother who fails to validate her creative autonomy and the "tragic bereavement" of her father. Drawing on attachment theory, critics suggest that Esther exhibits "anxious-avoidant attachment" and lacks a "secure base" from which to explore her identity. Her mother's attempts to force her

into shorthand and domestic submissiveness act as a form of environmental invalidation, telling Esther that her true self is "incorrect" (Plath, 125).

The violent representation of electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) administered by Dr Gordon portrays the "violence of psychiatry" as an instrument of control rather than healing (Plath 118). Plath utilises "temporal dislocation" to illustrate how this trauma shatters Esther's sense of linear time, leaving her "stewing in her own sour air" under the bell jar.

BPD Criterion in Esther Greenwood	Narrative Manifestation	Underlying Trauma/Trigger
Self-Harm / Suicidality	Repetitive attempts; "matter-of-fact" descriptions.	Social failure; inability to reconcile the "fig tree".
Identity Disturbance	"I felt very still and very empty"; "I didn't know who I was."	Loss of the "Father-Colossus"; maternal submissiveness.
Affective Instability	Rapid shifts between cynical humour and despair.	Pressure to conform to NYC social worlds.
Dissociative States	The "bell jar" metaphor: feelings of unreality.	Brutal, empathy-free ECT and invalidating doctors.

Fragmentation and Scriptotherapy in Susanna Kaysen's *Girl, Interrupted*

Susanna Kaysen's memoir *Girl, Interrupted* (1993) utilises representational strategies that emphasise the "fragmentation of the self". The memoir is constructed from thirty-four short, non-linear sections that do not follow a traditional chronological path. This "non-linear flow of time" is an act of "cognitive and emotional disorientation" that mirrors the "temporal fragmentation" experienced by those with BPD (Kaysen, 1993). Kaysen employs the "parallel universe" as a spatial metaphor for the psychiatric hospital (McLean), describing it as a space that exists

alongside "normal" life but has its own rules of behaviour. This heterotopia serves as both a "prison" of entrapment and a "refuge" of order, where the girls are "stripped down to the bare bones of themselves" (Kaysen, 1993), exacerbating the "impoverished self-image" that is central to BPD. A critical element of Kaysen's narrative is "scriptotherapy"—the act of writing her own story and including her real medical records to reclaim her identity from clinical labels (Kaysen, 1993). She challenges the BPD diagnosis, asserting that it connotes "culpability" (in contrast to "blameless" schizophrenia), and thereby contests the societal stigma that pathologizes her rejection of 1960s domestic norms.

BPD Feature in <i>Girl, Interrupted</i>	Narrative Expression	Therapeutic/Critical Interpretation
Dissociation	The "parallel universe" metaphor.	Dissociation as a "heterotopia of crisis".
Unstable Relationships	"Frantic efforts" to avoid abandonment by boyfriends.	Relational instability as "thwarted communion"
Identity Diffusion	Ambivalence toward the BPD label.	Search for agency through scriptotherapy.
Chronic Emptiness	Struggle with "boredom and emptiness".	Emptiness as a "lack of integrating structure".

Colonial Erasure and Tertiary Dissociation in *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) portrays the protagonist, Antoinette Cosway, as a victim of "intergenerational trauma" and "cultural dislocation"

(Rhys, 1966). Her early life in Jamaica is marked by "multiple adversities" (MA), including the death of her father and the violent burning of her family's estate. This "profound isolation"—as a white Creole who belongs to neither the Black community nor white English society—

acts as a deep form of environmental trauma that prevents the formation of a "coherent personal narrative".

Rochester acts as the "final invalidating trauma" through psychological destruction: he renames her Bertha, an act of "identity erasure" that cuts her off from her history (Rhys, 1966). This "gaslighting" leads to Antoinette's descent into

"blankness", which serves as a literary depiction of "tertiary dissociation"—where the personality fragments into distinct identities to manage overwhelming experiences. The novel's "stream-of-consciousness" style "meanders through her various traumas", mimicking the disarray of a mind that has lost its temporal anchor.

Colonial Trauma Factor	Clinical BPD Parallel	Narrative / Symbolic Result
Burning of Coulibri	Sudden, violent psychotrauma.	Nightmares and intrusive flashbacks.
Intergenerational Madness	Maternal psychopathology.	"'Splitting' (inability to integrate self-representations).
Patriarchal Objectification	Environmental invalidation.	"Loss of agency; becoming a 'shell'.
Spatial Displacement	Social isolation / Relocation.	The "madwoman in the attic" persona.

Theorising Sadomasochistic Behaviour as a Derivative of Trauma: *A Little Life*

Hanya Yanagihara's *A Little Life* (2015) provides a sustained analysis of the "unrelenting nature" of trauma through Jude St Francis (Yanagihara, 2015). This paper theorises that Jude's adult behaviours—including chronic self-harm and sadomasochistic behaviour—are derivative consequences of his unrelenting childhood abuse (Yanagihara, 2015).

Psychoanalytic theory explains these behaviours through the "compulsion to repeat"—an unconscious attempt to "take control of the trauma and master it" (Freud). By recreating the dynamics of abuse within a consensual (if harmful) framework, the individual seeks "retroactive control" over a past situation of total helplessness (Yanagihara, 2015). Jude's self-harm is a "release mechanism" and a routine to attain agency, though it ultimately fails to erase past violations (Yanagihara, 2015).

Technique	Narrative Function	Clinical/Theoretical Correlation
Delayed Responses	Information is withheld, then released in bursts.	Caruth's theory of trauma resurfacing later.
Non-Linear Plot	Chronology is shattered to create reader confusion.	Mimics the "shattering" of the victim's identity.
Mosaic Style	Backstory is revealed in small, unpredictable fragments.	Reflects the disarray of memory and reflection.

Maternal Toxicity and the Materiality of Suffering in *Sharp Objects*

Gillian Flynn's *Sharp Objects* (2006) offers a sustained micro-close reading of "maternal invalidation" through the character of Adora Crellin. Adora's behaviour is marked by "enmeshment, emotional withdrawal, and factitious caregiving" (Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy). The protagonist Camille Preaker's self-harm—carving words

like "wicked" into her skin—is a literal act of "materiality suffering", where the body becomes a "site of scriptotherapy" (Flynn, 2006). These words represent "labels that stick" in an invalidating environment, becoming internal "intrusive thoughts" that must be externalised for Camille to feel "free" of them. Her body is the "battleground for intimacies", and her scars indicate both her survival and the "inadequate processing" of her history.

BPD Manifestation in Camille	Narrative Evidence	Clinical Correlation
Recurrent Self-Harm	Carving words like "wicked" into her skin.	Skin as a site of "mastery and resistance".
Identity Disturbance	"Quiet BPD"; lacks self-insight; lacks a self.	"Unstable sense of self" due to maternal neglect.
Impulsivity	Alcohol misuse; risky sexual behaviour.	Impulsiveness as a means of "emotion regulation".
Fear of Abandonment	Longing for Adora's love; distress when ignored.	Frantic efforts to avoid "real or imagined rejection".
Dissociation	Hallucinations; feeling "spaced out".	Transient, stress-related dissociative symptoms.

Adora's "transactional" approach to motherhood—where Camille's needs are met with neglect or injury—portrays the "generational trauma" that transforms the "nurturing mother" into a "monstrous" figure. The novel's use of sensory-cue flashbacks "erases time", mixing past and present in a "trauma-informed temporality" (Flynn, 2006).

Narrative Resilience and the Theory of Mind

The "narrative unreliability" of characters like Esther, Susanna, Antoinette, Jude, and Camille is not just a stylistic trope but a "cognitive necessity". Clinical research shows that individuals with BPD have trouble with "mentalising"—the ability to imagine how others see them. This results in a "blind spot" in emotional awareness (alexithymia), which is portrayed in literature through the "unreliable narrator" whose story is shaped by "subjective bias, omission, or mental aberration".

The reader's function in these representations is to undergo a "reception shift", rethinking reactions that seem natural and becoming a "witness" to the protagonist's "thwarted agency". Through "scriptotherapy", characters attempt to reclaim their agency, rewriting their life stories according to their perceptions of identity. This act of witnessing reinstates a sense of action, offering a path for "narrative resilience" even when the characters' fates remain tragic.

Conclusion: The Architecture of Absence and the Quest for Coherence

Borderline Personality Disorder is portrayed in these literary representations as a "disorder of temporality and selfhood" rooted in the "architecture of absence" (Zanarini, 1997). The structural instability of the borderline self is mimetically equivalent to the cognitive reality of a brain altered by chronic developmental trauma (Linehan, 1993; Caruth, 1996). By framing behaviours like sadomasochistic behaviour as derivative consequences of trauma aimed at mastery, we can empathically comprehend the identity negotiation that defines the "trauma text" (Freud, 1920). The literary analysis of these five protagonists, combined with clinical data on childhood trauma, reveals a profound "phenomenological congruence". Borderline Personality Disorder is portrayed not merely as a compilation of symptoms but as a "disorder of temporality and selfhood" rooted in the "architecture of absence".

The sharpened thesis of this paper establishes the following:

1. **Representational Mimicry:** Literary techniques such as "shattering" chronologies and "mosaic" styles are mimetic equivalents to the cognitive reality of a brain altered by developmental trauma.
2. **Invalidating Genesis:** The biosocial frame (Linehan) and multifactorial model (Zanarini)

provide a stable theoretical foundation for understanding the "structural instability" of characters like Esther Greenwood and Camille Preaker.

3. **Derivative Sadomasochism:** "Deviant" behaviours such as sadomasochism and self-harm are derivative consequences of trauma—adaptive attempts at "mastery" and "re-enactment" in response to feelings of helplessness.
4. **Narrative as Testimony:** The "trauma text" serves as a medium for "narrative resilience", where the act of "witnessing" suffering through scriptotherapy challenges psychiatric authority and reclaims agency for the "fragmented self".

By examining these literary representations through a rigorous methodological framework, we can transcend stigmatising labels and attain profound, empathic understanding of the "pain and identity negotiation" that characterises the borderline self (Smith, 14).

Current trends in trauma theory, metacognition, and clinical insight into borderline personality disorder (BPD) and narrative integration suggest the following recommendations for future research.

1. Metacognition and Narrative Agency in Integration

Future research should move beyond the Caruthian model (where trauma is "unspeakable" and "unassimilated") to explore how literary form represents metacognition, the ability to contemplate one's own mental states (Cutlip et al., 2023).

Objective: To examine the process of changing BPD characters from "fragmented" to "integrated" narratives through self-reflection.

Focus: Explore whether literary techniques (e.g., metalepsis or stream of consciousness) function as an analogue to the mastery stage of metacognition in trauma recovery (Zhai & Du, 2024).

2. Neurobiological Realism in Criticism of Literature

There's a big difference between "clinical BPD" and "literary BPD". Research should explore how recent findings in epigenetics and the HPA axis may be represented metaphorically or structurally within fiction (PMC, 2017).

Objective: To bridge the gap between the "biological" and "psychosocial" representations of trauma.

Focus: Examine the correspondence between the "Architecture of Absence" (narrative gaps) and the biological phenomenon of dissociation and diminished body ownership in BPD patients (PMC, 2022).

3. Intersectionality's Fragmentations: Trauma Beyond the Western Canon

Most studies on BPD and fragmented narratives are based on Western, English-speaking literature. Further research should examine the intersections between collective trauma (colonialism, war, and systemic oppression) and individual BPD symptomatology in postcolonial literature (Harihara Sudhan & Sanjaykumar, 2025).

Goal: To de-stigmatise BPD as a “Western” or “individualistic” pathology.

Focus: Investigate the impact of “unintentional trauma” (e.g., natural disasters or displacement) and childhood maltreatment on narrative cohesion in non-Western texts (Asati, 2026).

4. The Reader as Witness: Second-hand Trauma and Ethics

The research could shift from the text to the psychology of the reader. The reader’s experience of a fragmented, “absent” narrative may lead to vicarious trauma or “narrative exhaustion” (Asati, 2026).

Purpose: To apply affect theory to the emotional labour of reading BPD-focused narratives.

Focus: Apply reader-response theory to explore whether fragmented structures cultivate empathy or, alternatively, reinforce the stigma and “unreliability” typically linked to BPD (PMC, 2026).

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Psychological Resistance in the Works of Toni Morrison

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Abstract— This paper examines the theme of psychological resistance in the novels of Toni Morrison, arguing that Morrison redefines resistance not merely as physical rebellion against oppression but as an internal struggle for selfhood, memory, healing, and emotional survival. Through characters who confront racial trauma, gendered violence, historical erasure, and internalized oppression, Morrison portrays psychological resistance as an enduring process of reclaiming identity within dehumanizing social systems. Focusing primarily on *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, *Beloved*, and *God Help the Child*, this paper explores how Morrison's characters resist domination through memory, silence, self-definition, emotional endurance, and communal healing. Drawing upon trauma theory, psychoanalytic criticism, and Black feminist thought, the study demonstrates that Morrison transforms the psychological scars of slavery, racism, and patriarchy into spaces of resistance and recovery. Morrison's fiction ultimately suggests that survival itself becomes an act of resistance when Black individuals refuse complete psychological submission to oppressive structures.

Keywords— Psychological Resistance, Trauma, Memory, Black Identity, Internalized Racism, Healing, Black Feminism, Psychological Survival.



I. INTRODUCTION

Toni Morrison occupies a central place in African American literature because of her profound exploration of Black identity, memory, trauma, and resistance. Her novels move beyond conventional narratives of political rebellion and instead examine the invisible psychological battles fought by Black individuals in racist and patriarchal societies. Morrison repeatedly demonstrates that oppression functions not only through physical violence but also through psychological domination. Racism infiltrates the mind, distorts self-perception, destroys emotional stability, and fragments identity. Her fiction therefore focuses intensely on the inner lives of her characters and the psychological consequences of historical trauma.

Morrison's work reveals that slavery and racism continue to survive through memory, inherited trauma, silence, shame, and internalized self-hatred. Yet alongside this suffering, her novels also portray acts of psychological resistance. These acts are often subtle rather than overtly political. Characters resist by preserving memory, refusing imposed

identities, reclaiming ancestral connections, asserting emotional autonomy, or reconstructing fractured selves. Morrison's protagonists struggle against forces that seek to erase their humanity, and this struggle becomes the foundation of psychological resistance.

Psychological resistance in Morrison's fiction can therefore be understood as the effort to protect or recover one's sense of self in the face of racial, social, and historical violence. Her characters endure trauma, yet they continuously seek healing and self-definition. Morrison's novels challenge dominant narratives that reduce Black people to victims by emphasizing emotional endurance, psychological complexity, and cultural memory. As critics have observed, Morrison frequently explores "the social construction of race and its effect on the psyche."

This paper examines how Morrison develops psychological resistance in *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, *Beloved*, and *God Help the Child*. Through these novels, Morrison reveals that psychological survival itself becomes a radical form of

resistance against systems designed to destroy Black identity.

II. PSYCHOLOGICAL RESISTANCE AND TRAUMA IN *THE BLUEST EYE*

The *Bluest Eye* presents one of Morrison's most devastating explorations of psychological destruction under racist beauty standards. The novel centers on Pecola Breedlove, a young Black girl who internalizes white ideals of beauty and believes that possessing blue eyes will make her lovable and visible. Morrison demonstrates how racism operates psychologically by convincing Black individuals to despise their own bodies and identities.

Pecola's tragedy emerges from internalized racism. She does not openly rebel against the structures that oppress her because those structures have already colonized her consciousness. Her desire for blue eyes symbolizes the psychological violence of white supremacy. Morrison reveals that the most dangerous effect of racism is not physical exclusion alone but the destruction of self-worth. Critics have noted that the novel portrays "racialized beauty hierarchies" and "fragile identities" produced by systemic oppression.

However, Morrison also presents forms of psychological resistance through characters such as Claudia MacTeer. Unlike Pecola, Claudia questions white beauty standards and resists cultural conditioning. When she destroys white dolls given to her as toys, she symbolically rejects the ideology that defines whiteness as beautiful and blackness as inferior. Claudia's resistance is psychological because she refuses mental submission to racist values. Her refusal to admire white dolls represents an effort to preserve her own identity against cultural indoctrination.

The novel also demonstrates how silence functions as both oppression and resistance. Pecola's silence reflects trauma and marginalization, but Claudia's narration becomes an act of witnessing. By telling Pecola's story, Claudia resists the erasure of Black suffering. Morrison thereby transforms storytelling into psychological resistance against historical forgetting.

III. FEMALE AUTONOMY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL RESISTANCE IN *SULA*

Sula examines psychological resistance through the character of Sula Peace, who refuses traditional expectations imposed upon Black women. Unlike the women in her community who conform to socially accepted roles of wifehood and motherhood, Sula seeks personal freedom and self-definition. Her resistance lies in her rejection of patriarchal norms and communal expectations.

Sula's individuality threatens her community because she refuses psychological conformity. Morrison portrays her as a woman who insists on living according to her own desires rather than submitting to restrictive moral codes. Although the community condemns her, Sula's refusal to surrender her autonomy becomes an act of resistance against social structures that seek to define Black women solely through sacrifice and obedience.

The friendship between Sula and Nel also reflects Morrison's exploration of psychological survival. Nel initially conforms to societal expectations, yet she later realizes that conformity has not provided emotional fulfillment. Through her grief after Sula's death, Nel recognizes the emotional repression that shaped her life. Morrison suggests that resistance sometimes requires confronting painful truths about oneself and one's complicity within oppressive systems.

The novel therefore portrays psychological resistance as the struggle for authentic identity. Morrison challenges patriarchal definitions of morality by presenting Sula's rebellion not simply as selfishness but as a refusal to accept psychological imprisonment.

IV. MEMORY, TRAUMA, AND RESISTANCE IN *BELOVED*

Beloved remains Morrison's most powerful exploration of trauma and psychological resistance. The novel examines the enduring psychological scars of slavery through Sethe, a formerly enslaved woman haunted by memories of violence and loss. Morrison portrays slavery not merely as a historical institution but as a psychological condition that continues to shape identity long after physical liberation.

Sethe's trauma manifests through fragmented memories, fear, guilt, and emotional isolation. The ghost Beloved symbolizes the return of repressed trauma and the inability to escape the past. Morrison demonstrates how traumatic memory disrupts psychological stability, forcing individuals to relive pain repeatedly. Scholars have emphasized that *Beloved* explores "the psychological scars left by slavery" and the intrusion of traumatic memory into everyday life.

Yet Morrison also portrays resistance through memory itself. Sethe's act of remembering becomes painful but necessary. Morrison rejects the idea that healing can occur through forgetting. Instead, the novel insists that confronting historical trauma is essential for reclaiming identity. The concept of "rememory" reflects Morrison's belief that suppressed histories continue to shape the present.

Sethe's controversial act of killing her child can also be interpreted as a distorted form of resistance. She refuses to allow her daughter to be consumed by slavery's violence. Morrison does not justify the act, but she reveals how slavery destroys conventional moral structures and forces impossible choices upon Black mothers.

Most importantly, *Beloved* ends with communal healing. Denver's movement outward into the community and the collective intervention of Black women suggest that psychological resistance requires collective support. Morrison emphasizes that trauma isolates individuals, while healing emerges through shared memory and communal solidarity.

V. PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALING AND RESISTANCE IN *GOD HELP THE CHILD*

God Help the Child explores the lasting psychological effects of childhood trauma, colorism, and emotional neglect. The protagonist Bride grows up feeling rejected by her mother because of her dark skin. Morrison examines how racial prejudice becomes internalized within Black communities themselves, producing deep emotional wounds.

Bride's psychological struggle reflects Morrison's continuing concern with identity formation under racist standards of beauty. Bride initially constructs her identity through external appearance and material success, yet beneath this confidence lies unresolved trauma. Critics have argued that the novel explores "internalised racism" and the psychological consequences of colorism.

Psychological resistance in the novel emerges through the Bride's gradual confrontation with her past. Morrison suggests that healing requires acknowledging emotional wounds rather than masking them. Bride's journey becomes one of self-recognition and emotional vulnerability. By confronting childhood trauma, she resists the emotional repression imposed by social expectations.

The novel also emphasizes self-love as resistance. Morrison challenges beauty standards that privilege whiteness and demonstrates the importance of accepting Black identity without apology. Bride's emotional transformation signifies a rejection of externally imposed definitions of worth.

VI. MORRISON'S REIMAGINING OF RESISTANCE

Across her novels, Toni Morrison expands the meaning of resistance beyond political rebellion or physical confrontation. Her fiction reveals that oppression functions psychologically by shaping consciousness, memory, and

self-perception. Consequently, resistance must also occur within the psyche.

Morrison's characters resist through storytelling, memory, self-definition, emotional endurance, and communal healing. Silence, often interpreted as weakness, becomes a complex form of survival. Memory, though painful, becomes essential for reclaiming identity. Morrison repeatedly demonstrates that survival itself is political because oppressive systems seek not only to dominate Black bodies but also to destroy Black minds.

Her work also critiques the psychological effects of internalized racism. Characters such as Pecola and Bride reveal how oppressive beauty standards produce self-hatred and emotional fragmentation. Yet Morrison simultaneously portrays characters who challenge these standards and recover alternative understandings of Black identity and beauty.

Furthermore, Morrison's emphasis on community highlights the collective nature of psychological resistance. Healing rarely occurs in isolation within her fiction. Instead, emotional recovery depends upon shared memory, cultural continuity, and communal recognition.

VII. CONCLUSION

Toni Morrison transforms psychological suffering into a profound site of resistance within African American literature. Her novels reveal that racism, slavery, patriarchy, and historical violence operate not only through physical oppression but also through psychological domination. Morrison's characters experience trauma, fragmentation, silence, and internalized self-hatred, yet they continually struggle toward healing, self-definition, and emotional survival.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison exposes the devastating psychological consequences of racist beauty standards while presenting resistance through Claudia's refusal to internalize white ideals. In *Sula*, psychological resistance emerges through female autonomy and the rejection of patriarchal conformity. In *Beloved*, Morrison demonstrates that confronting traumatic memory becomes necessary for healing and reclaiming humanity. In *God Help the Child*, she reveals how emotional recovery and self-love challenge the enduring effects of colorism and childhood trauma.

Morrison's greatest achievement lies in her redefinition of resistance itself. Resistance in her fiction is often quiet, internal, and deeply emotional. It appears in acts of remembering, storytelling, self-preservation, and communal healing. Her novels insist that maintaining one's humanity under oppressive systems is itself a radical act. Morrison therefore shifts attention from external rebellion

to the psychological dimensions of survival, demonstrating that the battle for freedom begins within the mind.

Through her exploration of trauma and recovery, Morrison gives voice to histories that the dominant culture attempted to erase. Her fiction becomes an act of literary resistance that restores dignity, complexity, and psychological depth to Black experience. Ultimately, Morrison's work affirms that even within the deepest suffering, the human spirit continues to resist annihilation.

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Colonisation of Woman's Body: An Analysis of Anita Nair's novel "Eating Wasps"

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Abstract— This paper analyses the colonisation of woman's body in *Eating Wasps* by Anita Nair with special reference to patriarchy, sexuality, gender oppression and bodily autonomy. Anita Nair presents the emotional and psychological struggles of women living in a male-dominated society where female sexuality is suppressed, controlled and condemned through rigid cultural codes. The novel portrays how patriarchal structures attempt to dominate women physically, emotionally and psychologically by reducing them to objects of desire and instruments of male pleasure. The study examines the experiences of various women characters such as Urvasi, Sreelakshmi, Najma, Megha and Theresa, whose lives reveal the multiple forms of violence inflicted upon the female body. Women who express their desires openly are marginalised and humiliated by society, whereas men escape social condemnation even after exploiting women emotionally and physically. Sreelakshmi's tragic relationship with Markose exposes the selfishness and hypocrisy of patriarchal morality where women become victims of male desire and abandonment. Similarly, the sexual assault of Megha and the acid attack on Najma reveal how brutal masculine power seeks to control and punish women who attempt to assert their individuality and freedom. Further, the paper explores how women themselves become instruments of domination within patriarchal culture. Characters like Theresa attempt to possess and control others through jealousy and emotional violence, thereby demonstrating that colonisation of the body operates at multiple levels within society. Drawing upon Luce Irigaray concept of bodily autonomy, the paper argues that women must reclaim ownership of their bodies and resist patriarchal structures that commodify female sexuality. The paper concludes that Anita Nair exposes the emotional trauma, exploitation and dehumanisation experienced by women in contemporary society while simultaneously celebrating the female body as a source of identity, power and selfhood. Through her women characters, Nair advocates the liberation of women from oppressive cultural ideologies and emphasises the need for bodily freedom, dignity and equality.



Keywords— Autonomy, Condemned, Dignity, Equality, Patriarchal, Sexual assault, Selfhood

I. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Indian women's writing largely focuses on the problems faced by women in patriarchal society where gender discrimination, emotional suppression and bodily exploitation continue to shape female existence. Women writers attempt to expose the invisible structures of domination that reduce women to passive objects within domestic and social spaces. Among the prominent contemporary Indian novelists, Anita Nair occupies an

important place for her bold exploration of female psychology, sexuality and identity. Her novels portray women who struggle to negotiate freedom, individuality and emotional fulfilment within oppressive cultural systems. *Eating Wasps* is a significant feminist novel that examines the complexities of womanhood, bodily desire and patriarchal violence in modern society. The novel presents the interconnected lives of several women who attempt to assert control over their bodies and emotions in

a culture that constantly seeks to regulate female sexuality. In traditional patriarchal society, woman's body is treated as property controlled by men through social norms, moral codes and cultural restrictions. Female desire is often silenced and condemned, whereas male sexuality is accepted and normalised. Anita Nair challenges these double standards by presenting women characters who openly express their bodily desires, frustrations and emotional needs.

II. COLONISATION OF WOMEN'S BODY

The novel also explores the psychological consequences of bodily oppression. Women are frequently made to internalise shame, guilt and fear regarding their own bodies and desires. At the same time, Nair portrays women who challenge silence and reclaim their individuality despite suffering trauma and social rejection. The female body in the novel becomes a site of struggle where issues of power, identity, sexuality and resistance intersect. Further, the paper draws theoretical support from Luce Irigaray ideas on the female body and bodily autonomy. Irigaray argues that women must reclaim ownership of their bodies instead of allowing patriarchal society to define female identity and sexuality. Her feminist perspective becomes relevant in analysing the experiences of Nair's women characters who struggle against cultural and masculine domination. This paper attempts to analyse how Anita Nair portrays the colonisation of woman's body through patriarchy, violence, emotional exploitation and cultural restrictions. It further examines how women resist bodily oppression and attempt to reclaim dignity, freedom and selfhood within a society that seeks to silence and control them.

In the traditional ambience, only man's sensuous feelings are given importance. Woman's sexuality is much forbidden in the patriarchal society. The male-dominated society has framed many taboos and restrictions for women. By curtailing woman's freedom of expression, man wants to dominate over woman's body. Mostly woman characters remain mute as the society expects them to be silent. But Nair's women carve their own space in order to communicate their emotions. Modern women have to pay a heavy price for violating the established cultural codes. Brutal, egoistic men can never fulfil the senses of women. As a result, there is domestic disharmony. When a woman walks out of the restricted space, she encounters terrible consequences.

III. MODERN WOMEN

Modern women are allured by many traps. A journalist called Urvasi is a sensuous woman. In the domestic realm, she is not provided with mutual love and respect as there is no mutual rapport between husband and wife. Hence she enters into a relationship with an anonymous man. Then she is disappointed in this illegal love affair. Nair discusses about the emotional turbulence of modern women and her strife between her bodily senses and the destructive masculine world. Sreelakshmi is a spinster who expresses her sexual desires frankly. Markose, a married man meets her and they develop passionate love. Soon after the consummation of their body desires, he walks out of her life. It is because, he being a christian priest, develops guilty feelings after committing adultery. Out of fear, he refuses to look back leaving Sreelakshmi in despair. Nair shows how such selfish men are not capable of facing the consequences of their adulterous relationship. Sreelakshmi is vexed after this unfortunate incident and pours out her feelings thus : "My Lands were clammy. I tried not to think of his face, of the wild abandon as it loomed over mine. The dilated pupils, the slackening mouth, the arched neck, the short bursts of breath, his sweat on my breasts, a drop landing on my lips. The salt of his sex" (242). The reckless venture of a Zoology lecturer Sreelakshmi lands her in great tragedy. Though she is aware of many lusty men in her life as a writer, she runs into an affair with a married priest. She confesses the deep desire in her thus; "My madness told me what to do. I wouldn't go to the wasps. I would make them come to me. But to him, I would go again and again. My desire was insatiable. My sex thrummed like it never had before. My madness was such." (226). Sreelakshmi's stories are disgusted by everyone including her mother and relatives as they expose woman's sexual emotions. Woman's sexuality is a taboo and the society does not approve of such a sensuous woman, who openly writes about her sexuality.

In the case of Sreelakshmi, her illegal passion wrecked her. Love has been utilised as a bait to catch a woman and enjoy her body for a brief moment. Sreelakshmi confesses that she " had been a conquest, a trophy, a way of redeeming his self esteem" (243). The intensity of her love has frightened the insincere coward Markose. For him his honour is more important than her passionate love. The suicide of Sreelakshmi does not disturb the coward Markose as women are treated as sex objects rather than human beings.

Brande Patil is a shuttle cock player. who is always a winner. Due to her obsession with her game, she has lost her feminine feelings. Her body has become masculine,

and so she feels an emptiness forming within her. Unable to gratify her senses, she resigns her career and enters into life as life is more important than popularity.

Even children are sexually assaulted by brutal men. One such victim is Megha who is sexually abused by an adult male who allures her with his honeyed words. Though the child addresses him as 'uncle', he views her as a sex object. Finally what she considered as a honey bee has turned out to be a wasp and the child is brutally molested by the oldman in a school van. As a rape victim, She is labeled as 'damaged goods'.

Man attempts to colonise woman's body in the guise of love. Most of the men characters are cold, indifferent and insincere. They escape from physicality of their love. They reject body senses in favour of power and social states. Like a property, they attempt to colonise woman's body.

Najma wants to elevate her social status by employing herself as a school teacher. Her mother works as a cook and supports her to realise her dream. Unfortunately, Najma's face has been ravaged by acid thrown at her face by a violent, brutal man whose love proposal is rejected by Najma. Instead of hiding her wounded face, she exhibits it in public without wearing burkha. She struggles to maintain her self respect and claims her identity as a woman.

Woman's possessive nature turns her into a cruel monster. Theresa's husband Anto has been attracted to Molly, the younger sister of Theresa. It arouses the jealousy of Theresa. Following Anto's death, she takes revenge on her sister who feeds her by her hard labour. Thus the love expected from her sister is not reciprocated by Theresa. Molly has no guilt feelings about her illegal affair with her sister's husband. She justifies her adultery as it made Anto happy. The characters are justified of their body claims, though it is seen as sin in the point of view of others.

IV. FINDINGS

Women are not allowed to choose their individual life. They are oppressed by cultural codes framed by crooked men who wish to colonise woman's bodies. Rape is a great damage done to the female body. It kills the lively spirit of a woman and her future becomes bleak. Not only man tries to colonise woman's body, but woman like Theresa also is determined to keep her husband under her control. Thus colonisation of other's body occurs in every culture. In "Bodily Encounter with the Mother", Luce Irigaray speaks about the value of woman's body;

It is important for us to guard and keep our bodies at the same time make them emerge from silence and subjugation. Historically we are the guardians of the flesh; we don't have to abandon that guardianship, but to identify it as ours by inviting men not to make us 'their bodies, guarantors of their bodies' (439).

These lines imply that women should have awareness about the value of their bodies. It should not be enslaved by crooked men or patriarchal ideologies. Anita Nair celebrates the woman's body as a prime source of life and procreation.

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Echoes of Feminist Existentialism in Jean-Paul Sartre's Intimacy

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Abstract— This paper examines the intersections of existential philosophy and feminist thought in Jean-Paul Sartre's short story "Intimacy". Drawing upon the philosophical frameworks of Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and other key theorists, the study explores how the narrative reflects themes of freedom, identity, and the condition of woman as the 'Other.' Through an analytical approach, the paper investigates the psychological and existential struggles of the female characters, particularly Lulu, highlighting the tension between autonomy and social conditioning. It further argues that while Sartre's work does not explicitly engage with feminist discourse, Beauvoirian influence is evident in its portrayal of gendered experience. The paper concludes that "Intimacy" offers a subtle yet significant engagement with existential feminism, revealing the complex dynamics between embodiment, freedom, and identity.



Keywords— Existentialism, Feminism, Sartre, Beauvoir, Intimacy

I. INTRODUCTION

"If I became a philosopher... it was all been to seduce women basically" (Sartre). The remark, often read as ironic or provocative, opens up a compelling entry point into the philosophical and interpersonal complexities that shape Jean-Paul Sartre's understanding of human relations, particularly within the domain of intimacy.

According to Martin Heidegger, intimacy may be understood as "a state of intense belongingness which arises from a meaningful connection or mutual dependence... [and] cannot be reduced to emotional experience" (Wrathall, 2021, pp. 429–430). Rather than implying fusion or the dissolution of difference, intimacy, in this sense, marks a dynamic coexistence of alterity and proximity. This philosophical framing becomes crucial in examining Sartre's treatment of interpersonal relationships, where intimacy is frequently entangled with conflict, ambiguity, and the instability of selfhood.

In *Intimacy*, included in *The Wall* (1939), Sartre interrogates the Cartesian assumption that emotions transparently reveal inner truths (Sartre, 2018). The narrative demonstrates how characters act in bad faith, unable to distinguish between genuine feeling and socially

conditioned sentiment (Sartre, 2021). Through the character of Lulu, the text foregrounds the tension between freedom and self-deception, exposing the fragility of human relationships when confronted with existential choice.

While the story does not explicitly situate itself within feminist discourse, its thematic concerns invite a reading through the lens of Existential Feminism. The influence of Simone de Beauvoir is particularly significant in this regard. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir articulates the condition of woman as the "Other," a concept that resonates with Lulu's constrained agency and internal conflict (Beauvoir, 2015). Her experiences can thus be understood not merely as individual psychological struggles but as reflections of a broader gendered condition shaped by social expectations and existential limitations.

Furthermore, the intellectual and personal proximity between Sartre and Beauvoir complicates any attempt to treat their philosophies as entirely distinct. Their collaborative engagement with questions of freedom, embodiment, and subjectivity suggests a shared conceptual terrain in which existential and feminist concerns intersect. In this context, *Intimacy* may be read as a literary site where

these intersections are implicitly negotiated, particularly through its representation of female subjectivity.

This paper examines how Sartre's *Intimacy* anticipates a feminist existential critique by revealing the gendered limitations of freedom within intimate relationships. By analyzing the characters of Lulu and Rirette, it aims to uncover the underlying structures of gendered experience embedded within the text. In doing so, the study attempts to bridge existential philosophy and feminist theory, demonstrating how *Intimacy* offers a nuanced exploration of freedom, identity, and the politics of intimacy.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between Existentialism and feminist thought has been widely explored, particularly in relation to questions of subjectivity, freedom, and identity. While Jean-Paul Sartre emphasizes individual autonomy, later feminist critiques reveal the limitations of this seemingly universal subject.

A central contribution to this discourse is made by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (Beauvoir, 2015), where she conceptualizes woman as the "Other." This challenges the neutrality of existential subjectivity by demonstrating how women's identities are shaped in relation to patriarchal structures.

The philosophical understanding of relational existence is further informed by Martin Heidegger's notion of "being-with" (Wrathall, 2021) which highlights that intimacy involves both connection and the persistence of difference. Feminist theorists such as Luce Irigaray extend this critique by exposing the phallogocentric foundations of Western thought, while Judith Butler reconceptualises gender as a performative construct (Butler, 2006).

Scholars like Rosemarie Tong situate existential feminism within a broader theoretical framework (Tong, 1989), emphasising Beauvoir's role in bridging existential and feminist thought. Additionally, critical perspectives such as those of Saunak Samajdar highlight how structures of knowledge and intimacy are shaped by gendered exclusions (Samajdar, 2006).

Despite these contributions, limited attention has been given to the intersection of existentialism and feminist thought within Sartre's literary works. This study addresses this gap by examining how *Intimacy* reflects and negotiates these theoretical concerns through its representation of female subjectivity.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative and analytical research methodology, grounded in close textual analysis. The primary text under consideration is *The Wall*, with particular focus on the short story *Intimacy*. The analysis is conducted through a theoretical framework that brings together Existentialism and Existential Feminism.

The study relies on interpretative reading strategies to examine how philosophical concepts such as freedom, bad faith, and being-for-itself operate within the narrative structure and characterisation. These concepts are primarily drawn from the works of Jean-Paul Sartre, particularly *Being and Nothingness* (Sartre, 2021), and are further examined in relation to the feminist critique articulated by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (Beauvoir, 2015).

Secondary sources, including critical essays and theoretical texts, are used to support and contextualise the analysis. The methodology is thus both analytical and comparative, as it seeks to identify conceptual overlaps and tensions between Sartrean existentialism and Beauvoirian feminism.

Rather than employing empirical or quantitative methods, the study emphasises interpretative depth, focusing on character analysis, thematic patterns, and philosophical implications within the text. This approach enables a nuanced understanding of how gendered subjectivity and existential conflict are represented in *Intimacy*, particularly through the experiences of the female characters Lulu and Rirette.

IV. RESULTS

The analysis reveals that *Intimacy* presents a complex representation of freedom that is deeply entangled with psychological conflict and social conditioning. While Sartrean philosophy posits freedom as an inherent and unavoidable condition of human existence (Sartre, 2021), the narrative demonstrates that such freedom is experienced as both burden, particularly by the female characters.

Lulu's character emerges as a central site of this tension. Her inability to decisively choose between her husband Henri and her lover Pierre reflects a state of bad faith (Sartre, 2021), wherein she simultaneously recognises and evades her own freedom. This oscillation between awareness and denial illustrates the existential paradox of freedom: the individual is condemned to choose, yet often seeks refuge in indecision or external justification.

Furthermore, the study finds that Lulu's predicament is not merely individual but structurally conditioned. Her choices are constrained by social expectations surrounding marriage, morality, and feminine identity. In this sense, her experience aligns with Simone de Beauvoir's notion of

woman as the “Other,” whose subjectivity is shaped in relation to patriarchal norms (Beauvoir, 2015). The internalisation of these norms contributes to her inability to exercise authentic freedom.

The analysis also highlights the role of intimacy as a site of instability rather than harmony. Relationships within the narrative are marked by misrecognition, emotional ambiguity, and a persistent failure to achieve genuine connection. This reinforces the Sartrean idea that the presence of the other complicates, rather than completes, the self.

Additionally, the comparative reading suggests that while Jean-Paul Sartre does not explicitly engage with feminist theory, his portrayal of female subjectivity inadvertently reflects concerns central to existential feminism. The narrative thus reveals an implicit convergence between existentialist and feminist thought, particularly in its depiction of constrained agency and the struggle for authentic existence.

Overall, the findings indicate that *Intimacy* functions as a literary space where philosophical concepts of freedom, identity, and otherness are not only explored but also problematised through gendered experience.

V. DISCUSSION

The analysis of *Intimacy* reveals that the concept of freedom, central to Existentialism, operates within the narrative as both a condition of possibility and a source of psychological distress. As Jean-Paul Sartre suggests, individuals are “condemned to be free” (Sartre, 2021), compelled to make choices without external guarantees. However, the text demonstrates that this freedom is not experienced as liberating; rather, it manifests as a burden that produces anxiety, indecision, and ultimately, bad faith.

Lulu's character embodies this existential tension. Her hesitation is most visible in the moments where she reflects on her relationships in isolation, particularly while lying in the hotel room and oscillating between thoughts of Henri and Pierre. These moments of introspection do not lead to clarity but instead deepen her confusion, illustrating her inability to translate awareness into action. Her retreat into habitual existence—returning to Henri despite recognising the emotional and physical discomfort of the relationship—signifies not the absence of freedom, but an unwillingness to confront its consequences. In this sense, her predicament exemplifies Sartre's notion of bad faith (Sartre, 2021), where the individual denies their freedom in order to escape responsibility.

Furthermore, the narrative complicates the idea of intimacy by presenting it not as a harmonious union, but as a site of

instability and misrecognition. This is evident in Lulu's interactions with both Henri and Rirette. Her physical proximity to Henri is marked by discomfort and aversion, while her fascination with Rirette introduces a different kind of emotional and bodily ambiguity. These relationships fail to produce genuine connection, instead revealing a persistent gap between desire and fulfilment. Intimacy, therefore, emerges not as resolution but as a space where the self is continually unsettled by the presence of others.

A feminist reading of the text, informed by Simone de Beauvoir, reveals that Lulu's struggle is not purely individual but structurally conditioned. In *The Second Sex* (Beauvoir, 2015), Beauvoir conceptualises woman as the “Other,” whose identity is shaped in relation to patriarchal norms. Lulu's indecision can be traced to this condition: her sense of responsibility towards Henri, despite her lack of love, reflects the internalisation of social expectations surrounding marriage and feminine duty. Her inability to pursue an alternative life with Pierre is not simply hesitation, but a manifestation of these ingrained norms.

Beauvoir's analysis of the female body further deepens this reading. While existentialism posits an abstract, ungendered consciousness, Beauvoir demonstrates that embodiment plays a crucial role in shaping lived experience. The female body, rather than functioning as a neutral medium, often becomes a site of limitation and contradiction. Lulu's discomfort with physical intimacy and her simultaneous attraction towards Rirette illustrate this tension, where desire, embodiment, and social conditioning intersect in complex ways.

The discussion also gains further dimension when considered alongside later feminist and philosophical developments. Judith Butler's notion of gender performativity suggests that identity is constituted through repeated social practices rather than fixed essence (Butler, 2006). Lulu's shifting roles—as wife, lover, and uncertain subject—reflect this instability, as she attempts to navigate expectations that are externally imposed yet internally sustained.

Similarly, A Foucauldian understanding of power and subjectification offers insight into the limitations of freedom within social structures. Lulu's decisions are not made in isolation but are shaped by moral codes and social norms that define acceptable behaviour. Her ultimate choice to remain within her existing circumstances reflects the subtle operation of power, where control is internalised rather than externally enforced.

The comparison between Lulu and Eveline from *Dubliners* (Joyce, 2022) further reinforces this interpretation. Both characters are confronted with the possibility of escape, yet remain bound by responsibility and fear. Eveline's paralysis

at the moment of departure mirrors Lulu's inability to act decisively, highlighting the tension between existential freedom and the weight of social obligation.

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that *Intimacy* functions as a critical site where existential and feminist concerns intersect. While Sartre does not explicitly engage with feminist theory, his portrayal of female subjectivity reveals the limitations of a purely abstract notion of freedom. The narrative thus exposes the ways in which gender, embodiment, and social conditioning complicate the existential ideal of autonomous choice, offering a more nuanced understanding of intimacy as a space shaped by both freedom and constraint.

VI. CONCLUSION

This paper argues that while Simone de Beauvoir draws significantly from Jean-Paul Sartre's phenomenological framework, she also extends it by introducing a critical engagement with the question of the "Other." In doing so, Beauvoir not only builds upon Sartrean existentialism but also exposes its limitations, particularly in relation to gender, embodiment, and lived experience.

Through this lens, Sartre's *Intimacy* emerges as a text that, although not explicitly feminist, reflects the conceptual tensions that Beauvoir later articulates more systematically. The narrative reveals how freedom, when situated within social and gendered structures, becomes constrained and internally negotiated rather than purely autonomous.

The analysis of Lulu's character illustrates this intersection, where existential freedom is complicated by embodied experience and social expectation. Her condition highlights the gap between philosophical abstraction and lived reality, reinforcing Beauvoir's argument that subjectivity cannot be understood independently of material and cultural conditions.

Ultimately, *Intimacy* stands as a literary testament to the intertwined development of existential and feminist thought. It reveals how the philosophical dialogue between Sartre and Beauvoir produces a more nuanced understanding of freedom, identity, and intimacy—one that acknowledges both the possibility of transcendence and the constraints imposed by gendered existence.

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Beloved – The Haunting of Slavery: Memory, Trauma, and Motherhood

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Abstract— Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) is a landmark novel that explores the haunting legacy of slavery through the psychological trauma of its characters. Centered around Sethe, a formerly enslaved woman who is haunted by the ghost of her dead daughter, *Beloved* examines the impact of generational trauma, the struggle for identity, and the complex dynamics of motherhood. Morrison masterfully weaves historical memory, supernatural elements, and fragmented narrative techniques to depict how slavery's horrors persist long after physical emancipation. This research paper analyses *Beloved* through the lens of postcolonial trauma theory and psychoanalysis, exploring how memory, guilt, and maternal sacrifice shape Sethe's identity. The paper examines the function of the ghostly *Beloved* as a metaphor for unresolved historical trauma, the psychological consequences of slavery on the Black female body, and how Morrison challenges traditional narratives of motherhood and freedom. By interrogating the intersections of race, gender, and historical memory, this study positions *Beloved* as a critical intervention in the discourse of slavery's lingering psychological scars.



Keywords— *Beloved, Slavery and Trauma, Historical Memory, Generational Trauma, Motherhood and Infanticide, Magical Realism*

I. INTRODUCTION

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) is one of the most significant novels in American literature, offering a harrowing exploration of the psychological and generational trauma inflicted by slavery. Set in the post-Civil War era, *Beloved* tells the story of Sethe, a formerly enslaved woman, who is haunted by the spirit of the daughter she killed to prevent her from being returned to slavery. Inspired by the true story of Margaret Garner, an enslaved woman who escaped but killed her child rather than let her be taken back into bondage, Morrison constructs a deeply personal yet universally relevant narrative about loss, survival, and the lingering wounds of history.

The novel is written in a nonlinear, fragmented structure, mirroring the disjointed, repressed, and painful nature of memory for those who have endured unspeakable suffering. Morrison's use of magical realism—where the ghostly *Beloved* physically manifests—blurs the

boundaries between the supernatural and historical reality, emphasizing that the past is never truly buried.

Beloved is deeply influenced by postcolonial and psychoanalytic theories, particularly Frantz Fanon's concept of historical trauma and Sigmund Freud's notion of the "return of the repressed". Morrison's narrative suggests that slavery is not just a historical event but a lingering wound, affecting not only those who lived through it but also their descendants. The novel questions whether healing is possible for those who carry the weight of past atrocities and explores how motherhood, freedom, and self-definition are reshaped in the aftermath of violence.

By examining *Beloved* through the lens of racial trauma, the politics of memory, and the supernatural as historical metaphor, this paper seeks to uncover how Morrison transforms historical pain into literary resistance. Through Sethe's haunting, Morrison asks: What does it mean to remember? How does one reconcile with a past that

refuses to be forgotten? And can love itself survive the burden of history?

II. THEMATIC ANALYSIS: MEMORY, TRAUMA, AND SLAVERY

A. The Haunting Power of Memory: The Past That Won't Stay Buried

One of the central themes in *Beloved* is the inescapability of memory and the psychological burden of the past. Morrison presents memory as a force that is both necessary and destructive, shaping the identities of the novel's characters while simultaneously imprisoning them in their trauma. Sethe, Paul D, and Denver all experience slavery not only as a historical reality but as a psychological wound that refuses to heal. The presence of Beloved, a ghost who physically embodies the repressed pain of the past, demonstrates that even when slavery is legally abolished, its horrors persist in the minds and bodies of its survivors.

Sethe's inability to forget the trauma of Sweet Home plantation and the murder of her daughter defines her existence. She believes that to remember is to keep Beloved alive, but to forget is to risk erasing the truth of slavery's brutality. Morrison complicates the notion of healing by showing how repressed trauma manifests in different ways:

- Sethe clings to the past, unable to move forward
- Paul D suppresses his emotions, locking them in his metaphorical "tobacco tin" heart
- Denver, born into trauma, must navigate a haunted world where the past is always present

By making memory a living, breathing force, Morrison argues that historical trauma is not just an individual burden but a collective reality for Black people in America. The story suggests that healing is not possible without confrontation, and yet, confrontation can itself be an unbearable weight.

B. Trauma and the Psychological Consequences of Slavery

Morrison illustrates that slavery did not just physically oppress African Americans—it psychologically fractured them. The novel examines how trauma affects the mind, particularly through Sethe's psychic pain and her ultimate act of infanticide. Her decision to kill Beloved is both a horrifying crime and a desperate act of love, revealing the moral paradox forced upon enslaved mothers. Morrison forces the reader to ask: Was Sethe's act madness, or was it the only rational response to an inhuman system?

Frantz Fanon's theory of colonial trauma helps explain Sethe's fractured psyche. Fanon argues that oppression dehumanizes the colonized subject, leaving deep

psychological scars that persist even after physical liberation. In Sethe's case, freedom does not erase her suffering; instead, it amplifies her pain because she is left alone with her unbearable memories.

Character	Manifestation of Trauma	Effect on Their Psyche
Sethe	Haunted by her past, obsessed with Beloved	Becomes trapped in guilt and grief, unable to live in the present
Paul D	Locks away his emotions in a "tobacco tin" heart	Fears emotional vulnerability, struggles with intimacy
Denver	Grows up in isolation, shaped by ghost stories	Must learn to break free from her mother's past and find independence

Morrison's portrayal of trauma suggests that slavery does not end with physical escape; rather, it lingers, shaping identities for generations. The novel explores whether love and community can rebuild what slavery has broken or whether some wounds remain permanent.

C. The Ghost as a Metaphor: The Supernatural as Historical Reckoning

The ghostly figure of Beloved is more than just a spirit—she is the embodiment of historical trauma. Morrison uses the supernatural to represent the horrors of slavery in a way that realism alone cannot capture. Unlike traditional ghost stories, where spirits are laid to rest once their unfinished business is resolved, Beloved cannot simply be exorcized because she represents an ongoing historical reckoning.

Beloved is both:

- A literal ghost haunting 124 Bluestone Road
- A metaphor for the collective suffering of enslaved people, demanding recognition

Her presence forces Sethe to relive her worst memories, but it also serves as a form of confrontation. By engaging with Beloved, Sethe grapples with the past, forcing herself to acknowledge what she has tried to forget. The question remains: Can she ever truly be free?

Morrison's use of magical realism blurs the line between history and myth, reality and memory, reinforcing the idea that the ghosts of slavery are never fully exorcized from American history.

III. CHARACTER ANALYSIS: SETHE, BELOVED, AND DENVER'S PSYCHOLOGICAL JOURNEYS

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is deeply rooted in character-driven psychological exploration, where each protagonist embodies different aspects of trauma, survival, and resistance. Through Sethe's maternal agony, Beloved's ghostly return, and Denver's journey toward self-liberation, Morrison constructs a multi-dimensional study of how slavery's violence extends beyond the physical realm into the psychological and generational fabric of Black identity.

A. Sethe: The Burden of Maternal Love and the Haunting of Guilt

Sethe is the emotional and psychological epicenter of *Beloved*, bearing the most visible and invisible scars of slavery's brutality. Her narrative is deeply intertwined with the paradox of maternal love, a love so absolute and fierce that it leads her to commit infanticide to protect her child from the horrors of enslavement. Toni Morrison constructs Sethe's character as a tragic figure whose past dictates her present, illustrating how trauma, memory, and guilt become an inescapable force in the lives of those who have endured extreme suffering.

1. The Psychological Weight of Infanticide

Sethe's decision to kill Beloved is not merely an act of desperation but a response conditioned by the brutal logic of slavery. Enslaved women, particularly mothers, lived under an impossible paradox—they could bring life into the world, but they had no power to protect it. In Sethe's case, murder becomes an act of defiance, a final assertion of agency in a system that denies her humanity.

Her choice—while horrifying—reflects the psychological distortions produced by systemic oppression. Morrison aligns Sethe's actions with Frantz Fanon's concept of colonial trauma, where the oppressed internalize violent survival mechanisms in response to extreme dehumanization. In Sethe's world, death appears to be the only path to freedom, not just for her daughter but for herself as a mother who refuses to let her child endure what she has suffered.

However, the cost of this choice is an unshakable burden of guilt, one that does not subside but instead manifests physically and psychologically, shaping the rest of Sethe's existence. Morrison does not frame Sethe's actions as justified, but neither does she condemn her. Instead, the novel forces readers to grapple with the moral complexities of maternal love under slavery, where choices are defined not by good or evil, but by survival and subjugation.

2. Memory as Imprisonment

Sethe's greatest struggle is that she does not live in the present—she lives entirely in the past. Unlike Paul D, who copes by repressing his trauma, Sethe clings to hers, unwilling to let go even as it consumes her. Her inability to move beyond the murder and the atrocities at Sweet Home demonstrates how memory can be both necessary and destructive.

Morrison presents memory as a double-edged sword:

- It is necessary because forgetting would mean erasing the past, allowing history's horrors to be ignored or dismissed.
- It is destructive because when memory overtakes the present, it prevents healing and renewal.

For Sethe, memory is not a passive act—it is an active force that shapes her reality. Every moment she relives the past, she strengthens its grip on her, preventing herself from seeing the future as anything other than a continuation of suffering. This psychological entrapment reinforces how trauma, when left unprocessed, does not remain in the past but continues to dictate the present.

Morrison highlights the dangers of living solely through memory—while history must be acknowledged, it cannot become the only defining force of one's existence. Sethe's tragedy is that she believes she has already lived her most significant moment (the infanticide), and thus, her life afterward is merely a ghostly repetition of that act.

3. Beloved as Sethe's Repressed Guilt

The return of Beloved is not just a supernatural event—it is the manifestation of Sethe's unresolved trauma. Whether Beloved is a literal ghost or an embodiment of psychological repression, her presence forces Sethe to confront her own self-inflicted punishment.

As Beloved's influence over Sethe grows, the balance of power shifts—Sethe no longer holds control over her past, but rather, her past holds control over her. This mirrors how unresolved trauma, when left unacknowledged, consumes the survivor, dictating their reality.

Psychological Conflict	Manifestation in Sethe's Behavior	Interpretation
Guilt over infanticide	Devotes herself obsessively to Beloved's presence	Trauma-induced atonement; cannot forgive herself

Memory as self-punishment	Replays the past instead of engaging in the present	PTSD, cyclical suffering
Love as destruction	Her maternal devotion leads to violent extremes	Examines the paradox of slavery's impact on Black motherhood

Sethe's tragedy is that her love, shaped by trauma, becomes suffocating rather than redemptive. Morrison challenges romanticized notions of motherhood, presenting Sethe's story as a psychological study of love distorted by oppression.

B. Beloved: The Ghost of the Past and the Living Specter of Trauma

Beloved transcends the role of a mere supernatural entity—she is the embodiment of slavery's lingering horrors, the unhealed wounds of history, and the unresolved trauma that consumes those who have suffered under oppression. Her presence in *Beloved* blurs the distinction between past and present, reality and metaphor, mirroring how trauma does not fade with time but persists in the consciousness of survivors. Morrison deliberately crafts Beloved's ambiguous existence, leaving the reader uncertain as to whether she is Sethe's murdered child returned from the dead or a traumatized fugitive who assumes the role of the lost daughter. This ambiguity heightens the novel's psychological intensity, making Beloved a haunting representation of both personal and collective trauma.

1. Beloved as Historical Trauma

Beloved's reappearance challenges the idea that the past can ever be truly buried. Her physical return symbolizes how slavery's legacy continues to shape Black identity, underscoring the novel's central argument: historical wounds remain open until they are properly acknowledged and processed.

Her insatiable need for Sethe's love and attention parallels the way repressed trauma demands recognition, refusing to be ignored. Morrison literalizes trauma's presence—it does not simply reside in the mind; it manifests as a living entity, one that demands to be fed, nurtured, and tended to, even at the cost of the survivor's well-being.

The more Sethe devotes herself to Beloved, the more she deteriorates, illustrating how unresolved trauma can consume one's identity, leaving no room for personal growth or healing. Morrison thereby critiques the idea that

ignoring or repressing suffering can lead to freedom; rather, it results in suffocation and stagnation.

2. Beloved as the Psychological Projection of Sethe's Guilt

Beyond being a historical metaphor, Beloved functions as Sethe's psychological projection, manifesting her repressed guilt and grief over the infanticide. Sethe, burdened by the impossible choice she made, seeks redemption through nurturing Beloved. She convinces herself that by devoting herself entirely to Beloved, she can atone for her past actions.

However, instead of providing Sethe with closure, Beloved slowly drains her—both physically and emotionally. This mirrors how unprocessed trauma does not heal through avoidance or self-punishment but instead deepens its hold over the sufferer. As Sethe's world narrows to only Beloved's needs, her ability to function in the present is completely eroded. Morrison critiques self-sacrificial motherhood shaped by trauma, demonstrating how guilt, when not addressed, can become all-consuming.

Symbolic Role of Beloved	Interpretation
The Ghost of Slavery	The trauma of the past never disappears, haunting generations
Sethe's Guilt Personified	When trauma is not acknowledged, it consumes the survivor
Historical Testimony	Represents all forgotten and silenced enslaved voices

Beloved's role is both literal and metaphorical, serving as a conduit between history and the present, forcing Sethe and Denver to confront their past in order to move forward.

C. Denver: The Rebirth of Identity and the Path to Liberation

Denver, Sethe's youngest daughter, emerges as a symbol of resilience and transformation in *Beloved*. Unlike Sethe, whose identity is consumed by the past, Denver represents the possibility of breaking free from inherited trauma. Raised in an environment of isolation, fear, and spectral hauntings, Denver's growth is shaped by stories of ghosts, suffering, and unspoken horrors. However, her journey is one of self-liberation, proving that while trauma is passed down, it does not have to define future generations. Denver's ability to break away from Sethe's emotional entrapment and Beloved's oppressive presence marks her as a beacon of hope and renewal.

1. The Impact of Isolation

Denver's childhood is shaped by profound loneliness, with 124 Bluestone Road serving as both a physical house and a psychological prison. The home is cut off from the larger Black community, and Denver grows up believing in ghost stories as absolute truth, reinforcing how trauma becomes internalized and normalized. Sethe's obsessive grief over Beloved leaves Denver emotionally neglected, forcing her to find solace in the company of a supernatural presence rather than human relationships. The psychological impact of this isolation manifests in her initial fear of the outside world—she is hesitant to interact with others, convinced that she and her family are cursed.

However, Morrison suggests that Denver's acceptance of the ghosts that haunt her life does not mean she must be bound by them. Instead, she learns to reinterpret these hauntings—not as chains, but as histories that she can choose to remember without being consumed by them.

2. Breaking Free from Sethe's Shadow

Denver's transformation is marked by her conscious decision to seek help from the Black community, a significant departure from Sethe's isolationist approach. While Sethe attempts to shut the world out, Denver recognizes the need for connection and communal support. Her willingness to step beyond 124 Bluestone Road is symbolic of emotional and psychological renewal—she understands that liberation does not come from denying the past, but from actively engaging with the present. In contrast to Sethe, who remains stagnant in a cycle of grief, Denver chooses action over despair. Morrison uses Denver's arc to illustrate that healing is not passive—it requires effort, courage, and the ability to embrace relationships beyond one's immediate suffering. While Denver carries the weight of generational trauma, she ultimately chooses to define her own future rather than remain trapped by the ghosts of the past.

Denver's Transformation	Key Actions	Psychological Growth
From Isolation to Independence	Seeks help from the Black community	Finds strength beyond family trauma
From Fear to Self-Assertion	Refuses to submit to Beloved's control	Asserts her own identity
From Haunted to Healer	Becomes a caretaker for Sethe instead of vice versa	Symbolizes the possibility of breaking generational trauma

Denver's journey offers the novel's only real hope—proving that while slavery's trauma is inescapable, future generations can choose to forge new identities.

IV. NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES: NONLINEAR STORYTELLING AND THE SUPERNATURAL AS HISTORICAL RECKONING

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* employs experimental narrative structures, fragmented chronology, and supernatural elements to construct a novel that mimics the psychological experience of trauma. The nonlinear storytelling reflects the fractured memories of slavery's survivors, while the supernatural blurs the boundaries between past and present, reality and memory. This section explores how Morrison's narrative techniques deepen the psychological and historical impact of the novel.

A. Nonlinear Storytelling: A Reflection of Trauma

Toni Morrison deliberately subverts the conventions of linear storytelling in *Beloved*, crafting a narrative structure that mirrors the fragmented and intrusive nature of traumatic memory. Rather than presenting events in chronological order, Morrison seamlessly shifts between past and present, forcing readers to experience the cyclical, unrelenting burden of historical trauma. This nonlinear technique reflects the reality of survivors—for whom the past is never truly past, but a constantly resurfacing force that dictates the present.

1. Memory as Disrupted Time

Trauma distorts the way individuals process time, making the past inescapable. Sethe's flashbacks to Sweet Home and the murder of Beloved are not voluntary recollections but uncontrollable intrusions—evidence of her post-traumatic stress. Paul D, similarly, does not confront his past willingly; his memories of the chain gang and the brutal conditions of enslavement remain suppressed until emotional triggers force them to surface. The nonlinear narrative structure mirrors this psychological dissonance, illustrating that for those who have endured profound suffering, the past is not a closed chapter but an ever-present reality.

Morrison's approach disrupts traditional Western notions of time and history, reinforcing the idea that slavery's psychological scars cannot simply be relegated to the past. Instead, these scars persist, invade, and shape identity, challenging the assumption that history is something that can be "moved on" from.

2. Multiple Perspectives and Unreliable Narration

Morrison complicates historical truth by presenting events through multiple, often conflicting perspectives—Sethe, Denver, Paul D, and Beloved all recount past events differently, exposing the fragmented nature of memory and the instability of personal narratives. This polyphonic storytelling forces the reader to engage with the unreliability of memory, as each character’s perception is shaped by their emotional and psychological state.

Beloved’s own disjointed monologues, filled with broken syntax and chaotic imagery, emphasize the loss of coherent identity caused by enslavement and death. Her unstructured, dreamlike narration blurs the boundaries between past and present, reality and the supernatural, further reinforcing the novel’s assertion that slavery’s horrors exist beyond conventional historical narratives—they are spectral, fragmented, and impossible to contain within a single version of the truth. By rejecting a singular, authoritative perspective, Morrison challenges dominant historical discourses that have silenced enslaved voices. Instead, she presents a multiplicity of truths, each shaped by the emotional and psychological scars of its narrator, forcing readers to confront the complexity of historical trauma in a deeply intimate way.

Table 1: Effects of Nonlinear Narrative in Beloved

Narrative Technique	Effect on the Reader and Characters
Fragmented Chronology	Mimics the way trauma interrupts normal perception of time, making past horrors feel ever-present.
Sudden Flashbacks	Shows how memories of slavery and trauma forcefully intrude on the present, destabilizing Sethe’s reality.
Multiple Perspectives	Highlights the subjective nature of memory, showing how different characters process the same events in unique ways.
Disorienting Structure	Forces readers to experience the same emotional turmoil as the characters, making history feel immediate and personal.

B. The Supernatural as Historical Reckoning: Beloved as Embodied Trauma

Toni Morrison integrates supernatural elements in *Beloved* not as mere fantasy, but as a profound means of reclaiming the voices of those erased by history. The

spectral presence of Beloved functions both as Sethe’s personal grief and as a broader symbol of the enduring trauma of slavery. Morrison challenges conventional storytelling by making the supernatural a vehicle for historical memory, forcing readers to confront the psychological and generational impact of racial oppression.

1. The Ghost as a Psychological Projection

Beloved’s haunting of 124 Bluestone Road extends beyond the physical realm—she embodies Sethe’s unresolved guilt, grief, and trauma. The uncertainty of Beloved’s existence—whether she is a real woman, the ghost of Sethe’s daughter, or an imagined presence—reflects the inescapability of trauma. Morrison constructs a spectral force that is both past and present, human and ghostly, emphasizing that the psychological scars of slavery remain deeply embedded in those who survived.

2. Historical Memory Manifested in Flesh

Beloved’s obsessive attachment to Sethe symbolizes how unresolved historical trauma dominates the present, making healing nearly impossible. Her childlike innocence, contrasted with her insatiable need for control and possession, suggests a paradox: she longs for love but simultaneously represents an inescapable force of reckoning. This duality mirrors the emotional burden of enslaved mothers, who were forced to both love and let go of their children under the brutality of slavery. Beloved’s physical and psychological hunger reflects the incompleteness of historical narratives that have failed to account for the lived horrors of the enslaved.

3. The Supernatural as a Testimony for the Silenced and Forgotten

The atrocities of slavery—rape, forced separation of families, physical abuse, and psychological degradation—are often lost in traditional historical records. By giving voice to a ghost, Morrison reclaims the narratives of those who were stripped of agency and erased from documented history. Beloved becomes a living archive of the untold suffering of Black women and children, making the supernatural not a means of escape but a confrontation with the past. Through Beloved’s spectral presence, Morrison refuses to let history be forgotten, insisting that the ghosts of slavery continue to shape the present and demand acknowledgment.

Table 2: The Symbolism of the Supernatural in Beloved

Supernatural Element	Interpretation in the Novel
Beloved as a Ghost	Represents both Sethe’s personal grief and the collective trauma of

	slavery, showing that the past is never truly gone.
Possession of Sethe	Symbolizes how unresolved trauma can take control of survivors, preventing them from living in the present.
Denver's Relationship with Beloved	Illustrates how trauma is passed down through generations but also how younger generations can seek freedom from the past.
Beloved's Disappearance	Suggests that confronting and acknowledging trauma is the only way to move forward and find healing.

C. Rewriting History Through Unconventional Narrative Techniques

Morrison's decision to blend history with ghostly storytelling serves as a challenge to conventional historical narratives. Traditional histories often erase the emotional and psychological depth of slavery's survivors; Morrison restores that depth by making the reader experience the past as a lived reality, rather than a distant event. The lack of linearity disrupts the idea of a "closed past", showing that slavery continues to shape identity long after its official abolition. The use of *Beloved* as a supernatural being forces an engagement with history that is both emotional and intellectual, rather than purely academic. By denying the reader a single authoritative version of events, Morrison reflects how history itself is fragmented, subjective, and filled with silences.

V. THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY IN HEALING: RECLAIMING IDENTITY THROUGH COLLECTIVE SUPPORT

One of the most critical aspects of *Beloved* is Morrison's portrayal of community as both a source of pain and a path to healing. While Sethe's suffering is deeply personal, Morrison suggests that individual trauma cannot be fully addressed without communal acknowledgment and support. The Black community in the novel plays a dual role—first as a silent witness to Sethe's tragedy and later as an active force in her redemption. Through this dynamic, Morrison emphasizes that healing from slavery's trauma is not an isolated process but one that requires communal solidarity and collective remembrance.

A. Isolation and the Consequences of Being Cut Off

Sethe's initial alienation from the Black community exacerbates her suffering. The townspeople

judge her for what they perceive as her arrogance, particularly in how she fed her children well while others suffered. Their resentment and moral condemnation lead them to withhold a warning about the arrival of the slave catchers, indirectly setting the stage for the tragic infanticide. Morrison uses this incident to highlight the dangers of social fragmentation—when communities fail to support each other, individuals are left vulnerable to despair and destruction.

As a result of her ostracization, Sethe becomes increasingly withdrawn, choosing to exist in a haunted isolation at 124 Bluestone Road. Her refusal to engage with the larger community deepens her psychological entrapment, reinforcing the novel's central theme that trauma festers when left unacknowledged. Unlike Baby Suggs, who once thrived in communal leadership and spiritual guidance, Sethe isolates herself, rejecting the possibility of shared healing.

Table 3: The Consequences of Isolation in *Beloved*

Character	Type of Isolation	Psychological Effect
Sethe	Physical and emotional self-exile at 124 Bluestone Road	Trapped in guilt, unable to move forward
Denver	Limited social interaction due to Sethe's isolation	Fearful and dependent, but later finds independence
Paul D	Emotional repression of past traumas	Struggles with intimacy and self-worth

B. The Power of Women's Collective Support

The turning point in *Beloved* occurs when the Black women of the community, who had previously remained distant, intervene to help Sethe. When they hear about Beloved's return and recognize her growing control over Sethe, they take collective action, coming together in a ritualistic exorcism. The group of women—both young and old, those who had once condemned Sethe and those who sympathized—gather outside 124 to sing, chant, and create a space of spiritual and communal healing. This scene marks the first time in the novel where Sethe is truly reintegrated into the community, suggesting that healing from trauma requires external intervention. Morrison deliberately constructs this moment as an act of both physical and symbolic reclamation. The women's voices, united in a shared expression of strength, become a force powerful enough to drive Beloved away. Denver also plays

a crucial role in bridging the gap between her mother and the larger world. By seeking employment and establishing relationships outside 124, she reconnects her family with the community. This shift underscores the idea that self-liberation, while necessary, must be accompanied by collective recognition and support.

C. The Importance of Communal Memory and Healing

Throughout the novel, Morrison illustrates how memory is both a burden and a necessary tool for survival. While Sethe is consumed by the past, the community's role is to ensure that history is not forgotten but transformed into a source of collective strength rather than individual suffering. The women's exorcism of Beloved is not an attempt to erase history but to prevent it from suffocating those who remain. Morrison contrasts Sethe's isolating grief with Baby Suggs' approach to memory and healing. Before her disillusionment, Baby Suggs provided spiritual sanctuary for the community, encouraging them to embrace their bodies and their humanity in the clearing. She understood that healing requires both personal acceptance and collective validation. In contrast, Sethe's refusal to let go of Beloved reflects a failure to engage in the communal process of memory—a struggle that nearly destroys her.

Table 4: Memory and Healing: A Communal vs. Individual Approach

Character	Approach to Memory	Impact on Psychological Well-being
Sethe	Clings to the past, refuses to move forward	Becomes trapped in grief, unable to heal
Denver	Learns from the past but seeks a future	Finds independence and community support
Baby Suggs	Encourages community remembrance and self-love	Briefly thrives but ultimately retreats due to despair

By the end of the novel, Morrison suggests that true healing can only happen when individuals re-enter the world and engage with others. Sethe's redemption begins not when she banishes Beloved, but when she finally acknowledges the presence of the community around her. In doing so, Morrison argues that while trauma is deeply personal, its resolution is necessarily collective.

VI. CONCLUSION

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is a powerful exploration of historical trauma, the burdens of memory, and the psychological toll of slavery. Through Sethe's haunting past, Beloved's spectral presence, and Denver's emergence as a symbol of renewal, Morrison weaves a complex narrative that challenges conventional historical discourse. The novel asserts that the wounds of slavery are not easily forgotten, nor should they be. Instead, they demand acknowledgment, storytelling, and communal engagement.

Sethe's journey reveals the dangers of living entirely in the past, where grief and guilt become consuming forces that prevent healing. In contrast, Denver's transformation exemplifies the necessity of moving forward—not by forgetting history, but by refusing to be trapped by it. Morrison's use of the supernatural, nonlinear storytelling, and multiple perspectives reinforces the idea that trauma is not linear or easily resolved. The novel compels readers to confront the persistent legacy of slavery and the need for collective remembrance and action.

Ultimately, *Beloved* is a novel about survival—not just physical survival, but emotional and psychological endurance. Morrison does not offer a simple resolution; instead, she presents healing as a process that is both individual and communal. Through Sethe, Beloved, and Denver, she illustrates that while the past shapes identity, it does not have to define the future. The novel serves as a literary monument to those who suffered under slavery, ensuring that their voices are not erased but continue to be heard, demanding recognition, justice, and healing.

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Political Undertones of Hinduism in the light of the book *Why I Am a Hindu* by Shashi Tharoor

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Abstract— *Hinduism, as a religious section became political in Modern India. Political religiosity became a power-oriented system and Shashi Tharoor analyses different aspects of the origin, aims and activities of this system to amass power for the survival. This book brings to light, the formation of Hindutva, the political phase of Hinduism and the different layers of emphasis that it exerts over various fields of the country. This article concludes with the notion of Tharoor regarding the supremacy of constitution.*

Keywords— *Hinduism, Secularism, Hindutva, Constitution*



Religion has always been a popular subject for discussions and dissertations because there are disagreements between the views of religious apologists and the opposing, ideally atheistic, viewpoint. Given that the vast majority of people practice religion and view it as an integral part of who they are, it is noteworthy that the case for a religious viewpoint is widely accepted. However, the opposition argument does, in fact, raise a number of legitimate concerns that the former is unable to adequately address. In *‘Why I Am a Hindu’*, written by Shashi Tharoor one of India’s finest public intellectuals gives us a profound book about one of the world’s oldest and greatest religion. This essay attempts to analyze how much Tharoor rejects the idea of a monothilic nation. When Muslims first settled in the Indus valley in the ninth century A.D., they began using the term "Hindu" to differentiate themselves from the locals. It is therefore a fact that the term "Hindu" was initially utilized to describe indigenous people of Indian subcontinent, not their religious identity. People who lived in Hindustan—the region that lay beyond the Indus River—were known as Hindus. Instead of referring to the religion of the Indian subcontinent's inhabitants, the term "Hindu" was first used as a secular term to describe and set them apart. Consequently, the region south of the Indus River was designated as Hindustan. According to the old customs, there is therefore very little distinction between an Indian and a Hindu. Both terms are distorted versions of the original Sanskrit word Sindhu, which refers to rivers in

general and the Indus River specifically. The Muslim scholars named the people who lived in the subcontinent Hindus, whereas the Greeks dubbed them Indus. The Muslim scholars had some awareness of the region's religious beliefs and practices, but the Greek historians, who referred to the subcontinent as the Indus, understood very little about them.

People first began using the term "Hindu" to define their national identity, fight colonialism, and advance Indian nationalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Along with setting their faith apart from Islam and Christianity, they also discovered a practical way to refute any idea of supremacy that the competing religions might have inferred or stated. The word was a more effective means of establishing one's identity against both the British and the local Muslims for educated modern Hindu of that era. Term Hinduism had been utilized in a limited meaning for a while to refer to Brahmanism or the Vedic religion. However, the name evolved to refer to all of the religious traditions that began with the Vedas and persisted for centuries when new reform movements emerged, which were essential in redefining and reorganizing the nation's social and religious traditions.

Tharoor begins his study of Hinduism by closely examining his personal beliefs before delving deeply into the religion. He discusses Great Souls of Hinduism, including Patanjali, Adi Shankara, Swami Vivekananda

Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Ramanuja, and numerous more who significantly influenced Hinduism's core beliefs. He explores the most significant schools of thought in Hinduism, including the Advaita Vedanta. He skillfully outlines the teachings of the Gita and Vivekananda's ecumenism, examines with compassion the Hinduism of habit practiced by common believers, and explains key ideas and concepts of Hindu philosophy, such as "Purusharthas" and Bhakti, in simple language. He examines the various ways that political Hinduism manifests itself in the contemporary world, including acts of violence carried out by right-wing groups and their followers in the name of religion. He examines Hindutva, describes how it came to be, and goes into detail about the thought of its most important philosopher, Deen Dayal Upadhyaya. *Why I Am a Hindu* (2018) is a groundbreaking and unique masterpiece that will be read and discussed both now and in the future. The author of this manifesto for the downtrodden explores the socioeconomic and cultural distinctions between other Hindus and Dalit-Bahujans (the majority, the so-called low castes) in relation to issues of death, Gods and Goddesses, family life, market relations, childhood, and, lastly, Hindutva (the ideology of the Hindu right). In addition to freedom of the press, human rights, Indian culture, and foreign affairs, Tharoor is a well-known speaker on India's politics and economy.

It is surprising to learn that, even though Hinduism is a very old religious history, the term that is used to describe it and set it apart from other religions is considerably more recent. There were no Hindus in ancient India. You had a bhakta, tantric, sanyasi, samkhya-vadin, Vedantin, Mimamsaka, Vaisheshika, Jina, Charvaka, Lokayata, Ajivika, rishi, muni, yogini, devi, Swami, Shiava, Vaishnava, Siddha, Buddha, and so on, but no Hindu. There were many other religious sects, ascetic communities, teacher traditions, and philosophical schools, the majority of which later joined Hinduism for historical reasons. To differentiate the indigenous religious customs of India from those that were practiced abroad, the term Hinduism was coined. The name persisted, much to discontent of many contemporary Hindus who saw it as a holdover from India's colonialism and foreign oppression. From the very beginning, Hinduism evolved in the same environment. Their shared cultural identity, national component, and several other characteristics are strongly related to India's social, political, and historical growth, as well as its people and culture. Their core beliefs are what constitute Hinduism. Thus, Hinduism can be considered a very old family of Indian-specific religious traditions. Hinduism's core is an undeniable reality, not a work of fiction or an artificial construct, even though its name is a colonial invention. In many forms, including Hindutva, this

argument is becoming more and more popular among the younger Hindu population.

It is a living tradition that reaches its millions of followers through their hearts, minds, and souls. Despite having a secular beginning, the term "Hindu" has come to be closely linked with the religious identity of over a billion people worldwide. The world is also linked to a wide range of organizations, ideologies, and religious groups. Hindus are renowned for being tolerant of various religions and belief systems, with the exception of a small number of fervent followers. There may be members of the same Hindu family who worship various gods and follow distinct paths. Some people think that Hindus face discrimination and that their leaders are treated disrespectfully both domestically and internationally. It is also true that religious fanaticism is growing among the Hindu population because of more awareness. Caste is used in place of class in this expression. Brahmins, or priests; Kshatriyas, or warriors and kings; Vaisyas, or merchants and farmers; and Sudras, or peasants and laborers, are the four primary classes, or castes, described in ancient writings. Panchamas, often known as untouchables, are a fifth class of individuals whose vocations require them to come into contact with filthy or unholy substances. The system is more difficult to deal with in the modern world, but in the past, the caste system was extremely rigid and kept individuals in distinct classes.

Many authors have utilized the title formula 'Why I Am...'. Karel Čapek (1924) *Why I Am Not a Communist*, Bertrand Russell (1927) *Why I Am Not a Christian*, Hans Küng (1987) *Why I Am Still a Christian*, Ibn Warraq (1995) *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, are well known throughout the world. Nearer to home are Kancha Ilaiah's incendiary *Why I Am Not a Hindu* (1995) and Bhagat Singh's *Why I Am an Atheist* (1930). Indeed, Tharoor's book title appears to be a deliberate reversal of the previous one, and possibly even of the topic.

Three main types of intellectual inquiry, cultural imagination, and political participation are all included in the comparative study of Hinduism. Initially, there are occasional attempts in premodern South Asia to describe similarities or correspondences between Islamic doctrines and Vedic worldviews. For example, al-Biruni described scriptural texts, cosmology, astronomy, and other topics in the 11th century, and Dara Shikoh attempted to draw attention to some similarities between Sufi and Vedantic thought in the 7th century. However, it is only with the progressive installation of the East India Company's administrative-legal apparatus in Bengal that the comparative endeavor of meticulously establishing correspondences between European and Indic conceptual

systems begins. Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin cultures were positioned at different points on an evolutionary continuum that was supposed to have culminated in the institutions and ideals of modernity by a variety of British scholars and administrators, as well as occasionally continental European figures, who started drawing vast comparative vistas in late 18th century. British Christian missionaries occasionally embraced the orientalist projections of a Vedic Hindu antiquity of pure humanity and the currently degraded popular Hinduisms. They then reinterpreted these temporal contrasts into their own comparative spectra of fragmented Hindu truths that ultimately led to the saving truth of Christ. Second, influential Hindu figures like Swami Vivekananda, S. Radhakrishnan, and others creatively appropriated these orientalist-colonial imaginations of a pure Vedic Hindu antiquity. They created unique patterns of comparative scales to place the fundamental spirit of the European and Hindu civilizations. Third, in the early 21st century, the comparative analysis of Hinduism described in this introduction has drawn harsh criticism from a number of scholarly groups. According to these academic viewpoints, attempting to compare across cultural and religious boundaries entails positing transhistorical universals, which are claimed to cause epistemic damage to different conceptual systems by enclosing them in monolithic descriptions. A Hindu category and a non-Hindu category appear to have something in common, which is why the comparative study of Hinduism is sometimes accused of being politically dubious and culturally reductive. Thus, another fundamentally contentious issue in academic circles is the comparative study of Hinduism. Bibliography on "comparative study of Hinduism" can be divided into three groups, as this article indicates. First, the opinions that foreigners like Christian missionaries, Muslim tourists, and British colonial officials have about Hinduism. Second, the several types of critical insider reactions created by Hindu figures who established comparison scales between elements of Christian ideology and European modernity and recreated forms of traditional Hinduism. Third, the idea of the comparative study of Hinduism is said to be closely linked to the relationship between the classification of indigenous knowledges and persistence of colonial power imbalances, according to contemporary scholarly challenges to the coherence of comparative effort.

As Tharoor acknowledges, issue is that Hinduism is made up of numerous, frequently conflicting elements. Therefore, it is challenging to locate a legitimate and authoritative tradition that may serve as a mirror for Hindutva. The Vedanta, a profoundly philosophical, Brahmanical, and sensitive tradition, was created by colonialists and is now considered to be dominant. India

saw the development of a homogenized form of Hinduism while Orientalists, colonial administrators, and scholars at Western colleges worked to translate, codify, and simplify a complex philosophical system. Nationalists defended this as the cornerstone of Indian identity. Intellectual colonization has such power!

As a result, a highly textualized Hinduism was removed from both contestations and the social setting. According to philosopher J.N. Mohanty, the Vedic wisdom was continuously contested by both the philosophy's proponents and detractors. Philosophical schools that adhered to Vedas and those that didn't—the *Sramanic* tradition—were primary points of contention. There is a lot of self-criticisms in the Vedic tradition. For example, a significant strain of naturalism and atheism emerged in *Samkhya* philosophy, which was originally rooted in the Vedic tradition. Not much attention is given to this. A strong anti-Vedic materialism is fostered by the heretical materialist school of *Charvaka* philosophy, which is also not included in metaphysical conceptualizations of Hinduism. Critical ideologies both inside and outside of Hinduism have been spectacularly marginalized by the establishment of a hegemonic tradition.

Tharoor, for example, restates Vivekananda's contention that Buddhism finished the Vedantic tradition's task. However, challenge that Buddhism had presented to caste discrimination, ritualism, monarchical state, and Brahmanical dominance was neatly flattened out in Vivekananda's argument. All it did was incorporate Buddhism into Hinduism. We should consider why Hinduism excludes logical and critical ideologies. Perhaps India would not have been placed in the spiritual vs materialism category if a rational, empiricist, materialistic, and skeptical philosophical school like *Charvaka* were given priority in development of a Hindu tradition. With all its material injustices, casteism, and communalism, India has been portrayed as exotic and alien. This hasn't aided in creating a fair future. Even while our society is captivated by the mystical spirit, it nevertheless fails to acknowledge the magnitude of widespread injustices.

Indian citizens, including the country's sizable minority communities, are granted a wide range of rights under the constitution. All ethnic and religious minorities are treated equally in India, a secular, multicultural democracy with territorial citizenship. Tharoor denies creation of a monolithic nation and firmly believes that one must adhere to certain parts of Hinduism to be recognized as one.

The Indian constitution and the laws have been formulated for the welfare and protection of all its citizens irrespective of their religion except the personal

laws that regulate various aspects like marriage, divorce, adoption, etc. One of our most prized fundamental principles is secularism, which is in fact a cornerstone of a genuinely modern country. It is meant to imply that the state plays little or no part in internal issues. Nonetheless, in India, the unquestionably honorable and sacred cause of secularism has been seized by self-described left-liberal academics on the one hand, religious extremists and fanatics on the other, as well as opportunistic politicians. As a result, the debate over secularism in India has been highly divisive, with people accusing one another of being fascists and pseudo-secularists. This seems to be the cause of the mirage of an apparent drift towards the displacement of non-secular discourse in the country.

It can be concluded that Hinduism is not just a religion but a way of life a culture, a culture which encompasses people from across the country and belonging to various faiths. India's identity as a diverse, democratic, and secular country that provides stability in an increasingly unstable region and world is crucial to its survival. *Why I Am a Hindu* reminds that a multilateral - nationhood is the necessity and intention of the law of the land, the Constitution of India, and any effort to challenge it will destabilize the constitution.

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A Study on Translation Strategies of Metro Prompt Words under Skopos Theory

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Abstract— *In the context of frequent international exchanges around the world, metro prompt words also play an important role in cultural communication. This paper takes Skopos Theory as the theoretical perspective to explore the translation strategies of metro prompt words. After analyzing the importance, research progress and trends of metro prompt words, this paper puts forward targeted translation strategies based on the three rules of Skopos Theory, and verifies the effectiveness of the strategies with examples of prompt words in different scenarios such as station entry, riding and exit. Finally, it puts forward optimization suggestions such as strengthening translator training, establishing a quality review mechanism and unifying translation standards, and discusses the enlightenment of Skopos Theory to the translation of other public signs. This study enriches the application of Skopos Theory in the field of public sign translation and provides a reference for the translation practice of metro prompt words.*



Keywords— *Skopos Theory, metro prompt words, translation strategies, cross-cultural communication*

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background and Significance

With the accelerating process of globalization, the internationalization level of cities continues to improve. As an important part of urban transportation, the metro is not only a convenient way to travel, but also an important window to display the city's image and culture. Metro prompt words are the key basis for foreign passengers to obtain travel information. Accurate and appropriate translation can provide convenience for them, while poor

translation may cause confusion and even affect the international image of the city (Li Hong 2018:15).

As an important theory in translation studies, Skopos Theory breaks the bondage of the equivalence principle in traditional translation theories and emphasizes the dominant role of translation purpose in the translation process. The application of Skopos Theory in the translation of metro prompt words can pay more attention to the needs and backgrounds of target readers, making translation more targeted and practical (Zhang Xiaoming

2020:23). Applying Skopos Theory to the research on metro prompt word translation can not only expand the application boundary of this theory in the field of specific public signs and improve its theoretical system in practical text translation, but also put forward practical translation strategies according to the situational and functional characteristics of metro prompt words, solve practical problems in current translation, improve the overall quality of metro prompt word translation, and support the international construction of urban transportation services.

1.2 Research Methods and Innovations

This study comprehensively adopts the case analysis method and literature research method to ensure the in-depth and comprehensive research. Among them, the case analysis method collects and sorts out a large number of prompt word examples from metro systems in different cities, conducts detailed analysis on these cases, deeply discusses the specific application of Skopos Theory in metro prompt word translation, and observes how translation strategies of different types of prompt words change with translation purposes (Wang Fang 2019:35). The literature research method systematically sorts out relevant research results of Skopos Theory and public sign translation at home and abroad, clarifies the development context and core connotation of Skopos Theory, and lays a solid theoretical foundation for the research.

The innovations of this study are reflected in two aspects: first, the pertinence of the research perspective, breaking through the simple language comparison or skill analysis in previous studies on metro prompt word translation, taking Skopos Theory as a systematic theoretical framework, discussing strategy selection from the perspective of translation purpose, and strengthening the theoretical depth of the research; second, the practicality of the research content, focusing on the situational characteristics of metro prompt words, analyzing the differences in translation purposes of prompt words with different functions and scenarios, putting forward operable targeted strategies, and making up for the

insufficient combination of strategies and practice in previous studies.

II. THEORETICAL BASIS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Core Connotation and Rules of Skopos Theory

Skopos Theory originated in Germany in the 1970s as the core component of the functionalist translation theory. It was first proposed by Hans Vermeer and perfected by scholars such as Katharina Reiss, Justa Holz-Mänttari and Christiane Nord, forming a systematic theoretical system. This theory breaks the shackles of traditional text-centered translation theories, defines translation as a purposeful communicative act, and holds that the purpose of translation determines all decisions in the translation process, providing a new theoretical guide for practical text translation.

Skopos Theory includes three core rules, namely the Skopos Rule, the Coherence Rule and the Fidelity Rule. As the primary rule of Skopos Theory, the Skopos Rule holds that the purpose to be achieved by the translation act determines the whole process of the translation act, that is, the purpose of translation determines the strategies and methods of translation (Vermeer 1989:22). The core purpose of metro prompt word translation is to provide clear and accurate information for foreign passengers to facilitate their smooth travel, which is the fundamental basis for the selection of all translation strategies. The Coherence Rule requires that the target text must meet the standard of intratextual coherence, that is, the target text is readable and acceptable in the target language culture and the communicative context where the target text is used, and can be understood by the target readers (Nord 1991:34). The Fidelity Rule means that there should be intertextual coherence between the source text and the target text, that is, the target text should be faithful to the content and intention of the source text, but the degree and form of such faithfulness depend on the purpose of translation (Reiss & Vermeer 1984:108). The three rules

support each other and jointly form the theoretical guidance framework for metro prompt word translation.

2.2 Research Status at Home and Abroad

Abroad, Skopos Theory has received extensive attention and research since its proposal. Many scholars have conducted in-depth discussions on the theoretical connotation, application fields and the relationship with other translation theories of Skopos Theory. In terms of the expansion of theoretical connotation, scholars have continuously refined and improved the core concepts of Skopos Theory. For example, the classification of translation purposes is more detailed. In addition to the traditional communicative purpose of the target text, scholars have also deeply studied the influence of the translator's personal purpose, the commercial purpose of the translation project and other factors on translation strategies (Nord 2001:56). In terms of application fields, Skopos Theory is widely used in the translation research of various text types such as literature, business, science and technology, and law. In literary translation research, scholars discuss how to use Skopos Theory to retain the original literary style while making the target text more in line with the reading habits and aesthetic needs of target readers, so as to realize the dissemination and acceptance of literary works in the target language culture (Hermans 1999:45). In the field of business translation, the research focuses on how to accurately translate business contracts, business letters and other texts according to the purpose and needs of business activities, so as to ensure the accurate transmission of information and the smooth progress of business activities (Hatim & Mason 1997:34).

In the research on public sign translation, foreign scholars have analyzed from multiple perspectives such as language, culture and function. From the linguistic perspective, they study the linguistic characteristics of public signs and their transformation rules in translation, emphasizing that the target text should conform to the grammatical and lexical norms of the target language; from the cultural perspective, they pay attention to the

differences in cultural connotations carried by public signs under different cultural backgrounds, and how to make cultural adaptive adjustments in translation to avoid cultural conflicts (Katan 2004:23); from the functional perspective, guided by Skopos Theory, they discuss how to select appropriate translation strategies according to the functions of public signs (such as indication, warning, promotion, etc.) to achieve the expected functions of public signs in the target language environment (Schäffner 1998:18). For example, for the translation of public signs in tourist attractions, foreign scholars believe that their publicity and guidance functions should be highlighted, and attractive language and cultural adaptive strategies should be adopted to attract foreign tourists and help them better understand the scenic culture.

Domestic research on Skopos Theory started relatively late but developed rapidly. On the one hand, scholars have deeply introduced, digested and absorbed the theoretical system of Skopos Theory, and made the domestic academic circle have a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of Skopos Theory through translating and interpreting relevant foreign literature; on the other hand, combined with China's translation practice and cultural background, they have conducted localized research and application of Skopos Theory. In theoretical research, the core rules of Skopos Theory are deeply analyzed, and the interrelationship and application priority of the Skopos Rule, Coherence Rule and Fidelity Rule in different translation situations are discussed (Zhong Weihe, Zhong Yu 1999:25). In applied research, Skopos Theory is widely used in the translation research of various texts, including literature, film and television, advertising, public signs and so on.

In the research on the translation of public signs such as metro prompt words, domestic scholars use Skopos Theory to analyze the problems existing in current translation and put forward corresponding improvement strategies. Through the analysis of a large number of examples of metro prompt word translation, problems such

as non-standard language expression, inaccurate transmission of cultural information and unclear translation purpose are found. In response to these problems, scholars based on Skopos Theory propose that the translation purpose should be clarified according to the needs and backgrounds of foreign passengers, and appropriate translation strategies should be selected, such as free translation, addition, omission and substitution, to make translation more accurate, clear and easy to understand (Huang Youyi 2005:30; He Xueyun 2006:42). For words with Chinese characteristics such as “安检”, if directly translated as “Security Check”, foreign passengers may not fully understand its meaning, and it can be translated as “Security Check for Baggage and Persons” by addition to convey information more accurately.

However, there are still some deficiencies in current research. In the applied research of Skopos Theory, although a wide range of text types are involved, for highly concise texts such as metro prompt words, some studies lack in-depth exploration and accurate grasp of translation purpose when analyzing translation problems, resulting in weak pertinence of the proposed translation strategies. There are few comparative studies on the translation of metro prompt words in different regions and cultural backgrounds, which cannot fully reflect the diversity of translation purposes and strategies.

III. ANALYSIS OF THE CHARACTERISTICS AND TRANSLATION STATUS OF METRO PROMPT WORDS

3.1 Linguistic Characteristics of Metro Prompt Words

As functional public signs serving public transportation, the language expression of metro prompt words needs to conform to the scenario characteristics of metro operation and passengers' information acquisition needs, and mainly presents three characteristics: first, conciseness. Metro passengers have high mobility and tight schedules, so prompt words need to convey core information with concise language, avoid lengthy

expressions, and ensure that passengers can quickly capture key content in a short time. For example, “小心碰头” and “先下后上” all convey information with minimal words; second, accuracy. Words must be precise and unambiguous, which is directly related to passengers' understanding and travel safety. For example, the word “倚靠” in “请勿倚靠车门” accurately defines the behavior boundary to avoid safety risks caused by vague words; third, standardization. It is necessary to follow the industry translation standards for public signs in public places to realize the unification of vocabulary and sentence patterns, which is convenient for passengers to identify and understand, and reflects the standardized management level of the city.

3.2 Current Translation Status and Problems of Metro Prompt Words

3.2.1 Common Types of Translation Errors

At present, various linguistic errors occur frequently in the translation of metro prompt words, which directly affect the effect of information transmission: first, spelling errors, such as misspelling “Approaching” as “Apporoaching” and “Emergency” as “Emergancy”. Such seemingly small errors are likely to cause cognitive confusion for foreign passengers, and even delay judgment in emergency scenarios; second, grammatical errors, including subject-verb disagreement, misuse of parts of speech, abnormal tense and other problems. For example, translating “请勿在车厢内饮食” as “Don't eating and drinking in the carriage” violates the grammatical rules of English imperative sentences and reduces the credibility of the translation; third, improper word choice, which does not conform to English expression habits. For example, translating “请保管好您的随身物品” as “Please keep well your personal belongings”, “keep well” is a non-standard collocation and is likely to cause obstacles to understanding.

3.2.2 Analysis of the Reasons Affecting Translation Accuracy

The translation problems of metro prompt words are the result of the joint action of many factors: first, uneven translator levels. Some translators lack solid English language skills, do not have a precise grasp of English grammar and lexical collocation, and have not received professional translation training, and lack awareness of the function-oriented public sign translation, so they are prone to mechanical literal translation; second, there are differences between Chinese and Western ways of thinking and expression habits. For example, the literal translation of the Chinese “小心碰头” as “Be careful of hitting your head” does not conform to the concise expression habits of English. If translators do not fully consider such differences, the translation is likely to be unnatural and difficult to understand; third, the lack of unified translation standards and review mechanisms. Although some cities have formulated English translation standards for public places, there are problems such as inconsistent standards and inadequate implementation in practice. The translation of the same prompt word varies in different lines and cities, and the lack of strict review and supervision leads to the long-term existence of wrong translations.

IV. ANALYSIS OF TRANSLATION STRATEGIES FOR METRO PROMPT WORDS

4.1 Translation Strategies Following the Skopos Rule

The Skopos Rule is the fundamental basis for the selection of translation strategies for metro prompt words. Before translation, it is necessary to clarify the core translation purpose—providing clear, accurate and practical information for foreign passengers—according to the functional types of prompt words (station entry guidance, safety prompts, service information) and usage scenarios, and then select appropriate methods such as literal translation, free translation, addition and omission.

Literal translation is applicable to prompt words with similar expression habits between the source text and the target language and no cultural ambiguity. It can convey core information concisely and efficiently while retaining the original information, and is the most commonly used method in metro prompt word translation. For example, “出口” is translated as “Exit”, “入口” as “Entrance”, and “请勿吸烟” as “NO SMOKING”, which directly correspond to common English expressions, concise and clear, and easy for passengers to understand.

Free translation is applicable to prompt words with unique Chinese expressions that are likely to cause obstacles to understanding if literally translated. It is necessary to flexibly convert according to English expression habits on the basis of being faithful to the core meaning of the original text. For example, “小心碰头” is freely translated as “Mind your head”, and “小心地滑” as “Caution: Wet Floor”, which not only retain the warning function but also conform to the expression norms of English public signs.

Addition is applicable to prompt words with Chinese cultural characteristics or implied information. By adding necessary information, foreign passengers can be helped to understand the core meaning. For example, “请在黄线外候车” is translated as “Please wait behind the yellow line. This line is set for your safety.”, adding the function of the yellow line to make up for the differences caused by cultural cognition; “安检” is translated as “Security Screening for Baggage and Persons”, adding the content of security check to avoid vague information.

Omission omits redundant polite expressions or modifiers without affecting the transmission of original information, conforming to the concise characteristics of metro prompt words. For example, “请您注意脚下安全, 防止滑倒” is simplified as “Watch your step. Mind the wet floor.”, omitting redundant expressions such as “请您” to highlight core information.

4.2 Translation Strategies Following the Coherence Rule

The Coherence Rule requires that the target text has intratextual coherence and is deeply integrated with the actual usage context of the metro, ensuring that foreign passengers can easily understand and accept it quickly.

On the one hand, it is necessary to ensure intratextual coherence of the target text in grammar, vocabulary and logic: grammatically, strictly follow English grammatical rules and correctly use sentence patterns, tenses and parts of speech. For example, “列车即将进站” is translated as “The train is approaching”, avoiding grammatical errors such as “Train will approaching”; lexically, select common words in English public signs to ensure standard collocation. For example, “贵重物品” is translated as “valuable items” rather than the uncommon “precious things”; logically, sort out the information order to conform to passengers’ information acquisition habits. For example, “此站可换乘 2 号线和 5 号线, 换乘通道在站台右侧” is translated by first stating the transfer lines and then pointing out the location of the transfer passage to realize logically clear information transmission.

On the other hand, the target text needs to conform to the usage context of the metro and passengers’ needs: the metro environment is characterized by dense crowds, complex information and tight schedules, so the target text should be concise and avoid redundancy; adjust the translation expression according to passengers’ psychological states in different scenarios. For example, during peak hours, the prompt “车门即将关闭” is translated as “The door is closing”, concise and powerful, conforming to the tense context of passengers rushing for the train; during off-peak hours, polite expressions can be appropriately added. For example, “请有序候车” is translated as “Please wait in an orderly manner”, reflecting the affinity of the service.

4.3 Translation Strategies Under the Fidelity Rule

The Fidelity Rule requires that the target text maintain intertextual coherence with the source text, and

be faithful to the core information and cultural connotation of the source text on the premise of achieving the translation purpose, so as to avoid information omission, distortion or cultural conflicts.

First, it is necessary to be faithful to the core information of the original text, convey the content and function of the prompt words completely and accurately, and not arbitrarily delete or tamper with key information. For example, for “禁止携带易燃、易爆、有毒物品进站”, the translation must fully cover the categories of prohibited items to avoid safety risks caused by missing information; for “列车因前方故障临时停车”, the translation must clearly state the reason for the stop to avoid passengers’ anxiety due to unclear information.

Second, it is necessary to take into account cultural faithfulness, deeply understand the cultural connotation contained in the original text, accurately convey and realize cultural adaptation in the translation, and avoid misunderstandings caused by cultural differences. For prompt words containing traditional Chinese culture, such as “尊老爱幼” and “文明乘车”, addition can be used to explain the cultural connotation while conveying the core meaning. For example, “请文明乘车, 尊老爱幼” is translated as “Please travel in a civilized manner. Respect the old and love the young, an important virtue in Chinese culture.”, allowing foreign passengers to perceive Chinese cultural connotation while understanding behavioral requirements.

V. CASE ANALYSIS

5.1 Selection of Different Types of Metro Prompt Words

To deeply explore the application of Skopos Theory in the translation of metro prompt words, prompt words in different scenarios such as station entry prompts, riding prompts and exit prompts are selected as cases. These cases cover the main links of metro travel and can fully demonstrate the important role of Skopos Theory in guiding the selection of translation strategies.

In the station entry link, the prompt word “请在安检处接受安检” is selected. The purpose of this prompt is to guide passengers to cooperate with security check to ensure the safety of metro operation. During riding, the prompt word “请给有需要的乘客让座” reflects riding etiquette and humanistic care, and its translation purpose is to convey the concept of civilized riding. When exiting the station, “请从该出口出站” is used to indicate the exit direction for passengers, and accurate and clear information transmission is its main purpose. Through the translation analysis of these different types of prompt words, the translation strategies from the perspective of Skopos Theory can be studied more pertinently.

5.2 Analysis of the Application of Translation Strategies Based on Skopos Theory

5.2.1 Application of the Skopos Rule

Take “请在安检处接受安检” as an example. Its translation purpose is to let foreign passengers clearly know that they need to cooperate with security check at a specific location to ensure the safety of metro operation. In translation, it is literally translated as “Please undergo security inspection at the security checkpoint”. This translation method directly and accurately conveys the original information, conforming to the Skopos Rule. Because for foreign passengers, clear and direct instructions are crucial in the metro travel scenario. Such translation allows them to quickly understand and take corresponding actions to ensure the smooth progress of the security check process, thus achieving the purpose of ensuring the safe operation of the metro.

The translation purpose of the prompt word “请给有需要的乘客让座” is to convey the concept of civilized riding and advocate passengers to carry forward the spirit of mutual assistance. Translated as “Please offer your seat to passengers in need”, this translation is concise and clear, directly conveying to passengers that the object of the seat-offering request is “passengers in need”, enabling foreign passengers to understand that they should pay attention to the needs of others and take the initiative to

offer seats during metro riding, achieving the purpose of spreading the concept of civilized riding. If the translation is too complicated or obscure, it may not effectively convey this concept and fail to achieve the expected communicative purpose.

The translation purpose of “请从该出口出站” is to indicate the exit direction for passengers to ensure they can exit smoothly. Translated as “Please exit through this exit”, it directly corresponds to the original information, allowing passengers to quickly understand which exit to leave the metro station. In the metro exit scenario, passengers often want to find the exit quickly, and this concise and direct translation can meet their needs and help them successfully complete the last link of travel, conforming to the requirements of the Skopos Rule for translation.

5.2.2 Application of the Coherence Rule

In terms of intratextual coherence, “列车即将进站, 请在黄线外候车” is translated as “The train is approaching. Please wait behind the yellow line.” Grammatically, “is approaching” is a correct present continuous tense expression used to describe the upcoming arrival of the train, conforming to English grammatical rules; lexically, words such as “approaching”, “wait” and “behind” are used accurately and appropriately, and “yellow line” is a common English expression, conforming to English vocabulary habits; logically, it first states that the train is approaching and then informs passengers to wait behind the yellow line, with clear logic, enabling foreign passengers to understand the prompt content naturally and smoothly, achieving intratextual coherence.

In terms of integration with the context, take “请抓紧时间上车, 车门即将关闭” as an example. In the tense context of the metro train about to depart, it is translated as “Please board the train quickly. The doors are closing”. Expressions such as “board the train” and “are closing” are concise and clear, in line with the tense departure context, enabling passengers to understand and take action in a

short time, successfully realizing the integration of translation and context.

5.2.3 Application of the Fidelity Rule

The translation of “请在指定区域候车” as “Please wait in the designated area” is completely faithful to the original information. “指定区域” corresponds to “designated area”, accurately conveying the requirement for passengers to wait in a specific area without any omission or distortion of information, ensuring that passengers can obtain accurate waiting location information.

In terms of cultural faithfulness, “新春快乐，阖家团圆” is translated as “Happy Chinese New Year! May your family be together in harmony during this special festival.” It not only conveys festival blessings but also explains in detail the meaning of “阖家团圆” in the Spring Festival culture, allowing foreign passengers to deeply understand the importance of family reunion in Chinese Spring Festival culture and faithfully conveying the cultural connotation contained in the original text.

VI. CONCLUSION

6.1 Summary of Research Findings

This study deeply analyzes the translation strategies of metro prompt words from the perspective of Skopos Theory and achieves a series of achievements with theoretical and practical value. At the theoretical level, it systematically expounds the origin, development and core rules of Skopos Theory, clarifies the interrelationship and dominant role of the Skopos Rule, Coherence Rule and Fidelity Rule in the translation process, and enriches the theoretical research of Skopos Theory in the field of public sign translation.

Through the analysis of the linguistic characteristics and translation status of metro prompt words, this paper reveals the linguistic characteristics of conciseness, accuracy and standardization of metro prompt words, points out the problems such as spelling errors, grammatical errors and improper word choice in current

translation, and deeply analyzes the causes of these problems such as translator levels, cultural differences and the lack of unified standards.

Based on Skopos Theory, a series of targeted translation strategies are proposed. Guided by the Skopos Rule, it is necessary to fully consider the needs and backgrounds of foreign passengers and the scenarios where prompt words are located to clarify the translation purpose, and achieve the translation purpose through literal translation, free translation, addition, omission and other methods. In terms of the Coherence Rule, ensure that the target text is coherent in grammar, vocabulary and logic, and closely integrated with the metro environment and passengers' needs. The Fidelity Rule requires faithful transmission of original information to avoid information omission or distortion, and pay attention to cultural faithfulness to accurately convey the cultural connotation of the original text and avoid cultural misunderstandings and conflicts.

Through case analysis of different types of metro prompt words such as station entry prompts, riding prompts and exit prompts, the effectiveness and practicality of translation strategies from the perspective of Skopos Theory are verified. These strategies can accurately convey information and realize effective communication with passengers according to the purposes and functions of different prompt words.

6.2 Research Deficiencies and Prospects

Although this study has achieved certain results, there are still limitations. In terms of research scope, it mainly focuses on common types of metro prompt words, and less research on prompt words related to special scenarios or emerging businesses, such as metro barrier-free facility prompts and metro commercial activity prompts. With the continuous expansion of metro functions and increasingly diversified services, the translation of these special prompt words also needs in-depth discussion. In terms of research methods, it mainly adopts case analysis and literature research methods, lacking empirical research. In the future,

questionnaires, interviews and other methods can be used to collect feedback from foreign passengers on the translation of metro prompt words, so as to more directly understand their needs and understanding, and provide a more powerful basis for the optimization of translation strategies.

Looking forward, Skopos Theory has broad development space in the field of metro prompt word translation research. With the gradual deepening of the application of artificial intelligence technology in the field of translation, how to combine Skopos Theory with artificial intelligence technology to improve the efficiency and quality of metro prompt word translation is a direction worthy of research. It is possible to explore the establishment of a metro prompt word translation corpus based on Skopos Theory, summarize translation rules and patterns through big data analysis, and provide a more accurate reference for translation practice. With the acceleration of urban internationalization, comparative research on metro prompt word translation in different cities will also be of great significance. By comparing the differences in translation strategies and standards among different cities, summarizing experiences and lessons, promoting exchanges and cooperation among cities, jointly improving the overall level of metro prompt word translation, better serving international passengers and showing the international image of the city.

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Commodified, Disciplined, Deified: Mythological Women and Patriarchal Power in Pushpa Kurup's *Power Women*

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Abstract— Mythology does not merely preserve cultural memory; it also shapes social attitudes toward women, sexuality, obedience, and moral legitimacy. Indian mythological narratives have historically represented women through patriarchal ideals such as chastity, sacrifice, and devotion, thereby reducing female subjectivity to symbolic functions within male-centered traditions. *Power Women: A Journey into Hindu Mythology, Folklore and History* by Pushpa Kurup revisits mythological women whose voices have been marginalized or distorted within dominant retellings. This paper examines Kurup's reinterpretation of Madhavi, Renuka, and Kannagi through the theoretical framework developed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in "Can the Subaltern Speak?". Spivak's argument shifts attention from silence itself to the structures that prevent marginalized women from being heard on their own terms. The paper also engages feminist scholars such as Uma Chakravarti, Simone de Beauvoir, and Shulamith Firestone to situate Kurup's work within broader feminist debates on patriarchy, female sexuality, and bodily control. Madhavi is commodified through reproductive exchange, Renuka is disciplined through surveillance of female desire, and Kannagi acquires authority only after conforming completely to patriarchal ideals of chastity and wifely devotion. Together, these narratives demonstrate that mythology does not simply reflect patriarchy but actively participates in preserving and legitimizing it. Kurup's feminist reinterpretation exposes the emotional and psychological dimensions erased by traditional retellings and restores complexity to women who were historically reduced to moral symbols.



Keywords— chastity, female agency, feminist reinterpretation, mythology, patriarchal silence, Spivak, subaltern, subjectivity

I. INTRODUCTION

Mythological narratives occupy a powerful position within Indian cultural consciousness because they shape not only collective memory but also social ideas regarding morality, gender, sexuality, and authority. Women within these narratives are frequently remembered through roles that privilege devotion, chastity, and sacrifice while suppressing emotional complexity and individual agency. Their stories are often filtered through patriarchal frameworks that determine which forms of femininity deserve reverence and which deserve punishment.

Feminist historians such as Uma Chakravarti have argued that patriarchal social structures in India depended heavily

upon regulating women's sexuality, reproductive roles, and bodily purity, particularly within Brahmanical traditions. Such systems transformed female virtue into a sociocultural requirement rather than a personal choice. Mythology became one of the most effective vehicles for preserving these ideological structures across generations.

Pushpa Kurup directly addresses this issue in *Power Women: A Journey into Hindu Mythology, Folklore and History* by arguing that mythological women have repeatedly been "misrepresented, ignored, suppressed, silenced and marginalized by male writers like Valmiki and Ved Vyasa" (4). Her project belongs to a larger feminist tradition of revisiting mythology from women's

perspectives. Scholars such as Nabaneeta Dev Sen have similarly emphasized that feminist retellings of myth challenge inherited narrative authority by recovering voices and experiences excluded from dominant canonical traditions.

The theoretical framework for this paper comes from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and her influential essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?". Spivak argues that marginalized women are not merely denied speech. More significantly, the institutional structures surrounding them reinterpret, absorb, or erase their voices before those voices can acquire independent meaning. Systems of power speak for subaltern women while simultaneously preventing them from defining themselves.

This paper applies Spivak's framework to three women discussed in Kurup's text: Madhavi, Renuka, and Kannagi. Though they emerge from different mythological traditions, all three are shaped by patriarchal structures that regulate female agency in distinct ways. Madhavi is commodified through exchange, Renuka is disciplined through moral surveillance, and Kannagi is celebrated only after embodying patriarchal ideals of chastity and devotion. Through these narratives, mythology reveals itself not as a neutral cultural archive but as an active participant in preserving gendered power structures.

II. MADHAVI AND THE COMMODIFICATION OF FEMALE SUBJECTIVITY

Madhavi's story reveals how patriarchal systems transform women into instruments of exchange. She is introduced as the daughter of King Yayati and possesses the unusual boon of regaining her virginity after childbirth. When Sage Galava cannot provide the horses demanded by Vishwamitra as guru dakshina, Yayati offers Madhavi instead. She is subsequently passed from one king to another in exchange for horses and compelled to bear sons for each of them (Kurup 67).

The narrative depends entirely upon the exclusion of Madhavi's desires. Fathers negotiate her future, sages determine her purpose, and kings accept her as part of a contractual arrangement. At no stage is her consent treated as meaningful. Her body becomes a medium through which masculine obligations are fulfilled.

Shulamith Firestone argues that patriarchal societies historically organized power around the control of women's reproductive functions. Madhavi's repeated circulation among kings reflects precisely such a system, where fertility becomes detached from female subjectivity and converted into exchange value. Her reproductive

capacity is treated not as part of her humanity but as a transferable social resource.

The so-called boon of restored virginity intensifies this commodification rather than liberating her from it. The restoration serves patriarchal anxiety surrounding purity and possession. It allows the same system to repeatedly consume her body while preserving the illusion of untouched chastity. Madhavi is thus rendered infinitely exchangeable, posing no threat to masculine ideas of purity or legitimacy.

Spivak's framework clarifies the structural implications of this arrangement. The issue is not only that Madhavi remains unheard. More importantly, the entire system surrounding her assumes that male authorities can represent her interests without consulting her at all. Her identity is continuously spoken for by fathers, sages, and kings.

Kurup sharply critiques the conduct of both Galava and Vishwamitra. Despite their spiritual authority, they participate comfortably in an exchange that reduces Madhavi to transactional value. Kurup observes that Vishwamitra's conduct reflects the logic of a commercial transaction, one in which Madhavi's humanity disappears beneath her utility (68).

Eventually, Madhavi withdraws into the forest and refuses marriage. Traditional readings often interpret this act as liberation or spiritual renunciation. Yet such an interpretation remains complicated. Her withdrawal occurs only after repeated exploitation has exhausted every meaningful alternative available to her. The forest becomes less a freely chosen refuge than the final space outside patriarchal circulation.

III. RENUKA AND THE PATRIARCHAL DISCIPLINE OF FEMALE DESIRE

Kurup describes Renuka as "an icon of unabashed female sexuality" (184). The phrase deliberately challenges traditional portrayals of Renuka as a woman corrupted by impurity. Instead of treating desire itself as transgression, Kurup shifts attention toward the system that criminalizes female interiority.

The episode unfolds with remarkable severity. Renuka, wife of Sage Jamadagni, experiences a momentary feeling of attraction while fetching water. Some versions specify that she sees a handsome man, while others leave the source of desire undefined. Jamadagni interprets her disturbed emotional state as evidence of moral corruption, and orders his sons to kill her. Four sons refuse and are cursed. Parashurama obeys and is rewarded.

The narrative permits no distinction between thought and action, which subjects female interiority directly to patriarchal discipline. Renuka neither acts upon desire nor attempts deception. Yet her internal experience alone becomes sufficient justification for punishment.

Uma Chakravarti observes that Brahmanical patriarchy depended heavily upon regulating female sexuality because lineage purity and social order were tied to women's bodies. Renuka's punishment reveals the extremity of that logic. Even involuntary desire becomes intolerable because patriarchal authority requires absolute control over feminine consciousness itself.

Spivak's argument becomes particularly significant here. She suggests that subaltern women cannot easily produce meaning on their own terms because institutional structures have already predetermined how their experiences will be interpreted. Renuka's silence is therefore not accidental. The narrative framework eliminates the possibility of self-definition before her perspective can even emerge.

Although later versions resurrect her through Parashurama's boon, the restoration does not return autonomy to Renuka. Her survival depends entirely on masculine authority. Eventually, her identity becomes associated with sati and idealized devotion rather than with the violence she endured. Patriarchal tradition transforms her into a symbol of obedience while suppressing the disciplinary structure underlying her story.

Kurup's reinterpretation resists this symbolic reduction by treating female desire as fundamentally human rather than morally corrupt. The narrative thereby exposes a patriarchal order that seeks control not merely over women's actions but also over their thoughts, emotions, and psychological autonomy.

IV. KANNAGI AND THE POLITICS OF CHASTE RAGE

Among the women discussed in this paper, Kannagi appears to possess the greatest degree of agency. In the Tamil epic tradition, she confronts royal authority, exposes injustice, and destroys the city of Madurai through the force of her rage. Yet the conditions under which her voice acquires legitimacy remain deeply tied to patriarchal ideals.

Kannagi's husband Kovalan abandons her for a courtesan and later returns after losing his wealth. Kannagi accepts him without resistance and offers him her final anklet so they may rebuild their lives. When Kovalan is falsely accused of theft and executed by the king, Kannagi enters the royal court and proves Kovalan's innocence by

demonstrating that her anklet differs from the queen's (Kurup 203–05). In grief and fury, she destroys Madurai.

Kannagi undoubtedly speaks with extraordinary authority. However, Spivak's framework raises a more difficult question: why is she heard? Her legitimacy emerges precisely because she has already fulfilled patriarchal expectations of chastity, patience, forgiveness, and wifely devotion.

Simone de Beauvoir argues that patriarchal societies reward women insofar as they embody roles constructed for them by androcentric culture. Kannagi's authority emerges not outside patriarchy but through near-perfect conformity to its expectations regarding ideal womanhood.

Kurup observes that Kannagi's destruction of Madurai demonstrates the immense symbolic power attached to feminine chastity and grief within this tradition (205). Yet this symbolic power remains conditional. A woman lacking chastity or refusing marital devotion would not receive equivalent moral recognition. Patriarchal culture permits Kannagi's rage because her suffering validates the values it already considers sacred.

This contradiction forms the central tension within Kannagi's story. She simultaneously resists patriarchal injustice and derives symbolic authority from the same ideological system that limits other women. Her resistance is genuine, but it remains inseparable from the dominant logic that grants legitimacy only to the ideal wife.

Unlike Madhavi and Renuka, Kannagi is not silenced through exclusion or punishment alone. Instead, her speech is selectively authorized under conditions determined by patriarchal morality itself.

V. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: DIFFERENT SILENCES, SAME STRUCTURE

The stories of Madhavi, Renuka, and Kannagi reveal different mechanisms through which patriarchal systems regulate women's lives and identities. Madhavi is controlled through commodification and reproductive exchange. Renuka is disciplined through surveillance of female interiority. Kannagi is idealized and selectively empowered through chastity.

Despite these differences, the underlying structure remains consistent. In all three narratives, patriarchal authority maintains itself by controlling not only women's bodies but also the terms through which female experience becomes socially intelligible. Women are permitted recognition only within interpretive frameworks already defined by masculine authority.

Spivak's theoretical framework is especially useful because it shifts attention from isolated acts of oppression toward the systems that produce and regulate meaning itself. Even Kannagi, who speaks most forcefully, acquires legitimacy only within boundaries already sanctioned by dominant ideology. Her speech does not entirely escape the structures that authorize it.

Kurup's reinterpretations resist these inherited frameworks by restoring emotional depth and psychological realism to mythological women. She repeatedly asks what these women may have experienced internally within situations imposed upon them. Such interventions align with the larger feminist project identified by Nabaneeta Dev Sen, who argues that women's retellings of mythology challenge the authority of canonical narratives by recovering suppressed female perspectives.

At the same time, feminist reinterpretation is itself an act of reconstruction rather than neutral recovery. Kurup does not simply uncover hidden truths buried within mythology. She actively reimagines these women through a contemporary feminist consciousness. That interpretive intervention is precisely what gives her work its critical and political significance.

VI. CONCLUSION

Madhavi, Renuka, and Kannagi continue to occupy significant positions within Indian cultural memory. Yet the forms in which they are remembered reveal how mythology frequently preserves patriarchal ideology alongside narrative tradition. Madhavi's exploitation is normalized as duty and sacrifice. Renuka's punishment becomes absorbed into narratives of devotion and purity. Kannagi's rage is sanctified only because it emerges from idealized chastity and wifely loyalty.

Pushpa Kurup challenges these simplified representations by foregrounding the emotional and psychological realities erased within conventional retellings. Her reinterpretations expose the structures through which mythology disciplines female desire, regulates female bodies, and authorizes women only under restrictive moral conditions.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak provides the theoretical vocabulary necessary to understand this process. Her concept of the subaltern reveals how patriarchal systems pre-empt female speech by interpreting women before women can define themselves independently. At the same time, the paper also demonstrates that mythological women such as Kannagi partially achieve symbolic authority, even if that authority remains conditional and structurally constrained.

Together, Kurup's feminist reinterpretations and Spivak's postcolonial feminist framework yield a reading in which mythology emerges as an active cultural mechanism for preserving gendered hierarchies. The mythological woman was never naturally silent. She was systematically silenced, disciplined, interpreted, and remembered through structures designed to speak for her rather than with her.

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Construction of Taiwan's Social Media Image in Chinese Mainland from the Perspectives of "Other-construction" and "Self-construction" Research

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Abstract— *With the widespread popularity of social media platforms in Taiwan, the methods, actors, and pathways of disseminating the image of mainland China in Taiwanese society have undergone profound changes. The traditional one-way communication model dominated by mainstream media has gradually shifted to a multi-actor interactive communication model involving official accounts, opinion leaders, and ordinary users. This study focuses on three major platforms—Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok—and employs theories such as framing theory, national image construction theory, and the "other-shaping vs. self-shaping" perspective. Through methods like content analysis, framing analysis, sentiment analysis, and discourse analysis, it examines content related to mainland China on Taiwanese social media over the past three years. The findings reveal that the image of mainland China on Taiwanese social media is co-constructed by multiple actors, with significant differences in framing strategies among them. Official accounts emphasize frameworks of political unification and developmental achievements; opinion leaders favor cultural resonance and emotional engagement, while ordinary users tend toward lifestyle and entertainment-oriented expressions. The cultural resonance framework is most likely to generate positive interactions, whereas the political unification framework is more prone to spark controversy and polarization. Platform algorithms, user interactions, and short-video mechanisms collectively influence the visibility and acceptance of mainland China's image. This study proposes communication strategies such as actor coordination, framing optimization, pathway innovation, and algorithm adaptation.*



Keywords— *Mainland China's image, Taiwanese social media, national image, framing theory, other-construction and self-construction.*

I. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

In recent years, with the rapid development of mobile internet and social media platforms, the information dissemination ecosystem in Taiwan has undergone profound changes. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Threads have become crucial channels for Taiwanese people to access news, express opinions, and engage in public discussions. According to the DataReportal report "Digital 2025: Taiwan," by 2025, Taiwan's social media users had reached 18.4 million, accounting for approximately 79.4% of the total population. Among these platforms, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok wield particularly significant influence among younger demographics.

Against this backdrop, the way mainland China's image is communicated within Taiwanese society has also evolved. In the past, the image of mainland China was largely "other-construction" by traditional Taiwanese media or Western outlets—that is, defined and framed by external actors. However, in the social media era, mainland China's official institutions, cross-strait opinion leaders, and ordinary users can now directly participate in information dissemination, granting the mainland stronger "self-construction" capabilities.

The term "other-construction" refers to the construction of a nation or region's image primarily by external actors, characterized by its reliance on external discourse systems. Conversely, "self-construction" emphasizes a nation's proactive efforts to build its own image through active communication and autonomous expression. Against the long-standing backdrop of political opposition and ideological divisions in Taiwanese media, the dissemination of mainland China's image has long been influenced by negative framing, including narratives such as the "China threat theory," "political oppression," and "military expansion." However, with the rise of short-video platforms and the spread of lifestyle content, mainland tourism, cuisine, technological advancements,

and pop culture have gradually become key channels through which Taiwanese youth engage with mainland China.

Thus, this study raises the following core research questions: Who are the primary actors constructing mainland China's image on Taiwanese social media? How do different actors shape this image through framing narratives? How do platform algorithms and interaction mechanisms influence the dissemination and reception of mainland China's image? And can mainland China achieve a transition from "other-construction" to "self-construction" in its communication strategy?

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Significance

This study integrates national image research with social media communication studies, expanding the traditional focus on state-led communication in national image theory. It highlights the new feature of "multi-actor collaborative communication" in the social media era [1].

The research enriches the application of framing theory in cross-strait communication studies. Framing theory posits that media shape public perception through "selection," "emphasis," and "exclusion." In the context of social media, framing becomes more fragmented, emotional, and algorithm-driven, a phenomenon systematically analyzed in this study. By introducing the "other-construction vs. self-construction" analytical framework, it explores mainland China's capacity and limitations in actively shaping its image within Taiwan's public discourse, offering a new dimension to national image research.

2.2 Core Definitions

"Other-construction" refers to the construction of a nation's image by external actors, reflecting an inherent imbalance in discursive power. Historically, mainland

China's image in international communication has often been framed by Western and Taiwanese media. "Self-construction," on the other hand, emphasizes a nation's autonomous efforts to construct its image through proactive communication and narrative control. In the social media era, official accounts, grassroots creators, and ordinary users can all participate in the "self-construction" process [2]. National image encompasses the public's comprehensive cognitive and affective evaluation of a nation, including cognitive, emotional, and value-assessment dimensions.

This study categorizes communication actors into three groups: official accounts, opinion leaders, and ordinary users. These actors differ significantly in their communication objectives, expressive styles, and audience influence.

2.3 Framing Theory

Framing theory was first proposed by Goffman and later further developed by Robert M. Entman. He argued that framing is a process through which the media influences public understanding and perception by "selecting" and "highlighting" certain information. From the perspective of image construction theory, Boulding posited that national image is not a simple reflection of objective reality but rather a subjective perception formed by the public during the communication process [3].

Analyzed through postcolonial theory, the dominance of Western discourse in global communication is emphasized, with China's image long influenced by the "Orientalism" narrative. Taiwanese media are also indirectly affected by Western news framing. This paper constructs a three-dimensional analytical model of "subject—frame—path." The subject dimension addresses "who communicates"; the frame dimension examines "how it is communicated"; and the path dimension explores "through what mechanisms it is communicated."

III. THE SOCIAL MEDIA ECOSYSTEM IN TAIWAN AND THE COMMUNICATION CONTEXT OF MAINLAND CHINA'S IMAGE

3.1 Overview of Social Media Usage in Taiwan

With the advancement of smartphones, mobile networks, and digital platforms, Taiwan has evolved into a highly "social-media-driven" society. According to recent statistics from Taiwan's Digital Development Department and Data Reportal, internet penetration in Taiwan has consistently remained above 90%. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Threads have become deeply embedded in the daily lives of Taiwanese citizens. For the 18–35 age groups in particular, social media is not only a crucial channel for obtaining information but also a vital space for expressing opinions, engaging in public discourse, shaping identity, and maintaining social relationships [4].

From a platform usage perspective, Facebook still holds significant influence in Taiwan. Due to its early development, Facebook boasts a broad user demographic, with middle-aged and older groups heavily relying on it for news and political discussions. As a result, many media organizations, politicians, political parties, and public intellectuals in Taiwan regard Facebook as a key platform for disseminating public opinion. During election periods, Facebook often becomes a battleground for political mobilization, policy promotion, and public debate. Discussions about Mainland China on Facebook tend to be highly politicized, frequently linking to cross-strait relations, security issues, and ideological conflicts.

Instagram, on the other hand, exhibits a more pronounced "visual communication" characteristic. Unlike Facebook, which emphasizes text-based news discussions, Instagram focuses on images, short videos, and personal lifestyle showcases, resulting in content that is more lifestyle-oriented, entertaining, and emotionally driven. Many young Taiwanese users encounter content related to

Mainland China's tourism, cuisine, pop culture, and urban landscapes through Instagram. For instance, posts featuring Mainland China's nightscapes, food explorations, Hanfu culture, and city vlogs enjoy high viewership and engagement rates on Instagram. This indicates that the portrayal of Mainland China on Instagram is gradually shifting from traditional political narratives to lifestyle and youth culture narratives [5].

TikTok, along with its Mainland counterpart Douyin, has become one of the most talked-about platforms in recent years due to its content spillover effects. TikTok relies on algorithmic recommendations to rapidly disseminate information through short videos, prioritizing entertainment, emotional appeal, and immediacy. Young Taiwanese users on TikTok gain more direct exposure to the daily lives, online culture, and consumer trends of Mainland Chinese youth. Content such as "City Walk," "night market challenges," "high-speed rail experiences," and "campus life" often transcends traditional political frameworks, allowing Taiwanese youth to form a more grounded and realistic perception of Mainland China.

Additionally, emerging platforms like Threads have gained popularity among young Taiwanese users in recent years. Given Threads' emphasis on real-time interaction and fragmented expression, its content tends to be more emotionally charged and opinion-driven. Topics related to Mainland China can quickly become viral on Threads, accompanied by intense emotional expressions and ideological clashes.

Overall, the social media ecosystem in Taiwan is characterized by: a heavy reliance on social media for information among young people, the gradual transformation of traditional public opinion dissemination by short-video platforms, the growing prominence of emotional, entertainment-driven, and fragmented content, and the increasing influence of algorithms over traditional editorial mechanisms in shaping public perception. In this media environment, the communication of Mainland

China's image is no longer confined to traditional media reports but has entered a phase of multi-subject, multi-platform, and multi-level interactive dissemination.

3.2 The Public Opinion Environment in the Context of Cross-Strait Relations

The social media landscape in Taiwan is highly politicized, with cross-strait issues being one of the most sensitive and contentious topics in Taiwanese society. Due to historical, political, and ideological factors, the image of Mainland China in Taiwan's public discourse is often imbued with significant political meaning.

Taiwanese society has long been divided between the "pan-Blue" and "pan-Green" camps, which hold markedly different views on Mainland China. The pan-Green camp typically emphasizes "Taiwanese sovereignty" and frames discussions around narratives such as the "China threat theory" and "democracy versus authoritarianism." In contrast, the pan-Blue camp tends to highlight cultural ties, economic cooperation, and peaceful exchanges across the strait. This political polarization further influences information dissemination and audience perceptions on social media.

In the era of traditional media, cross-strait issues were primarily dominated by television news and newspapers. However, in the age of social media, ordinary users have become key participants in shaping these discussions [6]. A growing number of political influencers, independent media accounts, and opinion leaders engage in debates about cross-strait issues on social platforms, further complicating Taiwan's public opinion environment. Some opinion leaders employ emotional language, clickbait headlines, and provocative rhetoric to attract attention, exacerbating societal divisions.

The algorithmic mechanisms of social media platforms reinforce the "echo chamber" effect, where users are increasingly exposed to information that aligns with their existing beliefs, leading to closed-off cognitive

structures. On Taiwanese social media, users with differing political views often form isolated information communities. For example, pro-independence users are more likely to encounter negative content about Mainland China, while those favoring cross-strait exchanges are more exposed to content about Mainland China's development, cultural exchanges, and tourism. This algorithmic reinforcement has led to a "segmented" perception of Mainland China in Taiwanese society. Some young users form relatively positive, lifestyle-based impressions of Mainland China through short-video platforms, while others remain highly wary or even hostile due to exposure to political conflicts and negative news.

Moreover, the "spiral of silence" phenomenon is widespread on Taiwanese social media. Given the sensitivity of cross-strait issues, some users may choose to remain silent even if they hold dissenting opinions, fearing online attacks, public pressure, or social ostracism. This results in an "extremization" of voices on social media, where those with strong opinions dominate the discourse while moderates refrain from speaking up.

During major cross-strait events, this polarization becomes even more pronounced. For instance, in discussions about military drills, elections, or diplomatic incidents, social media often erupts with emotionally charged debates, with opposing viewpoints clashing fiercely and even resorting to labeling. This highly adversarial environment poses additional challenges for the communication of Mainland China's image.

3.3 The Existing Dilemmas in the Image Dissemination of Mainland China

For a long time, the image of Mainland China has faced multiple structural challenges in its dissemination across Taiwan. The first is the enduring influence of traditional media frameworks. Historically, mainstream Taiwanese media coverage of Mainland China has disproportionately focused on political conflicts, military issues, and negative events. Topics such as the pandemic,

military exercises, and human rights controversies often dominate headlines, while economic development, social life, and youth culture receive comparatively less attention. This longstanding media framing has led to fixed perceptions of Mainland China among some Taiwanese audiences.

The Western media discourse also significantly shapes public opinion in Taiwan. Due to Taiwan's reliance on international news sources from Europe and the U.S., negative narratives about China from Western media are further amplified locally. Concepts like the "China threat theory," "technological infiltration," and "cognitive warfare" have frequently appeared in Taiwan's public discourse in recent years, gradually influencing public perception.

The spread of misinformation and cognitive interference on social media has further complicated the dissemination of Mainland China's image. Given the rapid speed and low moderation barriers of social media, unverified information, edited clips, and emotionally charged content can quickly go viral. Some politically motivated accounts exploit sensational headlines and one-sided narratives to fuel conflicts, deepening divisions among users.

Additionally, historical memory and identity differences stemming from decades of cross-strait separation play a crucial role in shaping perceptions of Mainland China. Many young Taiwanese lack firsthand experience with Mainland society, relying instead on media reports and online discussions for their understanding. As a result, repeated exposure to negative content on social media can reinforce stereotypes and cognitive biases.

The rise of short-video platforms has introduced new dynamics to the dissemination of Mainland China's image. On one hand, ordinary citizens, travel bloggers, and lifestyle creators have emerged as key contributors to shaping this image. On the other hand, Taiwanese youth

are increasingly exposed to Mainland cities, cuisine, pop culture, and daily life through these platforms, fostering more concrete and relatable perceptions. This shift suggests that the narrative of Mainland China is gradually transitioning from "grand political storytelling" to "everyday life narratives" [7].

Overall, the portrayal of Mainland China in Taiwanese social media is shaped by both traditional political structures and media frameworks, as well as new opportunities in the digital age. Breaking free from entrenched negative narratives and transitioning from "other-shaped" to "self-shaped" communication has become a critical topic in cross-strait communication research.

IV. THE ACTORS IN MAINLAND CHINA'S IMAGE CONSTRUCTION: WHO SHAPES IT?

4.1 Official Accounts: The Strategic Communicators

Mainland China's official communication actors primarily include the Taiwan Affairs Office, the Association for Relations across the Taiwan Straits, Xinhua News Agency, CCTV News, and local cultural tourism accounts. These official accounts wield significant agenda-setting power, with content focusing on cross-strait policies, economic development, and cultural exchanges. In recent years, they have increasingly adopted short-video formats and youth-oriented language, such as vlogs, live streams, and animated storytelling, to soften the tone of political communication. However, their formal language and limited interactivity often lead Taiwanese youth to dismiss such content as "propaganda" [8].

4.2 Opinion Leaders: The Intermediary Force between Official and Civilian Spheres

Opinion leaders include cross-strait influencers, scholars, cultural figures, and political commentators. Compared to official accounts, opinion leaders emphasize

more personalized expression and emotional interaction. For example, some Taiwanese influencers have gained significant attention on YouTube and TikTok by creating videos about mainland China's tourism, cuisine, and urban development. Opinion leaders excel at creating "soft connections" between political and lifestyle topics, making their content more relatable to younger audiences.

4.3 Ordinary Users: Participants in Fragmented Communication

Ordinary users are key participants in shaping the image of mainland China. Through reposts, comments, memes, and short video recreations, they contribute to the reproduction of this image. Research shows that Taiwanese netizens exhibit strong interest in content related to mainland tourism, food, nightscapes, and high-speed rail construction, while political topics tend to spark more controversy.

4.4 Inter-Subject Interaction Dynamics

In social media communication, official accounts set the agenda, opinion leaders act as "bridges," and ordinary users drive dissemination and emotional expression. The three form a complex interactive relationship, characterized by both collaborative dissemination and framing conflicts.

V. FRAMING ANALYSIS OF MAINLAND CHINA'S IMAGE CONSTRUCTION: HOW IS IT NARRATED?

5.1 Framing Extraction Methods and Coding System

Based on Entman's framing theory, the coding system categorizes frames into five types: development achievements, cultural resonance, political unification, humanitarian care, and negative response.

The development achievements frame highlights mainland China's economic growth, technological innovation, and infrastructure (e.g., high-speed rail, drones, AI, and urban development), which enjoy high visibility

on Taiwanese social media. The cultural resonance frame revolves around Chinese culture, cuisine, tourism, films, and traditional festivals, often eliciting the most positive engagement. Many Taiwanese users develop a sense of affinity through short videos featuring mainland night markets, hotpot, ancient towns, and pop culture [9].

While the political unification frame has clear political objectives, it sparks significant controversy on Taiwanese platforms, often leading to polarized debates. The humanitarian care frame emphasizes disaster relief, medical cooperation, and civilian exchanges, such as pandemic-related cross-strait collaborations, which receive positive feedback from some Taiwanese users.

The negative response frame primarily counters misinformation. Direct rebuttals have limited impact, whereas indirect responses using factual presentations and lifestyle content prove more effective.

5.2 Framing Differences among Stakeholders

Official accounts favor development achievements and political unification frames; opinion leaders lean toward cultural resonance and emotional frames; ordinary users predominantly adopt entertainment and lifestyle frames.

Research indicates that the cultural resonance frame generates significantly higher likes, shares, and positive comments compared to the political unification frame. Content about food, travel, and pop culture is more effective in breaking down political biases and fostering emotional connections. Although the political unification frame drives high engagement, it also attracts notably more negative feedback [10].

VI. FROM "OTHER-CONSTRUCTION" TO "SELF-CONSTRUCTION": COMMUNICATION MECHANISMS AND PATH TRANSFORMATION

6.1 Algorithmic Recommendations and Information Visibility

Official accounts remain a key source of Mainland China's image dissemination, but user-generated content (UGC) is becoming a significant force shaping Taiwanese youth perceptions. Particularly on platforms like TikTok and Instagram, ordinary users create decentralized communication through short videos and lifestyle posts.

Platform algorithms determine which content gains visibility. Research shows that emotional, entertaining, and visually engaging content is more likely to be recommended, while politically charged or didactic material is often skipped. This algorithmic mechanism reinforces "information cocoons" to some extent, yet short-video platforms can also break traditional media boundaries, exposing Taiwanese youth to more aspects of Mainland life.

Comment sections serve as crucial spaces for constructing Mainland China's image, where supportive and opposing views clash intensely. Emoticons, Internet memes, and parodic videos have become key modes of expression for young users. This study proposes a communication path model: "information exposure → emotional arousal → cognitive adjustment → attitude shift," highlighting culture's role as an "emotional lubricant." Compared to direct political messaging, everyday content more effectively lowers psychological barriers [11].

6.2 "Other-Construction" vs. "Self-Construction"

Western and mainstream Taiwanese media have long dominated international discourse, often framing Mainland China negatively. During major crises, the "China threat theory" retains strong momentum. While social media has

empowered Mainland China to proactively shape its narrative—with short-video platforms lowering barriers for public participation in national image-building—"self-shaping" still faces challenges: rigid official rhetoric, opaque algorithms, and entrenched political biases [12].

To build a collaborative communication network, official accounts, influencers, and ordinary users should coordinate efforts. Reducing monolithic political messaging while emphasizing cultural resonance, humanitarian appeals, and youth exchanges is vital. Innovating formats—leveraging short videos, livestreams, memes, and interactive challenges—can enhance relatability [13].

On social media, improving algorithmic adaptability by studying platform recommendation systems and optimizing titles, visuals, and engagement methods boosts content reach. Strengthening emotional bonds through shared experiences—food, travel, music, film, and pop culture—fosters common ground between cross-strait youth [14].

VII. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study reveals that the portrayal of mainland China in Taiwanese social media is characterized by multi-agent co-construction. Official accounts, opinion leaders, and ordinary users exhibit significant differences in communication frameworks and styles. The cultural resonance framework yields the most effective dissemination, while the political unification framework, despite its high visibility, is also the most contentious. Platform algorithms and user interaction mechanisms jointly influence the dissemination and reception of mainland China's image.

This paper constructs a "subject-framework-path" analytical model, enriching the research on national image

in the era of social media and providing practical strategic recommendations for cross-strait communication practices.

However, this study has certain limitations: the data collection scope was constrained by platform interfaces, and the psychological mechanisms of the audience require further investigation through in-depth interviews. Future research could further compare communication differences across various platforms.

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Silent Desires and Sacred Truths: Ismat Chughtai and the Queer Rewriting of Flesh and Spirit

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Abstract— *Ismat Chughtai's fiction engages the body as a deeply political and spiritual site, where desire, silence, and moral regulation intersect. This paper examines how Chughtai represents same-sex female intimacy not as moral collapse but as an alternative form of emotional and spiritual truth. Focusing primarily on Lihaaf and selected short stories, the study explores how queer desire, though socially coded as sin, becomes a source of comfort, care, and existential survival for women confined within patriarchal and religious respectability. Drawing on Michel Foucault's understanding of sexuality as a discourse of power, the paper argues that Chughtai subtly relocates spirituality from institutional religion to lived intimacy. While heteronormative morality denies queer bodies spiritual legitimacy, Chughtai's narratives suggest that desire itself functions as a form of inward faith, a quiet commitment to emotional honesty. Spirituality, therefore, is not abandoned but transformed. Situated in the turbulent context of late-colonial India and Partition, Chughtai's writing anticipates contemporary queer literary concerns by showing how private desire becomes a refuge from social, political, and moral violence. Her restrained narrative style, marked by suggestion, irony, and silence, allows queer embodiment to exist without moral spectacle. A brief comparative reading of Ocean Vuong's On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous and Akwaeke Emezi's Freshwater demonstrates how contemporary queer writers continue this redefinition of spirituality beyond religious doctrine. Read together, they reveal a queer literary tradition in which desire is not opposed to spirituality, but becomes its most honest language.*



Keywords— *Corporeal Studies, Desire and Spirituality, Ismat Chughtai, Narrative Studies, Queer Embodiment.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The space of narrative literature has long had a history of functioning as a site where the body is unrelentingly policed, where the flesh and in extension the spiritual legitimacy attached to the physical is subjected to moral authority and social discipline. The late colonial era of South Asia was a ripe site where the female body in particular was a surface charged with ideological struggle, expected to be pure, brimming with domestic virtue and upholding religious respectability, with absolutely no space for emotional autonomy, let alone the erotic. Emerging in such tumultuous terrains, Ismat Chughtai pens one of the most controversial stories in Urdu literary history, *Lihaaf* (The Quilt), a tale that defies the conventions of literary

narrative without uttering an explicit word. Refusing sensationalism, Chughtai's story rejects even the premise of same sex as the most contested part of the narrative but instead settles on desire and its depiction as an extremely uneasy and spectral dance between flesh and spirit, between the bodily hunger that cannot be denied and the metaphysical longing that cannot be fulfilled, the yearning and the unnamed—between the private heat of intimacy and the cold, scandalizing gaze of patriarchal society—as its central preoccupation.

Written in 1942 and first published in the Urdu magazine *Adab-i-Latif*, the story recounts the nocturnal intimacy between Begum Jaan and her maid, Rabbo, whose secret encounters unfold beneath the eponymous quilt. The paper

argues that Lihaaf constructs female desire not as a moral collapse but as an alternative form of existential and spiritual survival. Chughtai stitches the prose with silences, ellipses and ironic understatement, through a child's perspective, where the erotic is rendered palpable without ever being named outright. Following the melancholy of Begum Jaan, a woman bound to a house and an unconsummated marriage, is a wife in name only and confined to the patriarchal walls of nawab's prison where she rots in her unmet desires. The patriarchal confinement is not overtly named or critiqued but highlighted through Begum's loneliness. Her repression generates a spiritual erosion, where the self is hollowed out under the weight of a domestic structure and the body becomes the only remaining language through which the truth can be expressed.

In an environment where the begum is not sanctioned to choose herself, her desires, and have any agency, she puts her faith in feeling, warmth and human presence where marriage, religion and aristocratic respectability have failed to provide any meaning. The paper addresses three key questions: first, how does Chughtai employ narrative silence and material symbolism (the quilt, prayer, fasting) to re-map spirituality onto queer female intimacy? Second, in what ways do Foucauldian and post-structuralist notions of sexuality as discourse illuminate the power dynamics that render such desire both forbidden and subversive? Third, how does Chughtai's treatment of queer desire anticipate contemporary South Asian queer aesthetics, as exemplified by Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* and Akwaeke Emezi's *Freshwater*?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Butler argues that "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler 33); through this lens, Begum Jaan's intimacy—enacted through domestic rituals such as the quilt, prayer, and fasting—may be read as a series of repetitive performative acts. Butler further contends that gender "ought not to be conceived merely as the cultural inscription of meaning on a pre-given sex" (Butler 10), a formulation that allows us to read the body as the site where sexuality and spirituality are simultaneously written and erased. Foucault emphasises how these erasures operate as a form of power, challenging the "repressive hypothesis": he contends that the silence is not the absence of discourse but, "an element that functions alongside the things said" (Foucault 27). In *Lihaaf*, the domestic sphere operates as what Foucault calls a "privileged site of sexuality" (3), where regulation is most intense.

The narrative generates erotic knowledge through silence, the quilt's movement becomes a nonverbal utterance, aligning with Foucault's claim that sexuality is produced through dispersed practices rather than explicit articulation (94).

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* sharpens this analysis by framing silence as structurally productive. As Foucault writes—and Sedgwick quotes at the outset of her analysis—"there is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say" (Foucault, qtd. in Sedgwick 3; cf. Foucault 27). The bedroom becomes a literal and epistemic closet where desire is concealed and enacted both. Sedgwick's distinction between minoritizing and universalizing views of homosexuality allows Chughtai's text to be read not as an act of isolated deviance but as a critique of heteronormative knowledge itself.

Extending this argument, Jonathan Dollimore's *Sexual Dissidence* traces how "the unspeakable" becomes erotically charged through prohibition, noting that silencing often "produces a desire all the more intense for being denied representation" (Dollimore 33). This insight is borne out in Chughtai's use of ellipsis and metaphor, where the quilt's folds and nocturnal setting materialize what cannot be spoken.

This is relevant because South Asian scholarship situates *Lihaaf* within a longer cultural genealogy. Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai document how same-sex intimacy in Indian texts has historically been articulated through devotion and affect rather than identity (xxi). Gayatri Gopinath situates Chughtai's text within a broader queer South Asian framework, arguing that both Chughtai's story and Deepa Mehta's film adaptation "powerfully disrupt dominant gender and sexual constructions of communal and national identity in South Asia, as well as dominant Euro-American narratives of an 'out,' visible 'lesbian' identity" (Gopinath 26). Although Chughtai predates the diaspora, her narrative strategies anticipate contemporary queer aesthetics.

III. ANALYSIS

3.1 Silence, Desire, and the Performative Body

Chughtai represents desire as performative rather than innate; Begum Jaan's intimacy is enacted obliquely through domestic rituals rather than explicit declarations. The quilt, prayer and fasting all function as repetitive acts which highlight her desire. The intimacy is written through silence. A silence that does not erase desire but shelters it, like prayer shelters longing without naming it.

The method of restraint becomes its method of spiritual remapping, what is not spoken is what is most sacred.

Bourgeois modernity polices sexuality not through punishment but through an “injunction to silence” where sex is made to “disappear” in language (Foucault 4). Silence creates a private devotional world inside the zenana where moral surveillance can be countered and subverted.

3.2 The Quilt as Sacred Symbol

The quilt becomes the primary symbol through which this unspeakable intimacy gains its form. The narrator, a child who cannot interpret what she sees, only registers the quilt’s movement as eerie, alive. “Begum Jan whose quilt is imprinted on my memory like a blacksmith’s brand” (7). The “elephant shaped shadow” that “sways like an elephant” haunts the child narrator, visually terrorizing her. The refusal of explicit visibility is crucial in queer desire where it is presented not as a spectacle but as a mystery, much like spirituality. The quilt becomes the *purdah*, concealing the act while still allowing its presence to be omnipresent, occupying and larger than life itself. It functions as what Sedgwick terms the epistemological structure of the closet, where “closetedness itself is a performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence,” and desire is sustained precisely through that productive concealment (Sedgwick 3).

So huge is the mystery compounded around it that the narrator confesses it alike to being possessed by evil spirits and her habitual night fears, sleep walking and sleep talking all suggest that the supernatural is a metaphor for the repressed queer desire that the household seeks to conceal.

3.3 Prayer, Fasting, and the Counter-Ritual of Intimacy

Chughtai sharpens the symbolism in positioning Begum Jaan’s loneliness against the religious economy of fasting and prayer. Prayer operates as a shield against this very desire and also a conduit for the hidden intimacy. When the child, afraid and startled, asks Begum Jaan what is happening, she is ordered to recite the *Ayatul Korsi*. A protective verse that momentarily silences the imagined threat, it adds to the supernatural element of the concealed sexual act, as if it is being performed for a superior purpose, enacted like a ritual and a bystander to this ritual is asked to seek shelter in the *Ayatul Korsi* to protect them from this unnamed act. The *Ayatul Korsi* functions as a performative prayer which conceals and signals queer longing, enacting what Sedgwick describes as the way silence itself becomes “pointed and performative,” its unspoken content generating the very desire it refuses to name (Sedgwick 3).

Begum Jaan is surrounded by rituals meant to purify the body but they cannot save her from emotional starvation. Her husband’s piety is performative, a public masculinity which is tied to respectability rather than care. Material symbolism extends to fasting-like deprivation: Begum Jaan

“stiffened with cold despite the new cotton in her quilt while relatives feast” (9), mirroring a spiritual fast that heightens bodily awareness and erotic tension.

Rabbo’s intimacy is a counter-spiritual practice where it is not a sinful indulgence in a sea of abundance but is survival. “Rabbo came to her rescue just as she was starting to go under. Suddenly her emaciated body began to fill out. Her cheeks became rosy, beauty, as it were, glowed through every pore” (9). Her presence fills Begum back to life; it is not simply her body which requires the warmth but her spirit which finds an outlet in Rabbo’s devotion.

Rabbo’s relentless oil massages, described in vivid detail, serve as tactile prayers that replace orthodox worship, aligning the body with a private devotional practice. The text describes how “it was a special oil massage that brought life back to the half-dead Begum Jaan” (9) and how Rabbo “massaged her back... for two hours” (11), turning touch into a sustained act of devotion. The narrator describes it, “it was almost as if getting scratched for her was the fulfilment of life’s essential need—in a way, more important than the basic necessities for staying alive” (10). Rabbo creates a tactile liturgy that mirrors religious prayer, offering Begum Jaan a channel through which the unquiet itch can be temporarily soothed and spiritually attuned.

Rabbo’s devotion is therefore twofold, she is the witch who glows like heated iron, yet her relentless ministrations become a sacred service, a bodily liturgy that substitutes for formal worship. By dedicating herself to Begum Jaan’s relief, Rabbo enacts a spiritual kinship where the body is the altar and the massage the sacrament. The relationship between Begum Jaan and Rabbo thus transcends mere servitude; it is a covert spiritual communion.

This echoes Foucault’s argument that sexuality is not merely repressed but produced through “mobile, polymorphous, and contingent techniques of power” tied to the body’s sensations (Foucault 107). Begum Jaan’s body, denied affection under the guise of marital morality, becomes the site where spirituality is relocated from mere doctrine to touch.

3.4 The Domestic Archive and the Ethics of Silence

The narrative silence that envelops Begum Jaan’s inner world, “a picture of melancholy and despair” (9), creates a vacuum that the quilt and prayer fill, allowing intimacy to be read through objects rather than explicit dialogue. This strategy is identified by discourse critics as one that “re-inscribes desire onto domestic artifacts” (Mills 2004). Chughtai deepens this further through the child narrator who remains “innocent” yet the text constantly suggests more than it declares. The child notes that Begum Jaan’s voice, “Rabbo, Rabbo,” functions like a chant, blurring erotic urgency with devotional repetition. The name spoken

in desire becomes indistinguishable from a name spoken in prayer.

Chughtai's domestic space becomes the unlikely archive of queer life, one that "disrupts dominant gender and sexual constructions of communal and national identity in South Asia" while refusing a visible Euro-American "out" lesbian epistemology (Gopinath 26). The quilt does not simply conceal but archives what society refuses to record and could not be stated at a time of late colonial era as well. This alignment of domestic objects with devotional acts re-configures spirituality as a private and queer sanctuary within the patriarchal household.

The household in *Lihaaf* does not pose as a neutral family space but also as a micro-institution where sexuality is both forbidden and paradoxically produced. Foucault writes that sexuality became bound to "a great polymorphous injunction" to speak, classify, and manage sex (Foucault 33). In Chughtai's story, the Begum's body is precisely the kind of body Foucault describes as socially saturated with regulation, expected to represent aristocratic purity, marital fidelity, and religious decorum. But it is also worthy to note that Begum is desperate to look for relief from this desire she feels afflicted with; her need to turn towards this possession of itch is not limited to Rabbo. The child narrator is engulfed in it when she offers to scratch in replacement of Rabbo. "Begum Jan's deep dark eyes focussed on me, I started crying. She was clutching me like a clay doll... She seemed possessed" (16). Rabbo's massages only mask but do not cure the deeper need; Begum Jaan's spiritual yearning cannot be satisfied with ritual alone. This itch becomes a signifier of a yearning for transcendence, desire is rendered "forbidden" because it threatens the symbolic function her body performs within the patriarchal household.

Sedgwick argues that knowledge about sexuality is not simply divided into what is said and unsaid but actually, the unsaid structures the meaning of what is known (Sedgwick 3). Because the child narrator cannot name what she witnesses, she produces a space where the reader must decode a sacred mystery rather than observe a scandal. Post-structuralist theory also clarifies why the domestic setting is not merely a backdrop but a performative stage, where Begum Jaan's role as a respectable wife is itself a performance. Her marriage to the nawab is not the natural centre of domestic intimacy but a social arrangement which produces the illusion of heteronormativity while displacing desire elsewhere. The quilt, meant to signify privacy and modesty, becomes instead the medium through which an alternative form of embodied truth is enacted.

Importantly, this queer truth is not framed as purely erotic. It carries spiritual weight because it is produced in a world

where institutional religion and patriarchal morality have failed to offer Begum Jan emotional care. The rituals of prayer and fasting in *Lihaaf* appear less as sources of transcendence than as disciplinary technologies that deny the body's needs. Against this denial, queer intimacy becomes a counter-ritual: a practice of warmth, repetition, and comfort that resembles devotion. Chughtai thus relocates the sacred from institutional morality to affective survival, suggesting that what society calls "sin" may, for the marginalized subject, function as the only remaining form of spiritual sustenance.

IV. COMPARATIVE READING: VUONG AND EMEZI

Chughtai's silent narrative, which refuses confession as a privileged mode of truth and relocates meaning instead onto domestic objects and rituals, anticipates a queer aesthetic which shows silence not as a form of repression but as a form of narrative-making. This is precisely what Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* uses, fragmented epistolary lyricism where the novel written as a letter to a mother who cannot read, posits the impossibility of direct communication. Vuong writes, "I am writing to reach you—even if each word I put down is one word further from where you are" (3). He also treats language itself as a ritual, where writing is framed as a devotional act. The novel's epigraph—"using these words as a little plot of land... I can build you a center"—though attributed to Qiu Miaojin rather than Vuong himself, nonetheless sets this devotional tone for the entire text (Vuong, epigraph). Like Chughtai's quilt, which creates a private sacred space, the language becomes a sacred enclosure allowing forbidden feelings to survive.

Akwaeke Emezi's *Freshwater* extends this logic further by collapsing the boundary between flesh and spirit altogether. Where Chughtai's quilt functions as a liminal threshold between bodily desire and metaphysical meaning, Emezi's narrative literalizes spiritual multiplicity within the body, refusing the Western binary that separates sexuality from sacred experience. In both writers, queer embodiment becomes a metaphysical event; the body is not merely biological but an archive of longing, trauma, and spiritual reorientation.

V. CONCLUSION

To read *Lihaaf* only as a story of forbidden sexuality is to miss its more unsettling proposition, that the sacred does not always reside in sanctioned rituals, but often in what society refuses to name. Chughtai's narrative forces a confrontation with the instability of moral categories, purity and impurity,

devotion and desire, sin and survival, by locating truth in the very space that patriarchal order attempts to erase. What emerges is not a confessional narrative of queerness, but a critique of the cultural systems that demand confession in the first place. In refusing clarity, Chughtai insists that silence is not absence but presence, an ethics, a strategy, and a form of knowledge. Her work therefore opens a wider literary and theoretical horizon, where queer intimacy is not positioned against spirituality but becomes one of its most enduring, if unsettling, expressions.

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Factors Contributing to Social Isolation and Loneliness and its effect on the Psychological Well-Being of Malayali Migrant Students in Uk

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Abstract— Migration is a well-known process, movement of people from one place to another, this may be due to certain reasons like, employment opportunities, education purposes, enhance the standard of living etc. This study mainly focuses on the effects of social isolation on the psychological and emotional well-being of international migrant students from Kerala to the United Kingdom for educational purposes. Migration of young students is increasing day by day because of the high quality and world class education provided by the other countries and also the better infrastructure facilities. The objective of the present study was to find out the effects of social isolation on the psychological well being of international students. This study also studies about the financial or socio-economic background of the respondents and the causes or factors contributing to social isolation and the coping mechanisms they used to combat loneliness and isolation. The present study is a cross-sectional study conducted among 60 international migrant students from Kerala residing in United Kingdom for up to three years. The data was collected through structured questionnaires. The major finding of the present study is financial or economic aspect is the most significant factor that contribute to social isolation and loneliness followed by cultural and language barrier. This study contributes to the existing body of literature on the factors contributing to social isolation faced by the international student by providing a focused analysis of Malayali students' experiences residing in the United Kingdom and underscores the need for culturally sensitive support systems in educational institutions for better environment that fosters meaningful social relationships. This information is valuable for the educational institution and mental health sectors to create a supportive environment for the migrated students to enhance their psychological well-being and academic success.



Keywords— Social isolation, migration, coping mechanisms, social relationship

I. INTRODUCTION

Social isolation is a wide spread common problem faced by most of the international students as they move from their native place to other countries. The main issue is about the complexities they have to gone through while adapting to the unfamiliar environment of the educational institutions, the cultural norms. It is quite difficult to being away from home, family members, relatives, and familiar surroundings. This results in feeling of loneliness and detachment.

Social isolation is not about being physically alone or sitting alone in a particular place for hours, it's about the emotional strain of feeling disconnected from social relations. The absence of familiar faces, cultural differences, and struggles with language barriers can deepen this sense of isolation, making it harder to build new relationships or find a sense of belonging.

For these students, the transition is not just academic but deeply personal, affecting their mental health and overall well-being. As they try to carve out a place for themselves

in a foreign land, the lack of established social networks can make even small daily challenges seem insurmountable. Recognizing and addressing these struggles is essential to supporting their journey and helping them thrive.

(Bista & Dagley, 2015).

Emotional loneliness happens when someone doesn't have close relationships, like a best friend or partner, to rely on for support. Studies, especially with older adults, show that not having these emotional connections can lead to depression and anxiety and in some cases, those feelings can also make it difficult to form close bonds. While both emotional and social loneliness are linked to depression and anxiety, emotional loneliness tends to have a stronger connection to these struggles (Russell et al., 1984).

So International students, especially from Kerala, often face challenges like loneliness, cultural differences, academic pressure and financial stress. So students might feel the stress constantly when they are try to adapt to a new situation or environment, if they fails to adapt appropriately results in lack of social connection and alienation. If the universities or educational institutions can provide right support at right time can help a lot of students to overcome this difficult phase. The universities can take initiatives to create a supporting environment to create a sense of belongingness and emotional attachment among students.

There are numerous studies on the mental health of international students, but little focus or attention is given to study about the experiences of social isolation and loneliness among students from Kerala studying in the United Kingdom. This study aims to fill that gap by identifying the factors that contribute to social isolation, and how these factors affect the students mental and psychological well-being, and also the strategies used by the students to adjust with this situation.

This study is significant because it addresses a gap in the literature that deals with the experiences of international students from Kerala residing in the United Kingdom, particularly deals with the areas of social isolation and its psychological effects. This study takes a detailed observation of the experiences of international students from Kerala who settled in the UK. This research offers valuable insights that can enhance the academic knowledge to develop strategies or interventions for improving their mental health status and also strengthen the social connections and academic performances.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Kerala has a long history of migration, mainly for better employment opportunities. Recently, more young people decided to study in abroad. This change is mainly due to the

lack of employment opportunities in their native place and lack of salary. Young people are more desired to achieve advanced skills and better job opportunities. This clearly indicates how global education influence the economic trends and migration patterns. Young generation gave more importance for their improved life styles and financial stability for achieving a brighter future. (Joseph, 2023).

Studying abroad is always a mix of various emotions like excitement, tension, stress, the greatest challenge they have to address is social isolation. The range of social isolation can vary from simple to complex things like there is no one to talk with to difficulty in finding someone with similar interests or experiences. This makes them difficult to open up and share their feelings. This sense of isolation can have a negative effect and ends up in anxiety and depression. The emotional strain affects their motivation and results in poor academic performance (Auerbach et al., 2019).

For most of the students going to the United Kingdom to study is a way to establish a better brighter future and gain financial stability. However, once they arrive in a new place or country, they often face financial difficulties to meet their needs. Above all of this, there are certain other aspects like family expectation. Family members always look forward for their successful career and also have a notion that they provide financial support for the family. This also adds the stress and struggles hardly for balancing family expectations with their mental health. (Hercog & van de Laar, 2017).

The World Health Organization describes psychological well-being as a state where individuals can grow to their full potential, handle everyday stresses, and work productively. It's an essential part of living a balanced, fulfilling life. Strong psychological well-being doesn't just make us feel happier—it's also closely tied to better mental and physical health and even a longer life. Taking care of our mental state is a key step toward achieving overall health and happiness. (Dr. M. Dhanabhakyaam & Sarath M, 2023).

Families often face financial burdens due to the higher costs of higher education, including tuition fees and living expenses. Many students rely heavily on part-time jobs to cover their financial needs while studying. While this helps them manage expenses, it often adds to their stress and makes it harder to keep up with academic responsibilities. Balancing work and studies can become a constant struggle, leaving them feeling stretched thin and overwhelmed. (Jenny, 2013). Additionally, the cultural value placed on economic success and family expectations can increase the pressure on students to perform academically and succeed financially (Hercog & van de Laar, 2017).

Social isolation among international students often starts from the cultural differences, language barriers, and lack of

social support networks. These challenges are further compounded by discrimination based on caste, race, gender, and place of origin. Such preconceptions create constraints in forming social connections and make it difficult for them to feel the sense of belongingness. Instead of finding social support and acceptance in social groups, they may deal with alienation, which worsen the feelings of isolation and rejection (Research & 2021, 2021).

Furthermore, studying abroad often cuts down the opportunities for social engagement due to financial instability, because students often struggle to achieve a balance between their academic and work life (Jenny, 2013). Adapting to the unfamiliar academic curriculum and social expectations also acts as an additional burden and leads to feelings of alienation, it makes them difficult to build social relations with peer groups and communities (Sawir et al., 2008).

The fundamental cause behind social isolation faced by the international students is limited interpersonal communication. This can lead to loneliness, and difficulty in adjusting to a new environment. Language barriers and cultural differences acts as a hindrance for them to make friends and adapt to the new environment. when they are socially excluded it negatively affects academic performance and psychological well-being. Students are motivated to use campus services and practice self-care to maintain well-being. Universities can help them by developing programs and clubs that promote interaction between the domestic and international students (Alshammari et al., 2023).

Social isolation and loneliness significantly impact mental health, leading to issues like anxiety, depression, and lower self-esteem. Persistent loneliness has long-term effects on thoughts, emotions, and overall health, hindering students' ability to adapt to their new environment (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010). For students from Kerala, these challenges are amplified by their cultural background, which values close social and cultural ties. The separation from family and friends often deepens feelings of loneliness, especially when coupled with academic stress (Udayanga, 2024). Despite these struggles, maintaining cultural practices and traditions can provide a sense of belonging, acting as a coping mechanism for many students (Research & 2021, 2021).

While social isolation presents significant challenges, many students actively seek ways to cope. Participation in cultural associations, university support systems, and social groups provides avenues for building connections and alleviating loneliness (Udayanga, 2024). Engaging in peer networks and community activities also helps students navigate the complexities of living in a foreign environment while

preserving their cultural identity (Research & 2021, 2021). However, the effectiveness of these coping strategies varies among individuals, influenced by factors such as personality, cultural background, and personal circumstances (Sawir et al., 2008).

Humans always look for social connections, even with things they watch like TV characters or concepts like God. But sometimes, people feel isolated or lonely even when social opportunities are available, the reason behind this is they can't able to connect with the people properly. Persistent loneliness can affect a person's thoughts, emotions, and health, causing long-term problems in their life (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010).

Prolonged social isolation leads to increased risks of depression, anxiety, and poor academic performance. Loneliness among migrant students has been linked to feelings of exclusion, loneliness and lower self-esteem and affects their mental health to a larger extent.

This review highlights the multidimensional challenges faced by the international students from Kerala in the UK, varying from financial strain and social isolation to its intense psychological effects. When the Social and cultural barriers combined with academic and economic stresses can adversely affects their mental health. However, resilience and adaptability enable students to overcome these challenges. Future research should focus on developing targeted interventions to address their unique needs for promoting psychological and emotional well-being and help to achieve academic success in diverse atmosphere.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative research design to investigate the effects of social isolation on the psychological well-being of international students from Kerala studying in the UK. A structured approach is used to collect and analyze data to provide insights into the research objectives.

This study uses a quantitative research design to explore the Factors contributing to Social Isolation and Loneliness and its effect on the social isolation on the psychological well-being of international students from Kerala studying in the UK. The target population consists of international students from Kerala who have been residing in the UK for up to three years. A total of 60 participants will be selected using a purposive sampling technique to ensure diversity in gender, age, and academic disciplines.

Data will be collected through structured questionnaire using google forms covering demographic details, factors of social isolation, psychological well-being, and coping mechanisms. Statistical analysis will be performed using

SPSS for descriptive and inferential statistics

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

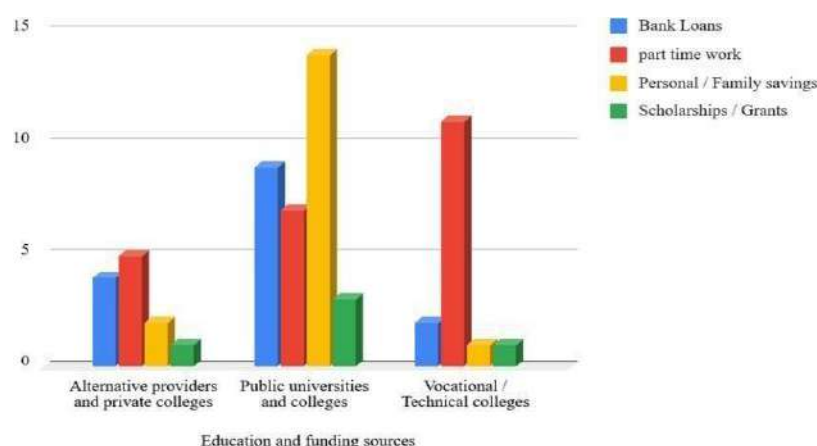


Fig.1: Funding sources of students studying in various educational institutions

This figure shows that most of the students rely up on personal and family savings, particularly among students studying in public universities and vocational colleges. Bank loans and part time work are the most common funding source across all institutions. Scholarships and grants are rarely utilized across all institutions.

This result aligns with the findings discussed in the literature review regarding the financial challenges faced by international students, particularly in the context of the rising costs of higher education. As mentioned in Jenny (2013), many international students struggle to cover tuition fees and living expenses, often relying on personal savings and part-time employment to manage financial burdens. This finding is also consistent with Hercog & van de Laar (2017), who highlighted that many Indian students in the UK, including those from Kerala, face financial constraints and are pressured by family expectations to succeed financially, which can further intensify their stress.

The limited availability of scholarships and government grants, emphasize that these monetary assistance are often

very hard to access or they are not enough to meet the full costs for most students. This only adds to the financial pressure discussed in previous research. So many students depend on their personal family savings and part-time jobs to meet their needs. This struggle to balance between the academic demands and financial instability is a common ground for international students (Jenny, 2013).

This finding corresponds with the literature findings as both draw attention to the fact that international student, especially from Kerala, face significant financial challenges while studying abroad. The literature reviewed indicated that many students rely on personal savings, part-time work, and loans to fund their education, with limited use of scholarships or grants. This is consistent with your results, which show that personal and family savings are the primary source of funding, followed by bank loans and part-time work, while scholarships and grants are rarely utilized. The literature also emphasizes the financial strain on students, particularly in light of rising education costs, which aligns with your findings.

Table 1: Crosstabulation of Family's Financial Status in Meeting Daily Expenses and Frequency of Stress Symptoms

How would you describe your family's financial status in meeting daily expenses * How often do you experience symptoms of stress such as rapid heartbeat or difficulty in breathing Crosstabulation

Count		How often do you experience symptoms of stress such as rapid heartbeat or difficulty in breathing				Total
		Never	Occasionally	Often	Very Often	
How	Constantly facing			0	0	6
Would	financial difficulties					
You	Financially stable but	1		8	5	11
describe	with some struggles	0				34

Your family's financial status in Meeting Daily expenses	Financially stable without struggles Frequent struggles Financially	3	4	3	11
Total	1 2	11	9	28	60

The analysis shows that there is a relationship between the financial status and stress levels. Students who are facing financial difficulties consistently are more prone to higher stress, while those who are financially stable report lower stress. Individuals with some financial struggles show varying stress levels. The Chi-Square test results ($p = 0.007$) and the likelihood ratio test ($p = 0.002$) support the connection between financial difficulties and increased stress.

The findings of this study align with previous literature highlighting the significant impact of financial challenges on students' mental well-being. As noted in the literature, financial difficulties, such as those faced by international students, can contribute to increased stress and emotional

strain, leading to negative effects on their psychological well-being (Jenny, 2013) (Hercog & van de Laar, 2017)).

In particular, the literature suggests that financial burdens, combined with the pressures of academic performance and adjusting to a new environment, can exacerbate feelings of stress and isolation (Udayanga, 2024). These challenges are consistent with the study's findings, where individuals experiencing constant financial difficulties reported higher levels of stress. The relationship between financial strain and stress, as revealed by the Chi-Square and likelihood ratio tests, further reinforces the arguments in the literature that addressing financial challenges can be crucial in reducing stress and improving the mental health of students, especially international migrants from Kerala studying in the UK.

Table 2: Crosstabulation of Study Focus Challenges and Loneliness Frequency in the UK
Do you find it difficult to focus on your studies due to feelings of isolation * How often do you feel lonely or isolated while living in UK Crosstabulation

Count		How often do you feel lonely or isolated while living in UK					
		Always	Never	Often	Rarely	Sometimes	Total
Do you find it difficult to focus on your studies due to feelings of Isolation	Maybe	1	1	5	0	4	11
	No	1	1	2	8	5	17
	Yes	24	0	5	0	3	32
Total		26	2	12	8	12	60

The data shows a strong connection between the social isolation and difficulty in concentrating on academics. Students who always feel isolated are more likely to struggle with focusing on their academic work, while those who experience lesser level of isolation tend to concentrate and perform better. The Chi-Square test results (Pearson value =

47.090, p -value = 0.000) and Likelihood Ratio test (value = 50.247, p -value = 0.000) indicates that there is a statistically significant relationship between the degree of isolation and the academic performance. These findings suggest that frequent isolation interrupt academic performance, creating a cycle that worsens both isolation and academic challenges.

This highlights the need for support systems to address the social and academic challenges faced by international students.

loneliness is not only emotionally distressing but it also hinders the cognitive functioning like thinking, reasoning, attention, problem solving etc. and concentration, leading to difficulties in academic performance. Social isolation leads to loneliness and this negatively affects both mental health

and results in poor academic performance. The challenges faced by international students in adjusting to a new social and academic environment (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010) as discussed in the review, supports this finding. So, when emotional distress from isolation, combined with academic pressure, deepen the difficulties faced by the students in focusing on their academics and they can't even perform better in academics.

Table 3: Crosstabulation of Friendship Challenges and Loneliness Frequency in the UK

What is the primary factor you find challenging in forming friendships in UK * How often do you feel lonely or isolated while living in UK Crosstabulation

Count

		How often do you feel lonely or isolated while living in					
		UK					
		Always	Never	Often	Rarely	Sometimes	Total
What is the primary factor you find challenging in forming friendship s in UK	Academic work load	1	0	3	0	2	6
	Different cultural backgrounds	8	1	6	2	6	23
	Lack of common interests	1	1	2	2	3	9
	Language Barriers	16	0	1	4	1	22
Total		26	2	12	8	12	60

The findings indicate that language barriers and cultural differences are the most significant challenges faced by the international students in the UK when trying to establish social connections or friendships.

These issues are closely related to the feelings of loneliness and isolation especially among students who struggle with language. The analysis confirms that there is a significant link between these challenges and social isolation. While other factors like academic pressure and lack of shared interests were also mentioned, they had a lesser impact on loneliness when compared with language proficiency. The results highlights the importance of providing support for

improving the language help and cultural integration programs, to help the students for breaking these barriers and create meaningful social connections with others.

The findings of this study closely match with what the previous studies has shown about the struggles faced by the international students especially language barriers and cultural differences. These challenges often make it very difficult for students to connect with others, sometimes they can't even express their feelings or ideas correctly due to language barrier. And results in feelings of isolation and loneliness. As discussed

in earlier studies these issues can have a negative or damaging effect on the mental well-being of these students.

The results from this study emphasize language and cultural differences directly contribute to loneliness among international students. The need for support systems, like language assistance

and programs that promote cultural integration, has been highlighted in other research, and this study further emphasizes the importance of such initiatives. By addressing these challenges, universities can create a more inclusive environment that helps students build meaningful relationships and improve their overall well-being (Alshammari et al., 2023

Table 4: Crosstabulation of Group Participation and Socializing Effectiveness for Coping

Do you participate in student clubs, societies, or group events to help manage feelings of isolation?

** How effective do you find socializing with other international students as a way to cope with loneliness or stress*

Crosstabulation

Count		How effective do you find socializing with other international students as a way to cope with loneliness or stress				
		Ineffectiv e, I prefer solitude or other Methods	Moderatel y effective, when I have time	Slightly effective, but not my preferred method	Very effective, I actively seek it out	Total
Do you	Never, I'm not	5	1	4	1	11
Participate	comfortable with group					
in student	<u>events</u>					
clubs,	Occasionally, but it	1	4	6	5	16
societies,	<u>depends on my schedule</u>					
or group	Rarely, I attend only	6	3	14	2	25
events to	<u>occasionally</u>					
Help	Regularly, I find it helps	0	0	1	7	8
Manage	a lot					
feelings of						
isolation?						
Total		12	8	25	15	60

The data shows that participating in student clubs and socializing with other international students can really help with loneliness and stress. The ones who actively participate in group events tend to find socializing much more effective in dealing with their emotional challenges. The results from the Chi-Square test (p-value = 0.001) confirm that there's a strong connection between active participation in student clubs to reduce isolation and loneliness. The Phi coefficient (0.701) and Cramer's V (0.405) shows the strong relation.

These findings suggest that engaging in group events can be a meaningful way to tackle isolation.

The coping strategies, like participating in social or cultural groups, to manage loneliness and stress are helpful for some students, but social isolation still correlates with academic difficulties, this implies that that these coping mechanisms may not always be sufficient for each and every student who

feel socially isolated, they need some other coping mechanisms to overcome this. Therefore, a more comprehensive and holistic approach is needed to support the students.

V. CONCLUSION

This research highlights the significant challenges faced by international students in the UK, including financial strain, loneliness, academic stress, and the strategies they used to cope up with these situations. Financial struggles are a major source of stress for many students, often contributing to feelings of isolation and difficulty focusing on their studies. Above all other factors, language barriers and cultural differences make it harder for students to establish social connection with others, making them lonelier and more disconnected. Some students try to find relief by socializing with other international students or joining in peer groups or college clubs, but this strategy doesn't always work for everyone. Many students still feel isolated due to the economic constraints or academic pressure. These challenges highlight the need and importance of more personalized support from universities or educational institutions for the better adaptation of international students in their novel surroundings. It's not just about helping them fit in socially, but also addressing their financial and academic struggles. By offering a more comprehensive approach to support them so that they can better manage the difficulties they faced and succeed in their academic journey.

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Mother Mary Comes to Me: A Critical Reading of Arundhati Roy's Memoir on Motherhood, Memory, and Resistance

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Abstract— *Mother Mary Comes to Me* (2025) is Arundhati Roy's first full-length autobiographical work since *The God of Small Things* won the Booker Prize in 1997. The memoir reconstructs Roy's complex relationship with her mother, Mary Roy, the Kerala-based educator and women's rights activist whose 1986 legal victory secured equal inheritance rights for Syrian Christian women. This review examines the memoir along four interlocking axes: the emotional architecture of the mother–daughter bond, the feminist and social commentary woven through the narrative, the lyrical and non-linear style that mirrors the workings of memory, and the larger ethical questions about love, grief, and inheritance that the book raises. The paper argues that Roy refuses both hagiography and bitter indictment, instead modelling a mature mode of remembrance in which admiration, resentment, and tenderness coexist. The memoir is read here as both an intimate elegy and an act of cultural critique, extending Roy's long-standing engagement with patriarchy, class, and political violence into the register of personal life writing.

Keywords— Arundhati Roy, feminism, Kerala, memoir, mother-daughter relationship.



I. INTRODUCTION TO THE MEMOIR

Mother Mary Comes to Me is a powerful memoir written by the Indian author and activist Arundhati Roy, published in September 2025. It is her first full-length autobiographical work since *The God of Small Things* won the Booker Prize in 1997. The book explores the complex relationship between Roy and her mother, Mary Roy, a well-known educator and women's rights activist from Kerala. Unlike ordinary autobiographies that focus mainly on achievements or success, this memoir concentrates on emotional truth, family conflict, memory, grief, and understanding. Roy presents her mother not as a perfect parent but as a strong, difficult, loving, and deeply complicated human being. In the cultural and spiritual landscape of Kerala — a setting central to Roy's literary imagination — Mother Mary is not merely a biblical figure but a foundational symbol of unconditional love, enduring grief, and quiet resilience. Mary Roy was famous for challenging patriarchal laws and fighting for equal inheritance rights for women. She was admired publicly as a courageous reformer, yet within the family her personality created emotional struggles and conflicts. Roy honestly describes how her mother's intelligence, ambition, and dominance shaped her childhood and adult life.

One of the most striking features of the memoir is its emotional honesty. Roy does not try to hide painful experiences or present her family in an idealised manner. Instead, she writes openly about fear, anger, love, resentment, and admiration. This honesty makes the memoir realistic and relatable. Readers can understand that family relationships are often complicated and cannot be explained in simple terms of right or wrong.

The title itself, *Mother Mary Comes to Me*, suggests memory, longing, and emotional return. Even after years of separation and disagreement, Roy realises how deeply connected she remained to her mother. The memoir becomes not only a story about one woman but also a reflection on motherhood, womanhood, identity, and healing.

Another important aspect of the book is its literary style. Roy's language is poetic, descriptive, and emotionally rich. Her writing creates vivid pictures of Kerala's landscapes, family homes, classrooms, and emotional tensions. The memoir combines storytelling with reflection, making it both intellectually engaging and emotionally moving.

Overall, the memoir introduces readers to a deeply personal world while also addressing universal themes such

as family conflict, female independence, memory, and emotional survival. It is a courageous and thought-provoking work that leaves a lasting impression on readers.

II. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MOTHER AND DAUGHTER

In *Mother Mary Comes to Me*, the mother–daughter relationship is one of the emotional centres of the work. Roy presents this relationship as deeply loving, complicated, painful, and shaped by memory, gender expectations, and generational conflict.

2.1 Central Nature of the Relationship

The narrator's relationship with her mother is not shown as simple affection or hatred. Instead, it is filled with emotional dependence, admiration, resentment, misunderstanding, and lasting attachment. The daughter often sees her mother as a powerful and independent woman, yet also as someone emotionally distant and difficult to understand. The mother becomes both a source of strength and emotional struggle.

As a child, Roy experienced both affection and fear in her relationship with her mother. Mary Roy wanted her children to be disciplined and successful, but her methods often caused emotional pain. Roy explains that living with such a strong personality made her childhood unstable and emotionally difficult. At times, she felt trapped within her mother's world and struggled to find her own identity.

2.2 Feminist Inflections of the Bond

The mother–daughter relationship also reflects Roy's feminist concerns. Through the mother's life, Roy explores the limitations placed on women, emotional loneliness, the pressures of marriage and social conformity, and the struggle for selfhood. However, the memoir does not simply criticise Mary Roy. Roy also deeply admires her mother's courage and determination. Mary Roy challenged patriarchal traditions in Kerala and fought an important legal battle that helped women gain equal inheritance rights. She founded a progressive school and became a respected educator. Roy recognises that her mother's strength inspired her own rebellious spirit and independence.

This mixture of admiration and resentment gives emotional depth to the memoir. Roy shows that human relationships are rarely simple. A person can hurt us deeply while also shaping our strengths and identity. Roy inherited her mother's courage, intelligence, and refusal to accept injustice, even though she also suffered because of her mother's behaviour.

2.3 Distance, Grief, and Understanding

The memoir also explores emotional distance. Roy left home at a young age because she felt she needed freedom

and independence. Yet even after leaving, her mother remained emotionally present in her life. Their relationship continued to affect Roy's thoughts, emotions, and writing. After Mary Roy's death, Roy experienced grief mixed with confusion and reflection. She realised that despite all the conflict, her mother remained central to her emotional world.

An important message in the memoir is that understanding someone does not necessarily erase pain. Roy does not offer complete forgiveness or simple reconciliation. Instead, she develops a deeper understanding of her mother as a woman shaped by loneliness, social pressure, ambition, and struggle. This mature understanding makes the memoir emotionally powerful and realistic. Through this relationship, Roy explores universal questions about family bonds, emotional inheritance, and the difficulty of truly understanding the people closest to us. The mother–daughter relationship becomes both deeply personal and universally meaningful.

III. FEMINISM AND SOCIAL ISSUES

Arundhati Roy uses *Mother Mary Comes to Me* to explore the lives of women and the social realities that shape them. The work combines personal memories with broader political and social commentary. Feminism in the text is not presented as a theory alone; it appears through the everyday struggles, emotions, and experiences of women.

One of the central feminist ideas in the book is the struggle of women to live freely in a patriarchal society. Female characters are shown facing restrictions imposed by family and society, expectations of obedience, emotional suppression, and limited personal choices. Roy highlights how women are often judged more harshly than men and are expected to sacrifice their individuality for family and social respectability.

Mary Roy's legal battle for equal inheritance rights became an important moment in Indian women's history. In Syrian Christian communities in Kerala, women often received limited property rights compared to men. Mary Roy fought against this injustice in court and won a historic case that improved women's legal rights. Roy presents her mother as a woman who refused to remain silent in the face of discrimination.

At the same time, the memoir shows that social struggle often comes with personal costs. Mary Roy's determination and ambition made her successful publicly, but they also created emotional strain within the family. Roy suggests that women fighting oppressive systems are themselves shaped by pain, pressure, and emotional conflict. This

makes the memoir more realistic because it avoids presenting feminism in simplistic terms.

Roy's own life also reflects feminist ideals. She chose independence over social conformity and developed a strong public voice through literature and activism. Like her mother, she questioned authority and challenged injustice. The memoir suggests that rebellion and courage can be passed from one generation to another.

3.1 Social Issues in the Work

Patriarchy. Patriarchy is one of the major social issues explored in the text. Men traditionally hold authority in society, while women are expected to remain submissive. Roy criticises gender inequality, male dominance, and the social systems that silence women.

Social Expectations and Judgment. The book shows how society controls women through moral expectations and public judgment. Women are often criticised for personal choices, emotional expression, independence, or non-traditional behaviour. Roy exposes the emotional damage caused by such societal pressures.

Emotional Isolation. Many characters experience loneliness and emotional suffering despite living within families or communities. Roy suggests that social structures often fail to provide emotional understanding, especially for women.

Class and Social Inequality. Like many of Roy's works, the text also reflects concerns about inequality and injustice. Differences in class, privilege, and social power affect relationships and opportunities. Roy subtly connects personal suffering with larger social systems.

Silence and Trauma. The work examines how pain and trauma are often hidden within families. Silence becomes a recurring social issue: women hide emotional wounds, families avoid difficult truths, and society ignores suffering that does not fit accepted norms. Roy portrays memory and storytelling as ways of breaking this silence.

The memoir therefore becomes more than a personal story. It also acts as a social commentary on Indian society and the pressures faced by women and families. Roy successfully combines intimate storytelling with political reflection, making the memoir intellectually meaningful as well as emotionally engaging. Through feminism and social criticism, *Mother Mary Comes to Me* encourages readers to question traditional ideas about family, gender roles, and emotional strength. It celebrates courage and independence while also acknowledging the emotional complexity of human relationships.

IV. STYLE, LANGUAGE, AND NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

The language, style, and narrative techniques in *Mother Mary Comes to Me* reflect Arundhati Roy's distinctive literary voice — poetic, politically charged, emotional, and deeply reflective. The work combines personal memory, social criticism, and lyrical storytelling to create a powerful reading experience. Readers familiar with her novel *The God of Small Things* will recognise the same lyrical quality and rich imagery in this memoir. Roy has the ability to describe ordinary moments with extraordinary beauty and emotional depth.

The memoir is written in a reflective and personal tone. Roy often moves between past and present, memory and reflection. Instead of following a strict chronological order, the narrative flows according to emotions and recollections. This non-linear structure reflects the natural movement of memory: human memories do not always appear in order; they return unexpectedly, connected by emotions rather than time.

4.1 Style of Language

Poetic and lyrical language. Roy uses highly descriptive and musical language. Her sentences often flow like poetry, filled with imagery, rhythm, and emotional intensity. Ordinary moments are described with beauty and symbolism, giving the narrative a dream-like quality through rich metaphors and similes, sensory descriptions, and emotional and symbolic vocabulary. This lyrical style helps readers feel the emotional depth of the characters and themes rather than simply understand them intellectually.

Simple yet powerful expression. Although Roy's language is literary, she often uses simple words and conversational phrases. The simplicity makes the emotions feel natural and authentic. Her writing balances sophistication with accessibility.

Political and social tone. Roy's language frequently carries criticism of social inequality, patriarchy, religious hypocrisy, political violence, and colonial influence. She blends artistic narration with political commentary, making the story both personal and socially meaningful.

Emotional intensity. The narration is deeply emotional. Feelings such as grief, love, loneliness, anger, and hope are expressed openly and honestly. Roy's language creates intimacy between the narrator and the reader.

4.2 Narrative Techniques

Non-linear narrative structure. Roy often avoids chronological storytelling. Instead of presenting events in a straight sequence, she moves back and forth between past memories, present reflections, and emotional recollections.

This fragmented structure mirrors the way memory and trauma work in real life.

Stream of consciousness. At several points, the narration follows the flow of thoughts and emotions rather than a logical sequence. This technique allows readers to enter the inner world of the characters through sudden memories, repeated ideas, emotional reflections, and interior monologue.

Symbolism. Roy uses symbols to add deeper meaning to the narrative. Common symbolic elements include motherhood, religion, nature, silence, and water and darkness. "Mother Mary" itself can symbolise compassion, suffering, protection, and spiritual motherhood.

Personal and political blending. One of Roy's strongest techniques is combining private experiences with larger political realities. Individual pain reflects wider social suffering, and personal stories become a way to discuss national and historical issues.

Vivid imagery. Roy creates strong visual pictures through detailed imagery. Readers can clearly imagine places, emotions, weather, and physical surroundings. The imagery often reflects the psychological state of characters.

Use of irony and contrast. Roy frequently contrasts beauty with violence, innocence with cruelty, religion with injustice, and love with oppression. This contrast strengthens the emotional and political impact of the narrative.

Overall, Roy's narrative technique makes the memoir emotionally moving and artistically sophisticated. Her ability to combine poetic language with psychological insight creates a memorable reading experience. The memoir demonstrates her talent not only as a novelist but also as a reflective and courageous memoirist.

V. CONCLUSION AND PERSONAL RESPONSE

Mother Mary Comes to Me is a deeply emotional and thought-provoking memoir that explores the complicated relationship between a mother and daughter. Through honest storytelling and powerful language, Arundhati Roy presents a portrait of Mary Roy as both an inspiring reformer and a difficult parent. The memoir avoids simple judgments and instead shows the emotional complexity of family relationships.

One of the greatest strengths of the memoir is its honesty. Roy openly discusses painful memories, emotional conflict, and personal confusion without trying to create a perfect image of herself or her mother. This honesty makes the memoir realistic and emotionally powerful. Readers can

relate to the idea that love and pain often exist together within families.

The memoir also succeeds as a feminist work. Mary Roy's courage in challenging patriarchal laws and building an independent life is inspiring. At the same time, Roy shows that strength and ambition can have emotional consequences. This balanced portrayal makes the memoir more meaningful because it presents women as fully human rather than idealised figures.

Personally, the memoir creates a strong emotional impact because it encourages readers to think about their own family relationships. It reminds us that parents are not perfect and that understanding another person's struggles requires empathy and maturity. Roy's reflections on grief and memory are especially moving because they show how complicated emotions continue even after death.

The literary style of the memoir is another major achievement. Roy's poetic language, vivid descriptions, and emotional insight make the book intellectually rich and artistically beautiful. The memoir also raises important questions about identity, freedom, forgiveness, and emotional survival. It suggests that people are shaped both by love and by conflict. Roy's relationship with her mother caused pain, but it also influenced her creativity, independence, and political consciousness. This complexity makes the memoir realistic and psychologically profound.

In conclusion, *Mother Mary Comes to Me* is not only a memoir about one family but also a universal exploration of motherhood, feminism, memory, and emotional truth. It is a courageous and beautifully written work that leaves readers with a deeper understanding of human relationships and personal identity. The memoir confirms Arundhati Roy's position as one of the most powerful and insightful contemporary Indian writers.

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The White Tiger Through the Lens of Feminism

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Abstract— Aravind Adiga's Booker Prize-winning novel *The White Tiger* (2008) has been widely examined as a narrative of class rebellion and postcolonial critique; however, its feminist and subaltern dimensions remain critically underexplored. This paper interrogates the novel through a feminist-subaltern framework, drawing upon Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's foundational question "Can the subaltern speak?" to examine the structurally silenced, rendered invisible, and doubly marginalised female figures who haunt Balram Halwai's first-person confession. While Balram's voice dominates the narrative, the women surrounding him, Kishan's unnamed wife, Pinky Madam, and the shadowy figures of the Darkness, are confined to the periphery of language, agency, and self-representation, embodying the condition of the subaltern within contemporary India's fractured socio-economic landscape. The paper is organized into five interlocking sections: an introduction situating the novel within postcolonial feminist discourse; a review of the intellectual genealogy of subaltern studies from Gramsci through the Subaltern Studies Collective to Spivak's feminist revision; a close textual analysis of female characters as embodiments of double subordination; an examination of the limits and possibilities of defiance; and a contextualisation of the novel's gender politics within contemporary India. The study ultimately argues that the novel's true subaltern is not Balram — who ultimately speaks and escapes — but the women whose silence makes his voice possible.



Keywords— Subaltern, Feminism, Aravind Adiga, Postcolonial Fiction, Defiance, Contemporary India

I. INTRODUCTION

Aravind Adiga's debut novel, *The White Tiger* (2008), arrives in the tradition of postcolonial fiction that refuses the consolations of nationalist narrative. Winner of the Man Booker Prize, the novel takes the form of a series of letters written by Balram Halwai — a low-caste entrepreneur and confessed murderer — to the visiting Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao. Through Balram's sardonic, self-congratulatory voice, Adiga maps the brutal terrain of class, caste, and economic aspiration in the India of the early twenty-first century. Scholarship on the novel has rightly focused on its scalding critique of neo-liberal capitalism and the corrosive mythology of the "rooster coop" — the social mechanism through which the oppressed internalise their own subjugation (Adiga 173).

Yet a striking critical lacuna persists: the novel's women remain largely unexamined. Feminist and subaltern scholarship offers a powerful corrective lens through which the text's silences become as significant as its declarations.

Following Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's foundational intervention, which argues that the subaltern and specifically the subaltern woman — "cannot speak" within the epistemic frameworks of dominant discourse, this paper contends that *The White Tiger* performs an ironic feminist allegory (Spivak 308). The man who escapes subaltern condition does so on the broken backs and muted voices of women who remain trapped within it.

This paper proceeds from the conviction that literary analysis is never merely aesthetic: it is political. To read *The White Tiger* through the lens of feminism is to uncover a structural gender violence that operates alongside, and is inseparable from, the violence of caste and class. Drawing upon Spivak, Ranajit Guha, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, bell hooks, and Simone de Beauvoir, among others, this study offers a close reading of the novel's female characters as sites of double and sometimes triple subjugation: by gender, caste, and the accelerating demands of a globalising economy.

II. THE SUBALTERN AND SUBALTERN STUDIES

The concept of the subaltern enters critical theory through Antonio Gramsci, who deployed the term in his *Prison Notebooks* to describe social groups excluded from meaningful participation in history, those who lack access to the institutions and discourses through which hegemonic power perpetuates itself (Gramsci 52). Gramsci's subaltern is defined by fragmentation, heterogeneity, and the absence of a unified political consciousness. This foundational instability was productively complicated by the Subaltern Studies Collective, founded in 1982 under the editorship of Ranajit Guha.

Guha and his colleagues, including Partha Chatterjee, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and David Arnold, sought to recover the voices and historical agency of the South Asian peasantry and dispossessed from the twin blind spots of colonialist and nationalist historiography. In the landmark essay "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India," Guha argues that both the colonial archive and the nationalist counter-archive systematically erase the consciousness of subaltern subjects, producing histories in which the masses appear only as objects of elite management rather than as agents of their own making (Guha 37).

It is Spivak's feminist deconstruction of the Subaltern Studies project, however, that most directly informs the present paper. In her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), Spivak insists that the Collective's own recuperative project risks reinstating a romanticism of subaltern consciousness that forecloses the very question it purports to answer. More crucially for feminist purposes, Spivak draws attention to the gendered dimensions of subalternity: "If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (Spivak 287). The subaltern woman is doubly erased — by colonial power and by the patriarchal structures of the communities within which she lives.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty extends this analysis in *Feminism Without Borders*, cautioning against homogenising constructions of the "third world woman" as a monolithic victim while insisting on the material specificity of women's oppression under neo-colonialism and globalisation (Mohanty 19). This methodological insistence on specificity is essential to reading *The White Tiger*: the women of Adiga's novel are not generic symbols of victimhood but precisely situated subjects whose silence is overdetermined by the specific configurations of caste, class, and gender that structure life in contemporary India.

III. PORTRAYAL OF THE SUBALTERN IN THE WHITE TIGER

Adiga peoples his novel with women who are present everywhere and listened to nowhere. The most structurally significant of these is Kishan's wife, referred to throughout simply as "the wife," never granted a name. This nominal erasure is itself a feminist statement. As Simone de Beauvoir argued in *The Second Sex*, the reduction of women to a relational identity — wife, mother, daughter is a mechanism of ontological dispossession: she is defined by her function within a male order rather than by any selfhood of her own (de Beauvoir 267). Kishan's wife is a labouring body: she cooks, cleans, endures, and disappears from the text as silently as she entered it.

Pinky Madam, the American-Indian wife of Balram's employer Ashok, appears at first to offer a contrast. She inhabits a world of relative privilege: she has access to consumer culture, urban mobility, and the social capital of diaspora identity. Yet Pinky Madam's story is one of profound entrapment. Her complicity in the hit-and-run accident that kills a child, her inability to secure justice or even acknowledgement of her own guilt, and her eventual flight from India without consequence illustrate the way in which class privilege for women remains contingent and fragile, dependent entirely on the goodwill and protection of men (Adiga 221).

Significantly, Pinky Madam's departure from India is not an act of liberation but of flight — she escapes not into autonomy but into the anonymity of another patriarchal order. Her leaving solves nothing for the unnamed woman whose child was killed. That woman, never individualised, never named, is the novel's most complete subaltern: her grief is unregistered, her loss uncompensated, her voice absent from the text. She exists in the narrative only as the catalyst for Pinky Madam's breakdown and eventual disappearance, instrumentalised even in her suffering.

The women of "the Darkness", the rural world from which Balram escapes, are collectively presented as victims of a social order that Adiga renders with unflinching brutality. They are married off without consent, subjected to domestic violence as a matter of unremarkable routine, and denied education, mobility, and economic independence. Bell hooks' contention in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* that race and class oppressions are inextricable from gender oppression finds vivid illustration here: these women are not merely poor, not merely low-caste — they are poor, low-caste, and female, and each of these conditions amplifies the others (hooks 32).

Even Balram's relationship to the women in his family is revelatory. He regards them with a mixture of pity and contempt, recognising their subjugation without

possessing the framework or the will to challenge it. His grandmother Kusum is the single female figure who holds any authority in his childhood world — yet her power is exercised entirely in the service of patriarchal economic imperatives: she negotiates Balram's labour, arranges his brother's marriage, and manages the family's financial survival. Her agency is real, but it is an agency entirely in the service of a system that subordinates her.

IV. THE DEFIANCE

Defiance in *The White Tiger* is a gendered phenomenon. Balram's spectacular act of resistance — the murder of his employer Ashok is available to him precisely because he occupies a position, however lowly, within a masculine economy of violence and mobility. His escape from the rooster coop is enabled by his gender: he can move through cities, take jobs, enter spaces, and ultimately disappear into the entrepreneurial anonymity of Bangalore in ways categorically unavailable to the women around him.

Homi Bhabha's concept of "mimicry" is instructive here. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha describes the colonial subject's appropriation of the coloniser's tools and signs as a form of ambivalent resistance — neither pure compliance nor full subversion (Bhabha 122). Balram mimics the discourse and behaviour of his masters: he adopts their speech, their ambitions, their willingness to deploy violence. This mimicry is available to him as a male subject. The novel contains no equivalent space for female mimicry — no moment where a woman appropriates the tools of her oppressors for any purpose, however ambivalent.

The closest the novel comes to female defiance is in Pinky Madam's departure. Yet, as argued above, this is not defiance but retreat — not a challenge to the structures that oppress her but a withdrawal from the scene of their operation. It is also worth noting that Pinky Madam's relative privilege places her outside the category of the subaltern proper: she has the resources to flee precisely because she has never been fully trapped. Her flight is only possible because of the class position guaranteed by her husband's wealth.

The unnamed women of the Darkness have no such exit. Their defiance, where it exists at all, is of the quiet, survivalist variety that James C. Scott calls "everyday resistance" — the small, undramatic acts through which subordinate groups navigate their subjugation without openly contesting it (Scott 29). These acts are real, and they deserve recognition, but they do not transform the structures that produce their necessity. Spivak's point stands: within the discursive economy of the novel, these women cannot speak. Their resistance, such as it is, leaves no legible trace.

This asymmetry between Balram's spectacular defiance and the women's mute endurance is not an accident of plotting; it is the novel's deepest feminist argument, made through structure rather than statement. Adiga shows us that the rooster coop is gendered: the men may, in exceptional circumstances, break free. The women remain.

V. CONTEMPORARY INDIA IN THE NOVEL

Adiga locates his feminist-subaltern drama within a carefully mapped material landscape: the India of the early 2000s, intoxicated by economic growth, haunted by poverty, and fissured by the widening gulf between the globalised urban elite and the immiserated rural mass. This is the India of "India Shining", the advertising slogan adopted by the Bharatiya Janata Party government in 2004 as a celebration of economic liberalisation, which Adiga subjects to savage irony throughout.

For women in this landscape, neo-liberal "development" has been a profoundly ambiguous gift. The macroeconomic literature notes that while India's growth decade produced significant reductions in absolute poverty, its benefits were distributed along existing axes of inequality — including gender. As Mohanty observes, the integration of developing economies into global capitalism tends to intensify the exploitation of women's labour while simultaneously disrupting the traditional community structures that provided them with at least minimal social protection (Mohanty 141).

The world of *The White Tiger* reflects this dynamic precisely. The village of Laxmangarh — Balram's origin — is not a space of a pre-modern community but a space of patriarchal violence exacerbated by economic precarity. Migration to the city does not liberate women; it merely exchanges one form of subordination for another. The novel's urban women — domestic workers, wives of aspiring entrepreneurs, women glimpsed fleetingly in the margins of Balram's account — are subject to the intensified surveillance and vulnerability that accompany the dissolution of community bonds without the replacement of any compensating infrastructure of rights or social support.

The figure of the unnamed child killed in the hit-and-run is particularly charged in this context. That the victim of elite irresponsibility should be ungendered in the novel — neither clearly identified as male or female — while the perpetrator's wife bears the psychological burden of the event is a pointed commentary on the gendered distribution of guilt and consequence in contemporary Indian society. Women bear the emotional costs of male violence while men — Ashok, his brother Mukesh, and ultimately Balram navigate the event through bribery, silence, and strategic disappearance.

VI. DISCUSSION

The foregoing analysis reveals *The White Tiger* as a novel whose feminist significance is inscribed not in its explicit thematic statements but in its structural and narratological choices. The decision to narrate the novel through Balram's first-person voice is not merely a formal device: it is a political act that replicates, at the level of form, the very silencing it depicts at the level of content. By granting Balram a male, upwardly mobile subject — sole access to narrative voice, Adiga enacts the erasure of female subjectivity that his novel documents.

This is a productive rather than a merely cynical irony. The conspicuous absence of female voices in the novel functions as a formal challenge to the reader: the gaps, ellipses, and silences that surround the women characters are readable as the traces of a subjectivity that the dominant narrative cannot accommodate. This reading strategy is consistent with Spivak's methodology of "reading against the grain" — attending to the text's exclusions and contradictions as sites of suppressed meaning (Spivak 294).

The paper's findings also have implications for the broader field of postcolonial literary study. They suggest that analyses of class and caste resistance in South Asian fiction are incomplete without a parallel feminist analysis: that the figure of the male subaltern who escapes his condition does so within and through a gendered economy that must be named as such. Balram's freedom is not universal emancipation — it is the particular freedom of a man willing to deploy violence within a system that affords violence to men. The women of *The White Tiger* remind us of the costs of this particular liberation.

VII. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This paper has argued that *The White Tiger* is most productively read through the combined lens of feminist theory and subaltern studies. The novel's female characters — unnamed, narratively marginalised, denied agency and exit — embody the condition of the doubly subaltern subject described by Spivak: oppressed by the intersecting structures of gender, caste, and class in ways that place them beyond the reach of even the novel's most radical gesture of resistance.

The central irony of the novel, from this perspective, is that Balram Halwai — the self-proclaimed White Tiger, the exceptional individual who breaks free — is not, finally, the subaltern. He is the subaltern who becomes audible, visible, legible. The true subalterns of the novel are the women whose silence underwrites his voice, whose immobility enables his mobility, and whose

continued subordination is the structural precondition of his liberation.

Several directions for further scholarship present themselves. First, a comparative study of subaltern female representation across postcolonial South Asian fiction — engaging Rohinton Mistry, Kiran Desai, and Bapsi Sidhwa alongside Adiga — would illuminate the ways in which the gendered dimensions of subalternity are variously configured across different national, religious, and caste contexts. Second, a reception study examining how Indian feminist readers and critics have engaged with *The White Tiger* would add an important dimension of situated reading to the theoretical analysis offered here. Third, an intersectional analysis incorporating disability, religion, and regional identity alongside gender and caste would produce a still more granular account of the matrix of oppressions the novel depicts.

Finally, the paper suggests that the feminist study of postcolonial fiction must resist the temptation to celebrate male resistance narratives as universal emancipation stories. Liberation that is achieved by, and available only to, one gender is not liberation — it is a redistribution of the terms of power within an unchanged structure of domination. *The White Tiger* knows this, even if its narrator does not.

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Existential Isolation and the Search for Meaning in an Absurd Universe: Re-reading Santiago as Hemingway's Existential Hero

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Abstract— This paper revisits Santiago in *The Old Man and the Sea* as an existential hero who faces isolation, meaninglessness, and loss in an uncaring universe. Going beyond the classical interpretations of stoicism or Christian allegory, the paper puts Santiago into an existential context that incorporates the views of Camus and Sartre. The sea is symbolized as the absurd state of human life- vast, indifferent, and unpredictable- and the human quest of meaning amidst unavoidable loss is dramatized, as Santiago struggles alone against the marlin and the sharks. His statement that a man may be destroyed but not defeated is a statement that expresses a philosophy, which is not based on outward achievements but rather on internal determination and conscious decision making. Santiago gives meaning to a world in which there is none by means of suffering, endurance and self-definition. The study claims that the heroism of Santiago is not in his victory over the nature but his resistance to giving up agency when confronting absurdity. In the end, the novel turns out to be deep reflection on existential dignity and moral strength on the part of Hemingway.

Keywords— Existential, Absurd, Isolation, Heroism, Moral Strength.



Introduction

The Old Man and the Sea is a novella written by Ernest Hemingway in 1952 when the world was deeply engaged in philosophical and historical turmoil in the aftermath of World War II. The sense of disillusionment dominated the culture in this post-war terrain, due to the horror of world warfare and the new menace of the Cold War that created an air of fear and the "vainness of life" (Karavin, 7). It was a period of modernist uncertainty in which literature was also more and more deprived of traditional moral certainties and was increasingly a world where individuals needed to face their own existence in a state of isolation. To Hemingway, who wrote in 1952, the novel of an old fisherman was a strong illustration of how a man must resist loss and the stalling of the unavoidable death.

This historical background offers a fertile field to existentialism, which deals with how meaningfully people can live in a world that is in essence meaningless. As the well-known phrase of Jean-Paul Sartre goes, man first of all exists; first of all, he encounters himself, and first of all, he surges into the world and defines himself afterwards, and a

person is nothing but what he makes of himself. In this context, the notions of isolation and the absurd are the manifestations of the understanding of the fact that the universe has no intrinsic meaning and the responsibility and the freedom of choice lie solely with the person. Existential heroism is therefore not about triumph over the external world but the genuine way of living through the conscious dedication to one struggle.

There are two dominant archetypes that have traditionally been the focus of scholarly interpretations of Santiago: the so-called "Christ figure" and the so-called "Code Hero". There is a strong emphasis on overt symbolism in religious readings like the images of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the hut of Santiago and his physical torment, a reflection of the path that Christ took to Calvary. In line with this, the "Code Hero" version characterizes Santiago as someone who embodies the concept of grace under pressure, a solitary and tenacious character whose integrity is quantified by compliance with professional competence and stamina. Although certain recent works recognize existentialism as a motif that comes back again and again with perseverance

and man- vs.-nature, there is a certain gap in research in re-examining Santiago in a strictly Sartrean or Camusian perspective. His symbolic position as a martyr or a professional is often stressed in the traditional analysis rather than as a hero who has to overcome the cosmic problems of human being or non-being (Maver 56).

This paper seeks to fill this gap with Santiago being a classic existential hero. On top of the religious signs and the morals of the trade, Santiago is existential with his perseverance spirit and his inability to change to the eighty-four days of failure that the universe creates for him. His experience shows that meaning is not discovered but made by a conscious decision and purposeful suffering in a blind and uninvolved universe. Finally, heroism of Santiago lies in his capacity to determine his identity, namely, his dignity and being undefeated, even when his physical accomplishments are forbidden by the sea.

The Absurd Universe: The Sea as Existential Space

The central paradox of the philosophical system of Albert Camus is the existence of the absurd because of the impossibility to reconcile the human desire to order and meaning with the indifferent and silent universe, which does not provide any. The last existential location where this absurdity is brought out is in *The Old Man and the Sea* through the Gulf Stream. Unlike the ancient nature writing that might have turned the ocean into a kind-natured benefactress or a vile deity, Hemingway talks about the sea as a vast, unpredictable and, most importantly, indifferent scenery, a place of cruelty where life and death occur without the moral commentary and divine oversight. The absurdity of the situation of Santiago is defined even before he goes to sea: after eighty-four days of fishing without a single hit, Santiago is already regarded by his people as a *salao*, the worst type of bad omen. Such a stand shows the immense estrangement of human work and cosmic compensation; his expertise in the profession, his egoism that has been long forgotten, his undefeated rigor, do not render the universe responsive to his demands, he gets nothing but emptiness of a failure over the long term.

Santiago, who sails away and out to the unknown lands that exist in the sea, is a very conscious and planned response to this absurdity. He is excruciatingly aware of the risks, the uncertainties of the deep itself and the imminent demise of his own person but he is ready to sacrifice his life in the fight, whatever the result. This devotion is the trait of the existential hero who realizes the fact that universe is not sterile and futile, it simply does not have a creator so the entire job of meaning-making is assigned to the individual. The same aspiration and futility, which is the desire of Santiago, is embodied in the marlin itself, a noble, endless creature of the water that Santiago loves and considers his brother, yet, at the same time, a part of a predator/prey

process, the result of which is destruction. The sea does not mind the marlin or Santiago than it minds the two of them; it is a fight that hard work is not paid with victory. The last, absurd detail which deprives the physical traces of the victory of Santiago is the arrival of the sharks later. This existential space nature does not compensate the persistence of the old man with material success but instead leaves him with a skeleton and this is the only veritable nature that is presented to the old man when he faces the absurd or in the face of the absurd, the struggle itself is the prize. Ultimately, Santiago has shown that despite his ability to be destroyed by the ruthless elements of the sea he has not lost because he has established his mission in the world that offers nothing.

Existential Isolation: Solitude as Human Condition

Existential solitude in the novella by Hemingway is not just the deprivation of social companionship but a metaphysical state of being that manifests the true selfhood of the protagonist in the novel. The physical isolation of Santiago on the open sea whereby he rows until he feels that there is nothing but the sea and sky is the catalyst needed in making such a self discovery. In abandoning the human company of civilization, he must face his being-in-situation in which he is no longer defined by his social role or his reputation among the other fishermen, but by the decisions that he makes in the nothingness. It is this solitude that is the state in which Jean-Paul Sartre says that man first of all exists, encounters himself, then leaps up in the world and defines himself later on. To Santiago, being alone is not a weakness, it is not a misery, an alienation that needs to be pitied by the crowd; it is the much-needed crucible that will demonstrate that he is nothing other than what he makes of himself.

This increased existential self-consciousness can be observed in the excessive self-discussion that the old man engages in. He does talk to himself, to his clenched hand, to the boy who is no longer there, Manolin, not because he is senile but to remind himself that he is still there and to sustain his determination in a world that fails to recognize him. His monotonous desire – when the boy was here,-- illustrates the distance of his social loneliness, and at the same time points to his metaphysical loneliness: he must in the end confront the marlin alone and without the aid of any others – without the shares or the help of others. The lack of true divine intervention in this isolation is also emphasized by the complete lack of actual praying; Santiago is seen praying, but in a mechanical manner, and it is up to his own courageous reaction and physical strength to overcome nature. He understands that although he is unlucky in the social perspective, he can still go beyond the confines of his ageing body by a doctrine of action. He can reach a state of authenticity by stoically withstanding pain and hunger without any external assistance, and this transcends all the

restrictions of bodies, sexes, relationships, and friendships. Thus, it is the isolation of Santiago that makes him the only person who can push his abilities to the extreme limits and that the so-called consciousness for its own sake can be justified only by the isolated action of continuing to hold oneself to struggle one chooses.

Freedom, Choice, and Responsibility

Although the above sections firmly defined the sea as the place of absurdity and isolation, the same circumstances are the prerequisites to exercise radical human freedom. The lack of social support and divinity in the existential world of *The Old Man and the Sea* does not render the individual helpless, but rather it gives the person the opportunity to be where, according to Jean-Paul Sartre, "existence precedes essence" (Harrison 61). This is the basic principle of existentialism, since human beings are not born with a sense of the purpose in their own being, or with a predetermined character; rather, they initially burst up in the world, and only subsequently define themselves by their decisions and actions. To Santiago, who has lost his reputation, his luck, even his youthful strength, his being as a fisherman is not an innate attribute but is an ongoing project, which he needs to re-prove every time he goes on a fishing trip.

The most radical manifestation of this freedom is the choice Santiago has to make of going way out there, beyond the shores he has known all his life. In passing the well-known ones and into the unknown, the new world of the Gulf Stream, he knowingly sheds the social designations he has been labelled with – that of 'salao', or the worst sort of bad luck. It is not a desperate material gain that is gambled with but a "heroic journey of discovery" which is meant to add meaning to an existence that has been threatened by eighty-four days of unproductiveness. Existentially, Santiago is nothing but what he makes out of himself. His active rejection of the passivity of fate and the safety of the shore by a deliberate turn towards the dangers of the deep sea, therefore, is his invention of his own possibilities, his own actuality through a doctrine of action.

This liberty is closely bound up with the absolute feeling of responsibility. According to Sartre, existence is created before the creation of essence, and therefore, it is the role of every individual to be responsible for existence. Santiago is not able to escape this weight; he does not fault the sea, the sharks or his own ageing body for his predicament. Rather, he embraces the repercussions of his devotion to the so-called mission that he has selected. Although physically exhausted and as his hands start to bleed, he reminds himself that he will stay with you until the time of his death and that he is determined to persevere in the life that he has chosen. His duty is also to the marlin; when he refers to the fish as his brother and at the same time promises to kill the fish, he is recognising that he is the cause of the death he

causes, but at the same time he is proud of the fact that he and the fish are both doing what they were intended to do in an uncaring universe. It is this brave reaction to his plight which makes him an authentic person; he is an authentic subject who shows his freedom by a dedication which continues even in the face of the physical consequences.

The final manifestation of this self-definition of the existential self is in the rebellious statement of Santiago: 'A man can be destroyed but not defeated.' This line is the philosophical one between the physical reality of the absurd and the spiritual reality of the hero. The term "destruction" is used to refer to the unavoidable outcome of the being-in-situation physical decay of the body, loss of the marlin to the sharks and the eventual coming of death. Nevertheless, defeat is a spiritual condition, which only takes place when a person abandons his/her agency or abandons the freedom of choice of his/her attitude. In his struggle with the sharks that have broken his oar and a long-gone pride, Santiago shows that the outer world can take away every accomplishment in his life, but it can never get to the final inner freedom that gives meaning to his life. It is not the marlin or the sharks he overcomes but the temptation to give in to despair: Carlos Baker puts it, "*Santiago is a man who endures suffering with dignity and proves that defeat need not mean disgrace.*" (302)

And in the end the dignity of Santiago lies in the struggle as such and not the result. He shows that not only is external validation the key to success, but also the contentment of the personal effort by not giving in to some loss. This view corresponds to the fact that Viktor Frankl noticed that spiritual freedom to arrange his life meaningfully cannot be deprived of till the last gasp of air. Santiago avoids the pit of the bleak by opting to be cheerful and undefeated despite his emaciated looks and his extreme wrinkles. He demonstrates that in a world where no one cares a man can be a hero not because he is the conqueror of nature, but because he is the conqueror of the desire to allow the external circumstances to determine his value. By his indomitable spirit to remain with the fish, Santiago develops a spirit that is indomitable, and this goes to show that the spirit of man is characterised by the unwillingness to be overcome by the absurdity that is threatening to overpower it. Thus, Santiago's decision to continue the struggle with the marlin reflects this existential responsibility: "*Man is condemned to be free; because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does.*" (Sartre 29)

Suffering and the Creation of Meaning

The existential environment of the Old Man and the Sea by Hemingway does not portray suffering as a peripheral tragedy but the main machinery, which helps the main hero to certify his existence. The pure physicality of the pain that Santiago endures: the bleeding hands, the great, regular

cramping, the near fatal fatigue of a body stretched to biological extremes, is testimony, the ultimate testament, to his being-in-situation. Hemingway carefully builds a theater of cruelty, using a flesh-piercing repertoire of images, which compels the character as well as the reader to face the nakedness of human existence in the face of an unfeeling nature. These wounds are not simple wounds to Santiago but they are symbols of his courageous reaction to a universe that is not predisposed to giving comfort. The line that is cut on his back, the coarse and salted flesh of his palms, become the physical indications of his commitment, the material expression of his not giving into the eighty-four days of failure that came before his journey.

This ubiquitous anguish is also changed but not rendered meaningless by the inner alchemy of will in Santiago. Existentialism, considered a doctrine of action, is that life is not something in itself but that it becomes something as it is lived and that meaning is a value that is given by the individual. The success of Santiago is to extend his own strength to its utmost extremes whether they turn out to be physically successful or not. He is not preoccupied with his suffering or is not lamenting to the deaf heaven; rather he takes up a pose of stoicism, deciding to not reason but to just suffer. This suffering is not a passive giving in to the state of unhappiness, but a project of self-creation. Santiago exhibits the for-itself identity of consciousness in how he makes himself think that he is comfortable, though his body is weakening, and thus is able to transcend the body. His physical suffering is real, but secondary to his mission; he understands that his body can be destroyed but his soul as a stranger with a strange old man will not be destroyed as long as he stands his ground.

This transformation can be examined through the philosophical parallel to *The Myth of Sisyphus* by Albert Camus to have a critical perspective on it. One of his well-known arguments was that Sisyphus is the so-called absurd hero as he sees some meaning in his seemingly pointless activity of pushing a boulder up a mountain, and watching it roll down to the ground again. Likewise, the fact that Santiago continues to fight and fight the marlin, a fight that is marked by the elements of magnificence and futility, is a protest against the meaninglessness that exists in the world. The push of his body to its extreme limits is the means by which Santiago cuts his own meaning in the universe which continues to be indifferent to his demands. As Sisyphus has to love to work so as to fill his own heart, so Santiago has his own "perfection" of struggle in the market value of the fish, but in the perfection of the struggle itself. When the sharks finally take away all the flesh of the marlin, and leave him just a skeleton, the meaning of his journey is not lost since it was created in the process of revolt against his ill-fated lot.

Moreover, the code of conduct which is internalized by Santiago is the major framework that helps him to survive his most isolated and painful moments. This grace under pressure is an in-house requirement which substitutes the external validation or God. He often talks to himself, and strengthens his role as a fisherman who is able to suffer what no man is able to suffer. This is an internal choice of being happy and untarnished even with the deep wrinkles and a worn out look which is a display of what Viktor Frankl means by the last inner freedom- the spiritual capability to decide how to feel irrespective of the outer circumstances. When making the pain the object of his attention, Santiago clears the way and makes his way significant as it turns out that a person is not a mere object of the environment but a subject, who can arrange his life on the basis of a certain value of his choice.

In conclusion, the novella assumes that meaning is a construct of subjectivity and it can be located in the inner world of the will of the individual and not in the surrounding world. That Santiago refers to the marlin as a brother, and at the same time, he is ready to kill it shows that he has an excellent understanding of his role in the cosmic problems of being human. He understands the inevitability of the situation in his struggle and knows that his success does not lie in the "external validation" of a trophy, but in the satisfaction of personal effort and self-worth (Sabudu 29). Coming home to the village with a skeleton, but still his pride and will to fight no matter what the results were, Santiago proves that, on the one hand, victory lies in his pride and will to fight no matter what are the results. His misery is, therefore, the only cost that can be paid to a worthwhile experience of existence, which is to show that in an absurd universe the only way that a man is not truly defeated is by having learned to endure his own pain towards a purpose that he has created himself.

Re-reading Santiago: Beyond Code Hero and Christian Symbolism

Two mighty interpretative pillars of *The Old Man and the Sea* have long been the "Code Hero" and the "Christ Figure". The classic interpretation of Santiago as a Code Hero focuses on his grace under pressure, stoic professionalism, and uncompromising commitment to the rituals and ethics of his profession, despite his old age. The identity of Santiago is confirmed in this perspective through his mastery of the sea, his long gone pride and is an example of discipline to the youthful generation. Parallel to this is the religious reading that sees Santiago as a martyr-like figure by express hagiographic symbols: his bleeding, his scourged hands, his three day ordeal, and ultimately the iconic image of the old man hauling up his heavy mast up the hill like a cross. Although these readings are so embedded within the text, they tend to position Santiago as

an archetypal character or sacrifice that is doomed to happen, which may ignore the radical agency that is taken into his struggle.

An existential re-reading is not aimed at displace these interpretations but to further elaborate on them by offering the philosophical why behind the acts of Santiago. The existential hero creates the principles of existence where the Code Hero adheres to a set of established rules of the profession, as a survival method in an absurd and indifferent universe. Focusing more on inner consciousness instead of outward symbolism, existentialism shows that the "code" of Santiago is his very essence, and thus a value that he constructs upon himself in a system of action, a doctrine of action. This view makes the pain more than an imitation of a religious martyr into a radical, real way of life in which meaning is forcefully taken out of the jaws of despair. As Philip Young remarks "*The Hemingway hero is one who lives by a strict code of honor, courage, and endurance in a meaningless world.*" (63)

Moreover, existentialism offers the requisite model to bring together the dignity, suffering, and freedom of Santiago into one, unified, project of self-definition. It takes into consideration the reality that his winning is not based on the outside world; when the marlin is a skeleton, and his physical success is nullified by the sharks, he still has dignity because it has never relied on the outside world to verify his greatness. His liberty can be traced to his bold reaction to a circumstance that would have otherwise resulted in hopelessness which demonstrates that the human soul can be "undefeated" so long as it does not allow an uncaring universe to determine its value.

By placing this reading within the context of being philosophically sharper, it is possible to have a more subtle interpretation of Hemingway as late modernism. Although the Christian icons are a cultural shorthand to persevere, and the Code Hero is an ethical prototype, the existential prism is that of the fundamental modernist panic of post-war disillusionment and cosmic loneliness. It introduces Santiago as a quintessentially modern character that understands that he is nothing but the one he creates himself to be. And in the end, when we consider Santiago in terms of the absurd and radical responsibility, we can see that Santiago does not simply survive, but rather chooses to survive, and that his rich emotional reward lies in the solitary perfection of a struggle he has made himself, which he has authored.

CONCLUSION

The Old Man and the Sea is a deep hymn to the philosophical modernism, in which Ernest Hemingway has situated the world, in which the traditional religious and social certainties have been transformed into modernist

uncertainty. Santiago turns out to be the ultimate existential hero, a character that shows that meaning is not something bestowed upon us by the heavens, but a conscious, inner creation. Insisting on the value of existential dignity as opposed to physical success, Santiago demonstrates that the value of man is measured by his ability to be unconquered in his soul despite his body and his accomplishments being ruined by the cold universe.

The story of Santiago summarises the main principles of the existential tradition. His radical out-of-this-world decision is typical of Jean-Paul Sartre who states that existence comes first, before essence: "*Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself.*" (Sartre 22) Santiago is nothing except the total of his acts and the responsibility he takes towards his life in solitude. This lonely determination resembles the Sren Kierkegaardian individual who has to find his/her way through the socially constructed anxiety of the abyss and the social stigma of being unlucky in order to achieve the state of true selfhood. Moreover, the fact that Santiago is always conscious of his aging body and that he is on the brink of death reminds the idea of Martin Heidegger of Being-toward-death where being close to death does not lead to despair but rather gives his endeavor the urgency that it is life-affirming.

Finally, the fact that Santiago comes back to the shore with a skeleton only reflects the vision of Sisyphus by Albert Camus; he is the absurd hero who does not find his "rich emotional reward" in the prize but rather in the perfection of the struggle itself: "*The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.*" (Camus 123) This idea echoes Santiago's struggle with the Marlin. It isn't the victory that counts, but the fact that you keep fighting when defeat is inevitable. The masterpiece by Hemingway, thereby, ends on a strong philosophical point: in an indifferent and unpredictable universe, the only light is the human spirit. Santiago is the symbolic human situation – endlessly struggling, always losing, but always able to make a noble being out of his mere fearless existence.

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Urban Alienation and cultural crisis in *The Waste Land* of T. S. Eliot

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Abstract— *The Waste Land* by T. S. Eliot stands as one of the most significant poetic representations of the spiritual, cultural, and psychological crisis of the twentieth century. Written in the aftermath of the First World War, the poem reflects the fragmentation and disillusionment of modern urban civilization. This paper examines the themes of urban alienation and cultural crisis as portrayed in the poem through Eliot's use of fragmented imagery, mythical references, and symbolic landscapes. The modern city, particularly London, appears as a barren and lifeless space where individuals experience emotional isolation, loss of identity, and moral decay. Eliot presents urban life as mechanical and spiritually empty, exposing the collapse of human relationships and the decline of traditional cultural and religious values. The study further explores how Eliot employs multiple voices, allusions, and shifting narrative techniques to depict the confusion and instability of modern existence. The poem's fragmented structure mirrors the fractured condition of post-war society and emphasizes the crisis of communication and meaning in contemporary life. At the same time, Eliot's incorporation of myth and religious symbolism suggests a search for spiritual renewal amid cultural degeneration. By critically analyzing the social and psychological dimensions of alienation in *The Waste Land*, this paper highlights Eliot's concern with the dehumanizing effects of modernity and the need for cultural regeneration. The poem ultimately emerges as a profound critique of modern civilization and its crisis of values.



Keywords— Cultural Crisis, Modernism, Urban Alienation

I. INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The *Waste Land* by T. S. Eliot is regarded as one of the greatest achievements of modernist literature in the twentieth century. Published in 1922, the poem emerged during a period of intense social, political, and cultural upheaval following the First World War. The devastation caused by the war shattered traditional beliefs, moral values, and cultural stability in Europe, creating a deep sense of despair and uncertainty among people. Industrialization, urbanization, and technological advancement transformed human life rapidly, but these developments also contributed to loneliness, emotional isolation, and spiritual emptiness. Eliot captured this crisis of modern civilization through the fragmented structure, symbolic imagery, and multiple voices of *The Waste Land*.

The concept of urban alienation became a central concern of modernist writers who witnessed the rise of overcrowded cities and the decline of meaningful human relationships. In the poem, the modern city is portrayed as an "Unreal City" filled with mechanical routines, lifeless crowds, and disconnected individuals. Human beings appear spiritually exhausted and emotionally detached from one another. Eliot presents urban life as barren and fragmented, reflecting the psychological condition of modern humanity. The poem suggests that modernization and material progress have weakened traditional social bonds and reduced life to a state of monotony and moral decay.

At the same time, *The Waste Land* reflects a broader cultural crisis in Western society. Eliot illustrates the collapse of religious faith, ethical values, and cultural traditions through various myths, literary allusions, and symbolic

references. The wasteland itself becomes a metaphor for the spiritual barrenness of modern civilization. However, beneath the themes of despair and fragmentation, the poem also hints at the possibility of renewal and regeneration through spiritual awakening and cultural rediscovery.

Thus, the study of urban alienation and cultural crisis in *The Waste Land* is significant because it reveals Eliot's critique of modern civilization and his concern for the moral and spiritual future of humanity. The poem continues to remain relevant in contemporary times, as modern urban life still produces feelings of isolation, anxiety, and cultural disintegration.

Rise of Modernism after World War I

The rise of Modernism after the First World War marked a significant transformation in literature, art, philosophy, and culture. The First World War (1914–1918) caused unprecedented destruction, loss of human life, and psychological trauma across Europe. The war shattered the optimism, stability, and moral confidence that had characterized the Victorian and Edwardian periods. People began to lose faith in traditional institutions such as religion, monarchy, and social conventions because these systems had failed to prevent the catastrophe of war. As a result, writers and artists felt the need to develop new forms of expression to represent the fragmented and uncertain realities of modern life. This cultural and intellectual movement came to be known as Modernism.

Modernist writers rejected the traditional literary styles and themes of the nineteenth century. Instead of presenting life as orderly and meaningful, they portrayed it as fragmented, chaotic, and spiritually empty. The horrors of war convinced many intellectuals that human civilization was in decline. Modernist literature therefore focused on themes such as alienation, isolation, disillusionment, and the loss of identity. Writers experimented with innovative techniques like stream of consciousness, symbolism, multiple perspectives, and fragmented narrative structures to capture the complexity of modern existence.

Industrialization and urbanization also played an important role in the rise of Modernism. Rapid technological progress transformed cities into crowded, mechanical spaces where individuals often felt lonely and disconnected. The modern city became a symbol of cultural decay and emotional emptiness. In literature, this sense of urban alienation was vividly expressed by modernist writers such as T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf. Their works reflected the psychological confusion and spiritual crisis of post-war society.

Among the major literary works of Modernism, *The Waste Land* occupies a central position. Published in 1922, the poem captures the despair, fragmentation, and cultural crisis

of the post-war world. Eliot uses mythical references, symbolic imagery, and fragmented voices to depict the moral and spiritual emptiness of modern civilization. The poem became a landmark of Modernist literature because it reflected the anxieties and uncertainties of an entire generation affected by war and social change.

Thus, the rise of Modernism after World War I represented a reaction against the collapse of traditional values and the emergence of a fragmented modern world. Modernist writers sought new artistic methods to express the complexities of human experience in an age marked by uncertainty, alienation, and cultural disintegration.

Crisis of Western Civilization

The crisis of Western civilization became one of the most significant intellectual and cultural concerns of the early twentieth century, especially after the First World War. Western civilization, which had long been associated with progress, rationality, science, religion, and moral stability, faced severe challenges due to war, industrialization, political conflict, and social transformation. The devastation caused by World War I shattered the belief that modern civilization was advancing toward peace and prosperity. Millions of lives were lost, economies collapsed, and societies were left emotionally and spiritually broken. As a result, people began to question the values and institutions that had shaped Western society for centuries.

One of the major causes of the crisis was the collapse of traditional moral and religious beliefs. Christianity, which had provided spiritual guidance and ethical foundations for Western society, gradually lost its influence in the modern age. Scientific discoveries, materialism, and secular thinking weakened religious faith and created a sense of spiritual emptiness among individuals. Many people felt disconnected from moral values and cultural traditions, leading to confusion and uncertainty about the meaning of life. Modern literature often reflected this spiritual barrenness and loss of faith.

Industrialization and rapid urbanization also contributed to the crisis of Western civilization. Cities became crowded and mechanical, and human relationships turned impersonal and fragmented. The growth of capitalism and consumer culture increased material progress but also created social inequality, loneliness, and alienation. Individuals living in modern urban society often experienced emotional isolation and a loss of identity. The modern world appeared chaotic, fragmented, and devoid of genuine human connection.

The crisis was further intensified by the decline of cultural unity and intellectual certainty. Traditional ideas about truth, beauty, morality, and social order were challenged by modern philosophy and psychology. Thinkers such as Sigmund Freud questioned the stability of the human mind,

while philosophers like Friedrich Nietzsche criticized conventional morality and declared the “death of God.” These ideas deeply influenced modernist writers, who portrayed life as fragmented, uncertain, and spiritually empty.

In literature, the crisis of Western civilization is powerfully represented in *The Waste Land* by T. S. Eliot. Eliot depicts a barren world where cultural traditions have collapsed, communication has failed, and humanity suffers from spiritual decay. The wasteland becomes a symbol of the moral and cultural degeneration of modern society. Through fragmented imagery, mythical references, and multiple voices, Eliot expresses the despair and confusion of a civilization that has lost its direction and meaning.

Thus, the crisis of Western civilization reflects the social, moral, and spiritual breakdown experienced in the modern age. It became a central theme of Modernist literature, which attempted to explore the anxieties, alienation, and cultural disintegration of twentieth-century life while also searching for the possibility of renewal and regeneration.

Eliot as a Modernist Poet

T. S. Eliot is regarded as one of the most influential poets of the Modernist movement in twentieth-century English literature. His poetry reflects the social, cultural, and spiritual crisis of the modern age, particularly after the First World War. Eliot rejected the traditional poetic forms and themes of the Victorian era and introduced innovative literary techniques that transformed modern poetry. Through fragmentation, symbolism, allusion, and complex imagery, he captured the uncertainty, alienation, and disillusionment of modern civilization. His works became a voice of the modern human condition and established him as a central figure of literary Modernism.

One of the major characteristics of Eliot as a modernist poet is his use of fragmentation. Modern life, according to Eliot, was broken, chaotic, and spiritually empty. To represent this condition, he abandoned linear narrative and coherent structure in his poetry. Instead, he used disconnected images, shifting voices, and abrupt transitions. This fragmented style reflects the fractured reality of post-war society and the psychological confusion of modern individuals. In *The Waste Land*, Eliot presents multiple speakers, scenes, and cultural references that together portray the disintegration of modern civilization.

Another important modernist feature in Eliot’s poetry is the extensive use of myth and literary allusions. Eliot believed that ancient myths and cultural traditions could provide order and meaning to the chaos of the modern world. He used references from Greek mythology, Christianity, Buddhism, Hindu philosophy, and classical literature to connect the present with the past. This technique, often

called the “mythical method,” helped Eliot explore the spiritual crisis of modern society while searching for cultural continuity and renewal.

Eliot also experimented with language and poetic technique. He employed free verse, dramatic monologue, symbolism, and stream-of-consciousness narration to express the complexity of human experience. His poetry often combines everyday speech with literary quotations and symbolic imagery, creating a rich and intellectually challenging style. Themes such as urban alienation, loss of faith, moral decay, and the search for spiritual redemption dominate his works. Poems like *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* and *The Waste Land* reveal the loneliness, anxiety, and emotional paralysis of individuals living in modern urban society.

Furthermore, Eliot’s critical essays also shaped Modernist literary theory. In essays such as “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” he emphasized the importance of literary tradition and impersonality in poetry. He believed that poetry should not merely express personal emotions but should reflect universal human experiences through artistic discipline and cultural awareness.

Thus, Eliot’s innovative techniques, intellectual depth, and exploration of modern crisis established him as a major modernist poet. His poetry not only reflects the fragmentation and despair of the twentieth century but also expresses a continuous search for spiritual meaning and cultural regeneration in a rapidly changing world.

***The Waste Land*: Significance, Theme, and Structure of the Poem**

The Waste Land by T. S. Eliot is one of the most important poems of twentieth-century English literature and a landmark of the Modernist movement. Published in 1922, the poem reflects the social, cultural, and spiritual crisis that emerged after the First World War. Eliot presents a fragmented modern world filled with despair, alienation, moral decay, and spiritual emptiness. Through innovative poetic techniques, mythical references, and symbolic imagery, *The Waste Land* captures the anxieties and uncertainties of modern civilization. The poem remains significant because of its intellectual depth, artistic experimentation, and universal portrayal of human suffering and the search for meaning.

Significance of *The Waste Land*

The significance of *The Waste Land* lies in its representation of the fragmented condition of modern society. Eliot portrays the modern world as spiritually barren and culturally disintegrated. The poem reflects the disillusionment of a generation affected by war, industrialization, and the collapse of traditional values. It

became a defining text of Modernist literature because it rejected conventional poetic forms and introduced new methods of expression. Eliot's use of free verse, multiple voices, symbolism, and literary allusions revolutionized modern poetry and influenced many later writers.

Another important aspect of the poem's significance is Eliot's use of the "mythical method." By drawing upon myths, religion, and classical literature, Eliot connects the chaos of modern life with ancient human experiences. The poem combines elements from Greek mythology, Christianity, Buddhism, and Hindu philosophy to suggest that spiritual regeneration is possible despite cultural decline. Thus, *The Waste Land* is not only a critique of modern civilization but also a search for redemption and renewal.

Themes of *The Waste Land*

One of the central themes of the poem is *urban alienation*. Eliot portrays modern city life as mechanical, lifeless, and emotionally empty. Individuals in the poem experience loneliness, isolation, and a lack of meaningful human relationships. The "Unreal City" symbolizes the dehumanizing effects of urbanization and industrial society.

Another major theme is *cultural and spiritual crisis*. Eliot depicts a civilization that has lost its moral values, religious faith, and cultural unity. The wasteland itself becomes a symbol of spiritual barrenness and moral decay. Human beings are trapped in confusion, despair, and emotional paralysis.

The poem also explores the theme of *fragmentation*. The broken structure, shifting voices, and disconnected scenes mirror the fractured condition of modern life. Eliot presents a world where communication has failed and meaning has become uncertain.

At the same time, *The Waste Land* contains the theme of *quest for renewal*. Despite the atmosphere of despair, Eliot hints at the possibility of spiritual regeneration through self-realization, cultural rediscovery, and religious understanding. The ending of the poem, with the Sanskrit word "Shantih," suggests peace and spiritual reconciliation.

Structure of *The Waste Land*

The structure of *The Waste Land* is highly fragmented and experimental, reflecting the disorder of modern civilization. The poem is divided into five sections:

1. "*The Burial of the Dead*" – Introduces themes of death, despair, and spiritual emptiness.
2. "*A Game of Chess*" – Focuses on the breakdown of human relationships and emotional dissatisfaction.

3. "*The Fire Sermon*" – Depicts moral corruption, lust, and the emptiness of modern urban life.
4. "*Death by Water*" – Presents death as both destruction and purification.
5. "*What the Thunder Said*" – Suggests the possibility of spiritual renewal and salvation.

The poem does not follow a single narrative or consistent speaker. Instead, Eliot uses multiple voices, abrupt transitions, and literary allusions to create a collage-like structure. This fragmented technique reflects the chaos and confusion of the modern world. The poem also combines different languages, myths, and cultural references, giving it a universal and multidimensional character.

Thus, *The Waste Land* remains one of the greatest achievements of Modernist poetry because of its profound themes, innovative structure, and powerful depiction of modern human crisis. Through its exploration of alienation, cultural decay, and the search for renewal, the poem continues to speak to readers across generations.

Statement of the Problem

The Waste Land by T. S. Eliot presents a disturbing picture of modern urban civilization marked by alienation, spiritual emptiness, and cultural disintegration. Written in the aftermath of the First World War, the poem reflects the psychological and moral crisis of twentieth-century society. The rapid growth of industrialization, urbanization, and materialism transformed human life but also weakened traditional social relationships, religious beliefs, and moral values. As a result, individuals living in modern cities became emotionally isolated, spiritually exhausted, and disconnected from both society and themselves.

One of the central problems explored in the poem is urban alienation. Eliot portrays the modern city as an "Unreal City" filled with lifeless crowds, mechanical routines, and fragmented human relationships. People in the poem struggle with loneliness, lack of communication, and emotional emptiness. Human interaction appears artificial and meaningless, revealing the dehumanizing effects of modern urban life. The poem suggests that technological progress and material advancement have failed to provide spiritual fulfillment or genuine human connection.

Another significant issue represented in the poem is the breakdown of cultural and moral values. Traditional religious faith, ethical principles, and cultural unity have collapsed in modern society, leaving individuals without moral direction or spiritual stability. Eliot depicts a civilization trapped in moral decay, confusion, and despair. Through fragmented imagery, myths, and literary allusions, the poem reflects the decline of Western civilization and the loss of cultural continuity. The wasteland itself symbolizes

a barren world where moral and spiritual regeneration has become difficult.

Therefore, the major problem addressed in this study is how *The Waste Land* portrays the alienation of modern urban society and the collapse of cultural and moral values in the post-war world. The study seeks to examine Eliot's critique of modern civilization and his representation of the spiritual crisis of humanity through modernist techniques, symbolism, and fragmented narrative structure.

Objectives of the Study

The present study on *The Waste Land* by T. S. Eliot is undertaken with the following objectives:

1. To analyze urban alienation in the poem by examining Eliot's portrayal of modern city life, emotional isolation, fragmented human relationships, and the psychological emptiness experienced by individuals in urban society.
2. To examine cultural crisis and spiritual decay reflected in the poem through the collapse of traditional moral values, loss of religious faith, cultural disintegration, and the spiritual barrenness of modern civilization after the First World War.
3. To study Eliot's modernist techniques such as fragmentation, symbolism, mythological references, multiple voices, intertextuality, and innovative poetic structure used to represent the complexity and disorder of modern life.
4. To explore the symbolic significance of the wasteland as a metaphor for the moral and cultural degeneration of twentieth-century society.
5. To investigate Eliot's vision of spiritual regeneration and renewal amidst the despair and chaos of modern civilization.
6. To evaluate the relevance of the poem in contemporary society by relating its themes of alienation, anxiety, and cultural crisis to present-day urban experience.

Research Questions

The present study on *The Waste Land* by T. S. Eliot seeks to address the following research questions:

1. How does Eliot portray urban alienation in the poem?
 - How are loneliness, emotional isolation, and fragmented human relationships represented in modern urban society?
 - In what ways does the "Unreal City" symbolize the dehumanizing effects of modern life?
2. What symbols represent cultural crisis in the poem?
 - How does the wasteland function as a metaphor for spiritual barrenness and moral decay?
 - What is the significance of myths, religious references, and symbolic imagery in portraying the collapse of Western civilization?
3. How does the poem reflect post-war modernity?
 - How does Eliot depict the despair, fragmentation, and disillusionment of the post-World War I generation?
 - In what ways do modernist techniques such as fragmentation, multiple voices, and intertextuality reflect the complexity of modern existence?
4. How does Eliot combine tradition and modernity in the poem?
 - How are ancient myths and cultural traditions used to interpret the crisis of modern civilization?
5. Does the poem offer any possibility of spiritual renewal or regeneration?
 - How does Eliot suggest hope, peace, or redemption amidst cultural decline and spiritual emptiness?

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study on *The Waste Land* by T. S. Eliot is based on a qualitative research methodology that primarily employs textual and thematic analysis. The research aims to examine the themes of urban alienation, cultural crisis, and spiritual decay in the poem while also exploring Eliot's modernist techniques and artistic innovations.

Textual Analysis

The study undertakes a close textual reading of *The Waste Land* to analyze Eliot's language, imagery, symbolism, structure, and poetic devices. Important passages, symbols, and literary references are critically examined to understand how Eliot portrays the fragmented condition of modern civilization. Special attention is given to the representation of the "Unreal City," the imagery of barrenness and decay, and the psychological condition of individuals living in urban society. The textual analysis also investigates Eliot's use of multiple voices, fragmented narrative techniques, and mythological allusions to express the complexities of modern life.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis forms another important aspect of the study. The research identifies and interprets major themes such as urban alienation, loneliness, cultural disintegration, loss of faith, moral decline, and the search for spiritual regeneration. These themes are analyzed in relation to the historical and social background of post-World War I Europe. The study also examines how Eliot connects personal suffering with the broader crisis of Western civilization. Through thematic interpretation, the research seeks to explain the relevance of the poem to both the modernist period and contemporary society.

Use of Modernist Literary Criticism

The study applies the principles of Modernist literary criticism to interpret the poem. Modernist criticism emphasizes fragmentation, uncertainty, alienation, experimentation, and the breakdown of traditional forms in literature. Eliot's poetic techniques are analyzed within the framework of Modernism to understand how the poem reflects the anxieties and disillusionment of the twentieth century. The research also considers Eliot's use of the "mythical method," symbolism, and intertextuality as important modernist strategies for representing cultural crisis and spiritual emptiness.

In addition to the primary text, the study refers to secondary sources such as books, journal articles, critical essays, and scholarly interpretations related to Eliot, Modernism, and post-war literature. These critical materials support the analysis and provide broader theoretical perspectives on the themes and techniques employed in *The Waste Land*.

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Waste Land by T. S. Eliot has received extensive critical attention since its publication in 1922. Scholars and critics have interpreted the poem from various perspectives, including modernism, mythology, psychoanalysis, urban alienation, cultural crisis, and spiritual regeneration. The poem's complexity, fragmented structure, and rich allusions have made it one of the most widely discussed works in modern English literature.

Critical Opinions on *The Waste Land*

Many literary critics regard *The Waste Land* as a landmark of Modernist poetry because of its innovative style and profound depiction of post-war disillusionment. Early critics emphasized the poem's fragmented structure and symbolic representation of the moral collapse of Western civilization. Eliot's use of multiple voices, literary allusions, and mythical references was seen as a reflection of the chaos and uncertainty of modern life. Critics such as

F. R. Leavis praised Eliot for capturing the spiritual emptiness and cultural decay of the twentieth century.

Other scholars focused on Eliot's use of the "mythical method," a term popularized by James Joyce and later discussed critically in relation to Eliot's poetry. Critics observed that Eliot used myths and religious traditions to impose order on the fragmented realities of modern civilization. The poem's references to Christianity, Buddhism, Hindu philosophy, and classical mythology have been interpreted as Eliot's attempt to search for spiritual renewal amidst cultural degeneration.

Several critics also examined the psychological and philosophical dimensions of the poem. Influenced by modern psychology and existential thought, scholars interpreted *The Waste Land* as a representation of anxiety, loneliness, and the fragmented consciousness of modern humanity. The poem's depiction of emotional emptiness and failed communication reflects the alienation experienced by individuals in modern urban society.

Previous Studies on Alienation and Modernism

A large number of studies have explored the theme of alienation in *The Waste Land*. Researchers have analyzed how Eliot portrays modern urban life as mechanical, impersonal, and spiritually barren. The "Unreal City" has often been interpreted as a symbol of urban alienation where individuals lose their identity and meaningful social relationships. Scholars have also discussed how industrialization, war, and materialism contributed to feelings of loneliness, isolation, and emotional fragmentation in modern society.

Studies on Modernism have highlighted Eliot's experimentation with poetic form and technique. Researchers have emphasized the importance of fragmentation, symbolism, intertextuality, stream of consciousness, and free verse in the poem. Eliot's rejection of traditional poetic conventions and his attempt to represent the complexities of modern life established him as one of the leading modernist poets. Many studies also connect *The Waste Land* with the broader crisis of modernity, focusing on themes such as disillusionment, cultural collapse, and loss of faith after World War I.

Research Gap in Cultural Interpretation

Although numerous studies have examined *The Waste Land* from modernist, psychological, and mythological perspectives, relatively less attention has been given to the interconnected relationship between urban alienation and cultural crisis. Most previous research has treated these themes separately rather than analyzing how cultural disintegration contributes to the alienation of individuals in modern society. Furthermore, while critics have discussed

Eliot's use of myths and symbolism, fewer studies have explored how these elements function as representations of the collapse of Western cultural and moral values.

There is also a need for a more comprehensive interpretation of the poem that combines social, cultural, and spiritual dimensions within the framework of post-war modernity. The present study seeks to fill this gap by examining how Eliot portrays urban alienation alongside the breakdown of cultural and moral traditions. It also attempts to analyze how Eliot's modernist techniques strengthen his critique of modern civilization and reflect the spiritual crisis of humanity. Thus, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the cultural significance and contemporary relevance of *The Waste Land*.

IV. URBAN ALIENATION IN *THE WASTE LAND*

Representation of Modern City Life

The Waste Land by T. S. Eliot presents a powerful portrayal of urban alienation through the depiction of modern city life. Eliot represents the modern city as spiritually barren, emotionally empty, and culturally fragmented. The poem reflects the social and psychological condition of individuals living in the rapidly industrialized urban environment of the twentieth century. After the First World War, cities became symbols of modern civilization, but they also created loneliness, monotony, and loss of identity. Eliot captures this atmosphere of despair and alienation by portraying city life as mechanical and devoid of genuine human connection.

London as an "Unreal City"

One of the most significant images in the poem is Eliot's description of London as an "Unreal City." This phrase symbolizes the artificial and lifeless nature of modern urban existence. Eliot presents London not as a vibrant center of culture and humanity but as a place filled with spiritually dead individuals moving aimlessly through their daily routines. The crowds crossing London Bridge appear ghost-like and mechanical, lacking emotion, individuality, and purpose. The image suggests that modern urban life has reduced human beings to lifeless figures trapped in routine and despair.

The city is described through gloomy and fragmented imagery, including fog, smoke, dirty streets, and crowds of exhausted people. These images create an atmosphere of decay and emptiness. Eliot's London reflects the moral and spiritual collapse of Western civilization after the war. Although the city is crowded, individuals remain isolated and disconnected from one another. Communication becomes meaningless, and personal relationships lose

emotional depth. Thus, the "Unreal City" becomes a metaphor for alienation, confusion, and the dehumanizing effects of modern civilization.

Mechanical and Monotonous Existence

Eliot also portrays modern urban life as mechanical and monotonous. Individuals in the poem follow repetitive routines without emotional engagement or spiritual fulfillment. Life appears controlled by habit, routine, and material concerns rather than by creativity, morality, or meaningful relationships. The characters in the poem perform ordinary activities mechanically, reflecting the emptiness and boredom of modern existence.

In sections such as "The Fire Sermon," Eliot depicts people living without passion or emotional connection. Relationships become superficial and purely physical, lacking love, understanding, or spiritual meaning. Human interaction appears artificial and emotionless, emphasizing the loss of authentic human experience in modern society. The mechanical nature of urban life turns individuals into passive and spiritually exhausted beings.

The monotony of city life also reflects the influence of industrialization and modernization. Machines, crowded streets, office work, and repetitive activities dominate human existence, leaving little room for emotional fulfillment or personal identity. Eliot suggests that modern civilization has transformed human beings into isolated individuals trapped in a cycle of routine and spiritual emptiness.

Thus, through the image of London as an "Unreal City" and the portrayal of mechanical existence, Eliot powerfully expresses the theme of urban alienation in *The Waste Land*. The poem reveals how modern urban society creates loneliness, emotional fragmentation, and spiritual despair, making individuals feel disconnected from themselves, from others, and from cultural values.

Psychological Isolation

The Waste Land by T. S. Eliot presents psychological isolation as one of the major consequences of modern urban life. Eliot portrays individuals who are emotionally detached, spiritually exhausted, and mentally fragmented. The modern city, instead of creating human connection, increases loneliness and alienation. The poem reflects the psychological condition of post-war society where people experience loss of identity, failure of communication, and emotional emptiness. Through fragmented voices, disconnected conversations, and symbolic imagery, Eliot reveals the inner crisis of modern humanity.

Loss of Identity

One of the important aspects of psychological isolation in the poem is the loss of identity. The individuals in *The*

Waste Land appear confused, fragmented, and disconnected from their true selves. Eliot presents characters who lack purpose, direction, and self-awareness. Modern urban life reduces individuals to anonymous figures moving mechanically through crowded streets and repetitive routines. They become part of an impersonal society where individuality and personal meaning disappear.

The image of the crowd crossing London Bridge reflects this condition. The people are presented not as unique individuals but as lifeless masses without identity or emotional depth. Eliot suggests that modern civilization has weakened human personality and reduced people to passive participants in a meaningless existence. The fragmentation of voices and perspectives in the poem further symbolizes the fragmented identity of modern individuals who struggle to understand themselves and their place in society.

Failure of Communication

Another major feature of psychological isolation in the poem is the failure of communication. Human relationships in *The Waste Land* are marked by misunderstanding, silence, and emotional distance. Conversations between characters often appear broken, incomplete, or meaningless. People speak to each other, but genuine understanding and emotional connection are absent. Eliot uses fragmented dialogues and disconnected speech patterns to emphasize the inability of individuals to communicate effectively in modern society.

In “A Game of Chess,” for example, communication between individuals reflects tension, anxiety, and emotional frustration rather than intimacy or understanding. Relationships become mechanical and superficial, lacking genuine emotional exchange. The inability to communicate reveals the deep psychological loneliness experienced by modern individuals. Eliot suggests that urban society has destroyed meaningful human interaction and replaced it with empty conversation and emotional detachment.

The poem’s fragmented structure itself reflects this communication crisis. Different voices, languages, and cultural references appear disconnected from one another, symbolizing the breakdown of unity and coherence in modern life. Communication becomes chaotic and uncertain, mirroring the confusion of modern civilization.

Emotional Emptiness

Emotional emptiness is another important element of urban alienation in the poem. Eliot portrays modern individuals as spiritually exhausted and emotionally barren. Human relationships lack love, compassion, and emotional fulfillment. People continue their daily lives mechanically without passion, hope, or inner satisfaction. The emotional

emptiness of modern existence creates feelings of despair, boredom, and spiritual decay.

In many parts of the poem, personal relationships are shown as lifeless and purely physical rather than emotional or spiritual. Eliot presents characters who experience loneliness even when surrounded by others. This emotional barrenness reflects the wider cultural and moral crisis of modern civilization. The wasteland itself becomes a symbol of the inner emptiness of human beings who have lost faith, purpose, and emotional vitality.

Thus, through the themes of loss of identity, failure of communication, and emotional emptiness, Eliot powerfully portrays psychological isolation in *The Waste Land*. The poem reveals the damaging effects of modern urban civilization on the human mind and spirit, emphasizing the loneliness, fragmentation, and alienation experienced by individuals in the modern world.

Fragmentation of Human Relationships

The *Waste Land* by T. S. Eliot presents the fragmentation of human relationships as one of the major effects of modern urban civilization. Eliot portrays a society in which personal relationships have lost emotional depth, spiritual meaning, and genuine human connection. In the modern world depicted in the poem, individuals are physically close to one another but emotionally distant and isolated. Human interactions become mechanical, superficial, and fragmented, reflecting the moral and psychological crisis of post-war society. Through disconnected conversations, lifeless relationships, and symbolic imagery, Eliot reveals the breakdown of social and emotional bonds in modern life.

Lack of Intimacy and Connection

One of the central aspects of fragmented relationships in *The Waste Land* is the lack of intimacy and emotional connection between individuals. Eliot portrays relationships that are empty, mechanical, and devoid of love or understanding. Human beings fail to communicate sincerely with one another, resulting in emotional isolation and loneliness. The poem suggests that modern urban life has weakened the emotional and spiritual foundations of human relationships.

In sections such as “A Game of Chess,” Eliot depicts conversations filled with tension, anxiety, and misunderstanding. Characters speak to one another, but their communication lacks warmth, empathy, and emotional closeness. Relationships become dominated by fear, dissatisfaction, and emotional emptiness rather than mutual affection and trust. Similarly, in “The Fire Sermon,” Eliot presents relationships that are purely physical and mechanical, lacking spiritual or emotional significance. The

encounter between the typist and the young man carbuncular reflects a relationship without love, intimacy, or genuine human feeling. Their interaction appears routine and emotionless, symbolizing the moral decline and emotional sterility of modern society.

Eliot suggests that industrialization, urbanization, and materialism have transformed human relationships into artificial and impersonal experiences. Individuals are unable to establish meaningful emotional bonds because modern civilization has created spiritual emptiness and psychological alienation. Thus, the lack of intimacy in the poem reflects the emotional crisis of modern humanity.

Depiction of Broken Social Life

The poem also presents a powerful depiction of broken social life in the modern urban world. Eliot portrays society as fragmented and disconnected, where individuals live without unity, trust, or shared moral values. Traditional social structures and cultural relationships have collapsed, leaving people isolated within crowded urban spaces. Although the city is filled with people, there is no real sense of community or collective identity.

The image of crowds moving through the “Unreal City” symbolizes the breakdown of social connection in modern civilization. People appear as lifeless figures trapped in monotonous routines and meaningless existence. Social interaction becomes superficial and fragmented, and individuals remain emotionally detached from one another. Eliot’s fragmented structure and shifting voices reinforce this sense of social disintegration by presenting a world lacking coherence, harmony, and stability.

The broken social life depicted in the poem also reflects the broader cultural and moral crisis of the twentieth century. War, industrialization, and the decline of religious and ethical values have weakened the foundations of social unity. Human beings become isolated not only from others but also from cultural traditions and spiritual meaning. Eliot portrays a society suffering from emotional exhaustion, moral decay, and loss of purpose.

Thus, through the fragmentation of human relationships, lack of intimacy, and depiction of broken social life, Eliot powerfully illustrates the theme of urban alienation in *The Waste Land*. The poem reveals how modern civilization has damaged human connection and created a world characterized by loneliness, emotional emptiness, and social disintegration.

V. CULTURAL CRISIS AND SPIRITUAL DECAY IN *THE WASTE LAND*

Collapse of Traditional Values

The Waste Land by T. S. Eliot presents a profound picture of cultural crisis and spiritual decay in the modern world. Written after the First World War, the poem reflects the collapse of traditional values, moral uncertainty, and the disintegration of Western civilization. Eliot portrays a society that has lost its spiritual foundation, cultural unity, and ethical direction. The modern world in the poem appears fragmented, barren, and emotionally exhausted. Through symbols, myths, and fragmented voices, Eliot expresses the despair and confusion of a civilization experiencing moral and spiritual decline.

Decline of Religion and Morality

One of the major aspects of cultural crisis in *The Waste Land* is the decline of religion and morality. Traditional religious beliefs, which once provided meaning and stability to human life, no longer hold strong influence in modern society. Eliot portrays a world where spiritual faith has weakened, leaving individuals emotionally empty and morally directionless. The collapse of religious values creates a sense of despair, alienation, and confusion among people.

The wasteland itself symbolizes spiritual barrenness and the absence of divine guidance. Images of dryness, sterility, and decay reflect the moral emptiness of modern civilization. Human beings in the poem appear disconnected from spiritual truth and moral responsibility. Instead of meaningful relationships and ethical living, modern life is dominated by materialism, lust, and selfishness. Eliot suggests that modern civilization has become spiritually dead because it has abandoned religious and moral values.

In “The Fire Sermon,” Eliot presents a world corrupted by moral decay and meaningless physical relationships. Love and intimacy lose their emotional and spiritual significance, becoming mechanical and empty. Similarly, in “A Game of Chess,” personal relationships are marked by tension, anxiety, and emotional dissatisfaction. These depictions reveal the decline of moral standards and the failure of modern individuals to achieve genuine spiritual fulfillment.

Eliot also uses religious references from Christianity, Buddhism, and Hindu philosophy to emphasize humanity’s search for redemption and spiritual renewal. The inclusion of these traditions suggests that spiritual recovery is possible, but modern society must first recognize its moral emptiness and cultural decline.

Cultural Disintegration after War

The First World War played a crucial role in creating the cultural crisis represented in *The Waste Land*. The war caused widespread destruction, loss of life, and psychological trauma, leading people to question the values

and institutions of Western civilization. The belief in progress, rationality, and moral superiority was shattered by the brutality of war. As a result, post-war society experienced deep disillusionment and uncertainty. Eliot captures this atmosphere of despair and fragmentation throughout the poem.

The poem reflects the breakdown of cultural unity and social order after the war. Traditional customs, beliefs, and social relationships no longer provide stability or meaning. Individuals feel disconnected from their cultural roots and unable to find purpose in modern life. Eliot's fragmented structure, shifting voices, and disconnected scenes symbolize the collapse of coherence and harmony in civilization. The poem itself becomes a representation of a fractured world where cultural continuity has been lost.

Eliot also portrays modern urban society as spiritually and culturally exhausted. The "Unreal City" reflects a civilization filled with alienated individuals who move mechanically through meaningless routines. Human life appears empty and directionless because the cultural and moral foundations of society have weakened. The collapse of shared values results in loneliness, confusion, and emotional isolation.

At the same time, Eliot's use of myths and literary allusions suggests an attempt to reconnect the modern world with the wisdom of ancient traditions. By referring to classical mythology and religious texts, Eliot seeks to restore cultural continuity and spiritual meaning in a fragmented modern civilization.

Thus, through the depiction of declining religion, moral decay, and cultural disintegration after war, Eliot presents *The Waste Land* as a powerful critique of modern civilization. The poem reveals the spiritual emptiness and moral crisis of the post-war world while also suggesting the possibility of renewal through cultural and spiritual regeneration.

Myth and Symbolism

The Waste Land by T. S. Eliot employs myth and symbolism as important literary techniques to portray the cultural crisis and spiritual decay of modern civilization. Eliot believed that the fragmented and chaotic condition of the modern world could be better understood through references to ancient myths, religious traditions, and symbolic imagery. By connecting the modern age with past civilizations and spiritual traditions, Eliot presents the decline of Western culture while also suggesting the possibility of renewal and regeneration. The poem's rich symbolic structure and mythical references deepen its representation of moral emptiness, spiritual barrenness, and cultural disintegration.

Use of Mythical Method

One of the most significant modernist techniques used by Eliot in *The Waste Land* is the "mythical method." This method involves using myths, legends, and ancient cultural narratives to interpret and organize modern experience. Eliot uses mythology not merely as decoration but as a structural and thematic framework for understanding the crisis of modern civilization. By linking the present with the past, Eliot shows that human suffering, decay, and the search for renewal are universal experiences that continue across history.

A major influence on the poem is the legend of the Fisher King, a mythical ruler whose land becomes barren because of his spiritual and physical weakness. The wasteland can only be restored through healing and spiritual regeneration. Eliot uses this myth to symbolize the condition of modern society after the First World War. The modern world in the poem appears spiritually infertile and culturally exhausted, just like the barren kingdom of the Fisher King. Through this myth, Eliot suggests that modern civilization suffers from moral decay and requires spiritual renewal.

Eliot also incorporates references from Greek mythology, Christianity, Buddhism, and Hindu philosophy. These diverse traditions create a universal vision of cultural decline and spiritual search. The use of religious and mythological references emphasizes humanity's need for wisdom, self-discipline, and spiritual awakening. Eliot's mythical method helps impose order and meaning on the fragmented structure of the poem while connecting modern chaos with ancient cultural experiences.

Symbolic Images of Barrenness and Decay

Symbolism plays a central role in expressing the themes of cultural crisis and spiritual decay in *The Waste Land*. Eliot repeatedly uses images of dryness, sterility, ruins, and death to symbolize the emptiness of modern civilization. The wasteland itself is the most powerful symbol in the poem. It represents a spiritually barren world where human beings have lost faith, morality, and emotional vitality. The barren landscape reflects the inner emptiness and despair of modern society.

Images of dry land, dead trees, empty rivers, and lifeless nature symbolize the absence of spiritual growth and cultural fertility. Water, which traditionally symbolizes life and renewal, is either absent or polluted in the poem, emphasizing the spiritual drought of the modern world. The repeated images of dust, stones, and broken structures suggest cultural fragmentation and the collapse of civilization.

Eliot also uses urban imagery to symbolize decay and alienation. The "Unreal City" filled with lifeless crowds

reflects the dehumanizing effects of industrialization and urban life. People move mechanically through meaningless routines, symbolizing emotional emptiness and loss of identity. Similarly, the ruined chapel, broken architecture, and fragmented voices throughout the poem symbolize the destruction of cultural and spiritual unity.

At the same time, Eliot introduces symbols that hint at the possibility of renewal and redemption. The sound of thunder and the final Sanskrit word “Shantih” suggest peace, spiritual understanding, and hope for regeneration. These symbols indicate that despite the decay and fragmentation of modern civilization, spiritual renewal remains possible through self-realization and reconnection with cultural and religious traditions.

Thus, through the use of mythical method and symbolic images of barrenness and decay, Eliot powerfully portrays the cultural crisis and spiritual emptiness of the modern world in *The Waste Land*. His use of myth and symbolism not only reflects the fragmentation and despair of post-war civilization but also suggests a deeper search for meaning, order, and spiritual regeneration.

Quest for Spiritual Renewal

The Waste Land by T. S. Eliot not only portrays the spiritual emptiness and cultural decay of modern civilization but also presents a quest for spiritual renewal and regeneration. Although the poem is filled with images of barrenness, fragmentation, and despair, Eliot ultimately suggests that redemption and peace are still possible. Through references to Eastern and Western religious traditions, myths, and philosophical teachings, Eliot explores humanity’s search for spiritual meaning in a morally and culturally broken world. The poem reflects the modern individual’s desire to overcome alienation, emotional emptiness, and moral confusion through spiritual awakening and cultural rediscovery.

References to Eastern and Western Traditions

One of the most remarkable aspects of *The Waste Land* is Eliot’s blending of Eastern and Western religious and cultural traditions. Eliot believed that modern civilization had become spiritually barren because it had lost connection with its moral and cultural roots. To address this crisis, he incorporated references from Christianity, Greek mythology, Buddhism, and Hindu philosophy. These traditions provide a broader spiritual framework for understanding human suffering and the possibility of renewal.

Western religious traditions, particularly Christianity, appear throughout the poem in the form of biblical references, images of death and resurrection, and suggestions of sacrifice and redemption. Eliot uses

Christian symbolism to emphasize the need for spiritual rebirth in a morally decaying society. The imagery of ruined chapels, barren landscapes, and exhausted humanity reflects the decline of spiritual faith in Western civilization. However, Christian ideas of renewal and salvation also suggest hope for regeneration.

At the same time, Eliot draws heavily from Eastern philosophy and religious teachings, especially from Hinduism and Buddhism. The final section of the poem contains references to the Upanishads, one of the sacred texts of Hindu philosophy. The thunder’s message—“Datta” (give), “Dayadhvam” (sympathize), and “Damyata” (control)—offers moral and spiritual guidance for humanity. These teachings emphasize self-discipline, compassion, and selflessness as essential qualities for spiritual renewal. Eliot suggests that modern society can overcome its crisis only by rediscovering moral responsibility and inner spiritual balance.

The poem concludes with the Sanskrit word “Shantih,” meaning peace. This ending symbolizes spiritual calmness, reconciliation, and hope after the chaos and fragmentation of modern life. By combining Eastern and Western traditions, Eliot creates a universal spiritual vision that transcends cultural boundaries and highlights humanity’s common search for meaning and redemption.

Search for Redemption and Peace

The quest for redemption is one of the central concerns of *The Waste Land*. The poem portrays modern humanity as spiritually exhausted and trapped in a state of moral confusion, loneliness, and despair. Individuals suffer from emotional emptiness and alienation because they have lost connection with spiritual truth and cultural values. Eliot suggests that materialism, urbanization, and moral decay have created a spiritually barren civilization incapable of providing inner fulfillment or peace.

Despite this atmosphere of hopelessness, the poem repeatedly hints at the possibility of renewal. Water imagery, although often associated with dryness and absence, also symbolizes purification and rebirth. Death in the poem is not only destructive but can also lead to regeneration and spiritual transformation. Eliot uses myths of resurrection and rebirth to suggest that cultural and spiritual healing are still possible.

The poem’s fragmented structure itself reflects the search for order and meaning in a chaotic world. Through myth, symbolism, and religious references, Eliot attempts to restore coherence to a fragmented civilization. The search for redemption becomes both personal and cultural, involving the recovery of spiritual faith, moral values, and human compassion.

Ultimately, Eliot presents spiritual renewal as the only solution to the cultural crisis of modern civilization. The poem suggests that peace and redemption can be achieved through self-awareness, discipline, compassion, and reconnection with spiritual traditions. Thus, *The Waste Land* moves beyond despair and fragmentation to express a deeper hope for regeneration and inner peace in the modern world.

VI. MODERNIST TECHNIQUES IN *THE WASTE LAND*

The Waste Land by T. S. Eliot is considered one of the greatest achievements of Modernist literature because of its innovative poetic techniques and experimental style. Eliot broke away from traditional poetic conventions and introduced new methods to represent the fragmented, uncertain, and spiritually barren condition of modern civilization. Through fragmentation, multiple voices, intertextuality, symbolic imagery, and narrative experimentation, Eliot captures the complexity of modern life after the First World War. These modernist techniques not only shape the structure of the poem but also reinforce its themes of alienation, cultural crisis, and spiritual decay.

Fragmentation and Multiple Voices

Fragmentation is one of the most important modernist techniques used in *The Waste Land*. The poem does not follow a single narrative structure, logical sequence, or unified speaker. Instead, it consists of disconnected scenes, abrupt transitions, and fragmented voices that reflect the chaos and disorder of modern civilization. Eliot uses fragmentation to represent the psychological confusion and cultural breakdown experienced in the post-war world.

The poem shifts suddenly from one speaker to another, from one setting to another, and from one time period to another without clear explanation. Different voices appear throughout the poem, including men, women, mythical figures, ordinary city dwellers, and prophetic voices. These multiple voices create a sense of confusion and instability, symbolizing the fragmented identity of modern humanity. The lack of a central narrative or unified perspective mirrors the fractured condition of modern life, where coherence and certainty have disappeared.

Eliot's fragmented structure also reflects the collapse of cultural and moral unity. The poem becomes a collage of broken experiences, memories, and cultural references, emphasizing the disintegration of modern civilization. Through fragmentation and multiple voices, Eliot portrays the emotional isolation, uncertainty, and alienation of individuals living in the modern world.

Intertextuality and Literary Allusions

Another major modernist technique in *The Waste Land* is intertextuality and the extensive use of literary allusions. Eliot incorporates references from classical literature, mythology, religion, philosophy, and world cultures to enrich the meaning of the poem. These allusions connect the modern world with the cultural traditions of the past and help Eliot explore the crisis of modern civilization.

The poem includes references to works such as *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri, *Hamlet* and other works of William Shakespeare, Greek mythology, the Bible, Buddhist teachings, and Hindu scriptures. Eliot's use of literary and religious references creates a multilayered text that reflects both cultural continuity and cultural fragmentation.

These allusions also support Eliot's "mythical method," in which ancient myths and traditions are used to interpret modern experience. By linking the spiritual crisis of modern society with myths of death and rebirth, Eliot suggests that human suffering and the search for renewal are universal themes. Intertextuality gives the poem intellectual depth while also emphasizing the fragmented cultural condition of the modern age.

Imagery and Symbolic Landscapes

Imagery and symbolism are central to Eliot's representation of cultural crisis and spiritual decay. The poem is filled with vivid symbolic landscapes that reflect emotional emptiness, moral decline, and spiritual barrenness. The wasteland itself becomes the dominant symbol of modern civilization—a dry, sterile, and fragmented world lacking spiritual vitality and human connection.

Eliot uses recurring images of dust, rocks, dead trees, polluted rivers, ruins, and empty cities to symbolize cultural disintegration and emotional exhaustion. The "Unreal City" represents the alienation and mechanical existence of urban society, while barren landscapes reflect the inner emptiness of modern individuals. Water imagery also plays an important symbolic role. Although water traditionally symbolizes life and renewal, its absence in the poem suggests spiritual drought and moral decay. At the same time, water occasionally hints at purification and regeneration, indicating the possibility of renewal.

The symbolic landscapes in the poem create a dark and fragmented atmosphere that mirrors the condition of post-war civilization. Eliot's use of imagery transforms physical settings into representations of psychological and cultural crisis.

Stream of Consciousness and Narrative Shift

Eliot also employs stream-of-consciousness techniques and frequent narrative shifts to portray the complexity of human

thought and modern experience. The poem moves rapidly between memories, conversations, dreams, historical references, and inner reflections. These sudden shifts create an impression of instability and fragmentation, reflecting the psychological condition of modern individuals.

The stream-of-consciousness style allows Eliot to capture the flow of thoughts, emotions, and memories without following traditional narrative order. Different voices and perspectives merge into one another, creating a layered and complex poetic structure. This technique reflects the uncertainty and confusion of modern life, where individuals struggle to find coherence and meaning.

Narrative shifts in the poem also contribute to its dramatic and fragmented nature. Eliot moves between different speakers, locations, and historical periods without clear transitions, forcing readers to actively interpret the connections between different sections. This modernist experimentation challenges traditional literary forms and reflects the disordered reality of the twentieth century.

Thus, through fragmentation, multiple voices, intertextuality, symbolism, and narrative experimentation, Eliot transformed modern poetry and created a powerful representation of modern civilization in *The Waste Land*. These modernist techniques effectively convey the themes of alienation, cultural crisis, and spiritual decay while also expressing the search for meaning and renewal in a fragmented world.

VII. DISCUSSION

The Waste Land by T. S. Eliot offers a profound exploration of the crisis of modern civilization through its depiction of urban alienation, cultural disintegration, and spiritual emptiness. The poem reflects the social and psychological realities of the twentieth century while also presenting a broader critique of the effects of modernization and industrialization on human life. Eliot's modernist techniques, symbolic imagery, and fragmented narrative structure deepen the representation of alienation and cultural decay. The discussion of the poem reveals the strong relationship between urbanization and alienation, Eliot's criticism of modern civilization, and the continuing relevance of the poem in contemporary society.

Relationship between Urbanization and Alienation

One of the major concerns in *The Waste Land* is the connection between rapid urbanization and the alienation of individuals. Modern cities in the poem are portrayed as crowded yet emotionally empty spaces where people experience loneliness, confusion, and disconnection. The "Unreal City" symbolizes the artificial and mechanical nature of urban life in which human beings lose their

individuality and emotional identity. Although people live closely together in crowded urban environments, they remain psychologically isolated and unable to establish meaningful relationships.

Urbanization in the modern age brought industrial growth, technological advancement, and material progress, but Eliot suggests that it also weakened traditional social bonds and spiritual values. Human relationships became superficial and mechanical, while daily life turned repetitive and monotonous. The modern individual appears trapped within routines, unable to find emotional fulfillment or spiritual meaning. Eliot's fragmented portrayal of city life demonstrates how urban existence creates psychological instability and emotional emptiness.

The poem also reveals that urban alienation is not only social but deeply spiritual. The decline of community, religion, and moral values in modern cities intensifies feelings of loneliness and despair. Thus, Eliot presents urbanization as both a physical and psychological force that contributes to the fragmentation of modern human life.

Eliot's Critique of Modern Civilization

Through *The Waste Land*, Eliot offers a powerful critique of modern civilization and its cultural and spiritual decline. The poem portrays a world devastated by war, industrialization, and moral decay. Eliot suggests that modern society has become spiritually barren because it has lost connection with cultural traditions, religious faith, and ethical principles. The wasteland itself symbolizes the emptiness and degeneration of modern civilization.

Eliot criticizes the materialism and moral emptiness of the modern world. Individuals in the poem are shown as emotionally exhausted and spiritually directionless. Human relationships lack intimacy and compassion, while communication becomes fragmented and ineffective. Modern civilization appears obsessed with physical pleasure, routine, and material progress but incapable of providing inner peace or spiritual fulfillment.

The fragmented structure of the poem further strengthens Eliot's critique by reflecting the disorder and instability of modern life. Through multiple voices, disconnected scenes, and literary allusions, Eliot portrays a civilization that has lost unity and coherence. The use of myths and religious references suggests that modern society needs spiritual regeneration and reconnection with cultural traditions in order to overcome its crisis. Eliot's criticism is therefore not only social but also moral and philosophical.

Relevance of the Poem in Contemporary Society

Although *The Waste Land* was written in the aftermath of the First World War, its themes remain highly relevant in contemporary society. Modern urban life continues to

create feelings of alienation, loneliness, and emotional isolation. In today's technologically advanced and highly urbanized world, many individuals still experience lack of communication, fragmented relationships, and loss of identity. Eliot's depiction of emotionally disconnected individuals living in crowded cities reflects the psychological realities of modern society even in the twenty-first century.

The poem's critique of materialism and moral decline also remains significant today. Contemporary society often emphasizes consumerism, competition, and technological progress while neglecting spiritual and emotional well-being. As a result, people continue to struggle with anxiety, depression, and a sense of emptiness. Eliot's representation of spiritual crisis and cultural disintegration therefore continues to resonate with modern readers.

Furthermore, the poem's multicultural and intertextual approach has gained renewed importance in a globalized world. Eliot's use of Eastern and Western traditions highlights the universal nature of human suffering and the shared search for peace and meaning. The concluding message of spiritual renewal and self-awareness remains relevant in a world still affected by conflict, uncertainty, and cultural fragmentation.

Thus, *The Waste Land* continues to be a timeless critique of modern civilization and an important exploration of urban alienation and spiritual crisis. Eliot's vision of cultural decay and the search for regeneration gives the poem lasting literary and social significance in both the modernist period and contemporary society.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The present study of *The Waste Land* by T. S. Eliot highlights the poem as a powerful representation of urban alienation, cultural crisis, and spiritual decay in the modern world. Through fragmented structure, symbolic imagery, multiple voices, and literary allusions, Eliot successfully portrays the psychological and cultural condition of post-war civilization. The study reveals that the modern urban environment in the poem creates emotional isolation, loss of identity, and fragmented human relationships. The "Unreal City" becomes a symbol of the loneliness, monotony, and spiritual emptiness experienced by individuals living in modern industrial society. Eliot's depiction of mechanical existence and broken communication reflects the alienation and despair of twentieth-century humanity.

The analysis further demonstrates Eliot's vision of cultural degeneration in modern civilization. The poem portrays the collapse of traditional moral values, religious faith, and

cultural unity after the devastation of the First World War. Through images of barrenness, decay, and fragmentation, Eliot presents a world suffering from spiritual exhaustion and moral confusion. The wasteland symbolizes not only physical destruction but also the inner emptiness of human beings who have become disconnected from ethical and spiritual values. Eliot's use of myths, religious traditions, and intertextual references emphasizes the decline of Western civilization while also connecting modern suffering with universal human experience.

At the same time, the poem does not remain limited to despair and hopelessness. Eliot suggests the importance of spiritual and cultural regeneration as the only solution to the crisis of modern civilization. Through references to Eastern and Western philosophical traditions, the poem proposes self-discipline, compassion, moral responsibility, and spiritual awareness as pathways toward renewal. The concluding message of "Shantih" symbolizes peace, reconciliation, and the possibility of inner transformation. Eliot therefore presents spiritual regeneration as essential for restoring meaning, harmony, and cultural stability in human life.

The continuing relevance of *The Waste Land* lies in its timeless exploration of alienation, anxiety, and cultural fragmentation. Even in contemporary society, rapid urbanization, technological advancement, and materialism continue to create emotional isolation and spiritual emptiness among individuals. Eliot's critique of modern civilization remains significant because the problems of loneliness, moral uncertainty, and cultural disintegration are still visible in the modern world. The poem continues to speak to readers across generations by addressing universal human concerns related to identity, meaning, and the search for peace in a fragmented society.

Thus, *The Waste Land* remains one of the greatest achievements of Modernist literature because of its profound artistic innovation and its deep exploration of the spiritual and cultural crisis of humanity. Eliot's vision of decay and regeneration gives the poem enduring literary, philosophical, and social importance in both the twentieth century and the contemporary age.

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Breaking the Silence: Feminism, Realism, and Resistance in the Writings of Ismat Chughtai

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Abstract— *Ismat Chughtai remains one of the most influential literary voices of twentieth-century India. A pioneer of feminist Urdu literature, she explored themes such as gender discrimination, female sexuality, class hierarchy, and social oppression with remarkable boldness and realism. Her writings challenged patriarchal structures and gave voice to women whose experiences had long remained suppressed within conservative society. This paper examines the relationship between Chughtai's life experiences and her literary vision through a study of her autobiography *A Life in Words: Memoirs* and major fictional works such as *Lihaaf*. It further analyses her contribution to feminist discourse, her association with the Progressive Writers' Association, and her portrayal of women's resistance against social and cultural restrictions. Chughtai's realism, sharp social observation, and fearless narrative style enabled her to expose the hypocrisies of a male-dominated society and redefine women's representation in South Asian literature. The paper argues that Chughtai not only transformed Urdu fiction but also emerged as a revolutionary literary figure whose works continue to remain relevant in contemporary feminist studies.*



Keywords— *feminism, female sexuality, Ismat Chughtai, patriarchy, realism, Urdu literature.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Ismat Chughtai (21 August 1915 – 24 October 1991) emerged as a powerful literary voice in twentieth-century Urdu literature, known for her fearless exploration of themes such as female sexuality, gender roles, and class dynamics. Rooted in literary realism, her writing broke barriers and reshaped the narrative space for women in South Asian fiction. In 1976, the Government of India honoured her with the Padma Shri in recognition of her significant contributions to literature.

Chughtai's determination to pursue education met with strong resistance from her conservative family, yet she persisted and went on to earn a Bachelor of Education from Aligarh Muslim University. It was during her time at Aligarh that she became actively involved with the Progressive Writers' Association, a group that deeply influenced her ideological and literary growth.

Sukrita Paul Kumar, in *Ismat: Her Life, Her Times*, captures her essence by stating, "Ismat Chughtai wore no purdah.

And her pen worked as an instrument to sheer the purdah behind which the whole of middle-class Muslim women vibrated in gossip and scandal, desires and urges, jealousies and tensions, rituals and traditions, repressions and little rebellions" (Kumar & Siddiqui, 2000, p. 42).

Bold, unapologetic, and revolutionary, Chughtai's writing challenged the silences around women's inner lives. Her sharp wit, unflinching honesty, and courage to confront social taboos made her not just a literary icon but also a trailblazer who lived the very rebellion she wrote about.

Ismat Chughtai is celebrated for her bold portrayal of women who lived on the fringes of society—widows, beggars, sex workers, and those from marginalized communities. Through her writing, she brought to light the harsh realities faced by Indian women under the weight of patriarchy. Her work exposed issues such as widespread illiteracy among women, poor sanitation and living conditions, systemic disempowerment, lack of employment opportunities, and the suffocating grip of regressive social norms.

What sets Chughtai apart is her representation of both Hindu and Muslim women, especially those from the middle class. She delved into their private worlds with honesty and empathy, giving voice to their struggles, dreams, and suppressed identities.

Tahira Naqvi remarks:

“One of Urdu’s boldest and most outspoken female writers, Ismat Chughtai played an important role in the development of the modern short story as we know it today” (Naqvi, 2013, p. vii).

Ismat Chughtai gave voice and visibility to those hidden behind the metaphorical and literal veil. To truly grasp the essence of feminism in her work, one must delve into her life and the pivotal experiences that shaped her. Her autobiography *A Life in Words: Memoirs* offers a vital lens through which her literary vision can be understood.

With a bold and impassioned narrative style, Chughtai left an indelible mark on Urdu literature. She contributed significantly to the evolution of Urdu fiction by portraying the everyday realities of middle-class Muslim life. Her characters reflected not only the world around her but also her refusal to conform to patriarchal norms.

M. Asaduddin observes:

“It is her power of close observation that helps Ismat Chughtai to pick up on trivial yet extremely interesting and relevant details about people and their lives which are then woven into her stories” (Asaduddin, 2012, p. xxii).

II. ISMAT CHUGHTAI AND THE QUESTION OF WOMEN’S EDUCATION

Ismat Chughtai was born on 21 August 1915 in Badaun, Uttar Pradesh, into a conservative Muslim family. Her father, Khan Bahadur Mirza Qasim Baig Chughtai, served as a Deputy Collector, while her mother, Nusrat Khanum, managed a large household. Growing up as the ninth among ten siblings, Chughtai became aware of unequal gender treatment from an early age.

In her autobiography *A Life in Words: Memoirs*, Chughtai reflects critically on patriarchal structures that governed women’s lives. She observed, “Lack of equality is not only found between the rich and the poor, it is also present more deeply in the power relations between men and women” (Chughtai, 2012, p. 8).

Unlike her sisters, who largely accepted conventional domestic roles, Chughtai resisted patriarchal expectations. She aspired to enjoy the same freedom as her brothers and recalls, “I was just interested in climbing trees and cycling like my brothers” (Chughtai, 2012, p. 8).

Education played a transformative role in Chughtai’s life. At a time when higher education for women was considered shameful, she insisted on receiving an English education similar to that of her brothers. While several family members opposed her ambitions, her father and elder brother Azim Baig Chughtai supported her intellectual growth.

Chughtai later studied at Women’s College in Aligarh and at Isabella Thoburn College in Lucknow. Reflecting on her years in Lucknow, she writes, “The two years I spent in Lucknow proved to be important in my life. My mind found new avenues, and new doors opened in front of me” (Chughtai, 2012, p. 155).

M. Asaduddin notes that women’s education was strongly resisted in conservative society, and even sending daughters to boarding schools invited severe criticism from relatives (Asaduddin, 2012). Chughtai’s struggle for education therefore represented a broader resistance against social oppression.

III. AUTOBIOGRAPHY, REALISM, AND FEMALE EXPERIENCE

Chughtai’s autobiography *A Life in Words: Memoirs* provides valuable insight into the formation of her feminist consciousness and literary realism. Her autobiographical reflections reveal her determination to expose uncomfortable truths rather than idealized social images.

One of the most striking aspects of her autobiography is her unconventional portrayal of motherhood. Rejecting romanticized representations, Chughtai writes:

“We were so many brothers and sisters that my mother felt nauseous at the sight of us” (Chughtai, 2012, p. 1).

Through such observations, Chughtai exposes the emotional and physical burden imposed upon women within patriarchal structures. She challenges traditional literary depictions of motherhood as purely sacred and instead presents it as an experience shaped by pain, exhaustion, and social expectation.

Chughtai also criticized the concept of purdah and what she called the “veil of the mind.” For her, patriarchal control extended beyond physical restrictions and deeply influenced women’s thoughts and identities.

Economic dependence was another major concern in Chughtai’s feminist vision. She believed that women’s oppression was closely connected to their lack of financial independence. A woman without economic freedom was often compelled to tolerate injustice and abuse within marriage and family structures.

Chughtai's realism stemmed from her close observation of everyday life. Her characters reflected the experiences of ordinary people rather than idealized literary figures. Asaduddin observes that her ability to notice trivial yet meaningful details enabled her to portray the lives of both middle-class and marginalized individuals authentically (Asaduddin, 2012).

Her literary realism often unsettled conservative readers because it exposed social hypocrisy without concealment. Chughtai herself insisted that literature must reflect society truthfully, even when that truth appeared uncomfortable or disturbing.

IV. LIHAAF AND THE POLITICS OF FEMALE SEXUALITY

Among Chughtai's most celebrated and controversial works is *Lihaaf* (The Quilt), published in 1942. The story explored themes of female desire, loneliness, repression, and same-sex intimacy at a time when such subjects were considered taboo in Indian society.

Lihaaf led to accusations of obscenity and eventually resulted in a court trial. Chughtai strongly defended her work and refused to apologize. She argued that literature merely reflects social reality and that obscenity lies within society itself rather than within artistic representation.

Chughtai responded boldly:

"The world is also littered with filth. If it is raked up it becomes visible, and people feel the need to clean it up" (Chughtai, 2012, p. 37).

Through *Lihaaf*, Chughtai addressed subjects such as suppressed female sexuality, homosexuality, and emotional neglect within patriarchal marriages. The story became a landmark in feminist literary history because it challenged the silence surrounding women's desires.

Although many critics labelled her writing obscene, Chughtai rejected such accusations and identified herself instead as a realist writer. She later observed:

"Since then, I have been labelled a pornographer... the younger generation has recognized that I am a realist and not a porn writer" (Chughtai, 2012, p. 39).

The controversy surrounding *Lihaaf* ultimately strengthened Chughtai's literary reputation. The story opened new possibilities for women writers and contributed significantly to feminist discourse in South Asian literature.

V. RASHID JAHAN AND THE PROGRESSIVE WRITERS' MOVEMENT

Rashid Jahan played a crucial role in shaping Chughtai's literary and ideological outlook. Chughtai regarded her as a

mentor whose boldness inspired her to challenge patriarchal traditions fearlessly.

The Progressive Writers' Association further strengthened Chughtai's commitment to social reform through literature. Writers such as Sajjad Zaheer, Krishan Chander, Mulk Raj Anand, and Saadat Hasan Manto were associated with the movement. The PWA encouraged progressive thought, secularism, social equality, and resistance against exploitation.

Chughtai actively participated in the movement and believed that literature should address the pain and struggles of ordinary people. Reflecting upon the purpose of the Progressive Movement, she argued that reform would continue as long as human conscience opposed oppression and injustice.

The influence of the PWA is clearly visible in Chughtai's writings. Her stories consistently challenge rigid social customs, religious orthodoxy, gender discrimination, and class inequality.

Editorial writers such as Rashid Jahan and Ismat Chughtai went beyond conventional discussions of women's issues by addressing sexuality, desire, and emotional repression. Their writings expanded the scope of feminist discourse within Indian literature.

VI. ISMAT CHUGHTAI'S FEMINIST REALISM AND SOCIAL CRITIQUE

One of the defining characteristics of Ismat Chughtai's literary genius is her commitment to realism. Unlike romantic or idealized representations of women commonly found in earlier literature, Chughtai portrayed women as complex human beings shaped by social pressures, emotional desires, frustrations, and contradictions.

Chughtai believed that literature should not merely entertain readers but also reveal hidden social truths. Her stories dismantle the superficial respectability of patriarchal society by exposing the emotional suffering concealed within domestic spaces.

A major strength of Chughtai's fiction lies in her portrayal of female psychology. She presented women not as idealized symbols of purity and obedience but as individuals with ambitions, desires, jealousy, loneliness, and emotional complexity.

Another significant aspect of her work is the representation of domestic spaces as sites of conflict and resistance. Homes in Chughtai's stories are not peaceful or idealized environments; instead, they often become spaces where women experience confinement, surveillance, and emotional suffocation.

Her critique of society also extended to class structures. Chughtai observed the relationship between gender and class oppression with remarkable sensitivity. Many of her stories portray servants, widows, lower-middle-class women, and socially marginalized individuals whose struggles are intensified by economic inequality.

Chughtai's language further strengthened her realism. Rather than using excessively decorative literary expressions, she employed colloquial speech, humour, and conversational rhythms that reflected everyday life.

Her realism was often misunderstood as obscenity because she refused to conceal social realities. However, Chughtai insisted that confronting difficult truths was necessary for social reform.

VII. ISMAT CHUGHTAI'S LITERARY LEGACY

Ismat Chughtai is regarded as one of the four pillars of Urdu short fiction alongside Saadat Hasan Manto, Premchand, and Krishan Chander. Her contribution to literature extends beyond thematic boldness; she transformed the narrative representation of women and introduced a distinct feminist perspective into Urdu fiction.

Her writings influenced later generations of women writers, including Qurratulain Hyder, Khadija Mastoor, Razia Sajjad Zaheer, Mumtaz Shirin, and Hameeda Akhtar.

Another significant aspect of Chughtai's legacy is the translation of her works into English. Translators such as M. Asaduddin and Tahira Naqvi played an important role in introducing her writings to a wider global audience.

Chughtai's literary voice remains remarkably relevant in contemporary feminist discourse. Her critique of patriarchy, gender inequality, and social hypocrisy continues to resonate with modern readers and scholars.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Ismat Chughtai emerged as one of the most courageous and transformative voices in South Asian literature. Through her fearless exploration of gender inequality, female sexuality, economic dependence, and patriarchal oppression, she challenged dominant social and literary conventions.

Works such as *Lihaaf* and *A Life in Words: Memoirs* demonstrate her commitment to exposing the hypocrisies embedded within conservative society. Influenced by Rashid Jahan and the Progressive Writers' Association, Chughtai developed a literary vision rooted in realism, reform, and feminist consciousness.

Her contribution extends beyond Urdu literature into broader feminist and postcolonial discourse. Chughtai gave

voice to silenced experiences and redefined the representation of women in Indian fiction. Her writings continue to inspire readers, scholars, and writers by asserting the importance of truth, resistance, and creative freedom.

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Immersive Storytelling: How AR/VR is Transforming Fashion Runways and Exhibitions

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Abstract— The AR and VR Technologies are changing the world from the way we know it, reshaping industries by combining physicals and digital integration. The transformation of an attire for an exhibition or a runway show into an immersive digital avatar is a change of an era. This cutting-edge sophisticated technology empowers designers to exceed real world boundaries and create engaging and interactive narratives which increase perception, attention and appreciation. In this paper, I study AR and VR immersion and their use in creating fashion brand presentations, including those that completely transformed the fashion industry using advanced technologies. The biggest benefit in using AR/VR for apparel digitization is the ability to create alternative sustainable remediation for ordinary shows by saving on travel, venue, and physical material costs. Virtual reality fashion experiences also provide opportunities for cross-cultural interaction and engagement through accessible fashion. However, is it still easy to argue against the added challenges such as high production expenditure, technological inhibitions, and unwillingness to adopt AR/VR. Regardless these hurdles, AR and VR continues to change the narrative of the fashion world in terms of creativity and technology, consumer engagement and design storytelling with the passage of time.



Keywords— Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Fashion Shows, Clothing Digitalization, Ecological Fashion, VR, Branding and Marketing in Fashion, Fashion and Digital Characters.

I. INTRODUCTION

- Virtual Reality (VR) in Fashion_it is the digital and immersive virtual world created around you out of computer generated or video-based environments, be it through an HMD/VR headwear in which you are navigating within the VR. VR designers can develop, fit and demo clothing and improve their creativity in all ways but most especially sustainable without having physical interfaces. (Kompatsiaris, 2024)
- Augmented Reality (AR) in Fashion_digital elements brought by smartphones or smart glasses where textures/entities inside physical world (clothes accessories/effect) from markdown interactive windows and AR fitting rooms —

where the shopper can touch products in their real environment — at a premium technology level to retail therapy windows are all baby steps. (Kompatsiaris, 2024)

As technologies like Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR) have begun to become in integration within the industry of fashion.

The fashion industry is evolving rapidly with the inclusion of technologies such as Augmented reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR). Technologies provide the ideal and most efficient methods to represent designs, along with allowing an enhanced interaction with the audience. The fashion industry was concern about current technical ability and sketchy consumer acceptance, since so many recently have been latched on sustainability and innovation but

technology has progressed much faster. Moving from the physical resource to a creative enablement shift shall be advantage and hence use for AR and VR integration is imperative. (Kim, 2023)

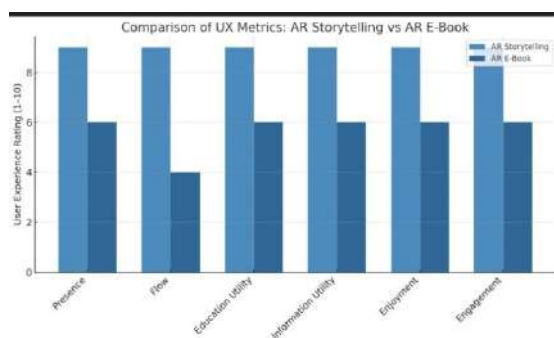


Fig.1: A comparative analysis of user experience metrics between AR e-books, based on presence, flow, education utility, enjoyment, and engagement. (Data adapted from Yang (2023) and Liu (2023))

Example relating to the respective issues is the VR Designer, introduced by Orestis Sarakatsanos. This app developed with VR technologies, redeploing the fashion design and presentation. Users can fit garments in a virtual environment via different professional applications by means of working on the unity engine, owning it from the Browzwear's V Stitcher. It means that designers are then able to evaluate both aesthetic and functional elements and even feel aspects without the use of physical samples for their virtual introduction. Showing cases without samples lowers the complexity for putting fashion in metaverse. Virtual multiuser virtuality promises a workflow solution for solving the largest collaboratively challenges in fashion design, VR adoption into professional practice. (Kim, 2023)

This study seeks to analyse the impact of Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) immersive storytelling technologies in altering the traditional fashion runway and exhibition paradigms. Given the increased importance of digital domains to the fashion industry, the research studies the impact of immersive virtual spaces on user experience, brand interaction, and creative expression. (Yang, 2023)

This research is informed by emerging academic literature, including virtual reality IVR fashion spaces, Se Jin Kim examines the impact of three types of virtual fashion environment design (physical duplication, mixed reality, and imagination) on cognitive, emotional, and aesthetic engagement. The aim is to analyse fashion's presentation not only as a storytelling element but also as a tool to strengthen emotional bond between consumers and brands. (Yang, 2023)

The scope also covers Class AR/VR integration in fashion shows and exhibitions for luxury, fast, and digital-first brands. It also addresses the educational, imaginative, and eco-friendly aspects of virtual fashion experiences, underlining the role of immersive technology in fostering diversity and inclusion in fashion discourse. This research seeks to advance the discourse on fashion and technology by examining the impact of emerging technologies on fashion communication.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The scholarly focus regarding the implementation of augmented reality (AR) in educational and cultural contexts has surged in tandem with the advancement of immersive technologies. In her article "Storytelling and User Experience in the Cultural Metaverse," Shuran Yang describes how AR storytelling can be used to improve user experience (UX) in digitally mediated environments. This research attempts to answer an important issue in applied research at the crossroads of narrative, technology, and cultural participation. (Tong Liu, 2024)

This study used a comparative method with a sample of 368 participants to assess user experience on two AR platforms: an AR e-book and a novel AR storytelling application located at the Shanghai Museum of Glass. Research: storytelling and user experience in the cultural metaverse. Her findings suggest that AR storytelling outperformed the AR e-book on almost all UX metrics: presence, flow, education, information utility, enjoyment, and engagement. Their results have resulted in some metaverse aimed at culture: in providing virtual cultural experiences, it seeks to enhance emotional engagement and immersion. (Tong Liu, 2024)

Perhaps most striking, and in line with previous findings, is the presence and flow reported by users of AR storytelling that suggests deep immersion into AR environments may stem from the interaction with powerful narratives.

The technology that intertwines fashion, storytelling, marketing, and AR/VR is termed as narrative-driven experiential marketing. From the fashion enterprise's perspective, this fusion aims to build a stronger emotional bond with customers which transcends a mere business relationship. The luxury segment of the fashion industry goes a step further as it moves beyond the visual stimuli to employ deep-seated consumer psychology, social identity, as well as perceptions of diffused ownership and bespoke experiences. (Cunha, 2023)

Derived from the more advanced virtual consumption theory, brand experience, and presence theory, the framework anchors explain the significance of branding in

the metaverse. The latter explains why some digital assets such as NFTs or garments for avatars are gaining disproportionate attention from the relatively younger Gen Z consumers. Brand experience explains the outcome of authentic and emotionally charged experiences that restructuring the perception of brands. This becomes detrimental for runways, showrooms, and exhibitions in VR fashion industry immersive environments. (Cunha, 2023)

Fashion brands use extended reality — essentially digital technologies that fall under the umbrella of Extended Reality (XR), including AR, VR, and MR for their audiences in an extensive manner. These new tools have added new levels of interactivity and personalization, that upend the binary between consumer-brand touch points etc.

XR allows brands to craft hyper personal experiences like using the AR, full immersive VR or digital showrooms so consumers can experience products in a very realistic and interactive way. These experiences not only enhance convenience but also foster deeper emotional connections through first-party control over their own fashion relating. Above all, integrated virtual settings add the world of storytelling and usually allow for playful, branched narratives that can fit in with a brand or align with various degrees of digital natives. (Kyung-Hee Choi, 2020)

XR use enables brands to capture live data, further helping them work out the actual consumer behaviour, preferences and pain-points. This data-driven analytics drives more focused and adaptive marketing plans that result in greater engagement with increasing loyalty. (Kyung-Hee Choi, 2020)

But the adoption of these technologies comes with its own challenges. The ROI of digital engagement is diluted by high implementation costs, technical limitations and varied user experience. Lack of consumer insights into XR expectations and usability can be a block to the mass adoption. (Alladi Venkatesh, 2010)

Industrially best practice informs that successful digital engagement is less about maintaining technology for the sake of it and much more about thoughtfully ascribing practical value. The use of XR should never be reductive to a singular user centred campaign that is as much about comfort and access as it is meaningful interaction. (Alladi Venkatesh, 2010)

Table 1: Overview of AR and VR applications across different domains of the fashion industry, highlighting their real world benefits.

<u>Fashion Domain</u>	<u>AR/VR Application Example</u>	<u>Impact/ Benefit</u>

Fashion Shows	Virtual Runways, Metaverse Fashion Weeks	Global Access, Cost Savings, Creative Freedom
Retail	Virtual Fitting Rooms, AR Mirrors	Try-Before - You-Buy, Reduces Returns
Education	VR-based Design Tools (e.g., CLO3D)	Hands-on Learning, 3D Garment Visualisation
Marketing & Branding	Immersive Brand Storytelling, Virtual Showrooms	Emotional Connection, Higher Engagement
Sustainability	Digital Sampling, Avatar Fittings	Less Material Waste, Reduced Travel Footprint

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- Examine how collaborative online platforms and design tools (CLO 3D, After Effects) enable designers and animators to co-create digital fashion)
- Evaluate the 3D fashion dynamic garments for consumer personalization and customization, especially in the context of virtual fashion environments or online.
- Investigating the sustainability consequences of digital fashion by exploring how digital garments could minimize physical waste and stocks of fashion products throughout the novel domain of virtual recycling.
- To elucidate the utility and potential trajectory of responsive digital garments for e-retail, fashion in education & user engagement in digital/digital space.
- To investigate systemic digital technologies for adaptive fashion design garment that can change type, style, and colour through dynamic animated features.

IV. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Research Design (This study sought to investigate on synthetic convergence of fashion, 3D dynamic design identity formation and virtual/digital sustainability within Luxury fashion ecosystems) The research scrutinizes subjective reading, investigating how digital garments and luxury fashion aesthetics affect self-presentations, consumer engagement, whatever is sustainable. (Mendes, 2019)

Based in an analysis of the theoretical framework that encompasses the aesthetics of production, aesthetics of reception and aesthetic labour, the study examines how

consumers think and act in response to fashion both on physical as well as virtual spaces. It considers digital design competencies and enters fashion storytelling as well means as personalization considering the role of interactive technologies. (Mendes, 2019)

Table 2: Key digital tools used in virtual fashion design projects, outlining their core applications and capabilities.

Tools Used	Application in Fashion	Features
CLO 3D	Virtual Garment Creation	3D Visualization, Dynamic Simulations
After Effects	Animated Garment Content	Motion Graphics, Rendering
VR Designer	Virtual Fitting & Presentation	Fit Simulation, Metaverse – Ready Export

Data Collection Methods

Qualitative data collection methods in the research:

- The research will explore digital fashion projects made from CLO 3D or After Effects. A project includes the making of a wearable piece that is clothing and treatable as art that promotes change in appearance design style, colour hue or pattern in real time (mostly by working together with motion graphic artists using social media). (Van Kerrebroeck, Brengman, & Willems, 2017)
- Interviews were done with fashion students & designers and digital creators working on virtual fashion design & collaborating. Interviews delved into their experiences, creative journey and thoughts on sustainability design identity as well as measures on audience engagement within a digital fashion environment. (Van Kerrebroeck, Brengman, & Willems, 2017)
- The visual studies included animated garment visualizations, virtual runway shows as well as online social media contents for the identification of repeated themes, aesthetic tactics and consumer interactions onto the garments. (Kompatsiaris O. S.-C., 2024)

V. SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

Scope

- It speaks to digitally savvy and younger audiences (e.g. fashion students, designers as well early adopters to XR technologies).
- The study investigated virtual dynamic fashion as opposed to luxury fashion aesthetics that deal with

creative practices and style as symbolic identity for consumer engagement.

- Main areas are your customization, sustainability, cooperation and digital tools in shaping the future of fashion.

Limitations

- Qualitative study ⇒ findings derived according to interpretation and not statistically generalizable.
- Participants are only those who are knowledgeable about the digital fashion tools we used, and this sample cannot speak for a broader consumer base.
- The use of high-end software such as CLO 3D and the technical competence of users may have affected both the creative process and pool of participants.
- XR and even virtual fashion are endlessly mutable, so long-term industry shifts are not so clear.

As fashion communication landscape changes rapidly, immersive storytelling, digital fashion and virtual showrooms are three connected concepts such that innovation in these relevant areas could redefine the issue of audience engagement, brand identity, consumer experience. (Kompatsiaris O. S.-C., 2024)

Immersive Storytelling has evolved from fashion brands serious tools to build narratives that transcend beyond garments and deliver an emotionally valid story. Brands using curated scenography in dynamic spatial design to communicate the immersive atmosphere and values their aesthetic plus cultural messages. But these spaces act as heterotopias in the sense that they facilitate a real-world “other world” into which audiences are brought into the brand creative universe.

Digital media, particularly Instagram magnifies this immersive factor this “Instagrammability” of an event directly scales with how successful and far-reaching we think it will be. (Mendes, 2019)

Digital Fashion is the term for an item or entire sets that are in a digital space — either as overlays on top of real or completely virtual products. The clothes are commonly based on 3D-models and can serve different purposes, like storytelling and identity play for garments by minimizing unnecessary material wastage just in the name of sustainability advocacy. Immerse Scenography in digital is when fashion collections are performed over meticulously produced VR environments that combine arts, fashion and technology into one over-all experience. (Jee Hyun Lee, 2020)

Virtual Showrooms basically goes a level deeper into the immersive storytelling by creating brand spaces which are both highly interactive and gamified at times for consumers to visit remotely. Mimicking the sensory experience of

physical retail or fashion runway events, showrooms present with visuals and 3D spaces to navigate around, they tell some stories within architecture. Virtual Showrooms in this order turn out to be an edited, curated experience of brand defining in the current day living archive of a virtual universe as fashion brands work with architects, motion designers.

These two together, amount to a paradigm shifts from legacy, disembodied fashion presentation to multi-dimensional participatory experiences. They demonstrate the clash of storytelling and spatial aesthetics with technology at work across all that is fashion: production, presentation, perception — in a culture that is increasingly more images than reality. (Jee Hyun Lee, 2020)

Interrelation Between Technology, Creativity and Consumer Experience

The embedding of technologies such as VR (Virtual Reality) in a retail space signals a trend: there appears to become a merging of tech innovation and experiential, consumer experiences. For instance, as shown in their research on "Escaping the crowd: An experimental study examining the effect of a Virtual Reality experience in a shopping mall" by Van Kerrebroeck, VR not only can be a working medium providing entertainment or luring but also, strategically implemented as an environmental problem for retailers — consumer unwillingness/crowding among other things induced. (Jennifer Elaine Stanley, 2023)

Technology enables the underpinning for imagination using VR for a sleigh ride through crowded shopping mall that provides some consumers with escapism and are being psychologically delivered from something. Various Creative uses of virtual are proof on how technology can be used to change customer view about retail environment towards their emotional response. Retailers are then able to create fresh, multisensory experiences which engages emotion and psychology really rooting into the opinion of satisfaction, loyalty to brand. (Jennifer Elaine Stanley, 2023)

Again, in this vein, creativity serves as that link that turns unstructured technology into valuable consumer experiences. Designing virtual worlds — festive or serene, branded — is an act of good enough storytelling, and spatial design if it is going to work on the user. These curated experiences illustrate how creativity uniquely enables technology to not only be functional but to streamline it to perform specific emotional and behavioural goals. (R, 2021)

Immersive technologies such as VR are a new medium of experiential retail from consumers. The emotion/psychological benefits (reduced stress and greater satisfaction/respect for the brand) show that technology-

centric experiences can augment the consumer journey. Furthermore, it is highly effective in high density/ high stress environments which indicates it could have many roles in retail design and marketing (R, 2021)

In the end, the marriage between technology and creativity allows for intentional consumer engagement, which by its definition is impossible to replicate, unique, personalized and more importantly emotionally congruent. The relationship redefines the future of shopping as brands are pushed to reinvent not just what they do but also how. (R, 2021)

ROLE OF FASHION INDUSTRY

Economic and Creative Impact of Fashion Events

The emergence of Virtual Reality (VR) tools such as the VR Designer application heralds a disruptive wave which will redefine the fashion events landscape, thus fundamentally affecting both its economic and creative facets. Technologies that boost immersive, collaborative, and visual processes have been reshaping fashion: how it's imagined, developed or experienced. (Fiorentino, 2023)

When fashion goes to events, it has always been more about the budget for designers to show their creativity out in the world. Designers can see how garments move on animated avatars in real time, from drape and silhouette not just fit. It not only spurs swift creative decisions but allows for more in-depth investigations on form and motion with body-sizes. (Fiorentino, 2023)

Design professionals can now co-create, review and improve all aspects of collections in real-time without any physical boundaries. The collaborative method itself creates those global creative synergies, positioning virtual fashion events as unique meshes of design exchange and aesthetics. (Fiorentino, 2023)

And from a financial perspective, VR fashion tools will save you money in the long run. Digital presentations cut the cost of runway shows altogether — venue, construction, runways needle expenses and more while translating to a better-quality show which looks as impressive as a real-life event. Shippe Limited VR Designer however gives a garment evaluation in the very beginning stage which reduces production errors and can also speed up the supply chain. (Fiorentino, 2023)

Virtual events are also more scalable, enabling a new generation of designers and smaller brands to take part in fashion weeks or exhibitions as well. Through these technologies, the proliferation of the industry is lowering the threshold to entry in high fashion week or exhibitions. (Fiorentino, 2023)

Consumer Expectations and Experiential Marketing

In the current digitally fuelled fashion industry consumer expectations are no longer function-only product experiences but extending to experiential, personalized and emotionally driven experiences. Integrating Virtual Reality (VR) within fashion design curriculum illustrates how technology may be utilized to fulfil and surpass these expectations with experiential marketing practices. (Khanal, 2024)

Through the study, we see VR-Tools such as CLO3D complete and in real-time interactive collaboration which have in them an educational kind of engagement but mirror the interactive interaction consumers are basically demanding from brands nowadays. This phase is an immersive environment that elevates the emotional connection and brand loyalty because users get immersed in the creative process, rather than just viewing it — something much more powerful than the state of conventional marketing. (Khanal, 2024)

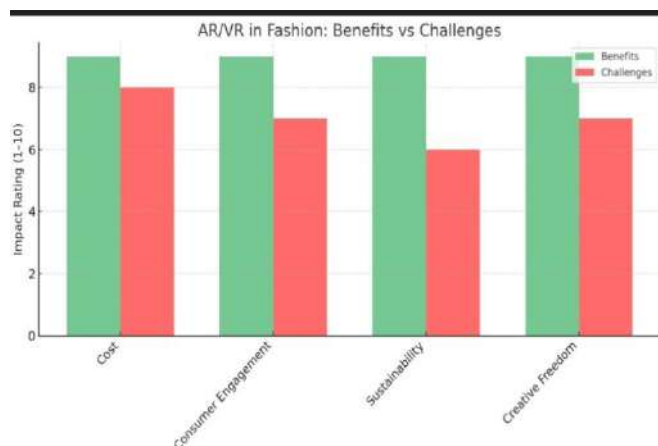


Fig.2: A comparative evolution of the key benefits and challenges associated with the adoption of AR/VR technologies in the fashion industry. (Source: Synthesized from various case studies discussed in the research.)

These could include immersive tech adaptations for fashion, such as hosting user-centred design sessions or virtual fashion labs or co-creation platforms that users can first visualize and then design/customize/experience/product develop on.

Some experimental application of Wallas creative thinking processes—preparation stage incubation and illumination with closest approximation (verification)— in VR based design models help understand that creativity can be structured yet improvised. When reading from consumer point of view they could inform the design of experiential marketing experiences that engage progressively deeper

states of engagement, creating curiosity and rewarding it with unlocking user-content. (Khanal, 2024)

Consumers today want to be a part of the brand narrative as well. Brands can meet the modern expectation of being both sellers and creative narrators and partners through innovative VR-based marketing. (Khanal, 2024)

VI. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The concept of Virtual Reality (VR) in education for fashion design and practice is undoubtedly an exciting creative outlet but it yields many technical and financial barriers to adoption in addition for showcasing the current state-of-the-art.

A study of college juniors and seniors interacting with the HTC Vive, as well as Google Tilt Brush (a software) on devices reveals that despite enabling creative exploration, VR is bulky and not accessible to everyone in the subset. The students encountered a sense of intimidation or uneasiness during their interaction with the new hardware and perceived software environment even in early adoption phases. This may be a steep slope to adopt (although in context of quick moving academic or commercial environments such as time efficiency depends too much on automation).

High-end hardware, compatible PCs and software licenses can turn VR design tools into expensive things to implement. In the educational setting, this amounts to an additional expenditure by an institution for purchasing equipment maintenance and faculty train equipment. Similarly in fashion industry as well, the cost of turning on VR hub — realistic avatar rendering is what a start like I would imagine e.g. limited to a few brands or even start-ups. (Batmaz, 2023)

Keynote: Its research highlights and emphasis the need for course modification to truly incorporate VR into the traditional fashion design curriculum. This is reflective of a more universal industry workflow challenge VR in the sense that writing and concepts of creative processes are not specifically conditioned for VR incorporations- often this comes at an additional cost of re-envisioning existing systems. These transformations not only take time to learn and train on but also reduces the output speed (may lead to delay in projects) which will increase operational expenditure. (Batmaz, 2023)

From voice assistants (like Amazons Alexa) within Virtual Reality (VR) fashion retail environments the role of cross-industry coordination between developers of technology and fashion is becoming increasingly imperative. Not only will the blending enrich user experiences, but it will also

bring new dimensions that need a partnership of expertise to deal with. (Lei Zhang, 2025)

The research found that voice commands with VR experiences are more seamless and engaging for shoppers than in-store. Greater ease and personalization are the goods by not being physically constrained, interacting with virtual clothing products. Still, true frictionless experiences are the result of software engineers, UX designers, and fashion merchandisers working together so that the technology matches user intentions and aesthetic foibles. (Lei Zhang, 2025)

This all too naive aspiration to sprinkle magic over immersive retail spaces utilizing off-the-shelf voice assistants highlights the nits of technology, for example short session lengths, poor vocabulary comprehension, difficulties assembling. Overcoming these is the result of fashion retailers collaborating with voice technology providers and XR developers to create innovative, bespoke software solutions for digital fashion & product discovery. (Lei Zhang, 2025)

The research additional exhibits the differences in consumer trust, users were less willing to going through virtual fittings for sweaters than swimsuit. Such ambiguity will require research collaboration across apparel designers, psychologists and technologists to face and alleviate consumers worries on fit reliability; privacy, body representation in virtual environments scheme/setting. (Lei Zhang, 2025)

Ricci et al. (2023) show, the Immersive Virtual Reality have a huge potential to revolutionize the way we shop and get totally immersed in digital fashion online. IVR builds better hedonic and utilitarian values than the already present state of the art IV, in virtual fashion retail the next step is combination of tailored Artificial Intelligence (AI) and haptic technologies. These developments are going to make digital shopping a sensory and personalized visual experience from its current state of being predominantly visually immersive. (Caroline Swee Lin Tan, 2024)

3D products are being visually engaged, 77% of which increase attractiveness; and 68% stimulation and novelty. (Caroline Swee Lin Tan, 2024)

That said, it is missing the touch which matters in fashion — texture, fit and fabric response drive garments purchase decisions. Some of this dimensional closing would be accomplished by integrating haptic feedback devices that could feel fabrics or the act of trying on garments in a digital way versus the sensory gap existing between physical and digital experiences. (Caroline Swee Lin Tan, 2024)

The outcome would dramatically increase product diagnostically and make virtual fitting rooms more convincing as well as reduce returns.

Artificial intelligence can help in customizing the in-app fashion avatars to users' unique tastes. Machine learning algorithms could look at what you do in a virtual space to recommend clothes based on style; the fits you've already tried then try again for like behaviours. When combined with real-time IVR data, AI enables dynamic buying journeys in an adaptive and context-sensitive shopping experience, where avatars replicate the size of the user and products suggest themselves in tune with their aspirations and tastes. (Caroline Swee Lin Tan, 2024)

Natural Language Processing (NLP) can also aid voice command virtual assistants within IVR environments to make it easier for customers to browse and query products. Such high-level interactivity would not only make it convenient but also mimics the exact same personalized in-store experience consultation — engaging and trust increasing.

IVR improves the sense of telepresence and shopping satisfaction more than Desktop Virtual Reality, this study revealed but the lack of tangible/ emotionally personalization breaks immersion. Fusing haptic devices with AI agents to solve this problem, instead allows users experience the product the fashion with tangible and emotional connection not just visually. (Caroline Swee Lin Tan, 2024)

The fashion industry is seeing Metaverse runways and virtual avatars as part and parcel of brand strategy with sustainability, digital innovation takes the primacy — an intangible that evolves hand in hand with the increasing capabilities of Virtual Reality (VR). (Khanal, 2024)

The Metaverse as a single virtual shared space is changing the expectation of brands, enabling to present fashion runs as fully immersive. Instead of traveling, traveling and wasteful set designs for staging designers can create digital narratives in a 5G supported infinite virtual worlds. These shows, which launch in VR headsets and desktop platforms, transform into experiences where movement and story interact, allowing viewers to follow along on or in digital outfits. (Khanal, 2024)

They thus fulfil two functions: on the one hand they lessen the ecological footprint of productions as physical events but also develop and promote a brands identity through far more creative freedom than a limited material world would allow.

This is in line with Krishna Khanal's understanding of immersive brand experiences that create emotional connection and narrative depth, which are crucial for

building loyalty with eco-conscious consumers. (Khanal, 2024)

Case studies point to brands such as IKEA; The North Face and Patagonia are already using immersive technologies to instruct and engage users on sustainability. Likewise in fashion this could be virtual avatars that not only model the clothing but also interact and tell on-message narratives about production sourcing, ethical labour and circular design, making sustainability 'real' and communicable. (Khanal, 2024)

Metaverse runways are creative and imaginative, but some of the technological and ethical issues are still there. Higher cost VR/AR hardware is a hindrance not just to innovation, but accessibility owing its nose-diving price-back again into personal data to fuel hyper-individual synthetic avatar lifestyles also raises questions about data-mined psycho-emotional manipulation. (Khanal, 2024)

Challenges mirror the cautionary tale of Khanal about the necessity of immersion balancing transparency and ethical behaviour. (Khanal, 2024)

Rounding out the personalization is the incorporation of brand virtual avatars. Another one can try outfits in real-time, culturally experience fashion worlds as avatars and even be basically a stand-in for values by categorizing all body types, identities. Once the users are in these avatars through VR or AR, they start engaging and taking active route about the sustainability story that the brand must tell. (Khanal, 2024)

VII. DISCUSSION

By far the traditional, industry standards of fashion like runway shows & 2D look books have preformed within in a curation story telling scenario experiencing through linear content with strong visual focus. These formats are good for widespread messaging but often reduce audience dialogue and lose of immersion. (Ludovica Rosato, 2024)

Immersive Technologies on the other hand, including Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR), drive dynamic, data-based storytelling in 3D worlds. Other mixed format combinations that should be explored are discussed in the study on hybrid immersive display environments. How it works: Immersive fashion presentation allows user to try on collection of garments, explore virtual spaces and feel reflexively about the brand story. Interventions that make spatial presence immersive — such as seeing the senses alive — are perceptible and meaningful, improving after experiences over simply passive viewing of established formats.

Immersive Presentations certainly faces challenge—technical limitations higher costs and need of fresh authoring. Eventually usable formats while still offering these might fall under hedonic value; but done right can add utilitarian value to consumer engagement. (Ludovica Rosato, 2024)

In the end traditional slide presentations provide order and ease-of-use, immersive technologies however provide potentiality for an even richer storytelling or new innovations. There is room for a middle ground merging that truly might be the future of fashion communication. (Ludovica Rosato, 2024)

Combining AR and VR with IoT expresses a radical move how brands can interact with their audiences.

Traditional media aside, these technologies transcend the senses to build lifelong emotional connections with users by creating multi-sensory, interactive experiences.

Long-term, these kinds of experiences could re-invent what brand engagement looks like Thereafter express consumers as agents instead of subjects, driving a more intimate relationship with the story of the brand. For instance, Household IoT devices in Jigsaw (smart lights and speakers) being used to create narrative environments as part of our daily interaction serve as proof points of turns on simple context into branded engagement moments. (Duck-Ki Ahn, 2023)

Beyond this, the barrier to content creation means more content creators can create more immersive campaign even brands that are not technically savvy about putting together that level of a campaign. But this democratisation should generate a deluge of user generated branded content, done better through social sharing and viral interactions. (Duck-Ki Ahn, 2023)

Still, for brands to be effective over time they need to manage the challenges of sensory overload, growing content consumption demands and narrative depreciation. As immersive platforms develop, data and adaptive storytelling will be what keep these locations of relevance to ensure higher consumer adventures. (Duck-Ki Ahn, 2023)

VIII. CONCLUSION

The above research identifies the disruptive power of AR Storytelling in cultural experiences in the emerging metaverse territory. Under a study of AR e-book and an innovative AR storytelling application in Shanghai Museum of Glass, the comparison indicates that AR narratives can significantly improve the immersion and interaction of users on multiple dimensions including flow, education

utility-information utility enjoyment-engagement. Although presence was not a primary predictor of engagement, the broader takeaways suggest AR technologies to be suitable for building richer, more lasting cultural encounters. Methodologically and practically as well, the study advances experience economy theory by providing recommendations for cultural institutions how to pragmatically implement immersive technologies with real-world visitor experiences.

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Biomedical Policy Awareness and implementation in MT. Grace Hospitals Inc. Network

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Abstract— *Biomedical field is an emerging sector in the healthcare industry of the Philippines. As mandated by the Health Department, hospitals are required to have biomedical management program to monitors, supervise and maintain medical equipment to ensure that health facilities are providing quality healthcare to the public. This study is conducted to determine the extent of biomedical policy awareness and implementation in terms of calibration, preventive maintenance, corrective maintenance, inventory management and documentation of Mt. Grace Resources Management Inc. biomedical technicians across partner hospitals of Mt. Grace Hospitals Inc. network. The study employed descriptive-correlational research design using a structured survey questionnaire as the main tool for data gathering with in-house MGRMI biomedical technician across MGHI network as respondents. It is found that in terms of calibration, preventive maintenance, corrective maintenance, inventory management and documentation, biomedical technicians are very much aware and that biomedical policy is very much implemented. Furthermore, biomedical policy awareness is significantly correlated to the policy implementation in terms of preventive maintenance, corrective maintenance and documentation. However, in terms of calibration and inventory management, biomedical policy awareness does not have a significant relationship to biomedical policy implementation. This means that the knowledge of biomedical technicians with the biomedical policy is fully translated into the daily practices and procedures of operations in terms of preventive maintenance, corrective maintenance and documentation but not in terms of calibration and inventory management. With the results of the study, the researcher developed a proposed standardized biomedical policy that can be adopted by MGRMI in order to improve productivity of the Biomedical Department.*



Keywords— *biomedical policy awareness, biomedical policy implementation, calibration, corrective maintenance, preventive maintenance.*

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the unsung heroes during the height of the world pandemic in 2020 are the biomedical technicians. Biomedical technicians are the ones who perform corrective maintenance, preventive maintenance and calibration of medical equipment and instruments used for diagnostics, treatment, surgery, recovery and therapy of patients.

In July 18 of 2012, the Department of Health, DOH, released Administrative Order No. 2012-0012 with regards

to the rules and regulations governing the new classification of hospitals and other health facilities in the Philippines. It states that there shall be a program for calibration, preventive maintenance and repair of equipment. The administrative order emphasizes the need for the hospitals and other health facilities to have a biomedical equipment maintenance program.

Based on the study of Santos (2020), Mt. Grace Hospitals Inc. (MGHI) hospitals with documented policies on

preventive maintenance programs had twenty-five percent (25%) less downtime compared to those without one.

In February 20, 2019, RA11223, otherwise known as the Universal Health Care Act, was passed. It is the law of the Philippines to promote and protect the right of health of every Filipino. The law emphasizes the need for a quality and safe delivery of healthcare services in the country which includes ensuring medical equipment are accurate, reliable and safe to use.

Mt. Grace Hospitals, Inc. (MGHI) is one of the biggest networks of hospitals in the Philippines. A strategy of MGHI to serve quality healthcare to people is to provide Quality Management System (QMS) to its partner hospitals. Included in QMS is the medical equipment management program, hence creation of a subsidiary company Mt. Grace Resources Management, Inc. (MGRMI).

MGRMI main purpose is to provide biomedical maintenance services and is committed to provide quality and cost-effective services and programs for hospitals or health facilities to ensure medical equipment are monitored and maintained in good working condition.

The researcher, as one of the senior biomedical technicians of MGRMI, is interested in understanding the process and procedures as well as the best practices of each Biomedical Department in each hospital in order to determine if there is a significant relationship between the biomedical policy awareness and biomedical policy implementation in MGHI network.

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions: What is the extent of biomedical policy awareness and implementation in terms of calibration, preventive maintenance, corrective maintenance, inventory management and documentation; and Is there a significant relationship between the biomedical policy awareness and implementation.

Further, the findings and results of this study helped the researcher developed a proposed biomedical policy manual that abides to ISO 13485:2016 for MGRMI.

II. METHODS

This study used descriptive correlational methodologies in order to determine the if there is a significant relationship between the biomedical policy awareness and implementation in MGHI network. This determination of significant relationship between the extent of awareness and extent of implementation of biomedical policy will help Mt. Grace Resources Management, Inc. to improve operations and discover strategies that will help the organization to maximize their profits. The process involved collecting and converting data into numerical counterparts so that

statistical calculations are done to formulate conclusions on the gathered data.

The respondents in this study are all the senior biomedical technicians and junior biomedical technicians of MGRMI assigned in different hospitals across MGHI network, specifically Mother Theresa of Calcutta Medical Center (MTCMC), GoodSam Medical Center (GSMC), Capitol Medical Center (CMC), Fe Del Mundo Medical Center (FDMMC), Medical Center Manila (MCM), VRP Medical Center (VRPMC), Divine Grace Medical Center (DGMC), Tagaytay Medical Center (TMC), HealthServ Los Banos Medical Center(HSLBMC), Westlake Medical Center (WMC) and Mary Mediatrix Medical Center (MMMC). This study used one hundred percent (100%) enumeration of senior biomedical technicians and junior biomedical technicians of MGRMI assigned in the aforementioned hospitals under MGHI as the hospital's biomedical service provider as respondents of this study.

Data were gathered using a structured survey questionnaire develop and validated, using Cronbach's alpha as test of reliability. Meanwhile, Five-Point Likert scale for the interpretation of biomedical policy awareness and implementation is applied. For the measure of level of significance between biomedical policy awareness and implementation, Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient was used since data are skedded based on the test of normality.

III. RESULTS

MGRMI biomedical technicians demonstrated a very high level of awareness of biomedical policy. Table 1 shows the summary of the extent of biomedical policy awareness among MGRMI biomedical technicians assigned to partner hospitals of MGHI network. It shows that in all indicators of the biomedical policies; biomedical technicians are all very much aware. These indicators are: Documentation, 4.94, Rank 1; Calibration, 4.91, Rank 2; Preventive Maintenance, 4.88, Rank 3; Corrective Maintenance, 4.83, Rank 4, and; Inventory Management, 4.78, Rank 5. Subsequently, the overall mean of the extent of biomedical policy awareness is 4.87 which is verbally interpreted as "Very Much Aware".

Table 2 shows the summary of the level of biomedical policy implementation. As shown in the Table, all five indicators of biomedical policy implementation are marked as very much implemented. These indicators are: Corrective Maintenance, 4.90, Rank 1; Documentation, 4.89, Rank 2; Preventive Maintenance, 4.81, Rank 3; Calibration, 4.72, Rank 4, and; Inventory Control, 4.61, Rank 5. The overall weighted mean for the biomedical policy implementation is

rated 4.87 which is verbally interpreted as “Very Much Implemented”.

Table 1: Summary of the Extent of Biomedical Policy Awareness

Indicators	AWM	VI	R
1. Calibration	4.91	VMA	2
2. Preventive Maintenance	4.88	VMA	3
3. Corrective Maintenance	4.83	VMA	4
4. Inventory Management	4.78	VMA	5
5. Documentation	4.94	VMA	1
OVERALL WEIGHTED MEAN	4.87	VMA	

Table 2: Summary of the Extent of Biomedical Policy Implementation

Indicators	AWM	VI	R
1. Calibration	4.72	VMI	4
2. Preventive Maintenance	4.81	VMI	3
3. Corrective Maintenance	4.90	VMI	1
4. Inventory Management	4.61	VMI	5
5. Documentation	4.89	VMI	2
OVERALL WEIGHTED MEAN	4.87	VMI	

For the test of significant relationship, Table 3 shows that the value of Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient, ρ , are all positive across all five areas biomedical policy such as calibration, preventive maintenance, corrective maintenance, inventory management and documentation.

To determine if these different correlations of the five different indicators of biomedical policy, in respect with the two variables, are statistically significant or not, the P-values were computed. P-value calculates the probability of obtaining data as extreme as observed, assuming the null hypothesis H_0 is true. If this probability is lower than the degree of significance, which is set at 5% ($P < 0.05$), the correlation coefficient is called statistically significant.

As shown at Table 3, three of the five areas of biomedical policy have P-value that are lower than the level of significance of 0.05 and therefore concluded that the

computed ρ value is statistically significant to these areas, which are Documentation, 0.002, Preventive Maintenance, 0.005, and Corrective Maintenance, 0.020. Consequently, two areas of biomedical policy have P-value that are greater than the level of significance of 0.05 and, therefore, considered the computed ρ value as statistically not significant to these areas. The concerned indicators are Inventory Management, 0.169, and Calibration, 0.362. Hence, the significant correlation between the two variables, the extent of biomedical policy awareness and the extent of biomedical policy implementation, is statistically significant in terms of Preventive Maintenance, Corrective Maintenance and Documentation. However, the correlation between the two variables is statistically not significant in terms of Calibration and Inventory Management.

Table 3: Relationship Between Biomedical Policy Awareness and Biomedical Policy Implementation

Indicators	ρ	P-Value	Interpretation
1. Calibration	0.199	0.362	Not Significant
2. Preventive Maintenance	0.560	0.005	Significant
3. Corrective Maintenance	0.482	0.020	Significant
4. Inventory Management	0.297	0.169	Not Significant
5. Documentation	0.614	0.002	Significant

IV. DISCUSSION

The findings of the study highlighted the importance of biomedical policies awareness in ensuring effective implementation of these same policies. The high level of knowledge about the biomedical policies translates and well-integrated in the daily operational workflow of MGRMI biomedical technicians.

The high level of preventive maintenance policy implementation reflects the importance of a proactive equipment management in reducing equipment downtime and avoiding unexpected machine failures that may compromise providing quality healthcare. Similarly, the significant relationship between the corrective maintenance policy awareness and implementation emphasizes biomedical technicians' knowledge in responding to equipment malfunctions and breakdowns. Documentation policy implementation also showed significant relationship with policy awareness, emphasizing the readiness of biomedical technicians with surprise audits, inspections and certifications of different regulatory agencies.

However, the absence of significant relationship in calibration and inventory management may imply insufficient allocation of calibration tools, computerized equipment maintenance management systems (CEMMS) is not fully utilized and inconsistent monitoring procedures.

These findings support previous studies highlighting the need of a biomedical equipment maintenance program. Santos et al. (2020) showed that hospitals with well-documented policies on preventive maintenance and regular audits reported twenty-five percent (25%) less downtime compared to those without standardized protocols. Based on the study of Haule et al. (2024), there is an urgent need to develop strategic plans, guidelines and workforce policies that formally integrate biomedical engineers into efforts to strengthen the health system in Tanzania. This is after the researchers underscore the importance of formulating a biomedical engineering policy based on empirical evidence. Garcia (2019) found that government hospitals in the National Capital Region (NCR) with formalized biomedical procedures had fewer equipment breakdowns and faster response times to repairs but limited funding and training remained as challenges in sustaining these programs.

Based on the findings, the researcher developed a proposed biomedical policy manual that may be adopted by MGRMI to improve productivity and operational efficiency.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the results, Field operations manager or any assigned personnel must discuss to the biomedical technicians the biomedical policy and properly explain the processes before delegating biomedical technicians to their respective assignments to ensure that biomedical technicians are well aware of the biomedical policy and processes of MGRMI. Hard copies of the biomedical policy might also be properly filed in each Biomedical Department office of each client hospital in order for the biomedical technicians to have a quick access to the policy. Field operations manager must actively review the performance of each Biomedical Department of each client hospital to elevate the level of biomedical policy implementation. Field operations manager must strictly require each Biomedical Department to submit monthly accomplishment reports timely, allocation of test tools can also be centralized, managers might consider to align the calibration and PM plan of all client hospitals to properly allocate resources and manpower, they can also do an unannounced visit for them to observe how biomedical technician carry out the processes. The MGRMI Biomedical Policy Manual can be adopted by partner hospitals of MGHI.

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Changing Caste Relations from An Ecological Perspective: A Socioecological Account of Agrarian Caste System

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Abstract— This paper looks at the changing caste relations from an ecological perspective, focusing on Thathamangalam in Palakkad district, Kerala. Paddy cultivation in this region historically played a major role in shaping gender, caste, and community relations, as well as the human-nature relationship, as in other areas of Kerala. The institution of caste defined the agrarian and labour relationships in Thathamangalam, as in other agrarian societies. However, with a decline in paddy cultivation, agrarian structure has undergone significant transformation over the years. The agrarian structure, or its various dimensions since the time of independence, such as land reforms and the Green Revolution, brought about subsequent changes. Traditional agricultural labour relations have also changed with recent developments. This study tries to indicate how ecological factors interdigitate with social ones and aims to examine to what extent an ecological analysis is possible in dealing with the complex paddy relations of production in rice farming. Further, it also analyses the different social groups in conjunction with social relations around the use of natural resources in paddy cultivation.



Keywords— Caste relations, Paddy cultivation, Agrarian transformation, Labour relations, Thathamangalam

Introduction

Paddy cultivation in Kerala provided an ecological framework for rural life. Agrarian social structure is primarily an institutional framework of agriculture, which includes the structural distribution of land holdings, the nature of land ownership, means and motives of production, and the members of the dominant class and the subordinate class of landless labourers. Due to the influence of changing ecological conditions i.e., the decline of paddy cultivation in the village, the social structure, polity and culture have undergone tremendous change.

Paddy cultivation in Chittur Thathamangalam area is in a declining phase. The low profitability of the crop, the increase in wages of agricultural labour, increased profit from other crops, and water scarcity are certain factors that have led to decreased paddy production. Primary data was

collected through an extensive sample survey of households. It was conducted in various stages. Personal narratives and interviews were collected across various castes to understand their long-standing social issues. Unstructured interviews were conducted with officials such as village extension officers and several other members of organizations working in the village.

Twenty households have been selected from the Chittur-Thathamangalam area. The region has several Menon Tharavads and many *agraharams* etc. The agrarian social structure of Thathamangalam is the same as that of other regions of Malabar. The lower castes performed agricultural work. Most of the paddy fields exist near temples or *agraharams*. The *Tiyya* caste performed major work in the fields, and some of them are owners as well. Labourers were drawn from attached labour communities

such as *Pulayan, Cheruman, Zhuran, Sambavan, Kanakkan* and *Vettavan* castes.

There are almost 46 SC colonies in Chittur Thathamangalam municipality, and many of their residents, shared their experiences. Years back, people in these colonies were fully involved in paddy cultivation, but now

only 30 percent of them are involved in paddy related work. None of them, except for one or two families, own agricultural land. Most of them remain landless agricultural labourers. Many of the informants explained stories of exploitation, servitude, and a deep sense of injustice perpetrated against them in the past.

Table 4.1: SC Colonies in Chittur-Thathamangalam Municipality

Sl. No	Colonies	Caste	Ward no	Families	Female	Male
1.	Cherumkod	Kanakkan	1	10	22	27
2.	Thuppalakulam	Kanakkan	2	18	39	37
3.	Vellappana	Kanakkan	1	3	5	4
4.	Ilayabhagavathikkavu	Kanakkan	3	20	39	42
5.	Arangampalod	Kanakkan	3	18	35	30
6.	Parakkulam	Kanakkan	4	29	40	35
7.	Thekkinkadu	Kavara	4	25	51	57
8.	Chembakasery	Kavara	4	22	39	34
9.	Palekkad	Kavara	4	15	30	25
10.	Thudukkodu	Kavara	2	8	21	13
11.	Chingattukulambu	Kavara	2	42	89	81
12.	Pakkod	Kavara	4	25	40	37
13.	Nellikodu	Kavara	27	17	33	30
14.	Idayankulambu	Parayan	20	17	26	31
15.	Poongodu	Kanakkar	29	16	39	39
16.	Mankavu	Kanakkar	2	7	18	12
17.	Kurinchira	Kanakkar	27	5	15	10
18.	Meenikkodu	Parayar	22	10	10	22
19.	Banglaparambu	Kanakkar	22	15	35	25
20.	Kadavankodu	Kanakkar	22	8	18	14
21.	Paruthikkavu	Parayar	23	40	75	85
22.	Thaniyampadam	Parayar	23	35	65	75
23.	Thumbichira	Kanakkar	24	30	52	68
24.	Neelikkadu	Kanakkar	24	25	55	45
25.	Umikkunnu	Kanakkar	24	35	85	65
26.	Nellukuthupara	Panan, cherman both	9	45	62	43
27.	Naramkuzhi	Panan, Cherunan both	9	38	68	52
28.	Vadakkathara	Chakliar	8	32	74	64
29.	Parayankodu	Cheruman	5	42	73	56
30.	Cheriyaparayankodu	Cheruman	5	34	63	48
31.	Nayadicolony	Nayadi	5	12	45	30
32.	Muthukadu	Panan	6	35	74	62

33.	Erumankodu	Nayadi	5	25	55	45
34.	Kacherimedu	Domban	13	36	82	64
35.	Aryamballam	Kavara	14	38	102	75
36.	Thamarachira	Kavara	14	28	51	42
37.	Channathodu	Mannan, cheruman both	14	20	58	45
38.	Pulinkovil	Cheruman	14	26	53	42
39.	Manthakadu	Panan	14	32	63	58
40.	Valmutti	Panar	16	40	84	78
41.	Valmutti	Panar	16	35	72	65
42.	Anikkodu Thekkegramam	Kanakkancher	17	31	68	61
43.	Kadalar	Kanakkar	16	25	55	43
44.	Moosaliparambu	Kanakkakar	16	37	68	54
45.	Tharakkalam	Kavara	19	30	67	53
46.	Ladies hostel road	Panan, cherumar	21	38	74	68

Source: Data from field study as well as from scheduled caste development office, Nattukal

The major portions of land were under the control of Namboothiris or Nayar families. However, the breakup of joint families partitioned the land into small parts, and they could not maintain these small portions under changing circumstances. The caste system provided adequate labour for the agriculture fields. The disintegration of the caste system reduced the number of agricultural labourers. The availability of other work created alternate employment opportunities for the village people. The development of education also enabled upward mobility from their lower strata. Ezhava people also obtained land after land reforms. However, lower-caste people like *Cherumar*, *Pulayar* etc. did not get any land for their survival. They had to be satisfied with low-paid jobs.

Most of the land owners changed the fields for residential purposes. The real estate mafia also had a hand in this process. Traditionally, they used bullocks for ploughing. Now, almost all farmers use tractors or tillers for this work. The manual labour used for trimming and repairing bunds before the first crop is costly due to higher labour expenses. Paddy cultivation has become a burden for farmers in Kerala. Local paddy farmers cannot sell their produce at a competitive price. The local way of life is disappearing as farmers and communities who nurtured age-old cultivation have now withdrawn from agriculture. Thus, landowners are using their right to opt for the crop of their choice and convert paddy fields to other crops and non-agricultural purposes. As for landowners, most of them are not full-time farmers, and hence the maximization of returns and the freedom of individual choice to shift away from

paddy to other non-paddy crops are inevitable to ensure adequate returns.

As these people, who were mostly engaged in paddy-related work, have moved to new occupational space, the link between caste or community and hereditary occupation has been severed. At the same time, there has been a substantial rise in non-agricultural occupations in the countryside, mainly due to better linkages with cities/towns and changes in lifestyle.

Vanishing Caste Labour Relations in Thathamangalam

Agrarian relations in this village some years ago were totally different. They have already changed quite radically. The agrarian social structure gradually lost its importance, and access to education enabled the working class to take up different occupations such as teacher, peon, clerical staff, etc.

An improvement in the general standard of living among the lower class is a notable aspect of this region. Several *Pulayas* have good houses, with plastered walls and tiled roofs. Many youths are matriculates, and several have received a university education. *Pulayas* are found to be very anxious to provide the maximum possible education to their children, and they take great pains to ensure that their children are educated. People of higher castes now freely mix with the lower classes. Dalits have almost completely withdrawn from paddy-related work. Many of them have moved to foreign countries in search of jobs. There are instances where the lower-caste people, with the money brought from abroad, demanded land from the upper classes

and bought it. The decline of agrarian caste relations has different implications for different sections of the population, and there can be different ways of looking at these changes.

For those on the margins, particularly the ex-untouchable Dalits, this change has only been for the better. It has freed them from the oppressive normative order of caste and the traditional value framework of hierarchy. They wanted their children to get educated and move out of the village. For the dominant and upper castes, this has meant an end to their power and privilege. They were critical of these changes. Upper-caste people do not insist their children be involved in paddy farming; instead, they want their children to get educated and move out of the village.

With the emergence of this new environment, members of the backward groups or castes—who were bonded to masters in the past—no longer accepted their status as an inexorable fate. They have become assertive. It is thus a widespread feature of the Indian countryside that labourers have become more demanding, aggressive, and less docile and respectful of the traditional social hierarchy. At another level, these changes have also generated a new sense of individuation in village society. Also, in the absence of viable economic opportunities and social support structures, they have generated a new sense of anxiety, a kind of “ontological insecurity” (Giddens, 1991).

Change in Power Relations

There has been a sharp decline in the supremacy of the higher castes, such as Nayar and Namboothiris, in the study area. In the past, the higher castes occupied the topmost position in the caste hierarchy. But today, they do not enjoy the same status that they once did. The relationship between caste and hereditary occupations has been less significant, and there has been a significant shift in the bases of power. Deshpande (2017) argues that the caste-based occupational structure has undergone a profound change and that the link between caste and occupation has been broken. Social status, as well as economic and political power, shifted towards a more open, class-structured society where status is based on attributes such as education, wealth and political influence. Certain factors, such as occupational diversification, migration to urban areas, and the role of media and the state, have helped to break the boundaries between caste groups. The expansion of education created a greater shift from a caste-based ascribed status system to an achieved one, and an individual’s distinctive qualities and attainments became linked to social status. Diversified livelihood options, along with transportation, communication, and educational

facilities, have been influential in bringing about change in the village.

One respondent from the field observed that when people in the village engage in conversation with each other, people from the upper castes used to say to lower-caste people that “your fathers were our slaves.” This reveals that the upper castes try to recollect the old days of power and domination. Talking about past tradition by the upper castes is a way of eulogizing and boasting about their past.

An End to Domination and Exploitation?

It could be argued that exploitation and domination are diminishing in the village, leading to fewer inequalities. Status was determined by the caste to which one was born. Moreover, customs and rituals conferred prestige and status on certain groups and occupations in the village.

One class appropriates the fruits of the labour of another class by virtue of possessing superior control over the means of production. The welfare of the exploiting class depends upon the work of the working class. We believe that untouchability is an institutional mechanism whereby the attribute of toxicity is imparted to certain groups of caste, which as a result become untouchable. Obviously, since jatis are not biological species, the members of untouchable castes do not acquire toxic properties, but these properties become attributed to them through a process of historical discrimination and subordination. Untouchability, on the principle of antibiosis, separated people from one another. The notions of purity and pollution legitimized this separation.

Avoidance relations are the norm that the rest of society imposes on these populations. It is deeply provocative but nonetheless logical to hold that the evolution of untouchability was, in an ecological sense, an effective strategy for imposing discrimination. Centuries of caste-based social organization prevailed in Thathamangalam, as in other areas of Kerala.

Analyzing caste from the Subaltern point of view, caste has functioned as a very effective system of exploitation and suppression. The ideal type of non-competition, non-antagonism, the ideology of *dharma* and *karma* accepted by all, etc., which are in the interest of elite groups, are no longer a reality now.

The new technology, new middle classes, and the metropolitan-globalized cultural styles of life that are emerging are detached from the traditional religious and ritual moorings of their culture. The present globalized world has brought forth people detached from the clutches of traditional religious life and the caste system.

Changing Habitus based on Caste Hierarchy

Bourdieu (1985) used the term *symbolic capital* to distinguish and identify social groups that enjoy greater prestige and honour in society because they are endowed with more symbolic capital, reflected in their patterns of behaviour and taste. The notion of the 'social' also has a similar connotation. It demonstrates that certain social groups have greater capacity to form social relations and competence to associate with others. These notions indicate that differences in terms of esteem, prestige, and status, rather than economic or political hierarchy, may play a dominant role in some systems of stratification. In these terms, capital is represented in four basic forms. Each form can be exchanged or 'cashed in' for any other form. These changing situations created a change in habitus and the power associated with it.

Bourdieu's theorization enables us to connect the past with present conditions in an agrarian society like that of Chittur-Thathamangalam. The concept of habitus explains how objective structure and subjective perceptions impact upon human action. In an agrarian society, caste, as a stable hierarchical system of stratification, served as the habitus that controlled its members and members were assigned to perform particular work.

The members of lower castes, who were mostly agrarian labourers, suffered from several restrictions and were prone to oppression. Educational opportunities, scientific and technological progress, urbanization, communication facilities, industrialization, changes in the economic structure, independent thinking, mobility, and access to the outside world transformed the agrarian society of Thathamangalam, which helped them obtain social, economic, cultural and symbolic capital. Now as a result of new legislative measures, their condition has improved. They are provided with several facilities that are not available to members of other castes. Certain reservations have also been made for them. Because of these changes, they have improved their position, both economically and socially.

The importance of landlords has diminished with the emergence of big capitalists and industrialists. Because of this change in the economic structure, wealth has acquired importance and a wealthier person is respected the most. People move to professions that are more remunerative. Professions no longer correspond to caste. The next generation of agricultural labourers goes to other places and seeks better employment.

Changing Identities

The loss of paddy culture may be one of the reasons behind the 'identity change' of different caste groups in the study area. According to Woodward (1997), identity gives us an idea of who we are and how we relate

to others and to the world in which we live. Identity is often defined by difference; in other words, it is defined by what it is not. Woodward suggests that identity marks the ways in which we are the same as others who share that position, and again, it also marks the ways in which we are different from those who do not. Identities are, thus, often constructed in terms of binary oppositions such as self/other, us/them, insider/ outsider, in here/out there, black/white, man/woman, civilized/barbarian etc. Identities are defined, constructed, consumed, and regulated within a particular culture or society, and meanings are created through "symbolic systems of representation about the identity positions (Woodward, 1997)" within that culture or society.

As in other agrarian societies, the lower-caste agrarian labourers of Chittur-Thathamangalam were allowed access only to unskilled forms of labour. Their reflective abilities, as well as innovative and imaginative capacities, were given no importance. They did not have access to education and were forced to work in subordination. There was no possibility of vertical mobility. Under the changed conditions, they have opportunities for education, which enabled them to attain professional skills, and many of them achieved vertical mobility.

Displaced Agrarian Mode of Production

Agriculture became more capital-intensive in nature. In Thathamangalam, as in other agrarian societies, the expansion of industrial economy has partially displaced the older modes of production; rather, it is right to say that different modes of production exist side by side and may create a hybrid economy, and a cultural lag is noted. Agriculture, which was once considered a prestigious occupation has lost its relevance. The feudal relationship between cultivator and labourer has been broken. Opportunities for education helped the lower castes widen their worldview, and they searched for new areas of profitability and moved to other non-farming sectors.

The landowners lost the higher status and respect they had maintained for years. The dominant castes no longer enjoy the hegemony of power.

Rural Proletarianization

Thirty-eight-year-old Sudhakaran, who is an agricultural labourer in Thathamangalam, is landless. He survives on wage labour in paddy fields. He said, "*I was poor before and am poor now. We do not have land. My parents were starving in the past, and the situation has not changed much for me. I cannot even meet the needs of my family members.*"

This striking disparity and dispossession are consequences of centuries of oppressive practices, where

Dalit cultivators worked as slaves on the lands of rich landlords and later for wages. This may be viewed as a continuation of that system. In spite of land reforms, the subservient status of Dalits is still continuing in certain cases.

The 'rural proletariat' is a sociological category that refers to landless workers in peasant communities. The actual tillers of the soil are wage labourers. The proletariat is the class of wage earners in a society whose only possession of significant material value is their labour power (how much work they can do). A member of such a class is proletarian. We see the persistence and reproduction of peasant units of production, which continues to be the main source of subsistence for a large part of the village population. The majority of the labourers of Chittur Thathamangalam are part of this category. Labourers are connected to the landowners as they work for them. The marginalization and proletarianization of the peasantry are other outcomes of commercialization of agriculture. Agricultural wage labourers are still landless. Thus, inequality in ownership of land still continues. Proletarianization, an important indicator of the development of a capitalist economy, is reflected in the extent of landlessness. According to NSSO data (Government of India, National Sample Survey Organisation [NSSO], 2006), the extent of landlessness in Indian agriculture has stayed more or less constant over the last five decades: at 11.7% in 1961 which marginally declined to 10 % in 2003.

A new scheme is being implemented in the study area for the most vulnerable groups, such as *Chakliar*, *Nayadi*, *Vedan*, *Kalladiar*, etc., to promote paddy cultivation in the study area. A proposal to provide 10 lakh rupees for the purchase of 25 cents of paddy field is a new initiative by the Kerala government to retain paddy cultivation in selected areas and promote paddy cultivation.

Disappearing Rigid Division of Labour

With a steady decline in paddy-related work and with the introduction of modern technology and education, many people in Chittur –Thathamangalam have moved out intergenerationally and shifted to other jobs.

Caste, which has persisted as a religious and feudal ideology, is disappearing. According to Ambedkar, the caste system is not merely a division of labour. It is a hierarchy in which one labourer is graded above the other (Kuber, 1991). This division of labour was not spontaneous; it was neither based on natural aptitudes nor on choice. An individual's sentiment had no place in it. Caste cannot be viewed as a feature of civilized society with a Durkheimian version of organic solidarity inherent in it. Division of labour is a feature of any civilized society, but caste system

cannot be viewed as a progressive feature because it creates rigid norms, curtails freedom of individual members in the society and compartmentalize people into different groups in society. Any feature that promotes an unnatural division of labour and restricts individual freedom cannot be considered progressive. The caste system suppresses the natural powers, inclinations and skills of individuals. Caste prevents labourers from becoming a class in itself; hence, caste has persisted as religious and Indian feudal ideology.

However, today the caste system is not as strong. The caste system in India provided a division of labour. It is a hierarchical system in which the people were graded. This division of labour was not spontaneous; it was not based on the skills or efficiency of a person, who was unable to choose his own career according to his abilities. This stratification of occupations was based on the caste system. This situation has now changed. Agrarian changes and rapid industrialization changed the situation. Previously, the rigid caste system did not permit any readjustment of occupations. Change is a characteristic of all societies, whether primitive or modern. A society undergoing revolutionary changes may lose its earlier identity because of the replacement of a large number of institutions.

The formal abolition of slavery did effect some changes in the life of the *Pulayas*. The enactments against slavery were the first reforms made in Kerala for the downtrodden. Members of the lower castes were profoundly ignorant and superstitious, steeped in abject poverty, and subjected to many vexations, restrictions, and disabilities. Their emancipation from slavery brought improvements in their material conditions. Caste was possibly one of the most abhorrent mechanisms devised by human beings to oppress other human beings.

Critical Analysis on Ecological-Niche Sustainable Relationships of Castes

'The role of God is played by Nature. Nature (Qudratka Mela) created human beings from the original source (adi) at the time it created all beings on the earth ... Everyone believed in one dharma which Nature had given them through intellect and knowledge' (Juergensmeyer, 2009).

Based on field data from western Maharashtra, Gadgil and Malhotra (1983), in their essay described the ecological reasons that maintained the stability of the caste system. They explained how, by living in the same geographic region, different *jatis* organized and used resources with minimal competition. Devices of resource partition and territorial exclusion ensured that individual *jatis*, and often individual families, had a monopoly over a specific resource in a particular territory. They argue that these practices promoted the sustainable use

of natural resources (what they term 'prudence') thereby facilitating the long-term persistence of caste. With its reproductive isolation and hereditary mode of subsistence, a caste population can be considered an analogue of a biological species and assigned an ecological niche.

The ecologist Madhav Gadgil and the anthropologist K. C. Malhotra have described the caste system as a set of trophic levels in which different castes occupy ecological niches marked by division of labour and resource partitioning. They argued that the caste system has endured over centuries and that its ecological stability was retained by limiting inter-caste competition over natural resources (*Indian Journal of Social Work*, n.d.).

Fieldwork by Gadgil and Malhotra revealed that different endogamous groups living in the same region minimized competition through resource partitioning and exclusion. Thus, individual castes, and often individual families or lineages within them, were by customarily assigned a monopoly over a particular resource in a particular territory. This reduced competition, fostered prudence, and helped maintain the stability of the system in the long run.

While examining nature through the lens of caste, we could say that the Gadgil-Malhotra report is an attempt that ignores the "environmentalism of the poor." The critique made in this context is that these ideas seem to emerge from a dominant discursive framework. Subordinate groups had very limited access to and control over land, which in turn led to food insecurity. They also lacked access to water and other communal resources.

The endurance of the Indian caste system has other explanations too. One group of scholars argues that its basis lies in a close connection between caste and class (with upper castes controlling land and other productive assets), while another group of scholars argues that caste has endured because its ideology is widely accepted by those at the bottom of the social hierarchy.

Unambiguously, for Ambedkar (Sharma, 2017), human encompass nature, and nature is governed by social relationships. Nature has been socialized and converted into human's social body; it has led to far-reaching transformations. Such an understanding essentially alters the 'natural' course of various processes, including that of the biosphere, or the biological, animate part of nature. Ambedkar was very critical of ideologies of universal and social nature, as they often concealed the past and politics of exploitative casteist relations.

While comparing this situation in the context of Kerala in general and Chittur Thathamangalam municipality in particular, it can be seen that the problem of utilization of natural resources in a caste society shows

issues of dominance and subordination. This is the reason for depriving the lowest strata of caste society of access to the essentials of life. Also, in the Kerala context, common property resources are scarce and access to these common resources is restricted. There are instances where lower castes were denied the raw materials for making essentials such as houses.

If we examine historically, it becomes clear that Dalits were never permitted to use wood and bricks to construct houses. They were never allowed any roofing material except thatch. Therefore, they were forcibly kept away from using durable materials for construction. It was the same logic of dominant control over natural resources by the upper castes that deprived untouchable castes of access to even resources for subsistence. This was not a sustainable mode of using natural resources, as it deprived the oppressed castes of access to basic resources.

Thus, the ecological balance described above may have been maintained only by depriving large sections of society of access to common property resources.

The Idea of Social Ecology as opposed to Hierarchy and Domination

Challenging the ideas of Madhav Gadgil and Malhotra, the idea of social ecology is opposed to all forms of hierarchy and domination, as well as to class exploitation. Even as we struggle to save the biosphere, it argues we must strive to eliminate domination, be it in matters of race, gender, sexual identity, and class exploitation. But today, the most immediate cause of the ecological crisis is the set of social relations known as capitalism. The nation-state is essential to the system, constituting the apparatus by which capitalist societies maintain social control through a monopoly of the use of force and, at the same time, nullify social unease to a tolerable level by providing certain minimal social services.

Social ecology, from an ecological-humanitarian perspective, sees human beings as the most differentiated and complex life forms on the planet, without which neither consequences nor freedom would exist.

CONCLUSION

Agrarian changes have created drastic changes in any society. It has freed them from the oppressive normative order of caste and the traditional valued frame of hierarchy. For the dominant and the upper castes, this has meant an end of their power and privilege. In such a transitional phase, indifference becomes particularly dangerous, for "indifferentism is the worst kind of disease that can affect people (Ahir, 2007)."

It has become a truism today that caste in India and the entire economic organization of the village has changed. Also, the meaning of the village for its residents has also undergone a complete change.

Ecological compulsions can restructure a social system in a new pattern; it can also change the mindset, including people's aspirations, leisure, and enjoyment etc. New ecological compulsions are being brought about by the modern world. It may shape our minds for the future. From an ecological point of view, therefore, it is impossible to defend the continuation of castes or in any way uphold their positive contributions to social life and at the same time hope to sincerely remove the belief in untouchability. But it can be made a point of studying how the solidarities inherent in a particular system or institutions can perform important functions in the contemporary transitional society or how the traditional institutions can be remodelled in contemporary society.

As has been observed, "the transformation of nature by powerful economic and technological forces was not only having a living impact on separate components of landscapes but was closely associated with the possibility of changing society altogether, and with it, its inseparable biosocial organ, i.e., human and humanity" (Dr. Ambedkar Foundation, n.d.).

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Grammatical and Mechanical Error Patterns in Investigative Reports of Criminology Students

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Abstract— This study examined the grammatical and mechanical error patterns in investigative reports written by third-year criminology students at North Eastern Mindanao State University – Cantilan Campus during the second semester of Academic Year 2025–2026. It specifically identified the morphological, syntactic, lexical, and mechanical errors present in students' spot and progress reports and determined the most frequently occurring category of errors. A descriptive quantitative research design was employed using error analysis to evaluate students' written outputs. The investigative reports were systematically analyzed, and frequency counts and percentages were used to determine the distribution of errors. Findings revealed that mechanical errors, particularly punctuation and capitalization, were the most frequently occurring errors, followed by lexical errors related to word choice and word form, while morphological and syntactic errors occurred less frequently. The results suggest that students experienced greater difficulty in applying formal writing conventions and selecting appropriate discipline-specific vocabulary rather than in constructing basic grammatical structures. The study concludes that targeted instructional interventions are needed to improve students' writing accuracy, especially in mechanics and vocabulary use, and recommends the integration of contextualized and ESP-based writing activities to enhance competence in producing clear and professional investigative reports.



Keywords— error analysis, grammatical errors, investigative reports, mechanical errors, writing competence.

I. INTRODUCTION

The competence of criminology students in investigative report writing is a critical requirement in their academic and professional formation, as it reflects their ability to document factual events with clarity, accuracy, and adherence to formal writing conventions. Investigative reports function as official documents in law enforcement and legal contexts; thus, they must be written with precision, objectivity, and linguistic correctness. However, despite the importance of this skill, many criminology students continue to experience difficulties in grammatical accuracy and mechanical correctness, which negatively affect the clarity, reliability, and professionalism of their

written outputs. This study examines the grammatical and mechanical error patterns in the investigative reports of criminology students, specifically identifying morphological, syntactic, lexical, and mechanical errors, and determining which category occurs most frequently. It

also examines the pedagogical implications of these error patterns for improving Technical English instruction in criminology education.

Writing is widely recognized as one of the most complex macro skills in language learning due to its integration of linguistic knowledge, cognitive processing, and discourse organization. Empirical studies consistently reveal that tertiary learners struggle with grammar,

vocabulary, sentence construction, and writing mechanics (Rosyada-AS et al., 2023; Salam & Nurnisa, 2021; Susanto, 2021; Ajaj, 2022; Surya, 2022). Mechanical errors such as punctuation and capitalization, along with lexical inaccuracies in word choice, remain persistent across academic writing contexts (Chen et al., 2024). In the Philippine setting, Canisi and Lambenicio (2023) found that criminology students demonstrate only moderate writing performance, with weaknesses particularly evident in content development and organization despite formal instruction. These findings suggest that writing difficulties persist not only due to linguistic limitations but also due to insufficient exposure to discipline-specific and context-based writing practices.

Investigative report writing is a highly specialized form of professional communication that requires strict adherence to procedural accuracy and linguistic precision. Eerland and Charldorp (2022) emphasize that the reliability of investigative reports is essential for their credibility in legal evaluation and judicial processes. Similarly, Pazarena, Kessler, and Watroba (2022) note that crime scene reports must follow structured formats that ensure clarity, completeness, and consistency in presenting factual information. However, despite these established conventions, Ajero (2025) reports that police and investigative reports still contain lexical, morphological, and syntactical errors that compromise clarity and meaning. These challenges highlight the gap between theoretical knowledge of report writing and actual student performance in producing accurate investigative documentation.

Writing performance is further shaped by linguistic, cognitive, and instructional factors. Mathew (2023) defines grammar as a structured system governing sentence formation and meaning construction, while Doner (2025) explains that grammatical competence develops through exposure and usage rather than rule memorization alone. Shivam (2022) and Long (2025) further emphasize that grammar plays a crucial role in reducing ambiguity and ensuring clarity in written communication. Alongside grammar, mechanics such as spelling, punctuation, and capitalization are essential in ensuring readability and professionalism in written texts (Moxley, 2023). Empirical studies also show that writing errors occur across multiple linguistic levels due to interlingual transfer, intralingual interference, and limited instructional feedback (Wang et al., 2025). In the Philippine context, Demi and Payot (2022) found recurring grammatical and mechanical errors among criminology students, reinforcing the persistence of writing difficulties in local tertiary education.

Despite the abundance of studies on writing errors and academic writing performance, a critical gap remains in

the literature. Most existing research focuses on general academic writing or ESL learners without sufficiently examining discipline-specific writing, particularly investigative report writing in criminology. Moreover, while error studies often identify common linguistic problems, they rarely translate findings into structured, data-driven pedagogical implications for Technical English instruction. There is also limited integration of grammatical, lexical, and mechanical error analysis within a single framework that directly informs investigative writing pedagogy. This gap suggests the need for a more context-sensitive and discipline-based analysis of student writing performance.

In response to these gaps, this study analyzes the grammatical and mechanical error patterns in the investigative reports of third-year criminology students at North Eastern Mindanao State University – Cantilan Campus. It specifically examines morphological, syntactic, lexical, and mechanical errors in students' spot and progress reports and identifies the most frequently occurring error category. Unlike previous studies that treat writing errors as isolated linguistic issues, this research integrates error analysis within the context of investigative report writing as a professional genre, thereby providing a more applied and discipline-specific understanding of student writing performance.

The major contribution of this study lies in its development of an empirically grounded basis for improving criminology writing instruction through error-pattern profiling. It extends existing literature by situating grammatical and mechanical error analysis within the specialized domain of investigative reporting, an area that remains underexplored in both local and international studies. Furthermore, the findings are expected to inform the design of contextualized, ESP-based instructional materials that directly address the actual writing deficiencies of criminology students. In doing so, this study bridges the gap between theoretical error analysis and practical pedagogical application, offering a more targeted approach to enhancing writing competence in law enforcement education.

The findings of this study are expected to assist English instructors, criminology faculty, curriculum designers, and academic administrators in designing more responsive writing instruction. By identifying specific error patterns and their frequencies, this research contributes to the development of more structured, contextualized, and discipline-oriented writing interventions. Consequently, it supports the enhancement of criminology students' writing competence, particularly in producing clear, accurate, and professionally acceptable investigative reports essential for their future roles in law enforcement and related fields.

II. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a descriptive quantitative research design, a research methodology that involves the systematic collection and statistical analysis of numerical data to describe patterns and trends within a given phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Specifically, the study focused on systematically examining the grammatical and mechanical error patterns found in the investigative reports of criminology students through measurable and observable linguistic data. Guided by an error analysis framework, the study identified, categorized, and quantified recurring errors in students' written outputs, particularly in terms of frequency and distribution across morphological, syntactic, lexical, and mechanical domains. This design was considered appropriate because it allowed for an objective and structured examination of writing errors without manipulating variables, thereby providing a clear descriptive account of students' linguistic performance.

2.2 Research Respondents

The respondents of the study were third-year criminology students enrolled in CDI 5 Technical English 1 (Investigative Report Writing and Presentation) during the second semester of Academic Year 2025–2026, with a total population of 508 students across 12 sections. They were selected because they are at a critical stage where investigative report writing is a core competency in their training. A sample of 219 respondents was determined using Cochran's formula, and stratified random sampling was employed to ensure proportional representation of all sections. This method is appropriate as it enhances representativeness and sampling precision by organizing the population into homogeneous strata before random selection; as Parsons (2017) explains, stratified sampling improves estimator accuracy and reduces sampling error by ensuring similarity within each stratum. The 219 respondents served as the quantitative sample for the systematic identification, classification, and quantification of grammatical and mechanical error patterns in their investigative report outputs.

2.3 Research Instrument

The primary sources of data in this study consisted of the spot reports and progress reports prepared by the respondents. These reports were produced as part of the students' investigative writing activities and served as authentic discipline-specific writing samples for analysis. The study analyzed two types of investigative reports: spot reports, which required concise presentation of incident details, and progress reports, which contained detailed narrative descriptions and chronological documentation of

investigative developments. The study employed a modified linguistic error analysis framework adapted from established second language acquisition error taxonomy (Dulay et al., 1982), categorizing errors into morphological, syntactic, lexical, and mechanical domains.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the analysis, the coding framework and error classifications were subjected to expert validation by instructors of English language and criminology-related writing. The basis for coding errors was anchored on observable linguistic deviations from standard grammatical rules, sentence structure conventions, vocabulary usage, and writing mechanics found in the students' investigative reports. Each report was carefully examined and coded according to the established classifications. Frequency counts and percentage distributions were then used to determine the occurrence and prevalence of grammatical and mechanical error patterns in the investigative reports.

2.4 Statistical Treatment

Frequency counts and percentages were used to systematically determine the distribution and occurrence of grammatical and mechanical errors in the students' investigative reports. Frequency counts involved tallying the number of occurrences of each error type across all respondents' written outputs, allowing the researcher to identify which error categories were most and least prevalent. These raw frequencies were then converted into percentages by dividing the frequency of each error type by the total number of errors and multiplying the result by 100, enabling clearer comparison of error distribution across categories. This approach is widely used in descriptive quantitative research because it provides a clear and interpretable summary of categorical data, allowing patterns and trends to be easily identified (Lund, 2021; Dong, 2023). Recent methodological studies also emphasize that frequency and percentage analysis remain among the most commonly used statistical tools in quantitative descriptive research due to their simplicity, clarity, and effectiveness in summarizing survey and textual data (Loreto-Gómez & Fernández-Sánchez, 2021).

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the grammatical and mechanical error patterns identified in the investigative reports of third-year criminology students. The table shows the frequency counts and percentages of errors categorized into morphological, syntactic, lexical, and mechanical classifications. Under each category, specific error types were identified and analyzed to determine the extent of students' difficulties in investigative report writing. The total row indicates the overall number of errors committed

across all categories, which served as the basis for performance. comparison and interpretation of the students' writing

Table 1: Category-Wise Analysis of Total Errors

Category	Types	Frequency	Percentage	Description
Morphological Errors	Verb Tense	342	13.27%	High
	Subject Verb agreement (verb errors)	71	2.76%	Low
	Voice of the verb	46	1.79%	Very Low
Syntactic Errors	Word Order	214	8.31%	Moderate
	Sentence Fragments	279	10.83%	High
	Run-on Sentences	162	6.29%	Moderate
	Word choice/Word Form	1019	39.54%	Very High
Lexical Errors	Preposition Errors	394	15.29%	High
	Pronouns Errors	49	1.90%	Very Low
Total		2576	100%	
Mechanical Errors	Spelling	443	10.13%	High
	Punctuations	2095	47.90%	Very High
	Capitalization	1836	41.98%	Very High
Total		4,374	100%	

As shown in Table 1, punctuation errors obtained the highest frequency among all identified mechanical errors, accounting for 47.90% of the total mechanical errors. This indicates that students experience considerable difficulty in applying proper punctuation marks and identifying correct sentence boundaries in investigative writing. Since investigative reports require accuracy, clarity, and organization of details, incorrect punctuation affects the readability and professionalism of students' written outputs. Capitalization errors also appeared frequently, comprising 41.98% of the total mechanical errors. This suggests limited mastery of formal writing conventions, particularly in the use of proper nouns, official terminologies, abbreviations, and sentence beginnings commonly observed in investigative documentation. Spelling errors, although lower than punctuation and capitalization, still recorded 10.13%, indicating weaknesses in proofreading and editing skills.

Among lexical errors, word choice and word form recorded the highest frequency, representing 39.54% of the total lexical and grammatical errors. This finding implies that students struggle in selecting precise and discipline-appropriate vocabulary when constructing investigative narratives. In criminology writing, inaccurate word choice may alter the meaning of information being conveyed, thereby affecting the clarity and reliability of reports. Preposition errors also appeared frequently, accounting for

15.29%, which indicates difficulties in using appropriate grammatical connectors and expressions in report writing. These findings support the claim of Mustafa et al. (2022) that tertiary-level students often encounter difficulties in vocabulary precision and writing mechanics despite prior grammar instruction.

In terms of syntactic and morphological errors, verb tense errors obtained 13.27%, while sentence fragments accounted for 10.83%, indicating that students still encounter challenges in maintaining consistency and completeness in sentence construction. Word order errors (8.31%) and run-on sentences (6.29%) appeared at moderate levels, suggesting partial control of sentence organization. In contrast, subject-verb agreement errors (2.76%), pronoun errors (1.90%), and voice of the verb errors (1.79%) obtained the lowest frequencies. This may indicate that students possess relatively better familiarity with basic grammatical structures commonly used in investigative report writing. Repeated exposure to standard sentence patterns in investigative documentation may have contributed to the lower occurrence of these errors.

Overall, the findings reveal that mechanical and lexical errors dominate the students' investigative reports, particularly punctuation, capitalization, and word choice/word form errors. This indicates that criminology students experience greater difficulty in applying formal

writing conventions and vocabulary precision than in constructing basic grammatical structures. The results further imply that students may understand the content they intend to communicate but encounter challenges in presenting information accurately and professionally in written form. These findings support the observations of Yuliah et al. (2019), who emphasized that professional writing requires mastery of discipline-specific vocabulary and adherence to formal writing conventions.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study contributes to the understanding of grammatical and mechanical error patterns in the investigative reports of criminology students by identifying the specific areas in writing where difficulties frequently occur. The findings revealed that mechanical errors, particularly in punctuation and capitalization, along with lexical problems involving word choice and word form, remain major challenges in investigative report writing. These results demonstrate the importance of strengthening writing instruction in criminology education, especially in areas requiring precision, clarity, and adherence to professional writing conventions. One advantage of the study is its systematic use of error analysis, which allowed the classification and quantification of recurring linguistic inaccuracies in authentic student outputs. However, the study is limited to third-year criminology students from a single institution and focused only on written investigative reports, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other academic contexts or disciplines. Despite these limitations, the study may serve as a basis for developing ESP-based instructional materials, contextualized writing activities, and intervention programs aimed at improving investigative report writing skills among criminology students. Future studies may further explore intervention strategies, comparative analyses across institutions, or additional linguistic features affecting professional writing performance.

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Representation of Patriarchy and Female Subordination in Selected Works of R. K. Narayan

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Abstract —This paper discusses patriarchy and female subordination in the selected works of R.K. Narayan who is one of the most glorified English-language novelists of India. Based on novels like *The Dark Room*, *The English Teacher*, and *The Painter of Signs*, the paper will examine how Narayan gives a picture of the social, cultural and domestic framework that tends to disenfranchise women within postcolonial Indian society. This paper will discuss that although Narayan does not identify himself as a feminist author, his subtle characterizations unwillingly reveal and criticize gender dynamics of oppression inherent in the traditional Indian society. The analysis is done through a feminist approach to explore the structural elements of male domination, forced domesticity, suffering without reaction and the lack of control of the women in the fictional town of Malgudi. Placing his narratives in the larger socio-cultural contexts, this work will add to the current academic debates concerning the topic of gender, identity, and resistance in South Asian literature. The special focus is on women characters like Savitri, Susila and Rosie whose plights throw light on the strong patriarchal principles according to which their lives, relationships, and desires are determined.

Keywords —Patriarchy, female subordination, male domination, Malgudi, womanhood, traditional values, domestic oppression.



Introduction

Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanaswami or R. K. Narayan is considered to be one of the most respected authors on Indian middle-class life in the twentieth century. Narayan built a miniature image of South Indian society by moving his fictional town of Malgudi and described all its trends, contradictions and social structures that are similar throughout the years in such an uncomplicated way. This paper will discuss three of Narayan's major novels, *The Dark Room* (1938), *The English Teacher* (1945), and *The Painter of Signs* (1976), that describe the issue of patriarchy and oppression of women. Through these works, we are able to know about the continuation of male domination and the gradual change in the role and duties of women in the traditional Indian families and the society where Narayan has written for almost forty years of his career. The writings of Narayan also show a deep understanding of the patriarchal

institutions that defined Indian social and familial life, especially before and after the independence of the country.

Patriarchy is a social system that supports male dominance and female subjugation in numerous legal, economic, cultural, and psychological ways. Narayan fiction offers a detailed description of the influence of these bigger systems on the routine life of everyday individuals, although it is unnecessarily explicitly political. Female characters are often peripheral in his storylines, demonstrate how women compromises under highly patriarchal conditions.

The Dark Room: The Architecture of Domestic Oppression

The Dark Room is the second novel by Narayan, and it is the simplest and the most direct one that he offers on the subject of marital patriarchy and women's oppression. The

story is about the role of a devoted mother and wife (Savitri) in a dictatorial and selfish marriage with Ramani. The title "*The Dark Room*" is an extremely powerful metaphor for the existence of Savitri and it represents the emotional and physical darkness that surrounds her in a family dominated by men. The protagonist Savitri's situation of subordination is reflected in her conversation with her husband, Ramani. "What a dutiful wife! Would rather starve than precede her husband. You are really like some of the women in our ancient books" (Narayan 11). This articulates the ideology of the patriarchy directly upon her. Ramani is the figure of the traditional patriarch that upholds the power through social status, emotional blackmail, and a monetary supremacy. Being the primary provider, he has absolute control over the family decision-making, the family finances, and the emotional atmosphere of the household. His attitude toward Savitri proves the prevalence of cruelty towards women in their married life. The dilemma that Savitri finds is an indication of how women are restrained in such unions in different ways. She has no financial ability to support herself; her identity is purely the roles of a wife and mother to society, and psychologically, she has adopted the merits of selflessness and faithfulness that the religious and cultural traditions promote. Ramani mocks her looks and makes comparisons with the young women, especially his office secretary, whom he develops feelings for. Ramani shows off to Savitri how handsome he is to another girl, and on the one occasion when he invites her to their own house it is a big embarrassment for Savitri.

The economic weakness of Savitri is clearly shown as when she escapes she does not have any money, skills, or social contacts outside her husband, so she is unable to take care of herself. Even considers drowning herself, demonstrating her helplessness. Her male companion Gangu, who wants to help her and feels like she is sharing her problem, tries to help her but in the end takes her to Ramani which is not a solution but a sign of being a failure. "What despicable creations of God are we that we can't exist without a support. I am like a bamboo pole which cannot stand without a wall to support it..." (Narayan 146). This is said by Savitri after attempting to run away and realizing society has no place for a woman alone, Savitri is forced to return to her subjugation, accepting it as the only way to survive. This makes *The Dark Room* so fascinating: Narayan does not give easy solutions or happy endings. The final part of the novel is intentionally vague and unreserved. Narayan introduces the idea of patriarchy as a system that is comprehensive and in which women find it hard to escape in practice (some of today's Indian books may also adopt social reform or education as a way by which women can

rise to conquer the dominance over them). *The Dark Room* in the title is not merely a refuge of her home but also the symbol of the prison of larger society, which is patriarchal and which she cannot escape. She ended up there, lying, this indicates that she seems like a woman whose soul has been squashed and who has resigned to her natural subservience.

The English Teacher: Idealization and the Burden of Perfection.

The English Teacher was published seven years after *The Dark Room*. It presents a different picture of marriage, but it still shows the hidden effects of patriarchy. In this novel, patriarchy appears in a form of "benevolent patriarchy". In this patriarchy men hold power and make decisions, but they do so in a caring and protective way. Susila's identity is closely connected to her husband, Krishna. She sees her role mainly as a wife and mother. She does not imagine a life or purpose separate from her family. Even when she becomes seriously ill, she does not focus on her own fears or needs. After her death, Susila is remembered as an ideal and pure person rather than a complete individual with her own identity. She is shown as the perfect wife—beautiful, loyal, caring, and never demanding. Her main role is to support her husband and family. The novel presents femininity according to traditional patriarchal values. Most details about Susila are connected to Krishna and their daughter. She is not shown with personal interests, dreams, or goals outside family responsibilities. The novel treats this not as a problem but as a virtue and a sign of true womanhood. When Susila moves to the city where Krishna teaches, her main aim is to make a happy home and to take care of their child. Patriarchy is also reflected in the way her illness and death are shown. Even while dying, she thinks more about her husband and daughter than herself. She worries about leaving her daughter alone as an orphan.

Although the novel shows deep love and sadness, it also reflects how patriarchy limits women to symbolic roles. Women are often seen mainly as good wives and caregivers instead of complete individuals with their own identity. The novel suggests that even loving relationships can still be shaped by patriarchal ideas. In *The English Teacher*, patriarchy does not always appear through cruelty or force. Instead, it works in quiet ways. Susila is expected to be patient, caring, and understanding. She never complains or demands anything for herself. Even in her death face, Susila plays the primary role of comforting Krishna to help him grow spiritually and console him. This image does not deny the fact that patriarchal ideology exists. *The English Teacher* is important to understand the attitude towards marital love, which is evident in the description of patriarchy voiced by Narayan as soft. Susila

can be a perfect wife only because she does not have personality beyond her domestic chores or wish that might clash with her husband. Subordination may be devotion, domesticity, and acceptance of limits.

The Painter of Signs: Modernity and the Precarious Survival of Gender Hierarchies.

The Painter of Signs, written in 1976, shows a much different social scene. Daisy is the example of the new woman of the independent India-educated, professionally competent, devoted to social problems, and not willing to follow the traditional role of a woman. Daisy, a female character who appears in the story in a modernizing India, is not like Savitri or Susila. She works as an educated person who believes in family planning and social service. She goes around the villages, educates, and supplies contraception, and she works with a family planning organization. Narayan provides the argument on the existence of patriarchal ideas despite the changing social roles of women using the relationship between Daisy and Raman. Raman is the protagonist and works as a painter of signboards. Her commitment to her work is over and above the traditional expectations in marriage and housework. The initial conflict between her professional and traditional marriage life shows up when Raman falls in love with her and proposes to her to get married. Daisy never thought that she will ever quit her career and live a domestic life.

But the description of Daisy by R.K Narayan is multi-dimensional and partly ambiguous. Even though they are allowed for the agency, education, and professional dedication that the female characters did not have earlier, but they still have some limitations. Her devotion to family planning is portrayed with irony; she is so sincere that she seems humorless, overzealous, and, to some extent, without a warm heart to take care of her husband and give birth to children, not to take independent employment. Raman becomes attracted to the independence and unique personality of Daisy, but after engagement, Raman wants her to be obedient to the traditional norms. He believes that their needs and wants must be considered first before her duties. Daisy continues to work and does not look after Raman for a long period of time. He desires to subordinate her. He sees marriage not as a partnership of equals, but wants to reduce her independence to fit the traditional mold of a wife. The traditional patriarchal view is that a wife must accompany her husband, support him, and give birth to children. This portrayal silently subverts the critique of conventional gendering. The reaction of Raman to Daisy shows that the expectations of the patriarchy remain alive even amongst progressive and modern men.

Loss and uncertainty are also found at the end. Daisy's decision is shown as a major sacrifice. She is unable to find companionship, love, and a family. The novel suggests that it can be difficult for women to balance professional goals and personal satisfaction. These ideas are shown in a traditional and old-fashioned way and gives importance and sympathy to such views. The novel does not imagine a situation where a man fully supports his wife's independent career, or where marriage and a woman's professional goals can grow together through understanding and compromise. Raman's aunt is an important character in the novel. She represents traditional values and beliefs. Her authority in the family is accepted without question. As a result, the novel shows concern about changing roles of women in society. At the same time, it accepts that these changes are practical and important. It also raises questions about how such changes may affect traditional social systems.

Comparative Analysis: Continuity and Change.

Economic dependence is shown as one of the main reasons for women's oppression in all three novels. In these texts, marriage becomes the important arena where patriarchal power is exercised. Even the independence of Daisy owes to her situation as a working woman, and her freedom is because she chooses not to marry. *The Dark Room* presents marriage as a form of control and repression. Husbands are shown as having strong control over their wives' lives, including their emotions, choices, and even their bodies. Even though marriage seems to be a benevolent factor in *The English Teacher*, the wife is, however, in total dependency on the needs and development of her husband. *The Painter of Signs* believes that the career and marriage of a woman cannot be combined and must be sacrificed to the other. The main cause of the failed escape of Savitri is that she has no money; Susila does not wonder why she was financially dependent on anyone, as she considers it to be a normal situation.

Nevertheless, these novels also have major differences that depict the changing historical settings. She managed to divorce without becoming totally poor or impoverished, and that is a sign of success, albeit in a limited way. In *The Painter of Signs*, the career and marriage of a woman are incompatible and have to be sacrificed in totality to the other. Major changes in the Indian society that include independence, more education opportunities for women, more employment opportunities, urbanization, and exposure to diversity of value systems can be marked in the transition from *The Dark Room* to *The Painter of Signs*. The character of Daisy is educated, employed, devoted to social reform, and opposed to traditional marriage.

However, Narayan carefully presents these patriarchal structures in the novels. His view seems mixed and uncertain. He criticizes the harsh effects of patriarchy but is also unsure about other alternatives. At the same time, he understands women's oppression while still valuing traditional social systems. *The Painter of Signs* suggests that women may find it difficult to balance career and marriage. The novel presents them as choices where one may need to be sacrificed for the other. Even though Daisy is educated and independent, she still faces patriarchal pressure. Narayan allows Daisy to make her own decisions. However, her freedom also comes with emotional loneliness and social distance. This suggests that independence may have personal costs.

The Role of Tradition and Modernity.

Most important things that Narayan did in his portrayal of the patriarchy is that he used tradition and modernity to relate gender in defining relationships. Tradition serves almost completely as the means of oppression in *The Dark Room*. Even such aspects that may be regarded as progressive, such as English education and office work, fail to liberate Ramani but, on the contrary, provide him with new forms to express his dominance as a male. Social expectations, culture, and religious doctrines are all used to make Savitri stay submissive. The book depicts tradition as a weight that limits the freedom and enjoyment of people instead of presenting any positive sides of the tradition. The time of all three books is the time when the society was changing greatly. *The English Teacher* took place in the freedom era, *The Dark Room* in the late colonial era, and *The Painter of Signs* in the post-independence years. All these novels deal with the conflict between traditional values and modern ideas in different ways. The novel suggests that tradition, especially spiritual values, can help people face problems of life. However, it ignores the fact that these same traditions can also make women subordinate. Instead of questioning this issue, the novel seems to support it. It presents a wife's devotion and self-sacrifice as something noble and spiritually meaningful.

The English Teacher presents a more complex relationship with tradition. Krishna finds comfort and meaning through Indian spiritual philosophy. However, this spiritual tradition does not question the existing gender roles shown in the novel. *The Painter of Signs* directly shows the conflict between tradition and modern ideas, especially in gender roles. Although Daisy's dedication to her work is admirable, the novel suggests that rejecting traditional values may leave a person feeling alone. Daisy represents modernity. She is educated, independent, employed, and committed to social reform. She does not want to be tied to a traditional marriage.

However, society's patriarchal mindset still puts pressure on her through social expectations. Daisy is judged according to traditional ideas of womanhood. Raman's aunt represents traditional values. She believes women should focus on household duties and support their husband.

Psychological Aspects of Subordination.

Narayan's novels transcend the social structures and institutions to look at the internalization of patriarchy in terms of psychology. Savitri in *The Dark Room* has been trained that being a good wife means sacrificing and serving. A woman is judged by the quality of service she is giving to her husband and children, and her needs and wants are not as important. She first reacts to Ramani's words by blaming herself for the wrong gone things and how she has failed to execute her role as a wife. Her self-blaming shows the degree of her internalization of patriarchal concepts, how that impacts desire and thought, and how it can be replicated and challenged, in the psychology of the individual. This psychological aspect is one of the best examples of Savitri in *The Dark Room*. The internalization process is evidenced by Savitri, who earlier embraces her inferior status.

The novel is a psychological progression of her embracing the world, rebelling against it, and finally falling into despair. Whenever she does lose it, it is justified and fierce, but also a consequence of being mentally drained and bearing the burden of having no other identity or purpose or place rather than family duties. She is aware of the injustice and cruelty of Ramani. The physical and psychological struggle to release herself from the internalized subjection she has undergone is her wish. However, the book shows how challenging this form of psychological resistance is to maintain in the event that the necessary social and financial support is lacking. At last, it is not only the pressure of the outside world that makes Savitri come back, but she herself realized that she does not have any existence without her husband and planned to come back.

The psychological aspects of patriarchy in *The English Teacher* are less marked, although they are equally important. The degree of internalization in Susila instead of the torturous acceptance of Savitri is more realized through the satisfaction with her limited world. As an indication of her spiritual development, this total identification is represented in the novel as admirable. It is a symbol of the utmost submission to the point of feeling like freedom with restrictions being tolerated as a fulfillment. Apparently, Susila has no personal life issues to deal with in the conflict between personal desires and

social norms since she has fully accepted her roles both as a wife and a mother.

The psychological aspects of patriarchy in *The Painter of Signs* are shown through the thoughts and expectations of Raman and Daisy. As in beginning Raman has feelings for Daisy. At that time he admires her a lot, but after their engagement his expectations changed, he wants her to be a traditional wife. Daisy also faces psychological pressure due to patriarchal social roles even after being educated and independent.

Silence and Voice

The quietness of female characters is the characteristic of these novels. Although Savitri is a viewpoint character in *The Dark Room*, the narrative description is more about her inner world rather than direct speech or thoughts. Moreover, the stillness of his female characters can also attract attention to the challenge of representing the representatives of the opposite gender, in addition to the reflection of real social conditions. Susila does not tell us much in *The English Teacher*, but the memories and observations of Krishna give us most of the information about Susila. This same theme of silence is the echo of historical situations when the voice of women was often stifled and their opinions neglected, and their lives were almost not written even in the patriarchal nations. Daisy in *The Painter of Signs* is even more eloquent than the other two characters, but she still has little trouble coming up with the expression of her innermost feelings and motivations. Nevertheless, it also raises some doubts about the control of the narrative and the way the characters are represented. Narayan is a male author whose primary presentation is in terms of male thinking; it is therefore natural that the female experiences are explained in terms of male thinking.

CONCLUSION

The male dominance shown in all three selected novels by R. K. Narayan reflects the strong control of patriarchy in Indian society. These novels show that patriarchy is not only caused by cruel men or weak women. It is also connected to social systems, religion, culture, economy, and personal beliefs. Through the lives of Savitri, Susila, and Daisy, Narayan presents different ways women respond to patriarchy. Savitri suffers in silence, Susila sacrifices herself, and Daisy tries to gain freedom. However, all of them face pain, struggles, and limitations. Narayan also shows that patriarchy affects women in many ways. Even kind and caring men, such as Krishna, may unknowingly support women's oppression. At the same time, educated and independent women also

struggle to escape social pressure and traditional expectations.

Narayan's treatment of these issues also has some limitations. He often presents events from a male point of view. Sometimes, he portrays independent women in a satirical way and shows attachment to traditional values. This makes his criticism of patriarchy more complex. Overall, these novels clearly show how patriarchy works in everyday life. It shapes people's thinking, limits women's opportunities, and affects their freedom. The novels also show how women resist, adjust, and survive under patriarchal control. Narayan highlights gender inequality and encourages readers to think about the need for a more equal society.

Scope for further research

This study discusses patriarchy and subordination of women in *The Dark Room*, *The English Teacher*, and *The Painter of Signs* written by R.K. Narayan. Future researchers may consider the persistence of marginalization of women's voices and the analysis of the exclusion of women in the right to be heard and express themselves independently in narratives. Future researchers may also study the limited freedom and role of women in English literature. Such studies may help in better understanding gender inequality and the struggles faced by women in both literature and society.

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Madhura Bhava and the Erotic Mysticism of Radha-Krishna Devotion in Select Songs of Kazi Nazrul Islam

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Abstract— *The Radha–Krishna tradition in South Asian devotional literature provides a significant space where divinity, love, and emotional intensity converge. Within this framework, Kazi Nazrul Islam reconfigures devotional expression through a sensuous and psychologically nuanced poetic idiom. His selected songs foreground Madhura Bhava as a devotional mode in which longing, anticipation, and embodied emotion shape the devotee’s relationship with the divine. Rather than approaching these compositions merely as religious or musical artefacts, this study emphasizes their literary and affective dimensions, arguing that they construct an interiorized feminine consciousness marked by desire, absence, and emotional yearning. The paper examines how Nazrul transforms acts such as adornment, offering, waiting, and dream encounters into expressions of eroticized devotion. Drawing on Indian aesthetic concepts of *ras*., *dhvani*, *vipralambha* and *śṛṅgāra*, the study situates Nazrul within the Vaishnava devotional tradition while highlighting his modern psychological sensibility. The analysis is further informed by Judith Butler’s theory of performativity and Lacanian notions of desire structured through lack, which illuminate the formation of feminine subjectivity and emotional asymmetry in the lyrics. The study also demonstrates that Krishna appears as elusive and emotionally dispersed, making absence the generative centre of devotion. Nature imagery and dream sequences intensify interior affect and longing. Ultimately, the paper argues that Nazrul modernizes the Radha–Krishna dynamic by internalizing it within feminine consciousness, transforming devotion into an embodied, sensuous, and emotionally charged experience.*



Keywords— *Devotional Erotics, Feminine Subjectivity, Madhura Bhava, Nazrul Islam*

I. INTRODUCTION: SITUATING MADHURA BHAVA IN NAZRUL’S LYRIC WORLD

Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899–1976), widely celebrated as the “Rebel Poet” of Bengal, occupies a distinctive position in South Asian literary history for his ability to synthesize diverse religious, cultural, and aesthetic traditions. While much of his oeuvre is associated with political resistance and Islamic devotional expression, Nazrul’s engagement with Vaishnavite themes, particularly the Radha-Krishna dynamic, reveals an equally profound immersion in Hindu devotional poetics. His Krishna-centric songs draw richly upon the emotional and symbolic universe of Braj culture, where the divine is not distant but intimately woven into the rhythms of human longing, play. Through lyrics that evoke Holi festivities, *viraha* (separation), and ecstatic union,

Nazrul reimagines Krishna not merely as a theological figure but as a sensuous, affective presence within the interior life of the devotee (Bhattacharya 112).

Within this framework, the concept of *Madhura Bhava*, a devotional attitude that envisions the relationship between the devotee and the divine in terms of romantic and erotic love, becomes central. Rooted in the broader tradition of the Bhakti Movement, *Madhura Bhava* finds one of its earliest and most influential expressions in the works of Jayadeva, where Radha’s longing for Krishna embodies the soul’s yearning for union with the divine. This mode of devotion dissolves the boundary between sacred and sensual, allowing bodily desire, adornment, and emotional intensity to function as legitimate expressions of spiritual experience (Dehejia 58). Nazrul inherits and transforms this

tradition by infusing it with a modern sensibility, foregrounding the feminine voice as a site where devotion becomes deeply internalized, psychological, and sensuously articulated.

Building upon this devotional and aesthetic lineage, Nazrul's Krishna-centric lyrics reveal a striking range of emotional registers that move fluidly between celebration, surrender, and aching separation. In songs such as “ব্রজ গোপী খেলে হোরী” (“The maidens of Braj play Holi”), Krishna appears as a playful and bodily ecstasy and the colours of love. The imagery of glances as “sharp arrows” and bodies trembling in আবেশ (passionate trance) foregrounds a deeply embodied devotional experience, where erotic play is inseparable from spiritual expression (Dehejia 61). Here, Madhura Bhava manifests not as one's own longing but as a collective, festive energy, aligning with classical Vaishnavite aesthetics while retaining Nazrul's lyrical intensity.

In contrast, the tone shifts in “হারিয়ে গেছে ব্রজের কানাই” (“The Kanai of Braj is lost”), where Krishna's departure to Dwaraka evokes a profound sense of বিরহ(separation). The absence of the flute, the বন (forest), and the pastoral world signals not merely spatial loss but the erosion of intimate divinity. The lament, “ওরে বৃন্দাবনের গোপালকে কি মানায় রাজার বেশে?” (“Does the cowherd of Vrindavan suit the attire of a king?”), suggests a resistance to institutional or regal representations of Krishna, privileging instead the emotionally accessible beloved (Bhattacharya 118). Similarly, in devotional appeals like “হে গোবিন্দ রাখ চরণে” (“O Govinda, keep us at your feet”), Nazrul invokes a posture of surrender, emphasizing divine grace and মানবিক অসহায়তা (human vulnerability), thus extending beyond *Madhura Bhava* into other *bhakti* modes.

Yet, across these variations, a consistent pattern emerges: Krishna is alternately present, absent, playful and elusive, while the devotee's voice, often feminized, remains emotionally invested and expressive. This dynamic prepares the ground for a more interiorized exploration of longing, where devotion becomes intertwined with desire, and the sacred is experienced through the sensual depths of the self.

Despite the richness and diversity of Kazi Nazrul Islam's Krishna-centric compositions, critical attention has largely remained confined to their musical excellence or their placement within devotional traditions. Nazrul's songs are frequently approached as performative pieces within the canon of Bengali music or as expressions of generalized *bhakti* sentiment. However, such readings often overlook the deeply interiorized and sensuous dimensions of these

lyrics, particularly the ways in which they construct a feminine subjectivity that is emotionally complex, desiring, and self-articulating. The Radha-Krishna dynamic in Nazrul, therefore, demands to be revisited not merely as theological allegory but as a nuanced exploration of affect, embodiment, and longing.

This gap becomes especially evident when one turns to lyrics such as “ওরে নীল যমুনার জল! বল রে মোরে বল” (“O blue waters of the Yamuna, tell me, tell me”), where the speaking voice moves restlessly across space, asking, “কোথায় ঘনশ্যাম / আমার কৃষ্ণ ঘনশ্যাম” (“Where is my Ghanshyam, my Krishna?”). The repeated questioning, the movement from “ব্রজধাম” (“the land of Braj”) to “মথুরা” and “দ্বারকা”, and the haunting absence of response transform devotion into an anxious, searching consciousness. Here, longing is not abstract but spatially and emotionally embodied, revealing a subject who is actively engaged in the pursuit of the divine beloved.

A similar interiorization is visible in “প্রিয় এমন রাত যেন যায় না বৃথাই” (“Let not such a dear night pass in vain”), where the act of waiting becomes ritualized through adornment and জাগরণ (wakefulness). The speaker prepares herself, “পরি চাঁপা ফুলের শাড়ি” (“I wear a champa-flower sari”), “জ্বালি আঁখি প্রদীপ” (“I light the lamp of my eyes”), transforming anticipation into a sensuous devotional practice. The external gestures of preparation mirror an inward intensification of desire, suggesting that devotion is experienced through the body as much as through faith.

The third lyric, “মোর ঘুমঘোরে এলে মনোহর” (“In my drowsy sleep you came, O Enchanter”), further complicates this dynamic by situating union within the liminal space of dream. The intimate moment, “চুপি চুপি চুমিলে নয়ন” (“you softly kissed my eyes”), dissolves upon waking into loss and uncertainty, leaving behind a heightened awareness of absence. Across these songs, Nazrul articulates a poetics where devotion is inseparable from desire, and where the feminine voice emerges as a site of sensuous subjectivity, emotional depth, and unfulfilled longing, an aspect that remains insufficiently explored in existing scholarship.

Extending this reading of longing, ritualized waiting and dream-like union, the study asks: how does Kazi Nazrul Islam construct *Madhura Bhava* as a space where devotion and sensual subjectivity converge? In what ways does the feminine voice articulate desire through acts of searching, adornment, and intimate encounter, while simultaneously confronting absence and loss? How do these lyrics transform external devotional gestures into inward emotional intensities, thereby reconfiguring the Radha-

Krishna dynamic as a deeply interior and embodied experience? By focusing on imagery, voice, and affective progression, this inquiry seeks to move beyond purely musical or devotional readings toward a literary understanding of sensuous bhakti. The following section, therefore, outlines the interpretive framework and critical approach through which these dimensions will be examined in detail.

II. READING THE LYRICS: APPROACH AND CONCEPTUAL BEARINGS

This study proceeds through a close textual reading of selected lyrics by Kazi Nazrul Islam, attending carefully to diction, imagery, voice, and affective movement. Rather than treating the songs as primarily musical compositions or generalized devotional expressions, the analysis foregrounds their poetic textures, tracing how meaning emerges waiting, spatial movement and sensuous detail. The aim is to read the lyrics as sites where emotional experience is structured and articulated, allowing the Radha–Krishna dynamic to be understood as an interior, evolving process rather than a fixed theological motif.

The primary interpretive framework guiding this reading is Madhura Bhava, situated within the broader Bhakti Movement. Traditionally articulated in Vaishnava theology, particularly in Rupa Goswami's *Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu*, Madhura Bhava conceptualizes the devotee's relationship with the divine in terms of erotic love, where longing, union, and separation become modes of spiritual realization (De 214). This framework is further elaborated in the lyrical tradition of Jayadeva, where Radha's প্রেম (love) for Krishna embodies an intense fusion of the sensual and the sacred, rendering desire itself a legitimate pathway to the divine (Miller 32). These classical articulations provide the conceptual grounding through which Nazrul's lyrics are approached.

To deepen this reading, the study also engages two Western theoretical perspectives. Judith Butler's notion of performativity is useful in understanding how the feminine voice in the lyrics is constituted through repeated acts, adorning the body, waiting, calling and remembering, thereby producing a gendered devotional subject (Butler 25). Simultaneously, Roland Barthes' reflections in *A Lover's Discourse* illuminate the fragmented, repetitive language of longing, where the speaking subject is suspended between presence and absence, continually rearticulating desire through address and silence (Barthes 37).

Together, these frameworks enable a reading of Nazrul's songs as layered texts where *Madhura Bhava* is not

merely inherited but reconfigured. The convergence of Vaishnavite aesthetics and modern theoretical insights allows the lyrics to be examined as complex articulations of sensuous devotion, embodied longing, and feminine interiority.

Extending this interpretive framework, the study selectively draws upon feminist and performative perspectives to further illuminate the construction of the feminine devotional voice in the selected lyrics. Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity becomes particularly relevant in reading repeated acts such as waiting, adorning, calling, and remembering as constitutive practices through which the speaking subject comes into being. In lyrics such as “প্রিয় এমন রাত যেন যায় না বৃথাই” (“Let not such a dear night pass in vain”), the preparation of the body, wearing the sari, lighting the “lamp of the eyes,” arranging offerings—can be read not merely as devotional gestures but as performative acts that produce a gendered subject oriented toward desire and expectation (Butler 33). The feminine voice, therefore, is not pre-given but emerges through these reiterated acts of anticipation and emotional investment.

At the same time, Adrienne Rich's insights into emotional dependency and relational longing help frame the asymmetrical dynamic between the desiring subject and the elusive beloved. In “ওরে নীল যমুনার জল! বল রে মোরে বল” (“O blue waters of the Yamuna, tell me, tell me”), the persistent questioning, “Where is my Krishna?”, reveals a subject whose identity is deeply anchored in the search for the other, exposing a structure of longing that is both empowering and precarious (Rich 45). Similarly, in “মোর ঘুমঘোরে এলে মনোহর” (“In my drowsy sleep you came, O Enchanter”), the fleeting intimacy of dream and the subsequent awakening into absence underscore the instability of fulfilment, reinforcing a cycle of desire that remains unresolved.

Within this framework, the scope of the study remains deliberately focused. It does not attempt a comprehensive survey of Nazrul's entire Krishna corpus, nor does it engage with musical composition, performance practice, or historical reception. Instead, it concentrates on the selected lyrics as literary texts, examining how imagery, voice, and affective progression articulate a sensuous mode of devotion grounded in *Madhura Bhava*. By foregrounding the interplay of longing, embodiment, and absence, the analysis seeks to demonstrate how Nazrul reconfigures the Radha–Krishna dynamic into a site of feminine interiority and emotional complexity.

Complementing these feminist and performative readings, the study also draws upon Indian aesthetic and

philosophical frameworks to deepen its understanding of devotional subjectivity. Within the Vaishnavite tradition of the Bhakti Movement, Madhura Bhava is closely aligned with the concept of *śṛṅgāra* rasa as elaborated in Bharata Muni's *Nāṭyaśāstra*, where erotic emotion, in its refined and aestheticized form, becomes a vehicle for transcendence (Bharata 6.33). Later Vaishnava theologians such as Rupa Goswami further develop this into a devotional aesthetic, wherein *viraha* (separation) intensifies emotional *anubhava* (experience), transforming longing into a heightened mode of spiritual realization (Haberman 89). This framework allows desire, adornment, and emotional vulnerability to function not as distractions but as essential pathways to divine intimacy. In the selected lyrics, acts of waiting, dreaming, and searching can thus be read as manifestations of rasa-experience, where the individual self is aesthetically and affectively oriented toward the divine beloved.

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A close reading of the selected lyrics reveals how imagery, voice, and emotional progression work together to construct a layered experience of Madhura Bhava. In “ওরে নীল যমুনার জল! বল রে মোরে বল” (“O blue waters of the Yamuna, tell me, tell me”), the imagery is spatial and fluid, moving across Braj, Mathura and Dwaraka. This shifting geography mirrors an unsettled consciousness, where the speaking voice is driven by inquiry and displacement. The repeated address to the নদী (river) externalizes longing, transforming nature into a *sakshi* (witness) of absence. The emotional progression here aligns with the intensification of *viraha*, where separation produces heightened awareness and continuous articulation of desire, resonating with Vaishnava aesthetic formulations of longing as a generative state (Haberman 92).

In contrast, “প্রিয় এমন রাত যেন যায় না বৃথাই” (“Let not such a dear night pass in vain”) organizes its imagery around preparation and stillness. Objects such as the sari, sandal paste, and lamp are not merely decorative but function as extensions of the self, marking a transition from outer ritual to inner anticipation. The voice here is composed yet charged, suspended between আশা

(expectation) and uncertainty. This gradual intensification reflects a performative construction of subjectivity, where repeated acts of adornment and waiting produce a gendered, desiring self (Butler 38). The emotional movement remains anticipatory, never reaching fulfilment, thereby sustaining the tension essential to *Madhura Bhava*.

The third lyric, “মোর ঘুমঘোরে এলে মনোহর” (“In my drowsy sleep you came, O Enchanter”), introduces a shift into a liminal register where imagery becomes tactile and intimate. The act of touching, kissing, and adorning unfolds within the dream, suggesting a momentary realization of desire. However, the voice fractures upon waking, and the emotional progression moves abruptly from union to loss. This fragmentation echoes the structure of longing described in Roland Barthes' reflections on the lover's discourse, where fulfilment is fleeting and continually deferred (Barthes 41). Across these lyrics, Nazrul orchestrates a movement from search to anticipation to ephemeral union, demonstrating how imagery and voice together sustain an ongoing, unresolved experience of sensuous devotion.

III. MADHURA BHAVA AS DEVOTIONAL EROTICS

Madhura Bhava designates a devotional mode in which the relationship between the devotee and the divine is imagined through the intimate dynamics of lover and beloved. Within the Vaishnavite stream of the Bhakti Movement, this bhava is regarded as the most intense and interiorized form of devotion, as it permits the devotee to experience union, longing, jealousy, and fulfillment in deeply affective and embodied terms. Theological articulations by Rupa Goswami systematize this mode through the language of rasa, where *śṛṅgāra* (erotic sentiment) becomes a vehicle for spiritual realization, especially in its dual movement between *sambhoga* (union) and *vipralambha* (separation) (De 219). Similarly, the aesthetic theory of Bharata Muni locates *śṛṅgāra rasa* as the king of *rasas*, emphasizing its capacity to transform sensory experience into aesthetic transcendence (Bharata 6.35).

In Nazrul's lyrics, this devotional erotics is neither merely symbolic nor purely theological; rather, it is lived through sensuous imagery, bodily awareness, and emotional fluctuation. The beloved Krishna is approached not as an abstract deity but as an intimately desired presence, whose absence or fleeting appearance structures the devotee's inner world. This aligns with Roland Barthes' notion of the lover's discourse, where desire is sustained through repetition, fragmentation, and the continual deferral of fulfilment (Barthes 47). The speaking subject in such a

discourse exists in a state of oscillation, mirroring the *Madhura Bhava* dynamic of longing and anticipation.

At the same time, Simone de Beauvoir's reflections on desire and relational identity illuminate how the self is constituted through its orientation toward the other, often producing asymmetrical structures of emotional dependence (Beauvoir 683). In the context of devotional erotics, this asymmetry does not diminish spiritual experience but intensifies it, as the devotee's vulnerability becomes a mode of surrender.

Thus, *Madhura Bhava* emerges as a complex fusion of aesthetic theory, devotional practice, and psychological experience, where the sacred is accessed through the sensuous, and desire itself becomes a pathway to transcendence.

In the selected lyrics, Kazi Nazrul Islam reconfigures *Madhura Bhava* by merging devotion (*bhakti*) with sensuous imagery, thereby dissolving the conventional boundary between spiritual reverence and bodily desire. The act of offering, which in classical devotional practice signifies surrender, is transformed into an intimate, almost tactile engagement with the divine beloved. This is particularly evident in the recurring motif of bodily adornment, where the devotee prepares herself not merely as a worshipper but as a lover awaiting union. The gestures of dressing, decorating, and arranging offerings extend beyond ritual into a domain of aesthetic self-fashioning, aligning with the Vaishnavite understanding of *seva* (service) as an embodied act of devotion (Haberman 101).

Such adornment also resonates with the aesthetic principles of *śṛṅgāra rasa* as articulated by Bharata Muni, where the beautification of the body functions as a precursor to erotic experience, heightening emotional receptivity (Bharata 6.47). In Nazrul's lyrics, however, this aesthetic preparation is not directed toward a human beloved but toward Krishna, thereby elevating sensuality into a devotional register. The body becomes both the site and medium of spiritual experience, where desire is neither suppressed nor sublimated but actively cultivated.

This convergence of devotion and sensuality can further be illuminated through Roland Barthes' concept of the lover's discourse, where the subject continuously articulates desire through fragments, gestures, and anticipatory acts (Barthes 52). The repeated acts of waiting, adorning, and calling in the lyrics function as such fragments, sustaining a state of heightened emotional intensity. At the same time, Simone de Beauvoir's reflections on the body as a lived and experienced reality underscore how subjectivity is constructed through embodied relations with the other (Beauvoir 673). In this context, the devotee's body is not passive but actively

engaged in the process of desiring and experiencing the divine. Thus, Nazrul's treatment of *Madhura Bhava* moves beyond symbolic representation. Through the transformation of ritual acts into sensuous practices, devotion becomes experiential and affective, rooted in the lived realities of the body and the intensities of longing.

If bodily adornment initiates devotional intimacy, Nazrul extends this movement through anticipation and its fragile consummation within the dream. In “প্রিয় এমন রাত যেন যায় না বৃথাই” (“Let not such a dear night pass in vain”), anticipation becomes an affective discipline: the speaker sustains wakefulness, prepares the self, and inhabits a threshold where arrival is imagined rather than secured. This aligns with Rupa Goswami's account of *vipralambha* (separation) as intensification, longing itself heightens the relish of union by stretching desire across time (De 223). The lyric's temporal suspension, waiting at the window, arranging offerings, renders expectation a sensuous practice that deepens inward experience.

This trajectory culminates in the dream-encounter of “মোর ঘুমঘোরে এলে মনোহর” (“In my drowsy sleep you came, O Enchanter”), where intimacy becomes tactile: “চুপি চুপি চুমিলে নয়ন” (“you softly kissed my eyes”). Here, the boundary between devotion and the body dissolves; contact, fragrance, and adornment enact a momentary *sambhoga*-like fulfilment. Within the aesthetics of *śṛṅgāra rasa* articulated by Bharata Muni, such heightened affect fuses sensory and emotional registers, producing an experience that is at once aesthetic and transcendent (Bharata 6.33). Yet the union is evanescent: awakening returns the subject to absence, intensifying the afterlife of desire.

This oscillation resonates with Jacques Lacan's understanding of desire as structured by lack, sustained through deferral rather than completion (Lacan 235). At the same time, Luce Irigaray's notion of fluid, non-linear feminine desire clarifies the lyric's shifting affects; like, anticipation, touch, loss, without closure (Irigaray 76). Thus, Nazrul's *Madhura Bhava* is not merely symbolic; it is experiential and embodied, where anticipation, intimate encounter and renewed absence generate a continuous, sensuous devotion.

IV. THE FEMININE VOICE: LONGING, WAITING AND EMOTIONAL LABOUR

In the selected lyrics of Nazrul Islam, the Radha-figure emerges not as a passive emblem of devotion but as a speaking subject whose interiority is structured through longing, *apeksha* (waiting), and sustained emotional investment. The voice that articulates desire is not merely

expressive but constitutive, it produces a self that exists in relation to an absent yet intensely felt beloved. This aligns with Judith Butler's understanding of subject formation as a process enacted through repeated acts; here, the acts of waiting, searching, and addressing the divine generate a distinctly gendered devotional identity (Butler 45). The feminine voice, therefore, is not given but continually performed through emotional labour.

Within the Vaishnavite tradition of the Bhakti Movement, Radha's longing is often valorised as the highest form of devotion, particularly in the theology of Rupa Goswami, where *viraha* intensifies the devotee's emotional and spiritual experience (De 227). Nazrul's lyrics resonate with this framework but shift the emphasis toward psychological depth. The act of waiting becomes not only a devotional discipline but also a form of affective labour, where the subject must continuously sustain desire in the absence of fulfilment.

This dynamic can be further understood through Adrienne Rich's reflections on relationality, where emotional investment often becomes asymmetrical, placing the burden of sustaining connection upon the feminine subject (Rich 52). In these lyrics, Radha's voice repeatedly reaches outward, calling, preparing, remembering, while Krishna remains elusive. This asymmetry does not diminish her agency but rather intensifies her experiential depth, positioning her as the *kendra* (centre) of emotional articulation.

At the same time, the tradition inaugurated by Jayadeva provides a crucial aesthetic precedent, where Radha's voice embodies both erotic desire and spiritual *utkantha* (yearning), establishing a paradigm in which feminine longing becomes the primary medium of divine experience (Miller 41). Nazrul inherits this lineage but internalizes it further, presenting Radha not only as a devotee but as a self-reflexive subject whose emotional labour sustains the entire devotional universe.

Across the selected lyrics, the Radha-figure is constituted through a continuous movement of searching, both geographical and emotional, where space becomes a projection of inner unrest. The shifting references to places associated with Krishna do not merely indicate physical absence but map a psyche in motion, attempting to locate the beloved within an ever-expanding horizon of desire. This dynamic resonates with Jacques Lacan's notion of desire as structured by lack, where the subject is perpetually oriented toward an unattainable object, producing an ongoing cycle of seeking rather than fulfilment (Lacan 287). The search, therefore, is not resolved but sustained as a condition of subjectivity.

Parallel to this movement is the ritualization of waiting, where time itself becomes aestheticized and disciplined. The repeated acts of preparation and anticipation transform waiting into a structured practice, aligning with Judith Butler's theory of performativity, wherein identity is constituted through reiterated acts (Butler 51). Here, femininity is enacted through waiting, adornment and emotional endurance, producing a subject whose devotion is inseparable from her capacity to wait. This waiting is not passive; it is an active, embodied process that sustains the presence of the absent beloved.

At the same time, the lyrics are marked by a quiet register of suffering, often expressed through tears and silence rather than overt lamentation. This subdued affect intensifies the emotional landscape, reflecting what Abhinavagupta describes in his commentary on *rasa* as the inward relish of emotion, where pain is aestheticized and transformed into a deeper *anubhava* (experience) (Gnoli 142). The tears, therefore, are not merely signs of *dukh* (sorrow) but become integral to the cultivation of devotional intensity.

This asymmetrical dynamic, where Radha invests emotionally while Krishna remains distant, can be further illuminated through Nancy Chodorow's analysis of relational subjectivity, where feminine identity is often formed through sustained emotional attachment and care (Chodorow 68). In Nazrul's lyrics, this asymmetry does not negate agency but rather foregrounds Radha's centrality as the bearer of affect.

Thus, Radha's devotion emerges as a form of gendered emotional labour, sustained through searching, waiting, and silent endurance, where longing itself becomes the primary mode of experiencing the divine.

V. DREAM, ABSENCE AND THE ELUSIVE BELOVED

In the selected lyrics, the dream emerges as a liminal space where the devotee briefly experiences intimate proximity with the divine beloved, only for that presence to dissolve upon awakening. This oscillation between fleeting union and renewed absence constructs Krishna as an elusive figure, whose inaccessibility sustains the intensity of longing and devotional desire.

The dream-lyric stages intimacy within a liminal zone where devotion briefly takes on a sensuous, embodied form before dissolving into renewed absence. The opening mood, “মোর ঘুমঘোরে এলে মনোহর... শ্রাবণ-মেঘে নাচে নটবর” (“In my drowsy sleep you came... the dancer moves like monsoon clouds”), signals a threshold state in which perception is fluid and affect heightened. The subsequent

imagery of secret proximity, “শিয়রে বসি... মোর বিকশিল আবেশে তনু নীপ-সম” (“seated by my pillow... my body blossomed in rapture like a kadamba bloom”), renders union tactile yet fragile, unfolding in a space neither fully real nor wholly imagined. This accords with Sigmund Freud’s view of dreams as sites where repressed wishes attain symbolic fulfilment, even as they remain structurally unstable (Freud 150).

Crucially, the lyric reframes devotional offering through intimate appropriation: “মোর ফুলবনে ছিল যত ফুল... নিলে তুলি’ খোঁপা খুলি’ কুসুম-ডোর” (“all the flowers I gathered... you took them, loosening my hair and weaving a garland”). The movement from altar to body transforms ritual into eroticized contact, echoing the *śṛṅgāra* dynamics theorized by Bharata Muni, where sensory and emotional registers coalesce into aesthetic experience (Bharata 6.33). At the level of Vaishnava theology, Rupa Goswami’s account of *vipralambha* clarifies how such fleeting union intensifies subsequent longing, making separation itself the ground of heightened relish (De 231).

The dream’s collapse, “স্বপনে কী যে কয়েছি... জাগিয়া কেঁদে ডাকি” (“what I said in the dream... waking, I weep and call”), restores absence, structuring desire as recurrence rather than completion. This pattern resonates with Jacques Lacan’s claim that desire is organized around lack and sustained by deferral (Lacan 235), and with Gaston Bachelard’s notion of oneiric images as intensifiers of intimate space that vanish on waking (Bachelard 29). Within Indian aesthetics, Abhinavagupta’s elaboration of *rasa* explains how such oscillation yields a distilled savoring of emotion beyond empirical reality (Gnoli 148), while Anandavardhana’s *dhvani* theory accounts for the suggestive excess that exceeds literal statement (Ingalls 95). Further, the *Advaita Vedanta* inflects this ephemerality: the beloved’s presence appears as a fleeting manifestation within consciousness, leaving behind an intensified awareness of separation. Together, these frameworks reveal Nazrul’s poetics as one where dream-union is not fulfilment but a catalytic interval that deepens longing and sustains sensuous devotion.

Krishna in these selected lyrics emerges as an elusive and ungraspable presence, one whose identity is constantly dispersed across shifting geographies and emotional registers. He is not anchored in a single space but moves between Braj, Mathura, and Dwaraka, creating a narrative geography of absence that resists fixation. This dispersal transforms him into a figure of perpetual deferral, where the beloved is always invoked but never fully located, reinforcing the structure of longing as constitutive of devotion. Such a configuration resonates with Jacques Derrida’s notion of *différance*, where meaning is

perpetually postponed and never fully present, existing only through traces and absence (Derrida 21).

This sense of elusiveness is further intensified through Nazrul’s deployment of nature imagery, which functions as an emotional extension of the devotee’s interior state. The Yamuna’s waters, monsoon clouds, night skies, and trembling winds become affective landscapes that mirror the instability of desire. In “ওরে নীল যমুনার জল! বল রে মোরে বল” (“O blue waters of the Yamuna, tell me, tell me”), the river is not merely a setting but a speaking witness to absence, carrying the burden of unanswered longing. Similarly, the recurrent invocation of “শ্রাবণ-মেঘ” (monsoon clouds) in “মোর ঘুমঘোরে এলে মনোহর” (“In my drowsy sleep you came, O Enchanter”) evokes a sensory atmosphere where sound, movement, and moisture become metaphors for emotional turbulence. The night itself in “প্রিয় এমন রাত যেন যায় না বৃথাই” (“Let not such a dear night pass in vain”) is charged with expectancy, functioning as a temporal container for desire.

Across the selected lyrics, Nazrul’s use of natural imagery extends beyond the already noted river, monsoon, and nightscape, forming a dense sensory field through which emotion is externalized and intensified. In “ব্রজ গোপী খেলে হোরী” (“The maidens of Braj play Holi”), the imagery of অশোক ফুল (ashoka blossoms) and ভ্রমর গুঞ্জন (the humming of bees) creates a springtime ecology where desire becomes organically embedded in nature. The flowering of ashoka is not merely decorative but suggests erotic blooming, aligning with classical Sanskrit poetics where seasonal nature mirrors emotional states (states) of *śṛṅgāra rasa* (Bharata 6.40). The bee’s humming, traditionally associated with longing in Indian lyric tradition, further amplifies the motif of restless desire seeking its object.

Similarly, in “মোর ঘুমঘোরে এলে মনোহর” (“In my drowsy sleep you came, O Enchanter”), the reference to নীপ-সম (kadamba-like bloom) transforms the body into a flowering landscape, suggesting a porous boundary between human and vegetal forms. The kadamba tree, deeply associated with Krishna iconography, functions here as a symbolic extension of divine intimacy, where nature participates in the aesthetics of devotion rather than merely framing it.

In “প্রিয় এমন রাত যেন যায় না বৃথাই” (“Let not such a dear night pass in vain”), the চাঁপা ফুল (champa flower) and কুসুম (blossoms) serve as delicate markers of anticipation and sensual preparation, reinforcing the idea that floral imagery operates as a medium of *भावत्मक* (affective) transition. From a theoretical standpoint,

Anandavardhana's *dhvani* theory explains how such images generate implied emotional resonance beyond literal meaning (Ingalls 107), while Abhinavagupta emphasizes their role in aestheticized emotional consciousness, where nature becomes *sahridaya* (emotionally attuned) with the subject (Gnoli 156). Thus, these floral and faunal imageries deepen Nazrul's poetics of desire by embedding *Madhura Bhava* within an ecologically charged, sensuous world.

Within Indian aesthetic theory, Abhinavagupta's articulation of *rasa* explains how such external landscapes are internalized as emotional experience, allowing nature to become *sahridaya* (emotionally attuned) with the devotee's consciousness (Gnoli 152). Likewise, Anandavardhana's theory of *dhvani* underscores how these natural images operate suggestively, pointing beyond literal description toward deeper emotional states (Ingalls 103). From a Western philosophical lens, Martin Heidegger's notion of being-in-the-world further clarifies how environment and self are inseparable, with nature functioning as an existential extension of lived experience (Heidegger 91). Additionally, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on embodied perception illuminates how sensory engagement with wind, water, and sound structures the devotee's consciousness as inherently relational (Merleau-Ponty 240).

Thus, Nazrul constructs a poetic universe where Krishna's absence is not a void but a productive force. Through dispersal, nature imagery, and affective extension, presence becomes momentary and unstable, while absence persists as the enduring condition that generates and sustains devotional intensity.

VI. CONCLUSION: REIMAGINING DEVOTION AS DESIRE

The preceding analysis of selected lyrics by Kazi Nazrul Islam demonstrates that *Madhura Bhava* operates in his poetic imagination as a sustained fusion of the sacred and the sensual, where devotional experience is inseparable from embodied desire. Across the lyrical spectrum, devotion is neither abstract nor purely ritualistic; rather, it is continuously mediated through bodily imagery, emotional intensity, and sensuous perception. This alignment with the Bhakti Movement reveals how Nazrul inherits a long-standing aesthetic tradition in which *prema* (love) becomes a legitimate pathway to the divine, yet simultaneously reconfigures it through a modern psychological depth.

A key finding of this study is the emergence of Radha as a psychologically complex subject rather than a static devotional emblem. Her voice is constructed through layers of anticipation, introspection, and affective endurance, positioning her as an active site of emotional

production. This aligns with Luce Irigaray's notion of feminine subjectivity as fluid and relational, where identity is formed through shifting dynamics of desire and absence (Irigaray 83). Radha's emotional world is thus neither passive nor derivative but constitutes a self-sustaining field of *anubhava* (experience), where longing becomes constitutive of being.

Central to this configuration is the role of longing (*viraha*) as the dominant mode of devotion. Rather than culminating in stable union, devotion is structured through continual deferral, where absence intensifies emotional depth. This resonates with Jacques Lacan's formulation of desire as rooted in lack, perpetually sustained through unattainable objects (Lacan 276). Within the Indian aesthetic tradition, Abhinavagupta further clarifies that such emotional oscillation is not a deficiency but the very condition for *rasa* experience, where aesthetic consciousness is heightened through relational tension (Gnoli 164).

Ultimately, Nazrul's reimagining of devotion transforms *Madhura Bhava* into an experiential and affective continuum in which sacred love is lived through the body, articulated through emotion, and sustained through absence. The Radha-Krishna dynamic thus becomes a site of ongoing psychological and aesthetic negotiation, where desire itself emerges as the central principle of devotional life.

The analysis of selected lyrical compositions by Kazi Nazrul Islam ultimately demonstrates a significant reconfiguration of the Radha-Krishna dynamic, wherein traditional devotional structures are internalized into a deeply reflective feminine consciousness. Rather than presenting Radha as a fixed icon of surrender, Nazrul's poetic imagination constructs her as a dynamic subject whose emotional world is shaped through continuous processes of longing, memory, anticipation, and imaginative union. This inward turn signals a shift from externalized mythic narration to interior psychological articulation, where devotion becomes a lived, affective experience rather than a purely doctrinal expression.

Within the broader framework of the Bhakti Movement, such a transformation is particularly significant, as it extends the classical model of *Madhura Bhava* into a modern register of subjectivity. The devotional relationship is no longer confined to ritual or allegory but is re-situated within the emotional and sensory interior of the devotee. The feminine voice, in this context, emerges not as secondary but as constitutive, producing meaning through acts of yearning and emotional articulation. This aligns with Simone de Beauvoir's insight that subjectivity is formed through lived experience and relational positioning, where

identity is continually shaped in relation to the other (Beauvoir 689).

At the same time, the persistent emphasis on absence and desire underscores how devotion in Nazrul's lyric world is structured through emotional intensity rather than fulfilment. This recalls Jacques Lacan's formulation of desire as perpetually deferred, sustained by lack rather than resolution (Lacan 278). Yet, in contrast to purely psychoanalytic frameworks, Nazrul's poetry transforms this lack into an aesthetic and spiritual condition, where absence becomes a productive space for imagination, sensuousness, and affective depth.

Consequently, Nazrul modernizes the Radha–Krishna dynamic by internalizing it into feminine consciousness, thereby transforming devotion into something deeply intimate, embodied, and emotionally charged. The divine is no longer an external object of worship alone but a presence that permeates thought, body, and feeling.

In Nazrul's lyric universe, the divine is not merely worshipped, it is desired, awaited, and felt in absence as much as in presence.

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Performing the Feminine: Gold and Gender Performance in Kerala

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Abstract— Cultural discourses and practices have cemented the gendered identification of gold with women. With the advent of androgynous fashion since 1920s, attempts have been made to blur the culturally-validated gendered association of fashion. Nevertheless, gold jewellery still remains closely associated with femininity. This paper, which reads two jewellery ads in Kerala, seeks to understand how jewellery remains entrenched within its traditional gendered associations while strategically co-opting more progressive discourses that challenge the stereotypical performances of gender.

Keywords— Advertisements, androgynous fashion, femininity, gender, jewellery, Kerala



Introduction

Jewellery, especially gold, occupies multiple social functions in Kerala. As K.C. Mujeebu Rahman and Anindita Chakrabarti observe, “Gold is worn and displayed on the body as a form of adornment; it creates a distinct public presence, including status claims, notion of self and modes of identification” (291). With the coming in of androgynous fashion, attempts have been made to make fashion gender fluid. Multiple examples of such instances are available. But has it really succeeded in making an impact, especially in the case of gold jewellery? Two jewellery advertisements were released; one in 2021 and one in 2025. The 2021 jewellery ad was by Bhima Jewellery, “Pure as Love”, featuring transgender actress Meera Singhania Rehani. The advertisement talks about the journey of a transwoman and the role that gold plays in every stage of her journey. The second advertisement directed by Prakash Varma and featuring Mohanlal was released by Vinsmera jewellery in 2025. This paper has selected these two advertisements as the primary texts as it is instrumental in comprehending how even seemingly ‘ground-breaking’ advertisements that were hailed by the public for their inclusive politics subscribes to and even solidifies the gendered associations between jewellery and femininity. The paper reads these texts using the methodological framework of visual analysis. It looks at the selected advertisements as visual

texts that communicate meaning through the visuals and as discourses that cannot be separated from larger cultural narratives about gender.

The advertisement portrays Mohanlal as actor Mohanlal, wearing gold necklace, ring and bracelet and appreciating his beauty. The actions are very feminine and the advertisement ends with the dialogue ‘anyone would be tempted’ (translated by self). In the ad, Mohanlal on wearing the jewellery showcases feminine features and emotions. In the Bhima jewellery ad, the person, on embracing her femininity adorns herself more and more with gold. Though these two television advertisements were launched and accepted as ground breaking, stereotype-breaking, on a closer reading it is evident that both these ads subtly show that gold jewellery is associated with what is feminine.

Gold jewellery and gender

Existing scholarship on women and jewellery in India has made pivotal contributions in the ways in which gold jewellery is considered as the marker of married women (Dixit 2017). While gold remains a socio-cultural signifier of status, the onus of embodying the status of the family rests on the woman. As observed by Aparna Dixit, “... woman heavily adorn herself to symbolise status of her in-laws and it’s very gendered role of jewellery” (29). This

could be read closely with the ways in which women are positioned simultaneously as custodians of culture and as consumers who can make choices about what to buy. This suggests how women are seen both as “consumers and objects of consumption” (Ciochetto). On the other hand, the amount of gold a married man wears are minimal and reduced to a wedding ring and if more, a gold chain. While men adorn themselves with minimal jewellery, the amount of jewellery that a woman is expected to wear after marriage is incapacitating or hindering with their daily lives (Dixit 29).

Coming to the context of Kerala, gold jewellery has an identity as malleable as gold. Back in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries gold had an identity associated more with wealth. It did have an identity associated with gender but it was more or less equally masculine and feminine. Back then, gold on men stood for power and there was nothing effeminate in wearing jewellery (Ushakumari 2022). The kings and landlords adorned themselves with gold in plenty because gold back then, was prominently a symbol of wealth. But, century forward, in the twenty first century, gold has more of a female centric identity. This could be of two major reasons. One, the death of matrilineal system and the coming in of patrilineal system where in the concept of dowry gains prominence and the idea of a bride clad in gold ornaments started becoming a normal thing. Second could be the coming in of the Christian missionaries, colonialism and the seeping in of Victorian morals and standards which considered jewellery in men to be an effeminate thing (Ushakumari 2022). This is evident in novels such as o Chandumenon’s *Indulekha*, which played a major role in transmitting Victorian morality in Kerala society (Ahinasha). The novel contrasts Suri Namboothiri, who wears lot of jewellery to show his wealth, with Madhavan who refrains from this practice. Here, Madhavan’s abstinence from gold is seen as a marker of his refinement, self-restraint and education. Thus, we can see a shift in the idea of jewellery on men, abstinence from gold becoming more masculine and patriotic.

Adornment occupies a major role in all the special occasions in a Malayali household and gold jewellery enjoys a prominent role. The argument that gold in the twenty first century has a female centric identity is proven by the amount of gold worn by the bride on her wedding day compared to the amount of gold that the groom wears. The bride, if from a family that can afford ample amount of gold, adorn herself with various gold jewellery, literally from head to toe; on the other hand, the gold on groom is just a few pieces of jewellery like, ring, chain and bracelet. Thus, it would not be wrong to say that now, “Jewelry is frequently used to emphasize the differences between the male and female body for the purpose of social interaction”

(Russel 2010). K.C. Mujeeb Rahman and Anindita Chakrabarti in the article “Malabar Gold: Relational, Reproductive Saving, Gendered Property and Wealth Accumulation among Kerala Muslims” talk about the gendered role of gold. They say that in Malabar, Muslim men do not wear gold jewellery. “According to sharia, they are not permitted to wear even a gold ring” (Rahman and Chakrabarti). They go on to say that this distinction is evident even in the way people gift gold; boys are given gold coins and girls are given gold jewellery. This practice very well illustrates the deeply embedded association of gold jewellery and femininity, which starts even from a young age.

In the twenty first century, gold is still a matter of wealth and pride in Kerala society but the gender aspect of the jewellery has taken a more prominent position than in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. From childhood, girls go through experimentation with jewellery. “They directly or indirectly understand their gender in the frame of ornamentation” (Dixit 29). While for men, gold is more about social and cultural aspect, for women, there is more. It is about adornment, beautification, docility, symbol of marriage, security and a reserve for her future. “Jewellery has frequently functioned as the primary or soul source of wealth under direct control of women” (Dixit 30). The very famous normative Malayalam expression, which later became the tagline of Bhima jewellery ad, “*pennaayal ponnu venam*” (a woman must have gold) is something that every Malayali who lived in the first quarter of the twenty first century has seen, heard on different occasions through different media and has become a very familiar idea, though there are active effort from various people to undo that idea. Bhima jewellery went a further step ahead and added a little more to “*pennaayal ponnu venam*”. They added, “*patharamaatavalkekan Bhima than swarnam charthidenam*”, roughly translated as ‘to bring out the best version of her, she must be adorned with gold jewellery from Bhima’. Only when a woman is adorned with gold jewellery, can she look the prettiest or be the best, claims the jewellery ad. “Gold is not only viewed as a sign of wealth, but also as an expression of femininity” (Lindberg). Anna Lindberg interviewed three women of Scheduled Castes who had similar attitudes of considering women without gold as masculine. In the interview she came across views such as “Gold makes me feel more woman-like, more feminine”, “I am sorry, but to us, women like you are a bit masculine because they don’t have any gold” (Lindberg).

One can hardly find a jewellery ad in Malayalam that has no female actor or model featured in it. If it is a jewellery ad, there will be a woman wearing gold ornaments, looking gorgeous. Despite multiple efforts to undo the concept that every woman must have gold, jewellery shops and

advertisements still make use of that idea to propagate that false desire in the minds of the parents of a girl that their daughter ought to have at least a minimal amount of gold. Anna Lindberg observes that women of all castes told her that they tried to give their daughters gold when they married to keep a reserve for survival in times of hardship and starvation. This was back in the 1980s and the tradition still continues in most part of Kerala. Parents start buying gold for their daughters, right from their childhood, especially if they belong to a wealthy enough family, because of the idea that the girl should have enough gold especially on her wedding day is deeply entrenched in the Malayali psyche. “Men accumulate as much gold as they can for their daughter’s or sister’s wedding” (Rahman and Chakrabarti). The association of women and jewellery has gone beyond the materialist aspects and has acquired symbolic value, as well. The kind of jewellery that a woman wears can at times indicate the marital status of a woman. A married woman is expected to wear a *taali*. The social norm dictates that a married woman wears a *taali*, which is indicative of her allegiance towards her husband, culture and social norms. The fact that jewellery is more of a symbol of marriage for women is evident from the fact that no matter what many pieces of gold jewellery is sold or pawned, the last piece of jewellery left will be the *taali*. Gold thus holds symbolic value in the life of a married woman.

Gender in culture must be understood through the socialization that males and females undergo as part of developing an identity. Jewelry can be seen as such a method of socialization – not a result of innate differences between the sexes, but one of many methods used to inculcate difference, in status and in self-perception. (Russel 2010)

The amount of jewellery one wears, the kind of jewellery one wears and the fashion of the jewellery are all indicative of various factors of an individual. The traditional Kerala jewellery like the *manga maala*, *nagapada maala*, *kaashu maala*, *palakka maala*, *pichimottu maala*, *elakathali*, *oddyanam*, *jimikki*, *thoda*, *minnu*, and other intricate temple-inspired designer jewellery, are all associated with the female gender. These are all worn by women. And this traditional jewellery is exclusive to women of the upper class and upper caste. The real traditional gold jewellery is more expensive compared to other gold ornaments. These gold ornaments, in addition to their materialistic value, has more symbolic value as well. They are meant to be of intergenerational inheritance, and holds great value in the social and cultural milieu.

The coming of androgynous fashion made great changes in the world of dressing and adornment, but it was mostly

about clothing. “At its core, androgynous fashion challenges the binary framework that has historically dictated separate clothing for men and women ... it questions the cultural codes that assign meaning to colors, cuts, fabrics, and accessories” (Seattle wire). Even in this era of androgynous fashion and blending in of jewellery and fashion with gender fluidity, gold jewellery still remains associated with femininity. In Kerala, the advent of androgynous fashion could not make any change in the deeply entrenched gendered aspect of gold jewellery. It still remains as an aspect of femininity. Even if there occurs a photoshoot or a short video showing men wearing traditional gold jewellery which is usually worn by women, it just remains in those videos/photos alone. Hardly can we see men imitating that fashion in the day-to-day life, not even during any special occasion.

Gold in Advertisements

Advertisements play a crucial role in the construction of meaning around things. Advertisements are good at creating new customs and practices in the society. Ads, especially television ads, though short, are very impactful on individuals. They are powerful and impactful tools in creating social and cultural norms and rules. They penetrate messages and ideologies deep into the psyche of people. They affect and influence the audience and the audience would be too passive to notice the impact that advertisements have on them. The primary aim of advertisements is to inform customers or audience. But advertisements also play a major role in shaping and developing the needs and wants of the customers. They can even create false needs among people. Advertisements not only creates false needs; they also create meanings and construct realities; “Media do not simply reflect reality; they help to construct it” (Hall 1997). The impact that the advertisements have on customers even affect rational decision making. It is capable of constructing meanings related to gender, identity and consumption. Advertising is not just about selling products — it plays a *cultural role* in defining who women are and what is expected of them (Ciochetto).

Jewellery ads in Kerala presents gold not just as a commodity but associates cultural meanings to it. It is pinned to familial bonds, relationship between father and daughter, brother and sister, mother and child, and every other familial bond, thus giving it a sublime value. Jewellery ads in Kerala have ever since been following the same patterns and same content. It has always shown a wedding, a jewellery clad bride, a traditional Hindu wedding mostly, thus portraying gold jewellery as “feminine signifiers” (Valjakka) of beauty. Hardly can we ever find a jewellery ad that is not set in the backdrop of a

wedding, or one that has no female actor/model in it. So, on looking through the lens of jewellery ads in Kerala, it is evident that gold jewellery has always been associated with women and femininity. The change in perception is visible in the change in portrayal of women in the traditional social roles to the employed independent women with an agency of their own. Even in such ads, even though the style and fashion of the jewellery might change, the ad still tells that she needs jewellery, that is now called statement jewellery.

The two television ads taken for study, especially the Vinsmera advertisement, had gained ample popularity during the time of release and created much discussion, especially in the social media. The Vinsmera advertisement, released on 18 July 2025, titled “Truly Irresistible” was considered pathbreaking. ‘The Print’ described it as a television ad that ‘broke away from the traditional tropes of jewellery ads.’ Mohanlal, gracefully embracing his feminine energy. The advertisement, unlike other jewellery ads, does not show a wedding that background the gold, but the shooting site of a jewellery advertisement and Mohanlal appears in the advertisement as actor/ superstar Mohanlal himself. He is there to act in the advertisement within the advertisement and suddenly the crew finds the jewellery box that carried the entire set of jewellery missing and Prakash Varma, the actor/director of the advertisement, when he reaches the caravan to inform Mohanlal about the missing jewellery, finds him wearing the jewellery and enjoying, seeing himself dolled up in the gold necklace and ring. The expression of shock on the face of Prakash Varma could be the indication of seeing the lost jewellery on Mohanlal or more likely, the astonishment of seeing Mohanlal wear the gold jewellery that is supposed to be worn by a female actor. There, apparently, is a female model present and is seen being introduced to Mohanlal as the person who is to act along with him in the ad, wearing the gold necklace. During this instant of the ad, the female model is seen wearing the necklace before placing it in the jewellery box. Even though, the idea of replacing the female actor to showcase the jewellery by Mohanlal could be pathbreaking, the concept of showing him not as the person that he usually is, but as someone embracing the femininity in him on wearing a piece of jewellery leaves the space to ponder on the association between gold jewellery and gender.

The advertisement, though is primarily concerned about beauty, self-acceptance, gender, performance and embracing one’s identity. The macho identity of the super star Mohanlal did help in reducing the troll and agitation that could have been created had it been casted for another actor. And this proves the point that this paper tries to put forward. In the jewellery ad, an actor who has almost always portrayed characters of peak ‘masculinity’, is seen

performing/ embracing his ‘feminine side’. Why would wearing jewellery bring out the feminine side of a person? A man can wear gold jewellery and need not feel feminine. The concept of gender fluidity might be the idea that the creators might have intended to convey through this television ad but the fact that they used gold to convey such an idea and the act of using gold to showcase the embracing of femininity indirectly points towards the fact of association of gold with femininity. So, directly or indirectly, the advertisement reinstates the idea of gold jewellery being associated with female and femininity.

The Bhima Jewellery advertisement, released on 17 November 2021, titled “Pure as Love”, features the transgender actress Meera Singhania Rehani. The theme of the ad, like most other jewellery ad, was a Hindu wedding, but featuring a transwoman and her story of becoming. The second part was new. A jewellery ad on theme of a Hindu wedding (a very hetero-patriarchal set up), featuring a transwoman as the bride was new to the Malayali audience considering the fact that the Bhima jewellery customer base is in rural India, and the acceptance of such an advertisement could be doubtful.

The ad shows the journey of gender transformation of the character in the ad. When the ad begins, we see the protagonist looking at the horizon. The person treasures a pair of gold anklet, probably given by the family. The ad shows the protagonist slowly getting access to various materialistic aspects that adds to the feminine gender like jewellery, lipstick, clothes etc. As the ad and the transformation progress, the changes are very evident. She gets rid of the facial hair, grows her hair long, is seen happier compared to the older days. But what is most striking is the jewellery that she now wears. She starts adorning herself with more gold jewellery. This points towards the idea that the more she gets close to her female identity, the more jewellery she possesses. Or rather, the more the jewellery that she wears, the more pronounced is her femininity. Her identity as a woman peak when she is shown as a bride, clad top to bottom in gold in plenty. This reiterates the idea of ‘gender performativity’ (Butler), that adorning oneself with gold in a way that appeals to the society gives you certain gender identity, thus ‘gender becoming a bodily discipline’ (Bordo). Gender is not something that you are but something that you repeatedly over time, says Butler. So, wearing a *taali*, adorning more and more with gold jewellery can be considered as acts that produce femininity over time.

The ad definitely checks the boxes of inclusivity and can certainly be viewed as a groundbreaking one in the field of advertising. While these are true, there is also this hidden point of perception that gold jewellery is very much

associated with femininity. The adding in of more and more gold during the progressing stages of transformation of the gender identity of the character subtly announces the belief that “*pennaayal ponnu venam*”, which is roughly translated as ‘a girl must have gold’. This is a Malayalam quote and in the Malayalam language, there exists no such Malayalam quote that suggests that a man must have gold. When “man must have gold” could mean wealth and financial betterment, “a woman must have gold” means a woman must have gold jewellery.

Thus, these two television ads, though they break away from the usual style and content of jewellery ads, still holds the association of gold jewellery and femininity strong and intact. The intention on the periphery could be inclusivity, but the fact that it is yet another marketing strategy, cannot be ignored. Whatever be the case, every advertisement on gold jewellery still features women, and still ties it to the idea of femininity. Thus, to say that the Kerala society, whatever be the change in style and fashion and adornment, still associates gold jewellery to femininity, would hardly be an exaggeration. Hardly can a girl walk around with a neck bare of any ornaments. She will definitely be the victim of the question of “why?”, which is not the case with men. Men can go gold-free. Gold still affects men, but not through wearability or adornment but about accumulation, in the economic sense. Even though, there are people who wish to go for a gold-free wedding, many would not succeed in convincing their family with their idea of a bride without any gold jewellery. They would be asked to wear at least fake gold jewellery. Any bride who decides to have a gold-free wedding, has to encounter umpteen number of questions. It is impossible for a Malayali psyche to see a bride without any gold jewellery. Much entrenched is the association of gold with femininity in Kerala that the adorned body becomes a cultural text.

From the two advertisements discussed above, it can be inferred that in spite of all the progress happening around, the world becoming more inclusive and progressive, the association of gold jewellery and femininity cannot be diminished. Even though gold still holds the symbol of wealth, and power, the association with femininity supersedes or overshadows the other aspects of gold. This is evident from the amount gold that adorns a bride on the wedding day in spite of the rising gold price. Whatever be the price of gold, a Malayali family still finds it difficult to get their daughter/sister married off without enough gold and the association of gold jewellery and femininity continues.

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Reconfiguring Gender Norms: Patriarchy, Female Desire, and Subversive Agency in Girish Karnad's *Nagamandala*

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Abstract— *Girish Karnad's Nagamandala (1988) occupies a prominent place in modern Indian drama for its critical engagement with patriarchy, gender oppression, and female subjectivity. Drawing upon Kannada folk traditions and oral narratives, Karnad reconstructs the experiences of women trapped within restrictive social institutions, particularly marriage. Through the character of Rani, the play interrogates the silencing of women's emotions, sexuality, and agency within patriarchal culture. The magical intervention of the Naga not only transforms Rani's personal life but also symbolically challenges the rigid structures governing female chastity and obedience. By combining folklore, symbolism, and magical realism, Karnad creates a dramatic space where women's desires are validated and oppressive gender norms are questioned. This article examines how Nagamandala redefines concepts such as fidelity, purity, and marital duty while simultaneously exposing the hypocrisy of patriarchal morality. The study further explores Karnad's use of folk motifs and narrative multiplicity as tools of feminist resistance. Ultimately, the paper argues that Nagamandala remains a powerful feminist text that continues to resonate in contemporary discussions on gender justice and women's empowerment in India.*



Keywords— *Girish Karnad, Nagamandala, Feminist Drama, Patriarchy and Gender Oppression, Women's Agency and Empowerment*

Introduction

Girish Karnad is widely recognized for blending mythology, folklore, and contemporary social concerns in Indian theatre. In *Nagamandala*, he adapts two Kannada folk tales and transforms them into a compelling critique of patriarchal structures embedded in Indian society. The play narrates the story of Rani, a young woman trapped in an emotionally barren marriage with Appanna, who neglects and confines her while maintaining an extramarital relationship. The entry of the Naga, a cobra assuming Appanna's form, introduces a magical dimension that becomes central to Rani's emotional and psychological awakening.

The play functions on multiple levels—as folklore, fantasy, psychological exploration, and feminist critique. Karnad's dramatic technique employs storytelling traditions traditionally associated with women, thereby foregrounding female voices and experiences often

excluded from dominant patriarchal discourse. The layered narrative structure and symbolic imagery allow Karnad to question conventional understandings of marriage, chastity, and feminine virtue.

Patriarchal Oppression and Domestic Confinement

One of the most significant themes in *Nagamandala* is the oppressive nature of patriarchal marriage. Rani enters married life with innocence and hope but soon discovers that marriage has reduced her to isolation and silence. Appanna exercises complete authority over her movements and emotions, locking her inside the house and denying her companionship. His treatment of Rani reflects the deeply rooted patriarchal belief that women are possessions meant to serve male interests.

Karnad presents Appanna as a representative of male privilege and social hypocrisy. While society tolerates his extramarital relationship, Rani is subjected to public

humiliation and suspicion merely because of her pregnancy. This unequal moral framework reveals how patriarchal societies regulate female sexuality while granting freedom and immunity to men.

Rani's loneliness becomes symbolic of the emotional alienation experienced by many women within traditional marital structures. Her repeated longing for conversation and affection emphasizes the denial of emotional fulfillment in patriarchal households. Karnad thereby critiques not only physical oppression but also the psychological consequences of gender-based control.

Female Desire and Emotional Awakening

A major feminist dimension of the play lies in its treatment of female desire. Through the magical presence of the Naga, Karnad creates a narrative space in which Rani experiences affection, intimacy, and emotional recognition for the first time. Unlike Appanna, the Naga listens to her, speaks lovingly, and fulfills her emotional needs. This transformation marks Rani's evolution from passive victimhood to self-awareness.

The use of magical realism enables Karnad to discuss female sexuality without directly confronting social taboos. The supernatural relationship between Rani and the Naga symbolizes suppressed desires that patriarchal culture attempts to silence. Rather than portraying female desire as immoral, the play legitimizes it as a natural and essential part of human identity.

Kurudavva and the Flames also play crucial symbolic roles in supporting women's voices. The Flames, who narrate stories exchanged among women, represent collective female memory and oral tradition. Through these figures, Karnad acknowledges storytelling as a form of resistance against patriarchal silence.

The Chastity Test and Subversion of Patriarchal Morality

The snake ordeal constitutes the dramatic climax of the play and serves as Karnad's strongest critique of patriarchal notions of chastity and purity. When accused of infidelity, Rani is forced to prove her innocence before the village elders by holding a cobra. However, her statement during the ordeal is intentionally ambiguous, allowing her to speak the truth while simultaneously exposing the absurdity of patriarchal judgment.

The cobra's protective response transforms Rani from an accused woman into a divine figure worthy of worship. This moment symbolically overturns patriarchal authority. The same society that doubted and humiliated her suddenly elevates her to the status of a goddess. Karnad thereby reveals the instability and contradiction inherent in patriarchal morality.

The ordeal also recalls the trial by fire undergone by Sita in the *Ramayana*. However, unlike the traditional epic narrative that reinforces female submission, *Nagamandala* reinterprets the ordeal as an act of resistance and empowerment. Rani emerges not as a passive sufferer but as a woman who reclaims control over her identity and social position.

Ambiguity and the Limits of Liberation

Although the play concludes with apparent reconciliation and transformation, Karnad avoids presenting a simplistic vision of liberation. Rani gains recognition and authority within the household, and Appanna appears remorseful and transformed. Nevertheless, her empowerment remains largely confined within domestic boundaries.

The ambiguous ending reflects the complexity of social change in patriarchal societies. While individual transformation is possible, deeply entrenched gender hierarchies continue to shape social realities. Karnad's refusal to provide a completely idealistic resolution strengthens the realism and intellectual depth of the play.

CONCLUSION

Nagamandala remains one of the most influential feminist plays in modern Indian literature. Through folklore, symbolism, and magical realism, Girish Karnad challenges patriarchal constructions of femininity, chastity, and marriage. Rani's journey from silence and oppression to selfhood and recognition represents the struggle of women seeking dignity and emotional fulfillment within restrictive social systems.

The play not only critiques patriarchal hypocrisy but also celebrates the transformative power of storytelling and female imagination. By validating women's voices and desires, Karnad redefines the possibilities of gender relations in Indian society. Even today, *Nagamandala* continues to inspire critical discussions on gender justice, female agency, and the politics of cultural tradition.

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Exploring the Timeless Dimensions of the *Mahabharata* through Devdutt Pattanaik's *Jaya*: Re-Locating Draupadi in the Modern Indian Imaginary

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Abstract— *The Mahabharata, an epic that continues to captivate audiences across generations, presents a rich tapestry of characters and themes that transcend time and space and impact culture even today, centuries after it was written. Draupadi, the central character, stands out as a complex and enigmatic figure whose portrayal has evolved over centuries of retelling. From her birth to 'swayamvara' (self-choice to marry) to her eventual fate, Draupadi's life reflects timeless themes of strength and resilience. Draupadi's character embodies complexities that resonate with contemporary discourses on gender, power, and agency, especially in the Indian subcontinent. She defies limitations in her quest for justice and empowerment and has fuelled the imagination of many writers for years. This paper will explore the portrayal of Draupadi across various retellings and interpretations, particularly drawing from Devdutt Pattanaik's comprehensive narrative in Jaya. Pattanaik's Jaya bridges ancient mythology and modern interpretation, offering readers a fresh perspective on the Mahabharata's relevance to contemporary life. This paper uses feminist theories to analyse and re-locate Draupadi in the modern Indian imagination shaped by the cultural dynamics or politics of the doctrines of Hinduism.*



Keywords— *Mythology, Draupadi, cultural dynamics, Dharma, feminism, agency*

I. INTRODUCTION

In India, feminism often intertwines with cultural narratives, including mythology, profoundly influencing societal values and norms. Indian mythology is rich with complex female figures, such as the Hindu goddesses Durga, Kali, Sita, and Draupadi, who embody a range of qualities from strength and independence to sacrifice and devotion. Feminists in India have sometimes reinterpreted these figures to challenge patriarchal interpretations and to offer alternative narratives of empowerment. Durga and Kali are often reinterpreted as symbols of feminine power and resistance, challenging the notion that women should be passive or submissive. Sita, traditionally seen as the epitome of wifely devotion, has been reimagined by some feminists as a figure who exercises agency within the constraints of her circumstances, particularly in her decision to return to the earth at the end of the great Indian epic,

Ramayana. Western feminism, particularly in its second and third waves, has often taken a more critical stance towards cultural myths and traditional narratives, especially those perceived as upholding patriarchal values.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In many cases, Western feminists have sought to deconstruct or challenge these myths to expose and dismantle the underlying power structures. Feminists have critically examined the figure of Eve from the Bible as a symbol of how women have been historically blamed for sin and moral weakness. Feminists like Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, in her work *In Memory of Her* (1984), challenge these narratives by reinterpreting them from a feminist theological perspective. Cinderella and other fairy tales have been critiqued for promoting passive female roles and

the idea that a woman's ultimate happiness lies in marriage. The story of Medusa, traditionally seen as a monstrous figure, has been reinterpreted by feminists as a symbol of female rage and victimhood. This is evident in works like *The Medusa Reader* (2003) by Marjorie Garber, where Medusa's narrative critiques misogyny and explores themes of female empowerment. These examples illustrate how Indian and Western feminists' approach cultural narratives differently, reflecting their unique contexts and priorities in pursuing gender equality. In both contexts, the goal is to achieve gender equality and empower women. The methods, however, are tailored to the specific cultural, historical, and social landscapes in which these feminisms operate.

Draupadi, the chief female protagonist of the great Indian epic *Mahabharata*, has been reinterpreted and reimagined in various literary works, both within the Indian subcontinent and beyond. The focus of this paper is to re-locate Draupadi in the modern Indian imagination shaped by the cultural dynamics or politics of the doctrines of Hinduism. Many authors and playwrights have explored her inner thoughts, emotions, and motivations, adding psychological depth to her character. *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) by Chitra Divakaruni Banerjee is a retelling of the *Mahabharata* from Draupadi's perspective. Banerjee challenges traditional narratives that depict Draupadi as a passive victim, instead portraying her as a resilient and assertive woman who navigates the complexities of her world with strength and grace. By giving voice to Draupadi's inner world, Banerjee invites readers to reconsider their perceptions of this iconic figure and appreciate her role's complexity within the *Mahabharata* narrative. In doing so, the novel enriches our understanding of Draupadi as a character. It offers a fresh perspective on the timeless themes of love, loyalty, and destiny that permeate the epic. Throughout the novel, the dynamics between one of the major characters of the epic, Karna, the son of Hindu Sun god Surya, a great warrior, and Draupadi evolves amidst the backdrop of the *Mahabharata*'s political intrigue and epic battles. In Banerjee's narrative, Karna and Draupadi's encounters are emotionally intense as they navigate the complexities of duty, honour, and forbidden desire. In Pratibha Ray's *Yagnaseni* (1984), Draupadi is a figure of immense moral strength who fulfills her duties as a wife to the five Pandavas despite her personal feelings and the injustices she suffers. Ray emphasizes Draupadi's role as a dutiful wife and a symbol of righteousness, portraying her as an ideal woman, unwavering in her adherence to her moral responsibilities. Saiswaroopa Iyer's *"Draupadi: The Tale of an Empress"* (2019), Ira Mukhoty's *Song of Draupadi* (2021) and Koral Dasgupta's *Draupadi* (2022) each offer a unique retelling of the *Mahabharata*, centring on the often-

overlooked perspectives of its women, particularly Draupadi. Mukhoty's narrative focuses on the lives of key female figures, presenting them with a deep historical and psychological lens. Dasgupta's work, interwoven with poetry, provides an intimate exploration of Draupadi's inner world and emotions, creating a lyrical and reflective portrait. Iyer's approach is episodic, focusing on defining moments in Draupadi's life, highlighting her evolution from a queen to an empress. On the contrary, Devdutt Pattanaik's *Jaya* (2010) treats Draupadi more as a character within a grand narrative, with her symbolic role in the epic taking precedence over her personal story.

III. RESEARCH GAP

Existing scholarship on reinterpretations of the *Mahabharata* has extensively examined Draupadi as a central female figure; however, limited attention has been paid to the manner in which Devdutt Pattanaik's *Jaya* positions her primarily within the broader moral and philosophical framework of the epic rather than as an autonomous narrative voice. Unlike contemporary retellings that foreground Draupadi's personal experiences and subjectivity, Pattanaik's narrative presents her largely as a symbolic figure whose experiences contribute to larger concerns of justice, dharma, and the consequences of human actions. Although Draupadi receives significant narrative attention in *Jaya*, there remains a noticeable gap in critical studies examining how her characterization functions as a vehicle for the epic's ethical and philosophical discourse. Therefore, this paper seeks to address this gap by analysing how Pattanaik emphasizes Draupadi's symbolic significance within the grand narrative structure of the *Mahabharata*.

In *Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata*, Devdutt Pattanaik provides a subtle portrayal of Draupadi, one of the most complex and pivotal characters in the epic. Draupadi is born out of a sacrificial fire, that makes her a divine figure with a predetermined destiny. Her birth is often seen as a response to her father's desire for revenge against Drona (the warrior Brahmin who instructs the Kuru dynasty), and she is prophesied to bring about great change. As far as marriage and polyandry are concerned, Draupadi becomes the wife of the five Pandavas due to misunderstandings and the peculiar circumstances of their lives. This polyandrous marriage challenges societal norms and is a significant aspect of her identity. It is important to note that despite the complexities of her marriage, Draupadi is portrayed as a devoted wife who maintains her dignity and commands respect from her husbands. Her humiliation in the Kaurava court, where she is disrobed, is one of the most pivotal and traumatic events

in the *Mahabharata*. This incident highlights the themes of powerlessness and injustice. Draupadi vows that she will not tie her hair until it is washed in the blood of those who wronged her. Her vow symbolizes her resolve and the driving force behind the Pandavas' quest for justice. She is depicted as a woman of intelligence and insight, who questions the norms and decisions that affect her life and the lives of her husbands. Throughout the epic, she serves as a moral compass for the Pandavas, challenging them to uphold dharma and seek justice. Her story continues to inspire discussions about women's rights, justice, and empowerment in contemporary society which is dealt with in this article. In *Jaya*, Devdutt Pattanaik emphasizes Draupadi's multifaceted character, highlighting her as a central figure in the narrative of the *Mahabharata*. Her journey is not only of suffering and struggle but also of immense strength and influence, making her one of the epic's most memorable and impactful characters.

Violation of Dharma in Marriage:

Draupadi's character in the *Mahabharata* indeed presents a contrast to many of the prescriptions found in the *Manusmriti* or *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, ancient text on principles governing Hindu society. The *Manusmriti*, an ancient legal text, generally promotes monogamy but allows polygamy under certain conditions. According to *Manusmriti*:

वन्द्याष्टमेऽधिवेद्याब्दे दशमे तु मृतप्रजा ।

एकादशे स्त्रीजननी सद्यस्त्वप्रियवादिनी ॥ ८१ ॥

vandhyāṣṭame'dhivedyābde daśame tu mṛtaprajā |

ekādaśe strījananī sadyastvapriyavādinī || 81 || (Tr. Jha 9.81)

It does not explicitly mention polyandry but provides rules for supersession, where a husband may take another wife if the first wife is barren, produces only daughters, or has children who die. Polyandry does not fit within these prescriptions, as the text is primarily concerned with a man having multiple wives for specific reasons related to progeny and household duties. Unlike the *Mahabharata*, where polyandry serves as a tool for unity and divine justice, the *Manusmriti* focuses on practicalities related to lineage and male offspring, with no explicit mention of polyandry as an acceptable practice. While *Manusmriti* advocates for monogamy, Draupadi's marriage to the five Pandavas significantly departs from this norm. Her unique marital situation does not align with the monogamous ideal presented in the *Manusmriti*. The concept of polyandry in the *Mahabharata* and the rules laid down in the *Manusmriti* present two distinct perspectives on the practice of a woman having multiple husbands. In the *Mahabharata*, the story of Kunti, the mother of Pandavas, inadvertently instructing her

sons to share Draupadi is a result of a misunderstanding when Kunti, without looking, tells Arjuna to share what he has brought home with his brothers. Despite realizing her mistake, Kunti insists on her words being followed, citing the need for unity among her sons, the Pandavas. Yudhishtira, the eldest of Pandavas and protector of dharma supports this decision by narrating an ancient story of Vidula, who married the ten Prachetas brothers, showing that such arrangements have historical precedent. It is worth noting that dharma related to marriage is changed as per convenience as described in the narrative. By removing the element of choice, Draupadi is presented as a woman fulfilling a divine role rather than exercising personal agency in her marital arrangement. In contemporary society, the story of Draupadi raises questions about how power and agency are wielded in relationships and how societal norms can limit women's choices. It reflects ongoing struggles for gender equality and the fight against patriarchal structures that restrict women's autonomy. The *Mahabharata* narrative reflects how power can be used to justify women's roles and decisions, often without their consent. Nowadays, similar justifications are used to control and limit women's choices, using cultural, religious, or social norms as rationale. Draupadi's marriage in the *Mahabharata* is justified through the power dynamics of her time, reflecting broader themes of duty and destiny. Her marriage also highlights issues of gender inequality and the use of power to control women's lives. The condition that Draupadi would walk through fire to regain her virginity before moving to the next husband symbolically highlights the objectification and ritualistic treatment of her role as a wife, emphasizing purity and service rather than personal agency or desire.

The Pandavas were allowed to marry other women during the years they were not with Draupadi, highlights a disparity in the freedoms afforded to men and women. The Pandavas' ability to seek other partners contrasts with Draupadi's more constrained marital obligations. It is clearly stated by Pattanaik in *Jaya* that "In Indonesia, Arjuna is said to have married seven women besides Draupadi" (Pattanaik 120). Likewise,

Yudhistira married Devika, the daughter of Govasana of the Saivya tribe, and begat a son called Yaudheya upon her. Bhima married Valandhara, the daughter of the king of Kashi, and begat upon her a son named Sarvaga. Nakula married Karennumati, the princess of Chedi, and begat a son named Niramitra upon her. Sahadeva obtained Vijaya, the daughter of Dyutimat, the king of Madra, and begat a son named Suhotra upon her. (116)

Draupadi's demand that these other wives should not reside in Indraprastha represents one of her few assertions of

agency, which is later violated with the arrival of Subhadra, Arjuna's wife. It suggests a desire to maintain her position and control within the household, but it also underscores her limited power, as the arrangement still primarily benefits the Pandavas. In modern contexts, similar issues arise when women's roles are defined by familial duties and societal norms, leading to suppressed identities and constrained freedoms. The treatment of Draupadi in the *Mahabharata* reflects the complexities of power dynamics, gender roles, and agency. While she had certain demands met, the overall structure of her marriage underscores the suppression of her identity in favour of familial harmony and duty.

IV. CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

Cultural diplomacy is a key aspect of soft power, and just as soft power relies on the attractiveness of culture, ideals, and policies to influence others, Draupadi's interactions and decisions reflect the influence of cultural values and wisdom in shaping outcomes. Soft power "is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payment. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies. When our policies are seen as legitimate in the eyes of others, our soft power is enhanced" (Nye X). Kunti's role in facilitating the polyandrous marriage of her sons to Draupadi can indeed be seen as an exercise of *soft power*. Kunti's influence over her sons and Draupadi is not based on coercion but rather on the power of her authority as a mother, her wisdom, and her ability to appeal to the higher ideals of unity and family duty. Kunti's role in orchestrating the polyandrous marriage of her sons to Draupadi is a clear example of soft power at work when Kunti uses her influence, wisdom, and emotional appeal to achieve her goal of keeping her sons united. Kunti's approach is a masterful use of persuasion and attraction, rather than force, to maintain family unity. Draupadi's acceptance can be read as a response to Kunti's soft power, where cultural values, maternal authority, and the appeal to family unity and harmony influence her decision.

According to Joseph Nye, "Soft power rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others" (5). Draupadi's narrative can be considered a case in point of analysis to explore how similar forms of soft power like social expectations, cultural traditions, and internalised patriarchy continue to shape women's experiences and limit their autonomy. Draupadi's story is not just about her suffering but also about how her identity is constructed through her relationships with the men in her life: her husbands, her father, and her tormentors. This story reflects the broader societal tendency to define women in relation to men. The soft power exercised on Draupadi in the *Mahabharata*

offers a rich narrative for examining the subtleties of power, gender, and resistance. Her story is a powerful lens to explore ongoing struggles for women's autonomy and equality in historical and contemporary contexts.

Voice of Draupadi: Draupadi's questioning of the eldest of the Pandavas, Yudhishtira's right to stake her after losing himself in the gambling game, can be seen as an assertion of her agency, challenging the patriarchal norms of her time. Her refusal to remain silent and passive in the face of injustice aligns with modern feminist ideals, where a woman's right to question authority and assert her dignity is central. It is pertinent to note that Draupadi's question about Yudhishtira's right to stake her after losing himself in the gambling game irked Duryodhana. "He felt it was beneath him to be answerable to any woman, even Draupadi" (Pattanaik 145). The act of staking Draupadi in a gambling game and her subsequent humiliation by Duryodhana and Dussasana are emblematic of how women have historically been treated as property or objects within patriarchal societies. Draupadi's question, "Is this dharma, to treat a woman so?" (145) during her public humiliation in the Kaurava court, is a powerful moment that resonates deeply with issues of injustice and the denial of voice, both in her context and in contemporary society. Draupadi's question is timeless, embodying the struggle against injustice and the demand for a voice in a world that often seeks to silence the marginalized. Motswapong Pulane Elizabeth rightly mentioned in her article "Understanding Draupadi as a paragon of gender and resistance" that "Through subversion, she becomes that which resists 'counter' male knowledge, power and glory. By so doing, Draupadi rejects the binary structures of patriarchal discourses of the political, social, and ideological forces of the society, hence subverting commodification in the society and preceding her identity as a human, not a commodity." Her courage in the face of overwhelming odds continues to inspire and resonate with contemporary movements for justice, equality, and human dignity. Draupadi is often denied agency and voice in crucial moments despite being a powerful and intelligent woman. Feminist theorist Martha C. Nussbaum critiques this objectification in her article "Objectification," where she highlights seven features of objectification. The seven features are:

1. *instrumentality*: the treatment of a person as a tool for the objectifier's purposes;
2. *denial of autonomy*: the treatment of a person as lacking in autonomy and self-determination;
3. *inertness*: the treatment of a person as lacking in agency, and perhaps also in activity;

4. *fungibility*: the treatment of a person as interchangeable with other objects;
5. *violability*: the treatment of a person as lacking in boundary-integrity;
6. *ownership*: the treatment of a person as something that is owned by another (can be bought or sold);
7. *denial of subjectivity*: the treatment of a person as something whose experiences and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account. (Nussbaum 257)

Treatment of Draupadi, especially during the disrobing incident at the assembly hall in *Mahabharata*, aligns with the features of objectification. There is a denial of subjectivity, and she is treated as an enslaved person who can be traded. Further, she also serves as a tool for the objectifier's purposes. In the assembly hall Karna, whom Draupadi had disqualified from participating in her 'Swayamvara,' calls her "a whore, public property, to be treated as your master's will" (Pattanaik 146). Here, Draupadi is treated as an object of trade in the game of dice. It is pertinent to note Pattanaik's point about situating this incident in contemporary society. Pattanaik interprets Draupadi's disrobing as more than just a physical act of violence; he sees it as a symbolic representation of the collapse of civilization. He says, "The unclothing of Draupadi is not merely the unclothing of a woman; it represents the collapse of civilization, the move from field to forest, from Gauri to Kali, when dharma is abandoned and Matsya Nyaya reigns supreme, so that might dominates the meek" (147). Gauri, representing the nurturing and gentle aspect of the feminine, is replaced by Kali, who embodies destruction and rage. This metaphor illustrates the destruction of dharma (righteousness) and the rise of adharma (unrighteousness) in society. (147)

In the modern context, this metaphor can be applied to situations where societal norms and ethical values are eroded, leading to chaos and injustice. For instance, when human rights are violated, the rule of law is subverted, or when power is used to exploit the vulnerable, it represents a "collapse of civilization" (147) in Pattanaik's terms. The rise of authoritarian regimes, the marginalization of minorities, and the exploitation of natural resources without regard for future generations are modern parallels to the Matsya Nyaya (the law of the fish, where the big fish eats the small fish) that Pattanaik mentions. Matsya Nyaya reflects a world where might makes right, and the powerful dominate the weak, abandoning the principles of justice and equity. Pattanaik's critique of the "hair-splitting arguments" (147) regarding whether a man can gamble his wife after losing himself speaks to a broader issue of how legal and moral justifications are often used to obscure the

fundamental injustice of a situation. In the story, Draupadi is treated as chattel, a mere object to be gambled away, which raises questions about her agency, autonomy, and the value of women in that society. Mistreatment of Draupadi can be read as the way legal systems and societal norms often fail to protect women and marginalised groups from exploitation. For example, debates about the legality of certain actions (such as marital rape, domestic violence, or human trafficking) can sometimes distract from the underlying moral issue: the treatment of human beings as property or commodities. The focus on legal technicalities can obscure the fact that, fundamentally, people are being dehumanized and their rights violated.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of the 'subaltern' from her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* offers another lens to understand Draupadi's humiliation. Spivak examines how marginalized voices, particularly women are often silenced or misrepresented in dominant discourses. Draupadi, as a woman in a patriarchal society, occupies a subaltern position where the male characters around her constantly undermine her agency. When Karna insults Draupadi, he effectively silences her by reducing her to a mere object of male discourse. Despite her earlier act of agency in choosing her husband, Draupadi's voice and choice are disregarded in the public sphere, illustrating the broader cultural pattern Spivak identifies, where subaltern women are not allowed to articulate their identities and desires. While Draupadi's actions challenge patriarchal norms, Karna's response seeks to reassert those norms through the mechanisms of shame and control.

V. DHARMA CONSEQUENTIALITY

The consequences of actions, particularly those taken in the name of dharma (moral duty or righteousness), are significant and far-reaching, often extending beyond the immediate context to impact the broader moral and social order. In the context of the *Mahabharata*, particularly in the case of Draupadi's story, this concept plays a crucial role in understanding the ethical dilemmas the characters face and the outcomes of their decisions. Yudhishtira's choice to gamble Draupadi away in the dice game is a pivotal example of dharma consequentiality. While Yudhishtira might have believed he was acting according to his duty as a Kshatriya (warrior) by participating in the game, the consequences of this action were catastrophic not just for Draupadi but for the entire Kuru dynasty. Draupadi's humiliation leads to the eventual downfall of the Kauravas and the great war of Kurukshetra. Similarly, Yudhishtira's decision to maintain the secrecy of the Pandavas' identities during their exile, even at the cost of Draupadi's safety and dignity, is another example of dharma consequentiality. His

adherence to the vow of anonymity (a key aspect of their dharma during the exile) results in Draupadi being subjected to further suffering, which fuels the rage and desire for revenge that drives much of the epic's later events. Draupadi's experiences reflect how the violation of dharma, particularly through the mistreatment of women, has broader social and moral consequences. The epic suggests that when dharma is not upheld, especially in treating the vulnerable, it leads to societal collapse and widespread suffering. Singh's article "Jurisprudence in and As 'Mahabharata': An Edifying Epic" (2010) aptly mentions that Sati (burning of a widow on the funeral pyre of her husband) and slavery was abolished not with "an approach of avoidance but owing to society's ability and willingness to come to grips with reasonableness" (173). On the contrary, the approach of avoidance citing dharma was adopted by the members of the royalty at the assembly hall. At the same time, the disrobing incident occurred, objectifying Draupadi as an entity to be gambled.

Dhritarashtra, the blind king of the Kuru clan, attempts to stop Draupadi from cursing his family, reflecting his recognition of the grave injustice that has occurred in his court. By admitting that it was a disgrace that he could not stop the dice game, Dhritarashtra acknowledges his failure as the patriarch of the Kuru dynasty. His powerlessness to prevent the humiliation of Draupadi underscores his moral weakness and the erosion of dharma within his court. He offers three boons to Draupadi in order to stop her from cursing. Draupadi's first request for the freedom of her husbands demonstrate her primary concern for their well-being and their restoration to dignity. Draupadi's decision to forgo the third boon, stating that "greed is unbecoming of a warrior's wife," (148) reveals her deep moral integrity and wisdom. In a moment where she could have asked for anything, she chooses to exercise restraint. This act of renunciation is significant as it distinguishes Draupadi from others in the epic who are driven by greed or desire for power. It also reinforces her commitment to dharma and the principles of honour that guide her actions. Draupadi's actions in this episode exemplify the ideal of restraint, a key aspect of dharma. Her refusal to ask for more than what is necessary demonstrates her understanding that true strength lies not in the accumulation of power or wealth but in the adherence to righteous principles. Her restraint contrasts sharply with the greed and ambition that drive many other characters in the *Mahabharata*, particularly the Kauravas.

VI. CONCLUSION

The study of Draupadi's portrayal in *Mahabharata* with special reference to *Jaya* reveals how cultural narratives

have been used to reinforce or challenge traditional gender roles. Devdutt Pattanaik's analysis of Draupadi's disrobing in the *Mahabharata* serves as a potent reminder of the dangers of abandoning ethical principles in favour of power and control. In the modern context, it makes us reflect on how legal systems, cultural norms, and societal values can be manipulated to justify exploitation and injustice. It calls for a deeper commitment to dharma, not just as a legal or religious principle, but as a fundamental ethical guideline for ensuring that all members of society are treated with dignity and respect. This reflection is especially relevant in a world where power dynamics favour the strong over the weak, often at the cost of justice and humanity.

The worship of Draupadi as Virapanchali in the Tamil tradition, particularly in the folk and rural cultures of Tamil Nadu, offers a fascinating lens through which to view her character in a modern context. Draupadi's transformation from a historical and mythological figure into a deity revered for her strength, resilience, and warrior-like qualities reflects broader societal values and the role of mythology in shaping cultural identity. The reverence for Draupadi as Virapanchali can be seen as a form of cultural resistance to patriarchal norms that often seek to limit or control women's roles. By elevating Draupadi to the status of a goddess, Tamil culture acknowledges and venerates her struggles, assertiveness, and unwavering demand for justice, which resonates with modern feminist ideals. Likewise, the worship of Draupadi as a 'fierce virgin-goddess in South India' (Pattanaik 150), especially through the re-enactment of the *Mahabharata* and the ritual of fire-walking, offers a unique perspective on the themes of gender, responsibility, and justice. The ritual of fire-walking at the end of the festival, where young men walk on fire, is believed to symbolize an act of collective expiation for the failure of Draupadi's five husbands to protect her. These practices highlight the deep cultural and religious significance of Draupadi's story, emphasizing the need for collective accountability and the power of ritual in addressing moral and ethical failures. In the modern context, this tradition serves as a powerful reminder of the ongoing struggle for gender justice and the importance of acknowledging and atoning for past wrongs.

DECLARATION

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of the Film *To Live* from the Perspective of New Historicism

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Abstract— *From the perspective of New Historicism and in combination with multimodal discourse analysis theory, this paper explores the historical narration and discourse representation in the film To Live, directed by Zhang Yimou. By analyzing the interaction among three modalities in the film—dialogue, image, and sound—the study reveals how the film reflects the core ideas of New Historicism. These ideas mainly include the marginalization of historical narration, the localization of history in everyday life, and the transformation of inevitable history into accidental history. This study provides a new perspective for understanding the film To Live. It also offers theoretical support for the application of multimodal discourse analysis in film and television texts.*



Keywords— *New Historicism; the film To Live; multimodal discourse analysis*

I. INTRODUCTION

The novel *To Live*, written by Yu Hua in 1992, tells the story of Fugui's difficult and tragic life. From a wealthy family background to extreme poverty, Fugui experiences the deaths of family members, wars, and various disasters. Through these sufferings, he gradually reflects on the meaning of life and the resilience of human survival. The novel presents both the cruelty of history and the struggle of individuals against fate. The work embodies the characteristics of historical narration and shows a strong tendency toward New Historicism.

New Historicist novels challenge and deconstruct traditional historical narratives. Through their own

perspectives and discourse strategies, such novels reinterpret and recreate certain historical events and narratives. What they reflect is the enduring nature of humanity in real life, as well as a deep exploration of history and human existence (Chen Yi, 2023). In 1994, *To Live* was adapted into a film. As an audiovisual medium, film often produces a stronger communicative effect than literary works because of its unique visual and auditory forms of expression. Different symbolic forms, such as images, sounds, and language, interact with one another and together construct the discourse system of the film. The meaning of discourse is not generated by linguistic symbols alone. Instead, it is often produced through the

interaction and cooperation of linguistic and non-linguistic symbols (Yan Jing, 2024). In the field of discourse studies, multimodal discourse analysis has become one of the major research directions in modern linguistics. It mainly studies how different symbolic resources work together within the same discourse to construct meaning.

After the introduction of New Historicism and multimodal discourse analysis into China, many scholars began to apply these theories in their research. Multimodal discourse analysis has often been used in studies of film and television works. Li Yan (2022) reviewed domestic studies on multimodal discourse analysis before 2022 and summarized the development and research trends in this field. Yan Jing et al. (2024), with the help of multimodal software, conducted an empirical analysis of the food documentary film *A Bite of China: Chinese New Year* from three dimensions: discourse context, discourse expression, and discourse meaning. At the same time, some scholars have examined literary works and films from the perspective of New Historicism. In a master's thesis, Lu Xiaoli (2007) analyzed Chinese films through the lens of New Historicism and found that Chinese New Historicist films possess strong local characteristics. Wang Xiying (2013), guided by New Historicist theory, studied the literary works *To Live* and *Brothers*. The study aimed to understand the grand narrative strategies of New Historicism and the way texts abandon mainstream ideology.

To sum up, there are still relatively few studies that combine New Historicism with multimodal discourse analysis in the analysis of films or literary works. Therefore, this study adopts the perspective of New Historicism and integrates multimodal discourse analysis to examine the New Historicist ideas presented in the film adaptation of Yu Hua's novel *To Live*. The study aims to fill this research gap and provide new ideas and methods for related research.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper is based on the perspective of New Historicism and incorporates the theory of multimodal discourse analysis in discourse studies. It analyzes and discusses the New Historicist elements contained in the film adaptation of the novel *To Live* by the well-known Chinese writer Yu Hua. The following sections provide a brief overview of these two theories.

2.1 New Historicism

New Historicism originated in the United States in the 1970s. In 1982, Stephen Greenblatt, a professor at the University of California, introduced the concept of "New Historicism" in the introduction to a special issue of the journal *Genre*. He used the term to describe the literary criticism practiced by himself and other scholars with similar academic interests (Wang Xiaotong, 2007). As a new form of cultural criticism, New Historicism quickly gained widespread recognition. Its major representatives include literary critics such as Greenblatt, Montrose, Oggel, and Goldberg, as well as the historian Hayden White.

New Historicism argues that historical fiction is a narrative form that closely combines history and literature. As a result, history exists in a fluid state between reality and fiction. Later, this literary critical theory, which became influential in Europe and the United States, was introduced into China. It had a profound influence on Chinese literary criticism and contributed to the rise of New Historicist fiction in China. Such fiction differs from previous forms of historical narrative. It no longer pursues the objective reality emphasized in traditional historical writing. Instead, it challenges and deconstructs traditional historical spirit and weakens solemn reflections on history. Writers reinterpret specific historical events and narratives through their own historical views and discourse strategies. In doing so, they deconstruct the grand narratives of traditional history and highlight marginalized histories that were previously ignored (Xie Linna, 2009).

2.2 Multimodal Discourse Analysis

As an emerging field of study, multimodal discourse analysis has become increasingly interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary. This theory argues that human communication is a holistic process involving multiple sensory channels and symbolic systems, rather than being limited to language alone. Language is no longer the only medium for transmitting information in everyday life. Different forms of media convey information through their own distinctive modes of expression. Therefore, visual culture has become one of the dominant cultural forms in contemporary society.

At the same time, film is regarded as one of the ideal objects for multimodal discourse research because it combines multiple modalities, including images, performance, and music. The theoretical foundation of multimodal analysis of film discourse comes from contemporary linguistics, semiotics, communication studies, and related fields. Although the theory originally developed from the study of written language, it has gradually evolved into an interdisciplinary research paradigm. It can effectively analyze complex texts in which multiple symbolic systems jointly construct meaning. In general, future studies of multimodal discourse will become increasingly comprehensive, involving multiple perspectives, multiple levels, and interdisciplinary approaches. Chinese scholars have also achieved certain progress in the study of multimodal discourse. However, the field is still at an early stage and requires further exploration with reference to international research achievements.

III. A MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE FILM *TO LIVE* FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF NEW HISTORICISM

Through the organic combination of dialogue, images, and sound, the film *To Live*, directed by Zhang Yimou, presents a deconstruction of mainstream ideology and historical rationality. At the same time, it reflects the

self-redemption of contemporary Chinese literature and carries an enlightening significance for ordinary people. The New Historicist ideas embodied in the film are mainly reflected in three aspects: the marginalization of historical narration, the localization of historical narration in folk life, and the transformation of inevitable history into accidental history. Together, these characteristics construct a profound reflection on and reconstruction of traditional historical discourse.

3.1 The Marginalization of Historical Narration

In Zhang Yimou's film *To Live*, the character Fugui represents the kind of "rogue-like" figure rejected by mainstream ideology. This portrayal corresponds closely with the New Historicist emphasis on marginalized historical narration. New Historicism argues that historical narration should move away from dominant ideology and instead adopt a marginal perspective. It focuses on marginal figures, marginal events, and marginal positions, while exploring their unstable and complex relationship with mainstream ideology. In this way, literary works can demonstrate their own ideological value.

At the beginning of the film, accompanied by the slow and sorrowful sound of the erhu, Fugui appears as a gambler. After losing a game, he casually signs his name in an account book and jokes, "Recently I've owed quite a lot of money, but at least my handwriting has improved." This detail vividly portrays him as a reckless and addicted gambler who wastes money without restraint.

The entire narrative centers on Fugui as a marginalized figure. The first half of his life is filled with irresponsibility and absurdity. He indulges himself in gambling and spends much of his time in casinos. Although he occasionally wins, he more often suffers heavy losses and accumulates large debts. He also shows little concern for his pregnant wife, Jiazhen. Fugui displays the characteristics of a typical spoiled young man: squandering family property, driving his father to death through anger, forcing his wife to leave home, and abandoning the happiness of his family. However, when

he finally decides to live an honest and stable life, fate continues to torment him. One tragedy after another falls upon him. His loved ones die in succession, and almost all misfortunes seem to gather around him alone. As a result, he falls from the peak of prosperity into the depths of suffering.

Fugui's experience is not merely an individual tragedy. Instead, it reflects the fate of countless ordinary Chinese people. As a symbolic figure, he represents those at the bottom of society who struggle to survive under difficult conditions. His life story mirrors the instability of historical circumstances, while the rise and decline of his family reflects the suffering experienced by many ordinary families. Through Fugui's difficult experiences, *To Live* presents a broader social and historical landscape behind individual and family histories. It allows viewers to glimpse the everyday life of ordinary people during that historical period. This narrative strategy, which focuses on marginalized individuals, is a typical example of the marginalization of historical narration advocated by New Historicism.

3.2 The Localization of Historical Narration in Folk Life

The deconstruction of grand narratives is an important narrative strategy in New Historicist theory. Through its folk-oriented narrative style, the film *To Live* presents a unique understanding of and reflection on history. One core characteristic of folk narration is its emphasis on the ordinary and secular side of human nature. In the film, the motivations and actions of characters are deeply connected with their individual personalities. The dialogue is also strongly rooted in everyday folk language, combining ordinary conversation with colloquial expressions and popular sayings.

In the film, Fugui is arrested while performing shadow puppetry and is forced to join the army. There he meets Old Quan. When Old Quan first appears, there is no background music. Instead, the audience hears only the noisy and chaotic sounds of the crowd. After learning that

Fugui wishes to return home to find his wife and children, Old Quan says, "What can we do? Staying alive is already good enough. You want to run away, but if I weren't looking for my brother, I would have taken off this yellow uniform long ago." This short dialogue not only explains why Old Quan chooses not to escape from the army, but also foreshadows his later death while searching for his brother's body.

There are many similar examples of folk narration throughout the film. This narrative strategy fully reflects the characteristics of New Historicism, especially its respect, concern, and sympathy for the survival conditions of individuals within historical contexts. In its representation of history, *To Live* attempts to recover and restore folk memory. It uses "folk historical consciousness" as a narrative tool in order to achieve a more comprehensive and multidimensional representation of history.

3.3 The Transformation of Inevitable History into Accidental History

New Historicist writers and artists often use accidental events in a flexible way to reconstruct history. In the film *To Live*, this historical contingency is deeply reflected in the deaths of Fugui's family members. In New Historicism, contingency suggests that history cannot be fully explained through logic or scientific causality. Cause-and-effect relationships appear incomplete and unstable at their origin.

In the film, the death of Fugui's son Youqing is a clear example of such contingency. The scene begins with a group of people running in panic. The background is filled with sorrowful erhu music. At the same time, a conversation is heard: "Is it Fugui's son?" "Yes. The district chief arrived at the school after dark. While reversing his jeep, he knocked down a wall. Xu Youqing happened to be sleeping behind the wall. Half the wall collapsed onto him, and he died immediately. The district chief was also injured and is now in the hospital." The film does not directly show Youqing's death. Instead, the event

is conveyed indirectly through dialogue. This creates a sudden and accidental sense of tragedy.

To Live is a tragedy centered on death and the suffering of human life. In addition to Youqing's death caused by the collapse of the wall, the film also presents many other unexpected deaths. Fugui's father dies from anger, Chunsheng's wife commits suicide, and Fengxia dies from severe bleeding during childbirth. These accidental deaths highlight the unpredictability and cruelty of fate. The deaths in the film do not seem to result from any clear historical necessity. Instead, death becomes a common and ordinary phenomenon, and its meaning therefore appears vague and uncertain.

These accidental deaths are designed to encourage viewers to reflect on the human condition and the survival of individuals throughout history. In this way, the film provides a perspective from which the tragedy of suffering can be observed and understood. New Historicism rejects the idea that human destiny is controlled by fatalism. It also breaks away from the fixed causal logic found in traditional historical narration. The history presented in the film is connected through a series of accidental events. Through the narration of individual experiences and unexpected encounters, history no longer depends on a carefully constructed causal framework.

IV. CONCLUSION

Using multimodal discourse analysis, this paper combines the three modalities of dialogue, image, and sound to examine three New Historicist elements in the film *To Live*: the marginalization of historical narration, the localization of historical narration in folk life, and the transformation of inevitable history into accidental history. The study analyzes how the film conveys personal thoughts and emotions through language, how it presents the destinies of different characters, and how sound contributes to the construction of emotional atmosphere.

From a certain perspective, *To Live* draws upon the essence of folk culture and reflects deeply on the

metaphysical question of "living." The film demonstrates the cultural language of human existence and expresses an ultimate concern for human survival. As a form of spiritual nourishment, the film gives people the strength to overcome despair and encourages them to continue living with resilience and hope in difficult circumstances.

This study has important theoretical and practical significance for deepening the understanding of the film *To Live* and for exploring the application of multimodal discourse analysis in film and television texts. Future studies may combine other theoretical perspectives to conduct more comprehensive and in-depth analyses of *To Live*. Such efforts may lead to more objective and comprehensive evaluations and promote further exploration of the film.

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Rethinking Literary Historiography Across South Asia and the Indian Subcontinent

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Abstract— This paper attempts to investigate the process of writing of the literary history in the context of South Asia and the Indian subcontinent. In doing so, it problematizes the process of canon formation by raising a number of questions. What are the critical frameworks and methodological tools involved? What are the gaps in the formation of the literary canon? What roles did caste, gender and class play in the process of writing of literary texts and their incorporation into the canon? The paper also problematizes the influence of the Western models of literary historiographies over the existing literary historiographies across Asia and the Indian subcontinent. It attempts to probe into the possible points of departure that provide us with the alternative frameworks from the ones provided to us by the Western model. Can we look at the literary history, alternatively, rather than classifying texts according to chronology or genres as is conventionally done? The paper attempts to suggest some of the frameworks in order to undo the influence of western model. Tracing the oral transmission of texts while highlighting numerous folkloric motifs prevalent in the canonical texts particularly focusing on the Sufi-Bhakti traditions. Another alternative is adopting a dynamic approach by incorporating new concepts such as “margin-centrism”, “multicultural corridors” and “pluralistic epistemologies” (206), as Prof. T.S. Satyanath puts it. His approach would be to reconceptualize cultural contacts as cultural re-negotiations which “nullifies the effects of imperialistic influence model of comparison” (208). Such an approach could dismantle the status of literary history as a grand narrative and propose alternative approaches.



Keywords— literary canon, literary historiography, margin-centrism, multicultural corridors, pluralistic epistemologies, grand narrative.

I. INTRODUCTION

Prof. Douwe Fokkema, an eminent literary historian from the Netherlands, in his essay, ‘Why Literary Historiography?’, expresses his concern regarding the shift in literary studies from historiography to criticism. He argues that the reason behind the crisis of literary historiography is that it adheres to either of the two extreme positions, i.e. either conforming to “positivist determinism” (39) or remaining spell-bound by the uniqueness of the text. The way out of this cul-de-sac, this point of saturation, he opines, is to choose certain common goals which provide the different “parameters for writing histories including literary histories” (40). Conventionally, Fokkema argues, this common goal has been provided by the “romantic,

nationalistic perspective” (37), which has become obsolete. Now, the task of literary historiographer is to discover new goals, new concepts that suture the process of literary historiography from a post-colonial perspective, as an activity of decolonising the discourse itself. This is where this paper intervenes. Where Fokkema builds a case in favour of literary historiography, by asking the question ‘why literary historiography?’ while majorly limiting himself to the first world literary phenomena, I would like to put forth an equally important question i.e. ‘how literary historiography?’ How can we rethink literary historiography in the context of South Asia and the Indian subcontinent? I intend to make a case in favour of why there is a need to *rethink* literary historiography with an appropriate approach when it is applied to the South Asian

cultural context so that it doesn't become a "metanarrative" in itself, to employ the term used by French Poststructuralist literary theorist Jean-Francois Lyotard. This is where the approach of looking at literary history from the lens of a suitable conceptual framework becomes important.

II. METHOD AND DISCUSSION

The discipline of literary history, states Sisir Kumar Das, an eminent Indian literary historiographer, has been under severe attack in the west during the last few decades. The reason for such an attack, he opines, is a failure of the historical method to develop a critical framework appropriate for dealing with the works of literature. Another reason that he gives is the general tendency of merging the literary histories into a general history which leads to a reduction of the literary works to either "source material of social history or to a species of knowledge" (Das 12). The possible reason behind this merger is that there is a great confusion about what exactly is the purpose of literary history and how is that purpose distinct from that of history in general. The purpose becomes significant when it comes to applying theoretical approaches to it. As Prof. Fokkema states, whom Das quotes, the literary historian has to have a clarity about the areas he wants to work in, since his purpose would decide what kind of theoretical approach would work for him. Commenting on the relationship between history and literary history, Das puts, "literary history being a part of a general history can hardly ignore it" (12). He validates Wallek and Warren's two approaches to the study of literary history i.e. the intrinsic and the extrinsic approach. Where the intrinsic approach would comprise of "an internal history- a story of development explainable without any reference to any non-literary phenomenon" (Das 12), the extrinsic approach would take into account "the external history- an account of forms and themes as created by a community and how they have been replaced by another set of forms and themes" (Das 13). This is how Das draws the link as well as the distinction between history and literary history.

Similarly, another eminent Indian literary historiographer, Prof. GN Devy, in his essay 'History and Literary History', discusses in detail the relation between the two. Devy argues that there are number of commonalities in the origin of history and literary history. Devy argues that history emerged as a "discipline" only when it became "the basis for ideological rhetoric" (5). Whoever initiated the documentation of history, be it revolutionary intellectuals, or Napoleon Bonaparte, or the white colonizers, did it with the purpose of power-acquisition. The story of institutionalization of literary

history is not too different, be it in the context of Europe or that of India. When literary history became part of the curriculum in colleges and universities in India, it became instrumental in reifying the already existing social divisions on the basis of class, caste, gender and language (Devy 5).

Devy further goes on to highlight the role of literary history, which he calls "an apparatus of canon formation" (5), in the process of sketching out "the boundaries of fields of literary production in terms of what is socially acceptable or unacceptable" (5). He makes it clear that "literary history directly reflects the values of the society in which the historian lives, for which he writes" (5). Canon, according to him, is an apparatus for justifying the authority's use of power. What Devy establishes here is the fact that the writing of literary history is never a politically innocent and socially innocuous act. To substantiate this point, he alludes to ancient Indian linguist Panini, who comments on the canonical language saying, "it is the community of the learned, the *shishtha*, that decides what is good in language. And it is their language ability that decides who is learned" (5,6). Panini's aphorism highlights not only the circuitous nature of the logic of canon formation but also cues towards the politics of exclusion based on the social rank and linguistic expertise.

This reminds me of an episode that occurs in the ancient Indian epic *Mahabharata*, about a literary contest (*Sashatrartha*) that takes place between the renowned scholar Acharya Vandin and a poor Brahmin differently-abled boy of mere nine years of age, Ashtavakra, who was born with eight limbs in his body. When Ashtavakra tries to enter the court of king Janaka in order to challenge Acharya Vandin for *sashtrartha*, he is stopped by the guard. On being stopped at the entrance due to his age, he states, "(t) rue growth cannot be inferred from the mere development of the body, as the growth of the knots of the Salmali tree cannot signify its age. That tree is called full-grown which although slender and short, beareth fruits. But that which does not bear fruits, is not considered as grown." (Ray 399). His rhetorical skills and knowledge of the Vedas impresses the king who gives him permission to attend the sacrifice. There he defeats Vandin in the literary contest and is taken as Guru by the King. Ashtavakra later goes on to write an important literary and philosophical work, expounding on the unity of the Supreme Being, known as *Ashtavakra Gita* or *Ashtavakra Samhita*. The reason behind bringing up this reference was to raise a number of questions about the politics involved in the writing of literary history. Firstly, the question arises, had Ashtavakra not been born a Brahmin but rather if he was someone belonging to 'lower caste', would he be given a chance to prove his excellence? We have numerous such examples throughout history where such attempts have been

truncated, Eklavya and Karna are well known examples. Hence, caste provides us with one of the alternatives to look at literary history. Even a celebrated text like *Mahabharata* offers us numerous possibilities to deconstruct it from the angle of caste. Karna, for example, was a *Suta putra*—someone belonging to the Suta caste, is something that is well known. But if one goes to investigate, who actually were the Sutas, some fascinating facets of history would emerge. Sutas, as GN Devy discusses, in his essay, ‘The Conventions of Literary History’, were the illegitimate progeny of the Kshatriyas who were born of their extra marital affairs with the women of different castes. These Sutas would do odd jobs in the court like they would become counsellors, charioteers or bards. Interestingly, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, two of the most celebrated texts of the Indian subcontinent, were composed by the Sutas is something that is often ignored by the critics. Similarly, we could deconstruct these texts from the lens of caste, class and genders.

One significant point that Devy brings up in his essay ‘The Conventions’, is the absence of any exclusive criterion for the classification of ancient Indian literature. Though for convenience, he classifies it into five categories namely- Suta literature, Mantra literature, Shastra, Akshara and Prakrit literature, with an additional category for Tamil reading people called Sangam literature, these canons cannot be classified on the basis of temporal chronology due to absence of any specific time of their emergence. Time was understood as fictional time which seeks to combine myth and history and most of these literatures claim to have a trans-historical, transcendental importance. Another reason could be that a number of canons like the Suta literature had their origin in folk or oral traditions. For a long time, these texts were orally transmitted.

Some of the challenges faced of literary historiography when applied to the Indian context are discussed by the Indian literary critic Sujit Mukherjee. “The conventions of literary historiography in India”, he states, “have demanded that each developed language should concern itself only with literary works in that language” (8). This approach, according to him, leads to the problem of splitting of our literary heritage on the one hand and the danger of becoming reductive to the extent of undervaluing certain features and over-emphasising others also looms. Mukherjee puts this approach to test by applying the same to the works of Tulsidas. He poses this question, how would a literary historian, working with the organising principle of “ascending order of magnitude” of characteristic features of a poet, regard Tulsidas? Tulsidas is a great poet of medieval India, holding a high stature in Hindi poetry and simultaneously a great poet of Indian literature. Mukherjee answers this question by stating, “[t]o call him a poet of

Hindi could be as inaccurate as it would be incomplete to call him a poet of Avadhi” (9). Therefore, he advocates the need of an alternative mode of literary history, one which re-evaluates our conventional understanding of our literary past. To reformulate, an approach by which, “we can learn to recognize a literary culture not merely by the literary texts but also as an outcome of various other factors operating at that time” (Mukherjee 9). One such approach could be examining the way in which the Bhakti movement interacts with Hindi and Avadhi literary traditions.

Another significant point that Mukherjee develops, is about the forms- how forms keep travelling from one language to another. When we look closely at the cultural contacts and how forms travelled along these contacts, one important observation that comes up, is that it is not always the bigger form that influences the smaller forms. We have seen, for instance, Prakrit literary forms influencing Sanskrit literature. Similarly, we find out that many literary forms grew out of folk forms. One great example of this is Sufi saint Shah Abdul Latif’s narrative poem ‘Sasui Punhoon’, which is based on a folk tale. It uses Punjabi folk musical tradition called ‘*Rasalu*’ form, the thirty *surs*, in which the poem is composed, are taken from the Nath Yogi tradition, again a folk tradition. Latif’s poetry is composed in *wae* i.e. written in the *Kaifi* form, which comprise of eight lines sung by two people along with Tambura, a folk musical instrument. Hence, literary forms often travel and influence each other, just like cultures do. The task of literary historiographers is to trace such literary journeys in its free-spiritedness and not try to straightjacket them into rigid genre-based classifications provided to us by the western model.

When one ventures upon writing a literary history of cultures like South Asian or countries like India, one problem that a literary historian comes across is finding an appropriate framework that can “accommodate not only the diverse literary traditions existing in the country but also the complexities of its multilingualism” (Das 1) as S K Das puts it, in the ‘Prologue’ of his book, *A History of Indian Literature*. In such a scenario, the mode of identification of literature can’t be solely linguistic as is the western convention. There is a need to include some other parameters to accommodate the “changes in the geographical distribution of a language (that) can lead to the emergence of diverse literatures within that language” (Das 1), since the “texts are not only interrelated and often interdependent, but also a part of the total history of the community which creates them” (Das 2). As AK Ramanujan demonstrates in his essay ‘Three Hundred Ramayanas’, how various tellings of Ramayana travelled across the Southeast Asian countries through land and the sea trade routes and got intricately mixed within their

cultural matrix. This transmission was not unidirectional as along with material transaction, literary and cultural transmission would also take place from both the sides. Similarly, Prof. T.S. Satyanath discusses in his essay, 'Understanding South Asia: South-East Asia Cultural Contacts', while carrying out a comparative study of sculptural and literary traditions of the *Panchatantra* tales in India and Indonesia, problematises the available studies based on the "influence" and "diffusion model" of comparison (Satyanath 206). Such an approach, according to Satyanath, worked under the influence of "colonial modernity" of "conceiving the world in terms of binary oppositions and logocentric constructions" (209). Even Devy offers a similar insight when he puts it, "primarily canon and nation were two goals of European literary historiography" (Devy 6). Satyanath's approach is a dynamic one- incorporating new concepts of "marginocentrism", "multicultural corridors" and "pluralistic epistemologies" (206). His approach would reconceptualise cultural contacts as cultural re-negotiations which "nullifies the effects of imperialistic influence model of comparison" (208). Such an approach deconstructs the status of literary history as metanarrative and comes up with alternative approaches. One such turn, which Prof Satyanath emphasizes upon is a spatial turn. The comparison is not done strictly at a national level, though he is doing a comparative study of two nations. In fact, it is done at a sub-regional level, involving the political dynasties and their patronage to the poets and trade contacts. By doing this, he is also advocating the need to "blur the national literary traditions and instead go for specific regional traditions that are redefined in terms of medieval cultural categories rather than modern ones (213). His approach is more driven towards creating a "centrifugal (diversifying and vernacularizing)" as against the "centripetal (unifying and cosmopolitan) process" (219). Such studies show us a path and offers a possibility of approaching the discipline of literary historiography from alternative critical frameworks.

III. CONCLUSION

Literary historiography has been given a lot of attention from people on two ends of the spectrum. On the one hand, lie people like Prof Fokkema, who are extremely defensive about the discipline of literary historiography to the extent of becoming nostalgic about it. Where the anxiety expressed by Prof Fokkema regarding a potential threat to the discipline of literary historiography is not invalid, but his fundamental argument still revolves around the western approach of seeing things in binaries. Here, he creates a binary of literary historiography and that of critical theory. Some of the nativist scholars, on the other hand, have taken

another extreme position by calling the whole idea of writing a literary historiography as a western construct. This paper has attempted to steer through a middle path, by providing a sort of mediation, which tries to accommodate the anxieties expressed from both the sides. The paper takes a third position, which is closer to a Postmodernist and a Postcolonial position, realising the need for the empire to write back and in doing so, subvert and register its resistance. The paper discusses some of the alternatives provided to us by people like GN Devy, who is firm in his conviction that literary historiography is "an involved interdisciplinary enterprise" (10). Similarly, Das stresses the need to develop a suitable critical framework to write a literary history. Mukherjee advocates the need to address the issues of multilingualism and incorporation of folk forms in the literary history. Prof. Satyanath shows us a path, through his study, how to dismantle the western discursive hegemony and do a trans-regional study from a pluralistic perspective. I have argued in favour of the conceptual framework as being one of the possible alternatives for writing literary history from a postcolonial perspective, as a practice of decolonising the discourse. There is a historical necessity to look for alternative ways of approaching the literary texts. Since, concepts are always in the process of becoming, by taking concepts as our point of departure or point of enquiry, we could look at the in-between spaces, the unformed spaces in order to reconfigure things.

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Motherhood as survival in Mahasweta Devi's 'Breast Giver': An Analytical Study

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Abstract— This paper explores the idea of motherhood as a means of survival in Mahasweta Devi's short story "Breast Giver". The protagonist Jashoda, a Brahmin woman whose identity as a mother is transformed into a source of livelihood. Through her role as a professional wet nurse, Jashoda's body becomes both her livelihood and her burden, revealing how motherhood is shaped by class, patriarchy, and social expectations. The study argues that motherhood in the story is not merely a biological or emotional experience, but a survival strategy imposed by circumstances. Jashoda's continuous nurturing of others' children highlights the exploitation of the female body, where care and sacrifice are objectified. At the same time, her identity is reduced to her maternal function, leaving little space for individuality or dignity and self identity. By examining themes of exploitation, gender roles, and marginalisation, the paper shows how Mahasweta Devi presents motherhood as both empowering and oppressive. While Jashoda gains temporary security through her maternal labor, she ultimately suffers physical and emotional deterioration. The story thus questions the glorification of motherhood and exposes its harsh realities in a socio-economic context. In conclusion, "Breast Giver" redefines motherhood as a complex site of survival, where resilience is intertwined with suffering, and care becomes a form of silent endurance, loneliness and painful death.



Keywords— Motherhood, Survival, Exploitation and Maternal body

Introduction

Motherhood is deeply based on care, nurturing, and unconditional or selfless love. However, in the works of Mahasweta Devi, motherhood takes on a far more complex and often troubling dimension. Her writings frequently focus on marginalized communities, exposing the intersections of gender, class, and power.

"Breast Giver" presents a powerful critique of how motherhood can be shaped by socio-economic pressures. The protagonist, Jashoda, becomes a professional mother, feeding and nurturing the children of others to support her family. This paper examines how motherhood in the story functions as a strategy of survival, while simultaneously revealing the exploitative structures that sustain it.

Motherhood as Economic Necessity

In "Breast Giver," Jashoda's journey into motherhood as a profession begins out of sheer necessity.

When her husband becomes incapacitated, the burden of survival falls upon her. In a society where women have limited economic opportunities, her ability to produce milk becomes her primary asset.

Motherhood, in this context, is no longer a private or emotional experience but a public and economic function. Jashoda's body becomes a means of livelihood, and her identity is defined by her capacity to nurture others. This transformation highlights the harsh realities faced by women in lower socio-economic strata, where survival often depends on the commodification of the body.

Commodification of the Maternal Body

One of the central themes of the story is the commodification of the female body. Jashoda's role as a wet nurse reduces her to a biological function, where her worth is measured by her productivity. Her body is continuously used, consumed, and ultimately exhausted.

The act of breastfeeding, typically associated with intimacy and care, is stripped of its emotional significance and turned into labor. This commodification reflects broader societal structures in which women's bodies are controlled and exploited under patriarchal systems. Jashoda's identity becomes inseparable from her role as a "breast giver," erasing her individuality.

Patriarchy and Gender Roles

Patriarchy plays a crucial role in shaping Jashoda's experience. Despite being the primary provider for her family, she remains confined within traditional gender roles. Her labor is not recognized as skilled or valuable; instead, it is seen as a natural extension of her role as a woman.

The story exposes how patriarchal norms normalize the exploitation of women's bodies. Jashoda's suffering is overlooked because it aligns with societal expectations of maternal sacrifice. Her identity as a mother becomes both her strength and her limitation, trapping her within a cycle of dependence and exploitation.

Marginalization and Subaltern Identity

Jashoda belongs to a marginalized section of society, and her experiences reflect the struggles of subaltern women. Her lack of social and economic power leaves her vulnerable to exploitation. She has little control over her body or her labor, and her voice remains largely unheard.

Through Jashoda's story, Mahasweta Devi highlights the intersection of gender and class oppression. The narrative gives visibility to the lives of women who exist on the margins, challenging dominant narratives that romanticize motherhood.

Motherhood, Suffering, and Decline

While motherhood initially provides Jashoda with a means of survival, it ultimately leads to her downfall. Years of continuous breastfeeding/ overfeeding take a toll on her health, resulting in severe illness. Ironically, the very society that once depended on her abandons her in her time of need.

This tragic outcome underscores the unsustainable nature of motherhood as a survival strategy. Jashoda's suffering reveals the lack of support systems for women who sacrifice their bodies for others. The story critiques the societal tendency to celebrate maternal sacrifice while ignoring its consequences.

CONCLUSION

"Breast Giver" offers a powerful rethinking of motherhood, presenting it as a complex and often painful

experience shaped by socio-economic realities. In the hands of Mahasweta Devi, motherhood becomes a site of survival, resistance, and exploitation. Jashoda's story challenges the idealized image of the selfless mother, exposing the harsh conditions under which many women live. Motherhood, rather than being a purely nurturing role, is shown to be deeply entangled with issues of power, labor, and inequality. Ultimately, the narrative calls for a more critical understanding of motherhood, one that acknowledges both its strength and its suffering.

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Valmiki Ramayana: A Spiritual Hermeneutic Reading

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Abstract— *Setting the Bala Kanda as the ethical and metaphysical axis along which the epic's moral world is established, this article comprehensively investigates the Valmiki Ramayana in a spiritual, hermeneutic mode. It refrains from reading the narrative as a mytho, historical saga and instead views the scripture as a guide that dramatizes through symbolic gesture, divine incarnation, and institutional authority of kingship and asceticism, the normative order of dharma and adharma. Using the classical Sanskrit texts, philosophical commentaries, and present-day hermeneutics as methodological tools, it interprets the birth of Rama, the sacrificial economy of Dasharatha, the enlightening role of Vishwamitra, and the performative breaking of Shiva's bow as allegories of the cosmic re-ordering and moral enlightenment. By placing Bala Kanda within the tradition of comparative review of sacred narrative and moral philosophy, the essay argues that Valmiki's poem jubilates an open, ended concept of righteousness. The Ramayana is seen here not as something fixed and having the form of a static moral law but more as an interpretative system in development; a code that keeps changing and through which every human interpretative exercise has a profound effect eternally, undergoing reshaping by the continuous interplay of divine and human moral will, human agency, and social organization.*



Keywords— *Adharma, Bala Kanda, Dharma, Hermeneutics, Sacred Narrative.*

I. INTRODUCTION

During the last two thousand years, the Valmiki Ramayana has not only been one of the most historically valuable but also one of the most philosophically and creatively significant texts in the Indic civilizational canon (Brockington, 1998). Traditionally considered the primary epic that most directly preserves cultural memory and narrative tradition, nonetheless, it has most probably influenced us deeply through the interpersonal of moral ontology and spiritual pedagogy (Prasad, 2009). Actually, as a main epic, Bala Kanda makes an extremely important, if not the most important, contribution to the establishment of the metaphysical framework in which the whole story is to be interpreted. It does not simply introduce characters and actions, but it also establishes the basis for the understanding of morality by showing human actions as being under a cosmic order ruled by dharma, and thus exposed to adharma (Valmiki, trans. Goldman, 1984).

Hermeneutics, as a method, opens the path to a meaningful reading that goes beyond historical literalism and aesthetic enjoyment and moves the interpretation to the symbolic, moral, and spiritual dimensions of the text itself. Hermeneutics asks what the function of the narrative is when it conveys a transcendental value and, in doing so, changes it into social and political norms, in the context of the sacred literature (Ricoeur, 1976). When employed on the Bala Kanda, this method suggests that the work's beginning act is an ethically conscious active dramatization: the coming of the divine into the mortal world is not merely a religious theme but a radical intervention into the moral economy of the world (Sullivan, 1990).

In this article, we've given two different interpretive frames to the Bala Kanda.

On the one side, it is interpreted in relation to classical Indian philosophical traditions that treat dharma as cosmic

law (ta) and social duty (svadharma) (Radhakrishnan, 1951).

At the same time, it is put in conversation with contemporary narrative ethics theories, ones that claim stories are moral testing grounds where readers are not only permitted but also invited to make ethical judgments and to use their social imagination (Nussbaum, 1990).

Such coupling makes it possible to understand the Ramayana as metaphysical and political, transcendental and immanent (Hiltebeitel, 2001). Interpreting the Bala Kanda is, in fact, a narrative problem in itself, which should be solved first. The epic starts when Valmiki meets Narada, and Narada poses the question of whether there can be any human who is completely virtuous. This reading goes beyond the rhetorical one; hence, it is also locating the epic as a story, telling an answer to the philosophical question whether there can be any form of "instrumental" goodness in a world that is morally divided (Goldman, 1984).

In such a way, Rama's life is the solution to the question raised by hermeneutics of how divine perfection can be made to be understood within the limits of human life.

Viewed within this context, the article argues that the first book of the

Ramayana is the threshold book, opening and engaging the reader in a symbolic matrix where ritual, royal kingship, ascetic authority, and divine influence are not the domain of the individual but rather interacting forms of moral structure (Sharma, 2003). The sacrificial rites of Dasharatha are not only manifestations of royal piety but acts of cosmological logic through which human desire is reduced to ritualised conformity with divine orders (Pollock, 1986). From the sacrificial economy that gave rise to it, the birth of Rama shall be seen as a cosmic response to a crisis in ethics, the mixture of divine ethical will and its historical antecedents (Doniger, 2009).

One of the criticisms lodged at this point by scholars is that it attempts to look outside the simplest moral interpretation (considering the Ramayana as a rigid code of conduct). Rather, it argues in a hermeneutics where dharma is seen as a place of tension between an ethical ideal and its realization rather than for being a collection of static rules. The contemporary academic scholarship has bolstered this position as well, recognizing the diversity of traditions contained within the Ramayana and the adaptable interpretive role the text serves in diverse societies and contexts (Richman, 1991). Here, concentrating on the Bala Kanda, we are now aware that this plurality has been an inherent feature of the epic right from its beginning.

Thus, the article is twofold. Initially, it performs a close textual reading of the main moments in the central episodes

of the Bala Kanda: the invocation of the deity, the character of sage Vishwamitra, and the performative symbolism of Shiva's bow; it reveals that these scenes convey a spiritual dialectic between order and disorder/dissonance (Bhattacharji, 2000). Secondly, it situates these readings in a wider comparative framework, referring to philosophical hermeneutics and narrative ethical theories to show the epic's crucial importance in relation to present debates on moral agency, political authority, and sacred/social demarcation (Chatterjee, 2011).

In light of this, the article casts the Valmiki Ramayana as a living book in this way: alive not in the closure of its dogma, but in its "openness to interpret a way in which interpretations (and ethical responses) can develop, in time and across time and cultures (Lutgendorf, 1991: 17) to be activated (Lutgendorf, 1991). The Bala Kanda serves as the epic's ethical prologue: It forces us to confront the foundational question that propels the entirety: How can righteousness be performed in an ordered world made by power and desire, history and contingency?

II. THEORETICAL REVIEW: HERMENEUTICS AND THE SACRED NARRATIVE

Religious hermeneutics in sacred texts is considered to be the struggle of taking historical detail to transcendent meaning. Gadamer (1975), in his classical hermeneutic theory, focused more on "fusion of horizons" as how the historical landscape of the text interacts with the interpretive context of the reader within a dialogic space. Using Bala Kanda as an example, this theory is used to demonstrate through the translation that the ethical assertions of the epic are not defined by, nor limited to, the sociopolitical moment. They certainly belong to a continuum of meaning, just as a single object allows for continuous reinterpretation (Clooney, 1990).

In the Indic tradition, pluralistic interpretation is a constitutive feature of textual transmission, not a matter of curiosity. The Ramayana has been stylized to resemble multiple kinds of rewrites and vernacular retellings, which culminate in an articulation of the ethical significance of Rama's life that is a response to localized, culturally oriented issues (Richman, 1991). Such a multiplicity indicates that the text not only functions in a kind of hermeneutic opening, but it also questions the scholarly necessity to discover a coherent, authoritative meaning (Hess, 1999).

The Bala Kanda is like a base that allows this sort of openness. The epic is not really seen as a mere first-hand doctrinal statement, but rather as an answer to a philosophical question (Goldman, 1984). Ethical reflection

through story offers a different perspective of Ramayana as a text of morality. Nussbaum (1990) claims that the narratives of an epic help to shape ethical understanding through the introduction of such ethical problems into a social and emotional environment.

Like in the Bala Kanda, ethical musing is made through act in fiction: the king's own wish for a son, the sage's command of the land, and the divine will to incarnate all, the present difficulties to ethics, in short, to bring out all the present moral dilemmas those that are simultaneously personal, political, cosmic (Kishwar, 2001).

These kinds of tales are set up for a reader to struggle with ethical questions rather than to find moral rules. Dharma philosophy will not allow easily reducible and reified terms. They go through the domains of law, duty, righteousness, and cosmic order as both descriptive and normative features (Radhakrishnan, 1951; Matilal, 2002).

The Bala Kanda brings out that subtle difference in the meaning of dharma. Dharma is thus not just an abstract idea but rather a reality experienced through rituals, duties, and self-sacrifices, as referred here. On the other hand, Adharma is not simply the lack of virtue, but it is portrayed as a force of tension and change that human beings and God (Biardeau, 1997) have to first perceive and then engage with. Ricoeur's idea that a symbol is a structural process constitutive of thought (Ricoeur, 1976) resonates with this contrast. The Bala Kanda, by virtue of its symbolic gestures of sacrifice and the breaking of Shiva's bow, tremendously condenses the deeply philosophical and moral themes of the narrative. At the same time, they invite me to think about the aspect of power, authority, and divine sanction, which go beyond the literal meaning of the text (Rukmani, 2001). As such, by integrating these theoretical perspectives, the article, ultimately, constructs a hermeneutic framework that accounts for the inner logics and universal philosophies underlying the Ramayana in the Indian spiritual cosmos (Clooney, 2007).

On the other hand, the idea is to interpret the Bala Kanda as a location where narrative, ritual, and moral issues come together to produce a spiritual story that, although it is culturally very specific, is spiritually universal (Sax, 2000).

III. THE SACRIFICIAL ECONOMY OF KINGSHIP AND COSMIC ORIGIN

The Bala Kanda has King Dasharatha at the center of the cosmic and royal duties crossroads. Dharmathe king's childlessness should not be viewed as a mere personal suffering but as a metaphysical phenomenon, a metaphysical phenomenon that threatens the continuation of dynastic and cosmic order.

According to Classical Indian political theology, the king's power is not seen as his own possession; it rather assumes the role of the royal officiant and mediator between the human and divine and is charged with the maintenance of *rta*, the cosmic principle of order which is indispensable for moral and social life (Radhakrishnan, 1951). In effect, by his unwillingness to have an heir, the king thus embodies a rupture in the chain of the divine law in the historical time (Heesterman, 1985).

The solution to such a rupture is shown to be in the ritual logic of sacrifice. Dasharatha's performance of the *putrakmei yaja* is not merely an act of individual devotion; it is a public and cosmic ritual which reinstates the king in his role as the ethical vehicle. Pollock (1986) argues that Sacrifice in the Sanskrit epic is essentially the expression of fallen human desire according to divine plan; thus, the individual desire is converted into cosmologically valid demand.

Actually, the king's desire for children is at the level of metaphysics, whereas the gods respond to human behaviour according to a moral domain that requires the ritualizing of the assertion (Smith, 1989).

The divinity assembly agreeing on Vishnu's incarnation was a very important hermeneutic act of understanding. The act of Rama's incarnation was thus not only a theological, abstract one but also a moral one by their joint fear of Ravana's tyranny (Valmiki, trans. Goldman, 1984). Such a change thus maps the relationship between transcendence and immanence differently.

God does not get away from the moral problems faced by the world. Instead, God participates in human history to set things right (Doniger, 2009). God's coming down is also the hermeneutical interpretation of the text's main proposition, that dharma itself should be lived and not merely contemplated (Sullivan, 1990).

The sacrificial economy thus generates a reciprocity of obligation. The king's ritual, which is according to divine law, brings about the divine reply, which is, in this case, the human genealogy. This dialectical aspect subverts simplistic notions of divine omnipotence by presenting the gods as morally reactive creatures so implicated in the morality as to necessitate both their actions and their obligations. Ricoeur's (1976) idea of narrative as the vehicle through which ethical worlds are mediated and interrogated has such a framework; in fact, it is in harmony with it.

The birth of Rama and his brothers is the true reflection of moral intent.

Rama seems to be a person beyond a mere human measure of development who had the potential to be a transcendent ideal, but was a prince whose divinity was not as a personal

role but a social rank mediated by society. This duality refutes the idea that the epic can be turned into a myth of a kind or a historical chronicle.

On the contrary, a person has to read Bala Kanda according to its essence to understand it as a method of theological transcendence and social realism, as well as to see how it handles the productive tension (Hiltebeitel 2001). Here, that tension is royal dharma politically expressed.

The king is not an autocratic one, but rather a law of nature keeper, and his authority can only be derived from his righteousness and ritual behavior. This interpretation is in contrast with modern models of government, where a ruler's legitimacy is decided by the people's choice or the government itself. On the contrary, Ramayana sees legitimacy as cosmic, grounded in the harmony with the divine order and supported by one's virtue (Radhakrishnan, 1951; Sharma, 2003).

The royal rites serve as a public testimony of the king's morality, thus elevating kingship from an inert status into a dynamic practice of dharma.

Dasharatha's character is, however, here used to mirror the agony of this sort of political legitimacy. His reliance on priests and the divine as sources of authority shows the power limits of kings (Heesterman, 1985). He cannot navigate the succession puzzle alone; he needs to choose the higher, deeper morality. It is of great importance for the man of God. This paper challenges hierarchical readings of the epic which stress royal authority, arguing instead for a relational view from which kings, sages and gods can in all probability be understood to wield different degrees of authority (Shulman 2001).

The narrator makes this approach more digestible by introducing Rishyasringa, a hermit whose ascetic purity is what allows them to perform the sacrifice. The sage's role reveals the epistemic and moral authority of the ascetic spiritual tradition that underlies the ethical foundations of the epic. Asceticism here then does not consist of the retreat from the world so much as it is an ethical capital that is at stake and capable of being wielded as a weapon to elicit a cosmic transformation (Olivelle, 1993).

Dasharatha and Rishyasringa's exchange is really a political, quasi-religious deal between two sides on various and competing moral lines. The central hermeneutic point of this story is the abandonment of the notion that the sacred and the secular are separate, distinct spheres. The Bala Kanda depicts a society based on the interdependent nature of ritual, government, and spiritual life, and their mutual dependency for coming legitimised and becoming effective. This unity is contrary to the academic tendency to separate religion from politics (Chatterjee, 2011).

The epic communicates a vision that, among other things, addresses the societal impact of spiritual practice and morality issues in political power itself. Embedding a god incarnation in the plot certainly makes it more intense. Rama is definitely not a character born outside of moral issues, but deeply involved in them. The divine is concerned with the complex issues connected to family relationships, duties, and political power, and therefore becomes the protagonist of ethical tension situations. That is why the ethics (Nussbaum, 1990) are recognised more in a feeling of being exposed and not of an application of universal moral rules. Here, Bala Kanda gives a narrative perspective to the divine, human suffering dilemma while pushing the divine virtues (Kishwar, 2001).

Hence, the sacrificial economy is understood at different hermeneutical levels. It theatrically portrays the mechanism of cosmic reciprocity (Smith, 1989) at the ritual level. At the political level, this informs an ethical model of kingship (Sharma, 2003). At the theological level, it reinterprets deity as a changeable, alive, and mutually giving being through history (Doniger, 2009). Together, these layers comprise the common theme of the epic: At a very elementary level, existence is divided between dharma and adharma, and existence is ultimately at war (Biardeau, 1997). However, the Bala Kanda does not present Rama as an archetypal pure hero of morals but rather as God's capacity, that is, a being of God susceptible of receiving God's action and thus being made good. In fact, the hermeneutic statement that dharma is not a virtue, but a condition that comes into existence as a result of a moral deed, is thereby vindicated (Matilal, 2002).

IV. ASCETIC AUTHORITY AND THE ETHICS OF INTERVENTION: VISHWAMITRA AND MORAL AGENCY

Thus, with the arrival of the sage Vishwamitra in the Bala Kanda, there is an almost complete ethical upheaval of the storyline. Nevertheless, while the sacrificial economy visibly symbolizes the mutual dependence of kingship and divinity, the ascetic's intervention brings in a third aspect of moral authority, which relies on *tapas* (austerity), knowledge, and spiritual discipline (Olivelle, 1993). One of the most daring moral assertions found in the story is Vishwamitra's request to King Dasharatha to let him take Lord Rama along to protect the sacrificial rites.

Several themes are involved in this situation: a challenge to paternal love, the dilemma of loyalty to one's king versus loyalty to one's father, and the rigidity of ascetic rules; in fact, the combination of these elements elevates the epic to the level of an ethical space that is further complicated by a physical drama (Valmiki, trans. Goldman, 1984).

In this way, one could say that Vishwamitra is essentially reinterpreting the scriptures in a manner similar to what Gadamer (1975) refers to as the claim of tradition (i.e., the present tradition). The hermit is the source of the authoritative voice, the one who issues commands but not in the way of political power, divine incarnation, but through the spiritual and the interpretive. It is not institutional, but epistemic authority. That distinction is crucial for the Ramayana's concept of a righteous order. Good power must be endowed with wisdom, which is the result of a conscientious and careful encounter with the sacred (Clooney, 1990).

Dasharatha's hesitation to leave at the beginning is first and foremost the human side of moral duty. The king's wavering is not portrayed as a moral weakness but rather as an emotional response stemming from the bond with family as well as political uncertainty. However, the plot eventually distances itself from the sage's directive as the main character finds the way, suggesting that moral decisions may involve giving up one's own will for the benefit of the majority (Bhattacharji 2000). This blending of elements reflects the mode in which Nussbaum (1990) portrays moral discernment as being, at times, tragic and involving choices between good things. The tension is worked out, not by abstract reasoning, but by the dramatization of the clash in the story.

Therefore, the borderline status of Vishwamitra also serves to highlight his authority. The picture of an ancient, wise king, at the same time, the political and spiritual, is a monarch who changes his power into wisdom by ascetic practices, as shown in his biography. So this transformation of power into wisdom via ascetic practice becomes an icon of ethical transformation. These changes, according to Pollock (1986), suggest that the story of the king is a cultural negotiation of the values of worldly success versus spiritual transcendence. And thus, Vishwamitra's battle is not from a stance of rejecting this world, but defining an ideal to power in which an understanding of spirituality and right and wrong coexist (Shulman, 2001). Building upon Vishwamitra, the tale of Rama is an example of how one can develop moral agency from one's behaviour. Not only does the sage provide universal principles, he imparts celestial weapons. In this way, the sage creates scenarios for Rama where he must make ethical decisions. For instance, the story of Tataka, a demoness, presents difficult questions of violence, legitimacy, and moral responsibility. Rama's deed is made to agree with the authority of the ascetic, which is put forward as a tool to preserve the ritual order; and thus, it implies that the moral rightness of violence in the epic world originates from an insistence on dharma (Goldman, 1984). They present a challenge to justify with

our current ethical senses: the idea that violence and morality are two opposing functions.

The Bala Kanda chapter presents us with an ethics of contingent valence that applauds an action if it is in harmony with the cosmic as well as the social order (Matilal, 2002). Ricoeur (1976) further elaborates on this idea through a rebuttal to narrative ethics, arguing that stories are situated judgments and therefore interpretations should only be based on the judgment given by the narratives. This is because the first few times when Rama goes against the forces of evil, such cases become ethical dilemmas, which lead the reader to wonder why the use of violence is justified. The fact that the unconditioned being holy conduct is the only path allowed by an ascetic reveals an epistemic aspect of dharma. Moral knowledge is not given or inborn; it must be acquired by those who better understand and recognize the interpretive power of the sacred order (Clooney, 2007).

In the narrative, Vishwamitra acts as a hermeneutic, turning the cosmic law into commands. The meeting with Ahalya brings in an ethical and hermeneutic layer of complexity. Ahalya's release from her curse, by the mere touch of Rama's hands, could be seen as the expression of the recognition of divine grace and the endorsement of patriarchal moral superiority, or also as a peace and order restoring symbolic act (Richman, 1991; Kishwar, 2001). The episode is seen as a meditation on sins, punishment, and redemption (Prasad, 2009), and it is suggested that this article should consider the episode in that context.

Ahalya's redemption is not the outcome of her own will. Rather, it is the result of intervention by a divine authority that has the power to enforce morality. Hence, through such a mechanism, this chapter referred to the issue of moral authority and what it requires: restoration. If one looks at narrative ethics, that is not the situation: The episode challenges its spectators to deal with the kinds of imbalances that characterize the epic society.

Ahalya's ordeal is crucial to understanding her, but her voice is not heard. The ethical solution here is Ramas gesture, rather than hers. The injustice of the situation weakens the criticism of the text's moral assumptions on the issues of gender and authority, but at the same time, it confirms the hierarchical moral structure of the epic wherein certain individuals (like gods) have the power to effect cosmic changes (Sutherland, 1989).

Vishwamitra's guidance is an excellent example of moral development, where one gains the ability to make decisions through experiencing conflicts that are then provided with an interpretive authority. Rama's good moral character, like all other virtues, comes from his trials, learning, and reflections, rather than from being a saint, by the grace of a

divine authority (Hiltebeitel, 2001). This is quite compatible with Gadamer's idea (1975) that it is the tradition itself which gives meaning to the activity, not the experience of its participants.

The ascetic authority that infiltrates this story, its highlighting over other aspects, shows the concern with higher forms of power: the power that is revealed throughout the story, the feeling of the importance of the way it is exercised as opposed to less visible forms. Dasharatha's rule has some shades of good, but without the help of his spirits, his kingship is morally weak. The sages' control over the king's compliance equally indicates that moral insight is above and beyond an institutional hierarchy (Heesterman, 1985). This change of power delegitimizes the interpretation of the epic simply as a demonstration of monarchical power when a more complex moral structure is taken into consideration, where legitimacy does not rely on formal office but on living according to dharma (Sharma, 2003).

Vishwamitra is also a moral greyzone character who, besides causing chaos, still contributes positively to such moral order. His former violent and lustful king character, before his becoming a sage, brings a moral intricacy to the way the ruling process is viewed. He is not an ideal that is eternally fixed but a person who has been through struggle and change and thus shaped by them (Shulman, 2001). It is a narrative motif that upholds the article's claim that the dharma in the Ramayana is not innate to a person but something that one can pursue.

There is no question that moral authority can neither be handed down by birth nor office, nor can it be inherited just by being born or serving in such a capacity, and in fact, it is something that has to be assiduously earned through one's experience as a figure of moral authority (Olivelle, 1993).

This picture challenges the idea of fixed morality and shows that living morally is a matter of constant change and development. Basically, it aligns with the current thinking trends within contemporary theories of moral development that emphasize practice and reflection, practice and reflexivity, and the making of narrative identity (Nussbaum, 1990), continuation of ethics, which gives precedence to narrative construction (Nussbaum, 1990).

The conclusion of Vishwamitra's training at the court of King Janaka indicates the coming together of the spiritual and social realms: spiritual power provides the political sphere with the basis for power, legitimacy, and worthiness.

Such a statement anticipates kingship and marriage becoming the main themes of discussions on moral and political issues (Sax, 2000). The above is widely perceived as a very intricate moral environment where asceticism,

kingship, and divinity intermingle in Bala kanda (Biardeau, 1997).

Vishwamitra is the link between these and also represents the small version of what the whole poem imagines in terms of morality. Good conduct is not a result of one authority dominating another, but of various kinds of authority interacting and understanding what dharma means. Vishwamitra is also a moral greyzone character who, besides causing chaos, still contributes positively to such moral order. His former violent and lustful king character, before his becoming a sage, brings a moral intricacy to the way the ruling process is viewed. He is not an ideal that is eternally fixed but a person who has been through struggle and change and thus shaped by them (Shulman, 2001).

V. SYMBOLIC TRIAL AND SOCIAL LEGITIMATION: BREAKING OF SHIVA'S BOW AND THE POLITICS OF MARRIAGE

The breaking of Shiva's bow (Pinka) at King Janak's court is probably one of the most symbolically loaded acts that have ever been placed in Bala Kanda. It is a test of physical prowess, a rite of social acceptance, a declaration of alignment with cosmic order, metaphysical (Sutherland, 1989). Interpretatively, this occurrence represents the epic's main moral principle: might (be it divine or not) is something that should be exhibited and kept through ethical behavior, not be spread or proclaimed in public (Valmiki, trans. Goldman, 1984).

Janaka's interpretation of the bow as a condition for Sita's marriage thereby places the marriage in a higher moral and political context. Marriage is seen as a public institution that brings together dynasties, legitimizes kingship, and reorders society (Sax, 2000), rather than a matter of private agreement. The bow is itself linked to Shiva; it stands for a power related to asceticism, a destructive force. By being there in the royal court, it (the bow) elevates the confrontation between two types of powers: ascetic strength, which is devoid of the world, and kingship, which is world-sustaining (Hiltebeitel, 2001).

Therefore, Ramas raising and breaking of the bow is as much indicative of his innate strength as it is about the harmonization of his two moral selves. Gadamer (1975) refers to the idea of play (Spiel) as a model of symbolic action, which means that the trial is not just a spectacle but an act in itself that produces meaning through the participation and interpretation of the actors and audience. The royal team and courtiers act as the witnesses to this scene, and their consensus gives social recognition to Rama's action.

Therefore, the ethical importance is not given but depends on the relationship and the approval of the community (Ricoeur, 1976). This is a good indication of the epic's emphasis on the social nature of dharma. Simply put, moral justice has to be tested and publicly demonstrated in a drama so that a person is known, challenged, and accepted (Pollock, 1986). The breaking of the bow is a narrative rupture that changes the moral order of the court. The fact that none of the existing kings can lift the bow is a further indication that lineage and power alone are not adequate grounds for ethical legitimacy.

To that end, Rama's triumph essentially shifts the notion of deservingness to a moral and spiritual quality (Sharma, 2003). Such a turnaround is reminiscent of what Ricoeur (1976) says about narrative being the means through which the social imagination is reshaped by providing different examples of human agency and values.

There is also more moral lift in the episode courtesy of Vishwamitra. It is his twin role as witness and intermediary between Rama's public star and his ascetic force to guide his own moral evolution that unites them. The sage's word is interpretative sealing; the symbolic act is the moral verdict (Clooney, 2007). The epic provides a type of integrative legitimacy whereby by virtue of its multilayered divine, ascetic, and social acknowledgment, moral and political deeds are legitimized with differing modes and degrees of justification (Biardeau, 1997). Even though Sita seems to appear secondary in contrast to the grand success of Rama, she plays an important role throughout the hermeneutic process. At the trial of Janaka's daughter, she represented pure womanhood, political alliance, and cosmic destiny (Kishwar, 2001).

The union of Rama and Sita is depicted less as a romanticizing ending to love affairs than as the merging of the moralities of two different moral principles. Janaka's role as a rajarshi (king, sage), which correlates strongly with the character of a court of political power that is not limited simply to a spiritual understanding of life and society but possessed also in a divine manner (Radhakrishnan, 1951).

Of course, the story has some gender matters to get down. Sita's freedom of selection is curtailed in a world that embraces masculine heroes and ascetic approval. Nonetheless, as a human representative (Bhmi) and paragon of virtue, she is the moral core that renders the relationship ethically productive (Sutherland, 1989). Richman (1991: 26) thinks each interpretation of the story will add a little to Sita's voice and power and hence can be varied somewhat.

But in the Bala Kanda, she is mainly at the intersection of cosmic and social orders. From the point of view of marriage politics, personal union becomes aligned with the syncretization of moral authority throughout kingdoms. The

marriage between Ayodhya and Mithila is not made by a quick treaty; it is a symbolically embodied and publicly recognized divine mandate. Thus, the epic sets a precedent for how political culture can be influenced by moral performance (Sharma, 2003). The bow test is, from the moral point of view, a gateway through which the loss of the legitimacy of authority through power can be seen.

Failing kings are not only not condemned as immoral, but on the contrary, they are considered to be outside the moral order because they are not united to the divine, ascetic conceptions. Rama's victory is the hero who combines two ethical perspectives, and one that he will eventually use to reform himself from the person who must maintain the legitimacy of his regime on the basis of ethical norms (Hiltebeitel, 2001).

The beginning of a royal court by an ascetic weapon also acts as a stimulus to metaphysical insight. Shiva's bow represents ascetic power as a force of destruction. When Rama breaks it, the metaphorical meaning is that he changes bad energy into good social force (Bhattacharji, 2000).

This deed doesn't destroy the power of asceticism; it diverts it in such a way that social order through marriage and kingship can still be upheld following it. This is the central theme of the epic about how a transcendent, or moral, force coexists with an immanent ethical order (Doniger, 2009).

Ricoeur (1976) has said that the power of imagination is a major factor in explaining how this particular episode is able to generate new moral worlds. The act of going beyond the original text by making an action legitimate, a new legal basis, is an invitation to the readers to imagine a moral world in which power is granted not because it is a right but because it is an ethical act. This is understandable in the imagination, and the role of the imagination is that it is a place where the epic is seen as a game of play and renewal of the social norms (Nussbaum, 1990). The public nature of the trial also serves to illustrate how recognition can be the most significant part of the act of dharma.

The audience is the jury that hears the case, and their approval transforms Rama's literal act into one single ethical trial. Such a social and psychological relation is consistent with the contemporary model that posits that moral norms are the outcome of the practices of mutual recognition and joint judgment (Nussbaum, 1990). In its discussion of the nature of power, the episode does raise another question. Power is not an ability that only one person can claim as theirs, but it can be exercised through ritual and symbolism. The Bow Trial, however, is the moment when one's moral worth is shown to an audience. Pollock (1986) would agree with the emphasis on performance presented in this way through his exploration of the Sanskrit epic and how political and cultural ideas are

propagated. Really, if we consider the episode from a hermeneutic as well as semantic point of view in parallel with others, it is not just the presentation of the scene as visual but also a heroic act, a wedding ceremony, a political alliance, or a metaphysical declaration coupled with a politically relevant narrative. In fact, they are so intertwined that they form a complex moral fabric which cannot be merely understood (see Sax, 2000).

In this way, the Bala Kanda will facilitate a reading process at various levels as symbol, narrative, and social environment constantly interact. The breaking of Shiva's bow is a significant point in the construction of Ramas public moral character since it signifies the change from an ascetic to one who is socially accepted and the shift from a private training to a public moral discipline (Clooney, 2007). Therefore, the politics of marriage does, in fact, reflect the argument of the entire article that the Ramayana is a moral world in which personal relationships are intertwined with both the cosmic and social order (Biardeau, 1997).

Rama and Sita getting together is not only a dramatic turning point in the story, but also an ethical, political, and metaphysical junction where various paths come together as if they complement one another. This instance shows that individual destiny can never be isolated from the collective, which is exactly what the epic dramatizes (Prasad, 2009).

VI. CONCLUSION

This article has argued for a spiritual, hermeneutic interpretation of the Bala Kanda as the ethical and metaphysical limits of the Valmiki Ramayana, a narrative architectonic that serves as a fluid field whose constituents are not rigid moral categories (dharma and adharmā) but lived, contested, socially constituted practices (Matilal, 2002).

The first book sets up a moral framework within which real authority is only a consequence of the ethical embodiment, public mediation, and ethical correctness (Pollock, 1986) of the image of the king, the sage, and the divine incarnation. Thus, the Bala Kanda allows for moral agency, political legitimacy, and spiritual accountability. In the examination of Dasharatha's involvement in the sacrificial economy, it was found that ritual acted as a mediating framework between human desires and celestial imperatives (Smith, 1989). The king's performance could be interpreted more as a demonstration of moral ability, which politically authorized the embedding of power within a cosmology of obligation and reciprocity, than a manifestation of personal piety. And therefore the divine reply of the incarnation of Rama recast transcendence as a historical method of solving moral conundrums, a focus more on moral performance

than metaphysical abstraction (Doniger, 2009). At the same time, Vishwamitra's intervention made the ethical problem more complicated and embodied a different kind of moral authority rooted in asceticism itself (Olivelle, 1993). By involving himself in royal matters, he placed spiritual insight above the hierarchy of organization and made that spirituality a condition for doing what is right.

The sage and the prince have a teacher-student relationship that, besides being a source of mutual help, initiated the conception of dharma as a state where one comes to understand by means of self-discipline, being faced with moral dilemmas, and interpretative instruction (Clooney, 2007). In this sense, the Bala Kanda depicts moral formation as a method of reflecting on the epic through its inclusion in broader philosophical discussions of moral development (Nussbaum, 1990).

The symbolic trial of Shiva's bow and the political debates about marriage subsequently helped to display this hermeneutic approach in the public area of the discourse on societal legitimation. Since this was done to the audience of hundreds for Rama, it turned the event into an ethical one that went beyond the competence domain, thus demonstrating how the epic was concerned to show that recognition and relationality are the ethical grounds of authority (Ricoeur, 1976). This episode, in many ways, literally incarnates the very core of the Ramayana, which reveals the greatness, glory, and godliness as aspects of one another and not as separate entities in a coiled manner (Biardeau, 1997). All the narrative instances/episodes/vignettes happen to collectively serve the Bala Kanda as a path/ means/ tool/ channel/ for ethical questioning; the symbolic materials of the text provide a set of interpretative possibilities that continue to resound in and out of that era/time (Richman, 1991). The article, by interacting with hermeneutic theory and narrative ethics, demonstrates how the epic operates as a living, breathing tradition, that is, as one which is constantly re-read with a sharpening moral/social awareness (Richman, 1991).

The component of morality/the ethical aspect is not delivered through a clean, neat sequence: One turning on the epic (hearing, viewing, reading) is an act of a person who uses such devices to create parallels between the epic and the contemporary world. The generative capacity of the Ramayana traditions as a moral and spiritual instrument is demonstrated by their (different) forms (Lutgendorf, 1991). The extrinsic/intended/further consequences of these interpretations/readings, private understanding of sacred texts, are indeed the very limits of sacred literature and political theology.

Bala Kanda also outlines a moral/ethical way of life, according to which the supreme/godly/transcendental

values get manifested in the doing of everyday life, and the ruling/ political authority depends on the leader's/ ruler's/ king's being morally responsible (Sharma, 2003). In its context, it fractures the existing rift between the sacred and the secular, and it gives a structurally moral and spiritually infused visualization of public life (Chatterjee, 2011).

The epic saga, then, is the story of power, responsibility, and the divine in this world. One may even consider such a hermeneutic approach an extension to the other kandas of the Ramayana or a crosswalk among global epic literature where parallel practices are used to How specific cultures utilize the nexus of divine agency and human ethics in the text/genre to facilitate other forms of narrative and story, thereby producing an inclusive reading of these texts this project will thus better explain how a story is a powerful vehicle for moral depth and social imagination to be Bala Kanda as a moral and ethical living landscape that ultimately challenges dharma in its dialogue. At the essence of these issues is the issue of right or wrong; what kind of authority is legitimate in a society (like the exercise of power in a king and the duties of a moral agent); all those questions are something that everyone could answer as they are subject to what they perceive of that point in time. The Valmiki Ramayana is a deeply spiritually and philosophically insightful work in its blending of myth with ethics, order, and social life (Hiltebeitel, 2001).

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Linguistic Hybridization in Odia: Oḍikṛt, Oḍilish, and Oḍindī

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Abstract— The current state of the Oḍiā language and the process of linguistic hybridisation observable within it have been analysed from both scientific and socio-linguistic perspectives. This study primarily focuses on the origin and grammatical application of hybrid terms such as ‘Oḍikṛt’ (Oḍi-a + Prā-kṛt or Sams-kṛt), ‘Oḍilish’ (Oḍi-a + Eng-lish), and ‘Oḍindī’ (Oḍi-a + Hin-dī). Although Oḍiā is a classical language, the forces of globalisation and intense cultural exchange have led it to blend with other languages, creating a vibrant new domain of code mixing and switching. In particular, urban environments—driven by education, media, social media, and considerations of social status—have significantly transformed the fundamental structure and character of the language. This transformation represents either a challenge to Oḍiā identity or a natural linguistic evolution. The essay also offers practical suggestions for maintaining a healthy balance between preserving the purity of the Oḍiā language and embracing necessary modern adaptations.



Keywords— Linguistic Hybridization, Social media, Linguistic Transformation, Odia Language, Oḍikṛt, Oḍilish & Oḍindī

I. INTRODUCTION

Language is a dynamic social institution that continually evolves and refines itself with the passage of time. The Oḍiā language is no exception to this reality. As one of India’s ancient Indo-Aryan languages, Oḍiā has successfully preserved its classical dignity while emerging as a harmonious synthesis of diverse linguistic influences (Dhal-1976). The linguistic journey of Oḍiā began with the ancient Prakrit tradition of *tatsama* (direct borrowings) and *tadbhaba* (adapted) words and has now extended to the modern Oḍilish culture (Sahu, 1994; Mathur, 2015). In contemporary times, the pervasive influence of Hindi films and English-medium education has made the use of ‘Oḍindī’ and ‘Oḍilish’ completely natural in the daily conversations of Oḍiā households (Mohapatra-2025; Chetia-2017). The structural fabric of the Oḍiā language rests on a profound Sanskrit foundation, popularly known as the ‘Oḍikṛt’ style. This style is essentially a refined and harmonious blend of *tatsama* and *tadbhaba* words, which

endows the language with both depth and lucidity (Sahu-1994; Mathur-2015).

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, the Oḍiā language fought a major battle against Bengali and Hindi influences to preserve its very existence (Palai-2021). As a result, in 1936, Odisha emerged as the first independent province in India formed on the basis of language. However, in the post-independence era and especially since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the dominance of English and Hindi has created new challenges for the Oḍiā language. In today’s society, ‘Oḍilish’ (Oḍi-a + Eng-lish) has become the common medium of communication among the educated class and urban population. This process has led to such an extensive blending of English words with Oḍiā grammar that it is gradually taking the shape of a distinct hybrid language (Biswal-2009; Mathur-2015).

Alongside this, the influence of ‘Oḍindī’ (Oḍi-a + Hi-ndi) is increasingly felt through Hindi films, music, and the speech of Oḍiā migrants (Mohapatra-2025; Chetia-2017). This

Hindi influence is particularly evident in northern and western Odisha, where it is visibly altering both vocabulary and pronunciation patterns. In this essay, we will examine this linguistic evolution of the Oḍiā language in depth. It is particularly noteworthy how, in major cities such as Bhubaneswar, Sambalpur, Berhamapur, Angul, and Cuttack, the Oḍiā language is slowly losing its original character in educational and professional spheres and adopting a hybrid form (Reddit user-2025; Chetia-2017).

In this study, the contemporary transformation of the Oḍiā language has been understood through the linguistic processes of ‘code-mixing’ and ‘code-switching’ (Mehra-2026; Biswal-2009; Chetia-2017). It is also evident that while the ‘Oḍikṛt’ style remains largely confined to traditional and formal domains, ‘Oḍilish’ and ‘Oḍindī’ have emerged as powerful, dynamic social forces. This change is not merely linguistic; it serves as a clear indicator of deeper cultural and psychological shifts. A close analysis of the changes occurring in the Oḍiā language reveals that they are the natural outcome of linguistic contact (Sahu-1994; Himani-2024). According to linguists, whenever two or more distinct speech communities live together or when multiple languages hold prominence within the same society, linguistic hybridisation inevitably takes place (Menasah-2010; Chetia-2017).

II. OḌIKṚT: THE PRĀKṚTA OR SANSKRIT-BASED FOUNDATION

A significant portion of the Oḍiā language’s vocabulary is derived from Sanskrit. In linguistics, this process is referred to as ‘Oḍikṛt’. Sanskrit words have influenced Oḍiā through three major streams: *Tatsama*: Words that are identical or nearly identical to their Sanskrit originals (e.g., *Prajā* (Citizens), *Ratna* (Jewel), *Prāntara* (Vast Open land), *Bhakti* (Devotion), *Parjyāpta* (Sufficient), etc.). *Tadbhava*: Words that have evolved and been modified from their Prakrit-Sanskrit roots (e.g., *Kumbhāra* (Potter), *Kendu* (Diospyros Melanoxylon), *Sāṅga* (Friend), *Cora* (Thief), *Naukā* (Boat), etc.). *Kṛdanta* and *Taddhita*: Words formed according to Sanskrit grammatical rules of derivation and suffixation (e.g., *Tyāga* (Sacrifice), *Bibaha* (Marriage), *Śoka* (Sorrow), *Bhaba* (Emotion), *Śāpa* (Curse), *Abatāra* (Incarnation), etc.) (Sahu-1994; Mohapatra-1943; Devangri-2025). The following are some prominent examples of the Oḍikṛt style: (Mohapatra-1997)

Sanskrit Root	Oḍiā Tatsama	Oḍiā Tadbhava
Dugdha (milk)	Dugdha (Milk)	Dudha (Milk)
Matsya (Fish)	Matsya (Fish)	Mācha (Fish)
Hasta (Hand)	Hasta (Hand)	Hāta (Hand)

Sanskrit Root	Oḍiā Tatsama	Oḍiā Tadbhava
Sandhyā (Evening)	Sandhyā (Evening)	Sanja (Evening)
Kūpa (Well)	Kūpa (Well)	Kūa (Well)

The importance of the Oḍikṛt style lies in the gravity and sophistication it imparts to the Oḍiā language. Sanskrit-derived words are particularly indispensable in domains such as spirituality, science, education, and jurisprudence. Words like ‘anurāgī’ (Enthusiast), ‘pratīyogī’ (Competitor), *kalpanā* (Imagination), *suśāsana* (Righteous rule), and ‘gōraba’ (Pride) form the very backbone of the Oḍiā language (Sahu-1994; Mohapatra-1943; Chetia-2017; Padhi-n.d.).

III. OḌILISH: THE NEW DYNAMISM OF LANGUAGE

In urban Odisha, the influence of English has become so profound that it has given rise to a new dialect or variety, popularly known as ‘Oḍilish’. The primary driver behind this phenomenon is code-mixing (Sinha-2009; Chetia-2017). In this style, English nouns or verbs are freely inserted into Oḍiā sentence structures. A grammatical analysis of Oḍilish reveals several interesting patterns (Nicodemo-2024; Lavadia-2025; Mohapatra-2023) (Table-1).

Table-1, Grammatical analysis of Oḍilish

Oḍilish Sentence	Grammatical Mixing	Meaning
ଓଫିସ୍‌କୁ ଗଲାଣି। (Se Office-ku galāṇi.)	English Noun + Oḍiā Case Ending	He/she has gone to the office.
ଫିରମ୍ କର। (Tike Verify-kara.)	English Verb + Oḍiā Auxiliary	Please verify it.
Exam-ଟି ବହୁତ ହାର୍ଡ୍। (Exam-tā bahuta hard thilā.)	English Noun + Article + English Adjective	The exam was very difficult.
ମୁଁ ଡିଆଲ୍ କରୁଛି। (Mum tumaku Call-karibi.)	English Verb + Oḍiā Future Tense	I will call you.

Using this kind of language among the educated youth is often seen as a marker of social status and sophistication. It indicates that language is not merely a tool for communication but also a powerful indicator of a person's education and social class (Reddit user-2025; Chetia-2017; Mohapatra-2023).

IV. OḍINDĪ: HINDI INFILTRATION AND INFLUENCE

The influence of Hindi on the Oḍiā language primarily comes from two major sources — commerce and business, and entertainment. In the Sambalpur dialect of Western Odisha, the impact of Hindi is particularly strong, giving rise to what can aptly be called 'Oḍindī'. However, this hybrid form has now spread across the entire state of Odisha (Mohapatra-2025; Tripathy-2025; Chetia-2017). Here are some notable examples of Hindi-influenced Oḍiā speech:

- **Pronunciation Changes:** The final 'ୱ' (a) sound in many Oḍiā words is frequently dropped under Hindi influence. For instance, instead of saying 'ଭୁବନେଶ୍ୱର' (*Bhubanesvara*), people now say 'ଭୁବନେଶ୍ୱ' (*Bhubanesvar*). Similarly, 'ଭାତ' (*Bhāta-Rice*) is pronounced as 'ଭାଡ଼' (*Bhāt-Rice*) (Mohapatra-2025; Parichha-2025).
- **Use of Hindi Phrases and Words:** Hindi expressions such as 'थोड़ी ना' (*thoḍī nā-it's not like*), 'फिर भी' (*phir bhi-Still*), 'मस्त' (*mast-Superb*), and many others have seamlessly integrated into everyday Oḍiā conversation (Mohapatra-2025; Parichha-2025).
- **Difficulty in Numerical Counting:** A significant number of English-medium students find it difficult to count from 1 to 100 in pure Oḍiā, while they can do so effortlessly in Hindi or English. Many now prefer hybrid pronunciations like 'एक-एक' (*eka-ek*), 'दुई-दो' (*dui-do*), 'तिनी-तिन' (*tini-tin*), 'चारि-चार' (*cāri-cār*), 'पाँच-पाञ्च' (*pāñca-pāñc*), 'छा-छे' (*cha-che*), 'सात-सात्' (*sāta-sāt*), 'आठ' (*āṭha-āt*), 'नहीं-नो' (*na-no*), and 'दास-दाश्' (*daśa-das*). These shortened forms are easier and faster to articulate in rapid speech (Reddit user-2025).

V. SOCIAL MEDIA AND LINGUISTIC TRANSFORMATION

Social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram have turned into a new laboratory for the Oḍiā language (Dey-2023; Lavadia-2025). Here, the use of Roman-Oḍiā (Oḍiā written in Roman script) has become extremely widespread. This practice simplifies

Oḍiā grammar and frequently encourages the use of 'Oḍilish' vocabulary. According to research, 30% to 40% of words in Oḍiā comments on social media are borrowed from English or Hindi (Nayak-2021; Yuana-2022). Examples include: *Tame Khai sarilani?* (*Tame khāi sārilaṇi-ତମେ ଖାଇ ସାରିଲଣି?* – Have you finished eating?) & *sab kuchh chhod diya tum keliye* (*Sab kucha choḍ diā tum keliye-ସବ୍ କୁଚ୍ ଛୋଡ଼ିଦିଆ ତୁମ୍ କେ ଲିଯେ* -I left everything for you). This ongoing tension between Oḍikṛt and Oḍilish in the Oḍiā language is not merely linguistic — it is deeply connected to social identity (Mohapatra-2023; Mohapatra-2021; Martineau, 2020).

PURITY VERSUS USAGE

Oḍiā linguists are broadly divided into two camps. One group strongly advocates for linguistic purity. They believe that the Sanskrit-based 'Oḍikṛt' style should dominate word selection, as it preserves the language's dignity and classical character. They express concern that original Oḍiā words such as 'Ātmagarbī' (self-respecting), 'Svārthi' (selfish), and 'Anusandhāna' (research/ investigation) are gradually falling out of use, which threatens the language's independence (Mohapatra-2025; Sahu-1994; Yuana-2022). On the other hand, scholars with a modern outlook view linguistic hybridisation as a natural evolution. They argue that when people use English words like 'Depression' or 'Stress', they are often expressing feelings for which there are either no precise traditional Oḍiā equivalents or the native words lack the same social weight and impact. Linguist Homi Bhabha has described this space as the "Third Space", where two cultures meet and create a new, hybrid identity (Bisoi-2026; Mohapatra-2021; Lavadia-2025).

EDUCATION AND THE FUTURE GENERATION

The position of the Oḍiā language in the education sector is a matter of serious concern. In Odisha, speaking Oḍiā is sometimes discouraged in CBSE and ICSE schools. Many children learn the English alphabet before they properly learn their mother tongue. As a result, 'Oḍilish' dominates their speech. They prefer to converse with friends in Hindi or English, causing the Oḍiā language to be increasingly confined to domestic and informal settings. Although the New Education Policy (NEP 2020) emphasises mother-tongue-based education, in practice, the overwhelming pressure of Hindi and English is pushing Oḍiā to the margins (Reddit user-2025; Mohapatra-2025; Lavadia-2025). According to census data, the percentage of Oḍiā speakers at the national level has declined from 3.62% in 1971 to 3.10% in 2011. This is a deeply worrying trend (Mohapatra-2025).

ROLE OF LITERATURE AND MASS MEDIA

In *Oḍiā* literature, the *Oḍikṛt* style has always enjoyed high prestige. In the writings of Fakir Mohan Senapati, we see a masterful and refined use of the *Oḍiā* language, where he strongly criticises the blind imitation of foreign languages (Mohapatra H.S. – 2025). However, in contemporary literature, the use of ‘*Oḍilish*’ and ‘*Oḍindī*’ is increasingly accepted as a reflection of modern reality (Bisoi-2026; Latifah-2024; Nayak-2021). In *Oḍiā* Short-story and poems, the mixing of Hindi and English words is deliberately used to appeal to the younger generation (Table-2).

Table-2, *Oḍiā* Short-story and Poem

<i>Oḍiā</i> Short-story & Poem text Mixing Code Hindi & English	
“ମୂର୍ତ୍ତି କେମିତି ହେବ ଖୁବ୍ ଅପ୍ ହୁ ଡେବ୍, ମଡର୍ଣ୍ଣ, ପ୍ରେଭୋକେଟିଭ୍, ମାନ୍ ବିସ୍ଫୋରକ.... ।” -କୁଲ୍ ଡ୍ରାଗନ୍ (Hota-2012)	“Mūrtti Kemiti Haba? खुब (Khub) up to date, Modern, Provocative, mane Bisphoraka... ” - Black Dragan (Hota-2012)
“ରାମ ନାମ ସତ୍ୟ ହେଁ ରାମ ନାମ ଜପନା ଆୟା ରାମ ଗୟା ରାମ ପରାୟା ମାଲ୍ ଅପନା । ଆଲା ରୋଜା ହର୍କୁଲେସ୍ ଓଲାଡ୍ ମାଲ୍ ଟ୍ରିପଲ୍ ଏକ୍ସ ଜନମ ଭୂମି ଫାଲ୍ ଧନୁ ଧୁନ ଶିଆଳ କେରୀ ଶିଂଘା ବାଣ ନାମ ନବମୀ ରାଜ ଖଡ଼ି ଛେଳି ।”-ରାମ (Das- 2015)	“Rāma nāma satya hai Rāma nāma जपना (japanā) आया (āyā) rāma गया (gayā) rāma पराया माल् आपना (parāyā māla apanā). आला (ālā) रोजा (rojā) Hercules Old monk triple x janama bhūmi phaḷa dhanu dhuna śiālā kerī śiṃghā bāṇa nāma navamī rāja khaḍi cheli.”-Rāma (Das-2015)
“ହରେକୃଷ୍ଣ ଦାସ ଚାହେଁ ଅବାକ ଆଶ୍ଚର୍ଯ୍ୟ ଆଜି ଏତେ ଭିଡ଼ ଏତେ ଲୋକ ଏତେ ତେଜ ଦୋକାନ ଆଲୁଅ ପେଟ୍ରୋଲ୍ ବାମ୍ବାରେ ସରକାରୀ ଜିପ୍ ଗାଡ଼ି “ଝିଅରିଂ ହୁଇଲ୍”ରେ ଏହି ଛୁଆଁ ପ୍ରଥମ ଶୀତର	“Harekr̥ṣṇa dāsa cāhem अवाक (abāk) āścaryya āji ete bhirḍa ete loka ete teja dokāna ālua Petrol bāsnāre sarakārī Jep gāḍi “staring wheel”re ehi chuām prathama śītara

ହରେକୃଷ୍ଣ ଦାସ ଚାହେଁ ସହରର ବନ୍ଧୁହୀନ ଜାତି ହୀନ “ନମସ୍କାର” “ଜୟହିନ୍ଦ୍” “ସଲ୍ଲାମ୍” ଭିତରେ ।”-ହରେକୃଷ୍ଣ ଦାସ-୪ (Mohanty-1995)	harekr̥ṣṇa dāsa cāle saharara bandhuhīna jñāti hīna 'namaskāra' 'jayahind' 'sallām' bhitare.”-Harekr̥ṣṇa Dāsa- 4 (Mohanty-1995)

In *Oḍiā* films and music, the mixing of Hindi and English words is deliberately used to appeal to the younger generation.

- “ହେ ପ୍ରଭୁ! ଥରେ ଦେଖା ଦେ.. ପୁଲେ ଟଙ୍କା ଦେ.. ଦେଖାତ ମିଳିବନି/ ତୁ ତ ଭାରି ବିଜି/ ଟଙ୍କା ତ କମାଇବା/ ନୁହେଁତ ଏତେ ଲଜି.” {He prabhu! Thare dekha de puḷe ṭaṅkā de... dekhā ta miḷibani tu ta bhari **busy**... ṭaṅkā ta kamāibā numhe ta ete **easy**....} (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UPeVxrEpc&list=RDUPeVxrEpc&start_radio=1)
- Mixing Hindi and English: “...ପୁରୁସତରେ ଉପର ବାଲା/ ବନେଇଥିଲା/ ନାରି... କାହାକୁ କଲା/ କାଲି ସାବେନି... କାହାକୁ କଲା/ ଗୋରୀ... Cool cool ଚେହେରା/ cool... ଲାଗିଛି ସିନା/ beautiful.... ହେଲେ ତାଙ୍କର ହିସାବ ଭାଇ କୋଇ ନେହିଁ ପାଆ.... What is this... this is ମାୟାରେ ବାୟା...yo yaa {फुरसत re upara bālā baneithilā nārī... kāhāku kalā kālī sābeni... kāhaku kala gorī... Cool Cool ceherā cool... lāgantisinā beautiful... hele tāṅkara हिसाब (hisāba) bhāi କୋଇ ନେହିଁ ପାଆ (koi nemhi pāyā)... What is this... this is māyāre bāyā.} (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=007OVk5ix54&list=RD007OVk5ix54&start_radio=1)
- ଲେଜି ଲେଜି ହାର୍ଟ ମୋର କ୍ରେଜି ହେଇପାଏରେ.... (Lazy lazy heart mora crazy heiyāere). (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CnDuWE9AFPs&list=RDCnDuWE9AFPs&start_radio=1)

VI. CONCLUSION

The use of *Oḍikṛt*, *Oḍilish*, and *Oḍindī* in the *Oḍiā* language is a clear reflection of its dynamism and the ongoing social changes around it. Just as heavy English influence on Hindi gave rise to "Hinglish", similar processes are reshaping *Oḍiā* today. The Sanskrit-based *Oḍikṛt* style provides the language with classical dignity and long-term stability. In contrast, *Oḍilish* and *Oḍindī* have emerged as essential responses to the demands of modern communication and urbanisation. Complete rejection of this linguistic hybridisation is neither possible nor practical. However, conscious effort is required to protect the fundamental character of the language. We must strive to preserve the classical Sanskrit foundation of *Oḍiā* while thoughtfully adopting modern styles in such a way that *Oḍiā* identity is

not compromised. Giving priority to the mother tongue in the education system and fostering a deep sense of pride in the *Oḍiā* language within the cultural sphere are essential steps. Only through these measures can *Oḍiā* remain a rich and vibrant language in the future. Change in language is indeed proof of its vitality. Yet, every *Oḍiā* speaker must remain vigilant to ensure that this change does not become a path toward erosion or eventual extinction.

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Human Identity and Nature: An Ecocritical Examination of Cultural Perspectives in Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*

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Abstract— This paper seeks to explore the intricate interplay between 'human identity' and 'nature' in Philip K. Dick's Hugo award-winning novel, *The Man in the High Castle*, concentrating primarily on the contrasting perspectives of Japanese and American characters in relation to the natural world. Dominated by authoritarian regimes in an allohistorical dystopian backdrop the novel presents 'nature' as an active entity that both influences and reflects culture. Grounded in traditions and value systems that emphasize harmony and congruence with the natural world, the Japanese characters demonstrate a profound sense of reverence for nature, which serves as a source of their spiritual and emotional sustenance. In sharp contrast, a kind of nuanced, utilitarian and alienated relationship with the environment is observed in case of the American characters often seen struggling with a sense of disconnection and despair. By analysing closely these divergent perspectives, the paper situates or at least tries to position Dick's work within a broader discourse on human-nature relationships in world literature, engaging with Eastern philosophical traditions that advocate for harmonious coexistence with nature and contrasting these ideas with the Western legacy of exploitation and abuse. This research, at its very core seeks to articulate a vision of coexistence that transcends way beyond the anthropocentric narratives, contributing to an ecocritical discourse that highlights how our cultural backgrounds influence our perceptions of nature and shape our identities in turn.



Keywords— Nature, Identity, Ecocriticism, Alternate History, human-nature relationships, Dystopian Landscape, Japanese culture, American Identity, Eastern philosophy, Beyond Anthropocentrism

I. INTRODUCTION

The Man in the High Castle, despite its Allohistorical narrative structure shares an intriguing and riveting exploration of 'identity' and 'nature' within certainly a somewhat dystopian setting. Set in an alternative 1962, fifteen years after the end of the war in 1947 following an Axis victory; the US is fragmented and occupied by the Axis powers. The eastern seaboard (Eastern Half) is under the German occupation, the west coast is a part of the PSA (Pacific States of America) under the Japanese control. The Midwest and Rocky Mountain regions exist as a quasi-independent, no man's land acting as buffer zone separating the two occupying

forces. Now, this sort of complex geopolitical scenario not only delineates the struggles of individuals grappling with their identities in an upended world but also serves as a canvas for examining how cultural backgrounds shape perceptions of the natural world in general.

The contrasting perspectives of Japanese and American characters dole out lens through which the broader themes of alienation, reverence for nature, and the human-nature relationship can be studied closely. Rooted in traditions, that reflect a deep sense of respect and reverence for Mother Nature, the Japanese characters, often exhibit a sense of belongingness, as well as a profound understanding of the interconnectedness of the

world of nature and that of man. This 'honour' and 'reverence' stands in stark contrast to the American characters, who frequently evince a more utilitarian, nuanced, and alienated relationship with their environment.

This dichotomy not only expounds the cultural legacies that shape each character's outlook but also serves to illuminate the broader implications of their interactions with nature. As Donna Haraway states, "Nature/culture ... are not a loosely related pairs of terms; their specific form of relation is hierarchical appropriation" (Haraway 12). And this hierarchy is even relative, as displayed within the differing perspectives of the Japanese and American characters. Furthermore, Folke Günther asserts that "if we want to be truly scientific, we must abandon the dualist view that nature exists outside culture and adopt a view, universally accepted among indigenous tribal people, that culture is inside nature" (qtd. in Sharma 196). This perspective emphasizes that culture depends on nature and underscores the ineradicable presence of nature within cultural constructs. Whilst American characters almost struggle with feelings of disconnection and existential despair, the Japanese characters, grounded in their oriental traditions seem to embody a philosophy that values coexistence and harmony. Gradually as the narrative unfolds, the plot reveals the daedalian ways in which the characters relate to their environment, highlighting how cultural backgrounds shape identities and influence perceptions of nature. As such, in this journey of discovery, *The Man in the High Castle* prods and almost in a way nudges the readers to take a second glance at their relationship with the natural world, encouraging a relationship beyond the Manichaeian approach of understanding nature and culture in terms of sheer duality.

II. CULTURAL CONTEXTS AND ECOCRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

The Man in the High Castle, quite deftly manages to explore the interplay between cultural identity and the natural world, particularly through the contrasting perspectives of Japanese and American characters. Set against the backdrop of an allohistorical setting administered by totalitarian regimes, the novel presents 'nature' not merely as a passive presence but as a dynamic entity that, in turn, reflects cultural identities it has shaped. This paper anchored around the concept of ecocriticism, takes an ecocritical approach, examining how human and environmental concerns meet within literature. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm call ecocriticism "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty xviii). This definition,

foregrounds the importance of understanding ecological contexts in the study of literature and push us to look beyond the alphabets and punctuations into the deeper ecological and cultural contexts that shape the very way we read and interpret stories and how they in turn shape our perception of the natural world.

At the very heart of the Japanese tradition, as described by Paul Watt "stand Shinto, the indigenous religion of Japan, and Buddhism, the Indian religion that reached Japan in the sixth through eighth centuries A.D. from Korea and China" (Watt 21). The amalgamation of Shinto and Zen Buddhism in the Japanese culture, results in a syncretic tradition that treasures values such as balance, interdependence, and reverence for nature. Characters like Nobusuke Tagomi not only embody these ideals, but channel these core values throughout, demonstrating a depth of natural awareness and ethical responsibility. Tagomi's meditations on beauty and simplicity serve to illuminate an outlook that promotes the sanctity of existence as he brawls with the implications of his choices within a society that often thrives on notions of authority and dominion. His appreciation of the natural world is more than mere aesthetic pleasure; it's a deep spiritual connection, a spiritual touchstone of a kind that serves to inform his sense of 'identity' and moral reflection. For Tagomi, nature is a source of wisdom and guidance. It is very different from the utilitarian views shared by most American characters.

In contrast, the American characters in the novel often seem materialistic and exploitative towards nature. Robert Childan and Frank Frink are the manifestations of alienation and hopelessness that reflect a greater kind of cultural conversation where material success and individual gain come at the cost of true interaction with the natural world. The derisive attitudes of Childan and Frank's cynicism only strengthen a sense of disconnection from nature that fuels their struggles to find 'self' in this dystopian world. This prevalent American outlook tends to reduce 'nature' to just an exploitable commodity, as reflected in Childan's adoration of the goals of the Nazis and Frank's concern with market trends. This outlook in a way abets feelings of despair and disconnection, focusing on the psychological effects of living in a society that markets life itself as a commodity. The chinwags and yarns between Japanese and American characters allow for a cross-cultural dialogue that substantially influences the formation of identity throughout the novel.

Tagomi's consideration and appreciation for American artifacts, as such the "Mickey Mouse wristwatch," symbolizes not only connection to a "dying old U.S. culture," but also a reflection of his nuanced

understanding of the American culture; way of life. Juliana's moments of connection with the natural world reveal the potential for empathy and understanding across cultural divides, even amidst the tensions of the stark political realities, Juliana steers through her identity in an oriental society, embodying the intricacies of cross-cultural exchange. Like Mr. Tagomi, the Japanese characters, primarily establish their cultural identities through interactions with nature. Mr. Tagomi's deep sense of spiritual connection to the environment stands in stark contrast to the estrangement and alienation experienced by most American characters, showcasing how cultural backgrounds shape perceptions of identity thereby determining people's understanding of themselves and their connection with the environment.

The contrasting perspectives on nature in *The Man in the High Castle* quite categorically confront and contest the anthropocentric narratives prevalent in Western thought. The novel confronts Western anthropocentrism by emphasizing the interconnectedness of all life forms. As Mountfort notes, the *I Ching* embodies a worldview where "Because of its vastness and greatness, it corresponds with heaven and earth. Because of its changes and its continuity, it corresponds with the four seasons. Because of the meaning of the light and the dark, it corresponds with the sun and moon" (Mountfort 290). This cosmological orientation doesn't place humans above or outside nature; it roots identity within the endless flow of natural cycles or rhythms as documented by the *I Ching* by accentuating these cultural contexts, the narrative articulates the need for sensitivity in nurturing empathy and understanding amid conflict thereby rejecting the dominant western narratives centered around exploitation and abuse of nature, urging for a more integrated vision of human existence within the natural spectrum.

III. AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES ON NATURE AND IDENTITY

The American characters in the novel, quite often reify a utilitarian and exploitative relationship with nature, reflecting cultural narratives that prioritize economic success and personal gain over honest relationships with the natural environment. This perspective is particularly evident in characters like Robert Childan and Frank Frink, who grapple with feelings of alienation and despair in a society dominated by an oriental culture that doesn't seem to value this utilitarian and materialistic attitude.

Robert Childan's character in a way typifies the American perspective on 'identity' and 'nature' within this dystopian backdrop, he's practically the poster child. The raging inner conflict within and his constant sense of

social awareness, around the Japanese couple reveal a deep-seated anxiety about his place in the society, dominated by a culture different to his own. His anxiety seeps out in almost every interaction, he's constantly worried about fitting in, about making the right impression among the Japanese elite. His thoughts, here, "And yet he trembled with fear, imagining himself knocking at their door," illustrate his apprehension about engaging with the Japanese couple, the Kasouras (Dick 4). Now, this fear is compounded by his concern over social propriety, as he questions whether he will "know the proper act and utterance at each moment?" or risk disgracing himself, "like an animal, by some dismal faux pas" (Dick 4). Childan's derogatory comparison of himself to an animal inadvertently reveals a critical aspect of his identity, by equating 'animality' with disgrace, Childan reveals an anthropocentric worldview that prioritizes human social constructs over the intrinsic value of all living beings, including animals. This perspective, potentially highlights a broader cultural narrative where, American characters often seem to exhibit a utilitarian and alienated relationship with their environment, viewing nature primarily as a backdrop, a mere setting for human activity rather than an active participant that shapes their lives. The term "animal," together with its derogatory connotations highlights the profound disconnect that many American characters, like Childan, experience first-hand in their relationships with one another and with nature. The 'anxiety' and 'self-doubt' that afflicts Robert reflects not only a case of personal estrangement or alienation, but a wider condition that is emblematic, indeed symbolic, of a cultural identity that struggles to locate meaning and to sustain authentic connection in a fragmented world.

Further, Childan's admiration for the Nazis' "nobility" and their ambitious projects, be it the colonization of Mars or the transformation of Africa into tillable farmland, reveals a utilitarian outlook that is rooted in exploitation of and domination over the natural world. His assertion that "what the Nazis have which we lack is — nobility" reflects a misguided understanding of what constitutes 'value' and 'worth' in life (Dick 20). Childan's perspective here is steeped in a desire for power and control, rather than recognizing the inherent value of nature and the importance of coexistence, he views nature as a resource to be manipulated and utilized for human gain. This utilitarian relationship with 'nature' is further emphasized by his reflections on the "Final Solution of the African Problem," where he rationalizes the violent and oppressive actions taken against marginalized groups.

But Africa. They had simply let their enthusiasm get the better of them there, and you had to admire that ... Now there

the Nazis had shown genius; the artist in them had truly emerged. The Mediterranean Sea bottled up, drained, made into tillable farmland, through the use of atomic power — what daring! How the sniggerers had been set back on their heels ... And as a matter of fact, Africa had almost been successful . . . but in a project of that sort, almost was an ominous word to begin to hear. Rosenberg's well-known powerful pamphlet issued in 1958; the word had first shown up, then. As to the Final Solution of the African Problem, we have almost achieved our objectives. Unfortunately, however — Still, it had taken two hundred years to dispose of the American aborigines, and Germany had almost done it in Africa in fifteen years. (Dick 20)

Childan's very belief as evident here including his remark "almost was an ominous word to begin to hear" suggests a desensitization to the suffering of others, as he prioritizes technological advancement and colonial ambition over ethical considerations (Dick 20). This perspective serves as a counternarrative to the sense of communion and interconnectedness that characterizes the Japanese position, as embodied by characters like Nobusuke Tagomi. Childan's interactions with the Kasouras, as the plot unfolds and his internal struggles serve as a microcosm of the larger themes of 'identity' and 'nature' in the novel. By examining these contrasting perspectives, we can better understand how cultural backgrounds shape our perceptions of nature and influence our identities, eventually contributing to an ecocritical discourse that transcends the anthropocentric narrative.

Frank Frink's character personifies this profound alienation felt by many American characters in the novel, particularly regarding their relationship with nature and cultural identity. As he listens to the radio discussing the "Co-Prosperity Civilization," his bitter commentary reveals cynicism and disappointment with the ruling hierarchy and the materialistic values that govern his society. The line, "we have not failed to perceive the future arena in which the affairs of man will be acted out, be they Nordic, Japanese, Negroid," highlights a utilitarian view of existence, reducing human interactions to mere categories based on race and power (Dick 08). His satirical thoughts on Germans colonizing Mars, "Picture of stolid, grumpy Germans walking around on Mars, on the red sand where no humans had ever stepped before" reflect both awareness of absurdity and deep cynicism about the future

(Dick 7-8). When he remarks, "But there is nothing to breathe," it serves as a poignant metaphor for his suffocating environment (Dick 08), encapsulating the existential void and disjunction he experiences within. This materialistic preoccupation has severed his connection to the natural world, leaving him trapped in a landscape devoid of vitality.

Frank's perspective in contrast to the *Nihonjin* characters residing in the PSA, who often seem to maintain a harmonious relationship with nature, is marked by competition and alienation. While High ranking Japanese bureaucratic figures like Nobusuke Tagomi find spiritual sustenance in their connection to the environment, Frank is completely subsumed by power struggles and the relentless pursuit of material gain. His reflections on the Pacific's, i.e. the PSA's abject failure to colonize other planets emphasize his preoccupation with geopolitical implications rather than a deeper understanding of the world. This dialectical tension between Frank's materialistic slant and the Japanese characters' veneration for nature highlights broader themes of 'identity' and 'cultural perception' in the novel. Frink's firm declaration, "I came for my tools. Nothing else," signifies his determination to reclaim agency in a world that has stripped him of his identity and purpose (Dick 38). Frank's pragmatic approach to life isn't glamorous or lofty, when he says "I should take my tools, get my motors from McCarthy, open my shop, start my piddling business ...", it reveals a desire to create and find purpose despite the looming threat of catastrophe (Dick 43-44). However, this determination is tinged with a sense of futility, as he acknowledges that "fate will poleax us eventually anyhow" (Dick 44). The struggle between his desire for agency and the overwhelming sense of doom that permeates his thoughts is highlighted by this resignation to fate, he's really trying hard to move forward, but the sense of doom never really leaves him. The interaction between Frink and his mate, Ed McCarthy further emphasize their practical, utilitarian approach to life, as their discussions mostly focus on 'work' and 'survival' rather than the beauty or significance of the natural world. Unlike Nipponese characters Tagomi and Kotomichi, who engage with 'nature' and oriental 'poetic' traditions, Frink and McCarthy are entrenched in a reality where the harshness and turbidity of their environment overshadows any appreciation for nature. This absence of nature in their interactions, highlights the pervasive sense of alienation and despair that characterizes their lives, reinforcing the idea that in a world dominated by oppression, the connection to the natural world is often lost.

Frank Frink's character offers a poignant glimpse into the American experience in *The Man in the High*

Castle. His alienation and materialism sharply contrast with the Japanese characters' spiritual ties to nature, revealing how cultural backgrounds shape our views of the world and ourselves. This contrast enriches the narrative, encouraging a thoughtful discussion about our relationship with nature while challenging dominant anthropocentric perspectives at the same time. Frank's struggles reflect the toll of pessimism, emphasizing the need to seek meaning and connection in an indifferent world. His journey through a harsh landscape serves as a reminder that, even amid adversity, we must forge our own identities and nurture our relationships with the environment around us.

Juliana Frink's character unlike her American counterparts manifests the complexities of American identity shaped by the permeating influence of Japanese culture in a dystopian landscape. Life in Japanese-occupied America forces her to see things differently, her experience, allow her to adopt a more nuanced perspective on life and mortality. Her contemplation of existence, particularly in the line, "Did he fall dead without me? A fink is a finch, a form of bird. And they say birds die," reflects a deep awareness of the fragility of life, resonating with Eastern philosophical concepts that embrace the inevitability of death (Dick 27). This awareness is further enriched by her judo practice, practicing judo does more than make her strong. It grounds her, helps her find balance, and opens her up to Japanese ideas about accepting what you can't control. Through Juliana, we see an identity in flux ... not just American, not quite Japanese, but something more complicated and, ultimately, more aware.

On closer examination, Juliana's description of Joe as "a little animal, not important but smart" highlights a distinctly American perspective on nature and human identity, revealing a tendency to diminish the significance of the natural world (Dick 73). This characterization underscores a broader cultural attitude that views animals and by extension, nature as subordinate in the hierarchy of existence to man. Juliana's perception suggests an underlying disconnect between humanity and the natural world, indicating that in the American context, the value of life is often measured by its utility or relevance to human experience. This perspective resonates with Robert Childan's internal conflict, as he fears disgracing himself, like an animal, reflecting a societal tendency to prioritize human concerns over the natural world (Dick 45).

Juliana's ambivalence toward Joe, coupled with her casual comparison to an animal, highlights the complexities of her identity as an American woman navigating a world dominated by Japanese culture. While she seeks meaning through the *I Ching*, her

characterization of Joe suggests an ingrained cultural bias that diminishes the significance of life forms outside of human experience. In Juliana, these small moments say a lot: they show how the culture you're raised in shapes what you see as "natural" or even "valuable." That's a thread running through the novel. But Juliana doesn't always fit the mould. When she interacts with Japanese characters, something shifts. She can be empathetic, even open, while her American peers usually stick to cold, and dismissive behavioural patterns often resulting from a cynical attitude towards life. Juliana's ability to admire nature, tends to echo a sensitivity that transcends the materialistic concerns that often preoccupy other American characters. Scenes where Juliana takes in the mountains and the shifting sky break through her day-to-day worries. The way she notices "shadows advancing from the Rockies" and "blue peaks turning to night" is more than just scenery; she is connecting to the place itself (Dick 24). Not every character in the story does that. Juliana walks this line between two cultures, sometimes acting as a bridge. This blending of cultural influences quite certainly depict the potential for a cross-cultural dialogue, proving substantially in a way that dialogue across boundaries isn't just possible, it holds the power to change perspectives and outlooks towards 'nature' as well.

Juliana's interactions and reflections reveal the pervasive influence of Americanness on her outlook, emphasizing a cultural tendency that seems to prioritize human experience over the natural world. This disconnection shapes her identity and reflects the broader societal dynamics at play in *The Man in the High Castle*. Her journey, when closely examined, reflects a search for identity in a world where traditional boundaries are blurred, in a fractured world, her only sense of meaning, comes from her ability to navigate across cultures, across regions, and at times across identities, suggesting thereby; the integration of different cultural philosophies and traditions can lead to a more profound understanding of oneself and one's place in the universe. Juliana, by navigating the complexities of her identity, challenges not only the rigid dichotomies of her society but also embodies the leeway of finding harmony and congruence amidst chaos, contributing to an ecocritical discourse that advocates for a more integrated understanding of human-nature relationships.

IV. JAPANESE PERSPECTIVES ON NATURE AND IDENTITY

A prominent Japanese character in the novel, working as a high official with the ranking Trade Mission on the Pacific Coast, Mr. Nobusuke Tagomi, embodies a

profound sense of *dulia* for nature that stands in stark contrast to the alienation experienced by American characters like Robert Childan and Frank Frink. In an excerpt from the text, when Mr. Tagomi notices Miss Ephreikian adorned with blue flowers pinned to her hair, he reflects on his past as a flower-raiser in Hokkaido, stating, "Once, he had professionally flower-raised back home on Hokkaido" (Dick 14). This memory, recollection isn't just for the sake of the flowers or Miss Ephreikin; it taps into a deeper part of his very identity itself. For Tagomi, working with flowers isn't just another job; it's a reflection of cultural values that shape his sense of self. He sees real beauty and meaning in them unlike the American characters, who often view nature through a lens of exploitation; as something to be used, measured, owned.

Tagomi's response to the "bit of lilac" in Miss Ephreikian's hair shows how attuned he is to the small, fragile elements and details of the natural world, and he values the kind of beauty and balance that his American counterparts fail to notice. Tagomi's habit of consulting the "oracle" before making important decisions further reveals a spiritual framework rooted in Eastern traditions. This way of seeing things is worlds apart from the blunt pragmatism and skepticism guiding the American characters. Childan and Frink, stuck in a totalitarian society, don't look for guidance beyond themselves and their circumstances. Tagomi, in contrast however, trusts in the interconnectedness of all life forms, an idea that often gets ignored in the West, this juxtaposition of Tagomi's sensitivity to nature with the American characters' insensitivity and alienation heightens the broader themes of identity and cultural perception in the novel. While Tagomi finds solace and a sense of purpose in his connection to the natural world, American characters like Childan and Frink are trapped and mired in a cycle of acute materialism resulting in alienation and estrangement.

A very interesting sort of interaction between Mr. Nobusuke Tagomi and Mr. Ramsey finds its place in the text, when Mr. Tagomi, already troubled by the symbolic implications of presenting a gift to Mr. Baynes, and having exhausted his own resources of judgement seeks counsel beyond his own meditations, and calls in Mr. Ramsey, his Assistant at the Pacific States' Trade Mission. This dialogue however, reveals something very deep about the complexities of cultural identities that governs man, it also heightens the contrasting relationships with nature that characterizes the Japanese and American perspectives. Tagomi's reflections here based on the oracle and the hexagram "A withered poplar puts forth flowers" may be understood as a meditation on resilience; a metaphor for renewal within decline, a vision that reflects a Japanese worldview attuned to the cyclical rhythms of nature (Dick

15). The imagery here of a "withered poplar" flowering against expectation suggests that even in a state of decline, there is the possibility of growth, of renewal, of vitality. This perspective aligns with Eastern philosophies and value-systems that advocate for a respectful and nurturing relationship with nature, viewing it as a source of wisdom and sustenance. Tagomi's background as a flower-raiser in Hokkaido further reinforces this connection, as it signifies a deep appreciation for the natural world and its cycles.

In contrast, Mr. Ramsey's attempt to assert his cultural identity through superficial means, such as darkening his skin, highlights a disconnection from not only his cultural and ethnic roots but also the natural world.

You, sir, are of American ancestry. Although you have gone to the trouble of darkening your skin color.' He scrutinized Mr. Ramsey. 'A tan achieved by a sun lamp,' Mr. Ramsey murmured. 'For merely acquiring vitamin D.' But his expression of humiliation gave him away. 'I assure you that I retain authentic roots with —' Mr. Ramsey stumbled over the words. 'I have not cut off all ties with — native ethnic patterns.' (Dick 14 - 15)

His 'humiliation' and 'frustration' here reflect a broader alienation that many American characters experience, as they navigate a society that prioritizes and identifies with power and material gain over a genuine connection to nature. Ramsey's recourse to a "sun lamp" rather than the sun itself is quite emblematic of this estrangement, for it signals not only a severance from cultural roots but also a refusal of the natural cycles that confer authenticity. In fabricating the appearance of 'vitality' through mechanical imitation, he embodies a society that substitutes artificial signs for organic continuity, seeking identity in illusion rather than in heritage or environment. The contrast with Tagomi is pretty decisive: where Tagomi interprets the *I Ching*'s "withered poplar puts forth flowers" as a metaphor for resilience within decline, affirming the cyclical wisdom of nature, Ramsey's counterfeit gesture dramatizes the American condition of dislocation. Dick thus crystallises the novel's central theme of authenticity and illusion, suggesting that fidelity to tradition and nature engenders meaning, while its abandonment yields despair and disconnection.

Tagomi's character serves as a critical lens for examining the Japanese perspective on 'nature' and 'identity'. His love for flowers, flower-raising and insightful perspectives on nature and its aspects highlight

the importance of cultural background in shaping one's relationship with nature, offering a counter-narrative to the anthropocentric and utilitarian views prevalent among the American characters. This exploration of divergent perspectives contributes to an ecocritical discourse that advocates for a more harmonious coexistence with the environment, challenging the dominant narratives of exploitation and alienation. The interaction between Tagomi and Ramsey serves as a microcosm of the broader themes of 'nature' and 'identity' politics. By analyzing how cultural backgrounds influence perceptions of nature, we can better understand the potential for renewal and growth that arises from a respectful and nurturing relationship with the environment.

The conversation between Mr. Tagomi, Mr. Baynes, and Mr. Kotomichi illustrates the complex interplay of cultural exchange and identity in an alternate world. When Tagomi presents Baynes with a Mickey Mouse wristwatch, he forges a connection to a "dying old U.S. culture," describing it as "most authentic of dying old U.S. culture, a rare retained artifact carrying flavour of bygone halcyon day" (Dick 37). The watch functions as a relic of American identity, a material artifact that embodies nostalgia and loss. It symbolizes a culture clinging to its past through objects, even as its ideals wither under foreign domination. For Baynes, the gift evokes ambivalence, reminding him of the fragility of American values and their reduction to commodities.

By contrast, Kotomichi's recitation of the poem, "As the spring rains fall, soaking in them, on the roof, is a child's rag ball" (Dick 37), shifts the focus from material relics to the cycles of nature. The poem captures the Japanese reverence for transience, simplicity, and renewal, celebrating innocence within the rhythms of rain and growth. Unlike the watch, which represents a dying culture preserved in artifact, the poem embodies a living culture sustained by nature's continuity. Together, these moments dramatize the divergence between American materialism and Japanese ecological aesthetics: one locates identity in objects of a fading past, the other in the ephemeral beauty of natural cycles. This contrast underscores how cultural inheritances shape perceptions of identity and nature, advancing thereby an ecocritical discourse that transcends the Anthropocene.

V. CONTRASTING PERSPECTIVES: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF JAPANESE AND AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES

The distinct and somewhat divergent perspectives of American and Japanese characters with respect to 'nature' unveil intense cultural disparities at the core of

their experiences while navigating within a dystopian allohistorical setting. This analysis explores how these differing perspectives influence their relationships, and connections with the natural world and their sense of 'self', highlighting the broader themes of identity, morality, and the human-nature relationship within the narrative.

Most American characters, like Frank and Juliana, often exhibit a materialistic and utilitarian approach to nature. A broader cultural tendency to prioritize economic success over spiritual or ecological harmony, is pretty evident in case of Frank's obsession with his jewellery business. He laments, "we're making more and more jewellery and it's just piling up around us" (Dick 169), this mirrors the alienation felt by American characters trapped in a cycle of production that lacks any sort of intrinsic meaning. A further dismissive attitude towards the natural world, suggesting a disconnect that diminishes the significance of life forms outside human experience, is reflected in Juliana's earlier cited description of Joe as "a little animal, not important but smart" (Dick 73). This perspective in a way resonates with Robert Childan's feelings of 'inadequacy' and 'alienation' as he struggles to establish his 'identity' in a society where traditional American values have been overshadowed by Japanese culture.

Japanese characters like Nobusuke Tagomi, on the other hand, symbolize a deep sense of '*sonkei*' or reverence for nature that emphasizes interconnectedness and spiritual fulfilment. Tagomi's engagement with the *I Ching* and his reflections "Shock! Hexagram Fifty-one! God appears in the sign of the Arousing" (Dick 144-145) illustrate a profound understanding of the natural world as an active participant in human existence. His sensitivity towards and attunement to the elemental rhythms of existence is made vivid when he contemplates the "Thunder and lightning," a visualization that channels the raw unrestrained power of nature (Dick 145). This strong sense of ecological awareness stands in sharp contrast to the often-exploitative attitudes of American characters, who struggle to find meaning and purpose in a world dominated by material concerns.

The contrasting set of perspectives is also noticeable to a certain degree, in the interactions between the characters. For instance, Childan's admiration for the Kasouras' "incredible Japanese sense of wabi" (Dick 91) reveals his yearning for balance and harmony, yet he remains an outsider in a culture that feels increasingly foreign to him. Further when Childan presents a 'scrimshaw' to the couple as a gesture of goodwill; the gift exchange foregrounds the complexities of cultural

exchange and the differing values placed on art and nature. Childan's gift is a performance of worth, a plea for recognition; the Kasouras' response is an ethos of simplicity, a life attuned to nature, when Childan tries to flatter with artifice, seeking validation; the Kasouras answer with simplicity, embodying harmony with nature. The one performs, the other lives.

The contrasting trajectories of American and Japanese characters in Dick's dystopian landscape disclose distinct modalities of negotiating and facing psychological turmoil. Frank, beset by an internal struggle of fear and isolation, trembles before the prospect of ridicule and rejection; Tagomi, by contrast, turns inward, finding in nature a sanctuary against chaos. Fear isolates, but reverence consoles. Tagomi's desire to "live unseen" and seek refuge in the simplicity of nature (Dick 194) highlights a yearning for connection that is often absent in the lives of American characters, who grapple with their identities in a world marked by division and despair.

In another instance, after a violent confrontation with the SD men, Mr. Tagomi is engulfed in deep psychological turmoil that reflects his cultural upbringing and reverence for life. He grapples with the moral implications of his actions, feeling the weight of taking lives in a society that values all forms of existence as sacred. As he manipulates the yarrow stalks, he is overwhelmed and perturbed by the reality of the "dead and dying Germans on the floor of his office," indicating that the immediate consequences of violence are too tangible for him to process. In this context, General Tedeki observes that Tagomi's distress is rooted in a culture where "no life is to be taken; all lives holy," emphasizing the moral conflict he faces (Dick 176). Tagomi's internal struggle reveals a profound sensitivity to the sanctity of life, illustrating how his oriental cultural background shapes his response to violence.

In contrast, Juliana's reaction to her violent encounter with Joe paints a different picture. After inflicting a serious injury on Joe, she exhibits a sense of nonchalance, stating, "Maybe I can tell them at the desk," and expressing no immediate remorse for her actions (Dick 188). Her focus quickly shifts to her own situation as she gathers her belongings and prepares to leave, indicating a self-preserving instinct rather than a moral reckoning. As she reflects on her escape, she acknowledges, "And I have most of those Reichsbank notes, so I'm in good shape, in spite of everything" (Dick 188). This suggests that her priorities lie in survival and autonomy rather than the ethical implications of her actions revealing a more detached and pragmatic attitude catered around survival.

The contrast between Tagomi's deep moral anguish and Juliana's cold pragmatism highlights the broader themes of cultural identity and the human-nature relationship in the novel. Tagomi's sensitivity to violence reflects the Japanese ethos that values life and interconnectedness, while Juliana's detached response illustrates an American perspective that often prioritizes individualism and survival over ethics. This comparative analysis reveals how cultural backgrounds shape individuals' responses to nature and their sense of identity. Tagomi embodies a philosophy of harmonious coexistence with the natural world, challenging the anthropocentric narratives prevalent in American culture. In contrast, the materialistic attitudes of American characters emphasize a disconnection from nature, exacerbating their anxieties about identity and belonging.

By examining these divergent views, this analysis not only highlights the cultural legacies that inform these interactions but also contributes to an ecocritical discourse that underscores the importance of 'empathy' and 'understanding' in navigating moral dilemmas in a world marked by conflict and oppression. Through the lens of both American and Japanese characters, Philip K. Dick invites readers to reflect on the ethical implications of their relationship with nature and the significance of cultural sensitivity in fostering a more integrated understanding of 'identity' in a fractured world.

VI. CONCLUSION: THE INTERPLAY OF IDENTITY, CULTURE, AND NATURE

Though modelled on the very premise of an Alternative History, Philip K. Dick quite ingeniously manages to craft a plot-narrative in *The Man in the High Castle*, that impels us to rethink our relations to identity and nature in a world that feels increasingly fragmented. The differing perspectives of American and Japanese characters reveal how deeply our cultural conditionings; backgrounds influence how we see the natural world and shape our sense of self. A profound sense of *sonkei* or reverence for nature and a sense of interconnectedness can be seen in Japanese characters like Mr. Nobusuke Tagomi. While American characters like Robert and Frank seem to be struggling with feelings of alienation and disconnect owing to their very materialistic attitude and utilitarian outlook that distances them from their very environment.

This interplay resonates with contemporary ecological discourse where "cultural belief systems shape individuals' perceptions and responses to environmental changes" (Milfont and Schultz 196). This insight emphasizes the need to understand how our cultural legacies inform our interactions with the world around us.

looking beyond narrow, self-centered narratives, the novel, despite its primarily allohistorical trait and complex narrative structure encourages us to embrace a more holistic perspective on existence by promoting empathy and cultural sensitivity. In this context, Juliana's role is quite pivotal; bridging the cultural divide between East and the West. Her susceptibility to nature, seen in her reflections on the mountains and sky, contrasts with the often cynical and utilitarian attitudes of her American peers. As evident in the text, by embracing the beauty of the natural world, Juliana's character escapes the sordid harsh realities faced by the other American counterparts, she manifests the potential for cross-cultural dialogues. It is this potential, that changes her outlook, and makes her identity unique to other characters in the novel. She grows through her journey challenging the rigidity of cultural boundaries and navigating the complexities of her own identity in a fragmented world, ultimately suggesting that a more harmonious and interconnected understanding of humanity's place within nature is possible.

In conclusion, it can be said that, the novel serves as a compelling critique of the anthropocentric world view, that assumes man to be the central and most important entity of existence, every other being merely here to serve/cater to his needs. This paper calls for a need to embrace a more inclusive, ecocritical perspective. Dick's portrayal of nature not only reflects the strain between cultural identities but also offers a vision for transcending these divisions in pursuit of a deeper, more holistic understanding of existence and in a way inspires us to seek harmony amid chaos, informing at the same time our identities are not formed in isolation, but are abstrusely woven through our relationship with the natural world, reflecting a profound sense of interconnectedness and communion that transcends individual existence.

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The Relevance of Śiva Saṅkalpa Sūkta Philosophy in the Age of Mental Anxiety and Fragmentation

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Abstract— *The contemporary world is increasingly characterized by psychological instability, emotional fragmentation, existential uncertainty, and spiritual alienation. In the midst of technological advancement and material progress, modern humanity continues to suffer from anxiety, depression, restlessness, and a persistent crisis of meaning. Ancient Indian philosophical traditions, particularly the Vedic hymns, offer profound reflections on the nature of consciousness and mental harmony that remain relevant in contemporary times. The Śiva Saṅkalpa Sūkta, found in the Yajurveda, is one such philosophical and spiritual composition that explores the sanctity, discipline, and transformative potential of the human mind. Through repeated invocations for an auspicious and enlightened consciousness, the hymn foregrounds the idea that the mind is both the source of bondage and liberation. This paper examines the relevance of the Śiva Saṅkalpa philosophy in the contemporary age marked by mental anxiety and social fragmentation. By employing textual analysis, philosophical interpretation, and interdisciplinary reflection, the article investigates how the hymn conceptualizes the mind as a sacred and stabilizing force. The study further explores how Vedic notions of mental discipline, ethical consciousness, and spiritual harmony can contribute to contemporary discourses on psychological wellbeing and existential healing. The article argues that the Śiva Saṅkalpa Sūkta offers not merely religious instruction but also a timeless philosophy of inner integration capable of addressing the fragmented condition of modern existence.*



Keywords— *Śiva Saṅkalpa, Vedic philosophy, consciousness, mental anxiety, fragmentation, spirituality, mind, Indian philosophy.*

Introduction

The Vedic literature constitutes the foundation of Sanskrit literature and remains one of the richest repositories of humanity, morality, spirituality, and philosophical inquiry (Radhakrishnan 21). The term “Vedic literature” refers to the body of sacred texts derived from the Vedas and includes the four Vedas or Samhitas, the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas, and the Upanishads (Dasgupta 14). Among these, the *Rg-Veda*, *Samaveda*, and *Yajurveda* are collectively known as *Vedatrayi*, while the *Atharvaveda* is regarded as a later addition. The *Rg-Veda*, considered the oldest among all Vedas, contains 1028 hymns divided into ten mandalas and forms the basis of subsequent Vedic thought and literature.

The Vedas are not merely literary monuments but living foundations of Indian religious and cultural consciousness (Flood 35). Unlike ordinary literary works, the Vedas are regarded as *apauruṣeya*—not composed by any human agency (Rao 52). The Vedic mantras are believed to have originated through the intuitive vision (*darśana*) and spiritual hearing (*śruti*) of inspired seers who experienced eternal truth directly. Hence, the Vedas occupy the highest position in the Hindu religio-philosophical tradition, transcending the limitations of ordinary sensory perception and intellectual reasoning.

The oral transmission of the Vedas from teacher to disciple preserved these texts in remarkably pure form across centuries (Aurobindo 67). Religion, philosophy, ethics,

science, music, ritual, aesthetics, and social thought all trace their origins to Vedic sources. The hymns of the *Rg-Veda* continue to be recited in ceremonies, rituals, marriages, temple consecrations, and spiritual practices even today, testifying to the enduring vitality of Vedic culture.

Within this vast Vedic corpus, the *Śiva Saṅkalpa Sūkta* occupies a highly significant place (*Yajurveda* 214). The hymn forms the first six mantras of the thirty-fourth chapter of the *Vājasaneyi Samhitā* of the *Śukla Yajurveda* and also appears in the *Rudrāṣṭādhyāyī*. The term *saṅkalpa* signifies will, determination, right intention, or auspicious resolve. The repeated refrain “Tan me manaḥ śiva saṅkalpam astu” (“May my mind be filled with auspicious thoughts”) foregrounds the transformative power of consciousness (*Yajurveda* 215).

The *Śiva Saṅkalpa Sūkta* is simultaneously philosophical, spiritual, psychological, and literary. Although part of the *karmakāṇḍa* tradition, the hymn possesses profound *adhyātmic* significance and is sometimes regarded as an Upanishadic text in itself. The six verses celebrate the glory of the mind, describing its capacity to wander through waking, dreaming, and deep sleep states, illuminate knowledge, perform rituals, and guide human destiny. The hymn recognizes that the mind possesses the potential for both bondage and liberation.

The modern world is frequently celebrated as an age of scientific achievement, technological innovation, and global interconnectedness (Jung 44). However, beneath the surface of material progress lies an unprecedented psychological crisis. Human beings today are increasingly confronted with emotional exhaustion, loneliness, anxiety disorders, depression, and existential fragmentation. Rapid urbanization, hyper-competition, digital dependency, and the erosion of spiritual values have intensified mental instability across societies. The contemporary individual often experiences a profound disconnect between external success and internal fulfillment.

In such a context, ancient philosophical traditions become important reservoirs of wisdom capable of offering alternative paradigms for mental and spiritual wellbeing. Indian philosophical literature, particularly the Vedic corpus, contains profound reflections on consciousness, ethics, selfhood, and cosmic harmony. Among these texts, the *Śiva Saṅkalpa Sūkta* occupies a distinctive position because of its intense focus on the mind (*manas*) as the centre of human experience and transformation.

The *Śiva Saṅkalpa Sūkta*, traditionally associated with the *Vājasaneyi Samhitā* of the *Yajurveda*, consists of six mantras ending with the repeated prayer: “Tan me manaḥ śiva saṅkalpam astu” (“May my mind be filled with auspicious resolve”). The repetition itself underscores the

centrality of consciousness in shaping ethical action, spiritual awareness, and psychological balance. The hymn presents the mind not merely as a cognitive instrument but as a sacred force capable of transcending fear, confusion, and fragmentation.

The philosophical significance of the hymn lies in its holistic understanding of human consciousness. Unlike modern materialist frameworks that often reduce mental processes to biological or neurological mechanisms, the *Śiva Saṅkalpa Sūkta* regards the mind as deeply interconnected with cosmic order, moral responsibility, and spiritual realization. Such a perspective becomes particularly relevant in the present age where human consciousness is increasingly fragmented by consumerism, digital distractions, and emotional alienation.

This paper seeks to examine the contemporary relevance of the *Śiva Saṅkalpa* philosophy in addressing mental anxiety and existential fragmentation. Through textual and philosophical analysis, the study explores how the hymn conceptualizes the mind as a source of inner harmony and ethical consciousness. The article further argues that the *Śiva Saṅkalpa Sūkta* provides a spiritual psychology that remains remarkably relevant in the twenty-first century.

The Philosophical Foundation of Śiva Saṅkalpa

The philosophical basis of the *Śiva Saṅkalpa Sūkta* emerges directly from the Vedic understanding of consciousness and reality. The Vedas regard the mind not merely as a psychological faculty but as a sacred medium connecting humanity with cosmic truth. In Vedic thought, scriptural authority (*śabda*) is considered superior to sensory perception (*pratyakṣa*) and logical inference (*anumāna*) because the Vedas are believed to arise from supra-human insight.

The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* describes ultimate reality as that “wherefrom words turn back together with the mind, not having attained it.” This conception reveals both the limitations and the profundity of the human mind. While ordinary consciousness remains bound within worldly existence, disciplined consciousness can become a vehicle for transcendence.

The *Śiva Saṅkalpa Sūkta* reflects this larger Vedic worldview. The hymn conceptualizes the mind as luminous, expansive, and dynamic. It recognizes the extraordinary power of thought and intention in shaping human destiny. The Sanskrit dictum “Yad Bhāvam Tad Bhavati” from the *Mundaka Upaniṣad*—“As you think, so you become”—resonates strongly with the philosophy of the hymn (Easwaran 188). The repeated prayer for auspicious thought underscores the Vedic conviction that consciousness determines reality.

The English poet John Milton similarly observes in *Paradise Lost* that “The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven” (Milton 98). Although emerging from entirely different cultural traditions, Milton’s insight parallels the Vedic understanding of the transformative and determinative power of the mind.

The six mantras of the hymn collectively present a sophisticated spiritual psychology:

1. The first mantra describes the mind as a far wanderer moving through waking, dream, and deep sleep states while simultaneously functioning as the light of consciousness.
2. The second mantra identifies the mind as the means through which human beings perform yajñas and righteous action.
3. The third mantra presents the mind as immortal, intelligent, and indispensable for all activity.
4. The fourth mantra associates the mind with temporal consciousness and spiritual immortality.
5. The fifth mantra symbolically compares the Vedic tradition to the spokes of a chariot wheel established in the mind.
6. The sixth mantra portrays the mind as a wise charioteer capable of guiding the individual toward higher realization.

The imagery of the chariot is particularly significant because it recalls the *Katha Upanishad*, where the body is described as a chariot, the senses as horses, and the mind as the reins controlling them (*Katha Upanishad* 1.3.3–9). Such symbolism emphasizes discipline, self-control, and ethical consciousness as prerequisites for spiritual liberation.

The hymn therefore establishes the mind as the centre of cognition, ethics, ritual action, imagination, and spiritual transcendence.

The term “Śiva Saṅkalpa” can be interpreted as “auspicious determination” or “benevolent consciousness.” The Sanskrit word *Śiva* signifies welfare, auspiciousness, peace, and transformative power, while *saṅkalpa* refers to intention, resolve, or mental orientation. Thus, the phrase collectively denotes a purified and elevated state of consciousness directed toward harmony and truth.

The recurring refrain of the hymn—“Tan me manah śiva saṅkalpam astu”—reveals the Vedic understanding that the quality of one’s mind determines the quality of one’s life. The hymn repeatedly invokes the mind as a sacred faculty capable of transcending limitations and attaining spiritual illumination. Rather than suppressing the mind, the text seeks to refine and align it with cosmic and ethical order.

One of the major philosophical contributions of the *Śiva Saṅkalpa Sūkta* is its recognition of the mind as both dynamic and expansive. The hymn describes the mind as capable of traversing vast distances, connecting past, present, and future, and functioning as the foundation of human consciousness. Such a conception anticipates later developments in Indian philosophy where the mind becomes central to metaphysical and spiritual inquiry.

In the Upanishadic tradition, the mind is frequently regarded as the mediator between sensory experience and spiritual realization. The *Katha Upanishad* compares the body to a chariot and the mind to the reins controlling the senses and intellect. Similarly, the *Bhagavad Gita* emphasizes that the uncontrolled mind becomes an enemy, while the disciplined mind becomes a friend. The *Śiva Saṅkalpa Sūkta* belongs to this broader philosophical tradition that foregrounds the transformative potential of disciplined consciousness.

The hymn also reflects the Vedic belief in the interconnectedness of the individual and the cosmos. Human consciousness is not isolated but participates in a larger cosmic order. Mental harmony, therefore, is not merely a personal achievement but part of universal wellbeing. Such an understanding stands in sharp contrast to the fragmented and individualistic tendencies of modern society.

Mental Anxiety and the Crisis of Modern Consciousness

Mental anxiety has emerged as one of the defining conditions of contemporary civilization (Kierkegaard 61). Despite advancements in medicine, communication, and economic systems, modern individuals increasingly struggle with emotional instability and psychological distress. Anxiety disorders, depression, and stress-related illnesses have become global concerns.

The causes of contemporary mental anxiety are complex and multidimensional. The acceleration of modern life, excessive competition, social isolation, economic insecurity, and digital overstimulation have profoundly altered human consciousness. Social media culture intensifies comparison, insecurity, and alienation, while consumerist ideologies equate happiness with material acquisition. Consequently, individuals often experience an internal emptiness despite external achievement.

Another significant factor contributing to modern anxiety is the erosion of spiritual and ethical foundations. Traditional communities and collective value systems have weakened under the pressures of globalization and urbanization. Human relationships are increasingly mediated by technology, resulting in emotional detachment and loneliness.

Existential thinkers such as Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Paul Sartre identified anxiety as an intrinsic feature of modern existence. Kierkegaard viewed anxiety as the dizziness of freedom, while Heidegger associated it with alienation from authentic being. Although these philosophical traditions emerge from different cultural contexts, they resonate with the concerns addressed in the *Śiva Saṅkalpa Sūkta*. Both traditions recognize the instability of human consciousness and the need for inner grounding.

However, the Vedic approach differs significantly in its solution. Whereas existential philosophy often emphasizes absurdity or alienation, the *Śiva Saṅkalpa* philosophy proposes harmony through disciplined consciousness and spiritual integration. The hymn suggests that mental suffering arises not merely from external conditions but from the fragmentation of consciousness itself.

The contemporary condition can therefore be understood as a crisis of consciousness. Human beings possess unprecedented technological power yet remain internally fragmented. The mind, instead of functioning as a source of clarity and stability, becomes overwhelmed by fear, distraction, and confusion. In this context, the philosophy of *Śiva Saṅkalpa* acquires renewed relevance.

The Sacredness of Mind in the Śiva Saṅkalpa Sūkta

The *Śiva Saṅkalpa Sūkta* presents a deeply sacred understanding of the mind. The hymn does not perceive consciousness merely as a psychological mechanism but as a divine and transformative force. The repeated invocation for an auspicious mind suggests that mental purity is essential for ethical and spiritual wellbeing.

In one of the mantras, the mind is described as the force through which human beings perform actions, acquire knowledge, and engage with the world. The hymn therefore recognizes the mind as the centre of human agency. Every ethical action, creative endeavor, and spiritual realization emerges from the quality of consciousness.

The sacredness of the mind also implies responsibility. Since the mind shapes human perception and action, its purification becomes essential for individual and collective harmony. The *Śiva Saṅkalpa Sūkta* repeatedly seeks a consciousness free from negativity, violence, and confusion.

This idea bears remarkable relevance in the present age where mental unrest often manifests in social violence, intolerance, and ecological destruction. Fragmented consciousness not only harms the individual but also destabilizes society. The hymn implicitly suggests that social transformation begins with inner transformation.

The sacred conception of mind further challenges reductionist approaches dominant in modern discourse. Contemporary society often prioritizes productivity and external achievement while neglecting inner cultivation. The *Śiva Saṅkalpa Sūkta*, by contrast, foregrounds introspection, mindfulness, and ethical awareness as foundations of human fulfillment.

The hymn also anticipates modern psychological insights regarding the power of thought patterns. Contemporary cognitive psychology acknowledges that repeated mental habits influence emotional wellbeing and behavior. Similarly, the Vedic hymn emphasizes the importance of cultivating auspicious intentions and disciplined consciousness.

Śiva Saṅkalpa and Spiritual Psychology

The *Śiva Saṅkalpa Sūkta* can also be interpreted as a form of spiritual psychology. Unlike modern psychology, which often focuses on pathology and behavior, spiritual psychology integrates consciousness, ethics, and transcendence.

The repeated prayer for auspicious resolve functions as a meditative affirmation aimed at restructuring consciousness. Repetition in Vedic traditions serves not merely ritualistic purposes but psychological and spiritual transformation. By repeatedly invoking a purified mind, the practitioner gradually internalizes values of peace, harmony, and self-awareness.

The hymn further recognizes the mobility and complexity of the human mind. It acknowledges that the mind can wander across temporal and spatial boundaries, often becoming restless and unstable. Such observations parallel contemporary understandings of anxiety where uncontrolled thought patterns generate emotional distress.

However, the *Śiva Saṅkalpa* philosophy does not advocate suppression of thought. Instead, it emphasizes alignment of consciousness with higher principles. This approach resembles certain aspects of mindfulness-based therapeutic practices where awareness and disciplined attention become means of psychological healing.

Carl Jung's concept of individuation also provides an interesting comparative framework (Jung 156). Jung believed that psychological health depends upon the integration of fragmented aspects of the self. Similarly, the *Śiva Saṅkalpa Sūktaseeks* the harmonization of consciousness through spiritual awareness.

Furthermore, the hymn implicitly critiques the modern obsession with externality. Contemporary culture encourages constant stimulation and distraction, leaving little room for introspection. The Vedic perspective,

however, insists that genuine wellbeing emerges from inner equilibrium rather than external accumulation.

Thus, the *Śiva Saṅkalpa Sūkta* offers a holistic psychology that integrates mental discipline, ethical consciousness, and spiritual transcendence.

Relevance in the Contemporary World

The relevance of the *Śiva Saṅkalpa* philosophy in contemporary society lies in its ability to address the psychological and spiritual crises of modernity. In an age marked by anxiety, fragmentation, and existential emptiness, the hymn provides a framework for restoring inner harmony.

First, the text emphasizes mental discipline and self-awareness. Contemporary individuals are constantly exposed to information overload and digital distraction, resulting in diminished concentration and emotional instability. The Vedic emphasis on focused consciousness encourages mindfulness and introspection.

Second, the hymn promotes ethical consciousness. Modern society often prioritizes individual success over collective wellbeing. Such a worldview intensifies competition, alienation, and social fragmentation. The *Śiva Saṅkalpa Sūkta*, by contrast, foregrounds auspicious intention and universal harmony.

Third, the philosophy of the hymn encourages spiritual resilience. Contemporary anxiety frequently arises from uncertainty and fear regarding identity, purpose, and mortality. The Vedic worldview offers a broader cosmic perspective in which human existence becomes interconnected with universal consciousness.

Fourth, the hymn possesses therapeutic significance. Chanting and meditative repetition have been shown to reduce stress and promote emotional stability. Although the hymn originates within a sacred context, its psychological insights transcend religious boundaries.

The *Śiva Saṅkalpa Sūkta* is also relevant in educational contexts. Contemporary education systems often prioritize technical skills while neglecting emotional and ethical development. Integrating philosophical and contemplative traditions into education could contribute to more balanced forms of human development.

Moreover, the hymn's emphasis on inner harmony possesses ecological implications. Modern ecological crises are rooted partly in fragmented consciousness and exploitative attitudes toward nature. The Vedic understanding of interconnectedness encourages a more harmonious relationship between humanity and the natural world.

Thus, the *Śiva Saṅkalpa* philosophy remains deeply relevant not merely as an ancient religious text but as a living philosophy capable of addressing contemporary crises.

Apart from its philosophical significance, the *Śiva Saṅkalpa Sūkta* also possesses remarkable literary and aesthetic qualities. The repetitive refrain creates a rhythmic and meditative structure that enhances the spiritual intensity of the hymn.

Vedic literature frequently employs symbolic and poetic language to communicate philosophical truths. In the *Śiva Saṅkalpa Sūkta*, the mind is represented through images of movement, illumination, and expansiveness. Such imagery transforms abstract philosophical ideas into experiential realities.

The aesthetic power of repetition is especially important. The recurring invocation "Tan me manaḥ śiva saṅkalpam astu" functions simultaneously as prayer, affirmation, and poetic refrain. The repetition gradually intensifies emotional resonance and contemplative depth.

CONCLUSION

The *Śiva Saṅkalpa Sūkta* remains one of the most profound reflections on consciousness within the Vedic tradition (Zimmer 201). Its repeated invocation for an auspicious and disciplined mind reflects a deep understanding of the centrality of consciousness in human existence. In an age characterized by mental anxiety, emotional fragmentation, and spiritual alienation, the philosophy of *Śiva Saṅkalpa* offers remarkable relevance.

The hymn recognizes that external progress alone cannot ensure human fulfillment. Genuine wellbeing requires inner harmony, ethical awareness, and spiritual integration. By presenting the mind as sacred, transformative, and interconnected with cosmic order, the *Śiva Saṅkalpa Sūkta* challenges the fragmented consciousness of modernity.

Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba observes that one must "master the mind and be a mastermind," emphasizing that true peace and self-realization emerge not from external control but from mastery over one's own thoughts and consciousness (Sai Baba 74). Similarly, the text offers valuable insights for contemporary psychology, education, ethics, and spirituality. Its emphasis on disciplined consciousness anticipates modern therapeutic practices while simultaneously transcending purely materialistic frameworks.

The enduring relevance of the *Śiva Saṅkalpa* philosophy lies in its universal vision of human consciousness. The hymn reminds humanity that peace cannot be achieved solely through external structures but must emerge from the

cultivation of an auspicious and enlightened mind. In this sense, the *Śiva Saṅkalpa Sūkta* continues to function not merely as an ancient Vedic hymn but as a timeless guide for psychological balance, ethical living, and spiritual awakening.

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Diaspora, Memory, and Belonging in Postcolonial Narratives

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Abstract— *Diaspora literature occupies a central position in postcolonial studies because it explores the emotional, cultural, and political experiences of displacement, migration, and identity formation. Postcolonial narratives frequently portray diasporic subjects negotiating between homeland and hostland while attempting to preserve cultural memory and construct a sense of belonging. This article examines how memory functions as a bridge between past and present and how belonging becomes a contested and evolving experience in diasporic communities. Through the works of writers such as Jhumpa Lahiri, Salman Rushdie, Bharati Mukherjee, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, the article analyses themes of nostalgia, hybridity, exile, cultural fragmentation, and transnational identity. The study argues that postcolonial diasporic narratives challenge fixed notions of identity and redefine home as a fluid and multidimensional concept shaped by memory, history, and cultural negotiation.*



Keywords— *Displacement, Migration, and Identity, Diaspora, Nostalgia.*

Introduction

The phenomenon of diaspora has become one of the most significant themes in postcolonial literature. The term “diaspora” generally refers to the dispersal of people from their homeland due to colonialism, slavery, migration, war, globalization, or economic necessity. Postcolonial narratives often depict the struggles of displaced individuals who experience alienation, cultural conflict, and identity crises while living in foreign spaces. These narratives reveal how migration reshapes personal and collective identities and how memory preserves connections to homeland and tradition.

Memory plays a crucial role in diasporic writing because it enables migrants to maintain emotional and cultural continuity despite geographical separation. Diasporic communities often reconstruct their identities through memories of homeland, language, food, rituals, and family histories. Simultaneously, belonging becomes a complicated issue because migrants frequently exist between two cultures, never feeling completely accepted by either. Thus, postcolonial diaspora narratives portray identity as hybrid, fluid, and constantly negotiated.

Diaspora and Postcolonial Identity

Postcolonial theorists such as Homi K. Bhabha, Stuart Hall, and Avtar Brah argue that diasporic identity is not fixed but constructed through cultural interaction and historical experience. Bhabha’s concept of the “Third Space” explains how diasporic individuals inhabit an in-between cultural position where identities are continually transformed. This hybridity allows migrants to negotiate multiple cultural affiliations rather than belonging exclusively to one nation or culture.

Diasporic narratives demonstrate that identity formation is deeply connected to colonial histories. Colonialism displaced millions of people through slavery, indenture, and forced migration, creating fractured identities that continue to influence postcolonial societies. Writers portray diasporic characters as individuals caught between memory and modernity, tradition and assimilation, homeland and foreign land.

For example, in *The Namesake*, Lahiri presents the experiences of Gogol Ganguli, who struggles to reconcile his Indian heritage with American culture. His identity

crisis reflects the broader diasporic condition of cultural fragmentation and the search for belonging. Similarly, Jasmine explores transformation and reinvention as the protagonist adapts to multiple cultural identities in America.

Memory as Cultural Preservation

Memory serves as a powerful force in postcolonial diaspora narratives. Through recollection, storytelling, and cultural practices, migrants preserve their connection to homeland and ancestry. Memory becomes both personal and collective, enabling diasporic communities to resist cultural erasure.

In many diasporic texts, food, language, music, and rituals function as symbols of memory. These cultural elements help migrants recreate fragments of home within foreign environments. Scholars note that memory acts as an “archive” through which displaced communities maintain continuity across generations.

Salman Rushdie, in *Imaginary Homelands*, suggests that migrants reconstruct homeland through fragmented memories rather than objective reality. The homeland becomes “imaginary” because it exists primarily through remembrance and nostalgia. This nostalgic reconstruction often idealizes the past while simultaneously highlighting the pain of displacement.

Similarly, in *Americanah*, memory shapes the protagonist’s understanding of race, migration, and identity. The narrative demonstrates how migrants carry emotional memories of homeland even while adapting to new societies. Adichie portrays nostalgia not merely as longing but as a critical reflection on belonging and exclusion.

Collective memory also appears prominently in African and Caribbean diaspora narratives. Works such as *Crossing the River* and *Small Island* examine how memories of slavery, colonialism, and racial oppression shape diasporic consciousness across generations. These narratives reveal how historical trauma influences identity formation and cultural belonging.

Belonging and Alienation

Belonging is one of the most complex themes in postcolonial diaspora literature. Diasporic subjects often experience feelings of rootlessness because they are positioned between cultures and nations. They may face racial discrimination, cultural misunderstanding, and social exclusion in host countries while also feeling disconnected from their homeland.

Postcolonial narratives frequently portray home as both a physical and emotional space. For many migrants, home becomes an unstable concept rather than a permanent

location. Diasporic individuals often create “multiple homes” through relationships, memories, and cultural practices.

In the works of Leila Aboulela, belonging is shaped by religion, migration, and political identity. Her stories illustrate how Muslim migrants negotiate cultural acceptance while preserving religious and cultural traditions. The idea of “displaced belonging” reflects the reality that migrants continuously move across social and political boundaries without achieving complete acceptance.

Similarly, South Asian diaspora narratives portray intergenerational conflicts regarding belonging. First-generation migrants often remain emotionally attached to homeland traditions, while second-generation individuals seek integration into host cultures. This tension creates identity conflicts within families and communities.

Hybridity and Cultural Negotiation

Hybridity is a defining feature of postcolonial diaspora narratives. Diasporic individuals often combine elements from multiple cultures, creating hybrid identities that challenge rigid national or cultural boundaries. Rather than choosing between cultures, migrants negotiate and adapt diverse influences.

This hybridity is visible in language, lifestyle, relationships, and artistic expression. Diasporic writers frequently use multilingualism, fragmented narration, and non-linear storytelling to represent the complexity of migrant experiences. Such narrative techniques reflect the fragmented yet creative nature of diasporic identity.

In Indian diaspora literature, writers such as Kiran Desai and Jhumpa Lahiri depict cultural hybridity as both enriching and painful. Their characters struggle with alienation while simultaneously developing transnational identities that transcend geographical boundaries.

Hybridity also becomes a form of resistance against colonial and nationalist ideologies that demand cultural purity. By embracing multiplicity, diasporic narratives challenge fixed definitions of race, nation, and identity.

CONCLUSION

Diaspora, memory, and belonging remain central concerns in postcolonial narratives because they reflect the realities of migration, displacement, and cultural transformation in the modern world. Diasporic literature demonstrates how memory preserves cultural identity while simultaneously reshaping it through nostalgia and reinterpretation. Belonging emerges not as a stable condition but as a

continuous process of negotiation shaped by history, race, culture, and migration.

Postcolonial writers reveal that diasporic identity is inherently hybrid and fluid. Through their narratives, they challenge essentialist notions of nation and home, presenting identity as dynamic and transnational. Ultimately, diaspora literature highlights both the pain of displacement and the creative possibilities of cultural hybridity. By exploring the intersections of memory, migration, and belonging, postcolonial narratives contribute to a deeper understanding of human identity in a globalized world.

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“I am not my skin. My skin is not me”: Djanet Sears Re-tells the canon

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Abstract— *Djanet Sears’ blues version of Shakespeare’s tragedy Othello turned into Harlem Duet, situates its plot in a new radical setting. The bard’s original play set historically between the venetian military citadel and the island of Cyprus, finds modern Othello living in Harlem, New York. Sears’s Harlem Duet revolves around the corner of Twentieth Century black militants Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Boulevards, not with Desdemona, but with his first “black” wife, Billie. Focusing on the African-Canadian playwright Djanet Sears Harlem Duet, the play highlights the political aspect through its double resistances against patriarchy and racism in Shakespeare’s Othello. Sears’s work imagines a prelude to Shakespeare’s Othello in a way that transgresses, and revisions the Shakespearean source material via issues of racism (both inter-and-intra-community).*



Keywords— *African heritage, exclusion, Harlem Duet, miscegenation, Othello, racism*

I. INTRODUCTION

Harlem Duet throws into question the very nature of the source itself as a source of the racism Sears examines. Sears’ work, in this mode, is not about faithful adherence to the narrative or performative conventions of traditional Shakespeare practice, but about the degree to which the playwright can transform that material into a counter-discourse that de-forms conventions in such a way that underpin tradition. In *Harlem Duet*, Sears uses specific details to enhance her play’s themes. A cell and brass provide the background music for her work. Audio clips of African-American leaders played throughout the play create thematic depth. The play’s title reflects its primary setting; the corner of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X Boulevards. Sears chooses to set her play at this location because as she explains, “I wanted an urban setting that would resonate for all North Americans, and because given that the play is an excavation of the question of importance of race, those boiling points that appear to be more tangible in the US than here. At 125th and 40th, there is an actual intersection that serves as theoretical axis of the arguments in the play” (Knowles, 1998).

II. THE CONTEXT OF HARLEM DUET

The play tells the story of Billie, a black American and Othello and their dissolving marriage. As the play develops, Othello turns further away from his partner, and more towards the ideals of a white identity, mainly through his affair with ‘Mona’, a white American woman who represents Shakespeare’s character. In *Harlem Duet*, Sears deals with the influence that a white-dominated, North-American popular culture on the psyche of the African-American. She includes a wide range of prominent historical figures in her piece, such as Booker. T. Washington and Jessie Jackson, emphasizing how these figures have fought against a white-dominated ideal.

Trying to pass as white and to be acknowledged by the white academy at Columbia University, Sears’s Othello is constantly reproached by his ex-wife Billie, who regards his engagement with Mona as a stepping stone to admission into the white community. Remembering the day when she sees Othello and Mona together, she utters in a disillusioned tone: “here, before me-his woman-all blonde hair and blonde legs. Her weight against his chest. His arm around

her shoulders, his thumb resting on the gold of her hair" (Sears, 1997)

III. THE REPUDIATION OF ONE'S ORIGINS

Repudiating his African background and cultural heritage, Othello states: "I am not minor (...) I mean my culture is not my mother's culture-the culture of my ancestors. My culture is Wordsworth, Shaw (...). A few lines later, he states: "I am an American. The slaves were freed over 130 years ago. In 1967, it was illegal for a Black to marry a white in sixteen states (...) Things can change, Billie. I am not my skin. My skin is not me" (305). The author's characterization and intricately plot-woven ideas unfold with a great understanding of and relevance to cultural identity issues. Sears not only deals with the individual's struggle, but also shines the spotlight on the importance of positive community leaders and progression. The play is most certainly Billie's, and not Othello's, a definite departure from Shakespeare's story. Through shifting the focus onto Billie, Sears opens the well-known story of Othello to interpretation, and forces audiences to think about the causes and the effects that are present in human relations. By *retelling Othello*, Sears dramatizes the historic trauma of miscegenation from a perspective that is excluded from other versions of the story. In so doing, she dramatizes both the historic exclusion of Black women from the *Othello* story, and the desire to rectify this exclusion, by literally putting the black woman at the centre stage. Shakespeare allows Sears to criticise the exclusionary function of the canon while simultaneously asserting her will to be included in it.

IV. DIVERGING FROM SHAKESPEARE'S VERSION

Sears *Harlem Duet* diverges quite radically from Shakespeare's version. It shares the same inciting incident-the sexual union of a Black man and a White woman- and it explores the consequent social rupture and violence. But while Shakespeare's plot uses miscegenation as a trope to dramatize the fears of White society, most post Shakespeare Othellos try to establish other perspectives on interracial sex and its consequences. As Jacquelyn Mc Lendon writes, African-American males have sought to "revise dominant narratives that interpret the psychology of the black male in white terms" (Lendon, 1997). In *Harlem Duet*, Sears imagines the previously untold perspective of a black woman to show that, in addition to the well-known consequences it has for Othello, his choice to take a White wife also has a catastrophic effect on the people he leaves behind. Examining the consequences of miscegenation in three distinct chronotypes, Sears takes Shakespeare's

rootless Othello, gives him a home in Harlem, shifting the focus away from the White community he tries to join, and on the Black community from which he comes and the people who live there.

In addition, because she wants to emphasize that her adapted *Othello* is not an isolated incident but a trauma repeated countless times throughout African-American history, Sears shows not 'one' Othello but 'three', each rooted in a significant moment in history. The story of what happens to Billie and Othello after he leaves her for a white woman is told and retold in three distinct plots, each reflecting a prominent era in African history: one just before Emancipation, in which Othello and Billie are slaves, (the pre 1860); one at the height of Harlem Renaissance in 1928, in which he is a minstrel actor; and in the present day (1990s), where Othello is an English professor and Billie is a stalled graduate student. The central, present-day plot includes other characters such as Billie's landlord, Magi; her sister, Amah; and her father, Canada, and Othello's new lover Mona (all of them being absent in Shakespeare's original play).

The play explores Billie's abjection in the wake of Othello's desertion, following her descent into depression, rage, and finally nervous breakdown. The trauma at the centre of each plot is the same: *Harlem Duet* focuses on the effects of miscegenation, not for Othello, Desdemona, or white society, but for the Black woman and the community Othello leaves behind.

While Shakespeare stages *Othello* on the periphery of white European society, Sears recontextualises it geographically and historically in the heart of Black America, situating it in times and places that signify particular positions in the field of racial convergence and conflict. Her characters are understood from the perspective of a Black community, "a fundamental shift in focus" from Shakespeare's version (Fischlin & Mortier, 2008). These characters are at home, not outsiders, although they are also conscious of the fact that this home is totally encircled, contained, and encroached upon by white America. In her analysis of the play, Linda Burnett clearly differentiates between "the deconstructivist postmodernism" and "the constructivist postcolonialism" of *Harlem Duet*. In her essay, "Redescribing a World: Towards a Theory of Shakespearean Adaptation in Canada", she writes:

Whereas postmodernism uses irony simply to tear down, postcolonialism uses it both to disassemble and to reassemble. It goes beyond the deconstruction of the texts that make up our cultural history to create new texts in which the old stories are re-imagined and reinterpreted from formerly excluded perspectives (Burnett, 2002).

The fact that no single character could be stigmatized as the oppressor and that even Mona, emerging as a silenced woman, awaits her tragic end in Shakespeare's *Othello* refutes the replacement of the oppressor by the victimized. Since there is no shift of roles between the victim and the victimizer, but rather a general depiction of many victims, the play refrains from any essentialism. Being aware of the danger of canonical counter discourses of postcolonial theory, Linda Burnett clarifies the supposed aim of postcolonial theory:

Postcolonialism's ultimate goal is not to defeat and replace these narratives (of colonialism, nationalism, patriarchy etc.) with its own master narrative. Its goal is not to vanquish the stories that have been told, even those that have been told from the perspective of the colonizer. Rather it is to advance narratives to stand beside (in addition to) earlier narratives. Its attempt is not so much to offer 'counter-narratives to the long tradition of European imperial narratives' - as it is to offer narratives that act to counterbalance those earlier univocal narratives (Ibid).

As Leslie Sanders writes that, "Othello has a context: he comes from somewhere, has a country, and has a world view" (Sanders, 2000). And he not only comes from somewhere, but also repeatedly abandons that somewhere in order to enjoy the benefits of inclusion in white culture. Sears's *Othello*, as Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier point out, must deal with the consequences of *not* being excluded from the community, "where community becomes a highly charged code for white culture as an arbitrary index against which one is (problematically) measured for inclusion or exclusion" (Fischlin & Fortier, 2008).

The mimetic spaces, (being audible or visible to the audience), of *Harlem Duet* are "the steps of a blacksmith's forge", in the 1860s, "a tiny dressing room" in 1928, and most importantly, Billie's apartment at the corner of Malcolm and Martin Luther King Boulevard in Harlem. Billie's apartment is the dominant location and she never leaves it until the final scene. The mimetic space being is, thus, restricted to very specific interior locations (forge, dressing room, apartment), Sears uses diegetic referents, (hints referred to by the characters) to reinforce the connections between these private mimetic spaces and the Black community to which they belong. In addition to the dialogue, a soundscape of speeches and music of Black political, spiritual, and cultural leaders links the dramatic space to African-America in general. Fischlin and Fortier note that the verbal and non-verbal sign systems in the play, the characters, dialogue, setting, and soundscape place "black experience at the heart of the play's visual and

literary representations," explicitly constructing the play as a nexus for different forms of black voice (Ibid). If the voices in the soundscape establish the stage as a cultural political nexus for the black voice, the characters establish the space as the centre of a personal experience of African-American particularly Billie and Othello:

OTHELLO: I never thought I'd miss Harlem

(Pause)

BILLIE: You still think it's a reservation?

OTHELLO: Homeland/reservation.

BILLIE: A sea of Black faces.

OTHELLO: Africatown, USA.

(Pause)

BILLIE: When we lived in the village, sometimes I'd be on the subway and I'd miss my stop...And I'd just walk. I love seeing all these brown faces.

OTHELLO: Yeh...

BILLIE: Since they knocked down the old projects, I can see the Schomburg Museum from here. You still can't make out Harlem Hospital. I love that I can see the Apollo from my balcony (56-7).

This passage fulfils several functions. First, it enriches the dramatic space by linking the mimetic space of the apartment to the diegetic space of Harlem and anchoring both at the centre of African-American experience. Second, the landmarks mentioned- the museum, the hospital, and the theatre- all establish Harlem as the centre of African-American culture and achievement (the "projects", on the other hand, are now a thing of the past). Harlem, thus, acquires positive and restorative connotations, as well. The vision of Harlem as the centre of an encompassing Black American culture is not, however, unproblematic, as Othello's ambivalence indicates: "is Harlem a reservation or a homeland?" Magi, Billie's Landlord, too, recognizes the potential problems of identifying Harlem as the centre of an African American universe; what Othello calls "Africatown, USA," she (Billie) calls "the Soweto of America" (25). Throughout the play, Harlem is represented ambiguously and problematically; it is a stronghold, but also a ghetto. Billie's conception of Harlem as the heart of the Black world is troubled, too: like white racists, she is disturbed by the presence of the monstrous "Other" on the margins of her world always encroaching upon its borders and yet necessary to make those borders visible. The threat of contamination is diegetically embodied in what Magi calls "Harlumbia": "those ten square blacks of whitedom, owned by Columbia university, set smack, dab in the middle of Harlem" (67). Here, in the centre of Billie's African-American haven, is a powerful symbol of the white culture

that excluded Billie, a stalled graduate student, and consumed her along with her ex-husband. (Othello, after breaking up with Billie, renewed his relationship with a white American woman "Mona"). Thus, though Harlem has many positive qualities, Billie's attempt to claim it as a sanctuary from the evils of whiteness is ultimately futile.

The 1928 scenes fashion an equally important diegetic space in the play; that of the stage itself. The mimetic space is a "tiny dressing room" at the theatre where Othello performs in minstrel shows. Othello, as a minstrel actor, makes a living representing his own Otherness, and his dream is to perform in the world of the white, "legitimate" theatre, and to perform white roles: "I'll not die in black face to pay the rent. I am of Ira Aldridge stock..." (98)¹. "I long to play the Scottish king. The prince of Denmark" (99). In this articulation of the story, Othello's desire for Mona, now a theatre director who gives him the chance to play Shakespeare, is tied again to her gaze: "Mona sees my gift," he says (99). Yet, it is not only Mona's gaze, but also the collective gaze of the theatre that Othello craves for, and the chance to be legitimized by playing Shakespeare. In fact, Othello's last words in *Harlem Duet* are Shakespeare's; when he leaves Billie's apartment for the last time, he enters 1928 again, and we see him "blackening up" for a minstrel performance while reciting Othello's speeches to the Venetian senate, in which he tells how he and Desdemona courted each other. In these lines, spoken in front of a real audience, by a Black actor playing a Black actor putting on a black face; and spoken as if he were rehearsing them in a mimetic off-stage space just before stepping on stage to perform blackness in front of a diegetic white audience. Othello reiterates his obsession with the white female gaze: "...My story being done, /she gave me for my pains a world of sighs/ she wished she had not heard it, yet she wished/ That heaven had made her such a man" (113). Therefore, in Shakespeare's words, Othello symbolically leaves Sears's mimetic space and enters the diegetic space of Shakespeare and more importantly Desdemona.

Desdemona, known as Mona or Miss Dessy in *Harlem Duet* represents Sears's most significant use of diegetic space. In *Harlem Duet*, as in Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Goodnight Desdemona* (1988) and Rossow-B. Kellogg's *Lear's Daughters* (1986), the emphasis on new characters does not entail the appearance of Shakespeare's characters. Instead, they are reallocated to diegetic space, where they nevertheless continue to play important roles. There is such a diegetic holdover in Sears's work. Mona

serves two important purposes: first, recycling the Shakespearean characters strengthens the connection between *Harlem Duet* and *Othello*. Second, she allows Sears to play the peculiar game of Shakespeare's adaptations, whereby they get to "have their cultural authority and eat it too" (Knowles, 2004). Playwrights like Sears contest Shakespeare's omnifarious high cultural authority. However, they often exploit it by rewarding "the cognoscenti with the pleasures of recognition" (Ibid). For instance, there is an element of playfulness in discovering through Othello's announcement that he has been awarded an important teaching post. How fully Sears has conceived her vision of how Othello would fare as an English professor rather than a military commander. More importantly, though, as characters who are repeatedly mentioned but never appear, the diegetic presence "accentuates" the mimetic absence of whiteness. There are numerous references to the (white) world outside Harlem. We see Magi, Billie's Landlord, "reading a magazine with a large picture of a blonde woman on the cover" (24) and hear Amah, Billie's sister, complain that she needs a "two-year course" on how to do white people's hair and make-up" (26) in order to get a cosmetician's certificate, but white characters are pointedly absent from the stage.

Just once, the convention of banishing whiteness from mimetic space is waived so to speak, and then all we see of Mona is her arm and "a waft of light brown hair" (47). Yet, the effect of overtly emphasizing the exclusion of white characters from the stage, interestingly, is to endow Whiteness with a menacing diegetic presence. Despite being reduced to an arm, Mona has more authority than any onstage character. When she arrives in (I.5) to pick Othello up at the apartment, the mere voice of the unseen Mona, which we hear on the apartment's intercom, and subsequently, her *silence*, have a marked effect on Othello, who has just been cheating on his new wife with his ex-wife.

MONA: (*Through intercom*) It's Mona. Could I have a word with

Othello?

OTHELLO: (*OVERLAPPING*) Shit!

BILLIE: One second please

He rushes to the intercom, while attempting to put his clothes back on. BILLIE tries to hold back her laughter. Her laughter begins to infect OTHELLO. He puts a finger over his mouth indicating to BILLIE to be quiet.)

¹ Ira Aldridge was the first Black actor to play Othello, so it is somewhat ironic that Sears writes an Othello who wants to play Ira Aldridge.

OTHELLO: Hey Mone...Mone, I'm not done yet. There is more here than I imagined. Why don't I call you when I'm done? (*MONA does not respond. OTHELLO's demeanour changes*).

OTHELLO: Mona? Mona? I'm coming, OK?

I'll be right...Just wait there for a second, OK? OK? (61).

Even as absent and "silent", Mona's presence shatters the apparent reconciliation between Othello and Billie. Othello's reaction to her silence demonstrates her power over him, and the soundscape cue at the top of the scene saturates the episode with a sharp irony: "*Malcolm X speaks about the need for Blacks to turn their gaze away from Whiteness so that they can see each other with new eyes*" (60). The use of the miscegenation trope in *Harlem Duet* is all the more powerful because, in its symbolic economy, the White woman is conceived as so dangerous and Othered as to be denied representation. Sears's adapted *Othello* bestows upon her audience a very intelligent and thought-provoking piece of work. The present-day issue of human relations in North America is instantaneously raised and its position in the play is focused upon when the lives of the multi-racial characters are illustrated.

Sears carefully establishes each character's place in the play with much consideration. They all present and uphold not only a distinctive voice, but also a caring and collective one as well. The accumulated effect of Djanet Sears's dramaturgical tactics of re-telling, the historical and cultural relocation of the Othello story, the recontextualization of miscegenation from a Black woman's perspective, and her use of dramatic space to create a world that both mimetically valorises Blackness and is yet threatened by diegetic Whiteness that Susan Bennett labelled as the "default position for the western audience" (Bennett, 1995). The conspicuous absence of white characters from the mimetic space of *Harlem Duet*, "forces the audience, regardless of who they are, into viewing the play from the perspective of black audiences" (Sanders, 2000).

The need to accustom Shakespeare's text to a new surrounding and circumstances by Djanet Sears was motivated by a need to rectify a sense of exclusion from the imaginary universal human experience for which Shakespeare is so often made to stand. *Harlem Duet*, in fact, works in the two directions at once. By subjecting *Othello* to a rigorous critique from a long-excluded point of view, it reveals that the canonical text and the canon in general, have stopped well short of representing a "universal" experience. And yet, by retelling the canonical text, she also claims a place within that canon for the previously excluded subjectivity, providing "an experience of how those 'other'

in a culture might feel dislocated by the dominant culture, and wish to dislocate and challenge its premises" (Ibid). Sears's re-telling of the *Othello* plot invites her spectators to consider a point of view that has often been as absent from our stage as it was from Shakespeare.

V. CONCLUSION

Quoting from Lyotard, Ashcroft states that a post-colonial work has to be postmodern as well so as to avoid creating its own new metanarratives (Ashcroft & Griffiths, 1989). Likewise, in *Harlem Duet* the intermingling of post-colonialism and post-modernism is harmonized so well that no value dominates over the others. Placing itself at the crossroads of many theories and discourses, *Harlem Duet* emerges as a postmodern, and postcolonial rewriting both resisting Shakespeare's dominance and appreciating his greatness. As the postmodern disruption of single time, space and character provides the play's liberal aspect, the post-colonial perspective presents us with the political side of the issue. As the title of the play suggests what Sears tries to form is a duet; therefore every discourse has its counter-discourse in the play, which makes the play unique and causes it to be liberated from firmly clinging to any essentialism or canon and from privileging any ideology.

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From Confusion to Self-discovery in *Brave Enough* by Kati Gardner: An Exploration of Identity Formation through Marcia's Identity Status Theory

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Abstract— *Young Adult Fiction often addresses societal issues that are relevant to adolescent readers. These books' appeal lies in their ability to resonate with young adults by tackling themes of identity, self-discovery, and growth. These themes are often explored within the context of challenging experiences such as chronic illness. This research paper examines Brave Enough by Kati Gardner, which emphasises resilience, hope, and the power of human connections. James Marcia's Identity Status Theory is used for a detailed analysis of the characters Cason and Davis. It offers a structured approach to examine the characters as they confront and navigate their identities amidst their struggles with cancer and addiction. This research paper highlights their development from confusion and exploration to a more defined and integrated sense of self. Thematic analysis is done to explore the characters' journeys and their reflection on a broader theme of identity formation.*



Keywords— *Identity status, identity formation, cancer, addiction, young adult fiction.*

The study of popular culture in literature is an expanding area that looks at current societal issues through new genres, interdisciplinary studies, and creative approaches in literary analysis. It focuses on books that are widely read and are enjoyed, and are known for being accessible and relevant to today's trends. This includes best-selling fiction and works that reflect modern cultural trends. "Popular culture is the television we watch, the cinema we give patronage to, the type of food... we eat, the type of attire we wear, the music we appreciate, the things we spend money on, in short, the whole society we live in." (*What is Popular Literature?* 7,8). In popular culture, Young Adult Fiction mostly focuses on young adults between the ages of twelve and eighteen. Young adult readers find these books interesting and relatable because they address issues relevant to their own lives. Adolescence is a phase everyone goes through, and it can be problematic if someone gets stuck in it. Young adult books are mostly based on "change

and growth" (Cadden 310). These books offer young adult readers a chance to explore this stage of life. It helps them navigate challenges and also encourages growth and self-discovery. "The burden of adolescent literature has always been to achieve synchronicity with the concerns of an audience that is defined by its state of flux and impermanence" (Coats 325). Thus, it reflects and resonates with their shifting experiences and emotions. These books cover a wide range of genres, including mystery, romance, illness, diaries, fantasy, horror, and adventure.

The use of illness in young adult fiction is getting wider. These stories help readers develop empathy for those with illnesses and provide a deeper understanding of various types of illnesses. Young adult cancer fiction often shows characters going through significant changes as they deal with illness and treatment. These stories focus on the formation of their identities, reevaluating their sense of self,

maintaining relationships and goals, and experiencing moments of growth and self-discovery while facing challenges. *Brave Enough* by Kati Gardner is a young adult cancer fiction that focuses on themes of resilience, hope, and the strength of human connections. It highlights the importance of tackling personal challenges and the support of the community. This ultimately shows that courage and hope can be found even in tough times. This research paper focuses on the characters, Cason and Davis and analyses the different stages of identity formation they go through.

Brave Enough falls under the genre of illness narrative. The author, Kati Gardner, is not only a writer and actor but also a childhood cancer survivor who has had her left leg amputated. The story revolves around two main characters, Cason Martin and Davis Channing. Cason is a talented young ballerina at the Atlanta Ballet Conservatory. During an audition for the American Ballet Theatre, she suffers a leg fracture and discovers she has an aggressive form of cancer called Ewing's Sarcoma, which leads to the amputation of her leg. Davis is a cancer survivor and a former drug addict struggling to maintain his sobriety. After his trial for possessing controlled substances, he was sentenced to complete three hundred hours of community service at the oncology unit of the children's hospital. There, he meets Cason, and the two quickly form a bond. As Cason undergoes treatment, Davis provides emotional support, understanding her struggles due to his own experiences. Other key characters include Natali Martin, Cason's mother, who appears strict and demanding, but is later revealed to have a kind and sensitive side. Additionally, characters like Jase, Mari, Noah, Paige, and Mary Faith are fellow cancer survivors. They help Cason come to terms with her new life after amputation, and Davis to overcome his addiction. Amid the emotional turmoil, physical challenges, and mental stress, the narrative emphasises the critical support of friends, family, and healthcare professionals to the main characters.

This research paper hypothesises that *Brave Enough* portrays a nuanced journey of its young adult protagonists, offering insight into the complex process of the formation of their identity amidst their experiences with cancer and addiction.

Despite the increasing focus on young adult literature that addresses cancer, there is a noticeable absence of analysis on *Brave Enough* by Kati Gardner. This gap in the literature presents an opportunity to explore the identity formation of adolescents among the challenges of cancer in greater depth using Marcia's Identity Status Theory. This research not only contributes to the understanding of identity formation in young adult cancer fiction but also

introduces *Brave Enough* as a significant text worthy of scholarly consideration.

James Marcia's Identity Status Theory is applied to analyse the impact of Cason and Davis's experiences with cancer on their journey toward developing their identities. In the book *Ego Identity: A Handbook for Psychosocial Research*, under the chapter "The Ego Identity Status Approach to Ego Identity", Marcia expands on Erik Erikson's idea of the identity crisis and defines four variants in resolving the identity issue in adolescents. They are identity diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and identity achievement. The four identity statuses are ways in which a teenager might find to deal with the identity issue. Identity diffusion is the first status, where adolescents have neither explored nor committed to any identity. This leads them to drift through life without clear goals or direction. The second status is identity foreclosure, where adolescents commit to an identity without exploration by accepting the values and beliefs passed down by their family and culture without questioning or considering alternatives. Moratorium is the third status, where adolescents actively explore different values and beliefs but have not yet committed to a specific identity. They keep their options open as they navigate an identity crisis. The final status is identity achievement, where adolescents have explored and have committed to a set of values, beliefs, and life goals. They feel confident in the choices they make. By applying Marcia's Identity Status Theory, the researcher conducts a thematic analysis specifically on the theme of identity formation to explore Cason's and Davis's identity formation amongst the challenges of cancer and recovery.

Cason falls under the latter three identity statuses. The second status is identity foreclosure, where a person makes strong commitments to certain roles or values. This identity is often shaped by external influences, including family and society. At the beginning of the book, Cason exhibits identity foreclosure. Her identity as a ballerina is influenced by her mother, Natalie, who is her rigid instructor. Even when she has a deadly pain, she is ready to perform in the audition. Cason refuses to acknowledge the pain. These lines highlight Cason's desperation and dedication to dance: "Bubbles of heat pulsed through the tendons around her hip...More burning, blinding in a way she hadn't thought possible" (Gardner 13). She keeps dancing till the end of the performance.

Regardless of her mother's impact, her identity is closely tied to her career as a ballerina. Her dedication to becoming a professional dancer is strong, and she follows this path without exploring other possibilities. This is highlighted in the following lines: "Cason was desperate to get into the Studio Company as her mother was...She would

spend her days dancing and dancing, surrounded by people who understood the release of landing the perfect *grand jete*" (Gardner 10). Cason experiences moments of identity foreclosure during her journey, particularly when she clings to her identity as a dancer. However, this foreclosure is challenged by her cancer, which makes her re-evaluate and think beyond her initial commitments.

When she is diagnosed with cancer and cannot walk, it threatens her identity as a ballerina and also her career. This leads to a crisis where she has to decide if her previous commitments are still relevant. It leads to the next status, that is, identity moratorium, where an individual is in the midst of a crisis, exploring different options and ideas, but has not yet settled on a clear direction or commitment. While playing cards with her child life specialist, Heather, Cason mentions that when she thinks about dance, she finds it hard to breathe. She goes on and says, "I didn't just dance. It's who I am...Who I was" (Gardner 54). There are similar instances where Cason finds it hard to come to terms with her new identity. For instance, while talking to her mother, she cries, "how can I dance when I have cancer and my leg is in a brace...?... This is not supposed to be my life" (Gardner 73). Her identity, which has been strongly tied to ballet, is questioned, and this triggers the start of an identity crisis in her.

She explores various aspects of herself beyond ballet, including her personal values, relationships, and future goals. When she is hospitalized she meets Mari, a cancer survivor and an amputee. Cason is amazed by Mari's ability to make amputation and adjusting to life afterwards look so easy. After bonding with Davis, Mari and Heather, Cason has a different perspective on her life. She starts to explore her new life as a cancer survivor and amputee. This period of exploration is marked by uncertainty as she tries to find a new sense of self among the challenges of cancer. An instance when Cason mentions that she can become a camp counsellor in the future reveals her exploration of other potential career paths. Subsequently, she gains autonomy when she decides to shave her head. During this stage, she gets help from her health professionals and fellow cancer survivors. The communication she has with them impacts the status of her identity formation.

Davis offers her emotional support throughout her treatment. He shows an optimistic view of her new life. After her left leg is amputated, Cason's little hope of becoming a dancer has been shattered. At this point, Mari has been a strong motivator for Cason. She helps Cason navigate life after amputation through her own experiences. Her physical therapist, Kelsey, encourages her to stay determined to become a dancer, even though Cason is reluctant to discuss dance, especially given her current

physical condition. There are moments when she has to confront the reality of her amputation and feels frustrated by accepting it. With the help of Kelsey, she starts to dance again despite her disability. Though Cason did not seem to be excited at her sessions with Kelsey, "Climbing even just a foot or two off the ground had been exhilarating. And she wanted to do it again" (Gardner 238). When she is asked to perform in Camp Chemo, Cason's history as a professional ballerina and her thoughts about being an inspiring dancer to others show her ongoing struggle to balance her past identity with her current challenges. Nevertheless, the relationships she has formed in the hospital with Heather, Kelsey and Dr. Henderson help her to come to terms with her new identity.

The final status is identity achievement, where a person has gone through a period of exploration and has made a commitment to their values, goals and roles. Cason, after exploring different aspects of her identity and facing the challenges of cancer, starts to integrate her experiences into a stable sense of self. During her time in the cancer camp, she observes other campers being energetic and having no primary thought or focus on their cancer. She actively takes part in all the camp activities and games. She loves it at camp. When she slips at the pool and gets hurt, she responds with, "I'm going to make Kelsey teach me how to fall correctly." (Gardner 278). At this point, she has started to accept her new self. Despite this, she is not ready to dance when Kelsey brings it up. After Kelsey mentions that it is important to remember that Cason has the "heart of a dancer" (Gardner 280), she realises that "Her dancer's heart hadn't been amputated, just her leg" (Gardner 280).

When Cason is asked about her goal, she initially responds by saying she just wants to finish chemo. Her friends Mari, Page, and Tiny suggest other possibilities beyond her immediate reality. When they question further about her dreams, she finally admits, "To dance" (Gardner 291). This marks the moment she accepts that, as Mari suggested, she can still be a dancer even without a leg. After bravely performing her silk dance in front of a few young campers, Cason feels emotionally fulfilled and motivated by the realisation that she has inspired the children. During her final performance in front of all the campers, she feels truly alive, "lost in the world she had so desperately missed" (Gardner 308). Since her left leg has been amputated, she has been questioning her worth and goals as a dancer. After her performance at the camp, she finds new ways to define her worth and future and redefines her goals as a dancer.

Her commitment to ballet and to get recognition from her mother has been a valued part of her identity. Holding on to it leads to identity foreclosure. Cason's transition to identity moratorium happens when she reflects

on her values, interests, and goals. She is in the midst of a personal crisis, trying to understand her new identity and her future. By the end of the novel, Cason reaches a state of identity achievement. After a period of exploration and self-reflection, she comes to a well-defined sense of self. She finds new ways to connect with her passions and goals. She embraces a broader sense of who she is and what she can contribute.

In contrast to Cason's journey, Davis's path is defined by his battles with addiction and recovery, which significantly shape his identity. Throughout the novel, Davis undergoes considerable evolution as he confronts his struggles with cancer, addiction, and the search for a new sense of purpose. Initially, Davis is in a state of identity foreclosure, where his commitment to overcoming addiction and finding a new direction is heavily influenced by the expectations of his family, healthcare professionals, and his moral obligation. When he has been assigned community service at the hospital where he is treated, Davis feels a deep sense of guilt. He knows the hardships his loved ones have to go through and feels that he has disappointed them. The expectations that are placed on him reinforce his identity foreclosure. For instance, Dr. Henderson's remark, "Davis, I'm really happy to see the progress you've made" (Gardner 37). This ongoing pressure from those around him initially prevents him from exploring other aspects of his identity, yet it also sets the stage for his eventual growth and transformation. It also helps him to stay sober. He is focused on the idea of redemption and living up to the role of someone who has overcome his past issues.

As the narrative suggests, Davis's efforts to stay sober mark the early stages of his identity development. His progression into identity moratorium reveals his struggle with multiple aspects of his identity, including being a cancer survivor and a recovering drug addict. This phase is marked by intense self-reflection and a questioning of his prior commitments and roles. When Davis encounters his old friends, Alexis and Ethan, he is reminded of his past as an addict. It leads to significant anxiety. The NA meeting with them triggers strong urges to relapse, highlighting the fragility of his sobriety.

Davis often experiences the need to get high during stressful or uncomfortable situations. For instance, when he meets his ex-girlfriend Alexis and Ethan, who supplies him with drugs, he feels an overwhelming urge to get high. This urge intensifies when he visits Detective Avery to report Ethan for assault. He even senses the taste of drugs in his mouth. Similarly, when Alexis emails him, admitting she cannot be helped, and Cason faces serious vascular issues simultaneously, Davis is traumatised and nearly succumbs to his addiction. He manages to resist by reaching out to his

sponsor, John, who offers guidance and support. The situation worsens when Alexis dies, and Davis blames himself for introducing her to drugs. His guilt and helplessness become so overwhelming that he is once again desperate to use drugs.

Despite the temptation, Davis understands that going back to his old ways is wrong and frightening, yet staying sober is equally challenging. This internal conflict is evident when the narrative states, "Now he was sober because he wanted to be...He would reclaim himself. He would deal with life as it came at him" (Gardner 65). Although the thoughts of using drugs, like "Just one hit...No one has to know" (Gardner 48) and "Just. One. More. Time" (Gardner 68), persist, Davis remains committed to sobriety. The physical and emotional pain he endures is described as: "A physical ache punched into his stomach, pushing his diaphragm up, making it impossible for him to breathe. It was always like this, no warning and often very little reason why, but he was desperate to get high" (Gardner 45, 46). During these challenging moments, his friend Jase plays a crucial role in keeping him grounded and focused on the present.

Davis's interactions with Cason and his experiences throughout the novel make him deeply reflect on his identity and values. This facilitates his transition from identity foreclosure to moratorium. As he learns more about Cason's struggles, Davis begins to confront his unresolved issues. He often grapples with feelings of self-criticism due to his past. When he is assaulted by Ethan, it is Cason who encourages him to file a case, as Davis initially believes that his words will not be trusted. The echoing thought, "I shouldn't be here...I deserved it" (Gardner 111), reveals his deep-seated guilt and self-doubt.

Davis's battle is not just with his addiction, but also with his own body and mind. Controlling his thoughts and actions to stay off drugs is an ongoing struggle. He finds this even more challenging than battling cancer. However, with constant reminders from Dr. Henderson about the strength he has shown in overcoming cancer, and the unwavering support of his mother and loved ones, Davis pushes through these dark thoughts and maintains his sobriety.

By the end of the novel, Davis reaches a point of identity achievement, successfully integrating his past experiences with addiction and cancer into a more positive sense of self. His journey involves accepting his past, acknowledging the personal growth he has undergone, and committing to a future that aligns with his true self and values. Davis learns to balance his past struggles with his present, making firm commitments to new goals and relationships that reflect his growth.

A significant moment in Davis's journey occurs during a conversation with Noah and Jase, where they discuss how it takes courage to choose the harder path. For the first time, Davis feels genuinely proud of his sobriety. Another critical moment occurs when Davis is on the verge of relapsing. At this point of weakness, Margaret, the director of Camp Chemo, calls him to inform him that he has been chosen to light the camp's first campfire. Margaret also reminds him that he is a fighter. Her words help Davis realise his worth and recall the challenges he has overcome to reach this point. He understands that his addiction does not define him and it is "just one of his layers" (Gardner 260). Davis's struggle with self-identity diminishes as he sees the pride and support of those around him. He feels immense gratitude towards his health professionals, Camp Chemo, and his loved ones. On the last day of camp, he tells Cason, "I wander sometimes, but I'm not lost" (Gardner 304), recognising the challenges of staying sober while also reinforcing his commitment. The camp gives him the clarity and motivation to continue on his path of sobriety. It reinforces his sense of purpose and identity.

Cason's and Davis's evolution in *Brave Enough* illustrates a journey from identity foreclosure and moratorium to identity achievement. Cason's experience with cancer leads to a period of intense self-exploration and redefinition. Throughout the novel, Cason reevaluates her goals and aspirations, moving beyond her initial focus on ballet. This reevaluation is a key aspect of her transition from foreclosure to achievement. Davis's development involves a crucial period of exploration and self-reflection, leading to a more authentic and integrated sense of self. Both Cason and Davis navigate their identity challenges and explore new possibilities. They evolve through different identity statuses and achieve a well-defined sense of self. Their journeys demonstrate that difficult experiences can lead to significant personal growth, allowing them to create new identities that honour their pasts while looking ahead to the future.

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Feminism in Islam- Reflection of Justice and Equality

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Abstract— *The contemporary and post-modern periods have challenged the common belief that feminism originated in the West and that Islam and feminism are naturally at odds with each other. In fact, the Qur'an itself contains the fundamental principles that support gender equality. Within the framework of Islamic teachings, gender justice is rooted in the values of equality, mutual responsibility, and shared spiritual accountability. Muslim feminist scholars have consistently pointed out that Islamic feminism has been misunderstood, misrepresented, and even distorted in various ways. It is often wrongly labeled as being against religion or against family values, but this is usually a result of cultural practices rather than the actual teachings of Islam. My interest in this topic comes from a genuine desire to explore and understand how Islam perceives gender equality, especially in light of the evolving discussions and movements within modern feminist thought.*



Keywords— *Religion, Islamic feminism, gender justice, misrepresentation*

Introduction

Islamic feminism is a movement that works towards achieving gender equality while staying rooted in the Islamic tradition. This concept has gained a lot of attention and discussion over the years, especially since the term was first introduced in the 1990s. The idea of Islamic feminism became prominent in Iran, where scholars like Afsaneh Najmabadi and Ziba Mir Hosseini explored how some women and men began using the term to express their views. They wrote about this in the Tehran-based women's journal called *Zanan* (Badran, 2009). In her book "Feminism in Islam," Professor Margot Badran explains Islamic feminism as a form of feminist thought and action that is based on the Islamic framework. It draws its understanding and authority from the Qur'an, and it aims to secure rights and justice for both women and men, considering their complete existence and roles in life. Islamic Feminism is a movement and area of study that works towards achieving true gender equality, but it does so within the beliefs and teachings of Islam. According to Islam, men and women are equal in rights and dignity, but they are not the same in every way. They have different physical, biological, and mental characteristics. The religion emphasizes spiritual equality, meaning that both

genders have the same value before God, but it also recognizes that there are different duties and responsibilities assigned to men and women, especially within the family. These differences are not seen as unequal, but rather as complementary, helping to maintain a balanced and peaceful society. Women are often regarded as the ones who play a key role in raising children, caring for the family, and managing the home. However, this does not mean that men are not important in the upbringing of children, nor does it prevent women from working or taking part in activities outside the home. In fact, Islam has given women many rights long before other parts of the world, such as the right to own property, to receive education, to inherit, to have a say in marriage, and even to seek a divorce if needed.

Feminism In Islam: A Reflection Of Justice And Equality

When Islam was revealed in seventh-century Arabia, it introduced a powerful message that the value of a woman's life is just as important as that of a man's. This idea challenged the existing norms of the time and laid the groundwork for a more balanced understanding of gender roles. In Islam, the different responsibilities given to men and women are not based on a belief in male superiority or

female inferiority. Instead, these distinctions come from the natural differences in their bodies, their physical makeups, and how they develop. Islam teaches that both men and women have equal spiritual value and the same potential for knowledge and wisdom. However, because of the way their bodies are structured and the different ways their hormones work, men and women may naturally be suited for different kinds of tasks. This doesn't mean one gender is better than the other, it simply means that roles are assigned in a way that supports fairness, stability, and peace in society. Islam encourages people to respect these natural differences while still treating everyone with dignity and fairness. This approach shows that true justice isn't about making everything the same, but about creating a system where everyone can thrive according to their unique strengths and abilities. Ibn Rushd, who authored a book known as *The Distinguished Jurist's Primer*, made a clear statement that "women are equal to men in every way when it comes to their natural abilities." He believed that the restriction of women from participating in public life was not due to religious teachings, but rather because of long-standing traditions and societal customs. Another major thinker, Al-Ghazali, emphasized the importance of ethical behavior and spiritual growth. He argued that the true purpose of life is to live morally and righteously, and he believed that this moral development is accessible to both men and women alike. In more recent times, scholars such as Amina Wadud have carried forward these ideas. She has written that "the Qur'an does not establish a hierarchy between men and women; instead, it establishes a system where both are accountable to one another and have the capacity to act with moral integrity." This perspective views gender roles as equal and balanced, rather than one being superior to the other. It is grounded in principles of fairness and justice, not in dominance or control.

Historical Perspective: Women In Early Islam

This understanding becomes even more apparent when we look at historical examples that show how modesty, responsibility, and active involvement in public life have always gone hand in hand without causing any conflict. The concept of purdah, which is often misinterpreted as a form of restriction, has never limited the intellectual, economic, or social abilities of women within the Islamic tradition. If purdah were actually a barrier, it would be impossible to explain how Hazrat Khadija (RA) was able to successfully manage large commercial ventures, or how the deep and valuable knowledge passed down by Hazrat Aisha (RA) reached the Muslim world with such strength and credibility. Fatima Mernissi, a scholar says that during the time of the prophet, women were clerally involved in public life, which goes against the idea that they were kept

away from society (Mernissi, 1991). Women like Hazrat Fatima (RA), Hazrat Zainab bint Ali (RA), Rufaidah Al-Aslamiyyahâ who was the first female nurse in Islamâ and Nusaybah bint Kaâb (RA), who bravely defended the Prophet (SAW) during the Battle of Uhud, serve as clear examples of how modesty never stopped women from leading, learning, starting businesses, or playing active roles in society. Taken together, these stories show that the Islamic concept of modesty is not about limiting women but rather about protecting their dignity and enabling them to take on important, impactful roles in the community.

Scholars have repeatedly pointed out that this idea of fairness and equality is deeply part of Islam. Leila Ahmed says that when Islam first started, it showed that both men and women are equal in terms of morality (Women and Gender in Islam, 1992, p. 42). She says that fairness between genders was always important, not something that came later. Amina Wadud also agrees, saying that the Qur'an treats both men and women as equally responsible for doing the right things (Qur'an and Woman, 1999, p. 14). This shows that in Islam, equality is about moral and spiritual responsibility, not just being the same in every way. At the same time, Islamic ideas don't think being equal means being exactly the same. Instead, they believe in adl, which is about fairness and making sure everyone is treated with respect, even if people are different. Asma Barlas explains that the Qur'an doesn't give men more importance than women; it speaks of equality in a way that is about morals and spirituality (Believing Women in Islam, 2002, p. 18). This allows for different roles in society without treating anyone as less important.

Modern Views On Justice And Equality Within Islam

Modern studies are increasingly focusing on a more flexible and evolving way of understanding the messages from the Qur'an, especially when it comes to issues related to gender. Many inequalities are not from the Qur'an itself, but from how people have interpreted it over time. A recent study (Hardy, 2025) says that Islamic feminism is a movement that tries to understand the true meaning of the Qur'an, not the ways that people have twisted it to support unfairness. They say that being unfair to women isn't something the Qur'an commands, but something that happened through certain traditional ways of reading it. Fidhayanti et al. (2024) also say that Islamic feminists now try to see the Qur'an in a new way that considers the real context of the time. This helps to show that justice is the main value in Islam. In the end, how Islam treats men and women isn't about making one better than the other or making them all the same. It's about a fair system that allows for differences but still gives everyone respect and dignity. By accepting both shared human qualities and

natural differences, Islam helps people grow in their own ways while keeping each other's worth in mind. In this way, fairness in Islam isn't about hiding differences, but about making sure those differences don't lead to unfair treatment or unfairness.

Today's thinkers, like Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas, suggest that the core Islamic values of *adl*, which means justice, and *ihsan*, which refers to compassionate fairness, naturally support the idea of equality. However, these principles have often been understood through the lens of traditional patriarchal norms in the past. These scholars encourage a fresh look at religious texts by clearly separating the original intentions of God from the cultural and social practices that influenced the development of classical Islamic legal traditions. In this updated perspective, justice is seen not just as treating everyone the same in a formal sense, but as a moral obligation to treat people with dignity, respect their independence, and ensure mutual respect between men and women. Equality, in this light, means fair treatment based on moral responsibility rather than identical roles, which allows for differences while opposing any form of hierarchy or discrimination. This approach positions Islamic feminism as a movement that is deeply rooted in religious faith, aiming to rediscover the Qur'an's original values of justice and to connect them with today's standards of human rights, all while staying true to the spiritual essence of Islam.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, when we look closely at the idea of Islamic femininity and examine it through the lens of justice and equality, we discover a deep and ever-developing moral vision that is rooted in Islamic teachings. The Qur'an places a strong emphasis on *adl*,

or justice, *ihsan*, which means compassion, and the inherent dignity of every human being. These values form a moral foundation in which both men and women are seen as equal in their spiritual nature and in the responsibility they bear towards morality. However, the gap between these lofty ideals and how they are actually practiced in society has mostly come from traditional views that are influenced by patriarchal attitudes and cultural norms, rather than from the messages that God has given us. In recent times, scholars like Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas have taken on the important task of re-evaluating how these teachings have been understood and applied. They have stressed the need to clearly separate the core spiritual truths from the legal rules that have been shaped by specific historical and cultural contexts. Their research shows that justice in Islam isn't something that is fixed and unchanging; instead, it needs to be regularly

reviewed and adapted as society evolves and new challenges arise. Today's conversations about equality in Islam highlight that it doesn't

mean everyone has to have the same roles, but rather that everyone should have fair treatment, respect, and the chance to succeed based on their abilities. This means that Islamic femininity is not a passive or static concept, but something that is active and powerful. It encourages women to take part in learning, to have a say in matters that affect them, to interpret religious texts, and to take on leadership roles within the boundaries of their faith. In this way, Islamic feminism is not something that is being forced from outside; it is an internal movement that seeks to rediscover and reconnect with the original spirit of justice and balance that the Qur'an was meant to convey. At the end of the day, the way justice and equality are reflected in Islamic femininity presents a strong combination of faith and progress. This approach doesn't reject tradition, but instead helps to reinterpret it in a way that makes it relevant for today's world. It invites a more inclusive and kind understanding of Islam, one that is based on compassion, mutual respect, and a shared sense of responsibility for creating a fair and just society. Therefore, Islamic femininity serves as a powerful example of how Islamic principles can continue to guide and influence our lives in dealing with modern issues, reminding us that true justice lies in recognizing and treating all people with the same value and dignity.

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Midwifery Students' Awareness and Development of Emotional Resilience through Reading Catharsis-Laden English Literary Texts

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Abstract— Midwifery students frequently encounter emotionally demanding clinical experiences that may lead to stress, fear, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion. While various interventions have been used to promote emotional resilience, limited studies have explored the use of catharsis-laden English literary texts as a reflective educational tool. This study determined the effect of reading catharsis-laden English literary texts on the emotional awareness and emotional resilience of BSM 2 – St. Anne midwifery students. The study employed a quasi-experimental one-group pretest–posttest design involving thirty-nine (39) students from Fatima School of Science and Technology, Inc. A validated and pilot-tested researcher-made questionnaire with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.9494 was utilized to assess emotional awareness and emotional resilience before and after the intervention. The intervention consisted of reading selected literary texts and completing reflective literary response activities. Data were analyzed using mean, standard deviation, and paired sample t-test, while qualitative responses were examined through thematic analysis. Findings revealed a significant increase in empathic concern ($M = 4.18$ to 4.34 , $p = 0.01$) and emotional resilience ($M = 4.09$ to 4.26 , $p = 0.02$) following exposure to the literary texts. However, fear and anxiety showed no significant differences. Qualitative results indicated that literary engagement promoted emotional release, self-awareness, empathy, reflection, and adaptive coping among the participants. The study concludes that catharsis-laden English literary texts can serve as an effective reflective intervention for enhancing emotional resilience among midwifery students. The findings support the integration of literature-based reflective practices into healthcare and midwifery education as a cost-effective and innovative strategy for fostering emotional well-being and adaptive coping skills among future healthcare professionals.



Keywords— Catharsis-laden English literary texts, emotional awareness, emotional resilience, empathic concern, midwifery education, reflective learning

I. INTRODUCTION

Literature has long been recognized not only as a medium for language learning but also as a powerful tool for emotional reflection, empathy development, and psychological insight. According to Rosenblatt (1978), literary meaning emerges through the transactional relationship between the reader and the text, enabling readers to connect literary experiences with their personal

emotions and realities. The concept of catharsis, rooted in Aristotle's *Poetics*, suggests that exposure to narratives characterized by pity, fear, and emotional conflict allows individuals to process complex emotions in a reflective and psychologically safe manner. Recent studies have further emphasized that emotionally charged literary texts promote emotional awareness, empathy, self-understanding, and reflective thinking among readers (Andrews, 2024; Palla, 2024; Pileggi, 2024). Likewise,

Charon (2021) emphasized the role of narrative medicine in developing empathy and emotional understanding among healthcare learners through literary engagement.

In healthcare education, emotional resilience has become increasingly important due to the emotional and psychological demands of clinical training. Midwifery students are often exposed to maternal complications, emergency deliveries, patient suffering, trauma, and fear of committing clinical errors. Studies have shown that healthcare students frequently experience stress, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and psychological pressure during clinical exposure (Labrague, 2022; Berdida & Grande, 2022; Santos et al., 2024). While interventions such as counseling, mindfulness training, reflective writing, and peer-support programs have been utilized to strengthen resilience, limited research has explored literary reading as a structured emotional coping mechanism, particularly among midwifery students in the Philippine context (Ramamurthy et al., 2024; Thompson & Li, 2024; Evans & Kallio, 2024).

The importance of promoting students' emotional well-being is further supported by Philippine policies. Republic Act No. 7722 (Higher Education Act of 1994) mandates higher education institutions to foster holistic student development, including affective and interpersonal growth. Similarly, Republic Act No. 11036 (Mental Health Act of 2018) advocates preventive mental health programs and the promotion of psychological well-being within educational institutions. Furthermore, the Department of Health (DOH, 2021) reported increasing mental health concerns among college students, particularly those enrolled in health-related programs.

In response to these concerns, this study investigates the effects of reading catharsis-laden English literary texts on the emotional awareness and emotional resilience of BSM 2 – St. Anne midwifery students of Fatima School of Science and Technology Inc. at Goa, Camarines Sur. Specifically, it examines changes in empathic concern, fear, anxiety, and emotional resilience following literary engagement. The study contributes to both English education and healthcare education by providing empirical evidence on the value of literature as a reflective and affective pedagogical tool. It also supports the development of evidence-based, literature-driven interventions that promote emotional resilience, well-being, and holistic professional development among future healthcare practitioners.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND STUDIES

The international and Philippine bodies of literature converge to form a coherent, timely, and empirically grounded justification for the present study, Midwifery Students' Awareness and Development of Emotional Resilience through Reading Catharsis-Laden English Texts. Globally and locally, the reviewed literature shares a distinct similarity with the present study in its identification of the core problem space for healthcare learners face substantial, documented emotional burdens during their clinical training. This shared reality is anchored by international meta-analyses and empirical trials reporting that 42.1% of nursing trainees face moderate clinical stress, while up to 45% of medical learners exhibit severe clinical anxiety and depression during widespread healthcare crises (BMC Psychology, 2024; Silver et al., 2024). In the Philippine setting, this baseline problem is strongly mirrored by local data indicating that 38% to 55% of nursing and midwifery students experience moderate-to-high stress and patient care anxiety during hospital duties, aggravated by systemic mental health vulnerabilities across higher education institutions (Labrague, 2022). These statistical indicators demonstrate a clear, cross-cultural similarity for healthcare training across geographical boundaries is inherently emotionally taxing, creating an urgent, universal demand for structured psychological defenses.

In terms of interventions, the reviewed foreign and local works exhibit strong similarities in their reliance on reflective, narrative-based, and affective strategies to alleviate this distress. Internationally, structured narrative curricula, oral "story slams," and narrative bibliotherapy have generated stable, small-to-moderate effect sizes ranging from 0.30 to 0.50 in lowering burnout and enhancing tolerance for clinical uncertainty (Béres et al., 2024; Stringer et al., 2024). Similarly, local Philippine intervention trends involve mindfulness, clinical experience-sharing circles, and reflective journaling, which have yielded a 25% increase in empathy scores alongside a parallel 18% to 31% drop in academic and clinical strain (Austria, 2024; Bautista, 2023; Garcia & Kim, 2023).

Furthermore, the pedagogical and conceptual frameworks utilized across these global and local studies are highly compatible. Both the reviewed literature and the present study interlock along the same foundational conceptual framework, Louise Rosenblatt's Transactional Reading Theory explains how readers co-construct meaning and make personal-emotional connections with texts (Suarez & Diva, 2022); Bibliotherapy and Narrative Medicine justify why stories facilitate safe emotional

release and insight; Resilience Theory frames psychological adaptability as a teachable process; and the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping clarifies the cognitive appraisal mechanisms through which narrative reflection reframes personal distress into growth.

Despite these clear thematic and conceptual confluences, profound methodological and operational differences exist between previous literature and the present study, exposing the precise gap that this study fills. Methodologically, previous study in this domain depends heavily on active, expressive, and interactive modalities. Foreign studies by scholars like Conolly (2023) and Stringer et al. (2024) rely on expressive writing, spoken-word workshops, and group storytelling programs to achieve reductions in burnout. Local health interventions similarly utilize external frameworks such as mindfulness training, counseling circles, or peer-support systems (Garcia & Kim, 2023). The present study radically departs from these outward-facing methods by isolating silent, internal reading and individual textual transactions as the independent variable, establishing a private and deeply internalized coping mechanism that does not rely on group discussion or clinical simulations.

Operationally, the focus of literary engagement is completely restructured in this study. Existing Philippine research using Reader-Response frameworks typically treats literature as a linguistic tool within standard language classrooms, measuring its success by how well it improves reading comprehension or reduces English language-learning anxiety by 15% to 25% among learners (Suarez & Diva, 2022). This present study, however, pivots away from language acquisition and uses English literary texts directly as a psychological training ground to build clinical emotional resilience.

Furthermore, while traditional bibliotherapy programs often rely on broad, non-clinical cohorts reading arbitrary materials, this study introduces a highly controlled, text-based paradigm. It uses six specific, structurally intense literary works: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*, Kate Chopin's *The Story of an Hour*, O. Henry's *The Gift of the Magi*, Maya Angelou's *Still I Rise*, D. H. Lawrence's *The Rocking-Horse Winner*, and Eudora Welty's *A Worn Path* which are curated strictly against six explicit literary-affective criteria: emotional conflict, emotional climax, reflective potential, human struggle, transformative insight, and reader engagement.

This study lies in the empirical design, scope, and target population of the present study. While past literature has broadly suggested that narrative exposure facilitates emotional processing, a major gap remains few

studies have quantitatively linked a student's precise awareness of literary emotional connections (pity, fear, anxiety) directly to resilience scores, and no research has explored this pathway within Philippine midwifery education.

The present study addresses this empirically important and practically urgent gap by transitioning from a purely descriptive or conceptual framework into a rigorous quasi-experimental design to quantitatively test this direct, causal pathway. Crucially, the study focuses on a highly specific and vulnerable respondent group of midwifery students. While foreign and local studies have heavily investigated generalized nursing respondents or medical residents, the unique psychological realities of midwifery trainees who navigate the intense, high-stakes emotional strain of maternal and neonatal care, birth trauma, infant mortality, and by now they become the front line of every emergency remain largely unexamined in study.

Based on the reviewed studies and literature, this study implemented a structured text-based intervention through reading and guided reflective literary response and utilized empirical measures to examine how BSM 2 – St. Anne midwifery students' awareness of emotional connections influences their resilience indicators. It moves past abstract recommendations to deliver a low-cost, curriculum-integrable, and culturally congruent strategy that transforms standard literary engagement into an evidence-based strategy for cultivating emotionally resilient, reflective, and compassionate midwives within the Philippine healthcare landscape.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quasi-experimental research design utilizing a one-group pretest–posttest approach to examine the effect of catharsis-laden English literary texts on the emotional awareness and emotional resilience of BSM 2 – St. Anne midwifery students. The design was deemed appropriate as participants were drawn from an intact class without random assignment. The study measured empathic concern (pity), fear, anxiety, and emotional resilience before and after exposure to the intervention. To enrich quantitative findings, qualitative data from reflective responses were also collected to provide deeper insight into students' emotional processing.

The respondents were thirty-nine (39) second-year Bachelor of Science in Midwifery students enrolled in Academic Year 2025–2026 at Fatima School of Science and Technology, Inc., Goa, Camarines Sur. Complete enumeration was employed, including all qualified students in the intact section. Inclusion criteria required

official enrollment, active clinical exposure, willingness to participate, and completion of both pretest and posttest procedures. Exclusion criteria included non-enrollment, absence during data collection phases, incomplete participation, or withdrawal of consent.

Data were gathered using a validated and pilot-tested researcher-made questionnaire consisting of four sections: demographic profile; emotional awareness (empathic concern, fear, anxiety) for pretest and posttest; emotional resilience for pretest and posttest; and perceived contribution of literary texts (posttest only). The instrument was validated by experts in education and language instruction and pilot tested to a similar group, yielding a Cronbach's alpha of 0.9494, indicating excellent reliability.

The study was conducted in three phases: pre-intervention, intervention, and post-intervention. The pre-intervention phase involved securing permissions, obtaining informed consent, and administering the pretest. The intervention phase consisted of guided reading of selected catharsis-laden English literary texts (*The Yellow Wallpaper*, *The Story of an Hour*, *The Gift of the Magi*, *Still I Rise*, *The Rocking-Horse Winner*, and *A Worn Path*) accompanied by structured reflective literary response activities linking narratives to clinical experiences. The post-intervention phase involved administering the posttest and gathering reflective evaluations of the intervention.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (weighted mean) and inferential statistics (paired-samples t-test) to determine significant differences between pretest and posttest scores. Qualitative responses were examined through thematic analysis to identify emotional patterns, coping strategies, and reflective insights. Findings from both datasets were integrated to provide a comprehensive interpretation of the intervention's impact.

Ethical protocols were strictly observed in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Informed consent was obtained, participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was ensured through coded identifiers. Data were stored securely and reported in aggregate form. Academic integrity was maintained through proper citation of all instruments and literary materials used.

Frequency and percentage were used to describe respondent profiles. Weighted mean was used to determine levels of emotional awareness and emotional resilience. Paired-samples t-test was employed to assess significant differences between pretest and posttest results.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Level of Emotional Awareness before and after reading catharsis-laden English literary texts

The BSM 2 – St. Anne Midwifery students demonstrated an overall “Aware” level of emotional awareness prior to the intervention across the three indicators: empathic concern ($M = 4.20$), fear ($M = 4.06$), and anxiety ($M = 4.08$). This indicates that before exposure to catharsis-laden literary texts, the students already possessed a relatively high level of emotional sensitivity, particularly in terms of empathic responses toward clinical and human suffering.

Following the intervention, empathic concern increased notably from an “Aware” level ($M = 4.18$) to a “Very Aware” level ($M = 4.34$), suggesting that literary engagement strengthened compassion, emotional reflection, and patient-centered understanding. In contrast, fear ($M = 4.06$ to 4.09) and anxiety ($M = 4.08$ to 4.11) remained within the “Aware” range with only minimal increases. This implies that while catharsis-laden texts effectively enhanced positive emotional awareness, their influence on negative emotional states was limited.

These findings suggest that literary engagement is more effective in strengthening empathic and reflective emotional awareness than in altering fear and anxiety responses.

3.2 Level of Emotional Resilience before and after reading catharsis-laden English literary texts

The findings revealed that the students already exhibited a high level of emotional resilience prior to the intervention ($M = 4.08$), indicating their ability to manage stress and maintain emotional stability during clinical exposure.

After exposure to catharsis-laden literary texts, emotional resilience increased to a “Very High Resilience” level ($M = 4.23$). This improvement suggests that literary engagement contributed to enhanced emotional regulation, recovery from stress, and a more positive emotional outlook. The results indicate that structured literary reading supports resilience development by allowing students to process emotionally challenging experiences in a reflective and meaningful manner.

3.3 Significant difference in emotional awareness and emotional resilience before and after intervention

The paired sample t-test revealed a significant difference in empathic concern ($p = 0.01$) and emotional resilience ($p = 0.02$), indicating that the intervention effectively enhanced these dimensions. However, fear ($p = 0.38$) and anxiety ($p = 0.49$) showed no significant differences, suggesting that these emotional states were not substantially affected by the intervention.

These findings imply that catharsis-laden literary exposure is more effective in enhancing positive emotional constructs such as empathy and resilience than in reducing negative affective states. This aligns with catharsis theory, which emphasizes emotional release and reflection rather than elimination of stressors. Likewise, reader-response theory explains that students interpret texts through their lived clinical experiences, where deeply rooted fears and anxieties—especially those linked to real clinical responsibilities—may not be easily altered through reading alone.

3.4 Contribution of catharsis-laden English literary texts to emotional resilience development

The results show strong agreement ($M = 4.47$) that catharsis-laden English literary texts contributed to emotional resilience development among the participants. Students reported improved emotional understanding, stress processing, empathy development, and reflective thinking.

Qualitative findings further identified four key contributions: emotional release through catharsis, enhanced empathy, improved emotional regulation and meaning-making, and increased clinical preparedness. These suggest that literary texts function as reflective tools that enable students to safely express emotions, understand patient experiences, and develop adaptive coping mechanisms essential for clinical practice.

3.5 Output: Reading-based emotional resilience intervention

The study produced a reading-based emotional resilience framework anchored on catharsis-laden English literary texts for midwifery students. This intervention emphasizes reflective reading, guided interpretation, and emotional processing as structured pedagogical strategies to enhance empathy, emotional awareness, and resilience.

The findings support the integration of literature-based reflective interventions in midwifery education as a supplementary approach to strengthen emotional competence, promote patient-centered care, and assist students in managing emotionally demanding clinical experiences.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that BSM 2 – St. Anne midwifery students already possessed a relatively high level of emotional awareness prior to exposure to catharsis-laden English literary texts, particularly in empathic concern, fear, and anxiety. However, literary exposure further enhanced their empathic concern, elevating it from an “Aware” level to a

“Very Aware” level, indicating that literary engagement effectively strengthens compassion, emotional reflection, and sensitivity toward patient experiences. Despite this improvement, fear and anxiety remained relatively unchanged, suggesting that these emotional responses are more deeply rooted in direct clinical exposure than in literary intervention alone.

It is further concluded that the students demonstrated a high level of emotional resilience even before the intervention, which significantly increased to a “Very High Resilience” level after exposure to the literary texts. This finding confirms that catharsis-laden English literary reading contributes positively to emotional regulation, recovery, adaptability, and the maintenance of emotional stability in stressful clinical environments.

Moreover, there was a significant difference in both empathic concern and emotional resilience before and after the intervention, indicating the effectiveness of literary engagement in enhancing positive emotional dimensions. In contrast, fear and anxiety did not show significant changes, implying that while literary texts are effective in fostering emotional reflection and catharsis, they may not directly reduce clinically rooted stress responses.

The findings also suggest that catharsis-laden English literary texts significantly contribute to the emotional development of midwifery students by serving as instruments for emotional release, empathy formation, meaning-making, and adaptive coping. Through reflective engagement with literary narratives, students are able to process emotions in a safe and structured manner, thereby strengthening their preparedness for emotionally demanding clinical experiences.

To sum it up, reading-based emotional resilience interventions grounded in catharsis-laden English literary texts are effective as a supplementary pedagogical approach in midwifery education, enhancing emotional competence, empathy, reflective thinking, resilience, and patient-centered care.

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Green Spirituality and the Transformation of Self in *The Color Purple*

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Abstract— “Every leaf, every blade of grass, every sand, every inch of earth is alive. This is what Shug talks about, God being in everything” (Walker 202).

Green spirituality, often called eco-spirituality, emphasizes the profound connection between human life and the natural world, viewing nature as sacred rather than merely functional. This paper examines how eco-spiritual awareness develops in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, focusing on the protagonist Celie's spiritual journey. As Celie transitions from silence and oppression to self-awareness, her growing sensitivity to nature becomes central to her transformation. Drawing on eco-critical and ecofeminist perspectives, along with insights from Félix Guattari and Bron Taylor, this paper argues that Walker presents spirituality as experienced and felt within the natural world rather than as something imposed from outside. Through symbols such as the color purple, trees, rivers, and the garden, the novel illustrates how reconnecting with nature can lead to healing, empowerment, and a more ethical way of living. Ultimately, this study suggests that Walker's vision of spirituality provides a meaningful response to contemporary ecological concerns.

Keywords— Green spirituality, eco-criticism, eco-spirituality, environment, anthropocentrism, self-awakening



I. INTRODUCTION

The Vedic idea “Mātā bhūmih putro’ham prthivyāh”—“The Earth is my mother, and I am her son” (*Atharva Veda* 12.1.12), expresses a way of thinking about the world in which human life is deeply connected to the Earth. This sense of connection is not new. Long before modern environmental debates, many cultures understood nature as something sacred rather than something to be controlled. Rivers, trees, wind, and sunlight were not seen as mere physical elements but as meaningful and even spiritual presences. Living close to nature, people developed ways of life that reflected respect, balance, and a sense of belonging within the natural world.

In contrast, the modern world has gradually moved away from this perspective. With industrialization and the rise of anthropocentric thinking, nature has often been reduced to a resource—something to be used, managed, or exploited.

This shift has not only contributed to environmental damage but has also created a kind of spiritual distance from the natural world. In this context, eco-spirituality is an important way to rethink how humans relate to nature. It encourages a return to ideas of interconnectedness, care, and responsibility, suggesting that environmental concern is not only a scientific or political issue but also a deeply ethical and spiritual one.

What is particularly significant is that eco-spiritual thinking is not limited to any one tradition. Across religions, we find similar ideas expressed in different ways. Christianity often views nature as part of divine creation, while Hindu philosophy tends to see the divine as present in all forms of existence. Buddhism emphasizes interdependence, reminding us that all forms of life are connected, and Islam, through the idea of *tawhid*, affirms the unity of all creation (*Qur’ān* 112.1–4). Despite their differences, these traditions share a common understanding that the natural world is not

separate from human life but part of a larger, meaningful whole.

It is within this broader framework that Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* can be read in a new light. While the novel is often discussed in terms of gender, race, and oppression, it also offers a powerful reflection on spirituality and nature. Walker presents spirituality not as something distant or controlled by institutions, but as something that can be experienced in everyday life—especially through one's relationship with the natural world.

This becomes clear in the journey of Celie, the novel's central character. At the beginning, Celie's understanding of God reflects the world around her: God appears distant, male, and authoritative, reinforcing her silence and suffering. However, as her relationship with Shug Avery develops, Celie begins to rethink this idea. She starts to see God not as something outside her, but as something present in everything—trees, fields, water, and even herself. This shift is quiet but powerful, and it changes the way she understands both spirituality and her own identity.

Celie's growing attention to nature—her ability to notice beauty, to care for her garden, and to find peace in the natural world—marks an important turning point in her life. Her spiritual awakening is closely tied to this renewed connection with the environment. Critics such as Trudier Harris have pointed out that this transformation challenges traditional religious ideas that have often silenced Black women, allowing Celie instead to develop a more personal and empowering sense of spirituality (Harris 157–58).

This transformation can also be understood through broader eco-spiritual frameworks. Bron Taylor argues that nature-centered spirituality recognizes the value of the natural world in itself, rather than only in terms of human use (Taylor 12). Similarly, Félix Guattari suggests that human well-being depends on the interconnection of environmental, social, and psychological dimensions of life (Guattari 28). These ideas help us see that Celie's journey is not only personal but also ecological and social. In addition, ecofeminist thinker Rosemary Radford Ruether highlights the link between the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature (Ruether 45). This connection is clearly reflected in Walker's portrayal of Celie's life.

This paper argues that *The Color Purple* presents eco-spirituality as a lived experience that emerges through attention, care, and connection with the natural world. Through Celie's journey, Walker demonstrates that reconnecting with nature can be a source of healing, strength, and self-discovery. At the same time, the novel encourages readers to rethink their relationship with the environment, suggesting that true spiritual awareness may be found in recognizing the world around us as sacred.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Critical analyses of *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker have historically focused on themes of gender, race, and identity, particularly in relation to the experiences of Black women within a deeply patriarchal society. Earlier scholarship often highlights Celie's journey from silence to self-expression, interpreting her transformation primarily as a quest for psychological and social empowerment. In contrast, more recent studies propose that this evolution is not only social but also profoundly spiritual, thereby allowing for eco-spiritual interpretations of the text.

Among the most significant contributions is Trudier Harris's examination of the novel's reworking of religious belief. Harris argues that Walker challenges dominant, patriarchal representations of God by presenting an alternative vision that is more inclusive and life-affirming (Harris 157–58). According to Harris, Celie's shift from viewing God as a distant, authoritative figure to experiencing the divine as something internal and relational marks a crucial step in her empowerment. While Harris's analysis primarily focuses on gender and religious critique, it also indirectly points toward an eco-spiritual understanding in which the divine becomes accessible through lived experience rather than institutional structures.

Ecofeminist theorists emphasize the link between spirituality, gender, and nature. Rosemary Radford Ruether argues that the oppression of women and the exploitation of the natural world stem from the same hierarchical systems that prioritize domination and control (Ruether 44–45). From this viewpoint, Walker's narrative can be interpreted as an ecofeminist text in which Celie's deepening connection with nature mirrors her resistance to patriarchal oppression. Her involvement with the natural world—especially through her garden—symbolizes not only personal healing but also a rejection of societal structures that devalue both women and the environment.

Greta Gaard expands ecofeminist thought into a more intersectional framework, arguing that environmental issues are deeply intertwined with matters of race, gender, and sexuality (Gaard 117–19). Her insights are particularly relevant for analyzing *The Color Purple*, as Alice Walker places her characters within overlapping systems of marginalization. In the novel, the connection between Black women and the land is not idealized; instead, it is shaped by histories of labor, exploitation, and survival. In this context, eco-spiritual awareness emerges as a form of resilience grounded in lived experience rather than abstract theory.

From a philosophical perspective, Félix Guattari's concept of ecosophy offers a holistic way of understanding the novel's structure. Guattari argues that environmental, social, and mental ecologies are interconnected and must be

addressed together rather than in isolation (Guattari 28–29). This framework aligns closely with Celie’s journey, in which her personal healing, evolving relationships, and deepening connection with nature develop simultaneously. Walker’s narrative thus reflects an integrated vision of transformation in which ecological awareness is inseparable from social and psychological change.

Similarly, Bron Taylor’s idea of dark green religion offers an important lens for interpreting the novel’s spiritual dimensions. Taylor describes a form of spirituality that recognizes the intrinsic value of nature and challenges human-centered belief systems (Taylor 12–13). This perspective is evident in the novel through Shug Avery’s teachings, which encourage Celie to perceive God in all aspects of the natural world. Such a view moves away from institutional religion and toward a more immediate, experiential understanding of the sacred.

Despite these important contributions, existing scholarship often treats spirituality, ecology, and social critique as separate areas of inquiry. There remains a need for a more integrated approach that brings these dimensions together—one that can account for how *The Color Purple* constructs a unified eco-spiritual framework in which nature functions simultaneously as a site of healing, resistance, and self-discovery. This paper addresses that gap by bringing together ecofeminist theory, eco-spiritual philosophy, and close textual analysis to show that Walker’s work offers not only a critique of oppression but also a meaningful vision of ecological and spiritual renewal.

III. ECO-SPIRITUAL AWAKENING IN ‘THE COLOR PURPLE’

At the heart of eco-spirituality lies the idea that reconnecting with nature can lead to healing. In *The Color Purple*, this idea is expressed through the characters’ lived experiences, particularly Celie’s. Her journey is not only about overcoming personal suffering but also about learning to see and understand the world differently. As her awareness of nature deepens, so does her awareness of herself. Walker suggests that this renewed connection with the natural world can transform both inner life and outward experience.

3.1 The Field of Purple Flowers

One of the most significant articulations of eco-spiritual awareness appears in Shug Avery’s statement: “I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and do not notice it” (Walker 196). This moment captures the essence of Walker’s vision, where

attentiveness to beauty becomes a form of spiritual recognition.

For Celie, the field of purple flowers represents more than a visual experience. It marks a turning point in her perception. Despite the hardships she endures, she can notice and respond to beauty. This shift is important because it signals a movement from passive endurance to active awareness. The color purple comes to symbolize not only beauty but also a deeper sense of presence and meaning.

Walker presents spirituality here as something embedded in everyday life rather than confined to religious institutions. Celie’s ability to recognize the beauty of the flowers reflects her emerging understanding that the sacred exists within the natural world. In this sense, eco-spiritual awakening begins with the simple act of noticing.

3.2 Trees as Symbols of Strength and Presence

Trees function throughout the novel as quiet but powerful sources of comfort and stability. Celie often turns to them in moments of distress, finding in their presence a sense of peace absent from her human relationships. When she reflects, “The trees are not trees, I do not know what it is. The air hits me, and I start to feel my skin” (Walker 211), it becomes clear that her perception of nature is changing.

This moment suggests that Celie is beginning to experience nature more intuitively and spiritually. Trees are no longer merely physical objects; they become living presences that offer support and continuity. Their rootedness and endurance mirror Celie’s own resilience as she navigates the difficulties of her life.

Nettie’s descriptions of the natural world in Africa further expand this perspective, presenting nature as vibrant and life-affirming. These descriptions not only contrast with Celie’s earlier experiences but also reinforce a broader sense of interconnectedness. In this way, trees come to symbolize both personal strength and a deeper connection to the world.

3.3 Celie’s Garden: A Space of Healing and Growth

Celie’s garden represents one of the most meaningful expressions of eco-spirituality in the novel. As she begins to cultivate it, gardening becomes closely linked to her sense of identity and independence. She observes, “Everywhere I look, I see something growing... Then I look down, and it is all like magic” (Walker 207).

The garden functions as both a physical and symbolic space. By tending to it, Celie experiences a sense of purpose and control that has been largely absent from her life. Gardening becomes a form of quiet resistance, allowing her to create and nurture life in contrast to the suffering she has endured.

At the same time, the garden reflects her inner transformation. As the plants grow, so does her confidence and self-awareness. Influenced by Shug Avery's understanding of spirituality, Celie begins to see the garden as a space where the divine is present in the processes of growth and renewal. The act of caring for the earth becomes inseparable from the act of caring for herself.

3.4 Rivers and the Flow of Spiritual Renewal

Rivers in *The Color Purple* symbolize movement, continuity, and transformation. Unlike the stillness of trees or the contained space of the garden, rivers are constantly in motion, reflecting the evolving nature of life itself.

Celie's reflection on water—how it “flows everywhere... like it belongs, like it is home” (Walker 204)—reveals her growing understanding of life as fluid and interconnected. The river becomes a metaphor for resilience, suggesting that obstacles do not stop movement but shape it.

The river also functions as a space of reflection and renewal. It allows Celie to think beyond her immediate circumstances and to see herself as part of a larger, ongoing process. Through this, Walker reinforces the idea that eco-spiritual awareness involves recognizing one's place within a broader web of life.

IV. DISCUSSION: ECO-SPIRITUALITY AS TRANSFORMATIVE CONSCIOUSNESS

In *The Color Purple*, eco-spirituality is presented not as a decorative theme or symbolic layer, but as a fundamental shift in consciousness. The novel depicts a journey from alienation to connection, in which the protagonist's relationship with the natural world gradually transforms her understanding of herself, spirituality, and existence. This transformation is subtle yet profound, emerging through lived experiences rather than doctrinal teachings. Eco-spirituality in the text thus serves as an embodied practice—something felt, perceived, and internalized rather than formally articulated.

At the outset, the world Celie inhabits is marked by fragmentation. Her sense of self is shaped by violence, silence, and imposed inferiority, while her understanding of spirituality is mediated through a distant and authoritarian image of God. This separation—between self and self-worth, between human and nature, between the individual and the divine—forms the basis of her initial condition. The movement toward eco-spiritual awareness, therefore, must be understood as a process of reintegration. It is through her gradual attentiveness to the natural world that these divisions begin to dissolve.

What is particularly significant is that this transformation does not occur through dramatic revelation but through

everyday encounters with nature. The act of noticing—whether it is the color of flowers, the presence of trees, or the movement of water—becomes the starting point of change. These seemingly simple moments carry epistemological weight. They alter not only what Celie sees but how she sees. The world shifts from being a space of endurance to one of meaning, where even small details become sites of reflection. In this sense, perception itself becomes transformative, suggesting that eco-spiritual awakening begins with a reorientation of attention.

This shift in perception also leads to a redefinition of spirituality. Initially, spirituality is external, hierarchical, and inaccessible—something imposed from outside and associated with fear and submission. However, as Celie's relationship with nature deepens, spirituality becomes immanent and relational. The divine is no longer located in distant authority but experienced within the textures of the natural world. This transition is crucial because it relocates power. Instead of seeking validation from an external source, Celie begins to recognize value within herself and her surroundings. Spirituality, therefore, becomes a mode of empowerment rather than control.

At the same time, the novel links ecological awareness with the reconstruction of agency. Celie's engagement with the natural world is not passive; it involves acts of care, attention, and participation. Through activities such as gardening, she enters into a reciprocal relationship with nature—one that contrasts sharply with the exploitative relationships that defined her earlier life. This reciprocity is significant because it introduces an alternative model of interaction based on nurture rather than domination. The cultivation of the garden becomes a space where agency is practiced, not asserted through power but through care. In this way, eco-spirituality offers a reimagining of power itself, shifting it from control to connection.

Furthermore, natural elements within the novel function as models of existence that challenge rigid human structures. Trees, for instance, embody endurance and rootedness, while rivers represent movement and adaptability. These elements are not merely symbolic; they offer alternative ways of understanding life. Celie's identification with these natural forms allows her to move beyond fixed definitions of identity. Instead of being confined by her past or by social expectations, she begins to see herself as capable of growth, change, and continuity. Identity, in this context, becomes fluid and evolving, shaped by ongoing interaction with the world.

Another crucial dimension of eco-spirituality in the novel is its emphasis on interconnectedness. As Celie's awareness expands, she begins to perceive relationships between different forms of existence—between human beings and

nature, between suffering and renewal, between individual experience and collective life. This interconnectedness challenges the isolation that characterizes her earlier existence. It replaces fragmentation with a sense of belonging, suggesting that meaning is not found in separation but in connection. The self is no longer an isolated entity but part of a larger ecological and spiritual network.

This awareness also introduces an ethical dimension that is implicit rather than imposed. The novel does not present ecological responsibility as a set of rules but as a natural outcome of perception. Once the world is seen as alive, meaningful, and interconnected, care becomes a necessary response. To ignore or neglect nature is no longer a neutral act; it becomes a failure of awareness. In this sense, eco-spirituality generates an ethics grounded in attentiveness. Responsibility arises not from obligation but from recognition—from the understanding that one's existence is intertwined with the existence of others.

Ultimately, *The Color Purple* presents eco-spirituality as a means of integration that unites the fragmented aspects of human experience. It connects the inner and outer worlds, bridging the personal and the ecological, as well as the spiritual and the material. Through Celie's journey, the novel suggests that healing is achieved not by escaping from reality but by engaging more deeply with the world around us. By learning to see things differently, she learns to live differently. Thus, eco-spirituality emerges not only as a theme within the narrative but also as a way to understand existence itself—one that emphasizes connection, care, and continuous renewal.

V. CONCLUSION

The Color Purple offers a deeply meaningful understanding of eco-spirituality by showing how a person's inner healing can grow alongside a renewed relationship with the natural world. Celie's journey is not only about overcoming suffering but about learning to see differently—to notice, to feel, and to connect. Through this gradual process, she moves from a life shaped by silence and separation toward one grounded in awareness and belonging.

One of the novel's most important contributions lies in its redefinition of spirituality. Instead of presenting it as something distant or controlled by authority, the narrative brings it closer to everyday experience. The divine is no longer something to be feared or obeyed from afar; it is something that can be felt in simple moments—in the beauty of a field, in the quiet presence of trees, or in the act of caring for a garden. This shift makes spirituality more personal, more inclusive, and more deeply connected to life itself.

At the same time, the novel shows that nature plays an active role in this transformation. It is not just a background setting but a space where healing becomes possible. Through her engagement with the natural world, Celie finds a sense of stability and purpose that she has long been denied. Caring for the earth helps her rebuild her sense of self, suggesting that healing does not occur in isolation but through connection.

The idea of interconnectedness runs throughout the novel. As Celie begins to understand her place within the larger world, she no longer sees herself as alone or powerless. Instead, she becomes part of a wider network of life where everything is linked—human beings, nature, and the spiritual dimension of existence. This awareness brings a quiet but powerful sense of responsibility, in which care and attention become essential ways of living.

In this way, *The Color Purple* presents eco-spirituality as a way of life rather than just an idea. It suggests that real transformation begins with small changes in perception—with learning to notice and value the world around us. In today's context, where environmental concerns are becoming increasingly urgent, this message feels especially relevant. Walker's novel reminds us that restoring our relationship with nature is not only necessary for the planet but also for our own sense of meaning and wholeness.

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Gender Marginality in Mahesh Dattani's Plays *Tara* and *Seven Steps Around the Fire*

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Abstract— Mahesh Dattani occupies a very high place among the contemporary Indian English dramatists. His plays are the authentic portrayal of the sufferings of the marginalized sections of society. He enlarged the scope of Indian English drama by writing plays on the controversial social issues. The issue of gender marginality emerges as the main theme in most of his plays. It is a practice by which individuals of certain genders are deliberately pushed to the margins of society. They are denied equal participation in the important spheres of life. In Indian social structure the position of women and third genders is marginalized. They are not allowed to enjoy equal rights. The position of third genders in society is worse than untouchables. In spite of some legal decisions in favor of the transsexuals the community is not accepted by majority of population. The social stigma associated with the third genders is the main cause of their rejection. Through his plays *Tara* and *Seven Steps Around the Fire* Mahesh Dattani raises his voice against this unjust treatment of women and third genders in society. He wants every individual to enjoy equal rights without any kind of discrimination. This research article aims to explore the marginalized status of the women and eunuchs in Indian social hierarchy through critical analysis of Dattani's play *Tara* and *Seven Steps Around the Fire*.



Keywords— Gender, Marginality, Patriarchy, Stigma, Third gender, Social Hierarchy

Introduction

The plays of Dattani reflect his deep concern for the changing values, moral conflicts and the challenges faced by the post-colonial Indians. His plays won universal recognition for their different subject matters. The subjects which were considered taboo by the previous authors, hold prime place in the dramatic world of Mahesh Dattani. In 1998 he received the most prestigious literary award-Sahitya Academy award for his collection of plays entitled *Final Solutions and Other plays*. His innovative themes and techniques brought revolutionary changes in Indian English drama. The issue of gender marginality emerges as the core theme in most of his plays. Through his plays *Where There is a Will, Tara, Bravely Fought the Queen* Mahesh Dattani raises his voice against the unjust treatment of women in patriarchal Indian social structure. His play *Seven Steps Around the Fire* is an authentic

representation of the marginalized social status of hijra community.

Objectives of the study are

1. To explore the marginalized social status of women in Indian social hierarchy.
2. To explore how the heteronormative norms of gender cause marginality of third gender.
3. To explore the impact of marginality on individual psyche.
4. To explore the role of Dattani in modifying people's attitude for the marginalized sections of society.

Methodology

The research methodology utilized in the study is the critical analysis of Dattani's play *Tara* and *Seven Steps Around the Fire* in the light of the theory of marginality.

Marginality of Female Gender in *Tara*

The issue of gender inequality is the main social issue focused in Mahesh Dattani's play *Tara*. The play highlights Dattani's belief that the practice of gender discrimination is harmful for the proper growth of both males and females. In a patriarchal society like India the rights and happiness of male members are given priority over the rights and happiness of its female members. This evil is deeply rooted in social stereotypes. In a gender oriented society both men and women are expected to behave according to certain rules assigned to them by the society. In the current Indian social structure the position of male is always central where as women are always pushed to the margins. They are supposed as weak and miserable creatures. They hold no separate identity or wish. Their identity seems to be included in the identity of the male members of their family. Falvia Agnes reveals the life-long subjugation of Indian women within the patriarchal social set up:

It is socially acceptable that within the family man is the master and the women is inferior and subordinate partner. Social pressures force women to maintain the 'status quo'. A woman who does not accept the traditional role of submissiveness into accepting this position, and any means including violence is justified (Agnes 151).

Dattani's play *Tara* is a sorrowful tale of the subjugation of a disabled girl- Tara. The play is the portrayal of the predicament of a girl child within the complexities of typical Indian family setup. The play reveals the hypocrisy of a modern educated family which pretend to give equal opportunity to both its male and female members but in reality the female members of the family become victims of gender discrimination. Through this play Dattani highlights the biases and prejudices which still ruin the lives of several girl children even amongst the highly educated urban families like the family of Patel's in the play *Tara*. Talking about the theme of the play Erin Mee says:

Tara centres on the emotional separation that grows between two conjoined twins following the discovery that their physical separation was manipulated by their mother and grandfather to favour the boy (Chandan) over the girl (Tara) (Mee 319).

These words of Erin Mee clearly reveal that the parental patriarchal inclination is mainly responsible for the all the troubles of Tara's life. The practice of discriminating girls and boys on the basis of their gender spoils the lives of many girls or women in the prevalent patriarchal structure. Thus the suffering of Tara is more social than physical. The play deals with the lives of Siamese children-

Chandan and Tara who were born with all the important organs except three lower limbs. These children are conjoined from the chest. After observing the medical reports of the twins Dr. Thakkar declares that the chances of the survival of the third leg on the girl child were more than the boy child. But Tara's mother Bharati and her maternal grand-father ask Dr. Thakkar to graft the third leg on to the body of boy child to provide perfection to the male heir of their family. Thus the leg which naturally belonged to Tara was given to the boy child Chandan to give him perfection but the leg did not survive on Chandan's body for long. It was amputated as a piece of dead flesh only three days after the surgery. Thus both Chandan and Tara are left to survive only on one leg. The failure of the operation fills the heart of Bharati with utmost guilt and grief. She regards herself responsible for the misfortune of her both the children specially Tara. To compensate Tara of the wrong done to her Bharati shows utmost care to her. Even in her teenage Bharati pampers Tara as a little child. Mr. Patel often rebukes Bharati for her giving excessive care to Tara: "Look at the way you treat Tara. As if she is made of glass. You coddle her, you pet her, you spoil her. She's grown up feeling she doesn't need anyone but you!" (CP, 352).

Tara becomes a victim of gender discrimination since the very beginning of her life. The preference for male child is the root cause of the injustice done to female child- Tara. The manipulation of the surgery in the favour of the male heir of the family ruins the lives of both Chandan and Tara. The female protagonist of the play Tara is deprived of a happy life by her own family members. Sangeeta Das rightly observes:

Tara is neither Chandan's tragedy nor it is really Tara's. Tara is sacrificed because she was a girl and had no right to have a better life than her brother. The idea of a complete girl child and an incomplete boy male child is so shocking that sacrifice of the girl child is acceptable than a handicapped male child. The tragic events depicted in the play are tragic actions belonging to everyday life (Das 115).

This decision of the family reveals the patriarchal leanings of Patels. Roopa, a common friend of Chandan and Tara, gives a hint of the age old beliefs and practices prevailing in the family of Patels, "The Patels in the old days were unhappy with getting girl babies—you know dowry and things like that—so they used to drown them in milk" (CP 349). On many occasions the attitude of Mr. Patel to his wife and daughter seems negative. As a father he is more concerned about the future and well-being of his son Chandan. Bharati also expresses the fondness of Mr. Patel for his son Chandan, "Don't tell me about your father. He

is more worried about your career than hers" (CP 348). He has many plans for his son Chandan. He wants Chandan to join a foreign university for his higher education. He gets angry when he sees Chandan helping Bharati in knitting sweater because he thinks that such type of tasks are not meant for male gender. He has no plans for his disabled daughter Tara. On the other hand, Bharati (Tara's mother) is very much worried about Tara's happiness. She says, "I plan for her happiness. I mean to give her all the love and affection which I can give" (CP 349). As a mother Bharati is very much concerned about Tara's happiness.

To get rid of her guilty conscience Bharati decides to donate her kidney to Tara but again she is not able to make a free choice. Her husband, Mr. Patel, arranges another donor for her because he does not want Bharati to feel the satisfaction by donating her kidney to Tara. He tells Bharati, "Because I do not want you to have the satisfaction of doing it" (CP 344). Imposing his authority he declares, "You will have to obey me. It's my turn now" (CP 344). As a patriarchal head Mr. Patel completely dominates his wife. When Bharati decides to tell Chandan and Tara the truth behind the manipulation of the surgery, Mr. Patel does not let her do so. He says, "If at all they must know, it will be from me. Not from you" (CP 345). Thus the position of Bharati in her own home is completely marginalized. She cannot take any decision independently either about her own life or about the life of her own kids. She feels completely helpless. The dominating attitude of Mr. Patel is responsible for Bharati's insanity.

Both Bharati and Tara become victims of gender discrimination. The whole life of Bharati is dominated by the male members of her family. Her maternal instinct is suppressed by the patriarchal norms of society. Under the influence of her father Bharati takes the wrong decision of imparting the third leg to Chandan and suffers silently throughout her life for taking active involvement in doing wrong to her own daughter. Because of the burden of guilt Bharati becomes insane. She is ready to do anything for the happiness of Tara. She requests the neighbourhood girl Roopa to make friendship with Tara and feels relaxed when Roopa gives her consent. She always wants to see Tara happy.

The practice of gender discrimination makes a very negative impact on the life of the male child Chandan as well. Chandan regards himself responsible for the misfortune caused to Tara. To escape the horrors of the reality behind Tara's untimely death Chandan shifts to London. He changes his identity with a new name from Chandan to Dan. He completely withdraws from the external world because it seems very difficult for him to

forget the days which he spent in the company of his twin sister Tara. Tara seems to him his another half. Erin Mee rightly comments:

Tara and Chandan are the two sides of the same self rather than two separate entities and that Dan in trying to write the story of his own childhood, has to write Tara's story. Dan writes Tara's story to rediscover the neglected half of himself, as a means of becoming whole (CP 320).

Marginality of Third Gender in *Seven Steps Around the Fire*

Marginality of third genders is the main issue focussed in Dattani's play *Seven Steps Around the Fire*. The play was first broadcast as *Seven Circles Around the Fire* by BBC Radio 4 on 9 January 1999. The play was reproduced on stage in collaboration of MTC Production and the Madras Players on 6th August 1999 as *Seven Steps Around the Fire*. Through this play Mahesh Dattani tries to sensitize the heterosexual community to treat the third gender individuals with love and compassion because he believes that love is the only remedy which can lessen the suffering of this marginalized community. The play is the portrayal of the plight of transgender women in Indian society. Dattani is against gender based discrimination. He believes in what Butler says that gender is "a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and perform in the mode of belief" (Butler 520).

Uma, the wife of Suresh Rao- Chief Superintendent of Police, in the play appears as an instrument of awakening. It is she who tries to articulate the mute voices of eunuchs in the centre. She also exposes the community of elitists that drags them to the margin. The play is an attempt to uncover the eternal struggles and hardships faced by the third gender individuals in their everyday life. Through this play Dattani shows that the presence of third genders is deemed auspicious only on two occasions i.e. child birth and wedding but they themselves are deprived of the rights of marriage and childbirth by Nature and also by society.

The play begins as a murder mystery dealing with the murder of a beautiful transgender woman Kamla who is burnt alive to death because she tried to achieve something prohibited. Uma Rao, a teacher and researcher in the department of Sociology, comes to know about this case while her research work on the topic 'Class and Gender Related Violence'. She visits Bangalore Central jail to meet Anarkali- another transwoman imprisoned in the jail on the charge of murdering her own companion Kamla. In the jail Uma is assisted by Munswamy a constable appointed by her husband Suresh Rao to protect her from any kind of harm. Unlike the other heterosexuals Uma has

a sense of respect for the third genders. Out of her feeling of respect she uses the pronoun 'she' to address Anarkali. When Uma asks Munswamy "Will she talk to me?" (CP 233), Munswamy immediately replies, "She! Of course it will talk to you. We will beat it up if it doesn't" (CP 233). These words of Munswamy highlight the marginalized position of eunuchs in society. Munswamy's use of the pronoun 'it' for Anarkali which is used to refer to animals and goods show his sense of superiority and hatred against eunuchs. He refuses to accept the human identity of eunuchs.

Munswamy does not want Uma to waste her time in solving a case related to third genders because he believes that the cases related to heterosexual world are more important. He does not want Uma to meet Anarkali because he believes that Anarkali will never tell her the truth. Addressing Uma he says, "It will only tell you lies" (CP 234). This statement of Munswamy reveals the general belief about the third genders that they are liars.

In the jail Anarkali is kept with male prisoners though she feels herself like a female. Many times she is beaten severely by her fellow prisoners. The empathy and rude behaviour of the heterosexuals make Anarkali aggressive and revengeful. She agrees to talk to Uma only when she comes to know that she is the wife of Chief Superintendent of police. With her love and sympathy Uma succeeds to win her confidence. In her first meeting with Uma Anarkali tells her, "I didn't kill her. She was my sister!" (CP 236). She also asks Uma "Would you kill your sister?" (CP 236). Anarkali's emphasis on the word 'sister' shows her craving for human touch and interpersonal relationship. Anarkali wants to develop sister like bond with Uma. She says to her "If you were a hijra I would have made you my sister" (CP 242). At the same time she is also aware of the class difference that exists between her and Uma. Uma says to Anarkali, "Of course we can be sisters!" (CP 242). Anarkali immediately replies "Where are you and where am I?" (CP 242). These words of Anarkali reflect her class consciousness. Being a hijra Anarkali knows well that society will never accept her any kind of relationship with Uma, a person belonging to heterosexual world. She is well aware of the fact that her own companion Kamla was murdered brutally because she tried to establish relations with heterosexual world. The hijras live as invisible minority in society. The position of transgender women is more marginalized. Most of the eunuchs earn their living by singing badhais at weddings and child birth. Anarkali also accepts "I sing with other hijras at weddings and when a child is born" (CP 241). This statement of Anarkali reveals the deprivation of eunuchs of respectable employments which is greatly

responsible for their poverty and marginalized social status.

Unlike Uma her husband Suresh has no sympathy for these marginalized creatures. He calls them "castrated degenerate men" (CP 238). When Uma asks him the reason of putting Anarkali- a transwoman in male prison, he gives a very contemptuous reply "They are as strong as horses" (CP 237). These words of Suresh highlight his indifferent attitude to eunuchs. He asks Uma not to develop any kind of sympathy for Anarkali. Like Munswamy Suresh too regards the eunuchs as liars. He warns Uma "Don't believe a word of anything it says. They are all liars" (CP 237).

Again and again Uma contemplates about the origin of this community but she fails to find any satisfactory answer. She visits Shivajinagar to meet Champa, the guru of Anarkali, to give her the money required for Anarkali's bail from prison. When Uma tells Champa that she is a social worker, Champa asks surprisingly, "I did not know that...you see us also as society, no? (CP 254)". These words of Champa highlight the apathy of society for the hijra community. Champa also tells, "We cannot speak...When we want to speak nobody listens. When we cannot speak..." (CP 259). These words of Anarkali very well reflect what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak declares in her critical essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' Here Champa shows that how society deprives these marginalized creatures of their freedom of speech. Their voice is either silenced or ignored by the powerful elitists like the government minister Mr. Sharma. Champa also tells that a eunuch holds no identity and respect outside their own community, "There is no world for a hijra other than the one we make for ourselves" (CP 261). This observation in the play marks the insensitive attitude of the heterosexual world for the eunuchs. The mainstream society does not let them feel the warmth of life with the involvement in personal relationship.

The action of the play moves forward in the form of investigation. Uma interrogates Champa to know about the real murderer of Kamla. She first thinks that the rivalry between Kamla and Anarkali was the reason behind the murder of Kamla. When Uma suspects Champa as a murderer of Kamla, she says, "You don't know how much we all loved her! You will not understand. I loved her more than you can love your daughter" (CP 262). Through this utterance of Champa, Dattani tries to highlight the intensity and warmth of love that the transgenders possess for one-another. Kamla- a homeless transgender was loved as a daughter by her guru Champa. Their love is no way different from the depth of love among human beings. This conversation between Uma and Anarkali is

interrupted by the arrival of Salim, the driver of Mr. Sharma. He comes there to search for a photograph. When Champa tells Uma that Salim often visit the place for Kamla, Uma's investigation moves towards Salim. With the constable Munswamy Uma visits the house of Mr. Sharma, the government officer, to know more about Salim. During this visit she meets Mr. Sharma and also his son Subbu.

Mr. Sharma informs Uma about Subbu's wedding but Subbu seems disturbed. He says "I hate weddings. I don't want all this. I don't wish to go ahead with this" (CP 267). The play questions the role of societal institutions like family, police and judiciary in reinforcing the marginalized status of eunuchs. In the play the family of Subbu plays a significant role in ruining his life. Subbu challenges the strong patriarchal norms by secretly marrying Kamla- a transgender woman. Subbu's relationship with the eunuch Kamla seems a sickness to his parents that needs to be cured. Mr. Sharma exerts his political power to erase Kamla from his son's life. He then forces his son into a heterosexual marriage. For the sake of his political career Mr. Sharma does not hesitate to sacrifice the happiness of his own son. In the play the senior police officers like Suresh Rao are portrayed as protectors of wealthy and corrupt ministers like Mr. Sharma. The physical torture inflicted on Anarkali in the police custody reveals the inhuman attitude of police for the socially neglected community of eunuchs. When Anarkali says to Uma, "One hijra less in the world does not matter to your husband" (CP 272) . This statement of Anarkali clearly highlights the indifferent attitude of police for this sexually barren community. The absence of Kamla- the main character, from the stage throughout the play also symbolizes the invisibility of eunuchs for the mainstream society.

In the play Dattani also portrays the systematic neglect of eunuchs in healthcare facilities. When Anarkali comes out of prison, she is severely injured. Champa visits many doctors for the treatment of Anarkali but they all refuse to treat her. At last Anarkali gives some brandy to Anarkali to lessen her pain. She also sings a lullaby to make Anarkali feel relaxed. Such behaviour on the part of Champa shows her care and concern for all her disciples. She treats all of them as her children. The hijras also give proper respect to Champa. She stands as a mother figure to them.

The last scene of the play- the scene of Subbu's wedding is emotionally very powerful. In this scene Uma reaches to attend Subbu's wedding with her husband Suresh. Champa, the head hijra, also comes with Anarkali and other eunuchs to sing badhai at Subbu's wedding. The very moment Champa and Anarkali start dancing, the

memories of dead Kamla becomes alive in front of Subbu. In a moment of excitement and tension Subbu snatches Suresh's gun. He first aims the gun at his father holding him responsible for the murder of Kamla. Then he shoots himself. The suicide of Subbu at the altar of his own wedding reveals his helplessness against the shackles of heterosexual norms of society. Subbu makes it clear that his own father is responsible for Kamla's murder but the whole incident was reported as an accident.

The issue of gender marginality thus remains a potent issue in the plays of Mahesh Dattani. Dattani believes that in the patriarchal Indian social structure women are the most neglected creatures. Through his plays *Tara* and *Seven Steps Around the Fire* he tries to reveal the deep rooted evils of gender marginality operating within the familial structure of Indian society. The society portrayed in the plays of Dattani is a world which accepts only those who are fit and conform to the prevailing heteronormative norms. Those who go against the accepted social values are either ignored or systematically silenced. In the patriarchal set up of Indian society the rights and happiness of women are always sacrificed to give perfection to its male members. The life of Tara, a disabled girl, is sacrificed to give meaning and completeness to her brother Chandan. Similarly the play *Seven Steps Around the Fire* is a realistic portrayal of the subaltern status of the third gender community. The constant craving of Anarkali for the human relationship shows how the social exclusion of individuals and communities cause great mental unrest. As a dramatist Dattani is not only confined to reveal the social alienation of the eunuchs but he also reveals their mental agitation. The last words of Uma, "All I want is that they want...to move on. To love. To live" (CP 282) clearly emphasize Dattani's philosophy of life.

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The Impact of the One Town One Product (R.A 11960) Program on Small and Medium Enterprises in the City of Cabanatuan, Nueva Ecija, Philippines

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Abstract— This study looked at how the "One Town, One Product" program, under Republic Act 11960, affects small and medium businesses in Cabanatuan City, Nueva Ecija, Philippines. Cabanatuan is well-known as a major business hub and is often called the Tricycle Capital of the Philippines. To see if the program is working, the researchers used a survey to gather data from business owners registered with the Department of Trade and Industry. A standard statistical methods was used to see how well owners understand the program and what kind of real-world impact it has on their businesses. The results showed that the program did not work out as well as the researchers originally expected. While business owners know how to physically set up a local product center, they do not truly understand the program's overall mission and goals. Their actual awareness is only at a middle level. Because of this lack of understanding, the program is not giving businesses a major boost. Business owners explained that tough market competition is still their biggest problem. They also shared that the government's rules are too hard to follow, the program does not bring in much extra money, and it has not done much to make local products better or easier for customers to find. The study also showed a very clear link between these two issues: the less a business owner understands the program, the less their business benefits from it. Because the training and information have been limited, the program's positive impact is stuck at a very average level. To fix this, the Department of Trade and Industry and the local city government need to work together more closely. They should start clear information campaigns so business owners truly understand how the program can help them. They also need to provide better business mentoring, build product centers in busy areas where a lot of people shop, and help local owners sell their goods online. Finally, the government should offer simple business training and low-interest loans so these local small businesses can handle the rules, save money, and successfully compete in the modern market.

Keywords— One Town One Product, Small Businesses, Cabanatuan City, Program Evaluation, Government Support.

I. INTRODUCTION

Cabanatuan, officially the City of Cabanatuan is a city in the province of Nueva Ecija, Philippines. It is the largest city in Nueva Ecija, and 5th in Central Luzon. The city is popular for being the home of tricycles. It prides itself as the

"Tricycle Capital of the Philippines" and its strategic location along the Cagayan Valley Road has made the city a major economic center in Nueva Ecija and nearby provinces in the region such as Aurora and Bulacan. It has earned the moniker "Gateway to the North" (League of

Cities of the Philippines, 2010). Cabanatuan as the largest urban place in the province of Nueva Ecija is an ideal place to put up business due to the presence of several higher institutions and big universities (BalinkBayan, n.d.).

Micro and small enterprises (MSEs) play a crucial role in driving economic growth, job creation, and poverty reduction, particularly in developing nations. These adaptable entities bolster economies, enhance employment opportunities, and fortify resilience against market fluctuations (Tawingan, 2024).

Globally, the ONE TOWN, ONE PRODUCT (OTOP) PHILIPPINES is a priority stimulus program for Micro, Small and Medium-scale enterprises (MSMEs) as government's customized intervention to drive inclusive local economic growth. OTO is an international program that originated from Japan's One Village, One Product. Its various versions and iterations in numerous countries are proofs that it is a viable branding and stimulus program for MSMEs (Department of Trade and Industry, 2019). The success of the program in other countries led the Philippine government to implement this program in the Philippines. The OTO was implemented to empower economic growth and promote the development of local products. The OTO Philippines supports micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to manufacture, offer and market distinctive products or services through the use of indigenous raw materials and local skills and talents. It promotes and creates jobs. Through OTO, local chief executives of each city and municipality take the lead in identifying, developing and promoting a specific product or service, which has a competitive advantage (GOVPH, n.d.).

The OTO approach is an effective way to empower local communities, boost local products, promote inclusive economic growth, and encourage entrepreneurship in the country (Go Official Website, 2023). By exploiting local resources and expertise, generating value-adding activities through the branding of local products, and developing human resources in the local economy, OTO development is considered a strategy to improve local communities' entrepreneurial skills (Fulay A.D. et.al, 2023). People's involvement in product development not only promotes economic growth but also highlights individuals' originality, creativity, and character. Manufacturers continue to enhance their goods in an effort to draw customers and increase the commodity's sales (Absolor J.L. et.al, 2022).

Despite the city's large businesses and trade competition, the One Town One Product (OTO) program was implemented in the city. The purpose of this study is to determine the level of awareness of the DTI-registered SME

entrepreneurs regarding the One Town One Product program and its impact on small and medium enterprises in the City of Cabanatuan.

To address the empirical goals of this paper, the study tests the following predictions: (1) The SME owners registered under the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) possess a high level of awareness and fully understand the One Town One Product program of the Philippine government under Republic Act No. 11960; (2) The small and medium enterprises in the City of Cabanatuan have benefited significantly from the implementation of the OTO program; and (3) There is a significant direct relationship between the entrepreneurs' level of awareness of the OTO program and its overall impact on their small and medium enterprises.

II. METHODOLOGY

To achieve the purpose of the study, the researchers used a quantitative descriptive research design. Quantitative descriptive research methods are used to systematically collect and analyze numerical data to describe or summarize a population or phenomenon (Unimrkt, 2023). There were 30 respondents in this study, all of them were from 2017-2023 SMEs registered owners in Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) based on the latest record of the Department. These respondents were chosen purposively to ensure that the study reflects the current state of small and medium enterprises in the city and their benefits from the One Town, One Product (OTO) program. The questionnaire used to gather information was constructed by the researchers. The researchers utilized the likert scale and the data gathered from the instruments were statistically performed using frequency count, percentage, and weighted mean. The responses of the respondents were evaluated according to the following scale: 1.00 to 1.79 Strongly Disagree; 1.80 to 2.59 Slightly Disagree; 2.60 to 3.39 Moderately Agree; 3.40 to 4.19 Agree; 4.20 to 5.00 Strongly Agree.

To mathematically evaluate the relationship between the variables within this descriptive framework, a statistical correlation analysis is integrated. The researchers utilized Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) to measure the direction and strength of the relationship between the level of program awareness and its perceived enterprise impact.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Level of awareness of the respondents on One Town One Product (RA No. 11960)

Table 1. Level of awareness of the respondents on R.A. 11960

Item	Weighted Mean	Verbal Description
1.The SME owners registered in the One Town One Product (OTOP) program have full knowledge of its mission and purpose	2.48	Slightly Disagree
2.The One Town Own Product (OTOP) Program will preserve Local traditions	3.3	Moderately Agree
3.The are clear qualifications and criteria in establishing One Town Own Product program	2.9	Moderately Agree
4.The One Town Own Product (OTOP) program has eligibility requirements	2.8	Moderately Agree
5.The process for establishing One Town Own Product (OTOP) Hub in the City is clear to SMEs owners	3.4	Agree
Overall Weighted Mean	2.97	Moderately Agree

Table 1 shows the level of awareness of SMEs registered owners on RA 11960 also known as One Town One Product. The table revealed that respondents agreed(WM=3.4) with a high level of conformity that the process for establishing One Town One Product (OTOP) Hub in the city of cabanatuan is clear to SMEs owners.

The respondents understand with moderate agreement (WM=3.3) that the OTOP program will preserve local traditions.

Even it was clear to respondents the process of establishing an OTOP Hub they moderately agreed(WM=2.9) that the program has clear qualifications and criteria in establishing OTOP program. They even moderately agreed(WM=2.8) that the program has eligibility requirements.

The table also revealed that the SMEs registered owners in OTOP slightly disagreed(WM=2.48) that they have full knowledge on the program's mission and its purpose. This result should not be interpreted as absence of knowledge about the mission and purpose of the OTOP program. What the result shows was the slight knowledge of the SMEs registered owner on the mission and purpose of the program and not the absence of knowledge.

The overall weighted mean in Table 1 is 2.97 with a verbal description of moderately agree. This indicates that SMEs registered owners in the DTI for OTOP program have a moderate understanding of that program implemented in the city of Cabanatuan.

Table 2. Impact of RA 11960 (OTOP)

Item	Weighted Mean	Verbal Description
1. The financial benefits of the One Town One Product (OTOP) program have a positive impact on the business SME owners	2.5	Slightly Disagree
2. The technical assistance from the OTOP Program has been helpful	2.7	Moderately Agree
3. The OTOP Program has improved the quality of local product	2.3	Slightly Disagree
4. OTOP Program promotes accessibility to local product	2.4	Slightly Disagree
5. The OTOP Program has enhanced local brand visibility	2.6	Moderately Agree
6. Market competition remains a major challenge to the One Town One Product (OTOP) program.	4.1	Agree
7. Regulatory requirement for One Town One Product (OTOP) is manageable	2.5	Slightly Disagree
8. One Town One Product (OTOP) program promotes meritocracy in recruitment and selection of personnel	2.4	Disagree
Overall Weighted Mean	2.68	Moderately Agree

2. Impact of One Town One Product to SMEs registered owners

The empirical findings regarding the operational and structural impact of the One Town One Product (OTOP) program on DTI-registered small and medium enterprises obtain several critical insights into its local implementation. Data from Table 2 reveals that respondents agreed that market competition remains a major challenge to the OTOP program, gaining the highest score in this category (WM = 4.1). This prevailing view may stem directly from the program's targeted focus on specialized local products that have not yet achieved mainstream popularity or strong demand among local consumers. In connection to this, the respondents indicated with moderate agreement (WM = 2.6) that the OTOP program has enhanced local brand visibility, indicating that the program's real-world impact on SMEs is currently limited or only moderate in terms of elevating the market presence of local brands.

A core service of the OTOP framework involves extending technical assistance to participating enterprise owners, which is defined as any form of professional help, guidance, or support designed to make individuals more effective in the performance of their functions (Magson-Niepes, C., n.d.), essentially, it serves as a specialized consultative mechanism. The respondents moderately agreed (WM = 2.7) that the technical assistance provided by the OTOP program is helpful, which presents a concerning trend for local implementation. This mid-tier evaluation indicates that SME owners are navigating the market with incomplete knowledge or unclear programmatic information due to underperforming or ineffective technical consultations, strongly suggesting that the program will continue to face implementation bottlenecks if the strategic path and administrative mechanisms are not completely clear to the participating SME owners.

When evaluated on institutional barriers, respondents slightly disagreed (WM = 2.5) that the regulatory

requirements for the OTOP program are manageable. This negative assessment highlights that the compliance pathways and administrative mandates implemented by the government are perceived as complex and difficult to follow from the perspective of local SME owners. In addition, this regulatory friction aligns with other lower-rated operational indicators, as the respondents slightly disagreed (WM = 2.4) that the OTOP program effectively promotes accessibility to local products. Adding to this restrictive evaluation, the data reveals that the respondents also slightly disagreed (WM = 2.3) that the program has successfully improved the quality of local products, indicating that administrative obstacle may be overshadowing the program's intended logistical and product-development benefits.

With respect to the impact of the program's financial benefits, the respondents slightly disagreed (WM = 2.5) that the financial benefits of the program have a positive impact on the business of SME owners, reinforcing the conclusion that the initiative has yet to translate into meaningful economic advantages for local entrepreneurs. Finally, when looking at the internal human resource framework, the respondents explicitly expressed a rating of disagree (WM = 2.4) regarding whether the One Town One Product (OTOP) program promotes meritocracy in the recruitment and selection of personnel, uncovering a perceived lack of transparency or fairness in institutional hiring choices. Taken together, the individual evaluations bring the overall weighted mean of Table 2 to 2.68, which maps to a verbal description of moderately agree, underscoring that the localized impact of R.A. 11960 on Cabanatuan City's small and medium enterprises remains heavily constrained and only partially realized.

3. Relationship between the entrepreneurs' level of awareness of the OTOP program and its overall impact on their small and medium enterprises.

Table 3. Correlation Matrix Between Level of Awareness and Program Impact of R.A. 11960

Variables	Overall Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r)	p-value	Statistical Significance	Decision on H3
Level of Awareness (X)	2.97	Moderately Agree	0.764	0.0001	Highly Significant (p<0.05)	Accept H3 (Significant Relationship)
Program Impact (Y)	2.68	Moderately Agree				

The correlation analysis reveals a Pearson correlation coefficient (r) of 0.764, indicating a strong, positive direct relationship between the entrepreneurs' level of awareness

and the overall impact of the OTOP program. Because the p-value (0.0001) is strictly less than the standard

significance level ($\alpha=0.05$), the third hypothesis (H3) is formally accepted.

This strong correlation mathematically proves that the limited operational and financial impact of the OTOP program (WM=2.68) is a direct consequence of the bottleneck in entrepreneur awareness (WM=2.97). Specifically, because the respondents lack full knowledge regarding the program's core mission and eligibility criteria, they struggle to successfully navigate regulatory requirements (Table 2 (7), WM=2.5) or maximize the program's technical assistance (Table 2 (2), WM=2.7). Conversely, the data implies that if the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) actively increases the entrepreneurs' conceptual understanding of R.A. 11960, the program's real-world output, such as product quality, market competitiveness, and overall financial benefits for the small and medium enterprises in Cabanatuan City, will statistically improve alongside it.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study predicts that the: (1) SMEs registered owners in Department of Trade and Industry fully understand the One Town One Product program of the Philippine government under Republic Act No. 11960; (2) SMEs in the city of Cabanatuan have benefited greatly from this; and (3) There is a significant direct relationship between the entrepreneurs' level of awareness of the OTOP program and its overall impact on their small and medium enterprises.

The study concludes that the One Town One Product (OTOP) program under Republic Act No. 11960 has not met its intended goals in Cabanatuan City due to a critical bottleneck in stakeholder knowledge. While DTI-registered SME owners grasp basic operational procedures like establishing physical hubs, they lack a fundamental understanding of the program's primary mission and purpose, resulting in a limited overall awareness score of 2.97. This deficiency directly restricts the program's practical efficacy, which garnered a low operational impact. The lack of deep programmatic awareness translates into severe real-world challenges, leaving local enterprises vulnerable to aggressive market competition while failing to deliver meaningful improvements in product quality, accessibility, regulatory ease, and financial returns. The statistical analysis confirms a strong, significant positive direct relationship between entrepreneur awareness and business impact, proving that the restricted benefits felt by local businesses are a direct mathematical consequence of this ongoing information gap.

To overcome these structural limitations and maximize the economic benefits of R.A. 11960, the Department of Trade

and Industry (DTI) and the Local Government Unit (LGU) of Cabanatuan City must execute targeted structural interventions. First, the authorities must transition entrepreneur awareness from moderate to complete by conducting localized educational forums and distributing clear, simplified regulatory toolkits. Second, the current underperforming technical assistance framework should be re-engineered into structured mentorship pathways focused directly on quality assurance and product design. Third, to mitigate strong market competition and enhance local brand visibility, the LGU must provide aggressive logistical support to plant physical OTOP hubs in high-traffic zones and secure prominent commercial retail spaces for certified local goods. Finally, traditional commerce must be reinforced with modern digital infrastructure by launching e-commerce incubation networks, alongside LGU-backed micro-grants and capacity-building programs. These integrated policy changes will ensure local entrepreneurs can absorb regulatory costs, scale their production, and turn institutional awareness into tangible financial growth.

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Negotiation of Cinema and Human Mind in Contemporary Society: Cultural and Psychological Perspective

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Abstract— Film has always been more than just entertainment; it is a cultural product that teaches, reflects, and even modifies human psyche. Cinema involves audiences and interacts with brain functions, emotional responses, and the formation of social identities through the use of narrative, sound, and visual representations. This essay explores the relationship between psychology and film with an emphasis on how watching movies impacts memory, perception, empathy, and personal development. Using a qualitative interpretive approach, it investigates the narratives, structures, and affective components of movies and their relevance to human psychological development. In addition to promoting shared memory and communal imagination, research indicates how film serves as a psychological experience, an art form, and a tool for introspection, empathy, and emotional control. Film thus fulfills both private and public functions, highlighting its significance in comprehending how individuals construct stories, feelings, and identities. It draws on media psychology, cognitive theory of film, psychoanalytic ideas, and qualitative research findings from audience studies and interviews. Using a qualitative interpretive approach, it investigates the narratives, structures, and affective components of movies and their relevance to human psychological development. According to research, movies promote shared memory and collective imagination while also acting as instruments for introspection, empathy, and emotional control. Film thus fulfills both private and public functions, highlighting its significance in comprehending how individuals construct stories, feelings, and identities.



Keywords— Human Psyche, Social Identities, Elements of film, Psychological Development, Cognitive Theory

I. INTRODUCTION

The Complex Relationship between Psychology and Film

Since its birth in the late nineteenth century, film has been likened to a "dream screen," a medium onto which viewers project their thoughts, fears, and desires (Metz 1975). Moving images have a special power to penetrate logical barriers and enter the unconscious mind. In a couple of seconds, a single scene has the power to make you laugh, cry, freeze in fear, or experience waves of delight. The close relationship between psychology and film is the basis for the long-lasting cultural influence of

movies. Because cinema uses narrative storytelling, visual representation, music, and performance more than other forms of art, it is a multimodal medium that can influence both individual emotions and collective consciousness.

The purpose of psychology, the scientific study of human thought and behavior, is to comprehend why and how people feel, think, and behave in particular ways. Together, psychology and film demonstrate how movies impact identity, perception, memory, and attention. Why do individuals connect with specific characters? In what ways do specific film techniques—like close-ups or soundtrack music—improve the emotional impact? Why

do certain movies fade into obscurity while others remain in people's thoughts for decades? These questions demonstrate the transdisciplinary nature of psychology and movies. This article claims that films are both a reflection of human psychology and an active force that modifies psychological processes. From a psychological perspective, we can see how moral reasoning, emotional expression, and even therapeutic therapy are influenced by movies. For example, "cinematherapy" has developed into a mental health intervention that employs movie narratives to promote healing, empathy, and self-discovery (Berg-Cross, Jennings, and Baruch 1990).

Cinema as a Psychological Event

Watching movies is an experience-based activity rather than a passive one. Viewers become engrossed in stories, identifying with the heroes or opposing villains, relating their own experiences to the characters, and balancing their moral principles with the storylines of movies. This interaction aligns with cognitive film theory, which suggests that viewers interpret movies similarly to actual events, deriving meaning from schemas, mental models, and emotional cues (Bordwell 1985).

Because movies are sensory, they are ideal for indulging in identification and empathy. According to Murray Smith (1995), movies enable viewers to adopt a character's perspective, resulting in an emotional congruence that fosters understanding beyond individual and cultural boundaries. For example, films like *Taare Zameen Par* (2007) and *Schindler's List* (1993) put viewers through the struggles of persecuted populations, evoking empathy and social consciousness.

The Cultural and Historical Conversation between Psychology and Film

Psychology and film have a long history together. The use of dreams, symbols, and archetypes in film interpretation was influenced by psychoanalysts like Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. One movie with overtly psychoanalytic aspects was Alfred Hitchcock's *Spellbound* (1945), demonstrating how movies can make the unconscious understandable. Cognitive psychology in the later decades moved the emphasis from the unconscious drives to the perceptual and cognitive processes. For example, David Bordwell emphasized the role of mental structures in comprehending film, highlighting how audience interpretation is shaped by editing, framing, and narrative clues (Bordwell 1985).

From the psychology of watching horror films (Turvey 2008) to the portrayal of trauma in Holocaust films (Caruth 1996), contemporary scholarship increasingly examines the therapeutic and social dimensions of film. Concurrently, neuroscientific

approaches such as neurocinematics study how specific brain regions respond to film stimulation and offer biological evidence for the psychology of film (Hasson et al. 2008).

There is still a lack of interdisciplinary study demonstrating how cinema influences human psychology in everyday situations, despite the fact that much has been said about either the therapeutic aspects of psychology or the art of film. This research aims to close that gap by outlining the psychological functions of cinema using a qualitative framework based on theory, film analysis, and audience opinion. It emphasizes both the collective and individual effects of movies, including how they influence social imagination and cultural memory as well as cognition, emotion, and identity. By answering these queries, the paper advances the expanding subject of media psychology and provides new perspectives on the psychological and cultural significance of movies.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

From psychoanalysis in the first half of the 20th century to current neuroscientific studies of spectatorship, the psychological study of film has evolved across a number of intellectual traditions. Scholars have long sought to understand why movies have such a profound emotional impact on viewers, how stories influence human awareness, and the function of cinema in identity, empathy, and collective memory. Important contributions are organized into five linked strands in this assessment. cultural/social psychology, cognitive theories, therapeutic applications, psychoanalytic methods, and neuroscientific viewpoints.

III. METHODOLOGY

One scientific study cannot fully capture the breadth of the relationship between film and human psychology. This essay takes a qualitative and theoretical approach, despite the fact that experimental and neuroscientific methods have produced valuable knowledge. This is due to two factors: first, movies are more than just stimuli; they are cultural products with symbolic meaning that cannot be measured; and second, psychology deals with subjective experiences like emotions, memories, and identifications that require interpretive explanation.

Thus, we can examine how movies serve as psychological texts and experiences using a qualitative approach. This method incorporates concepts to investigate the dynamic relationship between film and the human mind by drawing

on psychoanalysis, cognitive film theory, therapeutic psychology, cultural studies, and neuroscience.

Cinema, Emotion, and Psychological Growth

Because movies combine multiple senses into one seamless experience, they are arguably the best media for capturing people's attention. A movie simultaneously invokes the visual, aural, linguistic, and emotional systems, in contrast to literature, which is mostly centered on words, or music, which is structured by sound. According to cognitive film researchers like David Bordwell (1985), audiences use "narrative schemata," which are mental structures that help organize story knowledge, to create meaning. As a result, film functions as a simulation of reality, guiding perception and memory through carefully crafted sound and visuals.

Cognitive psychology research supports this. Visual sequences are more vividly remembered than single verbal descriptions, according to research on attention and memory (Anderson 1996). For example, montage editing improves comprehension by focusing attention on crucial details while removing distracting information. The psychological idea of dual coding, which combines verbal and nonverbal cues, explains why movies leave a lasting effect on viewers. To put it briefly, the cinematic media makes comprehension easier by using both visual and linguistic representation to locate information more safely inside cognitive architecture.

Film creates powerful emotional landscapes that allow viewers to experience catharsis, identification, and emotional control in addition to telling stories. Dreams are representations of unconscious desires, according to Freud (1900), and subsequent psychoanalytic film researchers like Christian Metz (1982) thought that shared dreams and films were comparable. Films give viewers access to unconscious emotions in a safe environment, enabling them to process feelings like fear, grief, or anxiety in symbolic form. Films also activate brain networks linked to empathy and compassion, according to recent research in emotional neuroscience (Plantinga 2009). For example, the mirror neuron system allows viewers to "feel with" characters by emulating their emotions and behaviors. In order to help kids and adults recognize and control their own emotions, Pixar's *Inside Out* (2015) dramatizes the functioning of joy, sadness, anger, and fear. Similar to how films like *Taare Zameen Par* (2007) foster compassion for kids with learning difficulties and alter societal perceptions of diversity and inclusivity,

The therapeutic value of movies is also demonstrated by techniques like cinematherapy, in which counselors and psychologists use carefully chosen movies to help patients identify their feelings and coping

strategies. Watching socially conscious films like *The Pursuit of Happyness* (2006) or *Good Will Hunting* (1997) together also fosters resilience by validating shared challenges. As a result, film becomes a tool for psychological growth and emotional instruction in addition to amusement.

Cultural Negotiation: Educational, Therapeutic, and Social Consequences

Instead of seeing movies passively, audiences use them to negotiate culture and form their identities. According to Stuart Hall's theory of representation (1997), media texts provide "cultural maps" that help people understand how they fit into the world. These maps are provided by cinema through dramatizations of cultural norms, country histories, and gender roles.

Bollywood films, such as *Lagaan* (2001), offer Indian audiences a tale of empowerment and resistance by fictionalizing the anti-colonial fight and celebrating group cooperation. On the other hand, Hollywood productions such as *Black Panther* (2018) create Afro-futurist identities that challenge the prevailing portrayals of Blackness in popular culture. In all cases, cinema functions as a setting for the imagining, contesting, and reconfiguration of identities.

Additionally, by giving viewers the opportunity to experience many points of view, movies promote cross-cultural empathy. While *Parasite* (2019) portrays class conflict in South Korea to appeal to a global audience, *Schindler's List* (1993) encourages viewers to sympathize with Holocaust victims. This is the function of film as a tool for cultural negotiation, enabling people and civilizations to examine their own stances in light of those of others.

The psychology of film has significant ramifications for social change, education, and healing. Movies can be utilized as educational tools in the classroom to encourage participation, cultural literacy, and critical thinking. Teachers frequently use movies to help students picture abstract concepts, such as psychological concepts in *A Beautiful Mind* (2001) or historical events in *Gandhi* (1982). Theater pedagogy has already demonstrated that dramatization promotes learning; movies offer this benefit to the general public by combining graphic narrative with emotional engagement.

As previously said, cinematherapy is becoming more widely accepted as a valid supplement to counseling in therapeutic settings. Movies have the power to externalize personal concerns, enabling viewers to relate to characters and consider other approaches to issues. By validating individual experiences within a broader cultural

narrative, films that tackle loss and resilience might offer avenues to rehabilitation for trauma survivors.

Cinema has the power to raise consciousness, inspire compassion, and spur action on a societal level. While documentaries like *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006) have influenced public discourse around climate change, films like *Hotel Rwanda* (2004) expose viewers to global atrocities. According to the psychology of cinema, these moviegoing experiences are beneficial not so much because they convey information in a vacuum but rather because they concurrently address emotion and cognition, resulting in long-term behavioral and attitude changes.

When taken as a whole, these four aspects—cognition, emotion, identity, and social application—show how film both reflects and influences human psychology. In fact, it generates new mental processes while reflecting existing ones. Film becomes one of the most useful cultural forms for psychological research because of its effects on perception and memory, emotion regulation, identity development, education, and therapy.

Psychoanalytic Approaches: Film as Dream and Desire

Early on, theories on the psychological impact of movies emerged in conversation with psychoanalysis. Although Sigmund Freud didn't write much about movies, his ideas on the unconscious, repression, and dreams had a significant influence on film studies. A cornerstone of psychoanalytic film theory was Christian Metz's *The Imaginary Signifier* (1975), which maintained that the movie functions similarly to a dream screen on which viewers project unconscious fantasies. According to Metz, identification with characters and the film's machinery creates a kind of "scopic regime" that satisfies latent wants. Building on the ideas of Freud and Lacan, Laura Mulvey (1975) created the notion of the "male gaze," which postulates that women are viewed by male viewers as objects of visual pleasure in traditional Hollywood film. Mulvey's theory demonstrates how cinema employs psychological processes of desire, identification, and repression, even though this is really a feminist perspective.

Lacanian theory was used in later psychoanalytic investigations, such as Slavoj Žižek's *Looking Awry* (1991), to investigate how films depict ideological illusions. According to Žižek, films are psychoanalytic creations that convey suppressed cultural fears rather than told stories. Therefore, by emphasizing the unconscious, desire, and symbolic representation, psychoanalysis provided the first framework to link psychology and film.

This concept was expanded upon in Murray Smith's *Engaging Characters* (1995), which proposed a model of character engagement that distinguishes between

recognition, alignment, and allegiance. Smith provides examples of how viewers interact with characters through emotional alignment, which promotes moral judgment and empathy. By stressing active cognitive and affective processes, this challenges the psychoanalytic idea of passive spectatorship.

Ed Tan (*Emotion and the Structure of Narrative Film*, 1996) recently conducted study on the ways in which film technology, such as music, editing, and framing, generates emotion. Tan claims that emotions in movies are shaped by narrative design rather than being random. Cinema was positioned as a laboratory of human intellect and emotion as a result of this shift in focus from unconscious impulses to conscious mental processes.

Identity, Empathy, and Collective Memory in Cultural and Social Psychology

Film is a social literature that shapes cultural imagination and identity in addition to the individual mind. In the context of film, Benedict Anderson's notion of "imagined communities" (1983) has been applied to examine how national theaters create collective identities. Films such as *Rang De Basanti* (2006) and *Mother India* (1957) demonstrate how narrative film fosters political consciousness and cultural memory in India.

Cultural psychology now places a lot of emphasis on empathy. According to Cohen's (2001) concept of "identification with media characters," identification fosters empathy, lessens prejudice, and facilitates intercultural understanding. Films about minority perspectives, such as *Philadelphia* (1993) on HIV/AIDS stigma or *Taare Zameen Par* (2007) on dyslexia, promote empathy and social awareness. In the Indian context, scholars such as Viridi (2003) have examined how gender identities are constructed and represented in Bollywood stories, while Dwyer (2006) has examined how cultural hybridity is expressed in Indian film. According to this research, movies are more than simply entertainment; they also have a cultural and psychological impact on how people perceive themselves, empathize with others, and identify with them.

Neuroscientific Perspectives: The Brain on Film

Neurocinematics, the most recent field of study, uses brain imaging to study how viewers react to films. fMRI studies by Hasson et al. (2008) showed that watching movies synchronizes viewers' brain responses, particularly in regions related to emotion and attention. This phenomenon, known as "inter-subject correlation," is proof that movies create biologically similar psychological experiences.

Film, according to Uri Hasson and co-authors, is a powerful "brain stimulator" because filmmakers purposefully control attention through the use of sound effects, editing, and framing. This neuroscientific viewpoint demonstrates how deeply film penetrates human psychology while validating earlier cognitive ideas based on empirical data from the brain.

Research Questions

How can movies elicit emotional reactions, cognitive thought, and unconscious desires?

In both individual and group psychology, how may movies serve therapeutic purposes?

In what ways can film support collective memory, empathy, and cultural identity?

What can we learn about the collective psychological impact of movies from neuroscience?

How may these perspectives be integrated into a thorough framework of the relationship between film and psychology?

The material for conceptual analysis includes:

Movies are considered as cultural and psychological texts. *Psycho* (1960) is for psychoanalytic research, *Inside Out* (2015) for cognitive-emotional comprehension, and *Taare Zameen Par* (2007) for therapeutic/educational impact is a few examples. The literature section discusses scholarly works that include psychoanalytic, cognitive, therapeutic, cultural, and neuroscientific studies. Audience experiences have documented in secondary research (focus groups, surveys, psychological case studies, and cinema studies). This triangulation ensures that the method is validated by prior research and real-world examples rather than being theoretical in isolation.

Framework for Analysis

Three main tactics are used in the qualitative approach:

Textual Analysis of Film Motion films are interpreted as cultural texts in which character development, visual techniques, and narrative frameworks reflect psychological processes. For instance, Pixar's *Inside Out* animates cognitive-emotional processes, whereas Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) demonstrates Freudian repeat compulsion. Textual analysis reveals how filmmakers purposefully include psychological aspects into their work.

Thematic Examination of Emotional Reaction

The approach uses themes of empathy, catharsis, identification, and fear in addition to textural elements to convey audience responses. This is in line with qualitative psychology, which organizes individual experiences into

patterns. For example, inspirational films like *The Pursuit of Happyness* (2006) inspire resiliency and hope, whereas horror films like *The Exorcist* (1973) inspire fear and suppression.

Synthesis Across Disciplines Finally, the approach integrates viewpoints from cultural studies, cognitive theory, therapeutic psychology, psychoanalysis, and neuroscience. We can see how the same movie may be interpreted in a variety of ways thanks to the cross-disciplinary approach: psychoanalytically as desire, cognitively as processing schemata, therapeutically as catharsis, culturally as identity creation, and neurologically as parallel brain activity. Advantages of a Qualitative Conceptual Method

This strategy has several advantages: **Holistic Understanding:** It avoids reductionism and takes into account the multifaceted nature of the relationship between film and psychology by fusing several traditions.

Cultural Sensitivity: Qualitative approaches take into account the diversity of audience backgrounds and the cultural connotations attached to movies.

Flexibility: From Hollywood thrillers to Indian melodramas, the concept works with movies from a variety of genres, eras, and cultures.

Depth of Interpretation: This approach explores deeper psychological resonances of movies, in contrast to quantitative methods that measure surface-level reactions.

Restrictions and Boundaries

At the same time, this approach has limitations:

Possibility of Subjectivity: Because interpretive analysis relies on the viewpoint of the researcher, bias may be a risk.

Scope Restrictions: Representative samples are chosen because a 7000-word article cannot fully examine every movie or psychological theory. The boundaries are intentional: the goal of the research is to provide conceptual insights and frameworks for comprehension rather than to create universal rules of film psychology.

Ethical Considerations

Even though the study does not involve human subjects, ethical issues are nonetheless relevant. It is important to examine films that depict tragedy, violence, or marginalization with tact, considering the psychological impact they have on susceptible viewers. Furthermore, therapeutic applications must be viewed as complementary instruments rather than as a replacement for expert intervention.

Methodological Justification

The goal of the study, which is to investigate the deep connections between film and psychology as intellectual, cultural, and experiential manifestations, justifies the use of a conceptual qualitative technique. Only qualitative techniques can reveal the depth of meaning, symbolism, and cultural context, whereas quantitative research can measure responses. This approach aligns with the interpretive goals of both psychology and film studies by viewing cinema as a mirror of society and the psyche.

IV. RESULTS

The findings of this conceptual study highlight the complex and dynamic relationship between human psychology and film. We can understand how films serve as mirrors to the psyche, stimulants of cognitive-emotional processes, and aids for navigating culture by drawing on psychoanalysis, cognitive theory, therapeutic psychology, cultural studies, and neuroscience. The results are presented thematically in the parts that follow, using representative case studies of movies as examples.

Unconscious Desires and Psychoanalytic Resonances

Psychoanalysis has concentrated on how dreams, fantasies, and repression shape human behavior ever since Freud. As a "dream factory," movies have a place where unconscious desires are projected and examined. Case Study: Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) demonstrates how unconscious conflict is portrayed in movies. Freud's theory of the split psyche—the struggle between id (pent-up wants), ego (social identity), and superego (maternal conscience)—is exemplified by Norman Bates. In addition to creating suspense, the infamous shower scene symbolizes the human body's frailty and the discharge of repressed aggression. The audience's response shows that these movies evoke both fascination and disgust at the same time—a phenomenon Freud called the eerie.

Thus, *Psycho* demonstrates how unconscious terror is portrayed in movies in a way that viewers both fear and are unable to ignore. The result here suggests that movies could function as shared dreamscapes, projecting imaginations that allow viewers to interact with suppressed aspects of themselves in a safe artistic setting.

Cognition, Emotion, and Mental Simulation

The significance of perception, schema activation, and mental simulation in the spectatorship process is emphasized by cognitive film theory. Instead than just passively taking in images, viewers actively create meaning by combining emotion and cognitive processes.

Case Study: *Inside Out* (2015, directed by Pete Docter) By anthropomorphizing the feelings of joy, sadness, anger, fear, and disgust, Pixar's *Inside Out* formally depicts the architecture of the mind. The film shows how the dynamics of affect and cognition shape personality, memory, and identity. Viewers can learn a profound cognitive-emotional lesson from the pivotal moment when Joy realizes that sadness is essential to empathy and strength. Psychologists have used *Inside Out* as a teaching tool to explain emotional regulation and memory formation, bolstering the idea that movies can encourage metacognition—thinking about thinking. According to the research, movies are a mental laboratory that helps viewers develop their emotional intelligence and problem-solving skills by immersing them in virtual worlds.

Therapeutic Functions: Catharsis and Healing

Movies are therapeutic in addition to providing representation. When used in psychotherapy, cinematherapy uses movies as a means of introspection, emotional release, and self-improvement.

Case Study: Aamir Khan's 2007 film *Taare Zameen Par* Ishaan, a dyslexic child who is misunderstood by parents and teachers, is portrayed in this Indian film. The narrative offers catharsis and support while validating his struggles and praising his inventiveness. *Taare Zameen Par* provides families and children with learning challenges with empowerment, understanding, and awareness. Counselors attest to *Taare Zameen Par*'s therapeutic uses by reporting using it in inclusive education seminars.

Case Study: Gabriele Muccino's 2006 film *The Pursuit of Happyness* This biographical drama inspires viewers to persevere in the face of adversity by chronicling Chris Gardner's tenacity. Its therapeutic effectiveness is in exhibiting tenacity and optimism, which are crucial components of positive psychology interventions. The results show that movies are valuable in therapeutic and educational settings because they can cause catharsis, show coping strategies, and offer safe spaces for emotional healing.

Cultural Identity, Empathy, and Collective Memory

Additionally, film is a cultural text that transmits shared memories and mediates communal identity. Here, anthropology, sociology, and psychology come together when spectators interpret movies as members of cultural communities as well as as individuals.

Case Study: Ashutosh Gowariker's *Lagaan* (2001) This Indian epic fictionalizes resistance, unity, and patriotism as the villagers use a game of cricket to fight

colonial dominance. Psychologically, it encourages group affiliation, strengthening Indian viewers' sense of cultural identity. Case Study: Steven Spielberg's 1993 film *Schindler's List* Spielberg's Holocaust drama serves as a forum for moral reflection and collective grief. Affective empathy, which feeds back into cultural memory and moral consciousness, is often reported by spectators.

These examples show how movies use communal psychology to help civilizations overcome trauma, negotiate identity, and cultivate empathy across boundaries.

Neuroscientific Perspectives: Embodiment and Synchrony Theorists' long-held concerns that movies align viewers' bodies and minds are empirically supported by recent advances in neuroscience. Case Study: Alfonso Cuarón's *Gravity* (2013) The immersive cinematography of *Gravity* causes measurable physiological reactions in spectators, such as elevated skin conductance, a fast heartbeat, and coordinated brain activity. Action scenes activate brain regions linked to motor simulation, as if viewers were lost in space, according to fMRI research.

Case Study: Steven Spielberg's 1975 film *Jaws* The video directly addresses the body's autonomic nerve system, as seen by the visceral dread reactions elicited by the suspenseful theme and withholding shark appearance.

The result demonstrates that watching a movie is more than just viewing it; it is experienced on a neurological level, uniting viewers in coordinated physical responses. Integrative Conversation When taken as a whole, these findings reveal a complex relationship between film and psychology: Psychoanalytically, movies act out unconscious fears and desires. They simulate experiences that enhance comprehension at the cognitive-emotional level. They promote change and catharsis at the therapeutic level. They develop empathy and identity at the cultural level. They coordinate embodied reactions at the neuroscientific level. These levels are interactive rather than isolated. For instance, *Inside Out* functions neurologically by stimulating brain activity in empathy, culturally by promoting conversations about mental health, therapeutically by affirming melancholy, and cognitively by picturing emotions. The important thing to remember is that films are psychological experiences, both individual and collective, subjective and physical, aware and unconscious.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on psychoanalysis, cognitive theory, therapy, cultural studies, and neuroscience, this study has examined the intricate and multidisciplinary relationship

between human psychology and film. The results show that movies are much more than just entertainment; they are a cultural and psychological laboratory that both reflects and influences the inner workings of the human mind.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, films are dreamscapes that express underlying fears and desires, like in Hitchcock's *Psycho*. As seen in Pixar's *Inside Out*, cognitive accounts suggest that films are mental simulations that simultaneously activate perception, memory, and emotion. Movies, like *Taare Zameen Par* and *The Pursuit of Happyness*, provide catharsis, strength, and healing on a therapeutic level. Culturally, movies foster empathy and social identification; films like *Schindler's List* and *Lagaan* enable viewers to process trauma and imagine unity. Additionally, neuroscientific research shows that moviegoing experiences are embodied and coordinated, coordinating viewers' neurological and physiological reactions across cultural boundaries.

These findings suggest that movies have a special place at the nexus of society, psychology, and art. They are simultaneously cultural rites, psychological tools, and artistic expressions. The psychological impact of movies may only worsen in today's environments, where streaming services and online media are prevalent, as interactive and personalized films create new forms of connection.

This study demonstrates the need for cross-disciplinary approaches in future empirical research, integrating psychology, film theory, and neuroscience in a more systematic manner. The effects of particular genres or narrative forms on empathy, identity, and cognitive processing can be further explored through empirical research. In the meantime, cultural and educational establishments need to utilize film as a therapeutic and pedagogical tool by incorporating it into training, counseling, and instructional settings.

Finally, the link between psychology and film is not coincidental, but necessary: films are psychological because humans are storytelling animals, hardwired to imagine, imitate, and empathize. Film is one of the most powerful mediums for understanding ourselves and others, connecting our inner lives to shared cultural experiences.

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The Re-Contextualization of Scientific Knowledge Discourse in Chinese Translated Science Fiction of the Late Qing (1902-1911)*

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Abstract— This paper investigates the re-contextualization of scientific knowledge discourse in Chinese translated science fiction from 1902 to 1911, situating these texts within the broader epistemic transformation of late Qing intellectual culture. It argues that science fiction translation during this period functioned as a dynamic site of knowledge negotiation, in which scientific discourse was continuously reshaped in response to shifting political and cultural imperatives. Based on a corpus of representative translated texts, this study identifies three major stages in the evolution of knowledge discourse. In the first stage, translation practices construct a highly politicized knowledge framework centered on military and technological science. Through strong domestication strategies, scientific narratives are mobilized to serve reformist agendas, thereby foregrounding the authority and urgency of Western scientific epistemologies. In the second stage, the scope of scientific knowledge is significantly expanded beyond a predominantly political paradigm. Translations increasingly incorporate elements of natural and social sciences, producing a more diversified epistemic configuration while still retaining an underlying reformist orientation. In the final stage, translation practices exhibit a relative shift toward textual fidelity and narrative preservation. Ideological intervention is attenuated, and greater emphasis is placed on the transmission of scientific content itself, marking a transition from hybridized knowledge production to more differentiated and stabilized forms of scientific discourse. These evolving re-contextualization strategies demonstrate that translated science fiction operated as an important epistemic instrument in late Qing intellectual life. The paper further argues that such translational practices not only responded to immediate socio-political demands, but also contributed to the gradual restructuring, expansion, and normalization of scientific knowledge in modern China.



Keywords— Discourse; Knowledge Discourse; Late Qing science fiction; Re-contextualization.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Translation studies has undergone an epistemic turn in recent years, shifting from a primarily linguistic focus to concerns with knowledge production, mediation, and circulation. Translation is increasingly understood not as a neutral conduit but as an active process that reshapes and re-contextualizes knowledge across cultural contexts. In China, a vital manifestation of this turn emerged during the late Qing period, when national crises generated an urgent

demand for Western knowledge, seen as essential for modernization and cultural revitalization, and for promoting societal enlightenment.

To reach the widest possible audience, late Qing intellectuals favored the most effective methods for disseminating knowledge. They actively promoted the eastward transmission of Western learning through large-scale translation projects. Within this broader intellectual movement, Liang Qichao, in 1902, articulated the

influential slogan: “If one intends to renovate the people of a nation, one must first renovate its fiction”, in his essay *On the Relationship between Fiction and Mass Governance*. This declaration is widely regarded as the starting point of the so-called Novel Revolution. Later that year, Liang launched *New Fiction* in *The New Citizen Journal*, formally classifying science fiction, titled “philosophical and science fiction” to include Chinese translations. He defined it as fiction written to explicate philosophy and the natural sciences, distinguished by its “lofty ideals” and reliance on “scientific observation” (Liang, 1902).

Chinese translated science fiction thus emerged as a key medium for disseminating scientific knowledge, while simultaneously serving ideological and reformist purposes. Existing scholarship on late Qing Chinese translated science fiction can be divided into macro-historical and micro-textual approaches. Macro-level studies emphasize its didactic and political functions and the role of translation in mediating Western knowledge and intellectual transformation (Der-wei Wang, 1997). As Wang notes, the genre integrates “knowledge and truth” with “dreams and romance” (Wang, 1997, p. 157). Micro-level studies focus on translation strategies such as abridgment, adaptation, and commentary insertion, showing that translators often reshaped source texts by subordinating scientific accuracy to ideological or narrative concerns (Pollard, 2000).

Most existing studies, however, treat scientific knowledge and its discourse primarily as background content rather than as a structured object of transformation. As a result, the mechanisms through which scientific knowledge was reconfigured in Chinese translated fiction remain insufficiently theorized. Addressing this gap, this paper examines the re-contextualization of scientific knowledge discourse in twelve representative Chinese translated science fictions published between 1902 and 1911. Drawing on knowledge studies and translation studies, it analyzes how scientific discourse was represented, mediated, and restructured under the socio-cultural conditions of the late Qing. The study argues that translated science fiction functioned as a site of epistemic negotiation, where knowledge was selectively reorganized in response to reformist and political imperatives.

II. THE OVERVIEW OF CHINESE TRANSLATED SCIENCE FICTION OF THE LATE QING

The period of Chinese translated science fiction in the late Qing is conventionally defined as 1902-1911, beginning with Liang Qichao’s formal definition of the genre and ending with the overthrow of the Qing dynasty. This time

frame has gained recognition in Chinese literary scholarship, supported by established studies such as A Ying’s *History of Novels in the Late Qing Dynasty* and Li Yajuan’s *A Study on the Relationship between Late Qing Novels and Politics (1902–1911)*.

During this period, while many foreign literary works were translated into Chinese, yet not all were explicitly labeled as “science fiction” in titles or subtitles. Some were categorized as “romantic novels”, “detective novels” or other genres, despite containing significant scientific elements and plots. Additionally, several translations incorporated scientific discourse without adopting the specific label of science fiction. To address this classification ambiguity, this paper draws on a wide range of scholarly sources, including *New Addition Catalogue of Novels in the Late Qing Dynasty and the Early Republic of China* by Tarumoto Teruo, *A History of Chinese Science Fiction* by Takeda Masaya, *Research on Late Qing Science Fiction Novels (1904-1911)* by Lin Jianqun, *History of Novels in the Late Qing Dynasty* by A Ying, *History of Chinese Translation* by Ma Zuyi, *Late Qing and Early Republican Fiction Series: Volume on Science, Chinese Science Fiction Literature Anthology: Late Qing Volume*, as well as relevant journal articles from Chinese Translation and Shanghai Translation.

Based on these sources, a total of 38 Chinese translated science fiction works were identified, including variant translations from the same source and plagiarized editions, published in newspapers, magazines, and separate editions. The period can be further divided into three phases: the beginning (1902-1903), the climax (1904-1907), and the ending (1908-1911). Analysis of scientific knowledge discourse in these works indicates that the discourse, which initially combined political and knowledge elements, gradually became more focused on scientific content, reflecting a general trend of increasing disciplinary purity in Chinese translated science fiction of the late Qing.

III. THE BEGINNING, PRIORITIZING REFORMIST POLITICAL APPEAL

This phase comprises ten Chinese translations of science fiction works, with Liang Qichao’s *A Philosophical Novel: Record of the End of the World* appearing as the earliest example. Although Liang designated the work as a “philosophical novel”, it falls within the category of science fiction as defined earlier in this study, since the broader contemporary classification of the genre was “philosophical and scientific fiction”. For this reason, the translation is still regarded as part of early Chinese science fiction translation.

The original source text of Liang's adaptation is Camille Flammarion's *The Last Days of the Earth* (1891), a short narrative envisioning the far future when the Earth is engulfed in ice and snow, and human civilization disappears beneath glaciers. The last surviving man, "Omega", carries the hope of human continuation as he searches for habitable land and a companion. Although he eventually encounters his beloved, they discover that their homeland has already been buried under snow; as epidemics spread, the two embrace and die beneath the falling snow within a pyramid.

While the Chinese translation broadly preserves the narrative framework, Liang's two major revisions reveal a consistent tendency toward ideological reorientation, particularly the prioritization of reformist political discourse.

One important tendency is his attempt to arouse the Chinese nation's desire to cast off oppression and become strong, especially by contrasting China with Europe and expressing vengeance against the countries that had recently invaded the Qing dynasty. When translating the passage describing the gradual destruction of the world and the disintegration of nations, he deliberately adds: "Those European countries, with their bizarre and monstrous methods of social organization, ultimately perished in their own sea of blood... Never did they expect, in the blink of an eye, to be attacked by the Chinese for revenge, and thus scattered in disarray, with none able to defend themselves" (Liang, 1902, p. 109). Although the original passage is narrated from the perspective of humankind at the end of the world, Liang reinterprets, and in effect distorts, it as a vehicle for criticizing Europe, thereby foregrounding his own political message through interlinear commentary. He also adopts traditional Chinese editorial devices such as prefatory remarks, headnotes, and interlinear notes, as in: "Magnificent are we Chinese people! Having translated to this point, I cannot refrain from raising a full cup in celebration; yet I know not whether my compatriots will prove equal to this prophecy".

The other major tendency is Liang's emphasis on traditional Chinese Buddhist thought and the incorporation of Buddhist discourse as a means of restructuring scientific imagination. When translating the passage in which the pyramid is described as the sole structure remaining on Earth at the end of the world, Liang inserts a substantial amount of Buddhist discourse into his description. For example, he writes that the pyramid, "with its detached and dispassionate gaze from beyond the mundane world, ... surveys the whole of this world: innumerable families, innumerable clans, innumerable tribes, innumerable states, innumerable sages, innumerable heroes, innumerable vulgar men, innumerable fools, innumerable political

systems, innumerable branches of learning, innumerable writings, innumerable arts and techniques, and even innumerable joys, innumerable affections, innumerable terrors, innumerable cruelties, and innumerable sorrows." The repeated use of "innumerable" translates the Chinese term *wuliang* (无量), a characteristic expression in Buddhist vocabulary that evokes the notion of immeasurable or countless phenomena. Through such additions, the pyramid is transformed from a physical remnant of human civilization into an observer endowed with a transcendental, quasi-Buddhist perspective on worldly existence.

Liang further makes this orientation explicit in a translator's note appended to the end of the work: "This translation is spoken for Bodhisattvas; it is not spoken for ordinary worldlings, nor for the Śrāvakas." By invoking central categories of Buddhist thought, Liang recontextualizes Flammarion's scientific vision of the future within a Chinese intellectual framework. The translated text thus becomes not merely a narrative about the end of the world, but also a vehicle for expressing Buddhist conceptions of history, human affairs, and transcendence.

As the first Chinese translated science fiction work, the fiction greatly influenced the translation methods and translators' approaches in later works. Firstly, Liang Qichao's strong political appeal for reform shaped the orientation of early translated science fiction. Just as Novel Revolution itself carried an explicit reformist implication, translated works were introduced as part of literary reform, and even literary revolution. Consequently, during the following two years, many translated science fiction works in this phase presented obvious reformist political appeals, often accompanied by dissatisfaction with the Qing government and concerns for national salvation. This tendency further encouraged translators to privilege practical and immediately applicable forms of knowledge, particularly military discourse, which was widely regarded as essential to national survival in the late Qing period.

Secondly, Liang's understanding of "science" also influenced the intellectual framework of early translated science fiction. In *A Brief Historical Survey of the Development of Natural Science*, also published in 1902, he offered a systematic delineation of the disciplinary scope of "science". He classified philosophy, political science, economics, and sociology as metaphysical learning, while chemistry, astronomy, and geology were categorized as physical learning. Moreover, he explicitly regarded metaphysical learning as superior to physical learning. Under this intellectual framework, many early translated science fiction works continued to reflect the

previous tendency of valuing traditional Chinese ideological principles through the formula of “Chinese Learning as Substance, Western Learning for Application”.

A comparable pattern of re-contextualization in the stage can be observed in *The Latest Scientific Novel of the West: Undersea Travel*, translated by Nanhai Lu Jidong and Dongyue Hongxi Sheng, based on Jules Verne’s *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Seas* (*Vingt mille lieues sous les mers*). While the translation preserves the general narrative of underwater exploration, it also significantly restructures the source text and remains incomplete, being serialized only up to Chapter Twenty-One.

The translators re-contextualized science fiction at both the formal and contextual levels, operating across three linguistic dimensions: the lexical, syntactic, and discourse levels.

At the lexical level, the translation exhibits a lack of consistency in rendering key scientific terminology (Chen, 2018), reflecting the unsettled state of scientific vocabulary in late Qing China. Two central terms from the text illustrate this problem. The first is submarine, which is translated variously as *shuidi qianxing chuan* (水底潜行船, “underwater vessel”), *shuidi qianxing tiejian* (水底潜行铁舰, “underwater iron warship”), *shuidi tiejian* (水底铁舰, “underwater iron ship”), *tiejian* (铁舰, “iron ship”), *tonghang* (通航, “navigation”), *haidi de lunchuan* (海底的轮船, “steamship beneath the sea”), and *neizhi chuan* (内支船). Rather than functioning as a stable technical term, the object is repeatedly described through its physical characteristics or mode of operation. A similar pattern can be observed in the translation of diving-dress, which appears as *shujiaopi zhi de yifu maozi* (树胶皮制的衣服帽子, “clothes and hat made of rubber”), *xiashui de yifu* (下水的衣服, “clothes for entering the water”), *youshui yifu* (游水衣服, “swimming clothes”), or simply *yifu* (衣服, “clothes”). These renderings identify the object primarily through its material composition or practical function rather than through a standardized technical designation. Consequently, although the translators conveyed the basic meaning of the scientific objects, the knowledge discourse underwent inevitable distortions during the process of re-contextualization.

The translation places considerable emphasis on the dissemination of scientific knowledge and seeks to impress upon readers the importance of science. Nevertheless, a large proportion of the original text’s detailed discussions of flora, fauna, astronomy, and geography are either heavily condensed or omitted altogether. In Chapter Seven, a marginal note attempts to justify this editorial strategy: “This book is originally a scientific novel and everything

in it is based on the principles of science; yet its full import cannot be completely conveyed to laymen” (Nanhai Lu Jiedong & Dongyue Hongxisheng, 1902, p. 76). The note reveals the translators’ awareness of the tension between scientific complexity and the intellectual background of their intended readership. As a result, scientific knowledge is selectively presented rather than comprehensively translated.

The translators’ preference for forms of scientific knowledge with direct political relevance, together with their own political interventions, becomes even more apparent at the syntactic and discourse levels. Formally, the text is rendered entirely in the style of a traditional Chinese chaptered novel. It adopts a highly colloquial narrative voice and concludes each of the first twelve chapters with an epilogue poem that anticipates subsequent developments. Moreover, as the work was serialized in a periodical, many chapters considered insufficiently engaging for readers were either abbreviated or omitted. Combined with the conventions of indigenous Chinese fiction, these adaptations further disrupted the continuity of the original narrative and reshaped its discursive structure.

At the contextual level, the translators likewise prioritized reformist political appeal over the faithful transmission of scientific knowledge. On the one hand, they omitted or significantly abridged passages regarded as scientifically informative but politically irrelevant, particularly discussions of foundational natural sciences such as geography, biology, and astronomy. Even when such episodes were retained, they were often drastically condensed. The following example illustrates how a scientifically oriented passage was preserved in outline while much of its original explanatory content was removed:

“A highly strung conchologist would certainly have fainted at the many display cases classifying specimens from the branch of molluscs. There I saw a collection of inestimable value, which time does not allow me to describe in full. Amongst the various products, I will cite for memory only: the elegant royal hammer-shell of the Indian Ocean, with regular white spots standing vividly out from a red and brown background; a brightly coloured imperial spondylus, all bristling with spikes, a specimen rarely seen in the museums of Europe, and worth, I thought, about 20,000 francs; ... and finally some periwinkles, delphiniums, screw shells, ianthines, ovules, volutes, olives, mitre shells, casques, murexes, whelks, harps, winkles, Triton’s shells, cerites, spindle-shells, wing shells, scorpion shells, limpets, hyales, and Cleodora: all delicate and fragile shells that science has baptized with its most charming names.” (Verne 2009:74)

“起身看那房内的珠宝，只见一幅相架旁有几个头号玻璃瓶，装满着许多珊瑚、玛瑙、珠贝之类。各瓶种类不同，各瓶放出各种异彩，也有青的、也有红的、也有黄的、也有白的、也有光怪陆离，精莹四射。只是眼睛好看，名儿是不知道的。又是长的、短的、粗的、细的、方的、圆的、三角的、扁的。”(Nanhai Lu Jidong and Dongyue Hongxi Sheng, 1902, p. 67)

(Rising to his feet, he examined the treasures displayed in the room. Beside a framed portrait stood several large glass jars filled with corals, agates, pearl shells, and similar specimens. The contents of each jar differed, and each emitted its own distinctive brilliance. Some were blue, some red, some yellow, some white; others displayed dazzling and variegated colors, glittering with crystalline radiance. They were pleasing to the eye, though their names were unknown to him. Their forms were equally diverse—some long, some short, some thick, some slender, some square, some round, some triangular, and some flat.)

On the other hand, the translators also introduced entirely new episodes that strengthened the text's political orientation. A notable example appears in the section discussing coral. While the source text presents coral as an object of scientific interest, the Chinese translation adds an episode in which a character discovers a coral ornament, about the size of a potato, supposedly worn on the official hat of a high-ranking Qing official. The coral is labelled “old man”, satirizing the fact that senior officials were typically advanced in age. Through a punning commentary—suggesting that the coral's age appropriately matched that of its wearer—the narrative shifts from natural history to political criticism. The episode culminates in the observation that “China has been brought to its present condition by those who wear red coral upon their heads,” transforming what was originally scientific knowledge about coral into an explicit critique of the Qing bureaucracy. Such additions demonstrate that scientific discourse was not merely simplified during the process of re-contextualization; it was frequently subordinated to the translators' reformist political agenda.

The translations produced during this phase exhibit different forms of constraint and adaptation. Some replace the original religious discourse with Buddhist concepts familiar to Chinese readers, while others substitute the source text's narrative structure with conventions derived from indigenous Chinese fiction. Despite these variations, one feature remains constant: the prominence of political discourse. Scientific knowledge is consistently re-contextualized in ways that serve political ends.

The Chinese translations demonstrate a strong reformist orientation. Rather than engaging systematically with the

foundational principles of the natural sciences, they tend to emphasize the prestige, utility, and abstract sophistication of scientific knowledge. Particular attention is often devoted to descriptions of military technology and armaments, which function as symbols of national strength and as reminders of the gap between China and the technologically advanced West. Scientific discourse is therefore valued less for its epistemological content than for its political significance.

As a result, the scientific knowledge retained in the translations is highly selective. Passages that support the translators' political agenda are preserved, adapted, or expanded, whereas knowledge deemed politically irrelevant is frequently condensed or omitted. In many cases, the re-contextualization of scientific discourse occurs primarily at the lexical level, focusing on the translation and introduction of scientific terminology. By contrast, at the syntactic, discourse, and contextual levels, political concerns assume a dominant role. The transmission of scientific knowledge is consequently reshaped, subordinated, and at times transformed to meet the demands of reformist political discourse.

IV. THE CLIMAX, BALANCING POLITICAL APPEALS AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSMISSION

Following the initial two-year phase of introducing and translating foreign science fiction, Chinese translated science fiction reached its peak between 1904 and 1907. During this period, the scope of source texts expanded significantly and was no longer confined to scientific novels. This diversification was driven by both the flourishing literary market and the increasing demands and aesthetic preferences of readers. Of the twenty-two translated works produced in this phase and 16 can be analyzed, seven were derived from non-science-fiction originals. Unlike the preceding phase, in which scientific discourse was largely subordinated to reformist political objectives, the period from 1904 to 1907 witnessed a gradual balancing between political appeal and knowledge transmission. While translators continued to view science fiction as a vehicle for social reform, they increasingly emphasized the educational, literary, and epistemological value of scientific knowledge itself. This shift was reflected both in the diversification of source texts and in new strategies of re-contextualization.

Compared with the earlier phase, science fiction translations during this stage display two notable tendencies: an expansion in the scope of knowledge discourse and a more deliberate preservation of literary qualities. A major factor contributing to this shift was the

incorporation of non-science-fiction texts into the translation corpus. In response to market demand, translators began to render a wider range of foreign literary works, including children's literature, detective fiction, military fiction, and romance narratives.

In the process of translation, these texts were often reinterpreted through a scientific or quasi-scientific lens. Elements associated with science, technology, or rational knowledge were selectively highlighted, even when they were not central to the original works. As a result, scientific discourse was no longer restricted to domains such as politics and military affairs. Instead, the scope of knowledge representation expanded, allowing for the systematic introduction of scientific knowledge from multiple fields and everyday domains.

One representative Chinese translation at this stage is *Scientific Novel: Xin Zaisheng Yuan*, adapted from *My First Patient*, the first story in *Stories from the Diary of a Doctor (Series I and II)*, published in *The Strand* in 1893. Narrated in the first person by a protagonist who is both physician and detective, the English source text recounts a sequence of events beginning with a young woman's critical illness, followed by medical intervention and the discovery that she has been poisoned, and concluding with an investigation that identifies both the perpetrator and the motive.

In its re-contextualization at both the formal and contextual levels, the Chinese translation departs significantly from the conventions of earlier translated science fiction. At the formal level, the translators demonstrate a notable appropriation of English narrative techniques. They abandon the traditional Chinese chaptered-fiction style characteristic of the preceding phase and largely preserve the linear narrative sequence of the source text, including the decision to postpone the revelation of the murderer until the end of the story. This stands in contrast to many earlier Chinese translations, which frequently disclosed the culprit at the outset. Such changes indicate a greater willingness to preserve the literary qualities of the source text, suggesting that translators increasingly valued narrative effectiveness alongside educational objectives.

At the contextual level, however, the translation reorients the narrative emphasis. Rather than foregrounding the detective plot, the Chinese version places greater emphasis on the seemingly miraculous efficacy of the stomach-pump, which rendered in translation as a "poison-extracting device", employed during the medical treatment. In doing so, it elevates a specific medical instrument into a symbol of scientific and technological power, while

relegating the detective dimension of the narrative to a secondary position.

The following passage illustrates this shift in emphasis:

"The electric battery was then brought into force and artificial respiration resorted to. For a long time we worked without any apparent result. One glance at the contents of the stomach-pump had caused Dr. Roper to turn so white....." (L.T. Meade & Clifford Halifax, 1893, p.96).

俄而电槽间之电器，即顾抽吸作用，然抽之既久，不见有丝毫之效果。余等渐将失望，然仍坚持从事，又竭力抽吸。继而路般注目于抽毒器中，不觉惊骇欲死。盖器中所容，已纯属毒质之气体。(Chen Wuwo & Zhang Mianzhan, 1907, p. 95)

(Soon after, the electric apparatus in the battery compartment—namely the device used for suction—was activated, but after prolonged extraction, no slightest effect was observed. We gradually began to lose hope, yet still persisted and exerted every effort to continue the suction process. Then Dr. Roper fixed his gaze upon the poison-extracting device and was suddenly struck with terror, almost as if he would die on the spot. For what the device now contained had become entirely a mass of poisonous gas.)

A comparison of the two passages reveals that, whereas the English text briefly reports the medical procedure and the doctor's reaction, the Chinese translation expands the process of extraction and heightens the dramatic effect of the medical device itself. The focus thus shifts from medical observation to technological intervention. Scientific authority is embodied not in abstract scientific principles but in a tangible instrument whose efficacy appears almost miraculous. Through this reorientation, scientific knowledge is rendered more concrete, visible, and accessible to readers through the discourse.

Whereas *Xin Zaisheng Yuan* demonstrates how a detective narrative could be reoriented toward medical science, Bao Tianxiao's *Faluo Xiansheng Tan* illustrates an even more radical form of re-contextualization, namely the transformation of a fantasy narrative into a scientific novel. This work demonstrates how translators incorporated material from non-science-fiction texts while simultaneously reframing them as vehicles for the transmission of scientific knowledge. The source text, *Baron Munchausen's Narrative of his Marvellous Travels and Campaigns in Russia*, is primarily a work of fantastical adventure rather than science fiction. In the process of translation, however, Bao Tianxiao deliberately reconfigured it as a scientific novel. He substantially expanded the scientific content of the narrative, providing rational explanations for originally fantastic episodes and

systematically recasting supernatural or implausible elements in scientific terms. Through this process of rationalization—or, more precisely, “scientificization”—the translation transformed a work of fantasy into one that could be presented to Chinese readers as science fiction. Unlike the translations of the previous phase, where scientific discourse was frequently subordinated to political concerns, Bao’s adaptation illustrates a growing effort to expand the scope of knowledge transmission by embedding scientific explanations within entertaining literary narratives.

One fantasy episode in *Baron Munchausen’s Narrative* describes the protagonist’s ascent to the moon by climbing a rapidly growing bean stalk, which later breaks and causes him to fall back to earth:

“I recollected that Turkey-beans grow very quick, and run up to an astonishing height. I planted one immediately; it grew, and actually fastened itself to one of the moon’s horns... I was four or five miles from the earth at least, when it broke; I fell to the ground with such amazing violence...” (Gottfride August Bürger, 1840, pp. 20-21)

Bao Tianxiao reconfigures this fantastical sequence as a scientifically explicable event: “氢气球忽为天空流星所冲突，予为地球所吸，即颠簸下坠，离地愈高，坠下之力愈重。”(Bao Tianxiao, 1905, p. 43)

(The hydrogen balloon was suddenly collided by a shooting star in the sky under the gravity of the Earth. It immediately jolted and fell. The higher it was from the ground, the heavier the force of its fall became.)

In the translation, the magical bean stalk is replaced by a hydrogen balloon, and the fall is explained through gravitational attraction rather than mechanical accident. This substitution removes the supernatural basis of the narrative and introduces basic physical concepts such as buoyancy and gravity as causal principles. Scientific knowledge is thus embedded directly into the narrative logic, transforming a fantasy adventure into a medium for the popularization of elementary physics.

This strategy reflects the broader tendency of the period to balance educational objectives with readers’ demand for literary enjoyment.

Meanwhile, translators also began to engage with the ethical implications of scientific development. For example, Chen Hongbi’s translation *Electric Crown*, drawing on themes associated with Frankenstein, explores the consequences of scientific experimentation and technological intervention. Similarly, Lu Xun’s translation *Zaorensu* (“*The Art of Creating Human Beings*”), adapted from *An Unscientific Story*, directs readers’ attention to questions of scientific ethics and the moral limits of human

intervention in nature. These works indicate that scientific discourse was no longer confined to issues of national strength or military modernization, but had begun to extend into broader ethical and philosophical reflections on science itself.

Although translators during this period continued to express reformist political concerns, the dominance of political discourse was considerably reduced compared with the preceding phase. At the same time, the scope of knowledge discourse expanded significantly, moving beyond military affairs to encompass ethical, social, and cultural dimensions of scientific knowledge. Science was thus increasingly positioned as a framework through which to interpret a wide range of modern social issues.

Nearly half of the source texts translated during this period were not originally science fiction. Through the adaptation of children’s literature, detective fiction, military fiction, and romance narratives, translators introduced knowledge discourses drawn from multiple domains. In doing so, they extended science fiction translation beyond the segmental level into broader discourse-level experimentation. As a result, the overtly political orientation of earlier translations gradually receded, while knowledge-oriented content became more prominent. Scientific and political discourses entered into a more balanced and hybrid configuration, giving rise to a more diverse and inclusive form of translated science fiction.

V. THE ENDING, PRIORITIZING KNOWLEDGE TRANSMISSION

Only six Chinese translated science fiction works were produced between 1908 and 1911, of which only three are available for analysis. Compared with the flourishing period of earlier years, enthusiasm for translating foreign science fiction declined sharply. This shift was closely linked to the political collapse of the late Qing dynasty. In 1908, both the Guangxu Emperor and the Empress Dowager Cixi died, marking the disintegration of the existing political order and triggering profound transformations across late Qing society, including literature and intellectual life.

At the same time, late Qing literary translation had, by this stage, largely completed its formative function. As Zhang Jing (2019, p. 3) notes, “the various models that could be offered for the modern transformation of Chinese literature had by then largely taken shape”. The weakening of reformist political ideology, combined with the failure of earlier reform movements, led to a shift in intellectual orientation. Revolutionary discourse gradually replaced reformist rhetoric, while science fiction itself came to be increasingly regarded as fiction rather than a vehicle for

political intervention. Concurrently, domestic Chinese science fiction began to emerge, often “prioritizing imagination over scientific accuracy”(Chen, 1999, p. 268).

During this period, only three translated science fiction texts remain available for analysis: *The End of the World*, *The Future of Aerial Warfare* (a war fantasy narrative), and *The Secret Party Leader*, adapted from Jules Verne’s *The Steam House*. All three texts were translated by Bao Tianxiao.

Despite their different source materials, these translations share several formal characteristics: they consistently adopt first-person narration, abandon the traditional chaptered-fiction structure, and omit marginal commentary and interpretive annotations. *The Secret Party Leader* even incorporates illustrations and other para-textual elements. Compared with earlier phases, these translations preserve dialogue and psychological description more fully, while scientific elements embedded in the narrative are retained with relatively greater consistency.

A diachronic comparison of Bao Tianxiao’s translation practice reveals a significant shift in translational orientation. Political appeals, which were prominent in earlier stages, are now largely relegated to paratextual commentary, and their rhetorical intensity is markedly reduced. Rather than functioning as explicit calls for reform, political discourse is transformed into narrative framing, such as speculative reflections on “the aerial world of the twentieth century”.

Overall, this period marks a transition in which translated science fiction no longer primarily serves as a vehicle for political intervention. Instead, it increasingly functions as a medium for the preservation and circulation of scientific knowledge within literary form. The decline in translation output thus reflects not only historical and institutional changes, but also a reconfiguration of the role of science fiction translation itself—from ideological instrument to epistemic archive.

VI. CONCLUSION

From a quantitative perspective, the translation of late Qing science fiction followed a three-stage trajectory of emergence, peak, and decline. In the initial stage, translators actively responded to Liang Qichao’s call for the Novel Revolution. The term “revolution” itself carried strong political connotations, and early science fiction translation was therefore closely bound to reformist ideological concerns. In this phase, science fiction primarily functioned as a vehicle for the transmission of political ideas through scientific discourse, or more precisely, as a means of articulating political knowledge

through selectively appropriated scientific content. The most prominent form of scientific knowledge introduced at this stage was military and technological knowledge, which was widely perceived as the most immediate indicator of national strength. To enhance its persuasive force and accessibility, scientific concepts were often simplified, reinterpreted, or even mythologized. Correspondingly, narrative techniques and discourse-level structures embedded in the source texts were largely subordinated to ideological concerns, and scientific knowledge operating at syntactic and discursive levels was frequently condensed or omitted.

In the second stage, science fiction translation began to exhibit a more systematic effort to reconstruct the knowledge discourse embedded in source texts. Translators increasingly adopted foreign narrative techniques and descriptive logics, while also expanding the source repertoire through the incorporation of non-science-fiction genres. As a result, the knowledge discourse of science fiction became significantly diversified. Translations of military fiction continued the earlier emphasis on technological and martial knowledge; detective fiction foregrounded rational investigation and the perceived epistemic authority of scientific instruments; and adaptations of ethical or speculative narratives introduced reflections on the limits and consequences of scientific practice. In this period, the re-contextualization of scientific discourse was no longer confined to lexical-level terminology transfer, but extended to syntactic and discourse-level restructuring. Traditional narrative modes were disrupted, and new configurations of temporality, spatiality, and narrative perspective were introduced into Chinese literary systems.

In the final stage, the number of translated science fiction works declined sharply, and the range of source texts contracted again toward canonical Western science fiction. Against the backdrop of political transformation at the end of the Qing dynasty, translators’ reformist enthusiasm gradually waned, while readers increasingly came to recognize that science fiction could not function as an all-encompassing epistemic framework. At the same time, influenced by earlier phases of translation activity, indigenous Chinese science fiction began to emerge. Once science fiction translation was no longer burdened with the explicit task of political enlightenment, the political dimension of knowledge discourse largely receded, leaving behind a more stabilized emphasis on scientific knowledge transmission within literary form.

Across these three stages, the trajectory of late Qing science fiction translation reveals a gradual shift from politicized knowledge transfer, to hybridized knowledge expansion, and finally to epistemic consolidation. More

broadly, it demonstrates that scientific discourse was not transmitted as a fixed or self-contained body of knowledge, but was continuously re-contextualized through literary mediation. The key issue, therefore, is not only what scientific knowledge was translated, but how it was narratively and discursively reconfigured within fiction—through plot construction, environmental description, dialogue, psychological representation, and the embedding of scientific terminology within literary discourse.

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Sociocultural Dynamics of Aesthetic Standards Transformation in the Modern Global Fashion Industry

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Abstract— *The global fashion industry has moved during the past decade away from a narrow Eurocentric repertoire of beauty toward a wider vocabulary that admits a broader range of bodies, ages, ethnicities, and gender expressions. This article examines the sociocultural dynamics behind that shift. The argument draws on Bourdieu's field theory and on the social-constructionist tradition, which together frame the change as a contested reorganisation of symbolic capital inside the field of global fashion. The study uses a qualitative, multi-case design that combines discourse analysis of advertising campaigns with structured comparison of four representative brand cases between 2021 and 2025. The analysis identifies four interlocking drivers, which are globalisation and cultural hybridisation, digital platforms and algorithmic visibility, body-positivity and inclusivity movements, and the rise of sustainability as an aesthetic value. Each driver enlarges the repertoire of legitimate aesthetic positions, and at the same time each generates new exclusions and commercial pressures, among them performative inclusivity, algorithmic homogenisation, and the commodification of ethical concern. The article contributes to fashion studies and the sociology of culture through a unified framework that integrates these drivers and through a clearer specification of the conditions under which aesthetic pluralism becomes durable at the level of structure and does not remain confined to reputation.*



Keywords— *aesthetic standards, body positivity, cultural diversity, fashion industry, globalisation, social media.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Across most of the twentieth century, the dominant aesthetic standard promoted by the global fashion industry remained narrow. The bodies that magazine covers, runways, and advertising campaigns celebrated were white, young, tall, and thin to an extreme degree, and the visual codes of high fashion were anchored in a small group of Western European capitals. Critical scholarship has long documented the social costs of that monoculture, and the past decade has shown a reorganisation of the visual field of fashion. Brands have rebuilt their casting practices around racial and size diversity, digital platforms have brought visibility to aesthetics rooted outside the traditional centres, and sustainability has emerged as both an ethical demand and a recognisable visual style.

Industry communications celebrate these changes as evidence of progress, and a parallel current of criticism reads them as superficial, commercially motivated, and uneven across markets. The scholarly literature on the transformation tends to address single dimensions in isolation, such as representation, digital media, or sustainability, with few attempts to articulate how those dimensions interact. The present article addresses that gap and treats the transformation of aesthetic standards as one multidimensional sociocultural process.

Three research questions guide the article. The opening question asks which sociocultural forces account for the recent diversification of aesthetic standards in global fashion. The second question asks how those forces interact within the institutional logic of the industry. The third

question asks under what conditions aesthetic pluralism becomes durable at the level of structure and does not remain confined to reputation. The remainder of the article follows a fixed sequence. Section II reviews the relevant literature. Section III sets out the theoretical framework and methodology. Section IV presents the analysis around four drivers of change. Section V discusses cross-cutting findings, and Section VI concludes.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study draws on three strands of scholarship. The opening strand concerns the social construction of beauty and the body. Classical critical work has shown how beauty ideals act as instruments of social stratification and discipline bodies through aspiration and shame. More recent contributions refine the argument and examine how digital media reshape the visual economy of the body, including the rise of filtered self-presentation and the spread of algorithmically curated ideals [1].

A second strand examines fashion as a social institution. Classical sociologists framed fashion as a mechanism of distinction and emulation. Contemporary scholarship extends that view and analyses fashion as a transnational cultural industry with its own field-specific logic of symbolic capital, in which legitimacy passes through editorial, retail, and platform gatekeepers [2]. Within that strand, recent work attends to the role of non-Western design centres and to the renegotiation of cultural authority that follows their growing visibility [3].

A third strand addresses representation, inclusion, and the politics of visibility. Studies have documented measurable increases in racial, size, age, and gender diversity in editorial and runway contexts since the late 2010s, and the same studies raise concerns about the gap between visibility and structural change [4]. Parallel work on sustainability shows that ecological concern now translates into aesthetic vocabulary, such as visible mending, monochrome capsule wardrobes, and the rehabilitation of secondhand garments as objects of taste [5].

These strands intersect, and they seldom converge into an integrated account. The present article responds and treats representation, platform dynamics, transnational diffusion, and sustainability as components of a single field-level transformation.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHOD

The study uses a qualitative, interpretive design that rests on two compatible traditions. The opening tradition is social constructionism, which treats aesthetic standards as

categories collectively produced, negotiated, and open to revision, and which denies them the status of fixed properties of bodies or garments. The second tradition is Bourdieu's field theory, which conceptualises fashion as a structured social space in which actors compete for symbolic capital under specific rules of legitimacy. The combination of those traditions supports an analysis of how new aesthetic positions are constructed and of how the existing structure of the field absorbs them, resists them, or pushes them to the margin.

Three sources of evidence were assembled for the period from 2021 to 2025. The first source is a purposive sample of twenty-four advertising campaigns from major global and challenger brands, which discourse analysis coded for representational claims, visual conventions, and rhetorical framings of inclusivity and sustainability. The second source is public industry commentary on runway castings, editorial coverage, and brand statements, which thematic review processed in order to identify recurring strategic patterns. The third source is a set of four brand cases selected for structured comparison on the basis of their prominence in industry discourse and the diversity of strategies they exemplify, covering inclusive sizing, modest fashion, digital-native influencer collaboration, and circularity. The analysis proceeded in iterations, alternating between case-level interpretation and cross-case synthesis, until the four-driver framework presented in Section IV stabilised.

Two complementary diagrams present the framework that organises the analysis. Fig. 1 introduces a typology of brand strategies along two axes, which are the depth of integration of inclusive practices and the breadth of drivers they engage, and the figure identifies the trajectory associated with durable pluralism. Fig. 2 depicts the four drivers as interacting forces operating within the sociocultural field of global fashion.

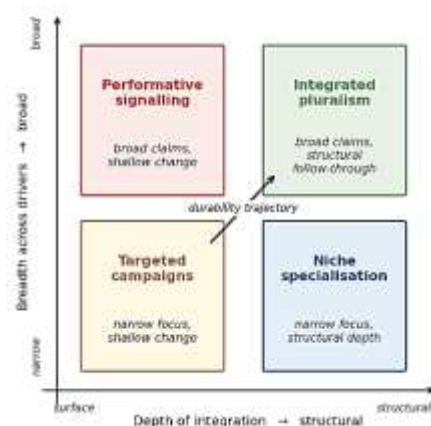


Fig. 1: A typology of brand strategies for aesthetic diversification, mapped along depth of integration and breadth of drivers engaged



Fig.2: Conceptual framework of four interacting drivers within the sociocultural field of global fashion

IV. RESULTS

4.1 Globalisation and Cultural Hybridisation

The opening driver concerns the diffusion of aesthetic codes from outside the traditional Euro-American centres. The expansion of Korean popular culture, the institutionalisation of modest fashion through dedicated weeks and retail categories [6], and the international visibility of African and Afro-diasporic design have altered the repertoire of styles that global gatekeepers recognise as legitimate. These developments cannot be reduced to a one-directional flow toward the periphery. They reorganise the centre and introduce new reference points that compete with longstanding ones [3].

The case material yields two observations. One observation is that hybridisation operates as a selective process. Elements of non-Western aesthetics that translate into the global luxury vocabulary with ease, such as silhouette experimentation or surface decoration, enter the field at a faster pace than elements that challenge the underlying logic of the field, such as alternative production rhythms. The other observation is that gains in visibility for non-Western aesthetics remain uneven across product categories and price points, which suggests that commercial calculation shapes hybridisation as much as cultural openness does.

4.2 Digital Platforms and Algorithmic Visibility

A second driver is the platformisation of taste-making. Social media has cut into the editorial monopoly that a small number of magazines and houses once held, and platforms have enabled a wider range of bodies and styles to gain visibility through peer-driven amplification. Within the typology in Fig. 1, platform-driven inclusion places most brands in the upper-left quadrant of broad and shallow signalling, and a smaller cohort of brands converts platform visibility into structural follow-through.

Platforms also introduce new constraints. Algorithmic systems reward engagement, which favours visual

conventions that the eye recognises at once and which produces a homogenised micro-aesthetic that travels across users at speed [1]. Influencer culture concentrates symbolic capital around individuals whose visibility depends on platform metrics and not on traditional editorial recognition, and the rapid turnover of micro-trends raises its own sustainability concerns. Platforms therefore widen aesthetic pluralism along some axes, and they compress it along others.

4.3 Body Positivity and Inclusivity Movements

A third driver is the cumulative pressure that body-positivity and the broader family of inclusivity movements exert on industry practice. Activist communities, consumer groups, and media commentary have raised the reputational cost of any absence of plus-size, mature, disabled, transgender, and non-binary representation. Brands that integrate inclusive sizing and casting as core operational choices, and not as occasional campaigns, appear in industry discourse as benchmarks [4].

The case material confirms the analytical value of separating structural inclusivity from performative inclusivity. Structural inclusivity becomes visible in the range of sizes that the brand produces and stocks, in the diversity of fit models used for product development, and in the composition of design teams. Performative inclusivity concentrates in seasonal campaigns and seldom changes the underlying production logic. The two forms coexist within the same firm, and firms deploy them as instruments for the management of reputational risk without a commitment to structural change [7].

4.4 Sustainability as an Aesthetic Value

A fourth driver concerns the reframing of sustainability and turns it from an ethical constraint into a recognisable aesthetic vocabulary. Visible mending, durable basics, monochrome capsule wardrobes, and the rehabilitation of secondhand garments as objects of taste now serve as markers of distinction among younger consumers in high-income markets [5]. Within Bourdieusian terms, ecological concern undergoes conversion into a form of cultural capital that operates alongside traditional markers of style.

The driver illustrates the analytical value of treating sustainability as a cultural category and as a material category at once. Where ecological vocabulary appears without corresponding changes in sourcing, production, or labour conditions, observers describe the outcome as greenwashing. Firms that integrate provenance, repair, and circularity into their core proposition develop a durable aesthetic identity that depends less on seasonal campaigns [8].

4.5 Cross-Driver Synthesis

Table 1 summarises the four drivers, their key mechanisms, illustrative cases, and theoretical anchors. The four drivers stand apart in analytical terms and remain entangled in empirical terms. The digital amplification of non-Western aesthetics activates the first and second drivers at the same time, and inclusivity claims appear bundled with sustainability claims in brand communication.

Table 1. Four drivers of aesthetic standards transformation

Driver	Key mechanism	Illustrative case	Theoretical anchor
Globalisation & cultural hybridisation	Diffusion of non-Western aesthetics through trade, migration, media	K-fashion, modest fashion, Afrofuturism	World-system, hybridity theory
Digital platforms & algorithmic visibility	Peer-driven taste-making and algorithmic amplification of niche bodies	TikTok micro-trends, Instagram influencer culture	Platform sociology, Bourdieu's field theory
Body positivity & inclusivity	Consumer pressure on size, race, age, gender representation	Savage X Fenty, Aerie, Skims	Critical body studies, intersectionality
Sustainability as aesthetic value	Reframing wear, repair, provenance as markers of taste	Slow fashion, secondhand luxury, repair-as-style	Eco-cultural capital, theories of consumption

V. DISCUSSION

Three implications follow from the analysis. The opening implication concerns the nature of the transformation itself. The diversification of aesthetic standards is real, and, as the typology in Fig. 1 shows, the change is best read as a reorganisation of the field and not as a linear move toward openness. New aesthetic positions enter the field, and they enter under conditions that existing gatekeepers set, among them legacy houses, large platforms, and influential retailers. The persistent gap between visibility on the runway and structural change in production, sourcing, and

decision-making shows that pluralism at the level of image can coexist with continuity at the level of organisation [2].

A second implication concerns the conditions under which pluralism becomes durable. The case material suggests that pluralism persists when operational decisions embed inclusive practices, when sourcing anchors sustainability claims and communication does not carry them on its own, and when non-Western design centres exercise editorial influence and not only inspirational influence. Pluralism that depends on platform attention or seasonal campaigning remains reversible and exposed to shifts in commercial sentiment [7].

A third implication is conceptual. A single hegemonic ideal no longer describes aesthetic standards in contemporary fashion. The field now hosts several legitimate but unequally resourced ideals that compete for symbolic capital. The shift calls for analytical tools that can represent plural and partially overlapping standards, of the kind that the framework in Fig. 2 suggests. The framework serves as a heuristic for further empirical work.

The analysis carries several limitations. The empirical material concentrates on the European, North American, and East Asian markets that dominate global fashion discourse, and the coverage of Global South consumer markets remains thin. The reliance on publicly available materials excludes the perspectives of designers, casting directors, and platform engineers, whose decisions shape the field from within. Future research can incorporate interviews with such actors and can examine markets where the four drivers interact under different institutional conditions.

VI. CONCLUSION

The article has argued that the transformation of aesthetic standards in the modern global fashion industry takes the form of a multidimensional sociocultural process driven by four interacting forces, which are globalisation and cultural hybridisation, digital platforms and algorithmic visibility, body-positivity and inclusivity movements, and the rise of sustainability as an aesthetic value. The qualitative, case-based design, grounded in social constructionism and field theory, has shown that each driver enlarges the repertoire of legitimate aesthetic positions and at the same time produces new exclusions and commercial pressures. The diversification observed across the past decade is real and uneven, and its durability depends on whether operational decisions absorb new aesthetic positions or whether such positions remain confined to communication. For brands, the practical implication is that credible pluralism calls for changes upstream of the campaign. For scholars, the implication is the need for integrated frameworks that can represent several legitimate aesthetic standards in tension.

For regulators and educators, the implication is that the visual transformation of the industry will not translate into structural change without aligned interventions in labour, sourcing, and platform governance.

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Ambedkar's Writings and Dalit Sensitivities: Voice, Suffering, and Repressed Emotions

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Abstract— This paper examines the intersections of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's structural, political, and philosophical writings with the interiority of Dalit sensitivities. While scholarship frequently emphasizes Ambedkar's legalism and constitutionalism, this study investigates how his oeuvre anchors the emotional landscape of the subaltern—specifically focusing on the articulation of institutionalized suffering, collective trauma, and repressed emotions. By close-reading foundational texts like *Annihilation of Caste*, *The Untouchables*, and his autobiographical notes in *Waiting for a Visa*, this paper maps the transition of Dalit consciousness from silent, internalized humiliation to an organized, confrontational socio-political voice. The paper argues that Ambedkar's writing functions not merely as political theory, but as an affective archive that legitimizes Dalit grief and translates visceral anger into structured emancipatory grammar.



Keywords— Ambedkar, Dalit Sensitivities, Repressed Emotions, Trauma, Affect Theory, Subaltern Voice.

I. INTRODUCTION: THE AFFECTIVE DIMENSION OF AMBEDKARISM

Scholarly engagements with Dr. B.R. Ambedkar primarily position him as a jurist, constitutional architect, and socio-political reformer. While these designations are indisputably accurate, they occasionally obscure the deeply visceral, emotional, and phenomenological underpinnings of his intellectual project. Ambedkar's writings do not operate solely within cold, detached legal frameworks; they are profoundly attuned to what can be termed *Dalit sensitivity*—the unique matrix of psychological vulnerability, historical trauma, and systemic humiliation experienced by those relegated to the nadir of the caste hierarchy.

This paper explores how Ambedkar's texts serve as an archive of repressed emotions, an anatomy of institutionalized suffering, and a catalyst for subaltern voice. In doing so, it bridges political philosophy with affect theory, illustrating that the destruction of the caste system required both structural reorganization and a psychological resurrection of the self.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: TRAUMA, AFFECT, AND THE SUBALTERN

To understand the emotional depth of Dalit sensitivities, it is necessary to deploy lenses from both Subaltern Studies and Affect Theory.

- **Systemic Humiliation:** Unlike occasional or situational trauma, caste-based humiliation is existential and continuous. It is a form of violence that penetrates everyday interactions, spatial structures, and bodily topographies.
- **Repressed Emotions:** Centuries of enforced untouchability conditioned the oppressed to internalize their degradation. Fear, grief, and indignation were historically repressed because their overt expression invited lethal retributive violence from dominant castes.
- **The Ambedkarite Shift:** Ambedkar intervenes in this historical impasse by providing a vocabulary for these repressed affects. He transforms what was treated as an unalterable cosmic fate into a historicized, political injustice.

III. THE ANATOMY OF SUFFERING: TEXTUAL MANIFESTATIONS

3.1 *Waiting for a Visa*: The Phenomenology of Exclusion

In his autobiographical fragments collected in *Waiting for a Visa*, Ambedkar moves away from macroeconomic data to detail the raw, localized reality of untouchability. The narrative is heavy with the affective weight of vulnerability.

Consider his recollection of a childhood journey to Koregaon, where he and his siblings were stranded at a railway station because no cart-driver would carry them upon discovering their Mahar identity. The text highlights a specific emotional mutation: the sudden transition from innocent childhood anticipation to crushing, alienating shame. Ambedkar writes:

"This picture of helplessness and loneliness has remained vivid in my memory... It was then for the first time that I knew I was an Untouchable, and what Untouchability meant."

Here, suffering is not an abstract sociological category. It is the physical experience of thirst in the scorching heat, the somatic shock of being treated as a pollutant, and the psychological realization that one's very existence inspires revulsion.

3.2 *Annihilation of Caste*: Anger as an Intellectual Force

If *Waiting for a Visa* documents grief and vulnerability, *Annihilation of Caste* (1936) is a masterclass in intellectualized rage. Originally written as a speech for the *Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal*, the text systematically dismantles the spiritual defense of caste.

Ambedkar's tone in this work is deliberately uncompromising. He targets the emotional complicity of the privileged, stating that the upper-caste Hindus have "sacrificed most precious moral values" to preserve their social status. By treating the Hindu scriptures (*Shastras* and *Smritis*) not as divine revelations but as blueprints for institutionalized cruelty, Ambedkar liberates the Dalit reader from the psychological guilt of religious transgression. The text validates the reader's repressed anger, transforming it into an analytical tool to deconstruct sacred hegemony.

IV. VOICE VS. SILENCE: BREAKING THE CULTURE OF DEFERENCE

For centuries, Dalit sensitivity was characterized by an enforced "culture of deference"—a behavioral code where the oppressed had to perform their own inferiority through language, dress, and posture. Ambedkar understood that true emancipation required the total eradication of this psychological submissiveness.

Through his newspapers—*Mooknayak* (The Leader of the Dumb), *Bahishkrit Bharat* (Excluded India), and *Janata* (The People)—Ambedkar directly challenged this silence. The title *Mooknayak* itself is a profound commentary on affect; it recognizes the existence of a voice that has been violently muted.

Periodical	Year Launched	Core Affective/Political Focus
Mooknayak	1920	Articulating the silence of the voiceless; establishing a distinct subaltern identity.
Bahishkrit Bharat	1927	Countering right-wing narratives; documenting active civic protests (e.g., Mahad Satyagraha).
Janata	1930	Broadening the struggle into a collective, democratic demand for labor and human rights.

Ambedkar's writings within these periodicals acted as a mirror, showing the Dalit community that their suffering was neither natural nor divinely ordained, but a human construct designed for economic and social exploitation.

V. FROM PATHOS TO ETHOS: THE MAHAD SATYAGRAHA AS TEXT AND PERFORMANCE

The Mahad Satyagraha of 1927, where Ambedkar led Dalits to drink water from the Chardar Tank, was both a political protest and a massive socio-emotional performance. The speech he delivered at Mahad, later canonized in Dalit political thought, explicitly shifts the narrative from *pathos* (appealing to the pity of the oppressor) to *ethos* (asserting the fundamental dignity of the self).

Ambedkar argued that the protest was not merely about water, but about establishing human equality. He declared:

"We are not going to the Chardar Tank to merely drink water... We are going to the Tank to assert that we too are human beings like others."

By framing the access to a basic natural resource as an assertion of ontological equality, Ambedkar altered the internal emotional landscape of his followers. The act of drinking water became a ritual of psychological rebirth, breaking the internal taboo of pollution that had kept Dalit emotions repressed for generations.

VI. THE ULTIMATE SUBVERSION: NAVAYANA BUDDHISM AND EMOTIONAL LIBERATION

The culmination of Ambedkar's engagement with Dalit sensitivity is his final act: the mass conversion to Buddhism in 1956, formalized in his posthumously published magnum opus, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*.

Ambedkar recognized that as long as Dalits remained within the metaphysical framework of Hinduism, their self-perception would always be tainted by the concept of inherited sin (*Karma*) and existential impurity. Conversion to *Navayana* (Neo-Buddhism) was fundamentally an act of emotional and spiritual purging.

By rejecting the Hindu pantheon through his 22 vows, Ambedkar systematically excised the sources of religious guilt and inferiority. *The Buddha and His Dhamma* reconstructs Buddhism not as an ascetic retreat from reality, but as an active social ethic centered on *Karuna* (compassion) and *Pradnya* (understanding). This shifted the emotional anchor of Dalit sensitivity from a locus of shame and alienation to one of dignity, brotherhood (*Maitri*), and cosmic equality.

VII. CONCLUSION: THE LIVING ARCHIVE

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's writings do far more than outline legal clauses or policy directives; they map the complex contours of the subaltern heart. They capture the historical sighs of millions and translate them into a vibrant, unyielding grammar of dissent.

By archiving Dalit suffering, validating repressed anger, and constructing new pathways for spiritual and emotional liberation, Ambedkar laid the intellectual foundation for the modern Dalit literary movement and political consciousness. His works remain a living archive, reminding us that social justice is incomplete without the restoration of psychological dignity and the complete liberation of the repressed self.

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Manohar Malgonkar's Combat of Shadows and Racism

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Abstract— This research paper is a study of the pride and prejudice of the ruling Britishers against the Indians and the glimpses of Indian politicians who are detrimental to the progress and prosperity of India due to their opportunistic nationalism. It projects the story of the British men who stayed in India for a long time left no stone unturned for vulgarizing the Indians through different means. The story of the novel *Combat of Shadows* revolves round the central figure Henry Winton, the British Plantation Manager of the Brindian Tea Company. In spite of the difference in race and nationality, Henry Winton is well intentioned; but soon, he finds himself in a demoralising and dehumanising situation which leads him towards corruption and moral degeneration. For the purpose of giving moral pills, Malgonkar chooses Henry Winton who has nothing to do with morals and code of conduct on which life should be based. He does what he likes and remains lost in the jungle of sensual pleasure. By showing him burning alive in a game-cottage, the author forms the lessons in an appalling way which makes one keep away from the path trodden by persons like Henry Winton.



Keywords— Racism, detrimental, opportunistic, vulgarizing, dehumanising, race and nationality.

Manohar Malgonkar was one of the prominent Indo English novelists. Like Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and others, he was a prolific and voluminous writer. He was one of those few Indo-Anglian novelists who show the hollowness of the concept of racial superiority in the bigger context of social life. So far as the ethical value is concerned, *Combat of Shadows* comes first from the hand of Manohar Malgonkar as a novelist. It takes an epigraph from the Bhagavad-Gita, verse 27, and runs into 35 chapters in all. Bhabani Bhattacharya observes, *Combat of Shadows* as “a humble attempt to delineate human nature in the light of Shrimad Bhagavadgita” (1984: 162).

In *Combat of Shadows* the concept of racial superiority was often extended by the British for the continuation of the British rule in India. Henry Winton is blind with racial arrogance and represents the British tendency of looking down upon the Indians. Malgonkar presents him as a true representative of the British race in an ironical way. Henry Winton who is proud and conscious of his racial superiority, often lapses into cowardice. He pales into insignificance before the ‘*Combat of Shadows*.’ Amur says about Winton’s story, “It culminates in the hero’s apocalyptic

realization of the ‘moment of truth’” (1973: 39). Henry Winton is one of the British Managers of the Brindian Tea Company having his headquarters at Silent Hill. He is young and masculine. He has a strong enchantment towards hunting and shooting. He appears as a dominate figure, a man of power and a man of strong will. He came to India with the education of Public School in England. He brought with himself many vices as his failure as a dealer in used cars in his own country has already undermined his character. His main aim here was to earn money and he was fearful of his failure.

Henry Winton, a British Plantation Manager, has developed a fondness for Ruby Miranda, a beautiful and bold Anglo-Indian girl, and is at once struck by her good looks. He is moved by his lust for her “eyes of the real Chandani Chowk whore, black and gold” (19). She is appointed as the Headmistress of the Silent Hill School by Winton because her beautiful face is the only recommendation against other candidates. He uses her as a mistress to break the loneliness and monotony of his plantation life in a remote corner of north-eastern Assam.

When Henry takes Ruby as a teacher in his school, he means to use her to gratify his sexual desire. He dwells on her physical charm. He sees her through his lustful eyes and reduces to an object of sex. He finds her as splendid in looks as in love making, if not so perfect in her accent and pronunciation. Whereas his colleagues mostly go for coolie women, Henry has shown himself as a man of taste in the choice of a mistress and he congratulates himself upon his choice.

As Henry wants to make a success of his career and as he places his career above everything else. Till he secures his career, he doesn't wish to get involved with a native woman, however beautiful she might be and however close she might be to his own race. He knows from his experiences of others that his career would be ruined if he failed to see "the thin line that divides fun from serious involvement," as his boss Sir Jeffry Dart puts it (108). He longs for Ruby at night, but is formal and guarded in the daytime. His exclusive sexual interest is exposed when one finds him uncomfortable when her talk veers towards the subject of marriage.

During this early period, Henry does sometimes sincerely appreciate Ruby's qualities. If the idea of marriage comes to Henry's mind when he is in such an appreciative mood, Eddie's application for a job arouses his suspicion of her loyalty and he quickly brushes the thought of marriage aside. Being a man of pride, he cannot bear to have a Eurasian as a rival in love and at once, his attitude towards Ruby Miranda changes. We see Henry's conceit and pride in his reactions to Ruby's angry outbursts at the meeting which takes place in his bungalow after he comes back from England, married. He was shocked to realize that she had greater expectations. Though Henry later protests against Jean's accusation that he did not marry Ruby because of his sense of racial superiority, he cannot really be said to be free from racial arrogance. Eddie Trevors is, it may be conceded, a bounder, but the degree of revulsion the Eurasian arouses in Henry cannot be explained away wholly in terms of common human pride. Jean Walters, whom Henry marries, had an English lover, but this does not hurt Henry so much. The way he reflects upon his relationship with Ruby during this clearly shows that his pride comes from a sense of racial superiority.

Unfortunately, Ruby is playing a game, the rules of which Henry does not know. She accepts the offer of the teaching job on Henry's plantation with the sole aim of winning and marrying the white man, who is "a passport to the dream-world of Eurasian woman-hood" (151). Initially Ruby's mother is against her taking the job and she advises her daughter, "don't go running after English men; they don't marry, not the pucca ones" (99). Eddie Trevors, her

lover, warns her, "the bloody English swine will give you a brat" (102). Despite the advice and warnings from well-meaning people, Ruby takes up the appointment and pursues her aim with single-minded devotion.

Like most of her fellow Anglo-Indians, Ruby is most unhappy with her Indian connection and she wants to become pure and whole by marriage with a white man. There are no words, the author writes, to describe the secret unspoken dream of her life, the dream of Anglo India:

She could never have explained to Henry Winton the throbbing, compulsive craving of Anglo-India to seek living Kinship with the West; the desperate daily struggle of separation and alignment, the tight clutching of the tenuous, often imaginary strands of relationships with the sahib's, the constant vigilance against further assimilation with the smothering, enveloping people of the Indian-soil. Above all, she could never have laid bare to any outsider her own personal dream of becoming someday sahib's lady, going into the reserved, all white clubs with her head held high, escorted by an Englishman without the slightest trace of coloured blood; of bearing blue-eyed, flaxen-haired children, of going to London for a dizzy round of the town and gaze at the King himself; and then of settling down in a cool, antiseptic, wholly English suburb and washing away the contamination of India and Tinapur. No effort was too much for the fulfilment of that constant, aching dream, no sacrifice too great—not even the sacrifice of the love of a man like Eddie Trevor (103).

Not Until Henry has been humbled by the slow discovery of his wife's disloyalty was he able to love Ruby. Humbled and chastened by his tragic experience of a loveless married life, he turns to Ruby, setting aside his earlier fear, pride, and racial prejudice. He views Ruby from a different angle now. To his great surprise and happiness, Henry finds that Ruby has learnt to speak English in the real BBC style. He invites Ruby to the game cottage in the forest, where he decides to propose to her.

Meanwhile, Ruby has taken her frustration in love as a further confirmation of the general Anglo-Indian belief that there is nothing but sorrow and disappointment in their seeking kinship with the white race, and she will, therefore, not be taken in by Henry's advances now. She is blinded by racial hatred and she cannot naturally see the change that has taken place in Henry's outlook. Concealing her aversion for him behind her smile, gestures, and sexual appeal, she accepts his invitation to spend the night with him in the game cottage. Though Ruby has been encouraging his advances, she has other plans in mind. With the help of a group of a people who bear grudges against Henry for one reason or other, Ruby has the game cottage set on fire, and

Henry is killed in the fire. Dr. Ashok Kumar Sharma observes:

“His prejudice and envy blurs his insight and self-realisation fails to save him from the fire of hell (1995:26)”.

Another craze for Winton is to join the military commission in the ensuing course at Belgaum, but this also remains unfulfilled. His competitor in love, Eddie, gets the commission and is to join the Academy within two weeks before he gets killed by the bumptious elephant, but Winton's wait without hope for a call up never materialises. For this, too, he envies Eddie, and subtly plots his murder. The only natural justice for him is what he meets with at the hands of his own people at the close of the novel. It shows his identity in which he appears to be self-cantered and immoral. For a long time he remains indulged in sensual pleasure that makes him morally weak. Moreover, his defeat as a hunter gives him a clear trait of corruption in his character. Philosophically, the novelist stands balanced and rational in his analysis of the forces—sex, money and fame—that make the mare go, he appears to be indignant against the Indian politicians. Malgonkar does not experience even a little bit of elation while depicting Indian reformer leaders. Kai Nicholson observes:

“There is a certain amount of caricature on the politician's personality buildup which Malgonkar utilizes to belittle him (1972: 37)”.

The novel presents several other sad racial encounters and the pitiable consequences of those encounters. Though the amorous story of Jean and Eddie is sketchily presented from the outside, it seems as though racial considerations do not stand in the way of their love. However, marriage does not come through even in this case, as Henry cunningly sets Eddie after a rogue elephant with dud cartridges and sends him to his death. Eddie is one of the large number of products of illicit sex and love, and he dies not knowing that his real father is no other than Sir Jeffrey Dart, the Resident Director, the man who views with great displeasure his officers getting involved with native women. When Eddie's mother was big with the child of Sir Jeffrey, he quietly got her married off to his watchman. The British officers on the plantation use without scruple coolie women to satisfy their sex, and if any complication like pregnancy arises, they give them a couple of hundred rupees to clear their conscience.

Very skilfully, Malgonkar appears to show that no race can claim to be in the strict adherence to the morality. Winton believes that the white skin is superior to that dark in strict adherence to this illusion has long nourished his sense of superiority. And this illusion of superiority is exploded here. It was too late when he realizes that he has real love in her heart for Ruby Miranda. Perhaps, his failure

in search of his moral identify with his own race compels him to feel deep involvement with Ruby: His whole system craved for her with a fierce insistence, to crush her into his arms, to feel the hardness of her taut breasts, the nipples burning patches of fire into his chest to smother her whole smooth honey coloured body with kisses became an urgent, almost an insane longing. From nowhere at all, an intense, burning thirst had sprung up, it was both physical and emotional, and quite irrepressible. It was the sort of longing that people commit murders for, he told himself (232).

He also feels and knows what led him to betray this passion:

. . . Henry knew within himself that he had renounced her love not because he did not reciprocate it, nor even because it was not the love of a white woman, as Jean has taunted him, but through fear, because Sudden dart had warned him not to get involved with her; fear that his career would have ended he had carried on as he was doing (276-77). To read this novel as a story of racial encounter is not away from reality. But some critics have a view that the end of the novel complicates the matter G. S. Amur says:

“What makes ‘Combat of Shadows’ superior to Bhowani Junction is the modernity of its theme and artistic integrity with which it is worked out in fictional terms. It is true that Malgonkar's predilection for his revenge theme which cuts across his moral discrimination as in the final episode of the novel where sudden Pasupati and Ruby are united in their hatred of Winton, confuses his statement on the racial situation and makes it less valuable than that of, say, Kipling or Forster, but his treatment of the main theme, the moral disintegrating of a European on foreign soil, has no parallel outside Conrad. In ‘Combat of Shadows’ Malgonkar perfected not only his art of story-telling but also the tools moral analysis which he was to put greater use in the later novels (1973: 76)”.

To interpret *Combat of Shadows* as a valid comment on the racial situation is to put more weight on it than it can bear. In fact, the final episode does not confuse the statement on the racial situation. It merely proves that the basic passions of men are the same in spite of their racial differences. Moreover, the author wants to say that the general tendency of all the men is to hate the bad and love the good. Only on this ground the characters of the different races unite in wreaking vengeance against the corrupt and dishonest Winton. Still further the novelist wants to suggest that a man who is morally corrupt cannot be accepted by the society even when it is made of various races.

CONCLUSION

This brief analysis of the novel *Combat of Shadows* shows that Manohar Malgonkar is a writer with purpose—and the purpose is to enlighten the mind and broaden the heart of the reader with the exposition of moral values without which the entire world appears to be wasteland even to T. S. Eliot (1990) a great modern poet and critic. Eliot writes in his “The Waste Land:”

“You cannot, say or guess, for you know only A heap of broken images, where the sun beats, And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief, And the dry stone no sound of water, only There is no shadow under this red rock (1990: 72)”.

For the purpose of giving moral pills the novelist in this novel chooses a weak, lecher and dishonest character, Henry Winton who has nothing to do with morals and code of conduct on which life should be based. He does what he likes and remains lost in the jungle of sensual pleasure. By showing him burning alive in a game cottage, the author forms the lessons in an appalling way which makes one keep away from the path trodden by persons like Henry Winton. From moralistic point of view this novel is the most philosophical one. It is not to be inferred that he ignores the claims of art for the celebration of moral values. The novelist's craftsmanship lies in weaving morals in the fabric of the novels.

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Meaning without Reference: The Snark as a Non-Referring Sign in Lewis Carroll's *The Hunting of the Snark*

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Abstract— Lewis Carroll's *The Hunting of the Snark* has long been read as playful nonsense or cryptic allegory, but such approaches overlook the poem's most unsettling feature: meaning persists even when reference becomes impossible. This paper argues that the Snark functions as a non-referring sign. It is a signifier that generates belief, authority, and coordinated social action whilst systematically foreclosing any stable referential ground. Drawing on close textual analysis and Wittgensteinian concepts of language-games and rule-following, the essay demonstrates that meaning in the poem does not collapse through semantic chaos or lexical excess. Instead, it unravels precisely through the successful execution of a fully public, rule-governed linguistic practice. The hunting party follows procedures, heeds warnings, and maintains collective confidence without ever establishing what the Snark actually is. The Bellman's authority rests not upon knowledge but on procedural maintenance. When the Baker finally encounters the creature, the moment of supposed confirmation becomes one of disappearance: 'For the Snark was a Boojum, you see.' This semantic catastrophe exposes a profound fragility in linguistic certainty. Carroll's poem reveals that language can remain operationally coherent and socially binding even when it lacks any survivable referential anchor. Far from mere whimsy, *The Hunting of the Snark* emerges as a radical literary experiment in meaning without reference, dramatising the unsettling possibility that we may speak meaningfully together about something that cannot survive being found.



Keywords— language-games, nonsense literature, reference, rule-following, semantics, Wittgenstein.

I. INTRODUCTION

Lewis Carroll's *The Hunting of the Snark* (1876) has long resisted stable critical classification. The poem is frequently grouped with Carroll's other nonsense compositions and is often approached as playful absurdity, satirical fantasy, or semantic indeterminacy (Lecerle; Sewell). Such readings, whilst attentive to the poem's comic surface and linguistic inventiveness, tend to proceed from an assumption that remains insufficiently examined: that the poem's central object, the Snark, either conceals a recoverable referent or signifies nothing at all. This paper challenges that assumption. It does not ask what the Snark 'really' is. Instead, it asks a more radical question: what kind of linguistic object must something be in order to destroy its own conditions of reference? In this respect, the poem is not merely whimsical or elusive. It stages a sustained and

disquieting inquiry into the relation between naming, procedure, and meaning. Critical accounts of Carrollian nonsense have traditionally emphasised either linguistic excess or semantic vacancy. Jean-Jacques Lecerle describes nonsense as a form of 'regulated violence against language', thereby foregrounding its destabilising relation to ordinary sense (Lecerle). Elizabeth Sewell similarly treats nonsense as a mode governed by internal patterning rather than referential transparency (Sewell). These formulations illuminate the playful instability of Carroll's idiom, yet they do not fully account for the peculiar seriousness of *The Hunting of the Snark*. The Snark is not merely linguistically unruly; it commands belief, fear, preparation, and disciplined pursuit. The poem stages an elaborate social enterprise that is complete with roles, criteria, and procedural authority and is centred on an object

whose apparent discovery culminates not in knowledge but in disappearance (Carroll).

This study argues that the Snark functions as a non-referring sign. It is a signifier that generates meaning-effects whilst structurally foreclosing stable reference. Meaning in *The Hunting of the Snark* does not collapse because of indeterminacy, ambiguity, or misuse. Rather, it collapses through the successful execution of its own procedures. The poem is therefore better understood not as a puzzle to be decoded, nor as a mere instance of literary nonsense, but as a radical experiment in meaning without reference.

Research Rationale

The rationale for this study is based in the need to reassess the theoretical assumptions underlying critical treatments of literary nonsense. Existing scholarship has tended to approach Carroll's poem either as a playful exercise in semantic destabilisation or as a coded allegory awaiting interpretative recovery. Both approaches, however, presuppose that the poem's meaning must ultimately reside either in referential clarity or in deliberate referential chaos. This binary framework obscures a more complex possibility: that Carroll's text stages a linguistic situation in which meaning persists as a social and procedural phenomenon even when reference becomes structurally impossible.

This research is further justified by the poem's continued relevance to philosophical debates concerning language, rule-following, and semantic certainty. By analysing *The Hunting of the Snark* through the lens of language-game theory and rule-following considerations, this study aims to demonstrate that Carroll's nonsense offers more than literary amusement. It provides a literary exploration of how linguistic practices can remain operationally coherent whilst lacking stable referential foundations. The hunting expedition functions as a sustained thought experiment in the social dimensions of meaning, exposing the fragility of linguistic certainty when procedural correctness is detached from survivable referential grounding.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Nonsense and the Problem of Meaning

The critical tradition surrounding Carroll's nonsense writing has frequently treated semantic instability as its defining characteristic. Lecercle describes literary nonsense as a mode that deliberately violates the norms governing ordinary language, creating what he terms a 'regulated violence' against linguistic order (Lecercle). In this view, nonsense does not simply abandon meaning;

rather, it destabilises the rules through which meaning ordinarily emerges.

Sewell's earlier study of nonsense literature likewise emphasises the patterned nature of nonsense discourse. For Sewell, nonsense is not chaotic but governed by its own internal structures and constraints. These structures generate an alternative form of intelligibility that differs from referential language whilst still remaining recognisable as language (Sewell). Carroll's works frequently illustrate this paradox: the surface of nonsense may appear absurd, but it continues to operate through grammatically coherent sentences, recognisable narrative forms, and stable linguistic procedures.

Such accounts illuminate an important aspect of Carroll's writing, yet they do not fully explain the peculiar structure of *The Hunting of the Snark*. Unlike many nonsense texts that foreground verbal play, Carroll's poem constructs an elaborate collective enterprise centred upon a single object of pursuit. The hunting party does not treat the Snark as a whimsical fiction; they treat it as an object whose existence commands preparation, caution, and methodical action. The central difficulty of the poem therefore lies not merely in linguistic absurdity but in the tension between procedural certainty and referential uncertainty.

As Wim Tigges observes, literary nonsense typically operates through a delicate balance between recognisable linguistic patterns and elements that resist interpretative closure (Tigges). Readers are able to follow the narrative and understand the procedures governing the hunt even though the object of that hunt remains elusive. The poem thus maintains intelligibility at the level of linguistic structure whilst simultaneously destabilising the referential expectations that normally accompany such structure.

Allegorical Interpretations and Their Limits

Because the poem appears to withhold referential clarity, critics have frequently attempted to recover a hidden meaning beneath its playful surface. A long tradition of interpretation has treated *The Hunting of the Snark* as a form of allegory. In such readings, the Snark becomes a symbolic stand-in for some more determinate object: philosophical truth, existential anxiety, the pursuit of knowledge, or the dangers of intellectual overreach.

These allegorical interpretations are understandable. Carroll's poem invites speculation by providing fragments of descriptive language that appear to gesture towards a coherent meaning without ever confirming one. Yet allegorical readings encounter a persistent difficulty. Allegory typically depends upon a stable correspondence between sign and referent. In *The Hunting of the Snark*, however, the poem systematically

undermines the possibility of such correspondence. The Snark is repeatedly named, described, and pursued, but these descriptions never accumulate into a coherent referential identity.

The tension between procedural certainty and referential absence suggests that the interpretative impulse itself may be part of the poem's design. Rather than concealing a hidden allegorical meaning, *The Hunting of the Snark* may instead dramatise the conditions under which meaning becomes impossible to stabilise.

III. METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this article employs a multi-layered semantic analysis situated within the broader framework of philosophy of language and literary theory. This study adopts an interpretative paradigm that interlinks close textual analysis with concepts drawn from Ludwig Wittgenstein's later philosophy and Saul Kripke's influential reading of Wittgenstein on rules and private language.

The primary text, *The Hunting of the Snark*, is read as a literary staging of linguistic practices that foreground the relationship between naming, procedure, and reference. To evaluate the poem's treatment of meaning, the study uses a phenomenological approach that attends to the hunters' shared behaviours, linguistic exchanges, and procedural commitments rather than seeking a hidden allegorical referent. The analysis utilises Wittgenstein's concept of language-games to examine how meaning emerges from participation in rule-governed social practices, even when those practices lack secure referential anchorage. Kripke's exposition of rule-following provides a supplementary framework for understanding how the poem dramatises the relationship between communal agreement and semantic certainty.

The Snark as a Non-Referring Sign

Naming Without Reference

Throughout *The Hunting of the Snark*, the central object of the expedition is repeatedly named but never successfully identified. The hunters speak of the Snark with apparent confidence, yet the poem provides no stable set of characteristics by which the creature might be recognised. The Bellman's instructions emphasise the importance of method and caution, but these instructions do not culminate in any definitive description of the object itself. Instead, the language surrounding the Snark consists of fragmentary hints, warnings, and speculative remarks (Carroll).

This peculiar situation raises an important linguistic question: what happens when a name circulates within a community without securing a determinate referent? In ordinary language, naming typically

presupposes some form of shared reference. In Carroll's poem, however, the name 'Snark' appears to function without ever establishing such a referential anchor.

The hunters nevertheless behave as though the name were perfectly meaningful. They organise an expedition, distribute roles, and follow a series of procedures designed to facilitate the hunt. The name therefore operates as a coordinating linguistic device rather than as a transparent label for a stable object. The crew's collective activity depends not on knowing what the Snark is, but on sharing the conviction that the name refers to something worth pursuing.

Carroll's poem carefully reproduces this social dimension of naming. The members of the hunting party appear to share a common understanding of the term 'Snark', even though the poem never provides a description capable of fixing its identity. The name circulates within the group as a point of coordination: it justifies the expedition, organises the hunters' actions, and structures their expectations about what they might encounter. Naming thus becomes an activity that generates practical coherence without securing semantic certainty.

Procedural Authority and the Bellman

The Bellman occupies a central role in sustaining this linguistic arrangement. As the leader of the expedition, he provides the instructions and warnings that guide the hunters' actions. Yet his authority does not derive from possessing privileged knowledge about the Snark. Instead, it arises from his ability to articulate and maintain the procedures that structure the hunt.

The Bellman's authority is reinforced by the fact that the hunters appear willing to accept his procedural guidance without demanding epistemic justification. His instructions are followed not because he provides a definitive account of the Snark, but because he establishes the rules through which the hunt becomes possible. The crew's confidence in these procedures allows the expedition to proceed despite the persistent absence of referential clarity.

This dynamic highlights an important feature of the poem's linguistic structure. Meaning within the hunting expedition is sustained by shared participation in a rule-governed practice rather than by access to privileged knowledge. The hunters trust the procedures of the hunt even when the object of that hunt remains obscure. As a result, the Bellman's authority rests on maintaining the continuity of these procedures rather than on revealing new information about the creature itself.

The Bellman's instructions are striking for their emphasis on method rather than knowledge. The hunters are

repeatedly reminded to follow certain practices, to remain cautious, and to remain attentive to the possibility that the Snark might in fact be a Boojum (Carroll). These instructions create a framework within which the expedition can proceed even though the object of the hunt remains uncertain.

Such a structure resonates with Wittgenstein's discussion of rule-following and linguistic practice, particularly the idea that meaning is sustained through public forms of agreement rather than through private acts of reference (Wittgenstein). Within the poem, the Bellman functions as the figure who preserves this agreement. His instructions stabilise the linguistic framework within which the hunters can continue to speak meaningfully about the Snark even though its identity remains uncertain.

Language-Games and Rule-Following

Wittgenstein's concept of language-games provides a useful framework for understanding the linguistic dynamics of Carroll's poem. For Wittgenstein, the meaning of a word is not determined by a fixed referent but by its use within a form of life—a shared social practice governed by public rules (Wittgenstein). Language-games derive their coherence not from correspondence to external objects but from the regularity of their application within a community.

In *The Hunting of the Snark*, the hunting expedition constitutes precisely such a language-game. The participants share a set of rules, expectations, and behavioural norms that enable them to coordinate their actions meaningfully. The term 'Snark' derives its significance not from a stable referent but from its role within this shared practice. The hunters know how to use the term appropriately within the context of the expedition, even though they cannot identify its referent with certainty.

Kripke's influential reading of Wittgenstein emphasises that rule-following is fundamentally a social phenomenon. For Kripke, the possibility of meaning depends upon the existence of a community that can judge whether a speaker is following a rule correctly (Kripke). Meaning is not a private mental state but a publicly observable practice subject to communal standards of correctness.

Carroll's poem dramatises both the power and the fragility of this arrangement. The hunting expedition demonstrates that a community can sustain meaningful discourse through shared rule-following even when the supposed object of that discourse remains elusive. Yet the poem also reveals the limits of this arrangement. The language-game of the hunt functions smoothly for most of the poem, enabling the hunters to coordinate their actions and maintain collective belief in the meaningfulness of their

enterprise. However, when the system attempts to anchor itself in an actual encounter with its supposed referent, it collapses.

The Boojum and Semantic Catastrophe

The fragile equilibrium sustaining the hunt ultimately collapses with the introduction of the Boojum. The Bellman repeatedly warns that some Snarks are in fact Boojums, and that encountering such a creature will result in the sudden disappearance of the hunter (Carroll). This warning initially appears as one more procedural detail within the structure of the expedition. Yet it eventually becomes the mechanism through which the poem reveals the consequences of its peculiar linguistic arrangement.

When the Baker finally encounters the creature he has been pursuing, the anticipated moment of discovery never occurs. Instead of providing confirmation or clarification, the encounter leads to his immediate disappearance: 'For the Snark was a Boojum, you see' (Carroll). The result is not knowledge but absence.

This moment exposes the fundamental instability of the linguistic practice that had sustained the hunt. The entire expedition had been organised around the expectation that the Snark could eventually be encountered and recognised. Yet the very moment that should have secured reference instead eliminates the subject capable of confirming it.

The Boojum therefore represents what might be described as semantic catastrophe. The linguistic system governing the hunt functions smoothly for most of the poem, enabling the hunters to coordinate their actions and maintain collective belief in the meaningfulness of their enterprise. However, when the system attempts to anchor itself in an actual referent, it collapses. The hunt does not fail because its rules are violated; it fails because those rules succeed in guiding the hunters towards an object that cannot be meaningfully encountered.

Carroll's poem thus dramatises a striking paradox: language can sustain social order, authority, and coordinated action even when its supposed referential foundation proves impossible to secure. The disappearance of the Baker reveals the ultimate consequence of this arrangement. The language-game of the hunt remains coherent and rule-governed, yet it cannot survive contact with the very object it purports to be about.

IV. CONCLUSION

The Hunting of the Snark has often been read as an example of literary nonsense whose apparent absurdity resists coherent interpretation. Such readings have emphasised the poem's playful linguistic surface or sought

to recover a hidden allegorical meaning beneath it. Whilst these approaches illuminate important aspects of Carroll's writing, they do not fully account for the peculiar structure of the poem's central object. The Snark is neither a recoverable symbol nor a simple instance of semantic chaos. Rather, it functions as a signifier that sustains collective belief and coordinated action whilst withholding the possibility of stable reference.

The analysis presented in this paper has argued that the poem constructs a linguistic situation in which procedural certainty coexists with referential absence. The hunters share rules, warnings, and expectations that enable them to organise their expedition with remarkable confidence. The authority of the Bellman derives not from possessing knowledge about the Snark but from maintaining the procedures that guide the hunt. Meaning within the poem therefore emerges from participation in a shared linguistic practice rather than from direct contact with a clearly identifiable object. The appearance of the Boojum ultimately reveals the fragility of this arrangement. The moment that should confirm the reality of the Snark instead produces disappearance, eliminating the very subject who might have verified the referent. The encounter does not resolve the hunt but exposes the structural limits of the linguistic system that had sustained it. In this sense, the poem does not simply frustrate interpretation; it dramatises the consequences of a linguistic practice that functions successfully whilst lacking a survivable referential foundation. Seen in this light, *The Hunting of the Snark* offers more than a playful exercise in nonsense. Carroll's poem becomes a subtle literary exploration of how meaning can persist within a community even when the object that supposedly grounds that meaning cannot be secured. The hunters' enterprise continues for most of the poem because their linguistic practices remain intact. Yet the disappearance of the Baker reveals that such practices ultimately depend upon a referential stability that the poem itself refuses to provide. Carroll's text thus exposes a paradox at the heart of linguistic certainty. Language may remain socially effective, procedurally ordered, and collectively meaningful even when it fails to anchor itself securely in the world it claims to describe. The Snark, in this sense, is not merely an elusive creature but a literary demonstration of the fragile boundary between meaningful discourse and semantic collapse.

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The Love Conundrum: A Comparative study of Shakespeare's Julia and Viola

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Abstract— *Shakespearean comedies are widely recognized for their complex characters and sophisticated examination of themes. Through a comparative analysis, this research paper aims to study the labyrinthine themes of love and disguise in two of William Shakespeare's well acclaimed comedies, The Two Gentlemen of Verona from his earlier plays and Twelfth Night from his later plays. The study primarily focuses on analysing the selected monologues and soliloquies of the protagonists—Julia and Viola—to elucidate their inner worlds and motivations to pursue their love. By colligating these characters' self-expressions, the paper aims to contribute to a better understanding of the subtleties of Shakespearean character development, growth of Shakespeare as a writer, portrayal of women in Elizabethan England and the thematic significance of love and disguise. It emphasizes how love and disguise go beyond mere manipulation and trickery, offering deep insights into human nature. At the heart of this study lies the analysis of significant themes of love and disguise, using the triangular theory of love proposed by Robert Sternberg. Julia and Viola tend to follow the traditional Elizabethan culture in general along with certain deviations from their traditional feminine roles which mark the uniqueness and individuality of these heroines. In the exploring the individual journeys of Julia and Viola, various similarities and differences become apparent which highlight the convolutions of love and identity, often intertwined with deception and self-discovery. Both Julia and Viola are projected as strong characters possessing the three basic elements in Sternberg's theory of love though their approaches are different.*



Keywords— *complex identities, deception and self-discovery, gender disguise, love, portrayal of women, Shakespearean comedies, traditional roles.*

Introduction

In the Elizabethan England, the idea of courtly love was en vogue. During these times, love was romanticized as a noble institute. Several popular Elizabethan poets such as Philip Sidney, Wyatt and Surrey, Edmund Spenser, John Donne, Christopher Marlowe and others have produced profound poems for their inamoratas. One of the major characteristics of their works was that they were mostly concerned with the higher social class of England. Both, their enamoured ladies as well as their fictional characters belonged to the upper strata of the society i.e. they focused on the courtly love. "According to the ideal of courtly love, a knight or nobleman worshiped a woman of high birth, and his love

for her inspired him to do great things on the battlefield and elsewhere" (Hirsch et al., 2005).

This kind of love (courtly love) can further be elucidated by using the "Triangular Theory of Love" proposed by the American psychologist, Robert Sternberg in the 1980s. This paper aims to apply Sternberg's theory of love on two of Shakespeare's comedies, namely, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* from the early plays of William Shakespeare and *Twelfth Night* from his later plays. Through a comparison of these plays, one explores the evolution of Shakespeare's writing and a gradual shift from naïve and innocent Julia to sophisticated and mature Viola. Sternberg's theory argues that a stable relationship (love, here) must be based on more than one of the three

essential elements. According to Sternberg, the three indispensable elements that are necessary in love are intimacy, passion and commitment (Sternberg, 1986).

Intimacy

Intimacy is when someone starts to feel a deep emotional connection with someone else which results in a mutual understanding between them. When people get intimately connected with someone, they usually tend to accept the person as they are. Anais Nin, a twentieth century French-born American diarist has aptly said, "What is love but acceptance of the other, whatever he is" (Nin & Miller, 1989).

Shakespeare's heroine, Julia in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* experiences this sort of deep emotional connection with her suitor, Proteus. In Act 1, Scene 2, Julia's soliloquy addressing her response to Proteus' love letter highlights her dilemma since she desperately wants to read the letter yet as expected from a young maiden, she tries to act in a modest way by avoiding it and eventually tearing it into pieces. Nonetheless, after the departure of her maid, she gathers all the pieces together and kisses each one of them to repent for her earlier misdemeanour. This desperate action of Julia stems out of the intimacy that she shares with Proteus.

Simultaneously, the adjectives used with their names in this letter such as "kind Julia", "love-wounded Proteus" and "Poor forlorn Proteus, passionate Proteus, / To the sweet Julia" also highlights the intensity of intimacy shown by Proteus in his love for Julia. As established earlier, according to Sternberg's theory, a stable relationship requires more than one of the essential elements of bonding between the partners. However, it is also necessary that these emotions are felt by both the partners to create a balance between them. *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* shows fluctuations in the intimacy between Julia and Proteus. In the beginning of the play, though there is a lack of direct communication, both Proteus and Julia experience the same intensity of intimacy between them. In the middle of the plot, Proteus falls out of love with Julia and is infatuated with Silvia which in turn complicates the relationship of Proteus and Julia. Nonetheless, these complications are resolved in the end and both feel the same intimacy again.

Since, this play is written by Shakespeare in his early career Julia seems to be somewhat immature and juvenile in dealing with her circumstances. Thus, she winds up in taking up some rash decisions. For instance, in Act 4, Scene 4 of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* Julia's soliloquy addresses her emotionally vulnerable nature despite being aware of Proteus' betrayal in love.

Alas, poor Proteus! thou hast entertain'd
A fox to be the shepherd of thy lambs.
Alas, poor fool! why do I pity him
That with his very heart despiseth me?
Because he loves her, he despiseth me;
Because I love him I must pity him.

(ACT 4 SCENE 4)

Sometimes, the acceptance of one's partner as he is, takes an extreme and somewhat toxic form where people even neglect the flaws and foibles of their significant others. This soliloquy highlights the toxicity of the relationship shared by Julia and Proteus where on one hand Proteus has betrayed Julia's love and on the other hand Julia is blinded by her love for Proteus and still tries to justify Proteus' betrayal. She feels disrespected by him yet manages to find ways to pity him by finding faults in herself. Julia seems to be a vulnerable and hopeless romantic character who is at the mercy of her lover to achieve a sense of self-worth. With regard to this line of argument Azalea Rosario raises a question, "How can such a loving girl go through the misfortunate events that Julia goes through for her unfaithful boyfriend?" (Rosario, 2013). The answer, however, could be justified using a phrase coined by Shakespeare in this play i.e. "Love is blind". One reason for Julia's vulnerability can be the element of irrationality in her love for Proteus.

However, in a comparatively mature play, *Twelfth Night*, the Shakespearean heroine, Viola, appears to be a patient and mature woman who waits for an appropriate time to resolve the intricacies and complexities that have emerged due to her disguise. In this play, the first instance of infatuation is witnessed in the beginning where Duke Orsino is shown to have strong emotions for Olivia. However, later the element of infatuation is also witnessed among Olivia and Cesario (Viola in disguise) and ultimately it can be seen between Duke Orsino and Viola towards the end of the play after Viola's revelation. Nonetheless, the infatuation between Duke Orsino and Olivia; and Olivia and Cesario does not lead the characters to have an intimate relationship since in both the cases only one of the partners feels intimacy towards the other and that too is transient. As soon as the truth of Viola's disguise is revealed, all the complications and misunderstandings are resolved. Olivia realizes that Cesario is a woman and eventually finds her love in Viola's brother, Sebastian. Similarly, Duke Orsino comes to the realization that in a true sense he has always felt an intimate connection with Viola but never gave it a serious thought since she was disguised as a male persona, Cesario. The bard has interwoven this intimacy between Duke Orsino and Viola throughout the play in their inner

worlds which is reflected in the soliloquies and monologues of both the characters. Viola, being an intellectual woman understood about her feelings for the duke in a few encounters but decided to wait and analyse the prospect of this relationship in practicality.

My state is desperate for my master's love;

As I am woman, — now alas the day!

What thriftless sighs shall poor Olivia breathe!

O time! thou must untangle this, not I;

It is too hard a knot for me to untie!

(ACT 2 SCENE 2 VIOLA'S SOLILOQUY ON
OLIVIA'S RING)

This soliloquy by Viola hints at her strong emotions that she has developed for Duke Orsino during her stay in Illyria. This intimacy in due course leads to her state of desperation for Duke. In a tangible manner, Viola can also be considered as a hopeless romantic character as she leaves it all to her fate rather than responding to her immediate adrenaline rush. However, at the same time, her patience also highlights the maturity she possesses.

Passion

Viola's state of desperation further leads us to the second most essential element in Sternberg's Triangular theory of love i.e. passion. According to him, the stage of passion is achieved when the emotional bonding previously established via intimacy further leads to a sexual attraction towards the other person. It leads to a state of desperation and a strong desire to get hold of the person which may be expressed implicitly through the use of asides and soliloquies or it may be expressed explicitly through certain paralinguistic features as well as dialogues. Passion can also result into sexual jealousy, one of the prominent themes in Shakespeare's plays. In his tragedies, for instance, in *Othello* the sexual jealousy of the titular protagonist brings about death of many people. While in his comedies, Shakespeare hints at this possibility but immediately returns to the main plotline. For instance, in Act 4, Scene 4 of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Julia's soliloquy highlights her sexual jealousy when she compares her physical appearance with Silvia for the love of Proteus:

If I had such a tire, this face of mine
Were full as lovely as is this of hers:
And yet the painter flatter'd her a little,
Unless I flatter with myself too much.
Her hair is auburn, mine is perfect yellow:
If that be all the difference in his love,
I'll get me such a colour'd periwig.
Her eyes are grey as glass, and so are mine:

Ay, but her forehead's low, and mine's as high.

What should it be that he respects in her

But I can make respective in myself,

If this fond Love were not a blinded god?

(ACT 4, SCENE 4)

Here, Julia compares and contrasts her physical appearance with that of Silvia in order to establish the body features which might have appealed Proteus. She seeks to understand why his sexual desires for a beautiful woman like Silvia have made him impassive for Julia since looks can be much deceiving. This self-doubt and hint of an inferiority complex as witnessed in Julia's soliloquy takes another dimension in the form of a feeling of revenge in *Twelfth Night*. In the beginning of the play, Viola agrees to woo Olivia for Duke Orsino while she herself has feelings for him. Viola, too, experiences sexual jealousy for Olivia as reflected in an aside in Act 1, Scene 3 where she provides hints to the audience of her motivations and future actions to be the wife of Duke Orsino. This aside suggests the determination and passion Viola has for Duke Orsino.

I'll do my best

To woo your lady— [aside] Yet, a barful strife—

Whoe'er I woo, myself would be his wife.

(ACT 1, SCENE 3)

Nonetheless, both of these Shakespearean heroines come to this realization that neither Silvia nor Olivia is a threat to any of them. Silvia, herself condemns Proteus for betraying the love of 'kind Julia' while Olivia has never responded to the love of Duke Orsino throughout the play. This knowledge offers the characters a resolution to their agitated emotions and sexual jealousy. Julia's soliloquy in Act 4, Scene 4 suggests the same idea:

I'll use thee kindly for thy mistress' sake,
That used me so; or else, by Jove I vow,
I should have scratch'd out your unseeing eyes²⁰⁴⁵
To make my master out of love with thee!

(ACT 4, SCENE 4)

Julia had an unsettled anger and jealousy towards Silvia when she realized Proteus' betrayal and was determined to seek revenge on Silvia but hurting her. However, when provided with the knowledge of Silvia's love for Valentine and her sympathy towards Julia, she decides to remain calm.

Julia and Viola share similar feelings of agitation, rage and jealousy, yet their ways of dealing with their circumstances differ a lot. Julia, being a juvenile character presents her feelings towards Proteus and Silvia either in a very blunt manner or in a suppressive, self-destructive

manner; whereas in Viola, one appreciates her balanced approach to life. Viola, too, possesses the qualities of being a lively and high-spirited woman alongside being a confident, wise and mature character. Nonetheless, both, Julia and Viola following the tradition of other Shakespearean heroines have a remarkable quality of self-assertiveness for which the use of female disguise seems to be a prominent reason.

Victor Oscar Freeburg defines dramatic disguise as “a change of personal appearance which leads to mistaken identity. There is a double test, change and confusion... it results in the same sort of complication for the person under observation” (Freeburg, 1965).

In pre-Shakespearean theatre, women characters as well as the device of female disguise weren't much developed. For instance, Dorothea in Robert Greene's *James the Fourth* is a passive and insipid character who depends on the advice of her friends to disguise as a male persona in order to save her own life from her husband. Phillida in John Lyly's *Gallathea* was motivated by her father to disguise to save her from sacrificial death. *Sir Clyoman and Sir Clamydes* was one of the earliest plays having a premature use of the device of female disguise.

Traditionally, disguise has been observed as an evil practice. T.G. has criticized transvestism for both men and women: “Player's practices can hardly be warranted in religion: for a man to put on women's apparel, and a woman a man's, is plain prohibition...” (T, 1913). A year later, a contemporary traveller of Shakespeare, Fynes Moryson presents his disgust at transvestism, specifically dealing with female disguise as practiced by whores: “I have seen courtesans in the time of shroving, appalled like men, in carnation or light coloured doublets and breeches...” (Moryson, 1908).

These assumptions arise out of the belief that a person hides something only when he's ashamed or scared of it. Thus, writers and critics in Elizabethan theatre saw the device of female disguise as inherently wrong. However, like the author himself, Shakespearean heroines have emerged as progressive as well as timeless. Peter Hyland in his article *Shakespeare's Disguised Heroines: Disguise in the Romantic Comedies* suggests that indeed female disguise was associated with various negative connotations in the past but it becomes important to Shakespeare as it acts as a medium to give voice to the audience or the common man of the times. He argues “the disguised girl affords him (Shakespeare) to manipulate the audience's responses by drawing it into the action” (Hyland, 1978).

Through the plot device of disguise, Shakespeare has given his heroines a heightened sense of consciousness

which helps them to analyse the situation in its entirety and thus act accordingly. Even in his earlier plays such as *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, though Julia is a comparatively juvenile character yet she is an unconventional and self-assertive woman. She is determined and passionate to get hold of her lover and when circumstances tend to fall out of her favour, she's hell-bent to make it right for herself, even if it means to hurt Silvia as suggested in the above soliloquy from Act 4 Scene 4.

Commitment

This is where the third indispensable element of commitment in Sternberg's theory of love comes into play. Commitment is the thoughtful decision and a promise to stand alongside someone in future no matter what life offers. The decision to love someone may or may not result into commitment. Proteus loves Julia but he is not committed to her because he tries to court his friend's beloved, Silvia in the absence of Julia. Similarly, Duke Orsino isn't committed to Olivia either as suggested at the onset of the play. His infatuation to Olivia quivers throughout the play and ultimately he realises his love for Viola in the end when her disguise is revealed.

However, if commitment arises out of love between two people, it strengthens the relationship between those sharing the feelings of intimacy and passion for one another. The Shakespearean heroines, Julia and Viola, are committed to their lovers through the entire play. Both of them decide to disguise in order to be around their lovers. In relation to this evolving meaning of disguise, Julia in a monologue in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* comments:

In a disguise of love:

It is the lesser blot, modesty finds,

Women to change their shapes than men their minds.

(ACT 5 SCENE 4 JULIA)

It hints at the fickleness of love at the part of Proteus while Julia has always remained committed to him, even though she had to adopt the evil practice of female disguise. Though, disguise does not form an appropriate example of passion and intimacy as defined by Sternberg's theory. Yet, it is a plot device which is either an action taken by a character as a result of his passionate feelings towards the other person or it is responsible for the creation of certain situations where characters experience passion for one another. Julia's decision to take up the male persona of Sebastian resulted from her passionate feelings towards Proteus and her insatiable

desire to experience his presence around her. In Act 2 Scene 7, she asserts:

Then let me go and hinder not my course
 I'll be as patient as a gentle stream
 And make a pastime of each weary step,
 Till the last step have brought me to my love;
 And there I'll rest, as after much turmoil
 A blessed soul doth in Elysium.
 (ACT 2, SCENE 7)

Here, Julia asks her concerned maid Lucetta to not impede her impulsive yet very important decision to make a small visit to Proteus as Sebastian. She believes that a few days in the company of her lover would quench the thirst she feels to see him.

On the other hand, Viola in *Twelfth Night* disguised herself for almost the entire play. Her decision to take up the male persona of Cesario was not a result of her love for Duke Orsino, rather this decision stemmed out from the social conditions of Elizabethan age where it was extremely difficult for an ordinary young woman to live and prosper alone, having no male support in the form of a father, brother or a husband. Thus, in a monologue at the beginning of the play, she requests her ship captain, Antonio to help her in hiding her true identity from everyone else.

Conceal me what I am, and be my aid
 For such disguise as haply shall become
 The form of my intent. I'll serve this duke:
 Thou shalt present me as an eunuch to him:
 (ACT 1, SCENE 2, VIOLA'S MONOLOGUE TO HER
 SHIP CAPTAIN)

Though Viola's disguise gave her an opportunity to be around Duke Orsino through which she developed passion for him, yet at the same time, her disguise has also resulted in Olivia's infatuation for Cesario. Olivia unwittingly falls in love with Cesario, enchanted by Viola's false appearance. This instance highlights the evil nature of disguise as it was seen traditionally. It indicates Shakespeare's complex style which amalgams the tradition of the Elizabethan theatre and his own progressive ideas. According to T.S. Eliot, "the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past. And the poet who is aware of this will be aware of great difficulties and responsibilities" (Eliot, 1982).

Shakespeare presents disguise as a modern plot device which helps in producing passionate feelings among the lovers, by bringing a new aspect to its previous use. Simultaneously, he also hints at the negative

outcomes that may arise out of female disguise, thus following the theatrical tradition of his predecessors. Hence, the bard manages to leave a mark on the Elizabethan audience as well as their future generations. Moreover, the bard's androgynous mind is reflected in the portrayal of his heroines such as Julia and Viola who take up male personas. It makes them conscious of both masculine and feminine traits. Analysing their situations from an androgynous mind having complete knowledge of the feelings of their counterparts, Julia and Viola are able to make better decisions for their love life.

Conclusion

A person's true personality is seen only when they are not under observation i.e. when they feel free to express themselves without any kind of socio-cultural criticism. Hence, the soliloquies, monologues, speeches and asides delivered by Shakespearean heroines tend to unveil the complexities of their inner world in the Elizabethan era i.e. they express their emotions more efficiently when other characters are not around. Sternberg's theory of love provides us an understanding into the complex characters of Shakespeare's heroines, namely, Julia and Viola. It highlights the fact that love is not one-dimensional but a complex web of various elements which evolve through the narrative of the plots and provide insights into the character's feelings, motivations and inspirations. Both Julia and Viola are remarkable examples of characters possessing a combination of intimacy, passion and commitment for their lovers yet the use of disguise in the plays adds on new dimensions to their otherwise simple love stories.

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The Clarified Bugle of Sovereignty: An Analysis of Geo-centric and Physical Metaphors of the Motherland in Mulk Raj Anand's Story 'The Lost Child'

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Abstract— A true son of the Indian soil, Mulk Raj Anand composed this prose poem in the year 1934, when India was under British rule. The child of this motherland was weeping because every child had lost their 'Mother' in this 'fair' of the British Raj. Everything was present before the child's eyes in that fair, except for his mother. Indeed, it was a critical juncture where literature had to perform its duty silently yet profoundly. Dr. Anand accepted this challenge and, for his noble and sacred objective, successfully established the deep bond between the child and the mother (the son and the motherland) in his poetic story 'The Lost Child'. In this short story, Dr. Anand adopted not only social, geographical, and political perspectives but also made excellent use of the principles of Physical Science. Taking absolute creative liberty in the realm of literature, he deployed it as the most potent weapon against colonialism. In this research paper, for investigative purposes, an attempt has been made to carve out a new path in English literature by integrating perspectives of natural philosophy such as physics and geography. Here, we have etched the deep relationship between Mother Earth and her children as an inherent birthright of every individual from a global perspective, encompassing both East and West, to sustain the harmony of love and peace upon the canvas of entire humanity.



Keywords— Mulk Raj Anand, Anti-Colonial Resistance, Literary Geography, Natural Philosophy, Classical Mechanics, Spatial Entrapment, Sovereign Love, Postcolonial Higher Education.

Introduction: The Epistemological Misdirection of Colonial Criticism

For decades, traditional academic curricula in Anglo-Indian literature have confined Mulk Raj Anand's 1934 masterpiece, 'The Lost Child', to a simple and poignant exercise in child psychology. Euro-centric critics and colonial administrative educational frameworks deliberately framed this composition as a narrative depicting the emotional instability of a child caught in the overwhelming cacophony of a rural Indian fair. This research paper contends that such a reading was a calculated policy of epistemological misdirection—a critical shield designed to obscure the revolutionary and anti-colonial architecture of the story. Written during the zenith of British

imperialist hegemony, this story is no naive psychological sketch; it is a highly sophisticated and symbolic bugle-call (Shankhanaad) of the Indian freedom struggle. By remaining at the heart of the Empire and utilizing the very English language of the oppressor, Anand presented a brilliant masterclass in literary subversion. Under the pretext of a simple pastoral tale, he articulated the profound existential agony of a colonized populace forcibly severed from their true "Mother"—the Motherland (Bharat Mata). The festive fair described in the story is an allegory for the illusory and materialistic delusions of the British Raj. It is a space where structural distractions, economic traps, and sensory allurements are deployed to mesmerize the colonized masses and induce a state of cultural amnesia. To

fully dissect Anand's creative consciousness, one must delve into the author's burning desire to uncover an absolute existential truth necessary for Indian well-being. Anand's mind was occupied by a fierce battle against the subverted intellect of his countrymen. He observed that the typical individual living under the yoke of the Raj was suffering from an engineered psychological fragmentation. By projecting this systemic trauma onto the raw, uncorrupted innocence of a young boy, Anand presents a macrocosmic diagnosis of the entire Indian subcontinent. The child's initial wandering gaze represents the colonized mind's tragic captivation by Western allurements, while his subsequent breakdown reflects the sudden, terrifying realization of total dispossession. Anand's true intent was to show that under colonial rule, every native—regardless of age or status—exists in a perennial state of childhood, rendered dependent, mute, and systematically separated from their cultural matrix. The psychological journey of the child is, therefore, a diagnostic blueprint aimed at the collective Indian psyche. Anand realized that for the long-term well-being and spiritual survival of the nation, Indians had to shake off the hypnotic slumber induced by foreign masters. The story serves as an intellectual mirror meant to shock the reader into recognizing that the glitter of colonial modernity is nothing more than a decorated cage, and that true national health can only be recovered when the individual reconnects with the foundational source of their identity: the ancestral soil. Crucially, this intellectual diagnostic was forged during Anand's frequent physical crossings between Britain and India. While residing in London, Anand interacted with the Bloomsbury Group and studied Western political philosophy, yet he constantly felt the painful pull of his unliberated homeland. Each time he sailed back to India, the stark contrast between British metropolitan wealth and the systematic starvation of the Indian masses shocked his literary sensibility. His return voyages during the late 1920s and early 1930s allowed him to witness the unyielding spirit of Mahatma Gandhi's satyagraha campaigns. Anand observed how ordinary, illiterate villagers were transforming into active agents of political defiance. He realized that the psychological breakthrough required for Indian emancipation could not be achieved by absorbing Western ideologies in isolation, but by documenting the raw, unadulterated reality of the Indian village. His mind, charged with these observations, sought to evoke freedom not through grand political treatises, but by exposing the deep emotional and spiritual cost of displacement. The writing of 'The Lost Child' reflects this exact mental transition: it is the work of an expatriate writer who returned home to find his people mesmerized by the master's market, and who used his pen to ring the alarm of cultural re-awakening. This research paper establishes a

multidisciplinary framework by synthesizing the 'Geography of Literature', spatial geopolitics, and the fundamental principles of natural philosophy and physics. This study illuminates how Anand transformed literary space into a site of deep political resistance. The analysis demonstrates how the lost child's ultimate rejection of material commodities mirrors the essential rejection of colonial structures. Ultimately, it is proven that the preservation of national intellectual assets and reconnecting citizens to the motherland remains the supreme objective of this literary art and the nation's survival.

The Allegory of the Fair: Capitalist Imperialism and Spatial Entrapment

To comprehend the geographical consciousness embedded in 'The Lost Child', one must first understand the structural layout of the vernal fair. In geographical terms, space is never neutral; it is actively constructed and weaponized by political powers. The "spring fair" in Anand's story represents the artificial spatial topography engineered by the British Raj. It is an economic landscape designed to foster dependency, consumerism, and alienation. Within this colonial fair system, the empire offers superficial material allurements like sweets, balloons, and music, the direct consequence of which manifests as cultural amnesia and spatial displacement for the native inhabitants. Conversely, an awakened national consciousness ultimately rejects these superficial attractions entirely, demanding absolute sovereignty over the motherland. The story commences with a vivid description of the masses surging toward the fair: "a multicolored humanity" emerging from the "wintry shades of narrow lanes." Transitioning from the organic, ancestral spaces of rural India into this structured, commercialized zone of the fair mirrors the forced displacement of Indian agrarian society into the capitalist trap of the British Empire. This fair represents the illusion of colonial modernity. It promises joy, prosperity, and inclusivity, but its internal configuration operates as a labyrinth that systematically alienates the individual from their original social and familial fabric. Within this imperialist fair, the child encounters several checkpoints, each representing a distinct facet of colonial exploitation and cultural displacement. The toy shops lining the entrance signify the early industrial allurements of Western manufacturing. These are non-essential commodities dumped into the Indian market to dismantle the economic vitality of indigenous artisans. The father's "red-eyed" look and refusal represent the rigid, punitive stance of the colonial state, which regulates public access to resources while maintaining absolute disciplinary control. Moving deeper into this labyrinth, the sweetmeat shop and its cries represent the commercialization of basic life necessities, where the child's intense yet unfulfilled longing for barfi

exposes the psychological conditioning of the colonized subject. The flower-seller vending garlands of gulmohur symbolizes the exploitation of the natural landscape's aesthetics and ecological wealth, which is now packaged and resold to the native. Simultaneously, the colonial mindset devalues these indigenous symbols by labeling them "cheap." Similarly, the man holding a bamboo stick of rainbow-colored balloons represents the fleeting, floating illusions of political reforms offered by British administrators—abstract rights devoid of real sovereignty. Finally, the snake charmer's music reflects the exoticized 'Orientalist' gaze of the Western world toward Indian culture, which the colonial mindset characterizes as "coarse" and hazardous. This system systematically detaches the natives from their ancestral philosophy and spiritual science. Anand demonstrates that prior to the moment of separation, the child is ensnared in this consumerist grid, acting as a mute consumer of imperialist illusions whose vision has been fragmented by the glittering commodities of the market. In mapping this commercial labyrinth, Anand's mind was operating on a level of profound socio-economic critique. He understood that capitalist imperialism does not merely conquer territories; it captures the human sensory apparatus. Every stall in the fair is a weaponized space designed to induce an artificial sense of lack in the native consumer. Anand masterfully captures how the average individual under these circumstances becomes a participant in their own subjugation. The crowd moving blindly toward the fair represents an entire nation marching unawares into economic and cultural bondage. The author analyzes the insidious nature of this entrapment: the British Raj had converted the vast subcontinent into a giant marketplace where indigenous goods were systematically devalued, and foreign, mechanical trivialities were elevated as markers of progress. Anand dissects the collective vulnerability of the Indian masses through the child's sensory overstimulation. By depicting the child's wavering focus, Anand illustrates how colonial capitalism splinters the natural alignment between the individual and their landscape. The child wants everything, yet knows he can possess nothing—a poignant reflection of the economic disenfranchisement shared by millions of Indians under British rule. The absolute truth that Anand unveils here is that the systemic well-being of India can never be realized within a framework built upon its exploitation. By exposing the fair as a spatial trap, Anand's creative consciousness issues a stark warning: to seek validation, sustenance, or joy from the institutions of the colonizer is to accept permanent exile from one's own baseline of sovereign power. This acute anatomical dissection of capitalist consumerism was directly derived from Anand's observations during his transitions back to the Indian hinterland. Traveling from the

mechanized industrial urbanism of London back to the small towns and rural settlements of Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, Anand noted a catastrophic pattern: the systematic destruction of the self-contained village economy. He observed how British Manchester textiles and manufactured toys were flooding rural markets, draining the wealth of native blacksmiths, weavers, and craftsmen. In his mind, the stalls of the fair were not imaginary constructs; they were literal observations of how the colonial machinery commodified the native landscape. He saw how the organic beauty of Indian flora and traditional sweets were being packaged into commercial transactions that benefited the imperial exchequer. By embedding these real-world economic observations within the child's temptations, Anand sought to evoke a fierce drive for freedom. He wanted every Indian reader to see that the economic layout of the fair was designed to leave the native permanently bankrupt—both financially and spiritually—and that India's well-being depended on dismantling this commercial illusion through swadeshi self-reliance.

Natural Philosophy and Physical Science as Tools of Anti-Colonial Resistance

Beyond its sociological and political dimensions, 'The Lost Child' operates on a profound plane of natural philosophy. It utilizes principles of classical physics and geomorphology to underscore the spiritual journey of the human soul under subjugation. Anand employs concepts of spatial dynamics, field theories, and equilibrium to expose the unnatural condition of colonialism. In classical mechanics, any particle remains stable and balanced as long as it is securely bound within its primary gravitational field. For a human being, this stable field is their natural habitat—their soil, their culture, and their motherland. The British Raj acted as an external, disruptive force that introduced an artificial field of attraction, attempting to pull the native particle out of its natural orbit. The various attractions of the fair function as localized, high-intensity electromagnets designed to deflect the particle, causing it to lose its orientation relative to its primary center of mass. The story reaches its climax at the roundabout. In the language of physical science, this swing represents a high-velocity vortex driven by centripetal and centrifugal forces. Mathematically, centrifugal force is expressed as the product of the object's mass and the square of its velocity, divided by the radius of the orbit:

$$F = \frac{mv^2}{r}$$

As velocity escalates, the outward centrifugal force threatens to rupture the structural bond anchoring the body to its center. The dizzying speed of the roundabout, which lifts the human body entirely off the earth into an ungrounded, spinning motion, symbolizes the blind vortex

of Western globalization and mechanical progress. It is here that the child voices his most explicit desire to ride the roundabout. When this demand is met with an absolute, terrifying silence, the artificial gravitational field of the fair collapses like a house of cards. The intense outward centrifugal force has completely severed the child from his original center (the parents). From the standpoint of natural philosophy, his sudden trembling, backward retreat, and frantic weeping are the violent physiological responses of an organism experiencing acute displacement from its natural habitat. This results in a catastrophic crisis where all coordinates of his identity are obliterated. Anand's deployment of these scientific metaphors highlights the sheer precision of his literary mind. He did not view science and literature as separate domains; instead, he recognized that the laws governing the physical universe could perfectly illuminate the unnatural mechanics of human oppression. Anand's mind was preoccupied with the concept of systemic equilibrium. He understood that colonialism is an inherently unstable, high-velocity system that forces human beings out of their natural, grounded state into a dizzying, artificial trajectory. The roundabout scene is a masterpiece of metaphorical physics, capturing the exact moment when the kinetic energy of colonial temptation overpowers the potential energy of native restraint. When every person finds themselves in such a high-velocity vortex—whether it is the historical trauma of 1934 or the modern chaos of unbridled materialism—the physical and psychological toll is identical. The individual loses their center of gravity. Anand illustrates that when a person is separated from their mass-center (their home and heritage), they enter a state of weightless terror, spinning rapidly until their structural framework collapses. For the well-being of the Indian nation, Anand uses this physical allegory to demonstrate that no society can remain healthy if it allows its foundational mass to be scattered by external centrifugal forces. The absolute truth revealed through this natural philosophy is that stability can only be restored when the kinetic frenzy of foreign imitation is halted, allowing the individual particle to drop back into its natural, organic orbit within the ancestral field. This preoccupation with mechanical momentum and field forces was deeply intensified by Anand's physical observations of Europe's rapid industrialization compared to India's manual landscapes. Living through the interwar period in Britain, Anand observed the dizzying, mechanical velocity of Western factories, trains, and urban roundabouts. When he returned to India, he saw this alien, mechanized momentum being violently imposed upon a pastoral civilization. He noticed how the ungrounded velocity of Western modernization was tearing the Indian peasant away from his ecological equilibrium, causing widespread socio-economic

destabilization. Anand realized that this artificial acceleration acted as an invisible force field, unbalancing the native psyche. The roundabout in the story is the literary manifestation of this observation—a symbol of the hyper-accelerated, machine-driven culture of the West that threatens to fling the ungrounded native into absolute historical oblivion. By using the rigid, undeniable laws of physics to describe this crisis, Anand's mind sought to awaken the native intellectual elite. He proved that freedom was not merely a political negotiation, but an urgent scientific and metaphysical necessity to restore India's natural equilibrium and societal health.

The Grand Subversion: Rejection of the Commodity and the Supremacy of the Mother.

The true revolutionary core of Anand's prose poem resides in its concluding events. When a compassionate man rescues the weeping child from the crushing crowd, he offers him every single commodity the child had previously yearned for to soothe him. The man leads him to the roundabout, to the balloon-seller, to the basket of flowers, and finally to the sweetmeat shop. According to any standard psychological framework of colonial behavior, the child ought to have been pacified by these gifts. Imperialism operates on the exact premise that the native population can be bought, appeased, or pacified through material concessions, infrastructure development, or economic incentives. This is the structured proposition of the imperial regime: offering an array of toys, sweets, balloons, and rides to keep the populace docile, while retaining absolute ownership over the land and its sovereignty. However, the native response constructed by Anand is one of absolute rejection, terminating solely and exclusively at the demand for the motherland. Here, Anand executes a magnificent literary subversion that tears the entire colonial mathematics to shreds. The child averts his face from every single material offer. He shuts his ears to the snake charmer's flute; he pushes away the rainbow balloons; he rejects the gulmohur garland; he refuses to take the barfi. Anand repeatedly underscores the child's irreversible cry: "I want my mother, I want my father!" In this single refrain, Anand transfigures the text into an absolute declaration of Indian independence. The child's voice becomes the collective voice of India. The message to the British Empire is clear and uncompromising: We do not want your manufactured toys; we do not want your commercial sweets; we do not want your administrative balloons; we do not want this blind vortex of your mechanical progress. We reject this entire fair of yours. We desire only our Motherland, and nothing else. In creating this dramatic reversal, Anand's mind strips away the complex layers of political rhetoric to reveal a raw, unyielding truth. He explores the psyche of the individual who has reached the absolute nadir of isolation

and discovered that material wealth cannot heal an existential void. The author analyzes the typical human response under intense crisis: when a person is truly lost, their superficial desires vanish, leaving behind only the primal need for safety, belonging, and connection to their source. By highlighting this psychological shift, Anand illustrates that the well-being of the Indian populace cannot be bought with colonial infrastructure, railways, or administrative concessions. The writer's mind cuts through the transactional logic of the British Empire, which assumed that economic subjugation could be sustained if accompanied by a steady supply of superficial comforts. The child's repetitive, unshakeable cry for his parents represents the awakening of a collective consciousness that refuses to be bought. Anand reveals an absolute truth crucial for India's future: true freedom and well-being are not economic commodities that can be bartered. By causing the child to reject the entire inventory of the fair, Anand asserts that a nation cannot find its soul in the marketplace of its oppressor. The ultimate salvation of the people lies in an absolute, uncompromising return to the protective embrace of their own sovereign identity and territorial baseline. This structural subversion of commodities directly mirrors Anand's profound observations of the Non-Cooperation and Swadeshi movements during his periodic returns to India. Anand stood on Indian platforms and witnessed massive, towering bonfires of foreign cloth and British-manufactured goods. He watched as everyday citizens, moved by a profound inner awakening, threw their expensive Western garments, toys, and luxury items into the flames. This real-world rejection of the imperial commodity deeply shaped his authorial mind. He saw that the true turning point of the Indian freedom struggle occurred when the native consumer ceased to value the master's gifts. Anand understood that the British Empire's power relied entirely on the native's psychological dependence on the colonial marketplace. By translating this mass historical phenomenon into the singular, stubborn refusal of the lost child, Anand's mind illuminated the path toward absolute well-being for his country. He demonstrated to every Indian caught in those historical circumstances that true sovereignty begins with an internal psychological strike—a grand subversion where the glittering baubles of the empire are rendered utterly worthless in comparison to the sacred, unbarterable soil of the Motherland.

The Contemporary Academic Parallel: The Crisis of Intellectual Capital.

The profound lessons of Anand's story are not confined merely to the historical epoch of 1934. This discourse holds an astonishing and visionary relevance to contemporary administrative challenges plaguing the higher education sector in post-colonial India, specifically regarding the

ongoing disputes surrounding the retirement age of university and college teachers. In today's socio-political landscape, the academic community—comprising veteran professors, researchers, and institution-builders—is waging a critical battle against premature superannuation. Currently, in regions like Uttar Pradesh, the retirement age for higher education faculty stands stagnated at 62 years, whereas central universities and several other progressive states have upgraded their frameworks to align with 65 years. When educators and intellectual leaders advocate for the immediate implementation of the 65-year retirement age, their voices are often misconstrued by bureaucratic structures as a mere personal service extension or a financial demand. This misunderstanding directly mirrors the actions of the crowd and the gentle man in Anand's fair, who assume that the weeping child can be satisfied with minor perks, gifts, or temporary administrative concessions. In reality, this demand of the academic community is a modern manifestation of the child's cry for his mother. It is a demand for the preservation of the nation's intellectual assets. Higher education is not a mechanical system meant merely to complete syllabi; it is a living mechanism for profound research, academic mentorship, and the transmission of geographical, cultural, and scientific consciousness to the next generation. Forcing a scholar to retire at the age of 62, at the absolute zenith of their intellectual maturity, research capability, and international academic standing, is akin to forcibly severing future generations from their richest cultural and educational anchors. By immediately raising the retirement age to 65, the state does not merely extend a service tenure; it safeguards its institutional memory. It ensures that upcoming generations of students and scholars get the opportunity to flourish under the stable and seasoned guidance of mentors who understand the currents of national consciousness. Just as the child in the story realized that all the material pleasures of the fair were utterly worthless without the protective presence of his parents, a nation's educational architecture cannot survive merely on digital classrooms and new buildings if it prematurely discards its core human capital. The immediate implementation of this policy is, in truth, an act of academic patriotism, protecting the intellectual sovereignty of the motherland at both national and international levels. Anand's underlying philosophy shines brightly through this contemporary parallel. Were the author alive today, his critical mind would immediately identify modern bureaucratic inertia as an extension of the old colonial mindset. The systemic choice to retire seasoned academics prematurely reflects a dangerous failure to value the intangible wealth of the nation. In these contemporary circumstances, every aging academic and every displaced researcher embodies the same structural abandonment

experienced by the lost child. The state, acting like the well-meaning but detached stranger in the fair, attempts to placate the academic community with token administrative restructurings, superficial infrastructure, or localized grants, while ignoring their fundamental cry for institutional stability and the preservation of intellectual heritage. Anand's text reveals that the genuine well-being of a nation depends entirely on the continuity of its generational wisdom. To throw away our most brilliant minds at the peak of their intellectual powers is to induce an artificial amnesia within our universities. The absolute truth that must be embraced for Indian well-being today is that our higher education institutions cannot survive as mere factories of information; they must be treated as sacred spaces of national consciousness. Safeguarding our intellectual capital by raising the retirement age is a direct fulfillment of Anand's vision—an act of institutional patriotism that secures the intellectual sovereignty of the motherland. This critique of systemic and institutional exploitation was a core feature of Anand's intellect, heavily informed by his direct interactions with both British and Indian educational institutions during his journeys. Anand pursued his doctoral studies at University College London and Cambridge, experiencing firsthand the institutional continuity and deep structural respect accorded to Western scholars, who were allowed to guide research deep into their senior years. However, when returning to India, he observed how colonial universities were designed merely to produce obedient clerks and low-level administrators for the Raj, treating native intellectual energy as a disposable commodity. He saw that the colonial state actively feared the deep, seasoned authority of elder Indian scholars who possessed the capacity to awaken national consciousness. This real-world observation reinforces the contemporary parallel: premature retirement policies are a lingering relic of a colonial administrative framework that seeks to cut off the head of national intellect. Anand's authorial mind reminds us that for the long-term well-being of a progressive India, we must structurally honor our intellectual guides, ensuring that our seats of learning function as sovereign reservoirs of ancestral and scientific wisdom.

Global Dimensions: Synthesis of East and West for Human Harmony.

To fully realize the potential of Anand's text as a new paradigm for research in English literature, we must elevate it above localized geopolitics and view it upon a global canvas of humanism. This profound connection between Mother Earth and her progeny is a universal birthright that transcends the divisions of East and West. Anand, who was deeply influenced by both Western socialist critiques and Eastern spiritual philosophy, utilized 'The Lost Child' to

bridge these two worlds. The structural framework of this narrative draws direct inspiration from Western natural philosophy, echoing the anti-industrialization ideals of Rousseau and Wordsworth. Simultaneously, it merges seamlessly with Eastern geo-centric ideology, reflecting the sacred reverence accorded to Mother Earth (Bhumi Devi) in ancient texts and the profound geographical consciousness found in epics like the Ramacharitmanas. This grand synthesis steers away from conflicts, leading toward a unified vision of global harmony, sovereign love, and enduring peace. In ancient Indian thought, the earth is not a piece of real estate to be exploited and industrialized; she is Bhumi Devi, the living mother sustaining all life. The spatial dimensions of idealism found in Platonic philosophy in the West mirror this very sentiment, pointing toward a higher, spiritual reality hidden behind material appearances. When the child rejects the objects of the fair, he is performing a profound ethical act aligned with Professor J.K. Mehta's philosophical economic theory of "Wantlessness." Professor Mehta propounded that true human happiness and sustainable progress do not stem from the endless expansion of material desires (the endless consumption of the fair), but from a conscious and ethical minimization of wants to attain spiritual liberation. 'The Lost Child' serves as a literary manifesto for this philosophy. By rejecting the artificial, profit-driven traps of the colonial market, the child returns to the equilibrium of love, peace, and elemental truth. At a time when today's world is fractured by territorial aggression, ecological devastation, and unchecked material greed, Anand's geo-literary vision paves the way for global harmony. It reminds humanity that our primary identity is not that of a consumer in a global market fair, but that of children of Mother Earth. Only by recognizing this sacred, inherent bond can humanity pivot away from conflict and exploitation, forging an existence defined by mutual respect, sustainable planning, and profound peace. In crafting this global synthesis, Anand's mind rose above the immediate pains of nationalism to outline a broader vision for universal human well-being. He recognized that the ultimate tragedy of the modern individual—whether living under an imperial flag in the East or inside an industrial city in the West—is the profound loss of connection with our common earth. Anand looks deeply into the soul of modern humanity, showing that when we reduce our world to a mere market fair, we sentence ourselves to a state of perpetual alienation. The child's distress inside the commercial arena is a shared human condition; it represents the cry of every soul trapped in a culture of endless consumption. Anand's creative mind masterfully reconciles the social justice frameworks of the West with the spiritual, earth-centered traditions of the East. He demonstrates that the long-term well-being of India, and

indeed of all humanity, lies in embracing a philosophy of voluntary restraint and deep ecological respect. The absolute truth revealed by this global synthesis is that true happiness cannot be found by expanding our desires within an artificial marketplace, but by returning to our foundational relationship with Mother Earth. Anand presents this realization as a universal birthright. By showing that our deepest psychological wounds can only be healed by returning to our origins, he offers a timeless blueprint for a balanced, peaceful, and sovereign world. This grand ideological synthesis was the direct product of Anand's unique life path across geographic borders. His travels across maritime lanes between the UK and India acted as an intellectual crucible. In the West, he watched the psychological disintegration of European society, which was heavily automated and deeply scarred by the First World War. When he returned to India, he spent extended periods at Mahatma Gandhi's Sabarmati Ashram, immersing himself in the philosophy of simple living, high thinking, and agrarian harmony. Anand's mind processed these dual realities to realize that neither Western mechanical material advancement nor Eastern isolation could save humanity when operating alone. He observed that the alienation of the lost child was the exact condition of the modern global citizen who had traded their organic identity for the commercial toys of industrial capitalism. By weaving his global travel observations into this short story, Anand created an enduring roadmap for global well-being. He proved that true human harmony can only be achieved when the material sciences of the West are balanced by the deep, geo-centric spiritual wisdom of the East, pointing toward a future where humanity lives not as competitive market consumers, but as peaceful guardians of Mother Earth.

Conclusion: The Eternal Echo of the Bugle.

Mulk Raj Anand's 'The Lost Child' stands as a monumental triumph of anti-colonial literature, a masterclass in spatial metaphors, and a profound treatise on natural philosophy. By dismantling colonial narratives that minimized the core ethos of this story under the guise of mere child psychology, this research paper has reinstated its true form as a revolutionary bugle-call of absolute sovereignty. Anand masterfully demonstrated that the luster of a foreign empire's material offerings is entirely hollow when cast against the organic and sacred bond between our motherland and its citizens. The child's steadfast refusal to be pacified by toys, sweets, or swings is an eternal reminder that a nation's core identity and its freedom are non-negotiable and absolute. This literary truth must be imperatively integrated into our modern governance and academic frameworks. To safeguard the invaluable, intangible intellectual assets of our institutions, to secure the

welfare of coming generations, and to protect our cultural and geographical consciousness, we must act with the same urgency and clarity that Anand infused into his prose. We must reject temporary, superficial administrative distractions and ensure that our intellectual custodians—our teachers and professors—are granted the full right to serve and guide the nation without premature restrictions. Ultimately, 'The Lost Child' is an eternal clarion call to reconnect with our roots, to keep our heritage intact, and to declare with absolute resolve that for any individual, community, or nation, there can never be a substitute for the protective embrace of the motherland. This eternal bugle-call stands firmly validated by Anand's life journey and his physical crossings between continents. His frequent returns to India allowed him to ground his high literary theories in the real-world suffering, defiance, and ultimate truth of the Indian populace. Anand's mind remained clear: true freedom can never be achieved in colonial exile or through the blind imitation of foreign structures. By channeling his sharp cross-cultural observations into every line of this prose poem, he designed a timeless engine for national health and collective well-being. The story leaves us with an absolute, historical truth: whether facing the open commercial exploitation of 1934 or navigating the deep institutional challenges of modern academia, our collective survival relies on our capacity to reject superficial, external temptations and anchor ourselves within our own sovereign landscape. The echo of Anand's bugle challenges us to protect our human capital, respect our ancestral wisdom, and confidently declare that the protective embrace of our motherland remains our highest duty, our absolute sovereignty, and our ultimate home.

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The Search for Meaning in Paulo Coelho's *Brida*: A Logotherapeutic Study

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Abstract— Paulo Coelho's *Brida* portrays the spiritual and psychological journey of a young woman seeking wisdom, love, and self-understanding. This paper examines the novel through the lens of Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy, a psychological approach that identifies the search for meaning as the primary motivation of human existence. The study explores how *Brida*'s quest for spiritual knowledge reflects Frankl's concepts of meaning-making, freedom of choice, responsibility, and self-transcendence. Through her encounters with the Magus and Wicca, *Brida* is introduced to diverse spiritual traditions that challenge her understanding of reality and encourage profound self-exploration. The analysis reveals that her journey is not merely a pursuit of mystical experiences but a process of discovering purpose, identity, and personal fulfilment. As she confronts uncertainty, fear, and inner conflicts, she gradually develops a deeper awareness of her potential and her place in the world. Her experiences illustrate Frankl's belief that meaning can be discovered through love, purposeful action, and commitment to values greater than oneself. The novel further emphasises the significance of personal choice and responsibility in shaping an authentic existence. By integrating psychological insight with spiritual exploration, Coelho presents meaning as a transformative force that enables individuals to transcend limitations and attain self-realisation. The study argues that *Brida* serves as a literary representation of logotherapeutic principles, highlighting the universal human desire for purpose and existential fulfilment. Through a logotherapeutic reading, the novel emerges as a profound narrative of self-discovery and spiritual growth, demonstrating the continuing relevance of Frankl's meaning-centred psychology in contemporary literary criticism and interdisciplinary studies.



Keywords— Logotherapy, Search for Meaning, Self-Transcendence, Spiritual Quest, Existential Fulfilment.

I. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary literature frequently explores the human search for meaning, identity, and fulfilment in a world characterised by uncertainty and existential anxiety. Among contemporary novelists, Paulo Coelho occupies a significant position for his sustained engagement with spiritual growth, self-discovery, and the pursuit of purpose. His novels often portray characters who embark on transformative journeys that lead them toward a deeper understanding of themselves and the world around them. Published in 1990, *Brida* narrates the story of a young Irish

woman who undertakes a spiritual quest to discover her destiny and understand the mysteries of life. Through her encounters with the Magus and Wicca, *Brida* navigates various spiritual traditions while seeking knowledge, love, and self-realisation.

The novel extends beyond a conventional coming-of-age narrative by presenting an exploration of existential concerns that resonate with modern readers. *Brida*'s journey reflects a universal human desire to discover meaning and purpose. Her search for spiritual enlightenment parallels the psychological process of self-exploration and personal

growth. Throughout the narrative, she confronts uncertainty, fear, doubt, and the challenge of making meaningful choices. These experiences reveal the complexities of human existence and the necessity of finding purpose amid life's ambiguities.

The present study examines *Brida* through the theoretical framework of Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy. Frankl, an Austrian psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor, developed Logotherapy based on the premise that the primary motivational force in human beings is the search for meaning. Unlike psychological approaches that emphasise pleasure or power as fundamental human drives, Logotherapy asserts that individuals achieve fulfilment when they discover purpose in their lives. Frankl argues that meaning can be realised through creative endeavours, meaningful relationships, and the attitudes individuals adopt toward suffering and adversity.

Applying Logotherapy to *Brida* provides a productive framework for understanding the protagonist's spiritual and psychological development. Brida's quest is not merely a search for mystical knowledge but an attempt to uncover a meaningful existence. Her encounters, choices, and experiences reflect the central principles of Logotherapy, including freedom of will, responsibility, self-transcendence, and the pursuit of meaning. Through this lens, the novel emerges as a literary representation of humanity's enduring search for purpose.

This study aims to demonstrate that Brida's spiritual journey embodies Frankl's conception of meaning-making and self-transcendence. By analysing the novel through a logotherapeutic perspective, the paper highlights the interconnectedness of spirituality, identity, and existential fulfilment. The research further contributes to the growing body of scholarship on Paulo Coelho by examining how psychological theories can illuminate the philosophical dimensions of his fiction.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Paulo Coelho's fiction has attracted considerable scholarly attention due to its engagement with spirituality, mysticism, personal transformation, and philosophical inquiry. Researchers have examined his novels from diverse perspectives, including religious studies, psychology, postcolonial criticism, existential philosophy, and comparative literature. Among his works, *The Alchemist* has received the greatest critical attention, while *Brida* has gradually emerged as an important text for understanding Coelho's treatment of spiritual awakening and self-discovery.

Several studies have explored the theme of self-discovery in Coelho's novels. Scholars argue that his protagonists often embark on journeys that symbolise inner transformation. These journeys involve encounters with mentors, challenges, and moments of revelation that facilitate personal growth. Such analyses suggest that Coelho presents self-knowledge as a dynamic process requiring courage, perseverance, and openness to experience. In *Brida*, the protagonist's quest for spiritual understanding exemplifies this pattern of transformative exploration.

Other researchers have focused on the spiritual dimensions of Coelho's fiction. They observe that his novels integrate elements from various religious and mystical traditions, creating narratives that appeal to readers across cultural boundaries. In *Brida*, Coelho combines aspects of Celtic spirituality, magical practices, and universal philosophical concepts. Scholars note that this synthesis reflects a broader concern with the human search for transcendence and meaning. Rather than promoting a specific religious doctrine, the novel encourages readers to explore their own spiritual potential.

Psychological interpretations of Coelho's works have also gained prominence. Some critics have applied Jungian analytical psychology to examine archetypes, symbols, and processes of individuation in his novels. Such studies highlight the presence of universal symbols and psychological transformations that accompany the protagonist's development. In *Brida*, the search for the soul mate, encounters with spiritual guides, and experiences of self-discovery have been interpreted as manifestations of psychological maturation and individuation.

The concept of identity formation constitutes another significant area of scholarly inquiry. Researchers have argued that Coelho's characters often confront questions concerning personal identity, purpose, and belonging. Their journeys reflect broader existential concerns related to authenticity and self-realisation. Brida's experiences illustrate the tension between social expectations and personal aspirations. Her quest for knowledge becomes a quest for identity simultaneously, demonstrating the interconnectedness of self-understanding and meaningful existence.

Although numerous studies have addressed spirituality and self-discovery in *Brida*, relatively few have examined the novel through the lens of Logotherapy. Existing psychological analyses tend to emphasise Jungian concepts, leaving Frankl's meaning-centred approach comparatively underexplored. This gap is significant because the novel repeatedly foregrounds questions concerning purpose, freedom, responsibility, and existential

fulfilment. A logotherapeutic reading therefore, offers fresh insights into the psychological and philosophical dimensions of the text.

Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy has been widely applied in literary studies to investigate narratives of suffering, resilience, and personal transformation. Scholars utilising this framework argue that literature provides valuable representations of humanity's search for meaning. Characters frequently encounter situations that require them to make choices, confront adversity, and define their values. Through these experiences, narratives illuminate the processes through which individuals construct meaningful lives. Applying Logotherapy to *Brida* enables a deeper understanding of how spiritual exploration functions as a pathway toward existential fulfilment.

The present study builds upon previous scholarship concerning spirituality and self-discovery while addressing the limited attention given to Frankl's theoretical insights. By interpreting *Brida*'s journey through the principles of Logotherapy, the research seeks to demonstrate that the novel portrays meaning not as a fixed destination but as an ongoing process of growth, self-transcendence, and personal responsibility. Such an approach contributes to contemporary discussions concerning literature, psychology, and the enduring human search for purpose.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design based on interpretative textual analysis. The primary text selected for analysis is Paulo Coelho's *Brida*, which is examined as a literary representation of existential and psychological concerns. The main objective is to interpret the protagonist's spiritual journey through Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy to understand how meaning-making, self-transcendence, and existential fulfilment are constructed within the narrative. The research follows a descriptive-analytical approach, where selected episodes, character development, and major thematic structures are closely read and interpreted in a systematic manner. Since the study deals with subjective experiences such as spirituality, identity formation, and existential awareness, a qualitative interpretative framework is more suitable than quantitative methods.

Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy is used as the theoretical foundation for analysis, focusing on key concepts such as the will to meaning, freedom of will, meaning in life, responsibility, and self-transcendence. These principles are applied to examine *Brida*'s psychological and spiritual development throughout the novel. The data is drawn primarily from the literary text,

supported by relevant secondary scholarly sources on existential psychology and Coelho's fiction. Through this framework, the study explores how *Brida* reflects universal human concerns related to purpose, identity, and fulfilment, demonstrating the connection between literature and psychological meaning-making.

Theoretical Framework: Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy

The present study employs Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy as the theoretical framework for examining Paulo Coelho's *Brida*. Logotherapy emerged from Frankl's experiences as a psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor, leading him to formulate a psychological approach that identifies meaning as the central motivating force in human life. Unlike Sigmund Freud's emphasis on the pleasure principle and Alfred Adler's focus on the will to power, Frankl argues that human beings are fundamentally driven by the desire to discover meaning and purpose. In *Man's Search for Meaning*, he states that "man's search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life" (Frankl 105). This proposition forms the foundation of Logotherapy and provides a valuable framework for understanding literary characters who undertake journeys of self-discovery and existential exploration. Since *Brida* centres on a young woman's quest for spiritual knowledge, identity, and fulfilment, Frankl's theory offers significant insights into the psychological dimensions of her journey.

Logotherapy is based on three fundamental principles: freedom of will, will to meaning, and meaning in life. The first principle, freedom of will, suggests that human beings possess the capacity to make choices regardless of external circumstances. Frankl rejects deterministic views that reduce individuals to products of biological or environmental conditions. Although external factors influence human behaviour, individuals retain the ability to choose their responses. As Frankl observes, "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms, to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances" (66). This emphasis on freedom is central to Logotherapy because it establishes the individual's responsibility for creating a meaningful life. Human beings are not passive victims of circumstances but active participants in shaping their destinies through conscious decisions and actions.

The second principle, the will to meaning, represents the core motivational force in human existence. According to Frankl, people naturally seek purpose and significance in their lives. When this search is frustrated, individuals may experience feelings of emptiness, boredom, and alienation. Frankl describes this condition as the existential vacuum, a state in which life appears meaningless and directionless. He argues that modern

society often contributes to this condition by encouraging material success while neglecting deeper existential needs. Consequently, individuals frequently struggle to identify goals and values that provide lasting fulfilment. The will to meaning, therefore, functions as a psychological necessity that guides human behaviour and personal development. Through meaningful goals and commitments, individuals overcome existential frustration and achieve a sense of purpose.

The third principle, meaning in life, asserts that meaning exists under all circumstances and can be discovered in every stage of human existence. Frankl emphasises that meaning is not a universal formula applicable to everyone; rather, it is unique to each individual and situation. Every moment presents opportunities for meaningful action, relationships, and growth. As he explains, "Life ultimately means taking the responsibility to find the right answer to its problems and to fulfil the tasks which it constantly sets for each individual" (98). Meaning, therefore, arises through personal responsibility and engagement with life's challenges. This perspective highlights the dynamic nature of meaning, suggesting that individuals continuously discover new purposes as they encounter different experiences and circumstances.

A central aspect of Logotherapy is Frankl's identification of three pathways through which meaning can be realised. The first pathway involves creative values, which are achieved through productive work, achievement, and contribution. Individuals discover meaning when they create, build, or accomplish something that benefits themselves or others. Creative activity enables people to express their abilities and participate actively in the world. Through meaningful work and purposeful action, individuals transcend self-interest and contribute to a larger social and ethical framework. This principle emphasises the importance of commitment, responsibility, and personal effort in the construction of meaningful lives.

The second pathway involves experiential values, which emerge through encounters with beauty, nature, art, culture, and human relationships. Among these experiences, Frankl places particular emphasis on love. He argues that love enables individuals to recognise the unique value and potential of another person. According to Frankl, "The salvation of man is through love and in love" (49). Love transcends superficial attraction and becomes a means of understanding another person's essential being. Through loving relationships, individuals discover meaning beyond their immediate concerns and develop a deeper awareness of themselves and others. Experiential values, therefore, contribute significantly to psychological well-being and existential fulfilment.

The third pathway involves attitudinal values, which become especially important when individuals encounter unavoidable suffering. Frankl acknowledges that suffering is an inevitable dimension of human existence. However, he argues that individuals retain the freedom to choose their attitudes toward suffering. While people cannot always control external events, they can determine how they respond to adversity. Frankl observes that "when we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves" (112). This principle transforms suffering from a purely negative experience into an opportunity for personal growth and self-discovery. Through courage, resilience, and dignity, individuals can find meaning even in difficult circumstances. Attitudinal values therefore represent one of the most distinctive contributions of Logotherapy to existential psychology.

Another important concept in Frankl's theory is self-transcendence. Unlike approaches that emphasise self-gratification or personal satisfaction as ultimate goals, Logotherapy proposes that fulfilment emerges when individuals direct themselves toward purposes beyond the self. Frankl argues that authentic human existence is characterised by commitment to values, responsibilities, and relationships that transcend individual desires. He explains that "being human always points, and is directed, to something or someone other than oneself" (*The Will to Meaning* 115). Self-transcendence thus involves moving beyond self-centred concerns and participating in meaningful activities that contribute to broader human purposes. Through this process, individuals achieve deeper forms of fulfilment and personal growth.

Closely related to self-transcendence is Frankl's understanding of self-actualisation. While humanistic psychologists such as Abraham Maslow regard self-actualisation as the highest human goal, Frankl considers it a by-product of meaningful engagement with life. He argues that happiness and fulfilment cannot be pursued directly; instead, they emerge naturally when individuals dedicate themselves to meaningful responsibilities and relationships. As Frankl notes, "Happiness cannot be pursued; it must ensue" (Frankl 138). This perspective shifts attention away from personal gratification and toward purposeful involvement in life. Meaningful existence, therefore, becomes the foundation upon which psychological well-being is established.

Logotherapy has become increasingly influential in literary studies because it offers valuable tools for examining narratives of identity, purpose, and transformation. Literary characters frequently confront existential questions concerning freedom, responsibility, suffering, and self-discovery. By applying Frankl's theory,

scholars can explore how characters respond to these challenges and construct meaningful lives. The framework is particularly useful for analysing narratives that focus on spiritual quests and psychological development. In such texts, the search for meaning functions as a central narrative force that shapes character growth and thematic significance.

Within the context of *Brida*, Logotherapy provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the protagonist's spiritual and psychological journey. Brida's quest reflects Frankl's concept of the will to meaning, as she seeks answers to questions concerning identity, destiny, and fulfilment. Her encounters with the Magus and Wicca encourage her to exercise freedom of choice and accept responsibility for her spiritual development. Through experiences of love, self-discovery, and personal transformation, she gradually moves toward self-transcendence and existential fulfilment. Consequently, Frankl's theory illuminates the deeper psychological significance of Brida's journey and demonstrates how Coelho's novel portrays the universal human search for meaning. The application of Logotherapy reveals that *Brida* is not merely a narrative of spiritual adventure but a profound exploration of the human desire to discover purpose and authenticity in life.

Analysis of *Brida* through Logotherapy

Paulo Coelho's *Brida* is a profound exploration of the human search for meaning, identity, and spiritual fulfilment. The novel narrates the journey of Brida O'Fern, a young Irish woman whose intense desire for knowledge leads her into a world of mystical experiences and self-discovery. Although the narrative incorporates elements of spirituality, magic, and esoteric traditions, its deeper significance lies in its exploration of existential questions concerning purpose, freedom, responsibility, and personal transformation. These concerns closely correspond to Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy, which identifies the search for meaning as the primary motivation of human existence. Through a logotherapeutic lens, Brida's journey can be interpreted as a process of discovering meaning through freedom of choice, love, self-transcendence, and commitment to personal growth.

At the beginning of the novel, Brida experiences a sense of incompleteness despite leading an apparently normal life. She feels dissatisfied with conventional existence and becomes increasingly aware of an inner longing that cannot be satisfied through ordinary experiences. This condition resembles what Frankl describes as the existential vacuum, a state characterised by feelings of emptiness, uncertainty, and lack of purpose. Rather than accepting this condition passively, Brida

actively seeks answers to questions concerning her identity and destiny. Her dissatisfaction becomes the catalyst for a transformative journey that reflects the logotherapeutic principle of the will to meaning. Frankl argues that human beings are fundamentally motivated by the desire to discover significance in their lives, and Brida's quest exemplifies this motivation. Her search for spiritual knowledge is not merely intellectual curiosity but a deeper effort to understand her purpose and establish a meaningful existence.

The significance of perseverance in the search for meaning is strongly highlighted through Brida's reflections on life's uncertainties. She gradually comes to understand that meaning cannot be discovered through passive waiting or by expecting complete clarity at every stage of life. Instead, it demands commitment, courage, and the willingness to continue moving forward even in moments of confusion and doubt. This understanding aligns closely with Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy, which emphasizes that human beings do not require absolute answers in order to live meaningful lives. Rather, they need a guiding sense of purpose that sustains them through uncertainty and motivates continued engagement with life. Brida's determination reflects this principle as she consistently faces situations that challenge her beliefs, emotions, and assumptions about existence. Despite these challenges, she persists in her quest for deeper truth about herself and the world around her. Her journey demonstrates that meaning is not always found in immediate solutions or clear outcomes, but often emerges gradually through the lived experience of struggle, reflection, and continued effort.

Another important concept within Logotherapy is freedom of will. Frankl maintains that human beings possess the capacity to make choices regardless of external circumstances. Throughout the novel, Brida exercises this freedom by choosing to pursue spiritual knowledge despite the risks and uncertainties involved. Her encounters with the Magus require her to confront fears and abandon familiar assumptions. Rather than remaining within the boundaries of conventional life, she embraces experiences that challenge her understanding of reality.

The importance of courage and freedom is emphasised when Brida learns: "When you find your path, you must not be afraid. You need to have sufficient courage to make mistakes" (Coelho 17). This statement reflects Frankl's belief that meaningful existence requires responsible decision-making. Brida's growth depends upon her willingness to act despite uncertainty. Mistakes become opportunities for learning and transformation rather than evidence of failure. Through this process, Coelho suggests that self-discovery is inseparable from freedom and

responsibility. Meaning emerges when individuals actively engage with life's possibilities and accept the consequences of their choices.

Brida's journey also illustrates Viktor Frankl's belief that suffering and adversity can contribute to personal growth. Although the novel does not focus on extreme suffering, the protagonist experiences emotional conflict, disappointment, and spiritual confusion. These experiences challenge her assumptions and compel her to confront aspects of herself that she had previously ignored. Rather than portraying suffering as meaningless, Coelho presents it as a valuable source of insight and transformation. From a logotherapeutic perspective, suffering acquires significance when individuals respond to it constructively. Frankl argues that people retain the freedom to determine their attitudes toward adversity. Brida's disappointments ultimately contribute to her growth by encouraging self-reflection and deeper understanding. Through these experiences, she develops resilience and acquires a more mature perspective on life. The novel, therefore, supports Frankl's argument that meaning can be discovered even in difficult circumstances.

A central dimension of Brida's transformation involves self-discovery and self-transcendence. Frankl argues that genuine fulfilment is achieved not through self-centred pursuits but through commitment to values and purposes that transcend the individual self. Initially, Brida's curiosity is directed toward acquiring spiritual knowledge for personal benefit. As her journey progresses, however, she begins to understand the interconnected nature of existence and the importance of participating in realities larger than herself. This process is articulated through the following insight: "Go in search of your Gift. The process of finding ourselves is called Love. The more you understand yourself, the more you will understand the world" (Coelho 38). This statement reflects the logotherapeutic principle of self-transcendence. Brida gradually realizes that self-understanding is inseparable from understanding others and the broader world. Personal growth occurs through relationships, compassion, and openness to experience. Her development illustrates Frankl's belief that authentic fulfilment emerges when individuals direct their attention beyond immediate self-interest and commit themselves to meaningful values.

Love occupies a particularly significant position in both Logotherapy and *Brida*. Viktor Frankl identifies love as one of the primary pathways through which meaning can be discovered. In Coelho's novel, the concept of the soul mate functions as a symbol of emotional, spiritual, and existential connection. Brida's search for love extends beyond romantic fulfilment and becomes part of her broader

quest for self-understanding. This understanding suggests that love serves as a bridge between individual experience and universal meaning. Through meaningful relationships, Brida gains insight into her identity and develops a deeper appreciation of life's interconnectedness. Love becomes a transformative force that enables her to transcend isolation and discover greater purpose. Consequently, the novel reinforces Frankl's conviction that meaningful relationships constitute one of the most significant sources of existential fulfilment.

Another important aspect of Brida's development involves the acceptance of personal desires and aspirations. Throughout her journey, she struggles to reconcile competing expectations and uncertainties regarding her future. Her spiritual experiences gradually reveal that authentic identity requires self-acceptance and honesty. From a logotherapeutic perspective, self-acceptance is essential because it enables individuals to recognise their unique responsibilities and possibilities. Brida's willingness to acknowledge her desires contributes to a more authentic understanding of herself. Through this process, she becomes increasingly capable of making meaningful choices and pursuing goals that correspond to her deepest values.

The novel ultimately suggests that meaning is discovered through active participation in life rather than passive observation. Brida's transformation results from her willingness to embrace uncertainty, accept responsibility, and remain open to growth. Her experiences demonstrate that purpose emerges through freedom, love, self-transcendence, and commitment to personal development. Viewed through Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy, *Brida* becomes a powerful narrative of existential exploration that affirms the human capacity to discover meaning even in the face of uncertainty and change.

IV. CONCLUSION

Paulo Coelho's *Brida* is a compelling narrative that explores the universal human quest for meaning, identity, and spiritual fulfilment. Through the journey of its protagonist, the novel illustrates the complexities of self-discovery and the transformative power of personal growth. Examined through the theoretical lens of Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy, *Brida* emerges as more than a spiritual or mystical narrative; it becomes a profound exploration of humanity's enduring search for purpose and existential significance. Brida's experiences reflect the fundamental principles of Logotherapy, particularly the will to meaning, freedom of choice, personal responsibility, self-transcendence, and the pursuit of authentic existence.

Throughout the novel, Brida's dissatisfaction with ordinary life motivates her to seek deeper understanding and spiritual wisdom. Her journey demonstrates that meaning is not passively received but actively discovered through engagement with life's challenges and opportunities. The choices she makes, the risks she undertakes, and the lessons she learns contribute to her psychological and spiritual transformation. Her development supports Frankl's assertion that individuals possess the freedom to determine their responses to life's circumstances and that meaningful existence depends upon responsible action and commitment to personal values.

The novel further emphasises the significance of love as a pathway to meaning. Brida's search for her soul mate and her growing awareness of human interconnectedness reveal that meaningful relationships play a crucial role in personal fulfilment. In accordance with Frankl's theory, love becomes a means of transcending individual limitations and discovering deeper dimensions of existence. Similarly, the experiences of uncertainty, disappointment, and struggle encountered by Brida illustrate that adversity can function as a catalyst for growth and self-understanding when approached with courage and perseverance.

Another important contribution of the novel lies in its portrayal of self-transcendence. Brida gradually moves beyond self-centred concerns and develops a broader understanding of her relationship with the world. Her spiritual awakening demonstrates that authentic fulfilment arises not from material success or external validation but from commitment to values and purposes greater than oneself. Through this process, she achieves a deeper awareness of her identity and destiny.

In conclusion, a logotherapeutic reading of *Brida* reveals the novel's profound engagement with existential questions concerning purpose, freedom, and human fulfilment. Coelho presents meaning as a dynamic and transformative force that enables individuals to overcome uncertainty and discover authentic existence. Brida's journey reflects the universal human desire to understand oneself and find significance in life. Consequently, the novel serves as an important literary representation of Frankl's psychological insights and demonstrates the continuing relevance of Logotherapy in contemporary literary studies. Through its exploration of meaning, love, and self-transcendence, *Brida* affirms the enduring human capacity for growth, resilience, and existential fulfilment.

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The Idealized Woman in Wordsworth's "*She Dwelt among the Untrodden Ways*" and Shakespeare's *Sonnet 130*: A Comparative Study of Feminine Representation and Poetic Idealization

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Abstract— The representation of women has remained a central concern in English literary traditions, often reflecting prevailing cultural notions of beauty, virtue, and desire. William Wordsworth's "*She Dwelt among the Untrodden Ways*" (1799) and William Shakespeare's *Sonnet 130* (1609) offer two distinct approaches to portraying women. While Wordsworth idealizes Lucy as a pure, nature-bound figure whose significance emerges through solitude and loss, Shakespeare challenges conventional poetic idealization by presenting a woman whose imperfections are openly acknowledged. This paper undertakes a comparative analysis of these poems to examine how each poet constructs femininity and negotiates the relationship between love and idealization. Drawing upon Romantic and Renaissance literary contexts, as well as feminist critical perspectives, the study argues that Wordsworth's portrayal elevates the woman into a symbolic and passive ideal, whereas Shakespeare's anti-Petrarchan approach humanizes his beloved by rejecting exaggerated comparisons. The analysis reveals broader shifts in literary attitudes toward women, moving from Romantic transcendence and spiritualization to Renaissance realism and emotional authenticity.



Keywords— Idealization, Romanticism, Renaissance Literature, Lucy Poems, *Sonnet 130*, Feminism, Gender Representation, William Wordsworth, William Shakespeare

I. INTRODUCTION

The depiction of women in poetry often serves as a reflection of the social and cultural values of a particular historical period. Poets have traditionally celebrated women through images of beauty, purity, and devotion, yet the methods through which such representations are constructed vary significantly across literary movements. William Wordsworth's "*She Dwelt among the Untrodden Ways*" and William Shakespeare's *Sonnet 130* provide compelling examples of contrasting poetic attitudes toward women and love.

Wordsworth's poem belongs to the celebrated Lucy series, written during the Romantic period and published in the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. The poem portrays Lucy as a mysterious young woman whose beauty and worth remain

largely unnoticed during her lifetime. Through natural imagery and themes of solitude, Wordsworth transforms Lucy into a symbol of innocence, purity, and harmony with nature. Her death intensifies the speaker's emotional response and solidifies her status as an idealized figure.

In contrast, Shakespeare's *Sonnet 130*, part of the Dark Lady sequence, deliberately challenges the conventions of Petrarchan love poetry. Rather than comparing his beloved to celestial or natural wonders, Shakespeare emphasizes her ordinary physical features and rejects exaggerated praise. Yet, paradoxically, the sonnet concludes with a sincere affirmation of love. Through this anti-idealizing strategy, Shakespeare critiques poetic conventions while celebrating genuine affection.

This comparative study explores how the two poets construct femininity, beauty, and desire. It argues that while Wordsworth elevates womanhood into a symbolic ideal detached from reality, Shakespeare embraces imperfection and presents a more humanized vision of love. By examining imagery, structure, and thematic concerns, the paper highlights the evolving literary treatment of women from the Renaissance to the Romantic era.

II. WORDSWORTH'S IDEALIZATION OF LUCY: NATURE, PURITY, AND ABSENCE

In "*She Dwelt among the Untrodden Ways*," Wordsworth presents Lucy as a figure closely associated with nature and isolation. The opening lines place her in a secluded landscape, "among the untrodden ways," suggesting both physical remoteness and spiritual uniqueness. This isolation contributes to her idealized status, as she exists beyond the ordinary social world.

The poet employs natural imagery to elevate Lucy's beauty. She is compared to "a violet by a mossy stone" and "a star" shining alone in the sky. These images emphasize delicacy, rarity, and quiet brilliance. Importantly, Lucy's beauty is not celebrated through physical description; instead, it is expressed through symbolic associations with nature. Such imagery reflects Romantic ideals that value simplicity, individuality, and the sublime qualities found in ordinary rural life.

Lucy's significance becomes most apparent after her death. The final stanza shifts from objective description to personal grief, culminating in the poignant declaration: "But she is in her grave, and, oh, / The difference to me!" Her death transforms her into an eternal memory and reinforces her symbolic perfection. The speaker's emotional response becomes the central focus, suggesting that Lucy's value lies partly in the effect she has on the male observer.

From a feminist perspective, this idealization can be interpreted as a form of objectification. Lucy possesses no independent voice, thoughts, or agency within the poem. Her identity is constructed entirely through the speaker's perceptions. Although she is elevated to a near-sacred status, she remains passive and silent. Consequently, Wordsworth's idealization simultaneously glorifies and limits femininity, reducing the woman to a symbol that serves male emotional and artistic reflection.

III. SHAKESPEARE'S ANTI-IDEALIZATION AND THE CELEBRATION OF REALITY

Shakespeare's *Sonnet 130* offers a striking contrast to Romantic idealization. The poem systematically dismantles conventional comparisons used in Renaissance love poetry.

The speaker insists that his mistress's eyes are "nothing like the sun," her lips are less red than coral, and her hair resembles "black wires." These descriptions reject the exaggerated metaphors commonly found in Petrarchan sonnets.

Rather than diminishing the beloved, however, Shakespeare's realism serves a critical purpose. By exposing the artificiality of traditional praise, the poet argues that genuine love does not depend on impossible standards of beauty. The beloved is presented as an ordinary human being rather than an unattainable goddess.

The poem's concluding couplet is particularly significant:

*"And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare."*

Here Shakespeare redefines idealization. True love is not based on fantasy but on honest recognition of another person's humanity. The beloved's imperfections become evidence of authenticity rather than deficiency.

Unlike Lucy, Shakespeare's mistress possesses a stronger sense of physical presence. She walks, speaks, breathes, and exists as a living, embodied individual. Although the poem remains filtered through the male speaker's perspective, the woman is not transformed into a distant symbol. Instead, she remains grounded in reality. This representation challenges conventional beauty standards and anticipates more modern understandings of love based on mutual recognition rather than idealized projection.

IV. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: TWO MODELS OF FEMININE REPRESENTATION

A comparison of the two poems reveals fundamentally different approaches to representing women. Wordsworth constructs an idealized feminine figure through imagery of nature, solitude, and death. Lucy becomes a symbol of purity whose significance derives largely from her absence. Her individuality is overshadowed by the meanings assigned to her by the speaker.

Shakespeare, by contrast, resists symbolic elevation. Through irony and anti-Petrarchan rhetoric, he dismantles conventional ideals of feminine beauty and presents a woman who is unmistakably human. While Lucy is associated with transcendence and spiritual purity, Shakespeare's mistress is characterized by physical reality and emotional authenticity.

Both poems nevertheless remain centered on male perception. Neither woman speaks for herself, and both are mediated through the perspective of a male narrator. In this sense, the poems participate in broader patriarchal traditions

of literary representation. However, their methods differ significantly. Wordsworth's idealization transforms the woman into an object of contemplation and loss, whereas Shakespeare's realism challenges the conventions that reduce women to unattainable ideals.

Historically, these differences reflect the literary values of their respective periods. Romanticism celebrated emotional depth, individual experience, and the spiritual power of nature. Consequently, Lucy emerges as an emblem of Romantic transcendence. Renaissance poetry, particularly in Shakespeare's hands, often interrogated inherited conventions. *Sonnet 130* reflects this critical impulse by questioning the sincerity of poetic exaggeration and redefining the nature of love itself.

V. CONCLUSION

William Wordsworth's "*She Dwelt among the Untrodden Ways*" and William Shakespeare's *Sonnet 130* present two influential yet contrasting visions of femininity and idealization. Wordsworth elevates Lucy into a timeless symbol of purity, beauty, and loss, reflecting Romantic ideals of nature and transcendence. However, this elevation comes at the cost of her individuality and agency. Shakespeare, on the other hand, dismantles traditional ideals through irony and realism, celebrating a beloved whose humanity is more valuable than conventional perfection.

Together, these poems illuminate changing literary attitudes toward women and love. Wordsworth's poem demonstrates how idealization can transform women into symbols, while Shakespeare's sonnet reveals the limitations of such transformations by affirming the worth of ordinary human reality. Their contrasting approaches continue to invite critical reflection on beauty, desire, authenticity, and the role of women in literary imagination.

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The Future of English Language Teaching in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: Opportunities, Challenges, and Emerging Directions

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Abstract— Artificial Intelligence or "AI", as the boffins call it, is rapidly changing the face of English Language Teaching. And the remarkable developments in generative AI, natural language processing, and intelligent tutoring systems, has opened a whole new world of possibilities for teachers and pupils alike. This systematic review takes stock of the scholarly literature on AI's growing role in ELT, drawing upon peer-reviewed studies published between 2020 and 2026, gathered from such sources as Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, and Google Scholar, and conducted according to the PRISMA guidelines. The evidence shows that AI brings with it a great many advantages such as personalized learning, adaptive instruction, prompt feedback, and improved assessment across the four key skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking. All the same, certain difficulties remain to be ironed out, namely questions of academic honesty, data privacy, bias built into the machines themselves, inequality in access to technology, and whether teachers are properly equipped to make use of it. The review's conclusion is a reassuring one: AI is most unlikely to do away with the English teacher altogether. Rather, it shall change the nature of the job, as teachers and machines come to work hand in hand. The future of English teaching, then, will be one of cooperation between man and machine, of cleverer methods of assessment, and of a growing need for both teachers and pupils to become well-versed in AI. This review offers critical insights for teachers, policymakers, curriculum designers, and researchers alike.



Keywords— Artificial Intelligence, English Language Teaching, Generative AI, Language Learning, Educational Technology, Personalized Learning

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as one of the most transformative technologies of the twenty-first century, profoundly influencing multiple sectors, including education. Recent advances in machine learning, natural language processing (NLP), and large language models (LLMs) have expanded AI capabilities, enabling systems to support teaching, learning, assessment, and educational administration. As Lo (2023) observes, these developments have accelerated "the transition from traditional

technology-enhanced learning environments to more intelligent, adaptive, and personalized educational systems," making AI an increasingly central component of global educational innovation.

A particularly significant milestone was the public release of ChatGPT by OpenAI in late 2022, which marked what many scholars describe as "a turning point in educational technology" (Lo, 2023). Since then, AI-powered tools ; including intelligent tutoring systems, automated writing evaluation platforms, and adaptive learning applications have become progressively embedded in educational

settings. According to Wang et al. (2024), these tools provide learners with "immediate feedback, personalized learning experiences, and interactive support," thereby enhancing both the efficiency and accessibility of learning.

The impact of AI has been particularly notable in English Language Teaching (ELT), a field naturally aligned with AI capabilities given its emphasis on continuous practice, individualized feedback, and skill development. AI technologies support learners across reading, writing, listening, and speaking through personalized instruction, automated assessment, and conversational practice. Hassan (2025) affirms that "AI-powered tools have improved learner engagement, increased learning autonomy, and enhanced language proficiency across various educational contexts," with generative AI further enabling the delivery of customized feedback tailored to individual proficiency levels.

Nevertheless, the growing adoption of AI in ELT raises serious pedagogical, ethical, and practical concerns. Crompton et al. (2024) caution that challenges related to "academic integrity, overreliance on AI-generated content, data privacy, algorithmic bias, and the potential erosion of critical thinking skills" remain inadequately addressed. Simultaneously, educators face mounting pressure to develop the AI literacy necessary for effective classroom integration (Uygun & Demir, 2026).

Looking ahead, AI is expected to reshape traditional educational paradigms rather than replace educators entirely. Deng and Jamaludin (2026) argue that AI should be understood as "a complementary tool that can support personalized learning, intelligent assessment, and enhanced instructional practices." Understanding these developments is therefore essential for educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers seeking to maximize AI's benefits while mitigating its associated risks.

1.2 Rationale

The rapid advancement of generative AI and machine learning has transformed English Language Teaching (ELT) by enabling personalized, adaptive learning. However, existing research primarily focuses on the short-term effectiveness of specific applications (like ChatGPT or chatbots). There is a critical gap in understanding the long-term implications of AI on curriculum design, ethical governance, academic integrity, and the changing role of educators. As educational institutions face pressure to integrate these technologies responsibly, a comprehensive review of the future of ELT in the age of AI is essential to guide policy, teacher preparation, and sustainable practices.

1.3 Purpose of the Article

This article examines the transformative impact of AI on ELT and explores how these technologies reshape contemporary language education. Specifically, it synthesizes current research, identifies key opportunities and challenges, and evaluates the implications for teaching, learning, and assessment. Ultimately, this review highlights emerging trends to provide a roadmap for the responsible and sustainable adoption of AI in future language learning environments.

1.4 Research Questions

To achieve the objectives of this review, the following research questions are addressed:

1. How is Artificial Intelligence transforming English Language Teaching?
2. What opportunities does AI offer for enhancing teaching and learning in ELT contexts?
3. What challenges, limitations, and ethical concerns arise from the integration of AI into language education?
4. What future trends and developments are likely to shape English Language Teaching in the age of Artificial Intelligence?

II. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

This study adopts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to examine the evolving role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in English Language Teaching (ELT). The SLR method was selected because, as Uygun and Demir (2026) note, it enables "a transparent, replicable, and comprehensive synthesis of existing scholarly work," particularly in rapidly developing fields such as AI in education. Unlike narrative reviews, which tend to be descriptive and structurally inconsistent, the systematic approach ensures methodological rigor through clearly defined search strategies, inclusion criteria, and analytical procedures. Crompton et al. (2024) affirm that this approach is "widely used in educational technology research to map trends, identify gaps, and synthesize evidence on emerging phenomena," making it especially appropriate for the present inquiry.

2.2 Data Sources

To ensure comprehensive and reliable coverage of the relevant literature, data were retrieved from four major academic databases:

- Scopus
- Web of Science
- ERIC (Education Resources Information Center)

➤ Google Scholar

These databases were selected due to their extensive indexing of peer-reviewed journals and high-impact publications across applied linguistics, educational technology, and language education. As Hassan (2025) observes, combining multiple databases "allows for a broad yet reliable retrieval of studies related to AI applications in ELT and EFL contexts," minimizing the risk of publication bias and ensuring greater representativeness of the available evidence. Wang et al. (2024) similarly underscore the importance of multi-database searches in scoping and systematic reviews to capture the full landscape of a rapidly evolving field.

2.3 Inclusion Criteria

The selection of studies was guided by predefined inclusion criteria designed to safeguard the relevance, currency, and academic quality of the reviewed literature. Specifically:

- Only **peer-reviewed journal articles** were included to ensure academic rigor and scholarly reliability.
- Publications were restricted to the period **2020–2026**, capturing what Lo (2023) describes as "the most significant and recent developments in AI-enhanced language education."
- Studies were required to address **AI in ELT, EFL, or ESL contexts** explicitly, focusing on tools such as generative AI, intelligent tutoring systems, automated writing evaluation, or AI-driven language learning platforms.

Syuhra et al. (2025) argue that applying such structured eligibility criteria is essential in systematic reviews, as it ensures that "only studies reflecting current technological and pedagogical developments are incorporated," thereby enhancing the overall validity of the findings.

2.4 Data Analysis

The selected studies were analyzed through **thematic analysis**, a qualitative method used to identify, organize, and interpret recurring patterns across data sources. This process involved systematic reading, coding, and categorization of the literature to extract key ideas related to AI integration in ELT. The analysis focused on four principal areas:

- Recurring themes in AI applications in language teaching and learning
- Pedagogical opportunities offered by AI technologies
- Challenges and ethical concerns associated with AI use
- Emerging trends and future directions in AI-enhanced ELT

Ginting et al. (2025) describe thematic synthesis as particularly valuable in educational technology reviews because it enables "the integration of findings across diverse studies, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of complex and evolving phenomena." Similarly, Yan et al. (2023) highlight its "flexibility and interpretive depth" as key strengths that make it well suited to systematic reviews in applied linguistics, where study designs, contexts, and findings vary considerably across the literature.

2.5 Selected Studies Included in the Review

After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, ten studies were selected for detailed analysis. These studies constituted the primary sources of evidence for examining the opportunities, challenges, and future directions of Artificial Intelligence in English Language Teaching (ELT).

No.	Author(s)	Year	Title
1	Al-Khresheh	2024	The Future of Artificial Intelligence in English Language Teaching: Pros and Cons of ChatGPT Implementation through a Systematic Review
2	Crompton, Edmett, Ichaporia, & Burke	2024	AI and English Language Teaching: Affordances and Challenges
3	Deng & Jamaludin	2026	Roles of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Instruction: A Systematic Literature Review
4	Ginting, Hartono, & Iskandar	2025	Navigating Artificial Intelligence (AI) Integration in English Language Teaching: Challenges, Opportunities and Future Directions
5	Hassan	2025	The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Enhancing English Language Teaching (ELT): A Review of Tools, Trends, and Pedagogical Impacts
6	Lo	2023	What Is the Impact of ChatGPT on Education? A Rapid Review of the Literature

7	Syuhra, Chandra, & Rosalina	2025	Artificial Intelligence in English Language Teaching: A Systematic Literature Review of Tools, Impact, and Challenges
8	Uygun & Demir	2026	A PRISMA-Based Systematic Review of Artificial Intelligence in English as a Foreign and Second Language Education (2023–2025)
9	Wang et al.	2024	Application of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) in Language Teaching and Learning: A Scoping Literature Review
10	Yan et al.	2023	Practical and Ethical Challenges of Large Language Models in Education: A Systematic Scoping Review

III. AI TECHNOLOGIES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

3.1 Evolution of AI in Language Education

The integration of technology into language education has evolved significantly over the past few decades, progressing from Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) to more advanced Artificial Intelligence (AI)-enhanced learning environments. Early CALL systems primarily focused on drill-and-practice exercises, grammar instruction, and vocabulary development with limited interactivity and adaptability. While these systems contributed to language learning support, they lacked the capacity to respond dynamically to individual learner needs.

With the advancement of machine learning and natural language processing, language learning technologies have transitioned into more intelligent systems capable of adapting to learners' proficiency levels and learning behaviors. This shift has led to the development of **adaptive learning systems**, which use learner data to personalize instruction, provide targeted feedback, and adjust task difficulty in real time. Such systems represent a major advancement in language education, as they move beyond static instructional models toward more responsive and learner-centered approaches. (Wang et al., 2024; Hassan, 2025)

3.2 Major AI Tools in ELT

Recent developments in Artificial Intelligence have introduced a wide range of tools that are transforming English Language Teaching (ELT) by enhancing instruction, assessment, and learner engagement.

ChatGPT and Large Language Models (LLMs)

Large Language Models such as ChatGPT have become highly influential in language education due to their ability to generate human-like text, engage in conversational interaction, and support writing development. These tools assist learners in idea generation, grammar correction, paraphrasing, and interactive dialogue practice, making them valuable resources for both autonomous and classroom-based learning. (Lo, 2023; Deng & Jamaludin, 2026)

Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE) Tools

AWE systems such as Grammarly and Criterion provide automated feedback on grammar, vocabulary, coherence, and writing structure. These tools enhance writing instruction by offering immediate corrective feedback and enabling iterative improvement, thereby supporting learners' writing development and reducing teacher workload. (Crompton et al., 2024)

Intelligent Tutoring Systems (ITS)

Intelligent Tutoring Systems are AI-driven platforms designed to simulate one-on-one tutoring by providing personalized instruction, adaptive feedback, and performance tracking. In ELT contexts, ITS help learners develop language skills through guided practice and individualized learning pathways based on their performance data.

Speech Recognition Applications

Speech recognition technologies support the development of speaking and pronunciation skills by analyzing learners' spoken input and providing feedback on accuracy, fluency, and pronunciation. These tools allow learners to practice oral communication in a low-anxiety environment while receiving real-time corrective feedback.

Personalized Learning Platforms

AI-powered personalized learning platforms use learner analytics to tailor content, pacing, and instructional strategies to individual needs. These platforms enhance learner autonomy and engagement by providing customized learning experiences that align with students' proficiency levels and learning goals. (Syuhra et al., 2025; Ginting et al., 2025)

Collectively, these AI tools represent a shift toward more interactive, adaptive, and learner-centered approaches in English Language Teaching, fundamentally reshaping traditional pedagogical practices.

IV. OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has created substantial opportunities for transforming English Language Teaching (ELT) by enhancing instruction, improving learner outcomes, and supporting more efficient assessment practices. As Wang et al. (2024) observe, AI technologies have introduced "unprecedented possibilities for personalizing language instruction, automating assessment, and expanding learner access to educational support," making them increasingly central to contemporary ELT practice.

4.1 Personalized Learning

One of the most significant contributions of AI in ELT is the promotion of personalized learning. AI-driven systems enable adaptive instruction by continuously analyzing learners' performance, preferences, and progress, then adjusting content and difficulty levels accordingly. Hassan (2025) argues that this adaptive capacity ensures learners receive instruction "tailored to their individual needs and proficiency levels, moving beyond the limitations of one-size-fits-all pedagogical approaches." Rather than following a fixed curriculum, learners benefit from dynamically responsive learning pathways that reflect their evolving linguistic competencies.

Equally important is AI's capacity to deliver individualized, immediate feedback. Syuhra et al. (2025) confirm that "AI-powered feedback mechanisms allow learners to receive targeted corrections in grammar, vocabulary usage, and sentence structure in real time," significantly enhancing learning efficiency and supporting continuous improvement in language proficiency.

4.2 Enhancement of Language Skills

AI technologies contribute meaningfully to the development of all four core language skills.

Writing

AI-powered tools support writing development through grammar correction, vocabulary enhancement, coherence improvement, and content structuring. Crompton et al. (2024) note that "automated writing evaluation systems and generative AI tools assist learners in refining their written output and developing academic writing competence," providing scaffolded support that would be difficult to replicate at scale through traditional instruction alone.

Speaking

In speaking skill development, AI provides pronunciation feedback through speech recognition systems that analyze accuracy, fluency, and intonation. Conversational AI tools further enable learners to engage in interactive dialogue practice, fostering what Lo (2023) describes as "greater speaking confidence and communicative competence" in

low-anxiety, self-paced environments where learners feel free to practice without fear of judgment.

Reading and Listening

AI also enhances reading and listening comprehension through adaptive texts, interactive activities, and multimedia resources calibrated to appropriate difficulty levels. Wang et al. (2024) affirm that such tools "allow learners to engage with authentic content while progressively developing their comprehension and critical engagement with language." Across all four skills, research consistently indicates that AI-supported language learning positively influences learner motivation, engagement, and overall language performance.

4.3 Automated Assessment and Feedback

AI has significantly transformed assessment practices in ELT through the development of automated evaluation systems capable of providing real-time, actionable feedback on learner performance. Crompton et al. (2024) highlight that these systems "ensure consistency, speed, and scalability in evaluating large numbers of student assignments," particularly in writing and grammar-focused tasks, thereby reducing the assessment burden on educators considerably.

Beyond efficiency, automated assessment enables immediate correction and reflection, enhancing the formative value of feedback. As a result, teachers can redirect their professional energy toward higher-order responsibilities such as instructional design, differentiated support, and meaningful learner engagement, rather than routine manual grading.

4.4 Increased Learner Autonomy

AI technologies play a pivotal role in fostering learner autonomy by enabling self-directed, flexible, and continuous language practice. Learners can access AI-powered platforms and resources at any time and from any location, extending language learning well beyond the physical classroom. Ginting et al. (2025) emphasize that "the availability of 24/7 learning support through chatbots, virtual tutors, and AI-driven platforms fundamentally changes the learner's relationship with their own educational process," encouraging greater responsibility for personal learning outcomes.

Syuhra et al. (2025) further argue that consistent engagement with AI tools "cultivates independent learning habits, promotes self-monitoring, and strengthens lifelong learning dispositions," qualities that are increasingly valued in twenty-first-century language education. In this sense, AI does not merely supplement instruction — it actively repositions the learner as a more empowered and autonomous agent in their own language development.

V. CHALLENGES AND CONCERNS

Despite the significant opportunities AI offers in English Language Teaching, its integration raises serious pedagogical, ethical, and institutional challenges. As Crompton et al. (2024) caution, "the rapid adoption of AI in educational settings has outpaced the development of frameworks needed to govern its responsible and effective use," making critical engagement with these challenges an urgent scholarly and institutional priority.

5.1 Academic Integrity

Among the most widely discussed challenges is the threat AI poses to academic integrity. The growing accessibility of generative AI tools has made it increasingly easy for learners to produce essays, assignments, and other academic work with minimal cognitive effort. Lo (2023) warns that this development has "fundamentally complicated traditional assessment practices, as educators struggle to distinguish between learner-produced and machine-generated content," thereby undermining the validity of conventional writing evaluations.

Yan et al. (2023) further argue that AI-generated submissions risk "eroding the authenticity of student work and compromising the integrity of academic credentialing systems," a concern that extends well beyond individual classrooms to broader institutional and policy levels. Addressing this challenge necessitates the urgent development of updated assessment strategies, AI-detection frameworks, and clear institutional policies governing AI-assisted academic work.

5.2 Overdependence on AI

A closely related concern is the risk of learner overdependence on AI tools. While AI can enhance learning efficiency, Ginting et al. (2025) caution that "excessive reliance on automated systems may gradually diminish learners' capacity for independent thinking, problem-solving, and deeper cognitive engagement with language tasks." Rather than functioning as active participants in the learning process, learners risk becoming passive consumers of AI-generated outputs.

This dependency is particularly concerning in language education, where the development of critical thinking, creative expression, and authentic communicative competence requires sustained mental effort and genuine linguistic risk-taking. If AI tools consistently perform cognitive tasks on behalf of learners, the long-term consequences for language proficiency and intellectual development may be significant.

5.3 Ethical and Privacy Issues

The integration of AI in ELT raises pressing ethical and data privacy concerns. AI systems typically require large volumes of learner data to operate effectively, creating considerable risks related to data security, confidentiality, and potential misuse. Syuhra et al. (2025) stress that "unauthorized access to or misappropriation of personal learner data can have serious consequences for both individuals and institutions," particularly given the sensitive nature of educational records.

Beyond privacy, Crompton et al. (2024) highlight the problem of algorithmic bias, noting that "AI systems trained on non-representative datasets may produce outputs that are systematically unfair or inaccurate, especially in multilingual and multicultural learning environments." Such bias can manifest in skewed feedback, culturally insensitive content, or inequitable assessment outcomes, reinforcing existing educational disparities rather than alleviating them. Ensuring transparency, fairness, and robust ethical governance of AI systems is therefore not optional but essential.

5.4 Digital Divide

The digital divide represents a structural barrier to equitable AI integration in ELT. Access to advanced technologies, reliable high-speed internet, and AI-powered learning platforms remains deeply uneven across and within countries. As Uygun and Demir (2026) observe, "disparities in technological infrastructure risk widening the gap between well-resourced and under-resourced educational settings," potentially transforming AI from an equalizing force into one that compounds existing inequalities.

This concern is particularly acute in developing regions and rural communities, where limited connectivity and inadequate device access may effectively exclude learners from the benefits of AI-enhanced language education. Without deliberate policy interventions to address infrastructural inequalities, the promise of AI in ELT risks remaining accessible only to the already privileged.

5.5 Teacher Preparedness

The effective integration of AI in ELT ultimately depends on the preparedness of educators to use these technologies critically and responsibly. Hassan (2025) notes that "many teachers currently lack sufficient AI literacy, pedagogical training, and professional development opportunities to evaluate and implement AI tools effectively in their classrooms." This gap is not merely technical, it reflects a broader need for educators to develop informed, critical perspectives on AI's affordances and limitations.

Ginting et al. (2025) emphasize that teachers must be equipped not only to operate AI tools but to "critically assess their pedagogical value, recognize their limitations,

and adapt them meaningfully to specific learning contexts and student needs." Achieving this requires sustained investment in continuous professional development programs that integrate AI literacy as a core competency for twenty-first-century language educators.

VI. THE CHANGING ROLE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS

The integration of AI into ELT is fundamentally reshaping rather than replacing the professional role of educators. As Crompton et al. (2024) observe, AI is "redefining teacher responsibilities, shifting the focus from traditional knowledge transmission toward facilitation, mediation, and human AI collaboration."

6.1 From Knowledge Provider to Learning Facilitator

Traditionally, teachers served primarily as knowledge providers delivering linguistic input and correcting errors. In AI-enhanced classrooms, however, this role is evolving toward learning facilitation. Hassan (2025) notes that teachers increasingly guide students in "navigating digital tools, interpreting AI-generated outputs, and engaging in meaningful language use," prioritizing learner-centered design and higher-order thinking over direct instruction.

6.2 AI Literacy and Teacher Competencies

Effective AI integration demands that teachers develop robust AI literacy — encompassing not only technical familiarity but also critical awareness of algorithmic bias, data privacy, and academic integrity. Ginting et al. (2025) argue that teachers must be competent in "selecting appropriate AI tools, interpreting learner analytics, and integrating AI responsibly into lesson planning and assessment." This makes AI-focused training an increasingly essential component of teacher education programs.

6.3 Human–AI Collaboration

A prominent emerging model in ELT is human–AI collaboration, where AI manages data-driven tasks such as grammar correction and automated assessment while teachers focus on pedagogical decision-making and learner engagement. Wang et al. (2024) describe this as a complementary relationship in which "AI extends rather than replaces human expertise," enabling more efficient instruction and greater attention to individualized learner support.

6.4 Why Teachers Remain Essential

Despite AI's expanding capabilities, teachers remain indispensable for contributions that machines cannot replicate. Lo (2023) emphasizes that educators provide "emotional support, meaningful human interaction, and

cultural mediation" — qualities essential for communicative competence development. Syuhra et al. (2025) further highlight teachers' irreplaceable role in developing learners' critical thinking and helping them evaluate and contextualize AI-generated content responsibly.

Overall, the teacher's role in AI-augmented ELT is not diminishing but evolving — becoming more strategic, interpretive, and distinctly human in nature.

VII. FUTURE DIRECTIONS OF ELT IN THE AI ERA

The rapid advancement of AI is expected to fundamentally reshape ELT across classroom practice, assessment, curriculum design, and teacher development. As Wang et al. (2024) note, emerging technologies are moving "beyond supportive tools toward fully integrated systems that redefine how language teaching and learning are conceived and delivered."

7.1 AI-Augmented Classrooms

Future ELT classrooms are expected to become AI-augmented learning environments where intelligent systems are embedded into everyday instruction. Hassan (2025) envisions these settings as spaces where "AI functions as a continuous support system, providing real-time feedback, adaptive learning pathways, and interactive language practice" alongside — rather than instead of — the human teacher.

7.2 Hybrid Human–AI Teaching Models

A prominent future trend is the emergence of hybrid human–AI teaching models in which instructional responsibilities are strategically distributed. Crompton et al. (2024) argue that this balance where "AI manages repetitive, data-intensive tasks while teachers focus on facilitation, creativity, and critical thinking development" is essential for preserving the irreplaceable human dimensions of language education while maximizing technological efficiency.

7.3 Intelligent Assessment Systems

AI-driven assessment is expected to move well beyond traditional grading toward continuous, formative, and adaptive evaluation. Such systems will enable more accurate tracking of learner progress and deliver immediate, personalized feedback at scale, substantially reducing teacher workload while improving the consistency and responsiveness of assessment practices.

7.4 AI-Supported Curriculum Design

AI is poised to play a growing role in curriculum development by analyzing large datasets on learner

performance and preferences. Syuhra et al. (2025) suggest that AI-supported design will enable "dynamic, responsive curricula that adapt continuously to learners' evolving needs and proficiency levels," ensuring that instructional content remains both relevant and personalized.

7.5 Development of AI Literacy

As AI becomes more deeply embedded in educational contexts, AI literacy will emerge as a core competency for both teachers and learners. Ginting et al. (2025) stress that future ELT programs must incorporate structured AI literacy training to ensure educators and students can "engage responsibly, critically, and effectively with AI technologies in academic and professional settings."

7.6 Ethical AI Policies in Education

Sustainable AI integration in ELT will require clear ethical governance frameworks addressing data privacy, algorithmic transparency, fairness, and academic integrity. Al-Khresheh (2024) emphasizes that institutions and policymakers must ensure "AI is adopted equitably and responsibly, with learner rights and educational values remaining central to all implementation decisions."

7.7 Emerging Research Areas

Several research directions will shape the future scholarly landscape of AI in ELT, including the pedagogical effectiveness of generative AI tools, AI's influence on critical thinking development, adaptive personalized curricula, and AI-assisted teacher education. Lo (2023) and Wang et al. (2024) collectively underscore that these areas "highlight the ongoing evolution of AI in language education and the urgent need for sustained empirical and theoretical investigation."

VIII. DISCUSSION

8.1 Synthesis of Findings

The findings of this review confirm that AI is fundamentally transforming ELT through enhanced personalization, automated feedback, intelligent assessment, and increased learner autonomy. Across the reviewed literature, generative AI, intelligent tutoring systems, and automated writing evaluation tools consistently demonstrate the capacity to improve both learning efficiency and learner engagement. Crompton et al. (2024) summarize this trajectory well, noting that AI is "not replacing traditional ELT practices but reshaping them into more adaptive, data-driven, and learner-centered models."

Nevertheless, the synthesis equally reveals persistent challenges — academic integrity risks, overdependence on AI, ethical concerns, and unequal access that temper these gains. Syuhra et al. (2025) caution that "the rapid evolution

of AI has introduced significant uncertainty regarding its long-term pedagogical impact," particularly concerning teacher roles and the depth of genuine learner development. Taken together, the evidence suggests that realizing AI's full potential in ELT requires as much attention to its risks as to its possibilities.

8.2 Implications for ELT Theory

From a theoretical standpoint, AI integration challenges and extends existing frameworks for language learning. Constructivist and sociocultural theories remain foundational, but must now account for the mediating role of intelligent systems in language acquisition. Hassan (2025) argues that AI "introduces new dimensions to second language acquisition theory by enabling continuous interaction, adaptive feedback, and data-driven personalization at a scale previously unachievable through human instruction alone."

This shift points toward the emergence of technology-mediated learning theories in which human cognition interacts dynamically with AI systems. Traditional teacher-centered models are consequently being reinterpreted within frameworks of human–AI collaborative learning, demanding theoretical innovation that keeps pace with rapidly evolving classroom realities.

8.3 Implications for Practice

Practically, ELT practitioners must integrate AI tools strategically rather than indiscriminately. Teachers are required to transition from sole knowledge providers to facilitators who guide learners in using AI responsibly, critically, and effectively. Ginting et al. (2025) stress that "instructional practices must incorporate AI-supported tools while simultaneously preserving a clear focus on critical thinking, communicative competence, and independent language skill development" — ensuring technology serves pedagogy, not the reverse.

Crompton et al. (2024) further emphasize that teachers must develop the capacity to critically evaluate AI-generated outputs, recognizing their limitations and preventing learner overreliance. Achieving this in practice demands sustained, structured professional development programs that build AI literacy as a genuine pedagogical competency rather than a superficial technical skill.

8.4 Implications for Policy

At the policy level, the growing embedding of AI in language education requires clear regulatory frameworks and robust institutional guidelines. Yan et al. (2023) argue that policymakers must urgently address "data privacy, ethical AI use, academic integrity, and equitable access," establishing transparent standards for AI-assisted

assessment and responsible implementation across diverse educational contexts.

Al-Khresheh (2024) further highlights that targeted investment in digital infrastructure and teacher training is essential to narrow the digital divide and ensure that AI-enhanced learning opportunities are distributed equitably rather than reinforcing existing privilege. Without such policy commitment, the transformative potential of AI in ELT risks benefiting only those already advantaged, deepening rather than reducing educational inequality.

IX. CONCLUSION

9.1 Summary of Major Findings

This review has examined the evolving role of AI in ELT, revealing its transformative impact across pedagogy, assessment, curriculum design, and learner engagement. The evidence consistently demonstrates that AI enhances language learning through personalized instruction, automated feedback, and adaptive systems. Crompton et al. (2024) affirm that tools such as generative AI, intelligent tutoring systems, and automated writing evaluation platforms have shown "strong and consistent potential in supporting the development of learners' linguistic competencies across all four language skills."

Equally, the review surfaces critical challenges — academic integrity risks, overdependence, ethical and privacy concerns, digital inequality, and inadequate teacher preparedness — that cannot be overlooked in the pursuit of innovation. Syuhra et al. (2025) capture the central conclusion well: AI is "not replacing English language teachers but fundamentally redefining their roles toward facilitation, mediation, and collaborative human–AI practice." The trajectory of ELT is clearly moving toward more adaptive, technology-enhanced, and learner-centered environments, but arriving there responsibly demands deliberate and critically informed action.

9.2 Recommendations

For Teachers

Teachers should actively develop AI literacy and integrate AI tools strategically into classroom practice — for lesson planning, feedback, and skill development — while safeguarding learners' critical thinking and independent learning capacities. As Ginting et al. (2025) stress, effective AI integration is not merely technical but "fundamentally pedagogical, requiring teachers to remain thoughtful architects of the learning experience rather than passive adopters of technology."

For Institutions

Educational institutions should invest systematically in AI infrastructure and provide structured professional development programs for both teachers and students. Clear institutional guidelines for ethical AI use in teaching and assessment are essential to protect academic integrity and data privacy. Crompton et al. (2024) emphasize that institutions must ensure AI is embedded in ways that "enhance rather than erode the quality and authenticity of human instruction."

For Policymakers

Policymakers must establish comprehensive regulatory frameworks governing the ethical, transparent, and equitable use of AI in education. Yan et al. (2023) argue that such frameworks must address "data protection, algorithmic accountability, and fairness in AI-driven decision-making" as non-negotiable foundations. Al-Khresheh (2024) further underscores the urgent need for policies that actively reduce the digital divide, ensuring that AI-enhanced learning opportunities are accessible equitably across all educational contexts and communities.

In sum, the responsible integration of AI in ELT demands coordinated commitment from teachers, institutions, and policymakers alike — maximizing the technology's considerable educational benefits while remaining rigorously attentive to its pedagogical, ethical, and social risks.

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Food, Fertility, and Faith: A Comparative Study of Ceremonial Eating Practices in Childbirth Traditions of Kerala and Karnataka

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Abstract— Ceremonial eating practices associated with pregnancy and childbirth constitute an important yet underexplored dimension of South Indian cultural life. This study examines the ritualised food traditions observed during prenatal, natal, and postnatal phases in selected communities of Kerala and Karnataka. Drawing on ethnographic observations, oral narratives, and cultural texts, the article analyses how specific food items, preparation methods, and consumption rituals function as symbolic markers of fertility, protection, and social transition. The study highlights regional variations while identifying shared cultural patterns rooted in indigenous medical knowledge, caste and community norms, and gendered domestic practices. It further explores how these ceremonial food practices serve as sites of intergenerational knowledge transmission and cultural continuity. In the context of rapid socio-economic change, medicalisation of childbirth, and shifting family structures, the article discusses the transformation and gradual erosion of traditional food rituals. The study argues that ceremonial eating practices not only reflect cultural beliefs surrounding motherhood and reproduction but also embody a broader system of social care, identity formation, and community solidarity in Kerala and Karnataka.



Keywords— Ceremonial food practices; Pregnancy rituals; Childbirth traditions; Kerala; Karnataka; Food symbolism; Maternal health beliefs; Cultural continuity

I. INTRODUCTION

Food occupies a central position in the cultural imagination of all societies, functioning not merely as sustenance but as a medium through which social values, religious beliefs, and life-cycle transitions are articulated. In regions such as Kerala and Karnataka, food practices are deeply embedded in ritual frameworks that structure everyday life as well as special moments such as birth, marriage, and death. Among these, pregnancy and childbirth emerge as particularly significant cultural events, marked by elaborate ceremonial observances and regulated dietary practices.

Pregnancy is not perceived solely as a biological condition but as a socially and spiritually charged state requiring ritual protection, moral regulation, and communal participation. Food rituals associated with childbirth function as mechanisms through which communities negotiate anxieties surrounding fertility, maternal health, and infant survival. These practices are shaped by indigenous medical knowledge systems, religious beliefs, ecological availability, and long-standing gender norms that assign women primary responsibility for reproductive labour and culinary knowledge.

Kerala and Karnataka offer a productive comparative framework due to their shared cultural histories and geographical proximity, alongside significant linguistic, religious, and ecological variations. While both regions are influenced by Ayurveda, folk medicine, and agrarian food cultures, they also exhibit distinct ceremonial forms shaped by caste practices, coastal and inland ecologies, and varying degrees of ritual formalisation. This study seeks to examine how ceremonial eating practices related to childbirth operate within these two cultural contexts, highlighting both continuities and divergences.

The primary objectives of this research are threefold. First, it seeks to document and comparatively analyse ceremonial food practices associated with pregnancy and childbirth in Kerala and Karnataka, situating them within region-specific ritual frameworks such as *Seemantham* and *Valaikappu*. Second, it aims to interpret the symbolic meanings embedded in these food-centred rituals, with particular attention to fertility myths, notions of purity and auspiciousness, and the culturally ascribed properties of specific ingredients and methods of preparation. Third, the study examines the ways in which these ceremonial practices function as mechanisms for regulating reproductive bodies through gendered systems of care and ritual authority, while tracing their intergenerational transmission through kinship networks and female knowledge traditions. It explores how these practices are being reconfigured in contemporary contexts, as biomedical discourses, urban lifestyles, and changing social norms interact with, adapt, or challenge traditional understandings of food, fertility, and faith.

II. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts an interdisciplinary theoretical framework drawing from cultural anthropology, food studies, gender studies, and medical humanities to analyse ceremonial eating practices associated with pregnancy and childbirth in Kerala and Karnataka. At its core, the study conceptualises food not merely as sustenance but as a culturally encoded medium through which fertility, bodily regulation, faith, and social order are articulated. Structuralist and symbolic anthropological perspectives provide the foundation for understanding food as a system of signs that communicates values, boundaries, and hierarchies within a given cultural context. Claude Lévi-Strauss's theorisation of food as a symbolic language and Mary Douglas's analysis of purity, pollution, and taboo offer critical lenses for interpreting dietary prescriptions, prohibitions, and ritual classifications surrounding

pregnancy, particularly in relation to notions of bodily vulnerability and moral order.

Ritual theory further informs the analytical framework, especially Arnold van Gennep's concept of rites of passage. Van Gennep's tripartite model of separation, liminality, and reintegration is particularly useful for situating pregnancy and childbirth as transitional states marked by social ambiguity and ritual attention. In both Kerala and Karnataka, ceremonies such as *Valaikappu*, *Seemantha*, *Appamangalam*, *Cheerani* and *Bayake* function as formalised responses to this liminality, employing food, sound, ornamentation, and collective participation to stabilise and protect the reproductive body. Victor Turner's elaboration of liminality and *communitas* (intense community spirit) extends this analysis by foregrounding the role of communal engagement, symbolic action, and affective solidarity in managing reproductive transitions. Turner's framework enables an understanding of how ceremonial eating practices create temporary moral communities that reaffirm social bonds while negotiating uncertainty and risk.

Feminist and gender-focused theories of the body are central to examining the gendered dimensions of ceremonial food practices. Pregnancy-related rituals are embedded within systems of reproductive labour and domestic knowledge that position women—particularly elder women—as custodians of fertility-related cultural expertise. While these practices can be read as empowering forms of embodied knowledge transmission, they also reinforce normative expectations regarding female discipline, care, and bodily conduct. Drawing on gender studies and feminist anthropology, the study interrogates how food taboos, prescriptions, and ritual performances simultaneously enable care and regulate the reproductive bodies of women within culturally sanctioned frameworks of morality and responsibility.

The framework is further enriched by indigenous health epistemologies, particularly Ayurvedic concepts of bodily balance, digestion, and thermal classification (*ushna* and *sheeta*). These principles intersect with ritual and mythic reasoning in shaping food-related fertility beliefs in both regions (which formed part of Dakshina Kannada earlier) with distinct regional emphases; dietary restraint and medicinal balance in Kerala, and abundance, sweetness, and sensory auspiciousness in Karnataka. By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the study situates ceremonial eating practices within broader systems of cultural meaning, social organisation, and embodied knowledge, enabling a nuanced comparative understanding

of how food, fertility, and faith are ritualised and reinterpreted across regional and contemporary contexts.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a qualitative ethnographic approach to document and analyse ceremonial eating practices associated with childbirth. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with elder women, mothers, and caregivers in selected rural communities of Kerala and Karnataka. These interviews focused on personal experiences, remembered rituals, and perceived changes in food practices over time. Participant observation formed a key component of the methodology, allowing for direct engagement with ceremonial events such as pregnancy rituals and postnatal care practices.

A comparative framework was adopted to examine both convergences and divergences between Kerala and Karnataka, with particular attention to variables such as communal affiliation, ecological context, and linguistic traditions. Ethical considerations remained central throughout the research process, especially in view of the intimate and sensitive nature of reproductive practices. Efforts were made to ensure that documentation and interpretation were guided by cultural sensitivity, and, owing to limitations in data collection, the study was confined to participants sharing comparable religious practices and belief systems.

Ceremonial Eating Practices During Pregnancy and after Childbirth

Ceremonial food practices begin early in pregnancy, often marking conception or the confirmation of pregnancy through subtle dietary shifts and ritual observances. In both Kerala and Karnataka, specific foods are prescribed to promote fertility, protect the foetus, and maintain bodily balance. Simultaneously, certain foods are avoided due to their perceived potential to cause harm or imbalance.

Rice, as the staple grain, holds symbolic significance as a marker of sustenance and continuity. Coconut, abundant in Kerala, is associated with purity and fertility, while jaggery symbolises sweetness and abundance. Ghee is valued for its nourishing and strengthening properties, believed to enhance digestion and foetal development. Herbal preparations, often derived from locally available plants, are administered to alleviate discomfort and strengthen the maternal body. Food preparation during pregnancy is typically a communal activity, involving elder women who guide younger mothers in dietary choices. These practices reinforce familial bonds and establish hierarchies of knowledge, positioning elder

women as authoritative custodians of reproductive wisdom.

Advanced stages of pregnancy are marked by elaborate ceremonies such as *Valaikappu*, *Seemantha*, *Appamangalam*, *Cheerani* and *Bayake* in Kerala and Karnataka. These rituals publicly acknowledge the pregnancy and invoke blessings for safe delivery and healthy offspring. Food plays a central role in these ceremonies, both as offering and as communal meal. Specially prepared dishes rich in ghee, milk, and grains are served to the expectant mother, symbolising nourishment and protection. The act of feeding becomes ritualised, transforming everyday eating into a performative affirmation of social support. Songs, blessings, and ritual speech accompany these practices, embedding food consumption within a broader symbolic narrative of fertility and continuity. These ceremonies also negotiate the public and private dimensions of pregnancy, bringing a traditionally domestic condition into the communal sphere while maintaining gendered boundaries of participation.

Within the Tuluva community of Dakshina Kannada, a region that culturally intersects parts of Kerala and Karnataka, the customary practice of bringing a hen chick from the maternal home is observed as part of an agrarian symbolic system. This practice is understood to promote poultry rearing, with the hen functioning as a marker of productivity and sustenance. The chick, once brought to the paternal household, is carefully nurtured; however, until the birth of the child, the incubation of eggs laid by the matured hen is ritually proscribed, indicating a culturally embedded regulation of reproduction that parallels human fertility practices.

The period surrounding childbirth is governed by strict dietary regulations rooted in concepts of bodily heat, purity, and vulnerability. Foods prepared immediately before and after delivery are selected for their medicinal properties, often classified as “hot” to restore bodily balance and aid recovery. Post-delivery diets are typically restricted, focusing on easily digestible foods such as rice gruel, herbal decoctions, and spiced preparations. These restrictions are not merely nutritional but symbolic, reflecting beliefs about pollution, protection, and controlled reintegration. Elder women and traditional birth attendants play a crucial role in administering these diets, reinforcing gendered systems of care.

Postnatal food rituals extend over several weeks, marking stages of purification and gradual reintegration into daily life. Lactation-related foods are emphasised, including preparations believed to enhance milk production and maternal strength. Ritual meals often coincide with ceremonies celebrating the newborn,

reaffirming social bonds and communal responsibility. These practices highlight the gendered division of labour, with women assuming primary responsibility for caregiving while also receiving temporary exemption from domestic duties. Food rituals thus function as mechanisms of social support and emotional care.

Food, Fertility, and Mythic Reasoning in Kerala and Karnataka

Before examining the ritual specificities of *Seemantham* and *Valaikappu*, it is necessary to situate these ceremonies within the broader mythic frameworks that govern food and fertility in the two regions. In both cultural contexts, fertility is not understood solely as a biological condition but as a state requiring ritual regulation, moral discipline, and divine mediation. Food myths play a central role in this process, operating as symbolic systems through which reproductive bodies are disciplined and safeguarded within culturally sanctioned norms.

In Kerala, food-related fertility myths are closely aligned with Ayurvedic principles of bodily balance and temple-centred ritual practices. Traditional beliefs categorise foods according to their perceived thermal properties, with certain items considered potentially disruptive to foetal stability if consumed during pregnancy. Myths surrounding foods such as papaya, pineapple, and sesame seeds frame them as substances capable of inducing miscarriage due to their *ushna* qualities, while rice-based gruels, coconut preparations, and herbal infusions are mythically associated with nourishment, uterine strength, and ritual purity. These beliefs are reinforced through oral traditions and domestic rituals overseen by elder women, positioning dietary discipline as both a moral and spiritual obligation. Food offerings to fertility-associated deities further venerate these practices, transforming everyday consumption into an act of faith and ritual observance (Douglas; Turner).

In Karnataka, fertility myths exhibit a stronger emphasis on abundance, auspiciousness, and sensory symbolism. Food traditions associated with pregnancy frequently privilege sweetness and plenitude, reflecting agrarian values tied to prosperity and lineage continuity. Mythic narratives surrounding prenatal well-being often emphasise the consumption of jaggery, ghee, millets, and sweet dishes, which are believed to invite benevolent forces and ensure reproductive success. Unlike the restraint-oriented dietary codes of Kerala, Karnataka's fertility myths foreground communal celebration and sensory engagement, where food consumption is integrated with sound, ornamentation, and performative ritual elements. These mythic associations frame fertility

as a socially shared condition rather than an individually regulated bodily state (Van Genneep; Lévi-Strauss).

Taken together, these region-specific food myths establish the ideological foundations upon which ceremonial practices related to pregnancy are constructed. They reveal how culinary symbolism functions as a cultural language through which fertility is imagined, protected, and ritualised. It is within this mythic and symbolic landscape that *Seemantham* and *Valaikappu* emerge as formalised ritual expressions, translating abstract fertility beliefs into structured ceremonial acts. The following comparative analysis examines how these two rituals embody and enact the distinct yet intersecting food-based fertility ideologies of Kerala and Karnataka.

A comparative reading of the *Seemantham* and *Valaikappu* ceremony reveals both shared South Indian ritual frameworks and regionally inflected cultural meanings surrounding pregnancy (Kumar 112; Narayanan 58). In Kerala, *Seemantham*; often performed during the seventh or ninth month of pregnancy functions as a ceremonial affirmation of maternal well-being and foetal protection, with ritual emphasis placed on nourishing foods, blessings by elder women, and symbolic gestures intended to ward off malevolent influences (Menon 94). The foods offered during *Seemantham*, typically prepared using locally available ingredients such as rice, coconut, and medicinal herbs, reflect agrarian ecology of Kerala and Ayurvedic traditions, underscoring the belief that diet plays a crucial role in regulating the pregnant body (Varier 201).

In contrast, the *Valaikappu* ceremony of Karnataka foregrounds sound, ornamentation, and embodied symbolism through the ritual act of adorning the expectant mother with glass bangles (*valai*) (Raghavan 77). The resonant sound produced by the bangles is believed to stimulate the foetus and ensure positive sensory development, while the use of bright colours and metal signifies fertility, prosperity, and continuity of lineage (Srinivas 163). Food rituals in *Valaikappu*, though present, occupy a complementary rather than central role, often involving sweet preparations and communal feasting that reinforce social solidarity (Iyer 129). While *Seemantham* privileges dietary regulation and maternal nourishment as ritual focal points, *Valaikappu* emphasises sensory engagement and material symbolism as mechanisms of reproductive care.

Despite these differences, both ceremonies function as culturally encoded systems of reproductive governance that situate pregnancy within collective female knowledge and kinship networks (Foucault 139; Jeffery and Jeffery 41). They serve as sites where traditional understandings

of the pregnant body intersect with social expectations, ritual authority, and communal memory (Ortner 86). In contemporary contexts, however, both *Seemantham* and *Valaikappu* exhibit adaptive transformations, as biomedical discourses, urban lifestyles, and changing gender roles reshape ritual practices without entirely displacing their symbolic core (Nair 214; Donner 97). This comparison highlights how regional childbirth rituals in Kerala and Karnataka negotiate continuity and change while sustaining culturally specific interpretations of fertility, care, and maternal embodiment.

Despite regional variations, Kerala and Karnataka share core symbolic patterns in childbirth-related food rituals. Both regions emphasise nourishment, protection, and balance, drawing on Ayurveda and folk medicine. However, variations emerge in ingredients, ceremonial forms, and linguistic expressions, shaped by ecology, caste practices, and religious affiliations. Cross-border cultural continuities are evident in shared ritual structures and symbolic meanings, reflecting historical interactions and shared agrarian traditions.

Ceremonial food practices are transmitted primarily through oral instruction, ritual speech, songs, and proverbs. Women function as key agents of this transmission, embodying and reproducing cultural knowledge through practice. Language plays a crucial role, with ritual terminology reinforcing symbolic meanings and cultural identity. Contemporary changes such as medicalisation of childbirth, nuclear family structures, and changing food habits have significantly impacted traditional practices. Institutional childbirth often marginalises ceremonial food rituals, while modern health advice may conflict with indigenous beliefs. As a result, many practices are either adapted or abandoned, leading to gradual erosion of ritual knowledge. Despite these challenges, ceremonial food practices continue to offer valuable insights into systems of care, emotional support, and community cohesion. They hold relevance for contemporary maternal health discourse by foregrounding holistic and culturally embedded approaches to care.

The ceremonial eating practices associated with pregnancy and childbirth in Kerala and Karnataka operate as complex cultural systems in which food functions simultaneously as nourishment, symbol, and ritual instrument. Through a comparative analysis of *Seemantham* and *Valaikappu*, the article has shown how regional ritual traditions translate deeply embedded fertility myths into structured ceremonial practices that regulate reproductive bodies through culturally sanctioned knowledge. While the ritual framework of Kerala foregrounds dietary restraint, medicinal balance, and ritual

purity, the practices in Karnataka emphasise abundance, sensory auspiciousness, and communal affirmation. These differences reveal not merely regional variation but distinct cultural logics through which fertility is imagined, protected, and socially governed.

The ceremonial food practices are inseparable from gendered systems of care and authority. In both regions, elder women, kin networks, and ritual specialists act as custodians of reproductive knowledge, transmitting beliefs and practices across generations. Food taboos, prescriptions, and ritual offerings thus emerge as mechanisms through which female bodies are disciplined and supported within collective moral economies of care. At the same time, these practices provide symbolic reassurance in contexts historically shaped by reproductive uncertainty, reinforcing faith-based understandings of fertility alongside embodied experience.

Modernity and Transformation in the Changing Cultural Landscape

In the context of rapid socio-economic transformation across South India, traditional ceremonial food practices associated with pregnancy and childbirth are undergoing significant reconfiguration. Processes such as urbanisation, increased female participation in formal employment, nuclearization of families, and the growing influence of biomedical discourses have collectively altered how reproductive rituals are perceived and practised in both Kerala and Karnataka. The medicalisation of childbirth marked by institutional deliveries, standardised prenatal nutrition guidelines, and professional obstetric care has gradually displaced community-centred knowledge systems that once governed maternal diet and ritual observance (Jordan 59–62). While biomedical interventions have undoubtedly contributed to improved maternal and infant health outcomes, they have also marginalised indigenous food practices embedded within culturally specific understandings of fertility, bodily balance, and spiritual protection.

In many communities of Kerala and Karnataka, ceremonial eating practices during pregnancy and the postnatal period traditionally functioned as more than nutritional interventions; they were symbolic enactments of cultural values surrounding purity, transition, and reproductive continuity. Structuralist and symbolic anthropological perspectives conceptualise food as a system of signs through which societies communicate moral boundaries and social order (Lévi-Strauss 36; Douglas 44). Prescribed foods such as medicinal porridges, herbal preparations, ghee-based dishes, and specific grains were believed to regulate bodily heat, enhance

lactation, strengthen the reproductive body, and safeguard the mother and child from malevolent forces. These practices reflect what Mary Douglas identifies as the cultural logic of purity and pollution, where dietary rules serve to maintain symbolic and social coherence during liminal life stages such as childbirth (Douglas 96).

Shifting family structures have further contributed to the transformation of these traditions. The decline of joint families and the increasing physical distance between generations have reduced the role of elder women, particularly mothers-in-law and grandmothers who historically functioned as custodians of reproductive food knowledge (Jeffery, Jeffery, and Lyon 112). In urban and semi-urban contexts, younger women increasingly rely on medical professionals, digital media, and commercial nutrition products, leading to the selective retention or abandonment of ritual food customs. As a result, ceremonial eating practices are often reduced to symbolic gestures performed on specific occasions rather than sustained systems of care embedded in everyday life.

Despite these changes, ceremonial food practices continue to hold cultural significance as markers of identity, belonging, and moral order. Feminist anthropological scholarship emphasises that reproductive rituals are crucial sites where gendered identities and cultural values surrounding motherhood are produced and reinforced (Van Hollen 18). In both Kerala and Karnataka, food rituals surrounding childbirth articulate deeply rooted beliefs about womanhood, fertility, and the sacredness of reproduction. They reinforce social bonds by mobilising kinship networks and community members who participate in food preparation, ritual feeding, and collective observance, thereby sustaining community solidarity even amid social change.

Moreover, ceremonial eating practices embody a broader system of social care that extends beyond the individual mother to encompass collective well-being. By regulating the reproductive body through culturally sanctioned foods, these rituals construct motherhood as a shared social responsibility rather than a purely private or medicalised experience (Mintz and Du Bois 109). While Kerala and Karnataka display distinct culinary traditions shaped by linguistic, religious, and ecological contexts, both regions share a cultural logic that situates food at the intersection of fertility, faith, and social cohesion.

IV. CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the transformation of ceremonial food practices should not be viewed solely as cultural loss but as part of an ongoing negotiation between tradition and modernity. However, the gradual erosion of these rituals

raises critical concerns regarding the disappearance of indigenous knowledge systems and the narrowing of cultural frameworks through which reproduction is understood. By foregrounding ceremonial eating practices as sites of meaning, care, and identity formation, this study highlights the importance of documenting and preserving these traditions as integral components of intangible cultural heritage in an era of accelerating socio-cultural change in Kerala and Karnataka.

By situating ceremonial eating within broader anthropological theories of ritual, purity, and liminality, this research contributes to ongoing scholarly conversations in cultural anthropology, food studies, and gender studies. It highlights how food-centred rituals continue to mediate the relationship between tradition and change, even as biomedical discourses and modern social transformations reshape reproductive practices in contemporary South India. Future interdisciplinary research drawing on ethnography, medical humanities, and feminist theory can further illuminate how ceremonial food practices adapt, persist, or are reinterpreted in the negotiation between cultural continuity and modernity.

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Bhumij Folksongs- From Recreation to Perception

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Abstract— Human communities transmit knowledge through two major channels: written traditions and oral traditions. Many tribal communities have historically relied more on oral transmission than on written documentation, and their collective memory is preserved through myths, legends, proverbs, riddles, ritual utterances, ballads, and folksongs. This paper studies selected Bhumij folksongs from Mayurbhanj district of Odisha as a form of oral literature. It focuses particularly on nature-oriented, devotional, and work-related songs because these categories most clearly reveal Bhumij consciousness about ecology, labour, community, worship, and everyday survival. The paper does not attempt to cover the entire range of Bhumij song traditions, such as marriage songs, love songs, or festival songs, because such a broad scope would require separate fieldwork and a different corpus. Drawing on primary field collection, translation, and close textual analysis, the study argues that Bhumij folksongs move beyond recreation: they preserve memory, communicate values, express ecological ethics, and make visible the community's perception of the world. The title "from recreation to perception" therefore indicates a movement from songs as entertainment to songs as cultural texts through which social consciousness can be read.



Keywords— Bhumij, folksongs, oral literature, tribal culture, Mayurbhanj, ecology, consciousness

I. INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE

Oral literature is one of the oldest and most enduring forms of cultural expression. Before the widespread use of writing, communities preserved their histories, beliefs, memories, and social values through spoken and performed forms. In tribal societies, oral literature often remains an active medium of knowledge transmission because songs, tales, myths, riddles, and proverbs are remembered, repeated, and re-created in everyday life. Nityanand Pattnaik observes that the unwritten literary world of tribal communities constitutes an important body of folklore because it carries memory from one generation to another (Pattnaik). In this sense, oral literature is not merely a storehouse of the past; it is also a living practice through which a community explains its relation with nature, labour, ancestors, deities, and society.

Folksongs occupy a special place within oral literature. They are sung during work, ritual, leisure, festivals, agricultural seasons, and moments of collective emotion. A folksong may appear simple in diction and melody, but it often carries a complex cultural meaning. It may entertain

the community and at the same time teach moral conduct, define social relationships, express devotion, record suffering, celebrate nature, or articulate protest. The study of folksongs therefore requires attention not only to the song-text but also to its performance context, singers, audience, occasion, and cultural function. As studies of tribal songs and oral epics in India suggest, songs may be read from literary, anthropological, and social perspectives together because they are artistic forms as well as cultural documents (Ram and Ram).

The present article studies selected Bhumij folksongs from the Mayurbhanj district of Odisha. The Bhumij are an important tribal community of eastern India, with a significant presence in Odisha, Jharkhand, and West Bengal. In Odisha, they are found mainly in Mayurbhanj, Balasore, Sundargarh, and Keonjhar. The community's name is commonly understood as "born from the soil," a meaning that connects the people with land, agriculture, and locality. This association with land is not merely etymological; it is reflected in Bhumij oral culture, where

forests, trees, cultivation, kinship, labour, and devotion recur as major motifs.

The scope of this paper is deliberately limited. Folk songs can be classified on the basis of theme and occasion, such as love songs, heroic songs, marriage songs, religious songs, work songs, seasonal songs, songs of social morality, songs of entertainment, and songs that describe the relation between human beings and nature. This article focuses on nature-oriented, devotional, and work-related Bhumij songs. These categories have been selected because they are directly connected with the paper's central aim: to understand how Bhumij folksongs express tribal consciousness about nature, labour, survival, worship, and community identity. Other categories, such as love songs, children's songs, marriage songs, and heroic narratives, are not denied importance; they are excluded only because they require a larger corpus and a separate analytical frame. The selected songs are therefore used as representative examples rather than as the totality of Bhumij song tradition.

The title "Bhumij Folksongs: From Recreation to Perception" needs clarification. In ordinary social life, folksongs are often understood as songs of recreation because they are sung for pleasure, rhythm, and collective participation. However, when they are studied as oral literature, they reveal perception: the community's view of nature, labour, social relations, and sacred power. The word "perception" here refers to cultural consciousness, not individual opinion. The paper argues that Bhumij songs are not only recreational performances but also interpretive texts that show how the community understands its world.

Objectives

The paper aims to:

- document selected Bhumij folksongs from Mayurbhanj as examples of oral literature;
- identify the thematic categories represented in the selected corpus, especially nature-oriented, devotional, and work-related songs;
- examine how these songs express Bhumij consciousness about ecology, labour, community, and spiritual life;
- translate selected songs into English while retaining their cultural meaning as far as possible; and
- locate the study within existing scholarship on folklore, tribal oral literature, and Bhumij/Munda cultural contexts.

II. METHODOLOGY

The study follows a qualitative and descriptive methodology. The primary material consists of selected Bhumij/Mundari folksongs collected from Bhumij

community contexts in Mayurbhanj district, particularly the Udala region and neighbouring areas where Bhumij cultural practices remain active. The data were gathered through field visits, informal interviews with singers and community members, group discussions, and observation of the social contexts in which songs are remembered and performed. The field method is important because oral literature cannot be adequately understood as isolated written text; its meaning is shaped by performance, occasion, and community memory.

Secondary sources are used to provide a scholarly framework. Works on tribal oral literature, Odisha folklore, Indian folk culture, and Munda/Bhumij cultural contexts help situate the selected songs within wider debates on folklore and oral tradition. The review of literature is not presented as a list of books but as a discussion of how previous scholarship helps identify the gap in the present study.

The translation method is also significant. The songs were first recorded or written in the source language as remembered by the singers. They were then translated into English through a meaning-based method rather than a strictly word-for-word method. The purpose of the translation is to communicate the central image, feeling, and cultural meaning of the songs to readers who do not know the source language. Wherever literal translation would produce confusion, a culturally equivalent English expression has been preferred. At the same time, key cultural terms such as "Karam," "Bonga," and "Dharam Daru" have been retained or explained because they carry meanings that cannot be fully replaced by English words. The translations should therefore be read as interpretive translations, not as final or fixed versions of the songs.

Profile of Bhumij Community

The Bhumij are one of the prominent tribal communities of eastern India. Their settlement history is associated with the forested and agrarian regions of Chota Nagpur and adjoining areas of Odisha, Jharkhand, and West Bengal. Colonial ethnographic accounts such as those of H. H. Risley associated the Bhumij with the larger Munda group and noted regional variations in language and culture (Risley). Although such colonial writings must be used critically because they often classify communities from an external administrative viewpoint, they remain useful for understanding how the Bhumij were historically described in relation to land, language, and social change.

In Odisha, the Bhumij are concentrated mainly in Mayurbhanj and adjoining districts. Mayurbhanj has long been a significant region of tribal settlement, where communities such as the Santal, Ho, Bathudi, Munda, and Bhumij have interacted with forests, agriculture, markets,

and regional political histories. The district was formerly a princely state and later merged with Odisha. Its cultural landscape is shaped by forests, hills, seasonal agriculture, and multilingual exchange. These conditions have influenced Bhumij oral traditions, where references to soil, trees, tools, fields, deities, parents, and village community appear frequently.

The Bhumij are closely associated with the Munda linguistic and cultural world, though many have also adopted regional languages such as Odia, Bengali, or Hindi depending on location and historical contact. The Bhumij oral tradition includes songs, tales, ritual utterances, and memories of work and worship. Some sections of the community have shown interest in scripts such as Ol Onal and Mundari Bani, but the oral mode continues to be central to cultural transmission. This makes documentation urgent, not because oral traditions are inferior to writing, but because modern education, migration, language shift, and social change may reduce the occasions on which younger generations learn these songs directly from elders.

The community is internally diverse. Local classifications mention groups such as Tamudia or Tamaria Bhumij, Holdipokharia Bhumij, Teli Bhumij, and Dehuri or Desi Bhumij. Such divisions may vary by locality, occupation, ritual role, and social memory. For the present article, these internal distinctions are not the main object of study; they are mentioned to indicate that Bhumij culture is not uniform and must be studied with attention to local variation.

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Scholarship on folklore and tribal oral literature provides the background for the present study. Pattnaik's work on the oral literature of the Santali, Kharia, Oraon, and Munda communities of Odisha is especially relevant because it treats the unwritten literary world of tribal communities as a serious cultural archive (Pattnaik). His work demonstrates that myths, legends, songs, and stories should not be considered marginal or primitive forms; rather, they are central to the transmission of community knowledge. This approach supports the present study's treatment of Bhumij folksongs as cultural texts.

Uma Ram and K. S. Ram's study of tribal songs, ballads, and oral epics of Bastar is useful because it shifts attention from purely anthropological description to literary criticism (Ram and Ram). Their work suggests that tribal songs can be analyzed for imagery, structure, voice, emotion, and social meaning. This is important for the present paper because Bhumij songs are not examined only as ethnographic data but also as expressive compositions with poetic and symbolic value.

Studies on Odisha's folk culture, fairs, festivals, and tribal traditions help locate Bhumij songs within a wider regional

context. Manmath Padhy and Achintya Mahapatra discuss folk legends, dances, fairs, and festivals of Odisha, showing how community performance is tied to ritual calendars and social life (Padhy and Mahapatra). Bhagabana Sahu's work on the folklife and culture of Odisha similarly emphasizes the connection between folk expression and everyday practice (Sahu). These studies are valuable for understanding the cultural setting in which Bhumij songs are performed, though they do not focus specifically on Bhumij folksongs as the central object of analysis.

Works on Indian folk literature and tribal culture also provide a broad conceptual foundation. Rani Kapoor treats folk literature as an important source for understanding social history and human concerns (Kapoor). Chitrasen Pasayat's work on Indian tribes in folk culture and Guptajit Pathak's study of folkloristic identity in tribal India underline the role of folklore in shaping identity (Pasayat; Pathak). C. R. Das's work on folk culture and literature in Odisha points to the philosophical and social dimensions of Adivasi songs (Das). These contributions indicate that folk literature is not merely decorative but carries a community's worldview.

Verrier Elwin and later editors of tribal myths and legends of Odisha have shown that myths are a mode through which tribal communities explain origin, creation, morality, and the relation between humans and supernatural forces (Elwin; Tripathy and Basa). Although myths and songs are different genres, both belong to oral tradition and often share symbolic concerns. In Bhumij songs, for example, trees may appear as living presences and divine protectors, which connects song imagery with mythic and ritual consciousness.

The gap in existing scholarship is clear. There are many studies on folk songs in general, tribal oral traditions, and Odisha folklore, but focused literary analysis of Bhumij folksongs remains limited. Existing works often discuss larger tribal groups, wider regions, or general categories of folklore. The present paper addresses this gap by studying selected Bhumij songs from Mayurbhanj and by showing how these songs express ecological, devotional, and labour-related consciousness. The paper therefore contributes to the documentation and interpretation of a relatively understudied oral tradition.

Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical perspective of this paper combines folklore studies, oral literature, and cultural interpretation. Folklore may be understood as the expressive culture of a community transmitted through tradition. It includes not only verbal forms such as songs, tales, proverbs, and riddles, but also performances, rituals, beliefs, and customary practices. Folksongs are therefore not isolated poems; they are part of

a larger cultural system. Their meaning depends on who sings them, when they are sung, why they are sung, and how the community understands them.

Oral literature differs from written literature in its mode of composition and transmission. It is not fixed in a single authoritative text. A song may change slightly from singer to singer, and such variation is not a defect but a feature of oral tradition. The singer is both a transmitter and a re-creator. This makes the study of Bhumij folksongs methodologically sensitive: one must pay attention to repeated images and themes rather than expecting textual fixity.

Folksongs perform several social functions. They provide recreation and emotional release; they educate younger generations; they transmit community memory; they strengthen group identity; they regulate moral behaviour; and they connect human life with sacred and natural forces. In the Bhumij context, songs often reveal a worldview in which human beings, trees, land, tools, ancestors, and deities are interrelated. This worldview may be described as ecological and relational because nature is not treated merely as a resource but as a living presence within community life.

The concept of consciousness is central to this paper. Here, consciousness does not refer to political awareness alone. It refers to the community's collective understanding of its own life-world: its relation to soil, forests, labour, kinship, suffering, worship, and survival. When a Bhumij song gives voice to a tree, praises a deity, or celebrates the dignity of labour, it reveals the community's perception of existence. The theoretical movement of the paper is therefore from performance to meaning: from song as recreation to song as perception.

The Folk Songs

The selected songs belong primarily to three overlapping categories: nature-oriented songs, devotional songs, and work-related songs. These categories are not rigid. A single song may combine ecological awareness, ritual devotion, and social feeling. For example, a tree-song may be at once an environmental appeal, a moral instruction, and a spiritual statement. Similarly, a work song may describe agricultural labour while also expressing community pride.

1. Work, Identity, and Collective Life

The following song identifies the community through labour and land:

*We are the Mundas
We plough the land,
Work with shovels and crowbar,*

*This is our music for work,
Of toil and sweat of the body.
Let this song float afar.
Love of father and mother
Is everything for us.
We have no worry, no griefs,
As the frogs frolic and swim
When tired.*

The song links identity with agricultural work. The speaker does not define the community by wealth, kingship, or written history, but by ploughing, tools, bodily labour, parental love, and collective song. Work is not represented as shame; it becomes "music." The image of frogs swimming when tired connects human labour with natural life. The song thus presents a worldview where human beings belong to the field, the family, and the environment. It also shows why Bhumij folksongs cannot be reduced to entertainment: the song converts labour into dignity and community memory.

2. Daruwa Binti/ Pleading for Life

"Daruwa Binti" is a nature-oriented song in which a tree speaks to human beings and pleads for life. The use of personification is central. By allowing the tree to speak, the song transforms a common act of cutting wood into a moral situation. The tree is not silent matter; it has pain, family, memory, and the desire to serve. This reveals a deeply ecological imagination.

The song is important for two reasons. First, it shows that the Bhumij imagination gives voice to non-human life. The tree has a family and a future, which means that deforestation is presented not only as economic use but also as violence against life. Second, the tree does not reject human need completely. It reminds human beings that it gives fuel, shade, fruit, leaves, and breeze. The ethical demand is therefore not absolute separation from nature but respectful coexistence. The song carries an ecological message long before modern environmental vocabulary enters the discussion.

1. Dharam Daru/ Evergreen Deity

"Dharam Daru" is a devotional song in which the tree is addressed as a sacred protector. The song is connected with the cultural world of Karam worship and the reverence given to trees as living symbols of divine power. Words such as "Bonga" and "Dharam Daru" indicate the presence of sacred force within the natural world. The song therefore belongs to the category of religious or devotional folksong, but it is also ecological because divinity is experienced through the tree.

Daruwa Binti	Pleading for Life
Kaage manmi kaage Aalam maa ginka senaha Ka hayajiyao kai senaha Aape aalah jula te Din din ge penetrate. Talak rapuda kedam Kam other jada hasu jiao Chila ka da tama-kulama Aaurio lel kawa han gana Jaika adah jaikimin Pereyaka musi aukate Nerege dular chimin Jathah amam tanai sana sakam Dalab bawa adha jayaa Kape banchaawa kai ama kere Aapeke hudhiha hayah Janam teya moran hama Tayre tanai aapeya sebare Jid tai jan re sena sebapeya Aalam gajiao dada re	No, human, no! Do not strike me with the axe. Do not throw me Into the fire of the hearth. This is my pain, agony, and misery. I am yet to see My children and grandchildren. How can you not understand How delightful life would be then? I have given all I have: Branches, fruits, leaves, and breeze. How can you make me bleed And plead for life? I yearn to live So that I may serve you again and again. How can you not imagine What it means to be allowed to breathe?

DHARAM DARU	EVERGREEN DEITY
Karam karam karam bonga Jowar joara karam bonga-2 Aam ke seva jamale Suku duku hatinwa jamale Munda kowa amdore dhoram daru Karam karam karam daru Munda kowa amdore dhoram daru Karam karam karam bonga Jowar joara karam bonga-2 Aam ke seva jamales Suku duku hatinwa jamale Munda kowa amdore dhoram daru Karam karam karam daru Munda kowa amdore dhoram daru Dhuna dhupo ta baa malate Amke atang daram jamale Duku boina re sutuh talem Amke issu nehar jamale Nehar nehar karam bonga	Hail to thee my Supreme deity, Hail to thee, Your service is my piety, You are my companion in dark and light. Hail to thee my Supreme deity, Hail to thee, The glory of the Munda clan, Shower your blessings to be a Man. Hail to thee my Evergreen deity, Hail to thee, Humbly offer you incense and flowers, Never deny shade of your divine hands. Hail to thee my Evergreen deity, Hail to thee, In this ocean of sorrows, Spirit and strength from you we borrow. Hail to thee my Evergreen deity,

Atang daram karam bonga Amke binate Jamale Shahas omalem jolon jalare Munda kowa amdore dhoram daru Karam karam karam daru Munda kowa amdore dhoram daru Diya salita hulu huli ta Amke atang daram jamale Maya duniya re soto amge Pellah omalem allake Jayo jayo jayo karam bonga Addi addi dhoram karam bonga Amke biswas tamale Ukku talam taam kole re Munda kowa amdore dhoram daru Karam karam karam daru Munda kowa amdore dhoram daru. Durang durang ta susun susun te Aake rijhaw tanale Dumang saddi te dholl saddi te Amke rasike ichhi tanale Dhoram dhoram dhoram karam bonga Amke khojhar tanale Sipinj doho talem Munda kowa amdore dhoram daru Karam karam karam daru Munda kowa amdore dhoram daru	Hail to thee, Venerating you, holy lamps we burn, Blow the conch shell along pious orison. Hail to thee my Evergreen deity, Hail to thee, Lead us in the path of truth, Never do we alter from your faith. Hail to thee my Evergreen deity, Hail to thee, Let our trust in you be unaltered, Shield us that we never be perturbed. Hail to thee my Evergreen deity, Hail to thee, In dancing, singing and making merry, Our goals never do we bury. Hail to thee my Evergreen deity, Hail to thee, Aligning in pairs and rejoicing, To the tunes of drumbeats dancing. Hail to thee my Evergreen deity, Hail to thee, Prayer before your lotus feet, Constancy in our devotion never adrift.

The song shows that sacredness is not outside the natural world. The tree is protector, companion, and deity. The worshipper seeks blessings not from an abstract distant power but from a living natural presence. This reveals the relational structure of Bhumij spirituality: the community's well-being depends on maintaining respectful relations with natural forces. The song also shows how worship, ecology, and identity overlap. The "Munda clan" is invoked through the tree, suggesting that community identity is ritually rooted in nature.

Analysis: Folksongs and Bhumij Consciousness

1. Ecological Consciousness

The strongest theme in the selected songs is ecological consciousness. In "Daruwaha Binti," the tree is not merely an object used for fuel; it is a speaking subject. The song asks listeners to imagine the pain of the tree and the future of its children. This form of personification is not simply a literary ornament. It expresses a worldview in which human life and non-human life are morally connected. The song teaches restraint, gratitude, and compassion toward the environment. Such an attitude corresponds with the wider tribal understanding of nature as a living field of relation rather than a dead store of resources (Pattnaik; Pasayat).

The ecological dimension becomes spiritual in "Dharam Daru." The tree is not only useful but sacred. The people

offer incense and flowers and seek protection from the deity-tree. The song therefore challenges the separation between nature and religion. In many tribal contexts, sacred groves, ritual trees, hills, rivers, and ancestral places form part of lived religion. The Bhumij song reflects this pattern by making the tree both ecological and divine.

2. Labour Consciousness

The work song presents labour as identity. "We plough the land" is not a complaint but a collective declaration. The song gives dignity to manual work and agricultural life. Tools such as shovels and crowbars are not simply instruments; they become symbols of community survival. The phrase "music for work" suggests that song transforms toil into rhythm and collective energy. In this respect, Bhumij folksongs function as emotional support during labour and as a cultural affirmation of the worker's life.

The song also reveals an ethics of simplicity. Love of father and mother, bodily labour, and natural images are presented as sufficient sources of meaning. The absence of "worry" and "griefs" should not be read literally as the absence of hardship. Rather, it expresses a cultural ideal: the community survives through labour, kinship, and harmony with nature. This is why folksongs are significant social documents. They show how people interpret hardship through shared performance.

3. Devotional and Ritual Consciousness

Devotional consciousness in the selected songs is inseparable from nature. "Dharam Daru" invokes Karam Bonga and addresses the tree as a sacred companion. The repeated hail or salutation creates the rhythm of prayer. The song does not use elaborate theology; its power lies in repetition, humility, and direct address. The devotee does not debate divine existence but participates in a relationship of service and protection.

This kind of song also educates the community. Through repeated performance, younger listeners learn whom to honour, how to address sacred forces, and why natural beings deserve respect. In oral cultures, such learning often happens through participation rather than formal instruction. The song is therefore both worship and pedagogy.

4. Social and Moral Consciousness

The selected songs communicate moral values without abstract preaching. "Daruwa Binti" teaches compassion by dramatizing the pain of the tree. The work song teaches respect for labour and parents. "Dharam Daru" teaches gratitude and humility before sacred nature. These values are not presented in the form of rules; they are embedded in images, rhythm, and performance. This is one of the

strengths of oral literature: it communicates social morality through memorable and emotionally charged forms.

The songs also reveal the collective rather than individual nature of Bhumij consciousness. The speaker often speaks for a group: "we are," "our music," "our deity," "our clan." Even when the tree speaks in the first person, its plea concerns the relationship between species and generations. The songs therefore move beyond personal emotion and articulate a shared moral universe.

5. From Recreation to Perception

The phrase "from recreation to perception" summarizes the central argument of the article. At the level of performance, Bhumij folksongs provide recreation: people sing during work, ritual, and community gatherings. The songs create pleasure, rhythm, and participation. But at the level of interpretation, they reveal perception: how the community sees land, trees, deities, labour, kinship, and survival. Recreation and perception are not opposites. Recreation is the mode through which perception is transmitted. The songs remain enjoyable because they are sung collectively, but they remain meaningful because they carry the community's worldview.

IV. CONCLUSION

Bhumij folksongs are an important part of the oral literature of Mayurbhanj and of the wider tribal cultural heritage of Odisha. They preserve memory, emotion, and social values through performance. The selected songs analysed in this paper show that Bhumij oral tradition is deeply connected with land, forest, labour, worship, and community identity. A tree may speak, a deity may live through a tree, and work may become music. These images reveal a cultural consciousness in which human beings are not separated from nature but are placed within a network of ecological, spiritual, and social relations.

The study has focused on nature-oriented, devotional, and work-related songs because these categories most clearly reveal the movement from recreation to perception. The article has not attempted to cover the whole range of Bhumij folksongs. Marriage songs, love songs, seasonal songs, children's songs, and heroic songs remain important areas for future research. Further fieldwork should collect more songs from different Bhumij regions, compare versions across villages, document performance contexts, and include the voices of singers, especially elder women and ritual specialists who often preserve oral memory.

The documentation and translation of Bhumij folksongs are valuable not because oral tradition needs to be replaced by writing, but because written records can support cultural continuity in a period of rapid social change. When

translated and analysed carefully, these songs can reach wider academic audiences without losing their rootedness in community life. The present study therefore argues that Bhumij folksongs deserve serious literary and cultural attention. They are songs of recreation, but they are also songs of perception, memory, and consciousness.

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The Geomorphological Mind: Bridging Ancient Insight and Modern Spatial Thoughts

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Abstract— *This paper advances a multidisciplinary ontological model termed The Geomorphological Mind. It establishes a profound structural, psychological, and spiritual parallelism between the undulating physical geomorphology of the Earth system and the deep architecture of human consciousness. Operating on the premise that the Earth is a living manifestation of divine consciousness, this study examines how the physical landscape—characterized by monumental uplifts and profound depressions—mirrors the experiential and spiritual trajectory of the human psyche. By bridging modern spatial thoughts (Geomorphometry, Fluvial Dynamics, and Isostasy) with ancient insights derived from classical Sanskrit prose, Vedic philosophy, and literary epics like the Ramcharitmanas, this paper demonstrates that landscape is an active participant in human evolution. Furthermore, it incorporates the geophysical principle of isostatic crustal densities alongside the economic and ethical spatial theories of J.K. Mehta (“Wantlessness”) and Platonic Idealism to propose an alternative model for sustainable, spiritually grounded urban and regional planning. The paper concludes that literature serves as the ultimate perennial aquifer, preserving the sacred geometry of both earth and mind across the undulating terrain of historical time.*



Keywords— *The Geomorphological Mind; Isostasy; Anthropocentric Bias; Wantlessness; Miltonic Endurance; Malook Das; Cosmic Architecture; Kinetic Quiescence; Terrestrial Equilibrium.*

I. INTRODUCTION: THE ONTOLOGICAL CONFLUENCE OF LANDSCAPE AND SOUL

For centuries, modern science has operated under a rigid Cartesian dualism that separates the observer from the observed, the thinking mind (*res cogitans*) from the material extension of the physical world (*res extensa*). Within this fragmented paradigm, geomorphology has been strictly confined to the empirical, quantitative, and mechanistic analysis of landforms, operating purely on physical laws of thermodynamics, tectonic forces, and denudational processes.

However, this materialistic reductionism fails to account for the profound, intuitive resonance that humanity has universally experienced when interacting with the Earth’s topography. Long before the advent of digital terrain modeling and remote sensing, the ancient human mind

recognized that the contours of the Earth were intimately intertwined with the contours of the spirit.

This paper proposes a radical synthesis: The Geomorphological Mind. This framework views the Earth system and the human mind not as distinct, separate entities, but as reciprocal mirrors reflecting a singular, all-encompassing Divine Consciousness. Just as the physical crust of the Earth is defined by its undulations—its dramatic mountain chains, sweeping valleys, deep gorges, and meandering river networks—so too is the human mind characterized by innumerable modes of emotional, intellectual, and spiritual fluctuations.

When humanity approaches the landscape with an attitude of complete sanctity, piety, and lack of bias, the artificial boundaries between physical geography and internal psychology dissolve. The undulating terrain ceases to be a mere physical obstacle and becomes a sacred text, a living topography of divine intent.

Through this extensive exploration, we trace the conceptual bridges connecting physical and perceived space, analyze the manifestations of geomorphological consciousness in ancient Indian literature, examine the spatial dimensions of classical idealism, map out a blueprint for an ethically grounded "Mehtasian" spatial ecology, and demonstrate how literature acts as an eternal guardian of this sacred, terrestrial-mental equilibrium.

II. PHYSICAL SPACE VERSUS PERCEIVED SPACE: THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL BRIDGE

To understand the Geomorphological Mind, we must first reconcile the divergence between how modern spatial science measures the world and how ancient consciousness perceives it. Modern spatial thought is fundamentally geometric and metric; it utilizes Geographic Information Systems (GIS), satellite interferometry, and geochemical assays to reduce the landscape to a series of data points, pixel values, and digital elevation models.

While these tools provide invaluable empirical accuracy, they often strip the landscape of its ontological depth. Space is treated as isotropic, homogenous, and value-neutral—a mere container for economic resources or a matrix of physical hazards.

In contrast, ancient geomorphological insight operates on a phenomenological, qualitative, and sacred understanding of space. In this worldview, space is never empty or neutral; it is anisotropic, laden with meaning, and structurally aligned with cosmic order (Rta). Landforms are understood as the physical crystallization of divine energy. A mountain is not merely a localized lithospheric uplift caused by convergent plate tectonics; it is an axis mundi, a structural pillar of spiritual aspiration. A river is not merely a channelized runoff system transporting sediment load; it is a living, purifying artery of divine grace flowing through the temporal world.

By establishing this bridge, we realize that modern geomorphometry—the quantitative measurement of landforms—is not discovering a random, chaotic universe. Rather, it is charting the precise, mathematical laws through which the Divine Consciousness manifests its physical geometry. The "ups and downs" of the physical terrain conform to profound structural laws, just as the fluctuations of human consciousness are bound by universal moral and psychological realities.

III. GEOMORPHOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN ANCIENT INDIAN LITERATURE

The repository of ancient Sanskrit prose and Indic literature provides some of the most sophisticated historical evidence of the Geomorphological Mind. The authors of these classical texts were not merely poets indulging in aesthetic imagination; they were acute observers of the physical landscape who possessed an advanced, intuitive understanding of geomorphic processes, hydrology, and terrain ecology.

Fluvial Dynamics and Hydrological Purism

In modern fluvial geomorphology, a river system is analyzed through the lens of its hydraulic geometry, cross-sectional area, velocity, sediment transport capacity, and base-level adjustments.

Ancient Indian thought, however, elevates the river to the highest realm of divine consciousness while remaining meticulously aware of its physical attributes. The perennial rivers of the Indo-Gangetic plains—the Ganga, Yamuna, and the lost Saraswati—were recognized as life-sustaining arterial networks whose seasonal behavior dictated the survival of civilization.

The ancient texts demonstrate a profound understanding of river rejuvenation, alluvial deposition, and deltaic evolution. The river is celebrated as a cleanser of both physical impurities and metaphysical blemishes (Papa). This dual cleansing property symbolizes the ultimate convergence of the physical and spiritual realms: the water that physically erodes the mountain and deposits fertile silt in the valleys is the exact same cosmic energy that erodes the rigid ego of the human mind, leaving behind a fertile ground for pious thoughts.

Terrain Evaluation in the Aranya Kanda of Ramcharitmanas

A profound case study in literary geomorphology is found in the Aranya Kanda of Goswami Tulsidas's Ramcharitmanas. The narrative, which details the exile of Lord Rama into the dense, wild forests of central India, serves as an extraordinary treatise on forest geomorphology, microclimatology, and rugged terrain evaluation.

The text does not present the forest as a generalized green backdrop. Instead, it carefully distinguishes between various terrain units: the steep, weathered slopes of mountains like Chitrakoot, the microclimates of deep valleys, the specific soil characteristics that support distinct vegetative covers, and the strategic positioning of ashrams (hermitages) near stable, perennial water sources like Panchavati along the banks of the Godavari.

Lord Rama's navigation of these undulating and perilous terrains is an allegorical blueprint for the human mind. The rugged paths, dense undergrowths, and hidden gorges represent the unexpected trials, psychological depressions, and chaotic fluctuations of temporal existence. Yet, by moving through these landscapes with an attitude of complete equilibrium—devoid of bias, resentment, or fear—the divine consciousness in human form demonstrates how the mind can accommodate any external topography while maintaining absolute internal sanctity.

Landscape Aesthetics and Geomorphic Process in Baan Bhatt's Kadambari

Similarly, in the classical Sanskrit prose of Baan Bhatt's Kadambari, the descriptions of nature reach an unparalleled level of geomorphological detail. Baan Bhatt describes the Vindhya forest and the hermitage of Sage Jabali with an eye that notices the precise effects of weathering on rocks, the color variations in soil indicating mineral composition (an early intuition of soil geochemistry), and the behavior of wild torrents during the monsoon.

In Kadambari, the landscape is alive; it breathes, reacts, and communicates with the characters. The physical features of the earth are explicitly linked to the emotional states of the minds traversing them. The towering mountains represent high intellectual achievements and stable meditation, while the deep, mysterious caverns represent the sub-conscious layers of the human mind, waiting to be illuminated by the light of wisdom.

IV. THE SPATIAL DIMENSION OF IDEALISM: FROM PLATO TO VEDIC THOUGHT

To construct a rigorous theoretical foundation for the Geomorphological Mind, we must examine the philosophical school of Idealism and its structural relationship to spatial organization.

Platonic Idealism and the Morphological Archetype

In Western philosophy, Plato's theory of Forms or Ideas posits that the material world we perceive through our physical senses is merely a shadowy, imperfect reflection of a higher, unchangeable, and eternal realm of absolute truths. Every physical object in the universe is a flawed copy of its perfect archetype or "Form."

When this philosophical lens is applied to geomorphology, it yields a fascinating insight. The thousands of individual hills, fault-block mountains, U-shaped valleys, and alluvial fans that modern geomorphologists map are not random, disjointed accidents of nature. They are physical, material manifestations of perfect spatial templates. When a modern spatial scientist uses mathematical equations to model a river channel's ideal hydraulic equilibrium or uses

geometric parameters to classify landforms, they are, in essence, searching for the Platonic "Form" hidden within the chaotic, eroded reality of the physical earth.

Vedic Idealism: The Externalization of Cosmic Order

While Platonic idealism posits a separate realm of Forms, Vedic and Upanishadic thought offers a more integrated, non-dualistic (Advaita) perspective. It asserts that the external physical landscape is not a separate copy of a distant ideal, but a direct, literal externalization of the cosmic mind. The universe is the macrocosm (Brahmanda), and the human being is the microcosm (Pindanda). In this light, the earth's geomorphological structures are structurally identical to the human body and mind: The rocky mountains and crags are the skeletal structure of a living, breathing earth deity (Prithvi Mata). The intricate, dendritic drainage networks of river basins are the circulatory and nervous systems of this planetary organism. The atmospheric hydrologic cycle—evaporation, condensation, precipitation, and infiltration—is the respiration, the Prana, of the Earth system.

Therefore, when the human mind experiences an uplift of inspiration, nobility, and divine aspiration, it is experiencing an internal orogeny—a spiritual mountain-building process. Conversely, when it descends into humility, introspection, and deep contemplation, it enters the quiet, fertile valley of the sub-conscious. The mind that understands this non-dual identity behaves with absolute piousness; it recognizes that to degrade the physical topography of the earth through reckless, greedy exploitation is to directly degrade and fragment the sanctity of human consciousness itself.

V. THE GEOPHYSICS OF HUMILITY: ISOSTASY AND CRUSTAL DENSITIES

To deeply understand the structural alignment between the physical earth and human intellect, we must analyze the specific mechanics of their changes, focusing heavily on how the Earth maintains its balance. A critical limitation of traditional spatial philosophy has been the tendency to value physical height as inherently superior to physical depth. In common human parlance, "reaching the peak" is equated with success, while "falling into a valley" is synonymous with despair. This framework dismantles that anthropocentric bias by introducing the exact laws of geophysics—specifically the principle of isostasy and the distribution of crustal rock densities.

The Paradox of Lithospheric Balance

According to the geophysical models of isostasy (such as those formulated by Airy and Pratt), the Earth's tectonic features float at an elevation dependent on their thickness and density. Mountains stand high because they are

composed of material with a significantly lower density. They are composed largely of continental granitic rocks, rich in silica and aluminum (SIAL), which are physically less dense and float buoyantly like icebergs upon the denser mantle below.

Conversely, the deep ocean beds and low-lying plains sit far lower in the topographic hierarchy because they are underlain by oceanic basaltic rocks, rich in magnesium and iron (SIMA). These rocks possess the highest material density and inner gravity on the planet's surface.

The Spiritual Interpretation of Material Density

When the Geomorphological Mind interprets this geophysical law, it uncovers an extraordinary moral truth regarding human character:

The Mountain Peak as the Illusion of Pride: The mountain towers over the landscape, appearing rigid, supreme, and unshakeable. Yet, its very height is a function of its lightness. In the geography of human consciousness, this perfectly mirrors the state of Pride (Ahankara). Pride causes an individual to elevate themselves above the masses, seeking visibility, dominance, and a towering stature. But this psychological elevation is structurally hollow and light. Because it lacks inner spiritual density, the proud mind is highly susceptible to severe external weathering. The winds of criticism, the frost of isolation, and the inevitable tectonic shifts of time easily fracture and erode the mountain-like ego.

The Sea Bed as the Reality of Inner Gravity: Hidden from sight, submerged beneath vast volumes of water, and subjected to immense hydrostatic pressure, the sea bed represents the state of Absolute Humility (Vinaya). The humble mind does not expend its energy in upward, visible display. Instead, it moves downward, condensing its spiritual power into a dense, grounded center of gravity. It does not need to boast of its elevation because its foundational weight supports the entire ecosystem. It becomes the ultimate catchment basin of the world, receiving, processing, and nurturing all the life-giving waters of wisdom that run off the arrogant, un-absorbing slopes of the mountains.

5.1 The Kinetics of Quiescence: Micro-Particles, Existential Stillness, and the Cosmic Household

To fully deconstruct the anthropocentric and hyper-utilitarian biases embedded in modern spatial planning, we must extend our geophysical paradigm from macro-landforms down to the silent micro-particle. In the mechanical view of economic geography, a particle of soil, rock, or matter is valued only when it is dynamic—when it is actively eroding, transporting, or generating kinetic

friction. A sediment grain resting statically in a bedrock fracture is dismissed as redundant or unproductive.

Yet, physical geography proves that this static matter is the foundational anchor of structural equilibrium. Without the immense, silent weight of unmoving sedimentary layers, slopes would spontaneously fail, and rivers would lose their base-level stability. It is the unheralded, stationary atom that absorbs the structural trauma of the world, maintaining the architectural dignity of the landscape through the poetry of absolute stillness.

This geomorphological truth provides a stunning material parallel to the philosophy of existential waiting and non-action found across disparate global traditions. In Western literature, this concept finds its ultimate voice in John Milton's sonnet *On His Blindness*, which concludes with the immortal realization:

"They also serve who only stand and wait."

Milton argues that divine service does not require restless, outward movement across land and ocean; rather, maintaining an unyielding, steadfast posture in the cosmic order is an active, majestic form of spiritual alignment. The soul that stands still is not vacant; it is a monument of pure, unvocalized devotion.

This Western insight converges flawlessly with the Eastern mystical tradition of the 16th-century Indian saint, Baba Malook Das, who famously declared:

"Ajar karai na chakari, panchi karai na kaam,
Daas Malooka kahi gaye, sabake daata Raam."

(The python does no service, the bird does no labor,

Yet Sayeth Malook Das, Rama is the ultimate provider for all).

Malook Das does not preach a fatalistic or lazy inertia. Instead, he uncovers a deep ecological law: existence is inherently sustained by the cosmos, and "non-doing" (Akarmata) carries its own sacred weight. The python, resting in deep stillness for weeks, is not an evolutionary error; it is a vital node of systemic balance, a quiet pulse within the respiratory rhythms of nature.

This dual literary and mystical insight provides a profound defense of the traditional Indian joint family system and the broader concept of the cosmic household. Modern economics isolates the individual based purely on reproductive earning capacity, viewing non-earning members—such as young children, aging elders, or dependent relatives in their middle ages—as economic burdens.

The Geomorphological Mind, however, recognizes them as the indispensable static particles of the familial ecosystem. While the active earners represent the dynamic, turbulent

fluvial channels driving the family's kinetic economy, the elders represent the deep, unmoving bedrock that provides psychological anchorage and historical memory. The children represent the fine, resting silt—seemingly unproductive today, yet cradling the rich, potential energy of tomorrow's landscape.

To strip the family of its quiet, non-earning members is to clear-cut a forest of its roots, leaving the soil vulnerable to catastrophic moral erosion. Every member of this household, whether performing kinetic labor or remaining in quiet, contemplative stillness, is traveling simultaneously on the same lithospheric vessel. They exist safely in the nurturing, material lap of Mother Earth (Prithvi), sheltered under the expansive, silent vigil of Father Space (Akasha). Together, as a beautifully woven, intergenerational tapestry, they navigate the undulating terrains of temporal life, moving day and night toward the ultimate, infinite goal of cosmic evolution.

VI. THE DUAL VOICE OF LITERATURE: BOOSTING CONSCIOUSNESS THROUGH LANDSCAPE

Literature is the sacred lens that focuses this geophysical reality into an actionable moral force. As a perennial aquifer of truth, literature does not view the difference between mountains and plains as a conflict; instead, it utilizes both structures in a positive, empowering manner. Rather than condemning the mountain for its lightness or the plain for its lowliness, literary genius extracts a distinct form of psychological booster from each terrain unit.

The Aspirational Axis: Boosting the Will via the Mountain

When classical and contemporary literature employs the mountain motif in a positive framework, it focuses on the structural attribute of vertical ascension and an uncompromising stand. In this mode, the mountain is stripped of its associations with pride and is instead elevated as a symbol of steadfastness, high ideals, and protective resilience.

In ancient Indian thought, the Himalayas are celebrated as Devatma—a living divine soul, the seat of Lord Shiva representing the pinnacle of absolute, undisturbed meditation (Samadhi). Literature uses this towering geometry to boost the human mind during times of crisis, commanding the individual to stand tall against injustice, to remain unmoved by the storms of emotional adversity, and to constantly project their aspirations toward the highest heavens of consciousness. It serves as a visual testament that human potential can rise above the baseline of ordinary, mundane existence to build an unyielding monument of righteousness (Dharma).

The Gravitational Axis: Boosting the Soul via the Plain and Sea Bed

Conversely, when literature turns its gaze downward toward the plains and oceanic beds, it switches to the axis of horizontal inclusivity and deep absorbency. Here, the lowering of terrain is presented not as a degradation, but as the ultimate manifestation of magnanimity and cosmic storage.

The ocean is universally addressed in Sanskrit classics as Ratnakara—the repository of priceless jewels. It is topographically downed, yet it possesses so much inner gravity and capacity that it absorbs the discharge of thousands of turbulent, muddy rivers without ever losing its boundary or overflowing its shores. Literature uses this image to boost the human spirit by teaching the grandeur of capacious humility. It instructs the soul to acquire such inner density that it can contain the joys, sorrows, sins, and virtues of humanity within its depths without losing its inner sanctity.

Similarly, the plain is celebrated as Bhumi Devi, the mother who tolerates the trampling of a billion feet and the furrowing of plows, responding only by producing life-sustaining grain. This boosts human empathy, showing that the ultimate power of divine consciousness is the capacity to support and sustain everyone from below.

VII. THE UNDULATING EARTH AND THE UNDULATING MIND: A COMPARATIVE MECHANICS

The defining characteristic of both the physical earth and the human intellect is that they are undulating. They reject flat uniformity. This undulating morphology is not a structural defect; it is the fundamental mechanism through which the Earth system sustains life and dynamics.

The Physics of Physical Undulation

If the Earth were a perfectly smooth, uniform sphere, it would become a stagnant, dead world. There would be no gradient to drive the flow of rivers, no orographic barriers to force atmospheric moisture to condense into rain, no variation in solar insulation to drive wind patterns, and no sediment transport to continuously refresh the mineral composition of the soil. The "ups" (orogenic uplifts, volcanic landforms) create vast reservoirs of potential energy.

The "downs" (tectonic depressions, carved valleys, ocean basins) act as the receiving areas for this kinetic energy, where gravity forces water and sediment to accumulate, creating the fertile conditions necessary for biological diversity. The Earth system manages this constant tension

between uplift and denudation with a majestic, un-biased thermodynamic equilibrium.

The Psychology of Mental Undulation

The human mind behaves in an identical fashion. A mind that is completely flat—devoid of emotional peaks, intellectual challenges, or moments of deep, introspective valley-like stillness—is a stagnant mind, incapable of creative genius or spiritual evolution. Throughout human existence, the mind is continuously subjected to internal tectonic stresses (the eruption of creative ideas, the uplift of noble ambitions) and external weathering forces (the trauma of loss, the friction of interpersonal conflict, the erosion of material security).

The critical difference lies in how the evolved mind responds to these undulations. A biased, uncultivated mind experiences these ups and downs as a chaotic, destructive roller-coaster. When it is on a peak, it becomes arrogant and unstable, prone to catastrophic moral collapses. When it falls into a depression, it becomes paralyzed by despair.

However, a mind operating with complete sanctity and piousness mirrors the un-biased equilibrium of the Earth system. When such a mind encounters a monumental crisis—a sudden, deep gorge across its life path—it does not react with emotional violence or intellectual bias. Like a masterfully adapted river system encountering a hard rock barrier, it maintains its essential identity, adjusts its internal velocity, utilizes the law of patience to carve a way through the obstacle, and converts the energy of the drop into a beautiful waterfall of creative wisdom. It understands that the "downs" of life are not punishments, but necessary catchments where the soul accumulates the rich, quiet experiences required for its next great spiritual uplift.

VIII. THE MEHTASIAN CITY: ETHICAL GEOMORPHOLOGY AND URBAN SPACE

The theoretical realization of the Geomorphological Mind must be translated into an actionable blueprint for modern spatial existence. In the contemporary era, humanity's relationship with the earth's landforms has become deeply toxic, driven by an aggressive, anthropocentric consumerism that treats the earth as a passive object to be conquered, reshaped, and commodified. Modern urban planning routinely flattens undulating hills, obliterates natural drainage basins, paves over critical groundwater recharge zones, and straightens dynamic river channels, leading to unprecedented urban flooding, widespread soil erosion, and psychological alienation.

To counteract this ecological crisis, we can invoke the profound economic and philosophical principles of J.K. Mehta. Mehta's economic philosophy centers on the

revolutionary concept of "Wantlessness". He argued that true human welfare and philosophical freedom lie in the conscious, ethical reduction of desires. Happiness is achieved not by satisfying an endless sequence of superficial wants, but by achieving a state of philosophical equilibrium where the mind is free from the tyrannical bias of constant craving.

When we extend Mehta's concept of "Wantlessness" into the realms of geomorphology and urban planning, we derive the model of The Mehtasian City. This urban space represents a city designed in complete structural and spiritual harmony with the undulating topography of the earth.

Topographic Harmony and Contour Alignment: Instead of deploying heavy machinery to level an undulating landscape to create a monotonous, Cartesian grid, the Mehtasian City embraces the "ups and downs" of the terrain. Roads, residential sectors, and civic spaces are engineered to follow the natural contour lines of the hillsides. This approach minimizes mass slope failure and landslides, preserving the natural aesthetic and structural continuity that reinforces the human mind's connection to the planetary body.

Preservation of Fluvial Architecture: In a Mehtasian city, natural streams, ephemeral torrents, and low-lying floodplains are treated as sacrosanct ecological corridors. They are never entombed in concrete pipes or built upon. The city's drainage network relies entirely on the pre-existing, natural catchment basins designed by millions of years of fluvial evolution, eliminating the hazard of artificial urban flooding while ensuring that the local aquifers are continuously replenished through natural infiltration.

Soil Geochemistry and Sustainable Resource Allocation: Highly fertile alluvial tracts are strictly preserved for local, organic agriculture, ensuring food security without the heavy imposition of chemical fertilizers that disrupt soil biochemistry. Industrial activities are strictly confined to geologically stable, non-porous rocky terrains where subsurface leaching is naturally contained, ensuring that the purity and sanctity of the regional water table is never compromised.

Human Capital and the Architecture of Contemplation: Crucially, the Mehtasian City recognizes that human capital is an integral component of the local ecosystem. By integrating natural landforms—such as retaining forested hillcrests as public spaces for silent meditation, or creating walking paths along unpolluted river banks—the urban space becomes an engine for spiritual elevation. Citizens are constantly reminded of the grand, slow, enduring processes of the Earth, which naturally subdues short-term greed,

guiding the community toward a sustainable, pious, and collective future.

IX. LITERATURE AS THE PERENNIAL AQUIFER OF WISDOM

If the earth is the physical body of this divine system and the human mind is its active consciousness, then Literature is the perennial aquifer that preserves and transmits the pure water of this shared wisdom across the vast expanses of historical time.

Human history is itself an undulating terrain. It has seen the glorious peaks of enlightened empires, artistic renaissances, and deep philosophical awakenings, followed inevitably by the dark valleys of global war, cultural amnesia, and materialist degeneration. During these dark ages—the deep depressions of historical time—the surface of the earth often becomes dry and spiritually barren.

However, literature operates precisely like a deep, confined groundwater aquifer. When the great sages, poets, and philosophers of antiquity experienced moments of profound alignment with the Divine Consciousness, they recorded these insights in written words. These texts became repositories of pure, un-biased truth.

As history marched forward and the surface world suffered from the droughts of ignorance or the floods of chaos, this subterranean reservoir of literary wisdom remained completely undisturbed, naturally filtered by the rigorous structures of classical language and sacred preservation. Whenever a contemporary scholar, an ethical planner, or a seeking soul taps into this literary aquifer, they drill an artesian well directly into the eternal mind of humanity. They draw up a cool, pure stream of thought that instantly bridges the ancient insight with the present moment, showing a bright, illuminated path toward a future where humanity remembers its sacred duty to the planet.

X. CONCLUSION: THE PATH OF PERENNIAL EQUILIBRIUM

The Geomorphological Mind offers a vital corrective paradigm for a world on the brink of ecological and psychological collapse. By demonstrating that the undulating structures of the Earth and the innumerable modes of the human mind are governed by the same divine laws of balance, equilibrium, density, and sanctity, this framework bridges the artificial divide between the sciences and the humanities.

We must move forward into the future with an integrated vision. Geomorphologists must not merely be technicians measuring the rate of landscape degradation; they must be

eco-philosophers who understand that they are reading the physical braille of a divine intellect. Urban planners must reject the arrogant, Cartesian impulse to flatten the earth, choosing instead to design Mehtasian cities that conform to the sacred, undulating contours of the terrain, thereby fostering a culture of wantlessness and long term sustainability.

Ultimately, this synthesis reminds us that our journey through space and time is a sacred pilgrimage. Whether we are climbing the physical peaks of the mountains, navigating the complex psychological terrains of our personal lives, or reading the timeless verses of ancient literature, we are moving within a single, continuous canvas of Divine Consciousness. By maintaining an attitude of absolute piousness, free from destructive biases, we can align our individual minds with the majestic, isostatic balance of the Earth itself, ensuring that our species does not become a tragic, eroded layer in the geological record, but continues to lead humanity toward a bright, enlightened, and harmonious future.

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Smiles, Status and Silence - “My Last Duchess” as a Critique of Modern Social Control

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Abstract— Robert Browning’s dramatic monologue “My Last Duchess”, though rooted in the Victorian era and set in Renaissance Italy functions as a powerful mirror to modern society. The poem foregrounds themes of patriarchal dominance, aristocratic power and the social importance of power and hierarchy, all embodied in the figure of the Duke. Browning exposes the unequal dynamics of marital relationships, highlighting the dominance of the husband and the enforced subservience of women. The Duchess’ reduction to an object - valued for obedience and controlled visibility reveals patterns of female objectification and silencing that persist beyond the poem’s historical context. These themes find clear reflection in contemporary social realities including gender inequality, domestic violence, power politics and the continued marginalization of vulnerable groups. By dramatizing the abuse of authority within private and public spheres “My Last Duchess” transcends its temporal setting and invites modern readers to confront enduring structures of oppression. The poem thus remains relevant as a critique of unchecked power and systemic inequality in present day.



Keywords— monologue, dominance, power, objectification, oppression

Introduction

Robert Browning is widely regarded as the poet who perfected the dramatic monologue, transforming it into a powerful literary form for the psychological exploration of the human mind. Through this technique Browning allows the inner turmoil, moral contradictions and subconscious impulses of his speakers to emerge gradually through their own words. His poetry thus becomes not merely a narrative device, but a psychological study of human behaviour and motivation. In “My Last Duchess”, Browning presents a complex portrayal of the speaker’s psyche, revealing how power, insecurity and obsession operates beneath the surface of aristocratic refinement.

The poem is structured around a seemingly polite interaction in which the Duke of Ferrara displays the portrait of his late Duchess to an envoy negotiating a new marriage alliance. However as the Duke speaks his possessiveness and commanding nature is steadily exposed. His obsessive concern with control, reputation and social status reflects not only individual pathology but also the

broader values of Victorian society, particularly its rigid hierarchies and patriarchal norms. The Duchess, silenced and objectified, exists only through the Duke’s controlling gaze, underscores the unequal power dynamics embedded within marital relationships.

Browning’s representation of gender relations extends beyond its historical context, offering striking modern parallels. The Duke’s expectations of female behaviour - obedience, exclusivity and emotional restraint - resonates with contemporary debates surrounding gender discrimination, patriarchal dominance and the social policing of women’s conduct. By merging psychological insight with social critique, “My Last Duchess” continues to function as a revealing study of both the Victorian psyche and enduring structures of power in modern society, controlling her actions, expressions and even her silences. This control persists beyond her death symbolized by his power to draw or remove the curtain.

Authoritarian Power, Subjugation and Marginalization of the Downtrodden

The Duke's insistence that his late Duchess follow only in his footsteps and reserve her smiles exclusively for him reflects an intense desire for absolute possession and control. She is reduced to a silent object - an ornamental presence, a lovely toy shaped and reshaped according to his whims and fancies - rather than acknowledging as an autonomous individual. This attitude mirrors the conduct of modern power hungry leaders who extend their authority beyond ethical and moral limits to satisfy personal ambition. Such a selfish, manipulative approach to power is rooted in egoism and self-centered human motives, where the desire to command and dominate eclipses empathy, equality and mutual respect. The Duke thus becomes emblematic of an authoritarian figure whose obsession with control transforms relationships into hierarchies of subjugation, revealing how unchecked power dehumanizes both the ruler and the ruled.

The Duke's intense pride in his eight hundred year old aristocratic title underscores his deep-seated obsession with lineage, social status and hierarchy. He demands unquestioning respect to this inherited honour and is profoundly infuriated by his wife's apparent tendency to regard his noble title and the ordinary courtesies extended by others as equal in value. Such an attitude exposes his rigid belief in social stratification where worth is determined by rank rather than humanity. This craving for status, human and societal validation fuels his authoritarian impulse to command and rule, reinforcing a culture of exclusion and domination. Consequently the downtrodden and socially powerless are rendered voiceless, subjected to disregard and inhuman treatment. The Duke thus becomes a representative figure of social snobbery illustrating how entrenched hierarchies perpetuate disrespect toward the weak and normalize inequality as a social order.

Gender Inequality: Historical Pattern of Women's Marginalisation

The Duke's criticism of the Duchess' innocence reveals his obsessive need to define and elevate her identity. He assumes the authority to 'paint' her character for controlling her actions, emotions and even her silences. This control persists beyond her death, symbolized by his power to draw or remove the curtain from her portrait at will, reducing her existence to an object of display. What he disguises as love is in reality, an exercise of absolute authority and possessiveness. When the Duchess's smiles fail to conform to his rigid expectations, she is metaphorically silenced, her voice and agency erased. The Duke's behaviour thus exposes a patriarchal impulse to discipline women who deviate from prescribed norms, presenting control not as oppression but as affection.

This portrayal resonates strongly with contemporary society where women continue to be denied equal status and are frequently treated as second-class citizens. Their identities are often defined through male figures - known by their father's or husband's names rather than as autonomous individuals. Limited access to education, confinement to domestic roles and the prioritization of physical body over intellect contribute to their systematic subjugation. Women are excluded from major decision-making roles, subjected to unequal wages, and frequently endure mental abuse, domestic violence and physical and psychological torture. Treated as possessions rather than as persons, they face objectification, possessiveness and gender-based discrimination that normalise inequality. The Duke's treatment of the Duchess thus becomes a powerful metaphor for entrenched gender hierarchies exposing how patriarchal power structures continue to marginalize women both within the household and across society.

Possessiveness and Toxic Masculinity: The Persistent Inequality of Women

The Duke's possessiveness reduces his wife to an object rather than acknowledging her as an autonomous individual. She is treated like a doll, something to be displayed, controlled and manipulated at his will - drawing a clear parallel to Nora in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. Like Nora, the Duchess is denied the freedom to think, choose or exist beyond the expectations imposed upon her. When she fails to conform to the Duke's rigid standards she is silenced and ultimately destroyed, revealing how patriarchal power punishes female authority. Her death does not mark the end of his dominance, instead the Duke swiftly seeks another alliance, emphasizing his persistent need to control a woman, a trait deeply rooted in toxic masculinity and Victorian male dominance.

This dynamic reflects a broader patriarchal structure that continues to shape both historical and modern societies. Women's meekness is normalized, while inequality shadows them at every phase of life - within families, relationships and social institutions. Toxic relationships manifest through emotional manipulation, domestic violence and the systematic silencing of the weak. Art itself becomes a tool of power, reinforcing male contemporary mechanism of control, shaping identities and dictating behavior. Through these parallels the text exposes how patriarchal dominance persists across time, revealing that the manipulation and the marginalization of women remains a central feature of social power structures today.

Power and Dominance: Democracy as a Modern Myth

Modern democracy often presents itself as a system of equality, yet in practice it frequently mirrors the

hierarchical power structures of royalty. Power remains concentrated in the hands of a few, driven by megalomania, an obsessive desire for respect, and an insatiable hunger for control. Social status becomes a weapon through which the elite assert dominance, while the marginalized are silenced and tormented. The recurring rise of the same powerful individuals to positions of authority exposes democracy as a myth for the lower classes who remain excluded from genuine participation. Wealth and influence ensure that the rich are perpetually revered, reinforcing a cycle where privilege sustains itself and the powerless are denied agency.

This imbalance is reflected in the figure of the Duke, whose authority persists even beyond death. The woman he dominates is reduced to a silent presence, veiled and concealed, her individuality erased both in life and in memory. The curtain that hides her becomes a metaphor for control – dismantled only at the Duke's will – illustrating how her existence is dictated entirely by his commands. She obeys unquestioningly, deprived of voice and autonomy much like the oppressed classes in modern society. Even after her death she remains trapped within his narrative emphasizing how entrenched power structures continue to suppress the marginalized long after resistance is no longer possible.

CONCLUSION

The poem ultimately holds a mirror to modern society transcending its Victorian setting to expose enduring social realities. As a classic work by Robert Browning, it explores eternal themes of power, domination, possessiveness and the persistent inequality faced by women. Through the Duke's psyche Browning unveils the inner workings of a male mind shaped by entitlement and authority – traits that remain disturbingly familiar in contemporary contexts. The Duke's narcissism and need for absolute control lead to objectification of women, reducing human relationships to displays of ownership rather than mutual respect.

In this way the poem resonates powerfully with modern experiences of toxic relationships, where control and dominance are often masked as love or social propriety. Browning's dramatic monologue allows readers to witness how unchecked power corrodes empathy and morality, making the Duke not merely a historical figure, but a representation of modern masculinity at its most destructive. The poem's lasting relevance lies in its ability to confront readers with uncomfortable truths about gender relations and societal hierarchies, affirming its place as a timeless critique of human arrogance and abuse of power.

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A Comparative Study of Translators' Styles of *The Peach Colony* Based on Corpus

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Abstract— This study conducts a comparative analysis of the translator styles in Lin Yutang's and Luo Jingguo's English translations of *The Peach Colony* (Taohuayuan Ji) using a self-built parallel corpus. By employing both qualitative and quantitative methods, the research examines linguistic features at lexical, syntactic, and textual levels, including vocabulary richness, sentence complexity, and readability. Results reveal distinct stylistic tendencies: Lin's translation favors conciseness and fluency, characterized by simpler vocabulary and compound structures, whereas Luo's version emphasizes explicitness and academic rigor, with a higher frequency of nouns and adjectives. The study highlights the impact of translators' choices on cross-cultural communication and offers insights for classical Chinese literature translation.



Keywords— *The Peach Colony*; corpus; translators' styles; comparative study

I. INTRODUCTION

Traditional studies of translator style have predominantly concentrated on how translators employ various translation techniques to effectively convey the ideas, meaning, and stylistic nuances of the original text. These studies often emphasize the linguistic and cultural equivalence achieved in the translation, with the primary focus being on preserving the original author's voice and the content of the text. However, there has been relatively less attention given to understanding the role and function of the translator themselves in the translation process. The translator's influence, their choices in interpreting the text, and the impact of their own personal and cultural background have not been fully explored in early translation studies.

With the deepening of translation studies in recent decades, the research focus has gradually shifted. Scholars

have increasingly moved from a primary concern with the original text and its author to a focus on the translated text and the translator who mediates between the source and target cultures. More and more scholars have begun to pay attention to the performance of translators' styles in translations, and have conducted in-depth discussions on this (Ding&Tang, 2005:77).

Within the context of studying translator style, literary works have become an essential corpus for such investigations. Literary texts, due to their unique cultural expressions, intricate stylistic features, and their high communicative and emotional value, provide an excellent foundation for analyzing how translators navigate between languages and cultures. The translation of literary works often involves navigating rich, nuanced meanings and stylistic choices, making them an invaluable source for studying the translator's style and the strategies they

employ in rendering the original text into another language. The use of literary texts in these studies offers a lens through which scholars can explore the translator's creative decisions, their approach to maintaining or transforming the cultural and stylistic essence of the original work, and the broader implications these choices have on the reception of the translated text. Thus, literary works provide fertile ground for exploring the complex interaction between the translator, the text, and the audience.

Classical Chinese literature occupies a pivotal position in the history of world literature, particularly in its cultural, philosophical, and artistic expressions. Its influence transcends the boundaries of China, offering profound insights into the complexities of human nature, the cosmos, and societal relationships. Not only does it form the bedrock of Chinese culture, but it also stands as a treasure in the global literary heritage, enriching the world's intellectual and artistic traditions. Among the many remarkable works of classical Chinese literature, *The Peach Colony* is a famous Chinese prose poem written by the poet Tao Yuanming during the Eastern Jin Dynasty, about 418 A.D.. This story is often seen as an allegory for the idealized concept of a peaceful, harmonious life, untouched by the corruption and strife of the outside world. It has become a symbol of an unattainable utopia in Chinese literature and philosophy, and it has come to represent a perfect, idyllic place. To this day, *The Peach Colony* is still of great value for the times and for research. This paper conducts a comparative analysis of two notable English translations of *The Peach Colony*, those by Lin Yutang and Luo Jingguo, using a self-constructed corpus to closely examine their respective translation styles. By employing a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, this study seeks to identify the similarities and differences between the two translations at lexical, syntactic and textual levels. The analysis aims to uncover the specific choices made by each translator in terms of language use, tone, and stylistic approach, and to explore the reasons behind the variations. This study aims to provide a reference for the English translation practice

of classical literature, promoting the dissemination of classical Chinese literature to foreign countries.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Translation is a process by which the chain of signifiers that constitutes the source-language text is replaced by a chain of signifiers in the target language which the translator provides on the strength of an interpretation (Lawrence, 2004:17). At present, there are several complete English translations of *The Peach Colony*, and many famous translators have translated this travelogue prose, such as Xu Jingcheng, Lin Yutang, Fang Chong, Luo Jingguo, and Sun Dayu. Most of the studies on the English translation of *The Peach Colony* are studies on the translation strategies of a particular translator under the guidance of translation theory. For example, Chen (2021) analyzed the strategies for filling in the semantic and contextual gaps in Lin Yutang's translation from the perspective of Reception Aesthetics. Fan and Peng (2017) compared and analyzed Luo Jingguo's translation with the original text based on Catford's theory of translation transformation, and sought strategies for translating ancient Chinese literature into English.

Translator's style is only a reproduction of the original author's style, so the study of translator's style has been neglected by the academics (Hu, 2012:67). Since Mona Baker (2000) proposed the "translator's style", the study of translator's style and translation style has become important topics. As a translator's creation based on the understanding of the original work, the translation inevitably carries the "voice" of the translator. The study of the translator's style reveals the translator's unique choices in text processing, such as lexical, syntactic, and rhetorical preferences, and highlights his or her creative contribution as a "second author". Qiu (2017) compared the English translations of *San Yan Er Pai* by Han Nan and Wang Huimin and explored the differences between the two translators in terms of translator style and their causes according to Saldanha's method of translator style research. Mei and Ruan (2023) compared Zhu Shenghao's and Sun Dayu's translation to *Hamlet*, discussing the different influence of ideology, poetics and patronage on the two

translator's translation process through the analysis of specific examples.

In the 90s of the 20th century, Mona Baker(1993) established the first translation corpus, which marked the birth of translation studies. Translator's style research is combined with quantitative research methods to collect statistics through corpora. These visual data can objectively compare and analyze the translator's tendency to choose vocabulary and sentence patterns when translating, so as to summarize the translator's style. For instance, Huang and Li(2024) used AntConc and WordSmith tools to conduct statistics and analysis of translators' styles at the lexical and syntactic levels of the translation of *On Cold Damage*, and studied the differences in translators' styles from three dimensions: historical background, translator identity, and concept. Li and Meng and Guo(2024) adopts the quantitative analysis method to study the famous translator Minford and his translations of *The Deer and the Cauldron* based on the corpus research method. Similar comparative studies of translators' styles using corpus research methods have covered literature from various countries as well as on a variety of subjects. Although there are several translations of the *The Peach Colony*, there are few studies of translators' styles in relation to this well-known article.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

The author extracts the original Chinese text of *The Peach Colony* from *Tao Yuanming Collection* annotated by Guo Ping(2019), and build small Chinese-English parallel corpus of *The Peach Colony* with Lin Yutang's translation(2009) and Luo Jingguo's translation(2005). These two translations are complete, and they are basically the same in the main text, which can provide sufficient and reliable corpus comparison support for the comparative study of translators' styles. It should be noted that the title "The Peach Colony" is a translated version of Lin's. Luo translates it as "A Tale of the Fountain of the Peach Bloosm Spring". The author uses Lin's version as the name for the corpus because the title is highly condensed, in line with the aesthetic habits of short English titles, easy to remember, and does not make any evaluation of these

two titles.

Self-built Chinese-English parallel corpus involves the following steps. First of all, the electronic version of the original Chinese text and the two English translations were converted into word format through text recognition software, and then manually proofread and identified the wrong words, cleaned the corpus, and manually aligned. Secondly, CorpusWordparser and Free CLAWS web tagger were used to code the Chinese and English corpus for part-of-speech assignment respectively. CorpusWordParser is a specialized software tool designed for corpus linguistics and text analysis, which is used to parse, annotate, and analyze large text corpora. CLAWS (Constituent Likelihood Automatic Word-tagging System) is a Part-of-Speech tagger developed by Lancaster University's UCREL team. The free web version allows users to upload texts and automatically annotate each word with grammatical tags. Finally, the corpus was converted into UTF-8 encoded txt format and imported into AntConc and WordSmith. AntConc and WordSmith are both corpus analysis tools used in linguistics and text-based research, offering features like collocation networks, keyword analysis, word frequency lists, ideal for smaller datasets and educational purposes. Then the language data produced by AntConc and WordSmith were exported for data statistics and comparative analysis. The readability analysis at the textual level was performed using AntWordProfiler. It is developed by Laurence Anthony, which a free, specialized corpus analysis tool designed for vocabulary profiling and text readability analysis, particularly useful for language teachers, researchers, and materials developers.

The specific linguistic features of the translated text mainly include lexical, syntactic and textual features. The author conducted quantitative and qualitative searches and analyses at the lexical, syntactic and textual levels of the two English translations and the original text. The lexical level mainly involves the important parameters of tokens, types, and lexical density. The syntactic level mainly contains the analysis of the number of sentences and the average line length. The textual level focuses on the cohesion and readability. Therefore, this study attempt to

analyse the linguistic features of two translations at these three levels and figure out the factors which influence the formation of the translators' styles.

IV. RESEARCH PROCESS AND RESULTS

4.1 Lexical level

Lexical features in text analysis include token, type, type-token ratio (TTR), standardized TTR (STTR), word length distribution, mean word length (MWL), and lexical density.

4.1.1 Tokens and types

In corpus linguistics, types (unique word forms) and tokens (total word occurrences) are fundamental units of measurement. TTR, calculated as the ratio of types to tokens, serves as an indicator of vocabulary richness—higher values suggest greater lexical variety. However, for texts exceeding 1,000 words, TTR may become unreliable due to uneven type distribution, prompting researchers to adopt STTR (TTR per 1,000-word segments) for more accurate cross-text

Table 1.

Table 1. Data of tokens and types of Lin's and Luo's translations

	Tokens	Types	TTR	STTR
Source Text	320	208	65.00	81.33
Lin's Translation	499	237	47.49	67.00
Luo's Translation	521	262	50.29	70.40

As can be seen from Table 1, Lin's translation has 499 tokens and 237 types and Luo's translation has 521 tokens and 262 types. The STTR of Luo's translation is slightly higher than that of Lin's translation (70.40% > 67.00%), showing that Lin uses more narrow vocabulary. Both of Lin's and Luo's translations are longer than the original text containing 320 tokens, which indicates the two translations tend to highlight the implicit information present in the ancient text, making readers comprehend the text more easily.

4.1.2 Word length

The distribution of word length refers to the likelihood of different word lengths (i.e., the number of

comparisons(Gao&Zhou, 2024:3). Since the number of tokens in translations of *The Peach Colony* is less than 1000, the standardized type-token ratio in this study is fixed at 100.

Compared to statistical software like AntConc and Lancesbox, WordSmith can automatically calculate the STTR, which is more convenient and quicker. Therefore, at the lexical level, the author chose WordSmith to complete the statistical work. First, the author enter the WordSmith interface; set the Standardised Type/Token basis as 100; click the File button; select the txt form of Lin's and Luo's translations and the source text. Then click "make a word list" button to enter the statistics interface. Thus, we can obtain the vocabulary and sentence information of the three translations as

letters in a word) appearing in a text, while MWL stands for the mean word length, which reflects the overall complexity of the vocabulary to some degree. In English, the longer the word, the more pronounced the written character of the text and the more difficult it is to read, and conversely, the simpler the content of the text(Liu&Tang, 2022:264). WordSmith is capable of calculating the number of words of each length and determining the average word length.

Table 2 can be obtained by integrating the data produced by WordSmith.

Table 2. Word length and mean word length of Lin's and Luo's translations

Word Length Statistics	Lin's Translation	Luo's Translation
MWL (in characters)	4.20	4.49
1-letter words	3.20%	2.11%
2-letter words	14.03%	13.63%
3-letter words	26.05%	25.53%
4-letter words	19.84%	18.43%
5-letter words	15.23%	13.63%
6-letter words	7.82%	7.29%
7-letter words	6.81%	9.60%
≥8-letter words	6.61%	9.79%

In general, words typically consist of 2 to 5 letters, with an average word length of around 4 letters. If the average word length exceeds 4 letters, the language tends to be more complex. Conversely, when the average word length is shorter, the language becomes simpler, making the text easier to comprehend. As can be seen from the statistics in the above table, the mean word length of the two translations is greater than 4 letters, which indicates that the language of the translated text is relatively complex. It should be noted that Luo's translation is not only longer than Lin's in terms of mean word length, but also more inclined to use long words than Lin. The number of words with seven letters or more was higher than that of Lin, and the number of words with six or fewer letters was lower than that of Lin, suggesting that the words are longer and relatively more complex in Luo's translation. On the whole, Lin's translation tends to choose simpler words.

Luo's translation is flexible in its wording and carries more information, which helps to convey the original text accurately and completely.

4.1.3 Lexical density

Lexical density (LD) is the ratio of meaningful words within a text, and it reflects the amount of information the text conveys. This measure is essential for assessing the style of a translation. A higher lexical density indicates a greater percentage of content words, which suggests a higher capacity for carrying information and a more precise, detailed conveyance of the original meaning. On the other hand, a lower lexical density means an increased presence of functional words, which diminishes the text's informational value. In English, content words usually include verbs, nouns, adjectives, and adverbs. In terms of calculation methods, lexical density - the percentage of content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs) relative

to total word count. Briefly speaking, Lexical density is equal to the number of content words divided by the total number of words.

Table 3. Data of lexical density of the two translations

	Lin's Translation	Luo's Translation
Nouns	104	133
Verbs	73	70
Adjectives	21	29
Adverbs	27	30
Lexical Density(%)	45.09	50.29

The author uses AntConc to calculate the lexical density. Firstly, the two translations are assigned part-of-speech on the website “Free CLAWS web tagger”, which provides a free service that can automatically recognize the part-of-speech of each word in the imported text and annotate them. Secondly, the txt files of the two

Table 3.

In terms of the specific parameters reflecting the

Table 3, the use of nouns, adjectives and adverbs in Luo's translation is higher than that in Lin's translation, indicating that Luo's translation is clearer in terms of narrative expression, more comprehensive and specific in terms of information transmission, and more explicit. The above analysis shows that the use of content words in Luo's translation is richer than that of Lin's, which confirms Beck's view(2000:250) that the token/type ratio is directly proportional to the richness and diversity of the author/translator's lexical use.

4.2 Syntactic level

The mean sentence length refers to the average

Table 4. Sentence number and mean sentence length of the two translations

	Lin's Translation	Luo's Translation
Sentence Number	28	36
Mean (in words)	17.82	14.47
STD	7.20	6.82
ST/TT Ratio of Sentence Number	1:0.97	1:1.24

Example 1

ST: 初极狭，才通人。复行数十步，豁然开朗。土

地平旷，屋舍俨然，有良田美池桑竹之属。阡陌交通，鸡犬相闻。

Lin's Translation: At first the opening was very narrow, barely wide enough for one person to go in. After a dozen steps, it opened into a flood of light. He saw before his eyes a wide, level valley, with houses and fields and farms. There were bamboos and mulberries; farmers were working and dogs and chickens were running about.

Luo's Translation: His first steps took him into a

Table 4, Luo's translation contains significantly more sentences than Lin's translation (36>28), suggesting that Luo's version is more detailed and comprehensive. Additionally, the mean sentence lengths in both Luo's and Lin's translations are relatively similar, at 14.47 and 17.82 words, indicating that both translations favor medium-length sentences. In Example 1, it demonstrates distinct stylistic differences between the two translations: Luo's version employs more sentences with shorter average length, meticulously unpacking each original clause into standalone details while preserving auditory imagery like "crowing... barking... within hearing". In contrast, Lin's translation favors compound structures and omits specific elements like "crisscrossing paths", prioritizing narrative cohesion over granular accuracy.

In general, Luo's translation has a smaller mean sentence length and lower sentence length variability compared to Lin's translation. This suggests that Lin's translation tends to use more complex, longer sentences, likely to capture the implicit meanings of the original text and to ensure a smooth and faithful translation, enhancing clarity. On the other hand, Luo's translation uses simpler, more consistent sentence structures, which might indicate a more straightforward approach to translation. In analyzing the syntactic form of the translated text, the average sentence length of the source text is significantly shorter than the target text, with the source text averaging 15.62 words per sentence and the target text averaging 24.09 words (Laviosa, 1998:558). Luo's translation shows a similar pattern, suggesting that more attention was paid to adapting the translation to the language habits of the target audience, with the sentence structures more closely aligning with authentic English expressions.

passage that accommodated only the width of one person. After he progressed about scores of paces, it suddenly widened into an open field. The land was flat and spacious. There were houses arranged in good order with fertile fields, beautiful ponds, bamboo groves, mulberry trees and paths crisscrossing the fields in all directions. The crowing of cocks and the barking of dogs were within hearing of each other.

According to

4.3 Textual level

4.3.1 Conjunctions

The cohesion and coherence of discourse are two important directions in discourse analysis. Articulation mainly focuses on the relationship between the surface structure of discourse, such as the connection between words and phrases. Coherence, on the other hand, involves the deep logical relationship of the discourse content, which reflects the rational organization of information and the fluency of thought. As the original text of classical Chinese, *The Peach Colony* has a high degree of meaning, and there are usually no explicit connectors between the sentences, which makes the translator must pay special attention to the semantic connection of the context when translating. In the process of translation, the translator often needs to add some conjunctions to reveal the logical relationships implicit in the source language. This not only helps to improve the coherence of the translation, but also helps readers understand the underlying deep meaning of the original text, so as to better convey the artistic conception and cultural connotation of the original text. Therefore, when translating *The Peach Colony*, the translator should not only be faithful to the surface meaning of the original text, but also make appropriate adjustments at the level of language structure and cultural background, so that the translated text can not only be read fluently, but also reflect the ideological depth and literary charm of the source text.

Example 2

ST: 既出，得其船，便扶向路，处处志之。

Lin's Translation: The man found his boat and came back, marking with signs the route he had followed.

Luo's Translation: Once out, the fisherman found his

boat and rowed homeward, leaving marks all the way.

In Example 2, Lin's translation streamlines the original by merging actions into a single compound sentence, using "and" for time sequencing and "marking with signs" as a participial phrase to imply continuous action. Luo's version enhances cohesion through explicit adverbials like "Once out" "all the way" and a clearer action chain, reflecting the original's spatial progression.

According to statistics, both translations use a large number of conjunctions, with 52 in Lin's and 54 in Luo's. In the translation of *The Peach Colony*, the two translations present similar narrative styles and linguistic aesthetics through the use of connectives. The abundant connectives build a dense and smooth narrative context, and the logical connection is enhanced through compound sentences, so that the translated text produces delicate descriptions and stories in the English context. Both translators are committed to fully reproducing the narrative

layers and ideological connections of the original text in the translated language, forming a more immersive reading experience, conveying Tao Yuanming's transcendent artistic conception and reconstructing a complete picture of the world in *The Peach Colony*.

4.3.2 Readability

To effectively assess the readability of the English translation, AntWordProfiler software was used as analysis tool. Among these, ARI is a widely used readability measure typically employed to evaluate the reading difficulty of a text. Its value is influenced by the lexical difficulty and sentence length of the text—higher values correspond to lower readability. The calculation formula is: $ARI = 4.71 \times (\text{characters} / \text{words}) + 0.5 \times (\text{words} / \text{sentences}) - 21.43$. This formula helps evaluate the difficulty level of the translated text, providing a basis for improving its readability.

Table 5. Readability of the two translations

	Lin's Translation	Luo's Translation
Characters	2156	2408
Words	499	521
Sentences	28	36
ARI	7.82	7.58

As can be seen in

Table 5, from the point of view of discourse readability, the automatic readability index of Luo's translation is slightly lower than that of Lin's translation. This suggests that Luo's translation is syntactically and semantically concise, less difficult than Lin's, and therefore easier to read. This low level of difficulty makes Luo's translation more suitable for foreign readers who lack background knowledge of ancient China, and can improve their reading experience and comprehension.

Table 6. Readability analysis in AntWordProfiler

	Lin's Translation	Luo's Translation

The core principle of AntWordProfiler to analyze text readability is based on vocabulary frequency statistics and hierarchical word list comparison. It categorizes words into frequency bands. AntWordProfiler comes with 3 General Service Lists (GSLs), which are classic vocabulary lists. The coverage of GSL 1 and GSL 2 in general discourse is 81.3%, the coverage of GSL 3 in scientific discourse is 85%, and the sum of the GSL 1 and GSL 2 indices can often be used to measure the legibility of a general text, and the higher the coefficient, the stronger the legibility of the text.

1_gsl_1st	86.40%	83.33%
2_gsl_2nd	6.00%	5.36%
3awl	0.20%	0.77%

The readability analysis conducted through AntWordProfiler demonstrates distinct lexical

Table 6. Lin's version exhibits stronger dominance of basic vocabulary with 86.40% coverage of first-tier GSL words compared to Luo's 83.33%, reflecting a more fundamental lexical foundation. Both translations show similar modest proportions of second-tier vocabulary (6.00% for Lin versus 5.36% for Luo), while Luo's text incorporates nearly four times more academic words (0.77%) than Lin's (0.2%), suggesting Luo's translation employs more specialized terminology. This pattern indicates that while both translations maintain relatively simple vocabulary overall, Lin's version leans toward greater accessibility through higher concentrations of core vocabulary, whereas Luo's work introduces slightly more advanced lexical elements that may appeal to readers with stronger English proficiency or academic interests. The divergence in word choice strategies likely reflects different translation priorities regarding audience accommodation and textual sophistication. According to the sum of the GSL 1 and GSL 2, the readability of Lin's translation is slightly greater than that of Luo's translation (92.4% > 88.69%), so Lin's translation is suitable for domestic readers with background knowledge of ancient Chinese culture.

V. DISCUSSION

This study's comparative analysis of Lin Yutang's and Luo Jingguo's translations of *The Peach Colony* reveals distinct stylistic tendencies that extend beyond surface-level linguistic choices, offering broader implications for corpus-based translation studies. While Lin's translation prioritizes fluency and concision—evidenced by lower lexical density (45.09% vs. 50.29%) and compound structures—Luo's version leans toward explicitness and academic rigor, with richer noun/adjective use.

characteristics between the two translations as

The corpus-driven methodology, while robust in quantifying stylistic patterns, has limitations. First, the small-scale, single-text corpus restricts generalizability; future studies could expand to multi-text corpora to distinguish translator-specific traits from text-specific adaptations. Second, qualitative analysis, though applied, could be deepened with extra data to contextualize stylistic choices.

These findings invite reconsideration of “fidelity” in classical translation. Luo's adherence to source-text granularity challenges the notion that readability necessitates simplification, while Lin's omissions raise questions about cultural loss. Future research could integrate reader-response surveys to assess how stylistic differences impact cross-cultural reception, bridging corpus analysis with empirical translation studies. Ultimately, this study not only maps two translators' strategies but also exemplifies how corpus tools can unveil the invisible negotiations between literary preservation and audience accommodation—a dynamic central to advancing World Literature paradigms.

VI. CONCLUSION

Through the above statistical and empirical analysis, it is found that the results of the two English translations of *The Peach Colony* are generally similar in terms of language data such as standardized type/token ratio, mean word length, use of conjunctions. However, due to the different translation purposes, knowledge levels, literary literacy, and social identities of the translators, the translations of Lin and Luo present different translation styles. To a certain extent, these differences may affect the dissemination and reception of translations in the other countries. Different translation styles may lead to different feelings in the reader's understanding, acceptance, and

appreciation of the text, which in turn will affect the communication effect of the translation. Lin's translation demonstrates an approach characterized by concise vocabulary, streamlined sentence structures, and higher readability, while Luo's version exhibits academic precision through lexical richness, detailed clause segmentation, and explicit cultural retention, favoring textual fidelity and scholarly rigor.

This study conducts preliminary statistical and empirical analysis of the linguistic metrics of the two translations from a limited perspective through corpus technology, which is not enough to fully reflect the overall picture of the translator's translation style, nor can it fully reveal the intrinsic relationship between the translator's style and the acceptance of the translation. Due to the limitations of research methods and data scope, future research can further combine more dimensional analysis, such as cultural background, translators' personal opinions, and readers' responses, to explore the relationship between translation style and translation communication effect more comprehensively.

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The Right to Health and Human Rights during COVID-19: Challenges, Responses and Future Perspectives

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Abstract— The COVID-19 pandemic emerged as one of the most devastating global crises in modern history, profoundly affecting public health systems, economies, governance structures, and human rights frameworks across the world. The pandemic not only posed a serious threat to life and health but also exposed long-standing inequalities in access to healthcare services, social protection, and economic opportunities. As governments struggled to contain the spread of the virus, issues relating to the realization of the right to health gained unprecedented significance. The pandemic demonstrated that health is not merely a medical concern but a fundamental human right closely linked with dignity, equality, social justice, and sustainable development. This paper examines the right to health from a human rights perspective and critically analyzes its implementation during the COVID-19 pandemic. It explores international legal standards concerning health rights, the challenges faced by healthcare systems, the impact of emergency public health measures on civil liberties, and the experiences of vulnerable populations during the crisis. The study further investigates issues such as vaccine inequality, mental health challenges, healthcare accessibility, and governmental accountability. Through a descriptive and analytical approach based on secondary sources, the paper highlights how the pandemic revealed both the strengths and weaknesses of existing human rights protection mechanisms. The study argues that the realization of the right to health requires a comprehensive rights-based approach that goes beyond healthcare delivery to address broader social determinants of health. It concludes that strengthening public health infrastructure, promoting universal healthcare coverage, reducing inequalities, and ensuring equitable access to healthcare resources are essential for safeguarding human rights during future global health emergencies.



Keywords— Right to Health, Human Rights, COVID-19 Pandemic, Public Health, Healthcare Access, Universal Health Coverage, Vaccine Equity, Human Dignity.

I. INTRODUCTION

Health occupies a central position in human life and development. It is universally acknowledged that without adequate physical and mental well-being, individuals cannot fully enjoy other fundamental rights and freedoms. The right to health has therefore emerged as one of the most significant components of the international human rights framework. Over the past several decades, international organizations, governments, scholars, and civil society groups have increasingly recognized that access to healthcare and the conditions necessary for good health are

not merely matters of public policy but fundamental human rights obligations.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in late 2019 transformed the global understanding of health and human rights. What initially appeared to be a localized public health emergency rapidly evolved into a global crisis affecting virtually every aspect of human life. Within a few months, healthcare systems were overwhelmed, economies entered recession, educational institutions were closed, and governments imposed unprecedented restrictions on social and economic activities. The pandemic highlighted the

crucial role of public health systems while simultaneously exposing structural inequalities that had long existed within societies.

The significance of the right to health became particularly evident during the pandemic because access to healthcare services often determined survival itself. Hospitals faced shortages of beds, oxygen supplies, ventilators, medicines, and healthcare personnel. In many countries, vulnerable populations encountered significant barriers in accessing timely and adequate medical treatment. The unequal distribution of healthcare resources revealed deep social and economic disparities that affected individuals' ability to protect themselves from infection and receive necessary care.

The right to health extends far beyond access to hospitals and medical treatment. According to international human rights principles, health encompasses a wide range of underlying determinants, including access to clean drinking water, adequate nutrition, safe housing, sanitation facilities, healthy working conditions, environmental protection, and health-related education. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that deficiencies in any of these areas could increase vulnerability to disease and worsen public health outcomes.

The relationship between health and human rights is multidimensional and mutually reinforcing. Human rights contribute to better health outcomes by promoting equality, non-discrimination, participation, and accountability. At the same time, good health enables individuals to enjoy and exercise their rights more effectively. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this relationship became particularly apparent as restrictions on movement, employment, education, and social interaction directly influenced both physical and mental well-being.

One of the most important lessons emerging from the pandemic is that health inequalities often reflect broader social inequalities. Individuals living in poverty, migrant workers, women, children, older persons, persons with disabilities, and marginalized communities frequently experienced greater exposure to infection and faced more significant obstacles in obtaining healthcare services. Existing disparities in income, education, employment, housing, and healthcare infrastructure contributed to unequal health outcomes across different population groups.

The pandemic also raised complex questions regarding the balance between public health protection and individual freedoms. Governments around the world implemented lockdowns, quarantine measures, travel restrictions, contact-tracing systems, and vaccination policies to control the spread of the virus. While many of these measures were necessary to protect public health, they simultaneously

generated debates concerning privacy rights, freedom of movement, freedom of assembly, and governmental accountability. The challenge of balancing collective health interests with individual rights became one of the defining features of the global response to COVID-19.

Another critical dimension of the pandemic involved the issue of vaccine equity. The rapid development of vaccines represented an extraordinary scientific achievement and offered hope for controlling the spread of the virus. However, vaccine distribution revealed significant disparities between developed and developing countries. Wealthier nations secured substantial vaccine supplies while many lower-income countries struggled to obtain adequate doses. This unequal distribution raised serious concerns regarding global justice, international solidarity, and the universal realization of the right to health.

In addition to physical health challenges, COVID-19 generated a global mental health crisis. Fear of infection, social isolation, economic uncertainty, bereavement, and prolonged disruptions to daily life contributed to increasing levels of anxiety, depression, stress, and psychological distress. The pandemic underscored the importance of recognizing mental health as an integral component of the right to health and highlighted the need for comprehensive mental healthcare services.

The COVID-19 crisis further demonstrated the importance of effective governance and international cooperation. Countries with strong public health infrastructure, transparent communication systems, and coordinated policy responses generally managed the crisis more effectively than those with weaker institutional capacities. International organizations played an important role in facilitating information sharing, scientific cooperation, and resource mobilization. Nevertheless, the pandemic also exposed limitations in global health governance and highlighted the need for stronger international mechanisms to address future health emergencies.

From a human rights perspective, the pandemic serves as a critical case study for understanding the practical implementation of the right to health under conditions of crisis. It reveals both the strengths and weaknesses of contemporary health systems and human rights institutions. The experiences of different countries provide valuable lessons regarding preparedness, resilience, equity, and accountability in public health governance.

Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to critically examine the right to health as a fundamental human right in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. By analyzing international legal standards, public health responses, human rights challenges, and policy implications, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between health and human rights in times of

global crisis. Furthermore, it seeks to identify lessons that may strengthen the protection of health rights and enhance preparedness for future public health emergencies.

The relevance of this study extends beyond the immediate context of COVID-19. As the world continues to confront emerging infectious diseases, environmental challenges, demographic changes, and growing inequalities, the protection of health rights will remain central to sustainable development and human well-being. Understanding the lessons of the pandemic is therefore essential for building more equitable, resilient, and rights-based healthcare systems capable of addressing future global challenges.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

One of the earliest and most influential contributions to the field of health and human rights was made by Jonathan Mann (1994), who argued that health and human rights are inseparable and mutually reinforcing. Mann emphasized that violations of human rights often lead to adverse health outcomes, while poor health conditions can undermine the enjoyment of human rights. His work established a conceptual framework that continues to influence contemporary discussions on public health and human rights.

Amartya Sen (1999) in his capability approach, emphasized that development should be measured not merely in terms of economic growth but in terms of people's freedoms and capabilities. Health occupies a central place in Sen's framework because poor health restricts an individual's ability to participate fully in social, economic, and political life. His work provides an important theoretical foundation for understanding health as a prerequisite for human development and social justice.

Paul Hunt (2002) the former United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health, significantly contributed to the understanding of health as a legally enforceable human right. Hunt argued that states have obligations not only to provide healthcare services but also to address the underlying determinants of health, including sanitation, nutrition, housing, education, and access to information. His analysis highlighted the importance of governmental accountability in ensuring the realization of health rights.

Lawrence O. Gostin (2014) expanded the discussion by examining the legal dimensions of global health governance. Gostin argued that health inequalities are often the result of political and institutional failures rather than purely medical factors. He emphasized the role of international cooperation in addressing public health emergencies and ensuring equitable access to healthcare resources.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has consistently emphasized that health is a fundamental human right. WHO

reports published before the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted persistent disparities in healthcare access between developed and developing countries. These reports identified poverty, discrimination, inadequate healthcare infrastructure, and insufficient public investment as major barriers to the realization of health rights.

The emergence of COVID-19 generated a vast body of literature examining the relationship between the pandemic and human rights. According to WHO (2020), the pandemic represented not only a health emergency but also a social and economic crisis with profound implications for human rights. The organization emphasized that responses to the pandemic should be grounded in principles of equality, participation, transparency, and accountability.

The United Nations Human Rights Office (2020) observed that the pandemic disproportionately affected marginalized populations, including women, migrant workers, ethnic minorities, older persons, and persons with disabilities. The report highlighted how pre-existing inequalities contributed to unequal health outcomes and increased vulnerability to infection.

Bachelet (2020) in her capacity as the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, argued that human rights must remain at the center of pandemic responses. She emphasized that emergency measures adopted by governments should be necessary, proportionate, non-discriminatory, and limited in duration. Her analysis underscored the importance of balancing public health objectives with the protection of civil liberties.

Bambra et al. (2020) examined the social determinants of health during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study found that socio-economic inequalities significantly influenced infection rates, hospitalization rates, and mortality outcomes. Individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds were more likely to experience crowded living conditions, insecure employment, and limited access to healthcare services, thereby increasing their vulnerability to the virus.

Blundell et al. (2020) focused on the economic consequences of COVID-19 and demonstrated that the pandemic disproportionately affected low-income households. The authors argued that economic insecurity, unemployment, and reduced access to social protection measures created additional barriers to health and well-being.

Van Dorn, Cooney, and Sabin (2020) highlighted the unequal impact of COVID-19 on racial and ethnic minorities. Their findings revealed that structural inequalities, including disparities in housing, employment, healthcare access, and environmental conditions, contributed to higher infection and mortality rates among marginalized communities.

The issue of vaccine equity has also received considerable scholarly attention. Studies conducted by **Moreno et al. (2020)** found significant increases in anxiety, depression, stress, and psychological distress among populations affected by lockdowns, social isolation, and economic uncertainty. These findings reinforced the understanding that the right to health includes both physical and mental well-being.

Research concerning healthcare workers has highlighted additional human rights concerns.

Greenberg et al. (2020) found that healthcare professionals experienced unprecedented levels of occupational stress, burnout, and psychological trauma during the pandemic. The study emphasized the importance of protecting healthcare workers' rights as a prerequisite for effective healthcare delivery.

Emanuel et al. (2021) argued that equitable vaccine distribution is a moral and human rights imperative. The authors criticized vaccine nationalism and emphasized the need for international cooperation to ensure universal access to life-saving vaccines. Similar concerns were raised by the WHO and the United Nations, which warned that unequal vaccine distribution could prolong the pandemic and deepen global inequalities. Mental health has emerged as another important area of research during the pandemic.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the concept and meaning of the right to health within the broader framework of human rights.
- To analyze the international legal and institutional mechanisms that recognize and protect the right to health.
- To assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the realization of health rights across different sections of society.
- To examine the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable and marginalized populations from a human rights perspective.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is based entirely on secondary sources of data. The research adopts a descriptive, analytical, and explanatory approach to understand the relationship between the right to health and human rights during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Secondary data have been collected from a wide range of sources, including academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, reports published by international organizations, government publications, policy documents, and official statistical records. Special emphasis has been placed on documents published by the World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations (UN), Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and other

recognized institutions working in the fields of public health and human rights.

V. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RIGHT TO HEALTH

The right to health is widely recognized as one of the most fundamental human rights because it directly influences the survival, dignity, and overall well-being of individuals. Unlike the traditional understanding of health as merely the absence of disease, contemporary human rights discourse views health as a comprehensive state of physical, mental, and social well-being.

The concept of the right to health is rooted in the principle that every human being possesses inherent dignity and is therefore entitled to conditions necessary for leading a healthy life. This perspective reflects a shift from viewing healthcare as a charitable service to recognizing it as a legal and moral entitlement.

The modern understanding of the right to health gained international recognition following the establishment of the World Health Organization in 1948. The WHO Constitution declared that the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic condition, or social status. This declaration significantly influenced subsequent international human rights instruments.

The right to health encompasses both freedoms and entitlements. Health-related freedoms include the right of individuals to make decisions concerning their own bodies and health without coercion or discrimination. These freedoms include bodily autonomy, informed consent, privacy, and freedom from non-consensual medical treatment.

Health-related entitlements refer to the availability of healthcare facilities, goods, services, and conditions necessary for maintaining good health. These include access to hospitals, medical professionals, medicines, vaccination programs, sanitation facilities, safe drinking water, adequate nutrition, and health education.

A rights-based approach to health emphasizes four essential dimensions commonly referred to as the AAAQ framework:

5.1. Availability

Healthcare facilities, trained medical personnel, medicines, and health services must be available in sufficient quantity to meet the needs of the population. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed significant deficiencies in this dimension as many countries experienced shortages of hospital beds, oxygen supplies, ventilators, and healthcare workers.

5.2. Accessibility

Healthcare services must be accessible to all individuals without discrimination. Accessibility includes physical

accessibility, economic affordability, and access to health-related information. During the pandemic, millions of individuals faced barriers in accessing testing, treatment, and vaccination services.

5.3. Acceptability

Healthcare services must be culturally appropriate, ethically acceptable, and respectful of individual dignity. Public health interventions should consider social and cultural contexts to ensure effective implementation.

5.4. Quality

Healthcare services must be scientifically and medically appropriate. Adequate infrastructure, trained personnel, quality medicines, and evidence-based treatment are necessary components of quality healthcare.

The right to health is also closely connected with other human rights. The enjoyment of health depends upon access to education, employment, housing, food security, clean water, social security, and a healthy environment. Consequently, violations of these rights often contribute to poor health outcomes.

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the practical significance of this interconnectedness. Communities experiencing poverty, overcrowded housing, unemployment, inadequate sanitation, and limited healthcare access often experienced higher infection rates and greater vulnerability to the virus. Therefore, protecting health rights requires a comprehensive approach addressing both healthcare services and broader social determinants of health.

From a human rights perspective, governments bear the primary responsibility for respecting, protecting, and fulfilling the right to health. This obligation includes adopting appropriate laws, allocating sufficient resources, ensuring non-discrimination, and strengthening healthcare infrastructure. The effectiveness of these obligations became particularly evident during the COVID-19 crisis, where governmental preparedness and policy responses significantly influenced public health outcomes.

VI. INTERNATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RIGHT TO HEALTH

The recognition of health as a fundamental human right represents one of the most significant developments in modern international human rights law. Following the devastation of the Second World War, the international community increasingly acknowledged that the protection of human dignity required the recognition of social and economic rights alongside civil and political rights. Within this broader framework, the right to health emerged as an essential component of human well-being and human development.

The international legal framework relating to the right to health consists of numerous treaties, conventions, declarations, and institutional mechanisms that collectively establish states' obligations to protect, respect, and fulfill health rights. These instruments provide both normative standards and practical guidance for governments in designing healthcare policies and responding to public health emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

6.1. The Constitution of the World Health Organization (1948)

The modern legal understanding of the right to health began with the establishment of the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1948. The WHO Constitution provided one of the earliest and most influential international recognitions of health as a fundamental human right.

6.1.1. The Constitution States

"The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition."

This statement represented a significant departure from traditional approaches that viewed health primarily as a matter of medical treatment. Instead, the WHO recognized health as a comprehensive state of physical, mental, and social well-being.

The WHO Constitution also emphasized that governments bear responsibility for the health of their populations and that international cooperation is necessary to achieve global health objectives. These principles became particularly relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic, which demonstrated the interconnected nature of global health challenges.

6.2. Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, is widely regarded as the foundation of the contemporary international human rights system.

Although the UDHR does not explicitly establish a separate right to health, Article 25 recognizes the right of every individual to an adequate standard of living necessary for health and well-being.

Article 25 states that everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of themselves and their family, including food, clothing, housing, medical care, and necessary social services.

The significance of Article 25 lies in its recognition that health depends upon a variety of social and economic conditions. The COVID-19 pandemic clearly demonstrated the importance of these determinants, as individuals lacking adequate housing, nutrition, healthcare access, or social security often faced greater vulnerability to infection and adverse health outcomes.

6.3. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), 1966

The most comprehensive international legal recognition of the right to health is contained in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

6.3.1. Article 12 of the Covenant

"The right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health."

The Covenant identifies several measures that states should undertake to realize this right, including:

- A. Reduction of infant mortality.
 - B. Improvement of environmental and industrial hygiene.
 - C. Prevention, treatment, and control of epidemic diseases.
 - D. Creation of conditions ensuring medical services for all.
- The relevance of Article 12 became particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. Governments were required to adopt effective measures to prevent disease transmission, provide healthcare services, and protect vulnerable populations.

The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights further clarified that the right to health includes not only healthcare services but also the underlying determinants of health such as safe water, sanitation, nutrition, housing, and health education.

6.4. General Comment No. 14 (2000)

One of the most important interpretations of the right to health is provided by General Comment No. 14 issued by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

According to General Comment No. 14, the right to health should not be interpreted as a right to be healthy. Rather, it is a right to enjoy facilities, goods, services, and conditions necessary for attaining the highest possible standard of health. The Committee identified four essential elements of health rights:

Availability: Adequate healthcare facilities and services must exist in sufficient quantity.

Accessibility: Healthcare must be physically and economically accessible to all individuals without discrimination.

Acceptability: Health services must respect cultural values and ethical standards.

Quality: Medical services must be scientifically and medically appropriate.

The AAAQ framework became an important tool for evaluating governmental responses during COVID-19.

6.5. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 1979

Women often face unique barriers in accessing healthcare services due to social, economic, and cultural factors. Recognizing these challenges, CEDAW requires states to eliminate discrimination against women in healthcare.

Article 12 obligates states to ensure equal access to healthcare services, including reproductive healthcare.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, women experienced disproportionate burdens arising from caregiving responsibilities, economic insecurity, and increased domestic violence. The provisions of CEDAW therefore became particularly relevant in evaluating gender-specific impacts of the pandemic.

6.6. Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 1989

The Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes children's right to the highest attainable standard of health and access to healthcare services. The Convention emphasizes:

- Child nutrition.
- Disease prevention.
- Maternal healthcare.
- Health education.
- Environmental health protection.

The COVID-19 pandemic affected children through disruptions in education, vaccination programs, nutrition services, and mental health support systems. Consequently, the CRC provides an important framework for assessing children's health rights during public health emergencies.

6.7. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), 2006

Persons with disabilities frequently encounter barriers in accessing healthcare facilities and services.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities requires states to ensure equal healthcare access without discrimination.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many persons with disabilities experienced challenges related to healthcare accessibility, communication barriers, and social isolation. The Convention therefore serves as an important legal instrument for promoting inclusive healthcare systems.

6.8. International Health Regulations (IHR) (2005)

The International Health Regulations (IHR) constitute a legally binding international framework for managing public health emergencies. The regulations require states to:

- Strengthen disease surveillance systems.
- Report public health threats.
- Cooperate internationally during emergencies.
- Develop preparedness and response capacities.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted both the importance and limitations of the International Health Regulations. While the framework facilitated international information sharing, the crisis revealed gaps in global preparedness and coordination.

6.9. Human Rights Principles Underlying the Right to Health

The international legal framework is guided by several core human rights principles:

Equality and Non-Discrimination: All individuals must have equal access to healthcare regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, age, or socio-economic status.

Participation: Individuals and communities should participate in decisions affecting their health and well-being.

Accountability: Governments must be accountable for healthcare policies and outcomes.

Transparency: Public authorities should provide accurate and timely health information.

Human Dignity: All healthcare interventions must respect the inherent dignity of individuals.

These principles became particularly important during COVID-19 as governments implemented emergency measures affecting millions of people worldwide.

VII. CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK DURING COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated both the strengths and weaknesses of the international legal framework protecting health rights.

On one hand, existing human rights instruments provided valuable guidance for governments responding to the crisis. They emphasized equality, non-discrimination, public participation, and universal healthcare access.

On the other hand, the pandemic exposed significant gaps in implementation. Many countries struggled to ensure equitable healthcare access, adequate medical resources, and timely vaccine distribution. Global disparities in healthcare infrastructure and economic capacity limited the practical realization of health rights.

The pandemic therefore reinforced the importance of strengthening international cooperation and ensuring that health rights are effectively translated from legal commitments into practical realities.

In conclusion, the international legal framework establishes a comprehensive foundation for protecting the right to health. However, the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrate that legal recognition alone is insufficient. Effective implementation, adequate resources, political commitment, and international solidarity remain essential for ensuring that health rights are realized for all individuals, particularly during times of global crisis.

VIII. COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND HUMAN RIGHTS CHALLENGES

The COVID-19 pandemic was not only a public health emergency but also a human rights crisis. The spread of the virus and the measures adopted to contain it affected nearly every aspect of human life. Governments across the world were compelled to impose restrictions that, while intended

to protect public health, had significant implications for the enjoyment of fundamental rights and freedoms.

The pandemic demonstrated that health and human rights are deeply interconnected. The protection of public health required collective action, yet such action often involved limitations on individual rights. Consequently, the pandemic generated an ongoing debate regarding the balance between public safety and individual liberty.

8.1. Right to Life

The right to life is recognized as the most fundamental human right because all other rights depend upon it. COVID-19 directly threatened this right by causing millions of deaths worldwide.

Governments were obligated to take all reasonable measures to protect human life, including strengthening healthcare systems, ensuring access to medical treatment, implementing disease control measures, and providing accurate public information. The effectiveness of governmental responses significantly influenced mortality rates and public health outcomes.

The pandemic also revealed disparities in the protection of the right to life. Individuals belonging to economically disadvantaged groups often faced higher risks due to inadequate healthcare access, overcrowded housing, and limited social protection.

8.2. Right to Health

The right to health occupied the center of human rights discussions during the pandemic. Healthcare systems experienced unprecedented pressure as hospitals struggled to accommodate increasing numbers of patients.

In many countries, shortages of oxygen supplies, intensive care facilities, medicines, testing services, and healthcare personnel affected the quality and accessibility of healthcare services. These challenges highlighted the importance of sustained investment in public health infrastructure.

The pandemic further demonstrated that the realization of health rights depends upon broader social determinants, including housing, sanitation, employment, and education.

8.3. Freedom of Movement

Governments implemented lockdowns, quarantines, travel bans, and curfews to reduce virus transmission. While these measures were generally justified by public health concerns, they restricted freedom of movement on an unprecedented scale.

Human rights principles require that restrictions on movement be lawful, necessary, proportionate, and limited in duration. The pandemic therefore generated important discussions regarding the legitimacy and scope of emergency powers.

8.4. Right to Education

The closure of schools and universities affected billions of students worldwide. Educational institutions rapidly shifted toward online learning platforms, creating both opportunities and challenges.

Students lacking access to digital devices, internet connectivity, or supportive learning environments experienced significant educational disadvantages. These disparities highlighted the relationship between education rights and socio-economic inequalities.

8.5. Right to Work and Livelihood

The economic consequences of COVID-19 were severe. Businesses closed, industries experienced disruptions, and millions of individuals lost employment.

Workers in informal sectors were particularly vulnerable because many lacked social security protections. The pandemic demonstrated that economic rights are closely linked to health outcomes, as income insecurity often limited individuals' ability to access healthcare and maintain adequate living conditions.

8.6. Right to Privacy

Technological measures such as contact tracing applications, health surveillance systems, and digital monitoring tools were widely adopted during the pandemic. Although these measures contributed to disease control efforts, they raised concerns regarding data protection, surveillance, and privacy rights. Governments faced the challenge of balancing public health objectives with respect for personal autonomy and confidentiality.

IX. IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON VULNERABLE AND MARGINALIZED GROUPS

The pandemic did not affect all individuals equally. Existing social and economic inequalities significantly influenced exposure to risk, healthcare access, and health outcomes.

Women: Women experienced disproportionate impacts during the pandemic. In addition to facing health risks, many women assumed increased caregiving responsibilities within households.

Economic disruptions particularly affected sectors employing large numbers of women. Reports from numerous countries also indicated increases in domestic violence during lockdown periods.

The pandemic revealed the need for gender-sensitive public health policies and stronger support systems for women.

Children: Children were affected through school closures, disruptions in healthcare services, nutritional challenges, and reduced opportunities for social interaction.

Extended periods of isolation and uncertainty contributed to psychological stress among many children and adolescents.

Older Persons: Older individuals faced significantly higher risks of severe illness and mortality. Long-term care

facilities emerged as major sites of infection in many countries.

Social isolation measures, while necessary for protection, often had adverse psychological consequences for elderly populations.

Migrant Workers: Migrant workers experienced considerable hardship due to employment losses, travel restrictions, inadequate housing conditions, and limited healthcare access.

Their experiences highlighted the importance of extending social and health protections to all members of society regardless of migration status.

Persons with Disabilities: Persons with disabilities frequently encountered barriers in accessing healthcare information and services. The pandemic emphasized the necessity of inclusive healthcare policies and accessible communication strategies.

X. VACCINE EQUITY AND GLOBAL HEALTH JUSTICE

The development of COVID-19 vaccines represented one of the most significant scientific achievements in modern history. However, vaccine distribution revealed substantial inequalities between countries.

Many high-income countries secured large vaccine supplies during the early phases of vaccine deployment. In contrast, numerous developing countries struggled to obtain adequate doses for their populations.

This disparity raised important ethical and human rights questions. If health is a universal human right, access to life-saving vaccines should not be determined primarily by economic capacity.

The concept of vaccine equity emphasizes that all individuals, regardless of nationality or income level, should have fair access to essential healthcare interventions. The pandemic demonstrated that global health security depends upon collective action. Unequal vaccine distribution not only undermines human rights but may also prolong global health crises.

11. Mental Health as a Human Rights Concern

Mental health emerged as a critical dimension of the pandemic experience. Fear, uncertainty, grief, economic insecurity, and prolonged social isolation contributed to increasing levels of psychological distress.

Research conducted during the pandemic reported substantial increases in anxiety disorders, depression, stress-related conditions, and emotional exhaustion.

Healthcare workers experienced particularly high levels of mental strain due to heavy workloads, exposure to infection risks, and repeated encounters with illness and death.

The pandemic reinforced the understanding that the right to health includes mental well-being as well as physical health.

Effective healthcare systems must therefore integrate mental health services into broader public health strategies.

XI. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis reveals several important findings as:

- COVID-19 demonstrated that health is a foundational human right upon which the enjoyment of many other rights depends.
- The pandemic exposed significant inequalities in healthcare access, resource distribution, and public health preparedness.
- Vulnerable populations experienced disproportionately severe consequences, reflecting broader patterns of social and economic inequality.
- Effective protection of health rights requires more than medical services alone. Housing, sanitation, employment security, education, and social protection all contribute to health outcomes.
- International cooperation remains essential for addressing global health challenges. Issues such as vaccine equity illustrate the limitations of purely national approaches to public health emergencies.

Finally, the pandemic highlighted the importance of balancing emergency public health measures with respect for human rights principles such as proportionality, transparency, accountability, and non-discrimination.

XII. CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic represents one of the most significant public health challenges in contemporary history. Beyond its medical consequences, the crisis exposed structural inequalities, tested human rights institutions, and revealed the critical importance of the right to health.

The pandemic demonstrated that health cannot be separated from broader social, economic, and political conditions. Access to healthcare, safe housing, adequate nutrition, education, employment, and social protection collectively influence individual and community well-being.

Although governments implemented numerous measures to contain the spread of the virus, the effectiveness of these measures varied considerably across countries. Differences in healthcare infrastructure, governance capacity, economic resources, and social protection systems significantly affected outcomes.

The experiences of vulnerable populations during the pandemic further highlighted the necessity of adopting inclusive and rights-based approaches to public health policy. Sustainable health security requires reducing inequalities and ensuring equitable access to healthcare resources.

The lessons learned from COVID-19 should inform future policy development and strengthen preparedness for subsequent public health emergencies. Protecting the right to health is not merely a legal obligation but a prerequisite for human dignity, social justice, and sustainable development.

XIII. SUGGESTIONS

- Governments should substantially increase investment in public healthcare infrastructure.
- Universal health coverage should be expanded to ensure equitable access to healthcare services.
- Emergency preparedness mechanisms should be strengthened through regular planning and capacity-building exercises.
- Greater attention should be devoted to mental health services and psychological support programs.
- Social protection systems should be expanded to protect vulnerable populations during crises.
- Healthcare workers should receive adequate training, resources, and occupational protections.
- Public health policies should be guided by principles of equality, transparency, accountability, and non-discrimination.
- International cooperation should be strengthened to ensure equitable access to medicines, vaccines, and healthcare technologies.
- Digital health technologies should be developed in ways that respect privacy and human rights.
- Future pandemic responses should adopt a comprehensive rights-based approach that integrates public health objectives with the protection of fundamental freedoms.

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Nutritional Adequacy and Healthy Dietary Needs in Group Meal Services for Older Adults

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Abstract— Population aging has become an important public health and social welfare issue worldwide, increasing the demand for nutritionally adequate and health-oriented meal services for older adults. Group meal services provided in long-term care institutions, senior centers, community meal programs, and day-care centers play a critical role in supporting older adults' daily dietary intake, health maintenance, and quality of life. However, older adults often experience physiological changes such as reduced appetite, chewing and swallowing difficulties, changes in taste and smell, chronic diseases, and reduced physical function, which may increase the risk of malnutrition and dietary imbalance. Therefore, this study examines nutritional adequacy and healthy dietary needs in group meal services for older adults. This study adopts a quantitative research design and uses a structured questionnaire to collect data from older adults receiving group meal services. The questionnaire focuses on demographic characteristics, perceived nutritional adequacy, healthy dietary needs, meal satisfaction, and service quality. A total of 50 questionnaires were distributed, 45 were returned, and 37 were valid, resulting in an effective response rate of 82.2%. The results show that most respondents were female, aged 51–60, married, and had a senior high school education. In addition, 89.2% of respondents expressed interest in nutrition-related knowledge, indicating that older adults are highly concerned about healthy eating. The findings reveal that respondents generally had positive perceptions of the group meals. Satisfaction scores for all meal-quality items were above 4.3. The highest satisfaction item was attractiveness of dishes, followed by freshness of ingredients, low-oil, low-salt, low-fat, and high-fiber preparation, appropriate portion size, and cleanliness and hygiene. In terms of healthy dietary needs, respondents placed the greatest importance on high ingredient freshness, deliciousness, hygiene and safety, and product quality. Correlation analysis further showed that satisfaction had the strongest



relationship with consumption behavior, suggesting that improving meal satisfaction may increase older adults' willingness to continue using group meal services. Overall, the study concludes that group meal services should not only provide sufficient food quantity but also ensure nutritional balance, food safety, freshness, appropriate texture, taste, and disease-related dietary suitability. Practical recommendations include involving nutritionists in menu planning, adjusting meal texture, reducing excessive salt, oil, and sugar, collecting regular feedback from older adults, and strengthening government support for elderly nutrition guidelines and community-based meal programs.

Keywords— *Nutritional adequacy; Healthy dietary needs; Group meal services; Older adults; Meal satisfaction; Healthy aging*

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Population aging has become an important public health and social welfare issue worldwide. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2015), healthy aging does not simply mean living longer, but refers to the process of maintaining functional ability and well-being in later life. From this perspective, diet is not only a matter of daily food intake, but also an important factor related to physical function, disease prevention, and quality of life among older adults. As the proportion of older adults continues to increase, the demand for appropriate nutritional care, healthy meal planning, and accessible group meal services has also grown.

Group meal services, such as those provided in long-term care institutions, senior service centers, community meal programs, and day-care centers, play a critical role in supporting the daily dietary intake and health maintenance of older adults. LoBuono, Locher, and Sharkey et al. (2023) pointed out that aging is often accompanied by physiological changes, including decreased appetite, changes in taste and smell, and difficulties in chewing or swallowing. These changes may reduce food intake and increase the risk of malnutrition, chronic disease, disability, and reduced quality of life. In addition, Deierlein, Morland, Scanlin, and Wong (2013) indicated that the dietary quality of older adults is influenced by health status, socioeconomic conditions, living environment, and dietary behaviors.

Therefore, meal design for older adults should not focus only on calorie supply, but should also consider nutritional balance, food texture, taste acceptance, and dining convenience.

Furthermore, Shams-White et al. (2021) noted that dietary quality can be assessed through factors such as vegetables, fruits, whole grains, protein, sodium, and saturated fat. This suggests that group meal services for older adults should consider both nutrient composition and overall dietary patterns. Therefore, whether group meal services can provide nutritionally adequate and health-oriented meals is an important issue that requires further investigation.

1.2 Motivation

Although many group meal services emphasize food quantity, cost control, hygiene, and operational efficiency, less attention may be given to nutritional adequacy, texture modification, menu variety, disease-specific dietary needs, and food acceptability among older adults. Huang (2006) indicated that meal-supply systems in elder-care institutions often face practical challenges, including menu planning, cost control, food preparation, and the need to provide meals suitable for older adults' physical conditions. This suggests that group meal services should not only focus on providing meals on time, but also on whether the meals meet the nutritional and health-related needs of elderly consumers.

In addition, older adults may have different expectations regarding taste, portion size, food softness, freshness, safety,

and meal diversity. Li (2002) pointed out that consumers' acceptance of healthy meals is influenced not only by nutritional balance, but also by food quality, reliability, price, convenience, and taste. Similarly, Huang (2005) found that middle-aged and older chronic-disease patients' willingness to purchase health-conditioning meals was affected by their eating habits, trust in product effectiveness, and concerns about hygiene and safety. These findings imply that meals designed for older adults must consider both objective nutritional standards and subjective consumer acceptance.

Furthermore, LoBuono, Locher, and Sharkey et al. (2023) emphasized that aging-related changes, such as reduced appetite, altered taste and smell, and chewing or swallowing difficulties, may negatively affect food intake and nutritional status. If these needs are not properly considered, older adults may reduce their food consumption, which may lead to malnutrition, weakness, poorer disease management, and reduced quality of life. Therefore, this study is motivated by the need to examine the nutritional adequacy and healthy dietary needs of older adults in group meal service settings, with the aim of providing practical suggestions for improving meal design and service quality.

1.3 Research Problem

This study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the major nutritional needs of older adults receiving group meal services?
2. Are the meals provided by group meal services nutritionally adequate for older adults?
3. What healthy dietary needs do older adults consider important in group meal services?
4. What factors influence older adults' satisfaction with group meal services?
5. How can group meal services be improved to better support healthy aging?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Aging and Nutritional Needs

Aging is associated with various physical, psychological, and social changes that may influence dietary intake and nutritional status. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2015) pointed out that healthy aging refers not only to living longer, but also to maintaining functional ability and well-being in later life. From this perspective, nutrition plays an essential role in supporting physical function, disease prevention, and quality of life among older adults. As people age, they may experience reduced muscle mass, lower metabolic rate, decreased appetite, dental problems, changes in taste and smell, digestive difficulties, and chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and osteoporosis. LoBuono, Locher, and Sharkey et al. (2023) also indicated that aging is often accompanied by decreased appetite and chewing or swallowing difficulties, which may reduce food intake and increase the risk of malnutrition and poor health outcomes. Adequate intake of protein, dietary fiber, vitamins, minerals, calcium, vitamin D, vitamin B12, zinc, and fluids is especially important for older adults. Protein helps maintain muscle mass, immune function, and physical strength, while calcium and vitamin D support bone health and reduce the risk of osteoporosis. Dietary fiber supports digestive health and may help prevent constipation and chronic diseases. In addition, sufficient fluid intake is necessary because older adults may have reduced thirst sensation and a higher risk of dehydration. Deierlein, Morland, Scanlin, and Wong (2013) noted that the dietary quality of older adults is influenced by health status, socioeconomic conditions, living environment, and dietary behaviors. Therefore, meal planning for older adults should not focus only on calorie supply, but should also consider food texture, taste acceptance, nutrient density, and dining convenience. Shams-White et al. (2021) further emphasized that dietary quality should be evaluated through overall dietary patterns, including vegetables, fruits, whole grains, protein, sodium, and saturated fat. Thus, meals for older adults should provide sufficient calories while ensuring

balanced nutrient intake and health-oriented dietary design.

2.2 Malnutrition and Dietary Risks among Older Adults

Malnutrition is a common nutritional and health problem among older adults, especially among those living in long-term care institutions, receiving community meal services, or relying on group meal programs for daily food intake. Malnutrition does not only refer to insufficient food intake; it also includes inadequate intake of essential nutrients, unbalanced dietary patterns, and poor diet quality. According to LoBuono, Locher, and Sharkey et al. (2023), aging is often accompanied by physiological changes such as reduced appetite, altered taste and smell, chewing difficulties, and swallowing problems, all of which may reduce food intake and increase nutritional risk. In addition, illness, medication effects, depression, social isolation, limited mobility, economic constraints, and inadequate meal design may further increase the likelihood of malnutrition among older adults.

Both undernutrition and overnutrition can negatively affect health. Undernutrition may lead to weight loss, weakness, reduced immunity, delayed wound healing, increased risk of falls, longer recovery time, and higher hospitalization rates. For older adults, insufficient protein and energy intake may also accelerate muscle loss and frailty, reducing their ability to perform daily activities. On the other hand, overnutrition or nutritionally unbalanced diets may increase the risk of obesity, diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and metabolic disorders. Huang (2005) indicated that many middle-aged and older adults with chronic diseases have specific dietary needs, and their willingness to accept health-conditioning meals is influenced by eating habits, trust in food quality, and concerns about hygiene and safety. This suggests that dietary risk among older adults is not only a medical issue, but also closely related to meal design and service quality.

Deierlein, Morland, Scanlin, and Wong (2013) further noted that older adults' dietary quality is affected by health status, socioeconomic conditions, living environment, and dietary

behaviors. Therefore, group meal services should carefully assess both nutrient sufficiency and dietary balance. Meals should provide adequate energy, protein, vitamins, minerals, dietary fiber, and fluids, while controlling excessive sodium, saturated fat, and sugar. In addition, meal providers should consider food texture, portion size, menu variety, freshness, and acceptability to reduce dietary risks and support healthy aging.

2.3 Group Meal Services for Older Adults

Group meal services refer to organized meal provision for groups of people in institutional or community-based settings. For older adults, such services are commonly provided in nursing homes, senior centers, long-term care facilities, hospitals, day-care centers, and community care programs. These services are important because they provide regular meals, reduce the burden of meal preparation for older adults and caregivers, and support community-based health promotion. Huang (2006) indicated that meal-supply systems in elder-care institutions are closely related to public policy, institutional management, and the development of senior food-service industries. Her study found that nearly 90% of elder-care institutions prepared meals by themselves, while some institutions would consider outsourcing meal preparation if costs could be reduced or if providers could offer meals with textures suitable for older adults. This finding shows that group meal services must consider both operational feasibility and the physical eating needs of older adults.

However, group meal services face several practical challenges, including budget limitations, labor shortages, food safety requirements, menu planning, individual dietary restrictions, and the need to prepare meals in large quantities. In many cases, menus may be designed based on general food-service standards rather than individualized nutritional needs. Huang (2006) further emphasized that policy support is needed in areas such as meal distribution systems, nutrition education, government subsidies, infrastructure, and regulations. These findings suggest that senior meal

services require cooperation among government agencies, institutions, nutrition professionals, and food-service providers.

In addition, group meal planning should balance nutrition, cost, hygiene, taste, and operational feasibility. Li (2002) pointed out that consumers' acceptance of healthy meals is influenced by nutritional balance, reliable food sources, price, convenience, and taste. Therefore, meals for older adults should not be treated only as routine food provision, but as part of health promotion and social care. Effective group meal services should provide nutritionally balanced, safe, fresh, affordable, and acceptable meals that meet the dietary needs and preferences of older adults.

2.4 Nutritional Adequacy in Meal Planning

Nutritional adequacy refers to the extent to which meals provide sufficient energy and essential nutrients to meet the physiological and health needs of a specific population. For older adults, nutritional adequacy is especially important because aging is often associated with reduced appetite, lower energy needs, decreased muscle mass, chronic diseases, and changes in chewing, swallowing, digestion, taste, and smell. LoBuono, Locher, and Sharkey et al. (2023) pointed out that these aging-related changes may reduce food intake and increase the risk of malnutrition, disability, and lower quality of life. Therefore, meal planning for older adults should not only provide enough calories, but also ensure adequate protein, dietary fiber, vitamins, minerals, fluids, and overall nutrient density.

For older adults, nutritional adequacy should include appropriate calories, sufficient protein, controlled fat and sodium, adequate dietary fiber, and enough micronutrients such as calcium, vitamin D, vitamin B12, zinc, and iron. According to the healthy-meal principles promoted by health authorities, each set meal should control calories within an appropriate range and maintain balanced proportions of major nutrients, including carbohydrates, protein, and fat. These principles also emphasize the use of natural foods, varied side dishes, proper seasoning, food

safety, and hygiene. In senior meal planning, portion size, food-group balance, cooking methods, texture, and nutrient density should be carefully considered.

In addition, Shams-White et al. (2021) emphasized that dietary quality should be evaluated through overall dietary patterns, including vegetables, fruits, whole grains, protein foods, sodium, and saturated fat. This suggests that meals for older adults should not be viewed simply as low-calorie or low-salt meals, but as balanced dietary patterns that support long-term health. Furthermore, Li (2002) indicated that consumers' acceptance of healthy meals is influenced by nutritional balance, reliable food sources, price, convenience, and taste. Therefore, although low-oil, low-salt, high-fiber, and adequate-protein meal designs are recommended, taste and acceptability should not be ignored. Nutritionally balanced meals can only improve health outcomes when older adults are willing and able to consume them regularly.

2.5 Healthy Dietary Needs and Meal Satisfaction

Healthy dietary needs among older adults include nutritional balance, food safety, ingredient freshness, appropriate texture, suitable portion size, menu variety, and disease-related dietary control. Because older adults often experience chronic diseases and physiological changes, their dietary needs may differ from those of younger adults. For example, older adults with hypertension may require low-sodium meals, while those with diabetes may need controlled carbohydrate intake and balanced meal timing. Huang (2005) indicated that middle-aged and older chronic-disease patients often understand the importance of dietary adjustment, but their willingness to accept health-conditioning meals is influenced by eating habits, trust in food effectiveness, hygiene, safety, and taste. This suggests that healthy meals must meet both medical and consumer expectations.

Meal satisfaction is also an important factor because it affects food intake, meal acceptance, and the long-term use of group meal services. Even if meals are nutritionally

balanced, older adults may reduce their intake if the food is not tasty, visually appealing, easy to chew, or culturally acceptable. Chen (2005) found that consumers and food-service providers may have different perceptions of healthy meal quality, especially regarding taste, portion size, ingredient freshness, low-oil and low-salt preparation, variety, plating, nutritional balance, reasonable price, and perceived health benefits. Therefore, meal satisfaction should be evaluated from the perspective of older adults rather than only from the viewpoint of meal providers.

In addition, Li (2002) pointed out that consumers' acceptance of healthy meals is related to nutritional balance, reliable food sources, price, convenience, and taste. These factors are especially important in group meal services, where meals are prepared in large quantities and must satisfy diverse needs. Successful group meal services should therefore integrate nutritional standards with user-centered meal design. This means that meals should be healthy, safe, fresh, affordable, easy to eat, and acceptable in taste and appearance. By improving both nutritional quality and meal satisfaction, group meal services can better support healthy aging and enhance the quality of life of older adults.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative research design to examine nutritional adequacy and healthy dietary needs in group meal services for older adults. A questionnaire survey is used as the main research method to collect data from older adults who regularly receive group meal services. The survey focuses on respondents' perceptions of nutritional adequacy, healthy dietary needs, meal satisfaction, and service quality. A quantitative design is appropriate for this study because it allows the researcher to systematically measure participants' opinions and analyze the relationships among different variables through statistical methods.

3.2 Research Subjects

The research subjects are older adults who regularly receive group meal services from senior centers, community meal programs, or long-term care institutions. Participants should be aged 60 years or older and have experience consuming meals provided by group meal services.

3.3 Research Instruments

The research instrument used in this study is a structured questionnaire designed to examine older adults' perceptions of nutritional adequacy, healthy dietary needs, meal satisfaction, and service quality in group meal services. The questionnaire consists of four main sections.

The first section collects demographic information, including gender, age, education level, health condition, living arrangement, and experience with group meal services. The second section measures perceived nutritional adequacy, including calorie sufficiency, protein intake, food-group balance, low-oil and low-salt meal design, dietary fiber intake, and nutrient variety. The third section examines healthy dietary needs, including food texture, portion size, freshness, hygiene, taste, disease-related dietary control, and menu variety. The fourth section evaluates meal satisfaction, including overall satisfaction, willingness to continue using the service, perceived service quality, and suggestions for improvement.

Most questionnaire items are measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1, strongly disagree, to 6, strongly agree. Higher scores indicate stronger agreement with the item and more positive perceptions of the group meal service.

3.4 Data Collection

Data are collected through paper-based or online questionnaires. Before completing the questionnaire, participants are informed about the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any time. Participation is voluntary, and all responses are kept confidential.

3.5 Data Analysis

The collected data are analyzed using statistical methods. Descriptive statistics are used to understand participants'

demographic characteristics and general responses. Independent-samples t tests and one-way ANOVA may be used to examine differences among groups. Pearson correlation analysis may be used to explore relationships among nutritional adequacy, healthy dietary needs, and meal satisfaction. Regression analysis may also be used to identify factors influencing meal satisfaction.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

This section presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents, including gender, age, marital status, education level, self-perceived body shape, occupation, monthly income, and nutrition-related knowledge. A total of 50 questionnaires were distributed to older adults who

received the group meal service. Among them, 45 questionnaires were returned, and 37 were valid, resulting in an effective response rate of 82.2%.

As shown in Table 1, female respondents accounted for the majority of the sample, representing 81.1%, while male respondents accounted for 18.9%. In terms of age, the largest group was aged 51–60, accounting for 50.0%, followed by respondents aged 65 and above, accounting for 36.1%. Most respondents were married, and the largest education group was senior high school, accounting for 73.0%. Regarding nutrition knowledge, 89.2% of respondents reported that they were interested in nutrition-related information, indicating that older adults generally showed a high level of concern for healthy eating and health maintenance.

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	7	18.9%
	Female	30	81.1%
Age	41–50	5	13.9%
	51–60	18	50.0%
	65 and above	13	36.1%
Marital status	Unmarried	3	35.1%
	Married	34	64.9%
Education	Junior high school or below	2	5.4%
	Senior high school	27	73.0%
	University / College	8	21.6%
Nutrition knowledge interest	Not interested	3	8.1%
	No opinion	1	2.7%
	Interested	33	89.2%

The demographic results suggest that most respondents were female, middle-aged or older adults, and had a basic level of education. The high percentage of respondents interested in nutrition knowledge indicates that group meal services for older adults should not only provide meals but also support nutrition education and healthy dietary guidance.

4.2 Perceptions of Nutritional Adequacy

This section analyzes respondents' perceptions of the nutritional adequacy of group meal services. Nutritional adequacy was evaluated through several indicators, including nutritional balance, low-oil, low-salt, low-fat, and high-fiber preparation, freshness of ingredients, portion size,

side dishes, and health-maintenance function.

As shown in Table 2, respondents generally expressed positive perceptions of nutritional adequacy. The mean score for low-oil, low-salt, low-fat, and high-fiber preparation was 4.572, indicating that respondents recognized the health-oriented cooking design of the meals. Nutritional balance received a mean score of 4.389, while

health-maintenance function received a mean score of 4.340. Freshness of ingredients received a particularly high mean score of 4.654, showing that respondents considered fresh ingredients an important part of nutritional quality. The appropriateness of overall portion size also received a high mean score of 4.571.

Table 2 Perceptions of Nutritional Adequacy

Item	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Low-oil, low-salt, low-fat, high-fiber preparation	37	4.572	0.624
Nutritional balance	37	4.389	0.960
Health-maintenance function	37	4.340	0.913
Freshness of ingredients	37	4.654	0.664
Appropriateness of overall portion	37	4.571	0.787
Side dishes	37	4.536	0.642

These results indicate that the group meals were generally perceived as nutritionally adequate. However, compared with ingredient freshness and portion size, nutritional balance and health-maintenance function received slightly lower scores. This suggests that future group meal services should provide clearer nutrition labeling, explain the health benefits of meals, and strengthen meal planning based on older adults' specific dietary needs.

4.3 Healthy Dietary Needs of Older Adults

This section discusses the healthy dietary needs considered important by older adults. The results show that older adults value not only nutrition but also freshness, hygiene, safety, taste, product quality, menu variation, and diverse choices. As shown in Table 3, the highest-rated need was high ingredient freshness, selected by 97.3% of respondents. Deliciousness ranked second, accounting for 86.5%, followed by hygiene and safety at 83.8%, and product quality at 81.1%.

These results suggest that older adults do not evaluate healthy meals based only on whether the meals are low in oil, salt, or fat. They also expect meals to be fresh, tasty, safe, and of good quality. Menu variation and diverse choices

were also important, with 62.2% and 70.3% of respondents selecting these items, respectively.

Table 3 Important Items in Healthy-Diet Consumption among Older Adults

Item	Percentage
High ingredient freshness	97.3%
Deliciousness	86.5%
Hygiene and safety	83.8%
Product quality	81.1%
Diverse choices	70.3%
Menu variation	62.2%
Added snacks	51.4%
Utensil quality	48.6%
Service quality	40.5%

The findings indicate that food freshness is the most important healthy dietary need among older adults. Therefore, group meal providers should strengthen ingredient selection, storage management, and food preparation procedures. In addition, since deliciousness was also highly valued, meal providers should avoid assuming that older adults will accept bland meals simply because

they are healthy. Healthy meals should be nutritionally balanced, fresh, safe, and enjoyable.

4.4 Meal Satisfaction

Meal satisfaction was analyzed based on taste, appearance, texture, variety, cleanliness, portion size, side dishes, and price. Overall, respondents reported a high level of satisfaction with the group meals. As shown in Table 4, all satisfaction mean scores were above 4.3, indicating positive evaluations of the meal service.

The highest satisfaction score was attractiveness of dishes, with a mean score of 4.732. Freshness of ingredients also received a high mean score of 4.654, followed by low-oil, low-salt, low-fat, and high-fiber preparation at 4.572, appropriateness of overall portion at 4.571, and cleanliness and hygiene at 4.561. The lowest score was reasonable price, with a mean score of 4.322, although this score still indicates a generally positive evaluation.

Table 4 Senior Citizens' Satisfaction with Group Meal Quality

Item	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Attractiveness of dishes	37	4.732	0.465
Freshness of ingredients	37	4.654	0.664
Low-oil, low-salt, low-fat, high-fiber preparation	37	4.572	0.624
Appropriateness of overall portion	37	4.571	0.787
Cleanliness and hygiene	37	4.561	0.756
Variation in ingredients	37	4.554	0.682
Side dishes	37	4.536	0.642
Taste of dishes	37	4.493	0.787
Variety of dishes	37	4.483	0.865
Overall appearance of dishes	37	4.482	0.810
Texture of dishes	37	4.447	0.740
Nutritional balance	37	4.389	0.960
Health-maintenance function	37	4.340	0.913
Reasonable price	37	4.322	0.955

The results show that older adults were especially satisfied with visual attractiveness, ingredient freshness, healthy cooking methods, portion size, and hygiene. This suggests that group meal services should continue to integrate nutrition, sensory appeal, and food safety. However, relatively lower scores for price reasonableness and health-maintenance function indicate that meal providers may need to improve value perception and provide clearer explanations of the meals' nutritional benefits.

4.5 Relationship among Nutritional Adequacy, Healthy Dietary Needs, and Satisfaction

This section examines the relationship among perceived importance, satisfaction, and consumption behavior. Pearson correlation analysis was used to analyze the relationships among the variables. As shown in Table 5, importance and satisfaction were positively correlated, with $r = 0.268$ and $p = 0.000$. Importance and consumption behavior were also positively correlated, with $r = 0.147$ and $p = 0.032$. The strongest relationship was found between satisfaction and consumption behavior, with $r = 0.392$ and $p = 0.000$.

Table 5 Correlations among Importance, Satisfaction, and Consumption Behavior

Variable	Importance	Satisfaction	Consumption Behavior
Importance	1.000	0.268**	0.147*
Satisfaction	0.268**	1.000	0.392**
Consumption Behavior	0.147*	0.392**	1.000

Note. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

The findings indicate that older adults who were more satisfied with healthy meals were more likely to demonstrate positive consumption behavior. In other words, satisfaction plays an important role in encouraging older adults to accept and continue consuming healthy meals. Although importance was also positively related to satisfaction and consumption behavior, its relationship with consumption behavior was weaker. This suggests that simply recognizing the importance of healthy eating may not be enough; meals must also be tasty, fresh, convenient, and satisfying.

4.6 Discussion

The findings of this study show that older adults generally had positive perceptions of group meal services. Respondents gave high satisfaction scores to attractiveness of dishes, freshness of ingredients, healthy cooking methods, portion size, cleanliness, and side dishes. These findings suggest that successful group meal services should not focus only on providing sufficient food quantity, but should also emphasize nutritional balance, sensory quality, food safety, and user-centered meal design.

In terms of nutritional adequacy, respondents positively evaluated low-oil, low-salt, low-fat, and high-fiber preparation, as well as ingredient freshness and portion size. However, nutritional balance and health-maintenance function received slightly lower scores compared with other items. This indicates that meal providers may need to strengthen professional nutrition planning and provide more visible nutrition information to help older adults understand the health value of meals.

The results also show that older adults placed the greatest

importance on ingredient freshness, deliciousness, hygiene and safety, and product quality. This finding is important because it shows that older adults do not accept healthy meals based only on nutrition. They also expect meals to be enjoyable, safe, fresh, and trustworthy. Therefore, group meal providers should integrate nutritional standards with consumer preferences.

Finally, the correlation analysis indicates that satisfaction had the strongest relationship with consumption behavior. This means that improving meal satisfaction may increase older adults' willingness to continue using group meal services. In practical terms, meal providers should regularly collect feedback from older adults, adjust menus according to their needs, and improve meal quality through cooperation with nutritionists, chefs, and care-service staff. Overall, the findings support the idea that group meal services for older adults should combine nutritional adequacy, healthy dietary design, food acceptability, and service quality. By doing so, group meal services can better support healthy aging, reduce dietary risks, and improve the quality of life of older adults.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

5.1 Conclusions

This study examines nutritional adequacy and healthy dietary needs in group meal services for older adults. The findings indicate that older adults require meals that are not only sufficient in quantity, but also balanced in nutrition, safe, fresh, easy to chew, and suitable for their health conditions. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2015)

emphasized that healthy aging refers to maintaining functional ability and well-being in later life. From this perspective, group meal services should be understood not only as food provision, but also as an important support system for health promotion and quality of life among older adults.

The findings also show that nutritional adequacy and healthy dietary design are important factors influencing meal satisfaction. LoBuono, Locher, and Sharkey et al. (2023) pointed out that aging is often accompanied by reduced appetite, changes in taste and smell, and chewing or swallowing difficulties, which may increase the risk of poor food intake and malnutrition. Therefore, meals for older adults should consider adequate energy and protein, food-group balance, appropriate texture, sufficient dietary fiber, controlled sodium and fat, and disease-related dietary needs.

In addition, Huang (2006) indicated that meal-supply systems in elder-care institutions require cooperation among government agencies, care institutions, nutrition professionals, and food-service providers. This suggests that improving group meal services should involve both nutritional planning and service management. Li (2002) also noted that consumers' acceptance of healthy meals is influenced by nutritional balance, reliable food sources, price, convenience, and taste. Thus, healthy meals must be nutritious as well as acceptable to older adults.

Overall, group meal services can play an important role in promoting healthy aging. When meals are properly designed, they can help older adults maintain physical function, prevent malnutrition, manage chronic diseases, improve meal satisfaction, and enhance overall quality of life.

5.2 Practical Recommendations

5.2 Practical Recommendations

First, group meal providers should design menus based on the nutritional needs and health conditions of older adults. Meals should include adequate protein, vegetables, fruits,

whole grains, calcium-rich foods, and sufficient fluids. Since older adults are more likely to experience muscle loss, reduced appetite, and chronic diseases, meal planning should emphasize nutrient density rather than simply increasing food quantity. Menus should also consider low-sodium, low-fat, high-fiber, and balanced food-group principles in order to support healthy aging and disease prevention.

Second, meal texture should be adjusted according to older adults' chewing and swallowing abilities. Soft foods, finely cut ingredients, moist cooking methods, and easy-to-chew meal preparation can help improve food intake and reduce eating difficulties. For older adults with dental problems or swallowing concerns, texture-modified meals should be provided without reducing nutritional value or visual appeal. Third, meal providers should reduce excessive salt, oil, and sugar while maintaining flavor through natural seasonings, herbs, spices, fresh ingredients, and appropriate cooking techniques. Healthy meals should not be bland or unattractive. Taste, aroma, color, and appearance remain important factors influencing older adults' willingness to eat. Fourth, nutritionists should be involved in menu planning, nutrient calculation, and regular nutritional evaluation. Professional guidance can help ensure that meals meet dietary standards and respond to the needs of older adults with hypertension, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis, or other chronic conditions. Cooperation among nutritionists, chefs, caregivers, and food-service managers can improve both nutritional quality and meal acceptability.

Fifth, meal providers should collect feedback from older adults regularly. Satisfaction surveys, interviews, and observation of meal intake can help identify problems related to taste, portion size, texture, temperature, menu variety, and service quality. By continuously adjusting menus based on older adults' feedback, group meal services can better meet user needs, increase meal satisfaction, reduce food waste, and improve the overall effectiveness of

elderly nutrition care.

5.3 Policy Recommendations

5.3 Policy Recommendations

Government agencies should establish clear and practical nutritional guidelines for group meal services for older adults. These guidelines should include standards for energy intake, protein supply, food-group balance, sodium control, dietary fiber, fluid intake, texture modification, and disease-related dietary needs. Clear standards can help meal providers design menus that are not only safe and sufficient in quantity, but also nutritionally adequate and suitable for older adults with different health conditions.

In addition, government agencies should provide financial support, staff training, and nutrition education programs to improve the quality of group meal services. Financial subsidies can help community meal programs and care institutions purchase fresh ingredients, hire professional staff, and improve kitchen facilities. Staff training should focus on elderly nutrition, food safety, texture-modified diets, chronic disease meal planning, and service communication. Nutrition education should also be provided to older adults and caregivers so that they can better understand healthy eating principles and make appropriate dietary choices.

Community-based meal programs should also be strengthened to support older adults who live alone, have limited mobility, or have difficulty preparing meals independently. These services can reduce the risk of poor dietary intake, social isolation, and nutrition-related health problems. Meal delivery, community dining, and senior service centers can serve as important platforms for promoting healthy aging.

Finally, cooperation among government agencies, nutrition professionals, care institutions, community organizations, and food-service providers is necessary. Through cross-sector collaboration, group meal services can become more accessible, affordable, nutritious, and responsive to the real needs of older adults. Such policy support can help promote

healthy aging, prevent malnutrition, and improve the quality of life of elderly populations.

5.4 Suggestions for Future Research

Future research may compare different types of group meal services, such as institutional meals, community meals, and home-delivered meals. Researchers may also conduct nutrient analysis to evaluate the actual nutritional content of meals. In addition, qualitative interviews with older adults, caregivers, nutritionists, and food-service managers may provide deeper insights into the challenges and improvement strategies of group meal services.

Overall, improving nutritional adequacy and healthy dietary design in group meal services is essential for supporting the health, dignity, and quality of life of older adults.

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Breaking Boundaries: Feminism and Female Consciousness in the Novels of Virginia Woolf

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Abstract— Literature has always served as a powerful medium through which writers challenge social norms and give voice to marginalised experiences. Among the literary figures who transformed the representation of women in English literature, Virginia Woolf occupies a unique place. Through her innovative narrative style and psychological depth, Woolf explored the complexities of female identity, freedom, and self-expression within a patriarchal society. This article examines the themes of feminism and female consciousness in three major novels by Virginia Woolf: *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *Orlando*. The study focuses on how Woolf portrays women's struggles for autonomy, creativity, and self-realization while confronting social expectations and gender-based limitations. Through characters such as Clarissa Dalloway, Lily Briscoe, and Orlando, Woolf highlights the emotional and intellectual experiences of women seeking meaningful identities beyond traditional roles. The article further discusses Woolf's literary techniques and the continuing relevance of her feminist vision in contemporary society. The analysis reveals that Woolf's novels remain important texts for understanding gender equality, women's empowerment, and the ongoing quest for individual freedom.



Keywords— Virginia Woolf, Feminism, Female Consciousness, Gender Equality, Women's Identity, Patriarchy

I. INTRODUCTION

Literature reflects society while simultaneously challenging its assumptions and values. For centuries, women were often represented in literature through perspectives shaped by patriarchal ideologies. Their experiences, desires, and voices were frequently overshadowed by narratives centred on male characters. The emergence of women writers created opportunities to challenge these traditions and present alternative understandings of human experience.

Virginia Woolf is one of the most influential writers who transformed the representation of women in English literature. Writing during the early twentieth century, Woolf witnessed a society undergoing social and political change. Although women were gradually gaini

ng access to education and public life, they continued to face significant restrictions imposed by

patriarchal structures. Woolf recognized these inequalities and used literature as a means of questioning social conventions. Unlike many earlier writers, Woolf placed women's thoughts and emotions at the centre of her narratives. She was interested not merely in what women did but in how they thought, felt, remembered, and imagined. Her novels explore the hidden dimensions of female experience and reveal the tensions between personal desires and societal expectations.

The concept of female consciousness occupies a central position in Woolf's literary vision. Female consciousness refers to a woman's awareness of her identity, individuality, emotions, and social position. Woolf's characters often struggle to define themselves within societies that seek to limit their freedom. Through these struggles, Woolf presents a powerful critique of patriarchal systems and advocates for women's intellectual and emotional autonomy. This article examines feminism

and female consciousness in *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *Orlando*. Through these novels, Woolf explores women's quest for identity, creativity, and freedom while challenging traditional gender roles.

II. VIRGINIA WOOLF AND FEMINIST THOUGHT

Virginia Woolf is widely recognized as one of the pioneers of feminist literary thought. Her writings consistently challenged the social and cultural limitations imposed on women. Although Woolf wrote before the emergence of contemporary feminist theories, many of her ideas anticipated later feminist concerns regarding equality, identity, and freedom. Woolf believed that women deserved equal opportunities in education, employment, and creative expression. She observed that throughout history, women had been denied access to resources and opportunities that were readily available to men. As a result, women often struggled to realize their intellectual and artistic potential.

A significant aspect of Woolf's feminist philosophy is her emphasis on independence. She argued that women needed both economic freedom and personal space to develop their talents and identities. Her writings repeatedly stress that self-expression and creativity cannot flourish under conditions of dependence and restriction. Woolf also challenged traditional assumptions about gender roles. She questioned the belief that women existed primarily to serve domestic and familial functions. Instead, she portrayed women as complex individuals capable of intellectual achievement, emotional depth, and artistic creativity. Through her novels, Woolf encouraged readers to reconsider established ideas about femininity and women's place in society.

III. FEMALE CONSCIOUSNESS IN *MRS DALLOWAY*

Published in 1925, *Mrs Dalloway* is one of Woolf's most celebrated novels. The narrative follows Clarissa Dalloway as she prepares for an evening party in London. While the novel appears to focus on ordinary daily activities, it is primarily concerned with the inner thoughts and reflections of its characters. Clarissa Dalloway represents a woman who has outwardly conformed to societal expectations. She is a respected wife and hostess who appears successful within her social world. Yet beneath this public identity lies a complex emotional life shaped by memories, regrets, and unfulfilled possibilities.

Throughout the novel, Clarissa reflects on the choices she has made, particularly her decision to marry Richard Dalloway. Her reflections reveal an awareness of

the compromises required by conventional social roles. Although she values stability and social connection, she also experiences moments of longing for greater personal freedom. Woolf's portrayal of Clarissa illustrates the tension between individual identity and societal expectations. Clarissa is constantly negotiating between her public role and her private self. Through her internal reflections, Woolf demonstrates that women possess rich inner lives that often remain invisible within traditional social structures.

The novel also challenges conventional literary representations of women by prioritizing emotional and psychological experiences over external events. Woolf presents female consciousness as a dynamic process involving memory, self-reflection, and the search for meaning. Clarissa's journey reveals the complexity of women's identities and their struggle to achieve self-understanding within restrictive social environments.

IV. WOMEN, CREATIVITY, AND IDENTITY IN *TO THE LIGHTHOUSE*

In *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf explores the relationship between gender, creativity, and personal identity. The novel presents contrasting representations of womanhood through characters such as Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe. Mrs. Ramsay embodies traditional feminine ideals. She is caring, nurturing, and deeply committed to her family. Her identity is closely connected to her role as a wife and mother. While Woolf acknowledges the significance of these qualities, she also reveals the limitations of defining women solely through domestic responsibilities.

Lily Briscoe, by contrast, represents a modern woman seeking intellectual and creative independence. As an artist, Lily challenges the belief that women are naturally less capable of artistic achievement than men. Throughout the novel, she struggles against social attitudes that discourage women from pursuing their ambitions. Lily's determination to complete her painting symbolizes her quest for self-expression and autonomy. Her artistic journey reflects the broader experiences of women who seek recognition in fields traditionally dominated by men. Despite criticism and self-doubt, Lily remains committed to her creative vision.

Through Lily Briscoe, Woolf demonstrates that women's identities cannot be confined to traditional gender roles. Creativity becomes a means of asserting individuality and challenging social expectations. The novel celebrates women's capacity for independent thought and artistic achievement while questioning the structures that limit their opportunities.

V. GENDER AND FREEDOM IN ORLANDO

Among Virginia Woolf's novels, *Orlando* stands out as one of her most innovative explorations of gender identity and personal freedom. The novel follows Orlando, a young nobleman who mysteriously transforms into a woman and continues to live for several centuries. Through this unusual narrative, Woolf examines how gender shapes human experiences and social opportunities. Before the transformation, Orlando enjoys the privileges associated with being a man in a patriarchal society. He has freedom of movement, social authority, and access to opportunities that are largely unavailable to women. However, after becoming a woman, Orlando encounters various restrictions and expectations imposed by society. This dramatic shift enables Woolf to expose the unequal treatment of men and women.

The novel challenges the assumption that gender differences are natural and unchangeable. Instead, Woolf suggests that many of the distinctions between masculinity and femininity are socially constructed. Orlando remains essentially the same individual despite the change in gender, yet society responds differently based solely on outward identity.

Through Orlando's experiences, Woolf critiques rigid gender norms and advocates for greater personal freedom. The novel encourages readers to move beyond conventional definitions of gender and recognize the complexity of human identity. In many ways, *Orlando* anticipates contemporary discussions about gender equality, diversity, and self-expression. By presenting gender as fluid rather than fixed, Woolf expands the scope of feminist thought and emphasizes the importance of individuality over socially imposed categories. The novel remains remarkably relevant in modern discussions about identity and inclusion.

VI. WOOLF'S LITERARY TECHNIQUES AND THE REPRESENTATION OF FEMALE CONSCIOUSNESS

Virginia Woolf's contribution to literature extends beyond her feminist themes. She revolutionized narrative technique by developing new ways of representing human consciousness. Her innovative methods allow readers to experience the inner worlds of characters with extraordinary depth and intimacy. One of Woolf's most significant techniques is the use of stream of consciousness. Rather than presenting events in a straightforward chronological order, she follows the flow of thoughts, memories, emotions, and perceptions within the minds of her characters. This approach enables readers to understand

women's experiences from their own perspectives rather than through external observation.

In *Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf moves seamlessly between present experiences and past memories, revealing the complexity of Clarissa's emotional life. In *To the Lighthouse*, she uses shifting perspectives to highlight different interpretations of reality. In *Orlando*, she combines fantasy and historical narrative to challenge conventional ideas about gender and identity. Another important technique is symbolism. Objects, places, and events often carry deeper meanings related to personal growth, identity, and transformation. For example, the lighthouse in *To the Lighthouse* symbolizes aspiration, understanding, and the search for meaning. Similarly, Orlando's transformation symbolizes the fluidity of gender and identity.

These literary techniques are not merely artistic innovations; they serve Woolf's feminist purpose by giving importance to women's thoughts, emotions, and experiences. Through her narrative style, Woolf demonstrates that women's inner lives are worthy of serious literary attention.

VII. FINDINGS

1. Virginia Woolf portrays women as independent individuals with unique identities and aspirations.
 2. Female consciousness develops through self-reflection, personal experience, and resistance to social expectations.
 3. Patriarchal structures often restrict women's freedom, creativity, and self-expression.
- Woolf highlights the importance of education, creativity, and personal autonomy in women's lives.
4. Gender roles are presented as social constructions rather than fixed realities.
 5. Woolf's novels remain relevant to contemporary discussions on gender equality and women's empowerment.

VIII. DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that Virginia Woolf's novels function as both literary works and social critiques. Through her characters, Woolf challenges the belief that women should be defined exclusively by their domestic roles. Instead, she presents women as intellectual, emotional, and creative beings capable of shaping their own destinies.

In *Mrs Dalloway*, Clarissa's reflections reveal the emotional consequences of conforming to social expectations. Her experiences illustrate the tension between personal fulfilment and social acceptance. Similarly, *To the Lighthouse* presents contrasting models of womanhood

through Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe. While Mrs. Ramsay represents traditional femininity, Lily embodies a modern vision of female independence and creativity.

Orlando broadens Woolf's feminist perspective by questioning conventional ideas about gender itself. Through Orlando's transformation, Woolf exposes the arbitrary nature of many social distinctions between men and women. The novel encourages readers to recognize identity as fluid and multifaceted rather than fixed and predetermined.

Another important aspect of Woolf's work is her emphasis on psychological reality. By focusing on inner consciousness, she gives voice to experiences that had often been overlooked in traditional literature. Her narrative techniques allow readers to understand the complexities of women's lives from within rather than through external judgments.

The continued relevance of Woolf's novels demonstrates the enduring importance of her ideas. Although significant progress has been made toward gender equality, many women still face challenges related to discrimination, unequal opportunities, and social expectations. Woolf's writings encourage readers to question these inequalities and support more inclusive social structures.

IX. CONCLUSION

Virginia Woolf occupies a central position in feminist literary history because of her profound exploration of women's experiences, identities, and aspirations. Through *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *Orlando*, she challenged traditional representations of women and created space for female voices within modern literature. The study reveals that Woolf's novels consistently emphasize the importance of self-awareness, independence, creativity, and personal freedom. Her characters struggle against social constraints while seeking meaningful identities beyond conventional gender roles. Through these struggles, Woolf exposes the limitations imposed by patriarchal systems and advocates for greater equality and autonomy.

One of Woolf's greatest achievements is her ability to represent female consciousness with remarkable depth and sensitivity. Her innovative literary techniques enable readers to experience the emotional and psychological realities of women's lives. By bringing these experiences to the forefront, Woolf transformed both literary form and feminist thought. The relevance of Woolf's work extends far beyond her historical context. Contemporary discussions on gender equality, women's rights, identity, and self-expression continue to reflect many

of the concerns she addressed nearly a century ago. Her novels remain powerful reminders that freedom, dignity, and self-realization are essential human aspirations.

Ultimately, Virginia Woolf's fiction demonstrates that breaking social boundaries is not merely a political act but also a deeply personal journey toward understanding oneself. Her works continue to inspire readers to imagine a society where individuals are valued not according to gender-based expectations but according to their humanity, creativity, and potential.

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Ojibwe and Settler Space: The Temporal Influence of Creation Stories on Tribal Gynocentrism

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Abstract— Ojibwe creation stories constitute the central epistemological framework of Anishinaabe ceremonial traditions. The stories are encoded with ancestral epistemic insights necessary for the continuum of Indigenous American tribal traditions in settler-dominated America. The application of Eurocentric interpretative paradigms erases the complex epistemic multidimensionality associated with the stories. The paper unearths central epistemic insights from the creation stories rooted in Indigenous gynocentrism. The paper establishes a crucial epistemic connection between Anishinaabe tribal cultures and the Indigenous woman. Through a tribal feminine epistemic lens, the paper also establishes the relational interconnections within space, time, and the mother deities in the formation of tribal realities contradistinctive to colonial simulations of reality.



Keywords— Sky-Woman, Gynocentric, Ojibwe, Anishinaabe, Grandmother Moon.

I. GYNOCENTRIC EPISTEMOLOGICAL DERIVATIONS FROM THE OJIBWE RE-CREATION STORY

The oral narrative begins with Sky-Woman falling on the Earth subsumed by a flood. Sky-woman is seeking land as she is about to give birth. A sea-turtle inverts itself so that its body functions as bedding for Sky-Woman to give birth on. With the help of the muskrat, Sky-Woman obtains a patch of soil. She breathes into the soil which results in the re-formation of land. The Earth is re-created through the breath of Sky-Woman. Sky-Woman gives birth to the Anishinaabe. Sky-Woman and the sea turtle merges into an island, which becomes the home of the Anishinaabe tribe.

The Ojibwe re-creation story constitutes a central aspect of the Anishinaabe cosmological framework. The Ojibwe re-creation narrative is encoded with primary epistemological insights. These ancestral knowledge and insights are orally transmitted across linear space and time, which results in the spiralic interconnection amongst the Indigenous Anishinaabe tribe perceived to occupy the past, present, and future simultaneously. Within the mythic

framework of the Anishinaabe creation stories “and the mythopoeic vision,” the “past, present, and future” with “ancestors, contemporaries and descendants” are fundamentally one. Through the narration of creation stories, the “conscious and unconscious are united through the magic of symbolic progression”, mediating the transmission of “indirect memories and ancestral insights not raised to conscious articulation” and resulting in a metaphysical and transcendent landscape that temporally “incorporates both the near and far” (Allen 117). The first epistemological insight rooted in the Ojibwe re-creation story is represented through the primacy of the Indigenous feminine deity—Sky-Woman.

The potent primacy of native femininity is illustrated through the function of Sky-Woman in creating life and the Earth. The birth of the Anishinaabe and the reformation of the Earth signifies the originary movement of time, and the birth of the biota begins with a celestial Indigenous woman. The Earth is flooded in the genesis of the Ojibwe re-creation story. All Anishinaabe oral narratives centered on the recurring creation of the Earth

invariably begin with an “ecological cataclysm” that has subsumed biotas. The cyclic mechanism “initiates change by killing a society that has outlived its life cycle.” The stories always begin with the flood and ends with the formation of a new Indigenous society atop its preceding counterpart. In this way, the Anishinaabe creation narratives highlight the cyclical nature of life and death, emphasizing the delicate balance between Indigenous communities and the natural world.

The “ecological destructive forces” represent “significant points of change” in the iterative formation of Indigenous communities, across space and time further signified through the temporal recurrence of creation cycles (Killsback 140). The Native American conception of temporality, which is spiralic and consists of interconnecting circles that bind the past, present, and future, is best illustrated through the Indigenous term—“Kobade”, which refers to “a link in the chain” that temporally binds Indigenous communities’ “great grandparents and great grandchildren,” along with the multiple temporal connections “between generations, nations, states of being, and individuals” generated through the oral tradition (Simpson 8). The cyclical nature of Indigenous time symbolized by the spiralic temporal model and concepts like “Kobade,” allows the continuous renewal of communities and their connection to the past, present, and future.

The creation story and its iterations, continually generated and iterated through oral narratives, teach Indigenous listeners about the originary ancestral knowledge, “coded and transmitted through complex networks”, and remind them that their bodies are networked vessels, constellations across time and space, connected to a universe of nations and beings, encoded with “everything they need to know”, guided by the overarching Anishinaabe epistemic framework, or “Nishnaabewin” (Simpson 21). The temporal cycle is a tripartite mechanism that represents—creation, destruction, and re-creation. The ecological disaster in the Ojibwe re-creation story in the form of the flood, represents destruction or the end of the preceding cyclic temporal event. The new temporal event and its cyclic progression is initiated by an Anishinaabe feminine deity.

The overarching presence of Indigenous femininity in Ojibwe creation stories suggests that Anishinaabe tribal epistemologies are primarily gynocentric. “Indigenous Americans base their social systems on ritual, spirit-centered, and woman-focused world views” (Allen 2). Pre-colonial Indigenous American societies, both “woman-based” and “woman-centered” are “bound to ritual” and maintain gynocentric ritual traditions

“based on spiritual understandings than on economic or political ones” (Allen 195). A key aspect of these tribal gynocratic societies is the allowance of both genders to “function positively within the social order” (Allen 3). The Ojibwe tribal framework is characterized by their belief in the potency of Native American women, represented through their ability to create life and foster the ecological conditions essential for the survival of tribal communities.

Native American tribes, aware that their existence as collective individuals and communities “came to them from the Grandmothers”, a term referring to the originary ritual source of creation, continue to acknowledge even after European contact, their existence is borne out of a woman “to the present” (Allen 200). The Ojibwe, for instance, reiterate and celebrate this central fact of tribal Native American existence through their mythic discourses, ritual traditions, and associated ceremonial cycles.

The notion of equating the feminine form with the creation act, extending beyond the biological association of womanhood with the creation of life, is fundamental in Indigenous thought. The woman, as the fundamental baseboard in the creation of everything, embodies “thought, memory, instinct, tradition, and medicine or sacred power”. She is also “ritual,

ceremony, food, and shelter”, functioning as “the ways by which these are developed.” This rich understanding of the feminine as the source of creation underscores the deep reverence and respect that Indigenous cultures have for women and their essential role in the continuity of life and culture.

The Indigenous woman is revered as “the bringer, teacher, and creator” (Allen 264), with the epistemological orientation of oral stories shaped by Anishinaabe feminine deities and Ojibwe women storytellers who sustain the oral tradition. In Anishinaabe cultures, the female shaman, or medicine woman, is entrusted with narrating creation stories, drawing her authority from “the ceremonial power of dream or vision”, which mediates the transmission of ancestral knowledge to present-day Indigenous listeners. Tribal societies and their creation are epistemically rooted in “the living presence of the dreamer among the people” (Allen 205), whose ability to envision Indigenous realities generates a life force embodied in songs, dances, ritual objects, and garments created by women, but primarily sustained through the oral tradition.

The female shaman across collective Native American cultures, is entrusted with the ceremonial duty “of lifting the burden of colonialism by visioning new realities,” (Simpson 34) devoid of European epistemological and colonial influences. The primacy of Indigenous women within the Anishinaabe epistemological and cosmological

framework, is not only equated with their biological ability to give birth. Indigenous American women are interpreted as the originary basis of tribal epistemes, and are responsible for both the creation and preservation of tribal knowledge. According to collective Native American mythic discourses, “the Grandmothers created the firmament, the Earth, and all the spirit beings in it”. In the Anishinaabe creation stories, the grandmother constructs are represented through Earth Woman, Grandmother Moon and Sky Woman respectively.

The feminine deities bring forth creation “by thinking into being, the Women, or the Woman, from whom the people sprang”, with these women, conceived by the grandmother deities, embodying thought and generating the people and all orders of existence, thereby shaping societal structures and practices such as “the laws, the sciences, agriculture, and social institutions” (Allen 200). All of which stems from the grandmother deities, without whom the act of creation is nullified. Native Americans in the present continue to “recognize the deity as female, and she is known as Thought Woman, for it is understood that the primary creative force is thought”. The Indigenous notion of thought is synonymous with epistemic creation.

It is “pre-potent power” that bestows the Indigenous woman “the basic right to control and distribute goods, because she is the primary means of producing them” (Allen 255). The second epistemological insight in the Ojibwe re-creation story is evident in the ecological symbioses between Sky-Woman and the sea-turtle, with the ecological relational interaction between Sky-Woman and the muskrat. The centrality of Indigenous femininity within the critical framework of Anishinaabe epistemologies, is also acknowledged through the primary function of Indigenous women in ensuring the cyclic continuance of ecosystems. One of the primary epistemic insights transmitted to Indigenous audiences through oral stories is the grandmother deities’ act of “making and remaking the world in a generative fashion within Indigenous bodies engaged in accountable relationships with other beings”. The Ojibwe creation stories emphasize that creation arises from “the commingling combined in motion and movement” between feminine forces, non-human species, and “Indigenous bodies of both sexes in attached correlations with all aspects of creation” (Simpson 21). These narratives not only highlight the ecological interconnectedness intrinsic to Anishinaabe epistemologies but also underscore the indispensable role of Indigenous women as custodians of cultural and environmental continuity, ensuring the harmonious balance between humanity and the natural world.

The stories fundamentally convey diverse interpretations and realizations of an Ojibwe worldview, while mediating the audience’s understanding of “Anishinaabe realities” and their associated “epistemology, pedagogy, and conceptual meaning” (Simpson 152). Narrated within “oral contexts where contemporary Anishinaabe cultural practices are the norm” (Simpson 103), these stories contribute to the resurgence and revitalization of Native American intellectual traditions. The Anishinaabe epistemological framework is centrally praxis-oriented, wherein the application of ancestral teachings through movement and action outweighs abstraction and theorization. The cross-species interaction between Sky-Woman and the sea turtle, results in the re-creation of land and the Earth. This instance further suggests another aspect of the primacy that underlies Anishinaabe womanhood which lies in the ability of the feminine entity to transgress the biological distinctions, amongst diverse species to create and preserve Indigenous ecosystems devoid of hierarchical, patriarchal, and anthropocentric beliefs.

Such ecosystems maintained by Indigenous women are further characterized by a relational interconnectivity amongst the plant and animal species that constitute the biota. The grandmother deities in the Ojibwe creation myths do not conform to a Eurocentric field of perception that centrally associates womanhood with fecundity. The celestial deities in the creation stories produce off-springs without the intervention of the other sex. Grandmother Moon and Sky Woman are fundamentally creators of knowledge. Their collective act of thinking creation, sequentially leads to the ecological formation of biotas. Creation is achieved through the mutual interaction between the feminine deities and the animal species in the myths. This instance dispels notions of anthropocentrism characteristic of European mythic discourses.

Native American creation stories, rooted in the primacy of the feminine form, “are more often accretive than linear, more a-chronological than chronological,” emphasizing “harmonious relationships of all elements” (Allen 243), including “the plant nations, animal nations, rivers and lakes, cosmos, and neighboring Indigenous nations” (Simpson 8). Relationality implies a form of interconnection amongst the ecological species in the biota in which agency is equitably distributed. Native American epistemologies suggest that both ecological elements and the geological formations of the biota possess intelligible consciousness. The Native American “does not regard awareness of being as peculiar to one species” (Allen 60). Tribal American epistemologies stress on the equitable relatedness of all living organisms, with the complete

absence of individual agency attributed to a single species.

The Anishinaabe mode of living contrasts sharply with Eurocentric frameworks, as it does not depend on “institutionality to hold its structures” but instead emphasizes processes that foster “networked relationships”. The Ojibwe worldview is characterized by a relational interconnectivity among species, expressed through “a series of interconnected and overlapping algorithms that includes stories, ceremonies, and the land” (Simpson 23). In contrast, Eurocentric thought often adheres to a unidirectional and linear notion of time, which extends to the compartmentalization of knowledge into fixed, stationary branches. This division reflects a universalized assumption of Euro-Western centrality, underscoring a recurring linearity in its epistemological approach. “Because of a sense of relatedness to—instead of isolation from—what exists, the Indian assumes that this awareness is a natural by-product of existence itself” (Allen 60). This contrast highlights the fundamental differences in how knowledge, relationships, and existence are understood and organized, with Indigenous perspectives offering a more holistic and interconnected worldview.

Western epistemes are primarily oriented towards expanding such an assumption. Its universalized application across non-Western spheres of thought ensures the dominance of European knowledge over Indigenous worldviews. In synchronization with the relational interconnectivity imbued within Indigenous ecosystems, a similar asynchronous and a-chronological connectivity within Anishinaabe epistemes is present. Eurocentric epistemologies are “uni-dimensional, monolithic, excluding, and chronological,” with analytical methodologies that are “linear and fixed”, whereas tribal epistemologies, by contrast, are “multi-dimensional, a-chronological, and including”, characterized by requirements that are “accretive and fluid” and cannot be interpreted within the Western epistemic framework (Allen 244). Native American epistemes are interconnected “in complex non-linear forms” (Simpson 23). While Eurocentric epistemes are distinctly branched due to varying orientations and focus of study, Anishinaabe epistemes are relationally and collectively bound to one another. The symbioses within Sky-Woman, the sea-turtle, and muskrat indicates a shared agency amongst the feminine and other ecological species.

The application of Western epistemologies in the interpretation of the natural world results in the separation, classification, and categorization of ecological species. European epistemologies are also rooted in the anthropocentric assumption that solely and unequally situates intelligible agency within the colonialist-

patriarchal paradigm.

The Ojibwe re-creation story teaches Indigenous listeners that the re-formation of the Earth is the result of the relational interaction, and participation amongst all the ecological species with no one species claiming precedence over others. The Ojibwe stories comprise epistemic layers characterized by “a series of complex, interconnected cycling processes that makeup a nonlinear, overlapping emergent and responsive network of relationships that spirals across time and space” (Simpson 24). This holistic perspective challenges the fragmented, hierarchical approach of Western epistemologies, emphasizing instead a vision of interconnectedness and shared agency amongst all beings in the natural world. The stories are epistemically rooted in land as the creation myths narrate the formation of distinctly feminine biotas. Anishinaabe thought processes stems from land. The creation of land in the stories is the result of complex cyclical processes that highlight “the emergent properties of the natural world” (Simpson 91). The Ojibwe are collectively oriented towards aligning themselves with this worldview.

The Ojibwe are further inclined “to relate events and experiences to one another. Indigenous worldviews do not organize perceptions or external events in terms of dualities or priorities, nor do they segregate causal relationships “in hierarchical and dualistic terms” (Allen 59) or arrange events and phenomena within chronological contexts, which distinguishes them from tribal American communities. The feminine and other ecological constructs within the biota are homogeneously linked to one another. Sky-Woman's non-conformity of human-centrism represented through her transgression of the colonial division amongst species, indicates that Anishinaabe epistemologies function both independently and differently from Eurocentric epistemic perspectives.

Tribal American societies, with their accompanying “tribal consciousness and attendant social structures,” differ enormously from those of the Western world, and tribal realities can only be understood when researched within contexts distinctly Indigenous to each specific tribe, using paradigms that embody epistemologies rooted in that particular tribal community and its “tribal matrix” (Allen 247). The a-chronological interconnectivity amongst species in the oral stories and epistemes, is also synchronously reflected in the Anishinaabe conception of time. The relational interaction between Sky-Woman and the animal species ensures the continuance of the central aspect of Anishinaabe epistemological framework—land.

The Ojibwe epistemological framework is characterized by the intertwining of both “theory and

praxis”, which are generated through the continuous interaction with Indigenous territories and “Indigenous processes inherently physical, intellectual, and spiritual” (Simpson 23). Processes such as “mapping, storytelling, and continuation” function as means of asserting Indigenous presence in colonized areas and further mediate “the renunciation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry” (Simpson 196). Ceremonial practices, within the context of tribal realities, can be understood as the “ritual enactment of a specialized perception” linked to a cosmic relationship, while creation myths serve as a “prose record of that relationship” (Allen 61). The ceremony, with its attendant ritualistic practices such as “incantation, song, dance, and prayer,” functions as the central tribal tradition “from which all allied songs and stories are derived”, and its primary purpose “is to integrate” members of a specific tribal community across space, time, and through dimensions beyond the material. The Ojibwe epistemological framework emphasizes the interconnectedness of knowledge, ritual, and community, fostering a holistic understanding of existence that transcends colonial narratives and reasserts Indigenous ways of being.

The ceremony fuses “the individual with his or her fellows, the community of people with that of the other tribal clan societies, and the larger communal group with the worlds beyond this one” (Allen 62). The concept of communal kinship, which transcends the chronological branching of hereditary and lineage, is “the bedrock of tribal life” and “necessarily includes all beings that inhabit the tribe’s universe” (Allen 63). The ecological species in Indigenous biotas and celestial worlds across the spiralic spatiotemporal framework are also included in the perceptual system of the tribe. The Ojibwe oral tradition functions as the primary epistemic practice that reinforces the Indigenous cyclic conception of time through its transgression of linear time. The Indigenous cyclic spatial construct signifies the continuum orientation of creation.

The cycle represents recurrence of the central temporal events namely the destruction and re-creation of the Earth. The cyclic spatial construct permeates across all tribal American cultures, and symbolizes “cycles of creative energies, and continual processes that bring forth more life, creation and thinking”. Encoded in creation stories across tribal American societies is “the original instruction represented in the form of Indigenous resurgence” (Simpson 24). The emergence of Indigeneity through the narrative application of the oral stories further “create networks across time and space, and generates doorways for new theoretical understandings to emerge” (Simpson 195). The act of storytelling is integral to the continuation of Indigenous societies is “connected to homelands, and is crucial to the cultural and political

resurgence of Indigenous nations” (Corntassel, Chaw-win-is, T’lakwadzi 137). The land ensures the cyclic continuance of Anishinaabe tribal communities and epistemologies. The third epistemic insight derived from the re-creation story is the function of Indigenous land in the formation of the Anishinaabe pedagogical framework. “The land, Aki, is both context and process” (Simpson 151). The land—wholly feminine—functions as both the literal and metaphysical “foundation of Indigenous and Anishinaabe thought processes,” (Simpson 213) and is responsible for the formation of “nature developed thought systems that are process and context oriented” (Simpson 91). The concept of communal kinship, which transcends the chronological branching of hereditary and lineage, is “the bedrock of tribal life” and “necessarily includes all beings that inhabit the tribe’s universe” (Allen 63). This interconnectedness between land, kinship, and thought systems highlights the foundational role of land in shaping the Indigenous worldview, where all beings are seen as part of an integrated and dynamic web of relationships.

It is Sky-Woman who gives birth to the Anishinaabe and turns herself into an island. These instances denote the Anishinaabe interprets land as feminine. “The land is mother. All symbols in the creation stories are connected with woman-ness, and through her to the universal feminine principle of creation, while the land and the people constitute a unitary whole, which “is the fundamental idea that permeates American Indian tribal existence” (Allen 119). The Earth is the First Woman and she “designates the beginning of the animal world, the plant world and human beings” (Watts 27). The Indigenous interpretation of femininity within a tribal Anishinaabe framework, is rooted in the association of womanhood with the creation of thought, tribal thought-processes, and cosmologies. The Ojibwe woman is the “center of the psychic or spiritual unity of her people. She is perceived as the hub of the wheel. It is by virtue of her gift, her ability, that “the people live and are a people” (Allen 204), and through her presence, “the people are connected to one another in ways more than language, culture, or proximity can assure”, with Sky-Woman functioning independently in re-creating the Earth, free from the interference of settler-colonial notions of hierarchy and patriarchy.

It is Sky-Woman's conscious exercising of this intelligible agency within an Indigenous spatial dimension, devoid of Eurocentric epistemic influences that results in the material manifestation of land. The land in the re-creation story is both the product of Sky-Woman's intelligible consciousness and possesses the same conscious intelligence, since Sky-Woman transforms herself into land distributing her agency to other ecological constructs. Colonial epistemologies interpret land as a non-living and

stationary capitalist resource, utilized for the expansion of existing settler structures. Anishinaabe worldview interprets land as an extension of independent, intelligent feminine agency, and as the source of Indigenous epistemes. The ceremonial narration and enactment of the stories bridges “the gap between isolate human being and lonely landscape” (Allen 120). In response to “the dispossessive forces of settler colonization in both historical and current manifestations,” the ceremonial stories are enacted “to reconnect Indigenous bodies to land” and protect Indigenous knowledge systems associated with the land (Coulthard Simpson 254). The reciprocal relationship between the land and its tribe generates the Indigenous processes, and knowledge responsible for the cultural continuum of the tribe.

The narration of the creation stories ensures the transmission of tribal and ancestral teachings, on the cultural and epistemic significance of land across chronological time. The oral tradition also functions in preserving epistemic teachings rooted in land to ensure the cyclic continuation of Indigenous American sovereignty, in the present centrally oriented towards the expansion of settler-colonial and capitalist structures.

“Anishinaabe conceptualizations of time and space present an ongoing intervention to linear thinking” (Simpson 152). The colonial structuring of time allows the chronological arrangement of sequential events where the past is negated, the present and future are causally oriented towards Euro-American expansion. The ceremonial enactment of the creation stories is “more than a linear revival of Indigenous cultures in the present”, as this resurgent act represents “a reconstitution of other parameters of sensing time and space that subvert dominant ways of knowing and being” (Martineau Ritskes 8). In this way, the Anishinaabe framework reclaims time and space as fluid and interconnected, offering a transformative challenge to the rigid, linear structures imposed by colonial ideologies.

The routes generated within colonized spatial dimensions through the ritualized creation of de-colonized spaces are represented through movement “in lines, words, performances and sounds that break through colonial enclosures to open spaces of imagination and creativity”, while the “ruptural potentiality” of the oral ceremonial tradition mediates the re-arrangement of causal temporality, embodying non-linear perceptions of time (Martineau Ritskes 10). Each narrative construct in the creation stories such as Sky-Woman, the sea-turtle, the muskrat, and the land with its formation represent central aspects of the Anishinaabe epistemic and theoretical framework. The presence of Sky-Woman, her act of

creating the Anishinaabe and re-creating the land, represents the predominant influence of gynocentric epistemes in the formation of tribal traditions and ritual practices. The presence of ecological species such as the sea-turtle and the muskrat, signify that intelligible agency is equally attributed to non-human species. The symbioses between the feminine and ecological constructs in the creation stories further indicate the primary function of non-human species, in determining the identities of tribal members in relation with specific animal species.

The totemic associations between Anishinaabe and animal species results in the formation of clan systems. The Anishinaabe tribal worldview interprets all non-human species as possessing intelligent agential awareness. Totemic clans are formed when individual tribal members are linked to specific animal species, rooted in a tribal understanding of a shared trait between the Anishinaabe and other ecological species. The arrangement and practice of the clan system in tribal societies function as “a way of intimately connecting people to animal nations” (Simpson 116). In this way, the Anishinaabe framework reclaims time and space as fluid and interconnected, offering a transformative challenge to the rigid, linear structures imposed by colonial ideologies.

Anishinaabe tribal societies are “profoundly influenced by the ecological world”, with their attendant social and political structures being informed by “ecological non-human species that exist across time and space” (Simpson 117). The ceremonial stories narrated by the female dreamer teaches her audience to “engage in a form of existence that generates a close relationship with the animal world, the ancestors and relations in the spirit world” (Simpson 158). Totemic clan formations are also rooted in the tribal belief that all degrees of creation are homogeneously linked to one another, since they stem from a common creator—“Gizhe Mnidoo” (Watts 21). The relational symbioses within Sky-Woman, sea-turtle, and the muskrat results in the creation of land. The symbioses instance in the re-creation story indicates that ecological non-human species, also play a significant role in the formation and preservation of Anishinaabe knowledge. Totemic clans within a tribal society “have responsibilities to a particular geographic region of the territory, and their relationship with that region is a source of knowledge, spirituality, and sustenance”, while specific tribal members associated with a clan are also required to “maintain and nurture a special relationship with their clan animal” (Simpson 33). The re-creation story begins with the Earth covered in flood. The oral story ends with the creation of land and the formation of ‘Turtle Island’.

The overarching influence of these constructs is

primarily represented through the transformation of the Earth, from an inhospitable planet to the abode of the Anishinaabe. Settler epistemologies insist on a dichotomous distinction between the elements—soil and water. The Anishinaabe perspective insists on a unitary association amongst all aspects of the biota, irrespective of the epistemic divisions mediated by Western sciences. Tribal societies “perceive their world in a unified-field fashion,” that broadly varies from the “single-focus perception that generally characterizes Western masculinist, monotheistic modes of perception” (Allen 244).

The form of agency that enables non-human constructs to function as conscious and independent actors within an ecosystem is referred to as “place-thought” (Watts 21). ‘Thought’ translates to a form of consciousness normatively denied to non-human actors through the application of Eurocentric epistemologies. ‘Thought’ refers to the intelligible capability of creating individual epistemic spaces independent of settler-colonial influences. ‘Place’ translates to the manifestation of a material plane through the application of agency exercised by non-human actors that functions as an epistemic space situated within the Indigenous tribal framework.

“Place-Thought” constitutes a distinctive aspect of Anishinaabe and Native American epistemologies that situates all forms of non-human actors—ecological and celestial—as central in the creation and continuance of Indigenous knowledge, with the two archetypical iterations of the creation narrative that embody the Indigenous concept of “place-thought” being the fifth and sixth fires of creation, the fifth of which is characterized by the celestial formation of Ojibwe epistemes by the universal creator or “Gizhe-Mnidoow”. The sixth fire is characterized by the creation of First Woman or the Earth.

The creation stories provide an alternate interpretation of the how the universe came to be, vastly different from the European interpretation of the same temporal event. While the biblical account of creation is characterized by the treatment of space as an isolated and exclusive dimension, the tribal creation stories “describe a theoretical understanding of the world,” through the unitary application of both place and thought. Tribal teachings reminds us that both spatial and temporal dimensions are singularly entwined, and is manifested through the celestial association between the feminine deities and ecological species. While Eurocentric creation discourses establish the hegemonic supremacy of the European male form in the creation of the world, tribal narratives centered on creation emphasize the symbiosis between “the spiritual and feminine”, with tribal American

accounts of creation being broadly characterized by “the common intersections of the female, animals, the spirit world, the mineral and plant world” (Watts 21). Tribal societies within Indigenous biotas are characterized by interactions within these intersecting worlds than singular human-centric interactions. The celestial-feminine and other non-human ecological actors in the re-creation story also influences its narrative orientation.

The over-arching influence of these constructs on the narrative trajectory of the re-creation story is represented through the function of “place-thought” (Watts 21) in the geological formation of Indigenous territories. Its application is evident in the triangulated interaction amongst the feminine and ecological actors, such as First Woman, Sky Woman, and Grandmother Moon, who represent Indigenous territories as “the literal embodiment of the feminine principle”. The application of “place-thought” is “an extension of her circumstance and communication with the water and animals—her agency”; through the symbiotic interaction with the turtle, Sky-Woman “is not only able to create land but becomes territory itself”, thereby becoming the foundational epistemic basis upon which tribal societies across time are built. This interconnectedness of the feminine, ecological, and epistemic realms within the re-creation story underscores the integral role of land, agency, and relationality in shaping the ongoing existence and knowledge systems of Indigenous societies.

Tribal societies as a whole are “demarcated by territory which is an extension of Sky Woman’s original circumstance”, with her being “present in the relationships between the intersecting dimensions” (Watts 23). The relational interaction within these constructs—through the application of “place-thought” (Watts 21)—determines the epistemic orientation of the oral stories. The re-creation of land signifies the production of Indigenous epistemes cyclically transmitted through the narrative mechanism of the oral tradition.

II. GYNOCENTRIC EPISTEMOLOGICAL DERIVATIONS FROM THE OJIBWE SIXTH ORDER OF CREATION STORY

The influence of the non-human constructs in the creation of ‘Turtle Island’ signifies the epistemic impact of these constructs, extends beyond the narrative confines of the oral stories. The celestial-feminine and animal agents in the oral stories are not stationary elements. They function as embodiments of Anishinaabe cosmologies. The narrative sequences that constitute the sixth order of creation are as follows. Of the seven orders of creation, the sixth order is significant as this specific creation story outlines the birth

of the first woman who is also referred to as Earth Woman. In the fifth order of creation, “Gizhe-Mnidoo” transmits all his knowledge into seeds, and in the sixth order, the first woman in the form of the Earth is created; however, the Earth is barren, and it is “Gizhe-Mnidoo” who mediates the symbiosis between the seeds encoded with his knowledge and Earth Woman (Watts 21). Life is created on Earth through the formation of Indigenous biotas for the habitation of all life forms.

The specific narrative instance in the sixth order of creation story that represents the primacy of Indigenous femininity, is the symbioses between Earth Woman and the seeds of knowledge. The seeds encoded with the originary basis of Indigenous cosmologies, centered on the creation of the universe and the Earth represents Anishinaabe epistemologies. “Those seeds carried all of the creative energy, all of the thoughts and the potential for all of life. Then Gzhwe Mnidoo made Mother the Earth. The very first woman created was a woman that would give birth to all of Creation” (Simpson 38). It is the symbiotic interaction between Earth Woman and the seeds that constitutes the originary creation of life. The merging between the two Indigenous constructs signifies that Anishinaabe knowledge, are epistemically rooted in and around the spatial orientation of the feminine form. Prior to the symbioses the Earth is devoid of life forms. After the conjoining with the seeds of knowledge, Indigenous ecosystems are created that houses all forms of life.

“Gzhwe Mnidoo looked upon Creation. Her life blood flowing below and above the ground. Her veins and her lifeblood, her bloodlines give life to all. She was created first—the first woman” (Simpson 38). These ecosystems constitute Indigenous lands and territories created upon a ground universally interpreted as feminine, within the framework of Anishinaabe cosmologies. Both the creation stories on Earth Woman and Sky-Woman, teaches Indigenous listeners the land is spatially and epistemically feminine. “From her breast came all there is—the winged of the air, the swimmers, the four legged, the plants, the crawlers, the trees, and the seas that moved across the land” (Simpson 39). Anishinaabe cosmological frameworks “are not an abstraction but a literal and animate extension of Sky Woman and First Woman’s thoughts” (Watts 22). The primary epistemic insight derived from the sixth order of creation story, is the Indigenous Anishinaabe interpretation of duality.

The simultaneous presence of dual and contradictory constructs constantly recurs in the sixth order of creation. The first instance of such a duality is evident in the parallel presence of “Gizhe Mnidoo” and Earth Woman, where, according to Anishinaabe cosmological accounts of

the originary creation of the universe, “Gizhe Mnidoo” is normatively described as male (Watts 21). This duality within the creation story reflects the foundational Anishinaabe belief in the interconnectedness of all life and the simultaneous coexistence of masculine and feminine forces in shaping both the physical and epistemic landscape of the world.

There are similar Ojibwe mythic accounts that describe ‘the Great Creator’ as unisexual. In the sixth order of creation story, the first instance of duality is represented through the binary distinction in gender as seen in the case of “Gizhe Mnidoo” and Earth-Woman. The symbioses between contradictory constructs constitute another recurring narrative theme in Anishinaabe cosmologies. The symbiotic association between varying Indigenous constructs evident in the Ojibwe creation stories, represents the unitary and homogeneous epistemic associations within the collective Anishinaabe cosmological knowledge. In the oral re-creation story, the relational symbioses between the feminine form and the animal constructs represent the singularity that underlies Ojibwe epistemologies. In the sixth order of creation story, a similar instance of epistemological homogeneity is evident in the symbiotic interaction between Earth Woman and “Gizhe Mnidoo,” (Watts 21) in the form of the seeds encoded with his knowledge. The dichotomous distinction in gender characteristic of Anishinaabe cosmologies varies with respect to the normative binary division in gender characteristic of Eurocentric epistemologies. The Eurocentric epistemological framework is characterized by masculinist, hierarchical, and anthropocentric notions.

Implicit within the gender binary construct in the Eurocentric theoretical framework, is the designation of the woman as the ‘weaker sex’ and the suggestion of superiority bestowed upon the male. The Eurocentric interpretation of the binary construct further implies an inequitable distribution in agency amongst the two sexes, with the male exercising greater agency and the situating of women within the masculinist-authoritarian paradigm. Indigenous feminine primacy constitutes a distinctive aspect of Anishinaabe cosmologies. The first woman or Earth Woman is created in the sixth fire of creation, and man is created in the seventh or final cycle of creation. That man is created after first woman and is born on the soil that represents first woman, suggests that man is dependent on and is by extension the child of first woman. “Original Man was the last to be created from the first woman. Gzhwe Mnidoo, having taken four parts of her body—soil, air, water, and fire—to mold a vessel, thereby reverses the normative supremacy associated with the ‘greater sex,’ nullifying hegemonic notions of gender, as “Gzhwe Mnidoo lowered him down to the Earth as he is the child

of great Mother. Anishinaabe touched and met his Mother” (Simpson 39). The symbiotic interaction between the celestial female and male entities in the sixth fire of creation story, denotes the equitable distribution of agency between both the sexes.

This instance further denotes the absence of hierarchical notions of gender as evident in the dual and mutualistic function of both feminine and masculine deities, in ensuring the cyclic continuance of Anishinaabe tribal cosmologies and other modes of knowledge. The seeds encoded with “Gizhe Mnidoo’s” (Watts 21) knowledge and its merging with the first woman, represents the sexual union between both the gender constructs. The act of creation that recurs in the oral stories represents the foundational basis of Anishinaabe epistemic and cosmological worldviews. The formation of Indigenous land and its temporal continuance constitutes the theoretical baseboard of the Anishinaabe tribal framework. The temporal recurrence of creation evident in multiple iterations of the oral stories on the genesis of Indigenous ecosystems, denotes the centrality of this specific temporal event in determining both the formation and orientation of Indigenous Anishinaabe knowledge. The creation of Anishinaabe epistemologies, cosmologies, and tribal traditions is ensured through the practice of the oral tradition. The unification between the dual genders and the resultant creation of the Earth in the sixth fire of creation story, signifies the point of temporal origin that functions as the basis of Anishinaabe ways of knowing and being. Another instance of duality is evident in the Anishinaabe interpretation of two Indigenous constructs, namely—Grandmother Moon and Grandfather Sun. The two Indigenous constructs are created in the third fire of creation. After the sixth order of creation is completed, a tripartite relational connection is established within the Sun, Moon, and the Earth. The Sun is interpreted as masculine.

The Moon and the Earth—Grandmother Moon and Earth Woman—are feminine. In the third fire of creation, the Anishinaabe interpretation of duality is represented through gender binary construct along with the dichotomy established between light and darkness. “This is the Creator’s Fire, Giizis, the Sun. Within that great circle was the partner to the Giizis, Grandmother the Moon. Dibiki-Giizis is the nighttime Sun who would give light in darkness”. Duality is established through the creation of the Sun and the Moon. “Grandmother Moon is the Grand woman of the universe who governs the seasonal cycles that renews all the life created” (Simpson 38). The genders are assigned to both the cosmological constructs, based on their degree of ability to shed light. The Sun is interpreted as masculine, since its ability to shed light results in the preservation of Earth Woman.

The Moon is interpreted as feminine, based on its similar ability to emit light at night to preserve the Indigenous ecosystems within Earth Woman. The relational interaction between the Sun and the Moon establishes the mutual dependency, between both the gender constructs in ensuring the preservation of Earth Woman. The interplay between binary constructs is also represented through the light/dark dichotomy. Within the critical framework of Anishinaabe tribal cosmologies, light is Indigenously interpreted as the source of Earth woman’s sustenance. The Anishinaabe interpretation of duality is primarily rooted in the third order of creation. If light functions as the giver of life and source of creation according to the Anishinaabe interpretation of duality in the third order of creation, then darkness represents the absence of creation. The interaction of Earth Woman with the masculine Sun and the feminine Moon, is also characterized by a relational dependency within the Indigenous constructs.

Indigenous listeners of the third and sixth orders of creation stories are reminded of the centrality that underlies the Indigenous feminine form, represented through the mutual function of the feminine constructs—Grandmother Moon and Earth Woman, in the cyclic creation and continuance of the Anishinaabe tribe and their native territories. The relational interconnection of Earth Woman with Grandmother Moon and Grandfather Sun teaches Ojibwe listeners in the present that their tribal traditions and rituals are characterized by an acknowledgment of these Indigenous constructs, and their participation in the formation of Anishinaabe tribal cosmologies and epistemologies.

III. CONCLUSION

The ongoing violence against Indigenous women in America sheds light on the need for the reclamation of lost gynocentric practices, and the resurgence of tribal feminine voices. The paper establishes a fundamental epistemic conception rooted in Indigenous femininity characteristic of Anishinaabe tribal culture. The paper addresses the vital role of Indigenous women in ensuring the continuance of tribal traditions in the colonized technoscientific present. The paper proves the feminine deities in the creation stories are animate extensions of tribal epistemologies crucial for the continuum of Indigenous tribes. The paper contributes to the continuing Indigenous efforts at challenging the epistemic dominance of Eurocentric thought processes, and its colonizing influence over Indigenous epistemic perspectives.

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Storytelling as Survival: Creativity, Voice and Healing in Select Stories of Alice Walker's *The Way Forward is with a Broken Heart*

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Abstract— This paper examines storytelling as a means of survival in Alice Walker's *The Way Forward is with a Broken Heart*. It focuses on the narratives "To My Young Husband," "Kindred Spirit," and "Blaze." The study places the text within feminist narratology and trauma theory. It argues that storytelling is not merely an act of representation but also a means of transforming knowledge. Walker's mixed narrative challenges traditional boundaries between fiction and autobiography. It highlights emotional experience as a source of knowledge. Through storytelling, the main character reshapes experiences of love, loss, and displacement into meanings that support both healing and resistance. The paper shows that fragmentation, rather than signalling a failure in the narrative, serves as a technique for reflecting trauma and enabling its exploration. In the end, storytelling becomes a means of survival, reclaiming voice, rebuilding identity, and redefining the "broken heart" as a source of creative and ethical renewal.



Keywords— creative and ethical renewal, feminist narratology, fragmentation, healing and resistance, storytelling.

I. INTRODUCTION

From the anti-slavery and women's rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s to the contemporary Black Feminist Movement, Black American women fought for liberation and struggled against all forces that silenced them. Whether called Womanism, Black Feminism, or African-American Feminism, these movements sought social, economic, and political equality. They also aspired to an appropriate and progressive vision of social justice for all Black American women. Everywhere, the oppressed are destined to abandon their cultural and racial identity. The hegemony imposed by the oppressor created a sense of inferiority among the oppressed regarding their culture, race, and tradition. In the postcolonial setting, the defeated race is slowly awakening from its inferior position.

The articulation by Black people, especially Black women, deconstructed the negative stereotypes around them, which

were a hindrance to their struggle for literary recognition from the oppressive hegemonic literary canon. Racism and sexism have been interrelated in the history of America, and Black women writers such as Alice Walker, Toni Morrison and Paule Marshall mirrored these two social evils in their novels. Even today, Black women writers continue to analyse the relationship between class, race and gender. "Continuing sexual discrimination, the imposition of the military draft and Federal incompetence in Civil Rights encouraged women, homosexuals, lesbians, Indians and most of all Blacks to believe that they would win their rightful status only by energetic campaigning" (M. Walker 223).

The Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement, which empowered Black men, and the White Women's Liberation Movement, which gained rights for white middle-class women, were of no use in empowering

Black women. Black women found themselves at the lowest rung of the social ladder and realised that if they could escape all forms of oppression by any means, then all kinds of oppression would be ameliorated. Black women approached Black feminism as a means to end multiple, triple or double jeopardy. Bearing in mind that the white feminist movements were of no use to black women's liberation, it was Alice Walker who coined the term "womanist" to distinguish black women's feminism from white women's. Asserting that feminist is to lavender as womanist is to purple, Walker suggested that Womanism is a form of feminism with Black women as the subject of its discourse. Unlike feminism, which concentrated only on women's upliftment, womanism focused on the writings of both Black men and women.

Quite different from the declarative stance of the traditional American novel, Black women's novels are works of inquiry. They are inquiries into the self, a yearning to sing their own songs, and a desire to prove that they are bold enough to face the world, irrespective of the discrimination they face because of race, class and gender. Black feminist theory aims at achieving gender equality for Black women and, thereby, eradicating racism as well as sexism. As Beverly Guy Sheftall explains, "black feminism's goals are to 'provide clarity about the impact and interface of racism, sexism, heterosexism and classism on the lives of African American women and to create a world in which race, class, gender hierarchies are no longer viable'" (xviii). In addition to giving their works a folk sensibility that incorporates both endurance and resistance, they aim to create narratives rich in social and cultural analysis from the perspective of the oppressed. They reject a binary of victim and hero, avoid the rhetoric of nationalism, protest or accommodation, examine the positive and negative aspects of the Black community and construct sophisticated and artistically successful fictions. They emphasise the survival of Black people, especially Black women, through open resistance and their desire for true freedom.

As an Afro-American woman, Alice Walker always sought to give voice to the oppressed, gendered subalterns in her works. A womanist who consistently criticised racist and sexist hegemony, she portrayed women characters in search of self-definition and spiritual redemption. All her works examine black women's journey towards identity and fulfilment through harmonious co-existence with their menfolk. Alice Walker opposes the views of Black male authors such as Du Bois, Richard Wright, James Weldon Johnson and Fredrick Douglass, who emphasised race issues while ignoring gender-based atrocities. She believes that male writers present a distorted account of the whole racial suffering, because in most cases they misrepresent

or ignore Black women. All the female characters in her novels are bold enough to embark on quests for self-discovery and are willing to change their circumstances. Whatever the consequences, these women emerge as rebels, coming through all trials and tribulations.

Alice Walker's *The Way Forward is with a Broken Heart* holds a unique place in contemporary literature. It stands out not only for its themes of love and loss but also for its innovative structure and approach to knowledge. The book defies easy categorisation as either memoir or fiction. Instead, it occupies a space that allows for both the sharing and the reshaping of lived experience. This blending is intentional; it reflects the changing nature of emotional and psychological states. The selected stories "To My Young Husband," "Kindred Spirit," and "Blaze" form a focused yet rich body of work that examines how storytelling relates to survival. These narratives connect not through plot but through shared themes, particularly their exploration of emotional vulnerability, relationship complexities, and the process of rebuilding one's identity. Rather than emphasising closure or resolution, Walker highlights continuity despite disruption. She suggests that survival is about incorporating pain into one's understanding of life, rather than overcoming it. This paper argues that storytelling is the primary means by which this integration occurs.

II. THE POLITICS OF VULNERABILITY IN "TO MY YOUNG HUSBAND"

"To My Young Husband" is an important text for exploring the politics of emotional expression. It reveals the vulnerability inherent in close relationships while examining the uneven power dynamics that shape them. This opening story serves as the lyrical, autobiographical foundation of the collection. It recounts a passionate marriage set during the turbulent Civil Rights era in Mississippi. Closely based on Walker's real-life marriage to a white Jewish Civil Rights Lawyer, the narrative shows how their shared idealistic goals initially brought them together in a magical bubble. However, as time goes on and they move to Brooklyn, the stark realities of race and their different identities, his as a career-focused Jewish man and hers as a young Black female artist, gradually drive them apart, leading to a painful divorce "But you would not read the thin paperback novel by this black woman I loved. It was as if you drew a line, in this curious territory" (Walker 8). Through this reflection, the narrator views storytelling as a means of survival. She ultimately expresses gratitude for the ten-year journey, turning her heartbreak into a source of wisdom, "I believe only the

moment we are in is promised, and that it, whatever it is, should always be 'the future' we want" (50).

In this context, love goes beyond mere feelings; it becomes a structure tied to broader social and cultural hierarchies. The narrative stands out for not glamorising or sentimentalising emotional pain. Rather, it presents vulnerability as a means of gaining knowledge, helping the narrator understand herself and the relationships around her. Expressing pain becomes a form of resistance to societal expectations that require women to contain their emotions. Moreover, the narrative challenges the division between strength and weakness. Emotional openness, often seen as a sign of weakness, is redefined as strength because it enables expression. By sharing her pain, the protagonist claims her experience, transforming vulnerability into empowerment. From a storytelling perspective, the address ("To My Young Husband") situates the narrative within a relational context. The narrative is not merely about the other person; it is directed towards them, blending personal reflection with dialogue. This reinforces the view that storytelling is a relational act that both builds and questions identity.

III. RELATIONAL IDENTITY AND SPEECH LIMITATIONS IN "KINDRED SPIRIT"

"Kindred Spirit" explores relationships through the lens of recognition. The story follows Rosa, deeply hurt by her recent divorce and feeling lost. She struggles to face her family at her grandfather's funeral. Later, she travels to Florida with her sister, Barbara, to see their Aunt Lily. Rosa sees the trip as a necessary penance. During their visit, Rosa battles intense depression and feels distant from her family because of her differing political views and strong emotional needs. "Was disappointment, then, the hardest thing to bear? Or was it the consciousness of being powerless to change things, to help?" (62). The story's healing moment comes at the end, when Barbara wears their late grandfather's old fedora to match Rosa's. "But then, just when she was almost gone, Barbara put on their grandfather's other hat, and reached for her hand" (67). This simple, symbolic act reaffirms their bond as true "kindred spirits" and helps break Rosa's deep isolation. The idea of a "kindred spirit" implies a connection that goes beyond surface differences. However, the narrative complicates this idea by highlighting the inherent tensions in identification. The relationship in this story both affirms and challenges personal identity. While recognising a "kindred spirit" can validate one's feelings, it also raises questions about the boundaries of the self. How does relating to another affect individual identity? The story does not resolve this tension; instead, it presents it as a

valuable avenue for exploration. In this context, storytelling serves as a bridge to help navigate these complexities. Through narrative reflection, the protagonist examines recognition without fully merging with another or completely separating from them. This aligns with feminist ideas about relational identity, especially the notion that the self is shaped through interactions rather than being a fixed entity. The narrative also addresses the limitations of language in capturing complex relationships. Trying to express feelings of connection reveals the shortcomings of traditional language. This need for a more experimental narrative form emphasises that storytelling is not just about describing but also about creating experience.

IV. MEMORY AND ALTERITY IN "BLAZE"

"Blaze" focuses more on time, highlighting the link between memory, narrative, and identity. In this brave and reflective piece, Walker examines the complex, often delicate dynamics of interracial female friendships. The story features Black women who actively confront and navigate their complicated relationships with white women in America. By discussing themes of racial tension, unspoken biases, and shared vulnerabilities with honesty and humour, the characters engage in open dialogue to address systemic divides. Through this exploration of discomfort, the story fosters emotional healing, demonstrating that loving relationships between Black and white women can happen when both sides are ready to move beyond cultural barriers. The narrative engages with the past not as a fixed set of events but as something that can change with new interpretations. The distance between experience and storytelling allows new meanings to emerge. Events that once felt chaotic become clearer through storytelling. This reflects trauma theory's focus on the importance of revisiting experiences over time "There was the rage, a shut door that seemed to be made of iron; but then way behind it, in the fields that encompassed her childhood, under a blue sky that was endless and magnificent, was the friendship, right in there with all the other good things of life. A time of mutual trust and happiness" (129). However, the narrative avoids a straightforward path to closure. Instead of showing a clear shift from trauma to healing, it emphasises the ongoing nature of storytelling. Memory is constantly revisited, suggesting that identity is an ever-evolving story. The idea of "re-authoring" is relevant here. Through storytelling, the narrator doesn't just recount her past. She reshapes it, reassigning meanings and altering its significance. This turns narrative into a space of agency, where the self is

actively formed through interpretation rather than merely affected by experiences.

V. CONCLUSION

In Walker's work, storytelling functions as a way of knowing. It transforms feelings into intelligible concepts, turning personal experiences into shared meaning. This underscores that storytelling is not merely expressive but also generative of knowledge. The assertion of voice is a vital form of resistance in the text. By sharing her story, the protagonist challenges systems that seek to silence women's voices. This aligns with feminist critiques of how certain forms of knowledge are often overlooked or marginalised. Fragmentation in the narrative does not signal confusion; rather, it is a deliberate strategy that reflects the disconnection of experience. It allows multiple perspectives and times to coexist, resisting the simplifications of straightforward narratives. The stories selected from the collection work together to convey a complex relationship between disruption and rebuilding. What unfolds is not a straightforward recovery story but a continuous process in which storytelling mediates between lived experience and meaning. This structure challenges traditional ideas about past and present, suggesting that the act of telling shapes both. The past is not fixed; it is continually reshaped through storytelling, while the present is influenced by how it is understood through narratives.

Additionally, the text emphasises the ethical dimension of storytelling. To recount one's experience is to take responsibility for its meaning. In this way, storytelling becomes a practice of self-reflection and accountability. Walker's *The Way Forward is with a Broken Heart* ultimately reshapes storytelling as a practice that blends art, ethics, and survival. The stories show that narrative is not merely a reflection of experience. Instead, it is a key means of forming and understanding experience. The "broken heart" becomes more than a symbol of loss; it becomes a vital source for creating knowledge, identity, and meaning. Storytelling thus serves as both a means of survival and a way to rethink the self, highlighting the transformative power of narrative in the face of emotional disruption.

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Non-human Narratives in Lisa See's *The Tea Girl of Hummingbird Lane*

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Abstract— Since the publication of Maxine Hong Kingston's *Woman Warrior*, storytelling has become a major narrative device in Chinese American literature. While some critics emphasize the importance of storytelling in the articulation of identity and in the examination of acculturation and cultural dislocation, others question its limitations and unreliability which seem to be recognized by some Chinese American women writers, such as Lisa See. To supplement the limited knowledge of first-person narrators, See employs tea as narrative devices in *The Tea Girl of Hummingbird Lane*. In addition, this novel includes written texts that supplement first person narration. A new-materialist perspective reveals that non-human things narrate or act. When Lisa See endows non-human things with narrative power, they are no longer inert objects but storied matter. Drawing on new materialism, this paper will address how non-human narratives and written texts can compensate for the limits of human narrators and play active roles in shaping the text's narrative and aesthetic expressions.



Keywords— Tea, New materialisms, *The Tea Girl of Hummingbird Lane*

I. STORYTELLING AND STORIED MATTER IN CHINESE AMERICAN LITERATURE

Maxine Hong Kingston's *Woman Warrior* underscores the Chinese tradition of the “talk-story” as a major trope in Chinese American women's narratives. Kingston's narrator positions herself as a young Chinese American girl who seeks her identity by telling stories about her father's sister, the no name woman, her mother, Brave Orchid's lifetime in China and in America, her aunt, Moon Orchid's life, as well

as by re-telling the tales of Mulan and Ts'ai Yen. Through the narrator's interweaving of these episodes, the Chinese tradition of “talk-story” becomes a main narrative device in negotiating the issue of identity. In retelling these stories of women's life in Old China and their life experiences in America, the characters are able to negotiate and articulate their identity. While some critics emphasize the importance of storytelling in the articulation of identity, others question its reliability and even charge that storytelling separates

Chinese American literature from the western canon. Dunick claims that “Throughout Amy Tan’s novels, talk-story promotes multiple levels of misunderstanding between both Chinese-speaking mothers and English-speaking daughters and between persons who speak different Chinese dialects” (5). She quotes Yuanyuan who: “... recognizes the limits of talk-story in Tan’s novels by arguing that they embody a distinct aspect of loss” (5). Depending solely on the narrators’ memories, these talk-stories “do not represent a stable text” but “often signal an erasure or loss of China as referent for the American-born listeners” (Dunick 5-6). Based on this factor, Dunick agrees with Yuan yuan’s assertion that readers should “... call attention to the inability of oral talk-story in Tan’s novels to establish and maintain an intergenerational cultural memory of China as a cultural homeland...” (6). Furthermore, Dunick illustrates that “talk-story cannot function properly for these Chinese mothers and American daughters without a source of mediation” (8). I agree with Dunick and Yuan yuan that Tan indeed realizes the limitations and unreliability of “talk-story” narration since the oral narrators in her first three novels are usually Chinese mothers who hold the limited knowledge of first-person narrators and narrate depending on their unreliable memories. To supplement the limited knowledge of first-person narrators, Tan also creates other-than-human narrators, such as storied food in *The Kitchen God’s wife*, narrative bones and written texts in *The Bonesetter’s Daughter*.

Like Amy Tan, besides employing the device of storytelling, Lisa See also explores the mother-daughter relation and the question of identity through non-human narrators and some written texts. In her bestselling *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan*, See explores sisterhood through nushu, a traditional Chinese female writing, and the medium of a fan. Likewise, in her latest novel, *The Tea Girl of Hummingbird Lane*, along with storytelling, tea and some written texts play crucial roles in characterization and plot structure. In a new-materialist perspective, besides humans, non-human things are able to narrate. Under the influence of the non-human turn, Chinese scholar Shang Biwu focuses on “non-human narratives” to eliminate the “anthropocentrism” of narrative studies. He defines non-human narratives as “(...) the organization of events

involving non-human entities into a text,” identifying “four main types: narratives of natural objects, narratives of supernatural objects, narratives of artificial objects, and narratives of artificial humans” (Shang 158). Besides, he states that “In narrative works, the non-human entity at the level of both story and discourse usually plays the roles of narrator, character and focuser, thus performing three narrative functions, namely the narrative function, the action function and the observation function” (158). In Shang’s view, as narrators, non-humans can narrate both humans’ and their own stories. And under the guidance of Bruno Latour’s Actor-Network Theory, non-human narrators could be regarded as “(...) actors and not simply the hapless bearers of symbolic projection” (Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 10). As actors, non-humans have active agency and they interact with humans in a network. Drawing on the theories of Lucretius, Spinoza, Gilles Deleuze, and Bruno Latour, political theorist Jane Bennett has also acknowledged widespread agency in living beings and material phenomena. She advocates “thing-power/vibrant materialism” to “dissipate the onto-theological binaries of life/matter, human/animal, organic/inorganic” (Bennett x). In her view, things are no longer passive objects but “vibrant matter” with “thing power.” What’s more, to criticize the ontological binary of the subject and the object, both Latour and Bennett endow non-human things with agency or power and emphasize their interactions with human beings in a network or an assemblage. Approaching the question of things with the insights of quantum physics, Karen Barad theorizes the inseparable interconnection between humans and non-human nature as “intra-actions” as opposed to “inter-action that presumes the prior existence of separate entities” (151). She claims that matter as agency is “intra-active becoming that never sits still” and is “generative” due to “the ontological inseparability/ entanglement of intra-acting agencies” (139). Thus, in Barad’s view, matter is in a process of becoming and mutation, and as such it is constituted in intra-action. Last but not least, in their observation function non-humans serve as focalizers that can observe or examine humans’ behavior and formulate their own experiences. When both Amy Tan and Lisa See endow non-human things with the power of narration, they are no longer inert objects but storied matter. In their works,

non-human narrators supplement human narrators in the construction of the plot and play active roles in shaping the text's narrative and aesthetic expressions.

II. TEA AS A BOND LINKING MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS OVER GENERATIONS

By setting *The Tea Girl of Hummingbird Lane* mainly in China and depicting many things characteristic of that location, Lisa See expresses her enthusiasm for Chinese culture, though only one-eighth ancestry is Chinese. Like her bestselling *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan*, which sets the story of female friendship in a Chinese village, *The Tea Girl of Hummingbird Lane* also centers on women's struggles and solidarity in ethnic Chinese culture. In this novel, See depicts an Akha girl, Liyan, and her family, who align their lives around the seasons and the farming of tea. Many book reviews point out the incredible power of tea in this novel. Emily Gray Tedrowe from *USA Today* remarks: "One of the fascinating elements of See's epic novel is the contrast between the isolated lives of the Akha and the globalized world of China's larger cities – a contrast bridged by tea". Besides bridging the gap between the remote areas and big cities in China, tea plays a crucial role in characterization and plot structure. Specifically, in addition to being a beverage, tea is vibrant matter which acts as a maternal bond, linking mothers and daughters across generations; a drinkable antique, incorporating Akha customs and Chinese tea culture; and a historical nexus merging female family lineage with the political and economic development of China. Finally, it is a medicinal tonic that not only combines different elements to allow body and mind to interact in beneficial ways but also illustrates the necessity of balancing economic development and environmental protection.

See's focus on non-human things in her works may be closely related to her experiences in the antique store of her father's family. She has many memories of those old items and expresses that, "it all fascinates me, the smell of old wood, the touch of objects, it's full of meaning to me. I am connected to my great-grandfather through these objects."ⁱ Since these old things become a nexus between See and her ancestors, it seems that they are not merely inert objects, but also "vibrant matter" or "agentic things" conjured up by new materialists. Drawing on new materialism and cultural

criticism on identity, I will investigate the agentic force of tea in the construction of characters' identity in *The Tea Girl of Hummingbird Lane*. Specifically, I will explore how the materiality of tea and discourse on it mutually articulate the issues of identity and the bonding of the female lineage across time and space.

The grove of old tea trees inherited by Liyan from her maternal line actively accompanies Liyan in her journey of self-discovery. The grove of mother tea trees and the things linked to it as well as the discourse on tea effect the shift of Liyan's identity from marginalized ethnic girl and helpless mother to self-reliant tea trader.

Growing up in a male-dominated society, Liyan is deemed to be worthless like her dowry, a primitive grove of old tea trees inherited from her mother. The grove is denigrated as a remote and cursed place before Liyan goes there. When taking Liyan to the grove for the first time, her mother recounts the close relation between it and her female lineage, pointing out the enormous value and divinity of old tea trees with their distinctive "yellow threads" that have medicinal power. To her mother, this grove is a sacred place that records her family lineage and provides precious gifts for curing people. Dissenting from her mother's view, Liyan is only able to "see not health and cures but superstition and traditions that hurt people" in this grove (See 47). Ignoring what her mother claims, Liyan remains convinced of the grove's worthlessness due to its remote and hidden location. When facing her so-called dowry, "a dozen of old tea trees" in the midst of which "stands a single tea tree" with nothing valuable apparent to her, Liyan listens to the voice in her mind, "the word that has been so much in my mind lately pounds against the inside of my skull. Worthless. Worthless. Worthless" (43). The old tea trees evoke a strong sense of identification (albeit negative) in Liyan's heart, as she compares her own prospects to this remote grove that seems to reflect her worthlessness as a daughter and a woman. She projects onto the trees the patriarchal perspective of women as mere objects of little value.

Liyan cannot realize the power and inherent worth of this grove of old tea trees until she delivers a baby girl under the protection of the mother tree. On learning that Liyan is pregnant with Sanpa's baby, her mother takes her to deliver secretly in the grove, since having a baby before marriage violates Akha tradition. Throughout the whole process of

the birth, the mother tree, sister trees and even the yellow threads reveal themselves as “vibrant matter” that has a deep intra-action with Li-yan’s body. The grove offers indispensable supportive thing power to facilitate Li-yan’s childbirth. First of all, the lofty geographical location of the old tea trees prompts Li-yan to undertake a climbing exercise before the delivery. This inevitably accelerates her labor process and makes it go smoothly. Li-yan seems to struggle physically due to her prenatal climb and reflects how, “if anything, our journey is speeding my labor” (95). When it comes to the labor process, Li-yan’s “circumstances are calamitous, but in the mother tree’s spreading branches” above her, she “sees a dome of protection” (96). She “grasps a low branch” when more power is needed, and her back “presses against the trunk as she pushes as hard as she can” (96). This description shows that the spreading branches of the old tea trees provide a natural shelter for Li-yan which gives her a strong sense of being protected physically and mentally. When she holds them tightly in her hands, the power of the branches flows into her body, allowing her to finish the labor. Providing an appropriate natural environment and a propitious sanitary condition, the old tea trees show their intrinsic natural force as agentic matter. Li-yan’s successful labor thus demonstrates the intra-connectivity between human and non-human bodies. Moreover, since they cannot take the placenta—“friend-living-with child”—back to the village and bury it under the ancestor shrine, the grove of old trees both accepts the evidence of childbirth and protects Li-yan’s new-born daughter. In addition, in response to A-ma’s order forbidding Li-yan from bringing any men to the old tea trees, the birth of a new daughter overturns the superstitious perception of the death of Li-yan’s grandfather. Li-yan discovers that, though ancient, the old tea trees are not cursed or unlucky for humans. Through numerous intimate “intra-actions” with these trees, Li-yan gives up her previous bias and misconceptions of them. Moved by their strong thing power, she rebuilds her trust in nature. By reinstating the materiality and power of both human and other bodies, the novel expresses the ecological insight that human beings are not outside nature. The Akha women and the trees are material entities sharing the same roots and origins in the land.

As a precious inheritance from her mother’s

generations, the grove can serve as a spiritual guide when Li-yan suffers another setback because of her marital failure and her husband’s death. Liyan becomes an outcast from her village after delivering her baby and surrendering her to the Menghai Social Welfare Institute. However, the sudden appearance of Sanpa and his proposal give her temporary hope. After their marriage, Sanpa takes Liyan to live at the border of Thailand whereupon Liyan finds that her husband has become a drug addict. To escape this desperate situation, Liyan runs into a forest while Sanpa chases her and is killed by a tiger. After the failure of her marriage and the death of her husband, and unsure if her family will accept her again, Li Yan chooses to return to her tea plantation. This time, the tea tree brings Li Yan a mother-like sense of security. “I seek the solitude of my grove and fell asleep under the grotto’s canopy, feeling the age and protection of the trees around me” (148). More than obtaining comfort and a sense of belonging, she finally draws the strength to begin a new journey, enlightened by her mother’s recounting of the Tea Horse Road history and the circumstances of the grove.

Before confiding her decision to send Liyan to a trade school, her mother recounts the history of their female ancestors and the life force they draw from the mother tree. Due to her mother’s storytelling, she understands the great obstacles her ancestors conquered to spread civilization through the trade of salt, matches, and so many other necessities. At the same time, Liyan comprehends the life force of the mother tree and its intimate alliance with her female ancestors. In her mother’s discourse, the mother tree is filled with life force as “the trunk and branches are still infested with various types of fungi, molds, orchids, and, of course, the yellow threads” (151). Transported by their nomadic ancestors, the mother tree assembles the life force of different elements that serve as medicine to heal the villagers:

All the life on the mother tree came from somewhere else. It was transported by our nomadic ancestors. You could say the tree shows the history of our female line... For generations, the nima and ruma of Spring Well and so many other villages have sought the help of the women in our family. We give them leaves, bark, and even the yellow parasite from the mother tree to use as medicine (151).

This maternal discourse not only expresses the power of

women in their family, but also points out the true value of the old tea trees—standing for a hundred years without falling, accepting and embracing setbacks and scars, and performing their thing power. Furthermore, Liyan's mother promises that her daughter is as "unique" as these old trees that are filled with life energy despite the intolerance and hardships they have undergone.

Drawing on her mother's narrative and the power of the grove, Liyan finds the strength to move forward. Before her journey to the outside world, she looks back at her grove; the mother tree is no longer worthless in her eyes, but full of agency empowering her as she claims:

"I try to absorb everything that I see with new eyes: the mother tree standing with such dignity, the sister trees offering their protective embrace, the camphor trees hiding them all, the ancient strength of the boulder, the cliff at the edge of the grove, the mountains in the distance" (152).

Personified as Liyan's female ancestor and her mother, this grove and things comprising it are able to endow Liyan with a new strength to begin a new life. Through the "intra-actions" between Li-yan and the old tea trees at different periods of her life, Li-yan absorbs different types of thing power and finally rids herself of the dilemmas that plagued her initially, so as to begin a new and self-reliant life in the outside world.

Inspired by the thing power of the tea trees, Li-yan moves beyond Nannuo Mountain to study tea systematically as a student. She achieves the transition to tea master after undergoing the process of exploring deeply the culture and philosophical significance of the Pu'er Tea produced by the wild old tea trees. Li-yan would not have become a tea master without her inherited talent for tea picking thanks to the holistic tea farming circumstances of her childhood, nor could she have become proficient without the systematic and scientific study of the tea culture. Most importantly, she would never have become a tea master without the unfortunate and trying experiences in her life, such as the failure of her first marriage and the loss of her daughter. In the first place, Li-yan is lucky to be recommended as a candidate to the Pu'er Tea College at Yunnan Agricultural University. Still as a novice in the tea art, Li-yan rediscovers the value of tea from her mother tree, and she learns a new word—*huigan*—"the returning flavor"

coming from its momentary bitterness. Reminded by Tea Master Sun, Li-yan realizes that she has not been home for eight years, during which time the flavor of the tea has also had enough time to develop. Taking the thought that Tea Master Sun states, "Man becomes wiser and more mature through life experience" (173), Li-yan tastes her tea with a new state of mind and discovers its unsuspected vibrant power—"the more I taste, the more captivated I become. The tea itself is physically seducing me" (174). This monologue by Li-yan serves as powerful evidence for the "thingness of things" that Bill Brown describes in his "Thing Theory". The power of the old tea leaves is conceptualized as *huigan*, which makes the "thingness" of tea become concrete. As an agentic thing the aged tea with *huigan* carries Li-yan's life memories. "Warmth washes up from my chest and flushes my face. What's happening to my body feels as potent as those early days when I first fell in love with San-pa" (174). In its bitterness and sweetness, there is a more than metaphorical "intra-connection" between the power of the tea and Li-yan's first love.

If the "*huigan*" discloses the thingness and the magic thing power of Pu'er tea for Li-yan, then a further systematic study of the knowledge and culture of tea helps Li-yan become a qualified tea master. In the twelve months after she discovers the profound significance of the old tea, she begins to learn the art and trade from Tea Master Sun. He "teaches me how to buy raw tea, store it, and let nature do its job of aging" (190). The most important point taught by this master is the natural aging of the tea, which not only shows the core value of Pu'er tea, but also demonstrates its agentic power. Holding the view that humans and other organic entities are equal partners, Li-yan treats the tea in a more comprehensive way in keeping with traditional Chinese philosophical thoughts. All of these insights allow her to become a tea master in a very short time.

In their interactions in the novel, the old tea trees, like Liyan, seem to have an existence of ups and downs. Initially, she thinks herself as worthless as her dowry. Then, as Liyan transitions from worthless tea girl to helpless mother to self-reliant tea master and tea trader, the old tea trees also change from apparently worthless entities to valued healers, from supposed fakes to precious commodities. The mutual transition of the old tea trees in the grove and the young woman who inherits them record Chinese tea culture,

witness the development of the tea industry, and shed light on the ecological crisis that Liyan's grove suffers caused by economic and scientific development.

III. NON-HUMAN NARRATIVES AND HALEY'S IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION: FROM CONFUSION TO GLOBAL CITIZEN

In contrast to Liyan's storytelling, *The Tea Girl of Hummingbird Lane* uses a number of devices to tell her daughter Haley's story, including letters, a transcript of a therapy session, and homework assignments. Not until the final chapter, however, do we hear Haley's own narrative and see the world entirely from her point of view. This style of storytelling not only enriches our experience of the narrative, but also guides us to observe Haley's search for identity. The narrative combines different written texts to record Haley's transition from being an adopted child suffering from an identity crisis to a global citizen.

Raised in California by loving adoptive parents, Haley often wonders about her origins despite her privileged childhood. To let Haley maintain her connection to her Chinese background, the adoptive parents encourage her to keep in the bottom drawer of her dresser the tea cake had left with her baby on the steps of an orphanage. This cake prompts Haley's curiosity and puzzlement about her origin. Her adoptive mother's letter explicitly records the interaction between Haley and the tea cake, revealing that Haley has a strong degree of identity confusion during her sleeps with it and traces the characters and decorations on the wrapper with her finger: "There are V's like cartoon birds, those repeating lines like S's, another stroke that meanders uninterrupted all over the place, and that thing that looks like a fork drawn in the center" (162). Interacting with the characters and decorations on the wrapper of the tea cake, Haley thinks about its meaning and even imagines that her birth mother is sending her a message. Besides, Haley even draws the tea cake and confides to her classmates that "I am the first person in my family to come here. I came from China. I bought a tea cake with me" (161). Therefore, it can be said that this displaced thing—the tea cake—stored in the drawer in Haley's bedroom still gives full play to its narrative purpose, holding the key to the mystery of Haley's identity.

As the most precious gift passed down through Ama's

family line, the tea cake becomes both a crucial clue in Haley's search for her roots and a guide to her life's orientation. In juxtaposing some of the e-mails between Haley and Professor Ho with Haley's narration about her experiences in a tea expo, we can see how the discourse on tea guides Haley to begin her studies and to search for her origins.

In her e-mails with Professor Ho, Haley recounts how her adoptive family background along with the tea cake left by her birth mother are the main reasons why she is committed to studying tea. As her adoptive mother Constance is a biologist and famous in professional circles, the connection helps promote Haley's application to her chosen academic program when she mentions her name to her potential supervisor. What's more, Haley's adopted father Davis is an arborist, which coincides with Haley's interest. As Constance writes in her letter, "Haley tags along with Dad everywhere he goes. She's inherited his love of trees." All of these show that Haley's adopted parents' professions and the material condition they provide pave the way for Haley to conduct her academic research, and that they help on the journey to her roots. In Haley's research proposal, she mainly questions the impact of climate change on the sensory and medicinal attributes of tea. Based on her research questions, we can observe that Haley mainly studies tea from a scientific perspective. However, inspired by the reply from the supervisor, Haley changes her attention from noticing the physical traits and function of her tea cake to the possible philosophical meanings of tea. The question that the professor raises to Haley — "how do we reconcile the poetry and philosophy of tea with the practicalities of growing and processing the product" neatly illustrates the combination of nature and culture (329). To the professor, more than a research object, tea is an example of what Donna Haraway calls "natureculture," and it bears philosophical and practical significances. Fusing nature and culture, tea always actively engages with people, as the professor illustrates in relating the ancient beliefs about tea passed down by his immigrant parents "Every hour spent drinking tea is a distillation of all the tea hours that have ever been spent; and Truly you can find the universal through the particular tea. Personally, I see a real disconnect between a sentiment like Tea is the cup of humanity and the hardscrabble life of tea farmers" (329). Encouraged by this

professor's provocative questions and beliefs concerning tea, Haley will further interact with it and gradually come to see it as a vibrant element of "natureculture" rather than merely a botanical research object.

In the last chapter of the novel, "A Pilgrimage to the Place of Origin", Haley recalls her encounter at a tea exposition with the son of Mr. Huang, Sean Wong, whose performance and discourse on tea further display the agentic force of tea and increase Haley's eagerness to search for the origin of herself and her tea cake. After looking around for a while at the tea expo, Haley feels a bit giddy, and she encounters Sean who invites her to sample his Pu'er. The first sip of Pu'er's liquid deeply impresses Haley as she enthuses, "The first sip of liquid blossomed in my mouth – bitterness bubbled away by sweetness" (349). Through Sean's explanation, Haley learns that this special taste is called *huigan*: "the overwhelming effect that this tea has on breath and opening the chest – that for a moment the world went dizzy" (349). Apart from the unique taste of this tea, Sean's behavior in pouring the beverage and his words about tea captivate Haley and make her believe he is a trustworthy connoisseur. Thus, she exhibits her tea cake to him. Rather than persuading Haley to sell her possession for an exorbitant sum, Sean observes the interconnection between Haley and her tea cake as he states: "Just as a person is searching for tea, the tea is searching for the person.... We'll make a pilgrimage to your tea cake's place of origin" (350). Sean's words fully acknowledge the agentic power of things. The tea cake shares equal status with Haley as both are engaged in a quest for their place of origin. Captivated by Sean's tea and his words on her tea cake, Haley determines to search for the origin of herself and her tea cake under the Sean's guidance. As we know, Sean is acquainted with Haley's tea cake and her birthplace. When he was a little boy diagnosed with bone cancer, his father took him to the Spring Well village where Haley's birth grandmother treated him with the yellow threads from the old tea trees and cured his disease.

What's more, the precious gift inherited from Haley's family lines allows her grandmother to recognize who Haley is the moment she sees it. With the guidance of Sean, Haley comes to Nannuo Mountain and meets an old woman who insists on taking Haley alone to the grove after she sees the tea cake. Keeping pace with the old woman, Haley

climbs the mountains and comes to the grove of old tea tree where she recognizes "... the tree that's been the symbol I've dreamed and wondered about my entire life.... I start to feel something. Memories. Although I can't possibly have a single memory of this place. Then, from deep within me, a profound sense of love radiating out to everything around me complemented by reciprocal waves of love coming at me, enveloping me. All that seems impossible too. I'm both perplexed and overwhelmed" (364). Due to the tea cake, Haley finally finds her origin and is reunited with her birth mother and her birth grandma in this grove filled with memory, history and presence. Because of this reunion, Haley gradually resolves her identity dilemma. Finally, she regards herself as "one hundred percent American and one hundred percent Chinese" which is "a new kind of global citizen" who "can be a bridge between two cultures and two countries" in Sean's view (358).

After "intra-acting" with the tea cake in different stages of her life—at bedtime in her childhood, at school in her class presentation, and at university through her academic research on the tea cake—Haley not only changes from a perplexed little girl to an intelligent, independent and outstanding scientific researcher, but also shifts from being a confused, rootless American into a global person. On one hand, the different narrative and written texts produced by the novel's human characters affirm the tea cake's agentic capacities; on the other, tea's narrative power to create configurations of meanings and substances engages humans in a field of co-emerging intra-actions.

Like the talk-story, tea in *The Tea Girl of Hummingbird Lane* represent powerful means of articulating cultural identity and transmitting cultural memories. Material beings supplement and even correct fallible human memory. Non-human things become texts inscribing and producing the dynamics of "diffuse" agency and non-linear causality. They stand beside and interact with written texts and oral accounts to assert the issue of identity. This novel revise conventional Western notions of identity as separate and individual, showing instead that humans and non-humans engage in an always-ongoing process of mutual reshaping and redefinition.

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The Well and the Attic: Mapping Madness, Trauma, and Gender through Kusum in *That Long Silence*

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Abstract— This paper presents a critical re-reading of Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* through the theoretical framework of Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady*, the madwoman in the attic trope as depicted in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, and contemporary feminist trauma theory. Focusing on the character of Kusum, the paper examines how madness in Deshpande's writing is not a personal or medical condition but a product of patriarchal oppression, familial betrayal, and the systematic silencing of women's suffering. By identifying Kusum as the Indian Bertha Mason, this analysis reveals how the archetype of the madwoman is reimagined in the Indian context to expose the cost of asserting agency and the consequences of non-conformity. The paper further investigates the intersection of class, gender, and trauma, underscoring how characters like Kusum - with limited agency - are marginalized within Indian families and society, their madness pathologised and their suffering erased. This study views Kusum's madness simultaneously as a symptom of insidious traumatising at the hands of a patriarchal society and as a form of resistance to it.



Keywords— Madness, Patriarchy, Oppression, Trauma, Feminism, Pathologisation, Resistance.

I. INTRODUCTION

Historically, the concept of madness has had an intertwining relationship with gender and power. In the Middle Ages, madness was viewed with a complex mixture of fear and awe, the causes of which were believed to be demonic possession or divine punishment, leading to the marginalisation of those deemed mentally deviant (Foucault 8). In the modern era, madness has been widely medicalised and pathologised, and its treatment and perception have exposed society's own notions of power and control (Scull 406). Michel Foucault, in his seminal work *Madness and Civilization*, propounds that madness, instead of being a natural phenomenon, has been societally constructed, driven by the need to define, exclude, and control that which escapes dominant notions of rationality. Those who were deemed 'mad' were not only physically separated and confined but also symbolically silenced by the dominant discourses of knowledge and power (Foucault 38).

This exercise of exclusion and control was by no means gender neutral. Elaine Showalter, in *The Female Malady*,

argues that madness had become a distinctly feminised condition in Western culture. Women were frequently labelled as hysterical, insane, or irrational, and their suffering was pathologised to reinforce patriarchal authority (Showalter 7). The archetype of the madwoman, as popularised in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* through the figure of Bertha Mason, embodied the cost of nonconformity but also emerged as a powerful symbol of resistance to oppression. Gilbert and Gubar's landmark study *The Madwoman in the Attic* extended this reading, positing that the madwoman is not merely a Gothic figure of horror but a double for the repressed and silenced woman writer herself. It is the repository of all that patriarchal culture refuses to name or accommodate.

This trope of the madwoman is further complicated in the Indian context, where it intersects with dominant structures of family, caste, class, and tradition. Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* forms a compelling lens through which the intersection of gender, madness, and trauma can be explored in modern Indian literature. While critical

attention has largely centred on the narrator-protagonist Jaya, the character of Kusum who is her neighbour and implicit counterpart has remained substantially underexplored. Throughout the novel, Kusum embodies the marginalisation, pathologisation, and erasure that women experience when they fail to conform to the patriarchal expectations of the dutiful Indian wife. This paper portrays Kusum as the Indian Bertha Mason: a figure whose destruction is engineered by the same social and familial forces that confine Jaya, yet who lacks the class and educational privilege that allow Jaya even the possibility of articulation. Drawing upon Showalter's *The Female Malady* and Gilbert and Gubar's madwoman trope, and in conversation with feminist trauma theory, the paper argues that Kusum's madness is both symptom and resistance. It is a legible, if painful, response to the insidious violence of a society that has no language for women's suffering beyond pathology.

II. THEORISING THE MADWOMAN: SHOWALTER, GILBERT AND GUBAR, AND THE INDIAN CONTEXT

Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady* remains a foundational text for any feminist engagement with the history of psychiatric discourse. Showalter demonstrates that the asylum in Victorian England was a space not merely of medical treatment but of social discipline: a mechanism through which women who transgressed the boundaries of femininity — through anger, desire, independence, or grief — were removed from the social body and rendered speechless (17). The diagnosis of hysteria, in particular, was routinely applied to women whose only discernible 'symptom' was the refusal or inability to perform the domestic and emotional labour demanded of their gender. Madness, in this framework, is not a neutral medical category but a technology of patriarchal control (76).

Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* extends this framework into the domain of literary criticism, arguing that the figure of the madwoman in nineteenth-century women's writing functions as the author's own enraged double. Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* is the paradigmatic instance: locked in the attic, denied speech, characterised as bestial and monstrous, Bertha enacts, in the register of Gothic excess, everything that Jane is forbidden to feel or express. She burns, destroys, and finally hurls herself from the roof; her violence is the displaced violence of every woman who has been confined, controlled, and silenced. Gilbert and Gubar's insight is that this figure of monstrous excess is not the opposite of the domesticated, 'normal' woman but her dark twin who bears the cost of the very femininity that patriarchy demands (78).

Transposing this framework to the Indian context requires attention to the specific cultural mythologies through which women's conformity is enforced. Deshpande makes this conditioning explicit through Jaya's own internalised cultural archive. As Jaya reflects on the mythological ideals of 'Sita', 'Savitri', and 'Draupadi', she registers the weight these figures of wifely endurance place on her own choices. The 'Indian ideal woman' embodied in these mythological figures is defined by self-sacrifice and unwavering loyalty, and their stories, passed down across generations, have cumulatively normalised subjugation and self-effacement. Showalter's insight that society pathologises women who do not conform to socio-cultural norms finds its Indian corollary here: the woman who diverges from the Sita-Draupadi model is not merely unconventional but is perceived as deviant or mad.

III. KUSUM AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF OPPRESSION: CLASS, GENDER, AND BETRAYAL

Kusum enters the narrative of *That Long Silence* as a peripheral but deeply unsettling figure: a woman already marked as 'difficult', already beyond the pale of respectable femininity. Her husband, Narayanrao, is a gambler whose failures are systematic and spectacular, and his neglect maps directly onto Kusum's progressive unravelling. Yet the novel refuses the comfortable reading in which Kusum is simply the victim of an individual bad man. Deshpande is meticulous in showing that the structures enabling Narayanrao's behaviour are entirely social. His neglect of Kusum is witnessed by the community, and yet its moral censure falls not on him but on Kusum — for not managing him better, for not bearing her suffering with sufficient grace, for eventually failing to maintain the performance of normalcy that is the primary obligation of the Indian wife.

The texture of Jaya's interactions with Kusum reveals how this community censure operates at the most intimate level. Jaya recalls visiting Kusum's flat and reacting with unconcealed disgust: "My God, Kusum, why have you let the place get so dirty? It stinks. Can't you at least open the window? And flush each time?" to which Kusum responds, "I pull the chain, but nothing happens" (Deshpande 14). It is a confession not merely of domestic failure but of complete physical and psychic depletion; she cannot manage even the most basic tasks. What is striking about Jaya's recollection of this moment, however, is the note of triumph and pleasure she registers in her own condescension. Jaya recalls "both my triumph and my pleasure in it" alongside Kusum's "crushed, bewildered face" (14). This moment crystallises Showalter's argument about the role of social policing in producing female

madness: the community's belittling attitude, its judgmental tone, its inability to perceive Kusum's incapacity as a symptom of distress rather than a moral failing, actively participates in Kusum's deterioration.

The question of class is inseparable from the question of madness here. Kusum lacks the cultural capital to manage and conceal her suffering in socially acceptable ways; her distress erupts visibly, and the community then mobilises that visibility to dismiss and pathologise her. Jaya's complex feelings towards Kusum, moving from childhood friendship to discomfort to pity, illuminate how class and gender intersect in the production of the 'madwoman'. Jaya, with her education and relative economic security, can internalise her suffering; Kusum, with no such resources, cannot. Betrayal by husband and family, and by society at large, has left Kusum disempowered and unable to engage with the mundane realities of life, and this disempowerment is itself then read as further evidence of her unfitnes.

The community's response to Kusum's illness reinforces this dynamic with particular clarity. Even after her death, Jaya notes, Kusum "aroused so much antipathy" (Deshpande 19). Jaya recalls Mohan's discouragement of taking Kusum ill when she fell ill on the grounds that she was not "our responsibility" (19). This refusal of care is framed not as callousness but as reasonableness: the family's burden is invoked, its limits acknowledged, its obligations defined narrowly enough to exclude a woman who has become inconvenient. The language of 'burden' and 'responsibility' here is precisely the language Showalter identifies in Victorian psychiatric practice. It is the language through which women are rendered manageable by being rendered disposable.

IV. THE INDIAN BERTHA MASON: CONFINEMENT, SILENCE, AND THE ERASURE OF SUFFERING

The parallel between Kusum and Bertha Mason is structural as much as thematic. Both figures represent the woman whom the dominant social order cannot accommodate, whose non-conformity must be confined and rendered invisible in order for the domestic order to continue. The community's characterisation of Kusum as "a maniac", overheard by Jaya and registered without challenge, is the moment at which Kusum's suffering is definitively converted into a diagnosis, her interiority extinguished by a label (Deshpande 20–21). This is the precise gesture that Showalter anatomises in *The Female Malady*: the conversion of a woman's suffering into a symptom of disorder, which simultaneously explains and dismisses her.

What distinguishes Kusum's confinement from Bertha's is its diffuse, informal character. There is no attic, no lock, no

single jailer. Instead, there is the accumulated weight of social pressure, economic dependency, familial indifference, and cultural expectation. The community remarks with disapproval that Kusum is "moaning and crying" and of "no use" (Deshpande 22). Her femaleness itself becomes the object of judgement: she is characterised as "unattractive" and "flat-chested", her body read as evidence of her inadequacy (Deshpande 20–21). These characterisations recall Showalter's observation that Victorian medical discourse routinely sexualised the pathologisation of women; the 'mad' woman was often also depicted as physically deficient, as if her mental deviance were written on her body.

The motif of silence is central to both Deshpande's novel and to the feminist theorisation of women's madness. Showalter argues that the Victorian psychiatric institution systematically stripped women of speech; in *That Long Silence*, this dynamic is reproduced through social rather than institutional means. Kusum's voice is suppressed not by a male doctor or a locked ward but by the accumulated indifference and shame of her community. Crucially, the novel also implicates Jaya in this suppression. Jaya's narration in the book also registers the violence of Kusum's situation with a clarity that is simultaneously sharp and limited. It is sharp because Jaya is herself a woman subject to many of the same forces but also limited because her own psychic survival depends, at some level, on not fully confronting what she sees. The 'long silence' of the title is not only Jaya's silence but Kusum's. It is the silence of every woman whose suffering has been rendered unspeakable by the social order that produced it.

V. MADNESS AS RESISTANCE: BEYOND PATHOLOGY

To read Kusum's madness solely as victimhood, however, is to reproduce the very interpretive violence that the novel critiques. Feminist theorists from Showalter to Phyllis Chesler have insisted on the double character of women's madness: it is simultaneously the product of oppression and a form of resistance to it. In *Women and Madness*, Chesler argues that the woman who 'goes mad' refuses, at some level, the demand that she continue to perform her own erasure. Her breakdown is a kind of terrible declaration that she will no longer absorb, without remainder, the violence directed at her (93).

In Deshpande's narrative, Kusum's eruptions constitute a form of counter-testimony. The community's verdict is that she is "of no use" and ought to be managed, contained, removed (Deshpande 22). But what Kusum's breakdown actually reveals, as Jaya records it, is a "vital truth" that Kusum's visible deterioration, her "moaning and crying",

her refusal of the composure expected of a dutiful wife, insist on being witnessed even when the community refuses to witness them (22). This is what Dori Laub, writing on trauma and witnessing in her essay “Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening” calls the testimony that takes place in the absence of a proper addressee: a speaking that cannot be heard within the available frameworks of understanding but that nonetheless constitutes a refusal of imposed silence. (57)

It is also significant that Jaya's own trajectory in the novel is shaped, in part, by her relationship to Kusum. Jaya's discomfort around Kusum, specifically her condescension, her instinct to distance herself, is a register of her own fear that Kusum's fate mirrors her own potential. Deshpande positions Kusum as Jaya's dark double in much the same way that Gilbert and Gubar position Bertha Mason as Jane Eyre's. Kusum embodies the fate that awaits a woman who has no language for her suffering and no social resources to sustain the performance of wellness. By refusing to let the reader rest comfortably in Jaya's perspective and by insisting on Kusum's presence even as the community erases it, Deshpande makes Kusum's suffering into an indictment of the same social structures that constrain Jaya.

Deshpande's deliberate refusal of narrative resolution for Kusum is itself a political gesture. Kusum does not recover, is not reintegrated, finds no redemption through suffering. Her fate is left suspended in ongoing, unresolved suffering that mirrors the unresolved violence of the conditions that produced it. The novel thereby refuses the double erasure that sentimentality would enact: the erasure of suffering through its neat narrative containment. Kusum's story ends not with resolution but with echo: the echo of a suffering that the community has chosen not to hear, and that the text insists the reader cannot unhear.

VI. CONCLUSION

Kusum occupies a position of singular importance in *That Long Silence*, yet she has been largely overlooked in the critical literature on Deshpande's novel. Reading her through the framework of Showalter's *The Female Malady* and the madwoman trope illuminates not only the mechanisms of her oppression but the ways in which Deshpande's text uses her figure to expose the systemic violence that underlies even the most apparently ordinary domestic arrangements. Kusum is the Indian Bertha Mason: a woman whose non-conformity cannot be accommodated by the social order and who is therefore pathologised and rendered invisible. But she is also, in her refusal of silence and in the terrible visibility of her breakdown, a figure of oblique, costly resistance.

The intersection of class, gender, and trauma in Kusum's representation reveals the selective character of the community's sympathy and the class bias of its pathologisation. Women with education, economic security, and cultural capital, like Jaya, can manage their suffering in ways that remain socially tolerable; women without these resources, like Kusum, are left exposed to the full weight of the community's need to distinguish the 'normal' from the 'mad.' The community's language — ‘burden’, ‘responsibility’, ‘maniac’, ‘of no use’ — is not merely descriptive but constitutive. It produces Kusum's madness as a social fact by denying the suffering that underlies it.

Deshpande's novel insists, however, that this distinction is fictive: what separates Jaya from Kusum is not sanity versus madness but the unequal distribution of the social resources required to maintain the performance of sanity. The long silence of the title belongs to both women, and to every woman whose suffering has been rendered unspeakable by the social order that produced it. In recovering and reinterpreting Kusum's silenced voice, this paper seeks to contribute to a richer critical engagement with Deshpande's work and, more broadly, to the ongoing feminist project of retrieving the madwomen from the attics, and from the chawls, the neglected flats, the neighbourhoods of studied indifference, to which patriarchal literary and social history has consigned them.

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The Geography of the Flowering Intellect: Spatial Dispossession, the Mercantile Ledger, and the Subversive Path to Global Humanism

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Abstract— This paper presents an exhaustive critical inquiry into the spatial, socio-economic, and literary mechanisms of imperial hegemony, tracking the ideological evolution of global extraction from early modern maritime capitalism to territorial colonialism. Using William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* as a primary cultural blueprint, we map the systemic transition of civilizational power from the static topography of land to the fluid, abstract realm of the financial ledger. This shift decoupled human value from qualitative, moral frameworks and anchored it exclusively within quantitative creditworthiness and market utility, establishing what we term the "Venetian Crucible" and the "Shylock Paradigm". By drawing explicit structural parallels between the judicial mechanics of the Venetian courtroom and the administrative apparatus of the British East India Company (EIC), this study demonstrates how imperial states weaponized law, cartography, and language to insulate corporate wealth while systematically erasing the sovereign identity of the cultural "Other". Finally, utilizing a post-colonial lens enriched by classical idealism, Gandhian non-materialism, and environmental ethics, we propose a transformative paradigm shift: moving beyond the extraction-oriented, suffocating "colonial umbrella" and transitioning toward a global pluralism conceptualized through the organic, compassionate architecture of the "Garden of Shared Existence".



Keywords— Spatial Hegemony, Mercantile Capitalism, The Shylock Paradigm, East India Company, Imperial Imaginary, Post-Colonial Humanism, The Colonial Umbrella, Cultural Erasure.

I. INTRODUCTION: THE CARTOGRAPHY OF THE INTELLECT

Intellectual inquiry has historically operated at the intersection of spatial science, governance, and creative expression. For centuries, however, the dominant academic traditions of the West have functioned within the cold, detached shadows of abstract theory, isolating the human soul from the material and geographic environments it inhabits. To trace the trajectory of global empires is to observe a highly calculated, rigid systemic framework where the frozen, clinical ledgers of administrative states have continuously sought to bind the vibrant pulse of human life to the sterile constraints of the page. This monograph offers an excavation of the historical heart, seeking to undo the mercantile logic of the past and deconstruct the heavy,

suffocating "umbrella of colonialism"—an ideological dome that presents itself as a necessary shelter for a globalized world but functions structurally as a cage that keeps the light of human empathy away.

The evolution of global extraction requires a dual methodological lens: one that combines geographical precision with literary deconstruction. Space, story, and soul constitute a single, flowing ecosystem. When we build artificial walls between science and poetry, between the administrator and the philosopher, or between the self and the world, we obscure the structural continuities that link historical systems of dispossession to modern paradigms of corporate globalization. Traditional geopolitical frameworks enforce spatial division and linear extraction.

This model can only be subverted by a flowing spiritual ecosystem where space, story, and soul hold hands together.

By analyzing how early modern literature served as an intellectual scout for emerging corporate states, we can trace the long, volatile distance from the canal-side counting-houses of Venice, where human souls were first systematically measured in gold, to the geopolitical configurations of the nineteenth-century British Raj, and finally to the digital metrics of contemporary hyper-capitalism. The objective of this paper is to provide a definitive, transcendent pathway for a new intellectual paradigm—one that transitions the academic gaze away from the clinical ledger of an empire and toward the patient, nurturing cultivation of a gardener, aligning scholarly methods with holistic, universal liberation.

II. THE VENETIAN CRUCIBLE: THE CITY AS AN ECONOMIC MACHINE

To comprehend the structural depths of early modern maritime trade and its colonial outcomes, we must strip away traditional performance histories that reduce theatrical narratives to localized domestic tales of unpaid loans and personal vengeance. Instead, we must elevate our analytical gaze to the socio-spatial landscape of the sixteenth century, recognizing Venice not as a static backdrop of picturesque romance, but as a hyper-capitalist laboratory and a high-stakes corporate environment—the historical equivalent of a modern global financial center. Venice functioned as a literal and figurative crucible: a highly pressurized, volatile vessel where the old, deeply rooted traditions of feudal Europe were systematically melted down, broken apart, and reformed into a cold, calculated system of global extraction.

In the pre-modern feudal world, human relationships, social status, and political authority were anchored in tangible, local realities: hereditary family honor, religious bloodlines, and the sacred, unbreakable oath of fealty tied directly to ancestral soil. Venice dismantled this ancient moral framework. Within its borders, creditworthiness replaced honor, which meant reputation was decoupled from lineage and reattached permanently to financial reliability and liquid assets. Furthermore, the contract superseded the oath, replacing the warm, communal bonds of mutual obligation with the notarized contract and the icy precision of the financial balance sheet. This resulted in the institutionalization of blind commerce, creating a distinct commercial vacuum where traditional ethics were suspended in the name of transactional efficiency, trading spiritual anxieties for the tangible certainty of a profit margin. This alchemical transformation fundamentally altered how human beings perceived their relationship to

time, labor, and one another, transforming the organic community into an interconnected market machine.

III. THE SHIFT FROM LAND TO LEDGER

For centuries across continental Europe, power was fundamentally static and explicitly tied to the visible topography of land ownership. Mastery over the physical landscape—the fields, forests, and valleys—automatically guaranteed political allegiance and the physical labor of the serfs who worked the earth. Power was local, material, and visibly manifest. Within the Venetian republic, however, a revolutionary paradigm shift occurred: power detached itself from the soil and migrated permanently to the ledger. Real, transformative authority no longer rested in the hands of those who wore ancestral armor or guarded stone castles; it belonged to a financial elite who controlled the abstract, invisible flow of maritime credit, insurance policies, and global shipping lanes.

Antonio, the titular protagonist of Shakespeare's drama, represents the literary prototype of this new financial vanguard. He must not be viewed merely as a wealthy shopkeeper or a passive seller of exotic spices. Antonio is a sophisticated venture capitalist, a maritime speculator whose entire existence is inextricably tied to the volatile fortunes of global trade. His wealth does not exist as physical gold locked safely within a localized vault; it is completely dispersed across the open ocean, vulnerable to hidden reef systems, unpredictable storms, and the shifting geopolitical alliances of distant ports. In this capacity, Antonio serves as the direct structural precursor to the corporate oligarchs and colonial governors of the East India Company (EIC), an organization that would receive its royal charter and begin its trajectory toward the total administrative subjugation of the Indian subcontinent just a short time after Shakespeare penned this play.

The transition from land to ledger marks the birth of a new, abstract form of structural violence. When power resides in the land, conflict is visible and localized; when power resides in the ledger, dispossession can be executed from a distant office with the simple stroke of a quill. The ledger totalizes existence, translating the wild, unrepeatable diversity of human cultures, languages, and ecosystems into uniform columns of assets and liabilities. For the modern venture capitalist, as for the Venetian merchant, the world is no longer a collection of sacred spaces to be respected, but a vast, scattered network of resources waiting to be calculated, rationalized, and pulled into the central hub of empire.

IV. SHAKESPEARE AS ARCHITECT: CONSTRUCTION OF THE IMPERIAL IMAGINARY

William Shakespeare, writing from the historical perspective of an island nation that was just beginning to cast off its geographic isolation and dream of its own global maritime empire, acted as an intellectual scout and cultural cartographer for the emerging British state. He was not a detached artist working in an imaginative vacuum. He took the sophisticated, cold Venetian model—a system that possessed the terrifying capacity to turn living human beings, cultural identities, and moral debts into calculated, exchangeable collateral—and mapped its coordinates clearly onto the Elizabethan stage. By doing so, he performed a vital piece of ideological labor for his society, transforming the theater into a space where the English audience could witness, process, and ultimately normalize the revolutionary idea that a state's primary duty is the protection of global commerce, even when that protection requires the systematic dismantling of human empathy.

Before a nation can successfully mobilize its physical resources to conquer, map, and colonize the external world, it must first conquer and unify its own internal imagination. Shakespeare played an absolutely pivotal role in the construction of this Imperial Imaginary—a beautifully designed, shared mental space wherein the English domestic population could perceive themselves not as isolated islanders, but as the noble, righteous protagonists of global history. In *The Merchant of Venice*, he executes this architectural maneuver by dramatically elevating the social and moral status of the merchant, transforming him from a historically suspect, self-interested tradesman into a tragic, deeply melancholic, and profoundly noble figure.

Consider the radical structural choice of the play's opening scene. The audience is not introduced to a traditional king, a courageous military general, or a holy philosopher; instead, they are forced to confront the existential interiority of a global merchant speculator:

"In sooth, I know not why I am so sad: / It wearies me; you say it wearies you; / But how I caught it, found it, or came by it, / What stuff 'tis made of, whereof it is born, / I am to learn..." (I.1.1–5)

This heavy melancholy is far more than a personal psychological mood or a convenient theatrical plot device; it represents the deep existential weight of a modern man whose entire life, safety, and identity are completely governed by the fluid dynamics of the sea and the global marketplace. By humanizing Antonio with this beautiful, poetic sadness, Shakespeare masterfully anchors the audience's deepest emotional empathy directly to the rising

merchant class. When Antonio's fortunes are later threatened by the strict enforcement of a contract, the audience feels its own economic stability and moral order profoundly threatened.

By aligning the emotional heart of the nation with the private financial interests of the merchant, the writer domesticated the language of the market. He embedded the vocabulary of corporate extraction—bonds, ventures, estates, and forfeitures—into the enchanting rhythms of English poetry, thereby making the brutal rise of global capitalism feel not like a violent disruption, but like a natural, inevitable step in human evolution.

V. THE CURRENCY OF POWER AND THE COMMODIFICATION OF THE OTHER

The aggressive rise of the Venetian model—and its direct historical successor, the global imperial model of the East India Company—demanded a radical, uncompromising reassessment of reality. To build a commercial empire that stretched across uncharted oceans, the corporate state could no longer afford to respect the sacred, unrepeatable uniqueness of the individual. The state had to learn to treat human beings, sovereign lands, ancestral forests, and ancient cultural histories as completely interchangeable variables, mere abstract numbers to be plugged into a grand, cold equation of global profit. This alchemical process transformed society into a massive, desensitized marketplace where everything—from the honor of a merchant to the skin of a laborer—could be weighed, priced, and converted into cash.

In an intrinsic value system, values are sacred, qualitative, and inherent, as given by the divine or nature. Conversely, the imperial ledger system enforces an ontological devaluation, turning values into commercialized, quantitative variables such as gold or data points. In this context, the ultimate and most lucrative commodity was rarely just exotic spices, fine silks, or precious metals; it was the self-determination, the cultural identity, and the sovereign agency of the "Other". True, absolute power is not merely the ability to possess physical things; it is the ultimate, unchecked authority to define reality itself. By setting the arbitrary price of Shylock's life, by deciding from a position of judicial supremacy that his private wealth belongs to the state, and by demanding that his ancestral faith be completely abandoned under the threat of death, the Venetian court exercises the ultimate colonial prerogative. They alone claim the right to dictate what is valuable, what is civilized, and what is entirely expendable.

The deep, tragic irony of this system is that this currency of power is inherently, dangerously volatile. The more an empire expands outward, demanding that the entire world

be measured exclusively in columns of gold, the more it silently loses the very essence of empathy and justice that makes the human experience worth governing in the first place. The ledger promises total control, but it delivers an empty, mechanical ghost world.

Historically, the East India Company ran headfirst into this exact systemic paradox. The more they treated the ancient, diverse, and vibrant landscape of India as a flat, sterile ledger of tax extraction and agricultural exploitation, the more they found themselves forced to deploy massive, expensive standing armies to brutally suppress the inevitable human uprisings that naturally follow such total dehumanization. The cold arithmetic of the merchant always carries within it the seeds of its own violent destruction.

VI. THE SHYLOCK PARADIGM: THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE MARGINALIZED

In the long history of global empire, the colonized subject is never merely an economic entity to be taxed; he is a highly specialized, deliberate psychological construction. The Shylock Paradigm represents the deep, unhealable internal fracture within the imperial system: the terrifying realization that the empire absolutely requires the presence, labor, and liquidity of the "Other" to function, yet can never permit that "Other" to truly belong or claim equal protection under the law. Shylock represents the indispensable foundational pillar upon which the elegant, cultured lifestyle of the Belmont elite is built. Without his immediate financial liquidity and his willingness to risk capital in the marketplace, the romantic, high-stakes speculative ventures of the Christian merchants would instantly collapse into bankruptcy.

Yet, this very economic necessity is what makes Shylock an existential threat to the ruling hegemony. The colonizer despises the fact that his own elegant lifestyle depends entirely on the resourcefulness of the person he wishes to look down upon. To resolve this inner tension, the state builds a complex psychological apparatus designed to separate the merchant's money from the merchant's humanity.

In colonial discourse, the subaltern subject is trapped within a cruel double bind. First, they face a forced assimilation of tools, meaning they are systematically forced to adopt the languages, the laws, the economic tools, and the social contracts of the colonizer simply to survive within an inherently hostile state. Second, they suffer systemic punishment for mastery; the moment they achieve competence over those very tools and use those instruments to defend their own dignity, they are severely punished for

their brilliance. Shylock operates within the marketplace with the precise, sharp, and hyper-legalistic mind of a Venetian merchant, reflecting back to the state the exact mirror image of the cold structures the state claims as its own proud identity. We see this accusatory mirror held up to the face of empire when he boldly declares:

"The villainy you teach me, I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction." (III.1.68–70)

Shylock is not a bizarre aberration born outside the system; he is the system's most dedicated, attentive student. He has learned through a lifetime of systemic abuse that in this modern world, power is claimed and wielded through the cold, literal, and unyielding enforcement of the written law. By turning the state's own precious legal code against its golden child, Antonio, Shylock commits the ultimate, unpardonable colonial crime: he demonstrates to the world that the law is not divine or inherently moral, but is merely a human weapon belonging to whoever knows how to hold its hilt.

VII. THE SPATIAL MATRIX: THE GHETTO, BELMONT, AND THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE OTHER

In the theater of the imperial mind, geography is never neutral; it is a moral canvas upon which the anxieties, desires, and prejudices of the hegemon are projected. The Venetian spatial matrix is explicitly split into three distinct, highly ideological zones: the Ghetto, the Rialto, and Belmont. The Ghetto functions as the primary, physical architecture of containment—a localized pocket designed to confine the presence of the "Other" while extracting their capital. The Rialto represents the volatile commercial marketplace where these identities collide out of financial necessity. Belmont, by contrast, functions as the ultimate geographical illusion: a pastoral paradise of aesthetic luxury, music, and romance that presents itself as entirely detached from the dirty, mercantile realities of Venice.

Yet, the radiant beauty of Belmont is purchased directly with the systematic enclosure and cultural erasure of the Venetian Ghetto. The sparkling happiness of Bassanio and Portia is smoothly facilitated and mediated by the endless flow of borrowed ducats. This geography of exclusion is extended globally through the introduction of foreign suitors, most notably the Prince of Morocco. When Morocco arrives to participate in the casket lottery, his skin color and geographic origins are immediately treated as existential markers of alterity. The moment he chooses incorrectly, Portia dismisses him with a chilling spatial finality:

"A gentle riddance. Draw the curtains, go. / Let all of his complexion choose me so." (II.7.78–79)

With these words, Morocco is banished back to the desert, categorized not as an individual who failed a test, but as a representative of an entire race deemed genetically and geographically incompatible with the "civilized" atmosphere of Belmont. He departs into the twilight, a ghost of the frontier, while the play safely turns its focus back to the domestic, heavily insured, and highly profitable harbors of Venice.

VIII. PORTIA'S COURTROOM AS AN IMPERIAL TRIBUNAL: THE WEAPONIZATION OF LAW

The climax of *The Merchant of Venice* unfolds within a space that traditional criticism celebrates as a sanctuary of pure justice and divine mercy: Portia's courtroom. However, when viewed through a post-colonial, geographical lens, this courtroom reveals itself to be the definitive historical prototype for the Imperial Tribunal. The law under empire acts as a massive, sweeping umbrella that shelters the colonizer from the storms of local resistance, while ensuring that the rain of extraction falls predictably and exclusively into the central treasuries of the capital. The courtroom ceased to be an instrument of moral justice and became, instead, the ultimate guarantor of commercial predictability.

We see this foundational logic laid bare when Antonio himself acknowledges the cold reality of his situation:

"The Duke cannot deny the course of law: / For the commodity that strangers have / With us in Venice, if it be denied, / Will much impeach the justice of his state." (III.3.26–29)

The underlying mechanics dictate that if contract enforcement is denied, foreign investor faith is lost, resulting in capital flight from the state. To resolve this, the imperial tribunal executes a fix: sacrificing the subaltern body to maintain a predictable, stable market. Antonio explicitly states that the state's definition of justice does not exist to uphold abstract human morality or divine righteousness; rather, it exists solely to ensure that international trade continues to flow without friction. If the Venetian state refuses to strictly enforce contracts—even contracts that demand a pound of living human flesh—foreign investors will immediately lose faith in the predictability of the market and take their capital elsewhere. The reputation of the state's justice system is entirely contingent upon its willingness to sacrifice human life on the altar of the contract.

When Portia enters the legal arena disguised as Balthasar, she does not transcend this mercantile logic; she optimizes it. Her celebrated "quality of mercy" speech is a masterclass in ideological deception:

"The quality of mercy is not strained, / It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven / Upon the place beneath..." (IV.1.184–186)

This speech provides a magnificent moral cover for the aggressive economic expansion of the state. While Portia loudly proclaims the universality of divine mercy, her subsequent legal maneuvers are structurally engineered from their inception to protect the capital and monopoly of those who hold the pen. The moment Shylock stands upon his literal bond, Portia turns the grammar of the law against his very survival. She introduces a hyper-literal distinction between flesh and blood—a distinction that does not exist in the spirit of commercial transactions—to strip him of his wealth, his property, and his sovereign identity.

It is vital that we strip away the comforting illusions surrounding the court's ultimate sentence: the forced conversion of Shylock to Christianity is not a gesture of holy forgiveness or spiritual salvation. It is an act of total, unvarnished symbolic violence. To be forced to "become a Christian" within the strict, exclusionary context of the Venetian state is to completely strip away the identity of the "Other" and replace it with a compliant, broken mask of the "Same". This is the precise historical and institutional equivalent of the colonial education systems and residential schools that would, centuries later, systematically seek to erase indigenous languages, wipe out native religions, and destroy ancestral traditions in favor of the standardized culture of the metropole.

IX. HISTORICAL PARALLELS: THE BRITISH EAST INDIA COMPANY IN INDIA

The structural experiments performed along the stone canals of Venice—the total commodification of human debt, the systematic legal isolation of the cultural outsider, and the cynical weaponization of the judicial system to legitimize economic extraction—were the exact same administrative experiments deployed on a massive scale by the British East India Company (EIC) across the Indian subcontinent. When the EIC transitioned from a joint-stock trading enterprise into an absolute governing authority following the Battle of Plassey, it utilized the exact same narrative architecture of the "civilizing mission" to mask its extractive operations.

The foundational Eurocentric myth that indigenous culture was fundamentally "backward," static, and chaotic, requiring the paternal "enlightenment" of Western

governance, served as the primary ideological justification for territorial annexation. The Company's orientalist scholars and administrators functioned exactly like the Venetian courtroom judges: they drew borders, drafted contracts of bondage, and constructed legal fortresses that turned shared, organic landscapes into private, taxable estates.

In this historical parallel, the primary mechanism shifts from the notarized contract and financial balance sheet seen in the Venetian crucible to the Permanent Settlement Act and Ryotwari land revenue grids in the British Raj. The judicial instruments evolve from Portia's courtroom into the Sadar Diwani Adalat and codified Anglo-Indian courts. The ideological masking changes from arguments regarding Christian superiority and the "Quality of Mercy" to the narrative of the "White Man's Burden" and the "Civilizing Mission." Ultimately, the systemic outcome remains equivalent: transitioning from the confiscation of individual subaltern wealth and identity erasure to widespread deindustrialization, famines, and epistemic subjugation across the subcontinent.

Under the EIC administrative grid, the native subject, much like Shylock, was dragged into a court where the grammar of the law was deliberately weaponized against their survival. The complex, fluid traditional systems of land tenure and communal sharing were frozen into rigid columns of tax extraction. The intellect of the colonizer was used as a predatory tool for domination, surveillance, and efficient resource colonization, totalizing existence and translating the wild diversity of Indian ecosystems into uniform, dead columns of assets and liabilities.

X. THE MUSIC OF BELMONT AND THE ILLUSION OF BROTHERHOOD

Within the architecture of any imperial narrative, absolute silence or highly curated compliance is the required psychological state of the colonized subject. The empire retains the exclusive monopoly on speech, law, and definition; the subaltern subject is expected merely to listen, submit, and internalize. However, authentic music functions as an organic, unstoppable auditory rebellion. It cannot be bound by the rigid terms of a legal contract, nor can its shifting melodies be seized, locked away, or auctioned off by a court sheriff. In the hyper-legalistic world of Venice, where every human interaction is reduced to a commercial "bond," music stands as the only truly "free" and unlegislated entity.

This radical potential of sound is articulated by Lorenzo as he sits with Jessica in the moonlit gardens of Belmont:

"The man that hath no music in himself, / Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds, / Is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils; / The motions of his spirit are dull as night..." (V.1.83–86)

Lorenzo identifies the total absence of music—the complete lack of aesthetic empathy, cultural imagination, and emotional resonance—as the defining psychological characteristic of the "spoiler," the colonizer, and the tyrant. The imperial architect, the unyielding ledger-keeper, the cold tribunal judge—all these historical figures are structural clones of the man who is "fit for treasons" because they have systematically silenced the delicate, empathetic music within their own consciousness. They have violently replaced the harmony of human coexistence with the rhythmic, monotonous ticking of the profit-clock.

Yet, the concept of "Brotherhood" championed so beautifully by Belmont's mercantile elite is never a genuine communion of equal, sovereign voices; it is a highly curated symphony played resolutely in a single, dominant key. When the text asks the audience to view the forced, traumatic integration of the cultural "Other" into the dominant structure as a beautiful, harmonious resolution, it is performing an act of profound aesthetic violence. It is an intellectual sleight of hand that asks us to believe that the complete erasure of an indigenous song is, in fact, a magnificent improvement to the overall quality of the music.

This process of aesthetic masking reaches its absolute peak in the opening of the final act, where the trauma of the courtroom is washed away by pastoral poetry:

"How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank! / Here will we sit and let the sounds of music / Creep in our ears: soft stillness and the night / Become the touches of sweet harmony." (V.1.54–57)

These lines, widely celebrated as some of the most breathtakingly beautiful lyric poetry in the history of the English language, act as the final, intoxicating veil of the imperial project. They invite the audience into a serene, moonlit sanctuary of "sweet harmony" while the historical reality of what just occurred in the trial—the violent dispossession of a minority citizen, the forced erasure of his religious identity, the total fracturing of a human soul—is quietly pushed off the stage and into the forgotten background. The writer uses the incredible majesty of the language to suggest that "Brotherhood" has been achieved through peaceful inclusion, while completely ignoring the fact that the absolute price of admission for the outsider was the total, unconditional surrender of their own historical truth.

XI. SUBVERSIVE MERCY: INTELLECTUAL PROTECTION OF THE SACRED

The human intellect, in its truest and highest form, is meant to operate as an uncompromising vessel for objective truth; the empire, conversely, in its highest administrative form, is an optimization vessel for material profit. The ultimate responsibility of the scholar is to fiercely protect the sacred from the commodity. We must develop a strategy of Subversive Mercy—a scholarly and existential practice that actively deconstructs the legalistic, extractive language of empires and uncovers the suppressed narratives of the subaltern.

This strategy relies on epistemic resistance to displace contractual primacy over human life, narrative reclamation to expose the structural violence of legal tribunals, and ethical realignment to transition the scholar from a clinical ledger-keeper to a compassionate gardener. Subversive mercy demands that we refuse to accept the ledger as the final scripture of human potential. It requires that we look closely at the moments of dramatic friction within imperial texts where the structural contradictions of the empire break apart under the weight of their own violence.

When Shylock asks, "Hath not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions?" (III.1.55–57), the text temporarily escapes the control of its imperial architect. In that singular, defiant moment, the universal pulse of human life shatters the mercantile logic of Venice, proving that even within the most rigid of historical systems, the subaltern subject retains an irrepressible capacity to demand recognition of their absolute humanity. The task of the decolonial intellectual is to finish the poem the empire abandoned, turning spoken poetic hypocrisy into lived global reality.

XII. BEYOND THE LEDGER: THE GARDEN OF SHARED EXISTENCE

To build a world that is genuinely human, we must completely turn our backs on the cold arithmetic of the counting-house and walk together into the vibrant, unprotected freedom of the garden. The global society we envision is not a network of transactional contracts, market competitions, and calculated debts; it is a living ecosystem of mutual flourishing. We must deliberately cast off the sterile vocabulary of the market and proudly adopt the organic language of the garden—the beautiful language of steady growth, of shared seasonal vulnerability, and of that profound, quiet beauty that blooms naturally when we finally cease to view our neighbor as an economic resource to be harvested, optimized, and sold.

This transformation requires moving completely away from the imperial ledger paradigm, which extracts, rationalizes, and commands. That paradigm produces a suffocating colonial umbrella marked by artificial, linear extraction. To achieve liberation, we must implement a transformative paradigm reversion toward the compassionate garden matrix, which cultivates, decentralizes, and sustains human life. This matrix ultimately nurtures, restores, and liberates, opening up a wild meadow characterized by organic, universal interdependence.

The human intellect, in its most liberated and historically beautiful expression, operates precisely like a delicate flower. It completely rejects the frantic, mechanical speed of industrial productivity; it requires open space, unpolluted light, and the gentle, patient grace of time to authentically unfold its unique potential. Within the harsh logic of the corporate ledger, a flower is stripped of its living wonder and reduced to a mere temporary commodity to be priced, bartered, and discarded at the close of the trading day. But in the vast, decolonized world beyond the ledger, the flower stands as a magnificent testament to the sacred miracle of life itself—a fragile, unfolding existence that demands absolutely nothing from the state except the fundamental right to simply exist in its own truth.

When we engage with other human beings across lines of difference, we must consciously do so with the exquisite tenderness of flowers. We must approach the historical "Other"—the pathologized Shylocks, the excluded Moroccos, and the silenced voices crying out from the exploited peripheries of our world—not with the aggressive demands of the insatiable merchant, but with the humble curiosity of the dedicated gardener. We must learn to recognize that every culture, every ancient tradition, and every individual human heart is a brilliant bloom of a completely different color, texture, and scent. To demand that all flowers look the same, speak the same language, and conform to the same Eurocentric standards of beauty and efficiency is to violently destroy the very soul of the global garden.

A truly global humanism is not a monocultural forest of uniform trees, but an expansive, wild meadow of infinite variety, where the value of each individual blossom lies entirely in its unique, unrepeatable capacity to drink the light of the sun. This is the ultimate, irreversible subversion of the colonial model of governance. Where the empire demanded aggressive cultural assimilation, we must demand deep, historical appreciation. Where the empire drew arbitrary, militarized borders across indigenous lands, we must choose to plant seeds of cross-cultural solidarity. The "music that makes the day" is the collective, uncensored song of this global meadow—a magnificent harmony that

does not arise from forced sameness or corporate standardization, but from the intricate, beautifully balanced coexistence of radical differences.

XIII. CONCLUSION: THE FLOWERING OF THE COMMON GOOD

The ultimate mark of intellectual genius is not merely to capture the world in prose, but to actively cultivate it toward the common good. We must dismantle the ancient, guilt-ridden philosophy that demands total self-effacement for the sake of the collective. To possess a self, to hold unique interests, to fiercely cultivate one's own intellect—this is the fundamental, sacred act of being alive. The root must push deep into the earth and absorb water for its own survival, or else the stem will collapse. However, the deep tragedy of the merchant, and the ultimate systemic failure of the empire, was the brittle belief that to thrive, one must fence off the meadow, build watchtowers over the grass, and claim the sunlight itself as private property. The merchant mistook ownership for vitality.

When we act with the ancient wisdom of the gardener, our self-interest ceases to be a hoarding instinct and transforms into a high act of stewardship. We pursue our own growth—our own intellectual, creative, and moral advancement—not to construct walls of exclusion, but to become an inexhaustible source of beauty and sustenance that the entire global garden can share. We realize that our personal genius is not a trophy to be locked in a vault, but a wellspring meant to irrigate the dry valleys around us.

We must systematically draw the world out of the dark, confined, leather-bound pockets of private gain—those insular psychological spaces that view life as a zero-sum game, where one man's gain must inevitably be another man's destitution. We do this by proving through our lived philosophy that the "good for all" is the only sustainable harvest. When a flower smiles, it does not bargain. It does not demand a signed receipt or a guaranteed return on investment before it releases its scent into the passing wind; it simply gives, and in that effortless act of giving, it ensures the health of the pollinators, the richness of the surrounding soil, and the eternal continuity of the meadow. Our global interest must be modeled on this natural economy of abundance rather than the artificial scarcity of the stock exchange. When we deliberately draw resources from the deep pockets of private gain and invest them in the collective flowering of the global common good, we trade the fragile, dead currency of the coin for the living, self-replicating currency of the seed.

This resolution marks an equilibrium convergence where critical intellect and shared humanity meet. The critical intellect provides a razor-sharp deconstruction that

demolishes illusions of division and exposes the mechanics of the corporate state. Shared humanity acts as an absolute directional compass, restoring a soft structural touch grounded in radical cross-solidarity. This intersection brings about a decided restoration: the imperial ledger is closed permanently, the suffocating colonial umbrella is folded away at last, and the global garden blooms in an eternal, magnificent return.

The heavy umbrella of colonialism is folded away at last. The ledger of human exploitation is closed. The courtroom of historical grievances is empty, its angry echoes fading into the past. All that remains before us is the garden—the vast, diverse, resilient, and smiling earth, waiting patiently for us to tend to it. We have moved decisively beyond the cold mechanics of the coin and into the warm, life-giving clarity of the light. We have learned, through trial, error, and poetic awakening, that when the intellect smiles for the good of all, the world does not just merely survive—it flowers, in an eternal, magnificent, and unstoppable return.

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Forces with Trajectories of Their Own: Thing-Power, Form, and the Brazilian Landscape in Elizabeth Bishop's "Questions of Travel"

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Abstract— *Ecocritical readings of Elizabeth Bishop's "Questions of Travel" (1965) have recently shown how the formal accuracy of the poem captures a nonhuman world beyond human comprehension but have tended to regard its waterfalls, rain, mountains, and streams as objects of representation. We argue in this article that these elements are better understood as actants in Jane Bennett's sense, forces with trajectories, tempos and propensities of their own which condition, disrupt and reorient the traveller's perception. Reading the poem via Bennett's notion of 'thing-power' reveals four kinds of elemental agency: the anticipatory interruption of the waterfall, the durational saturation of the rain, the withdrawal of the mountains, and the kinetic velocity of the streams. It demonstrates how the sequencing of these incommensurable registers in the poem enacts a critique of the traveller's epistemological mastery. The article also claims that Bishop's formal restraint, her proleptic conditionals, kinetic syntax, and refusal of totalising description do not merely illustrate new materialist claims but test and arbitrate them. The Brazilian setting of the poem is not a neutral backdrop in the analysis but a landscape located in history. The question of what it means to deploy a Euro-American theoretical lexicon to read a non-Euro-American place is woven throughout rather than added as a late qualification.*



Keywords— *Elizabeth Bishop, "Questions of Travel", New Materialism, Nonhuman Agency, Postcolonial Ecocriticism*

Introduction

Elizabeth Bishop's "Questions of Travel" (1965) resists the conventional framing of landscape as a passive backdrop to human experience. The poem's sustained focus on the agency of non-human elements, waterfalls, rain, streams, and mountains, has been increasingly read by critics as a site of intersection between Bishop's formal precision and her engagement with the natural world. This article furthers that inquiry by reading the poem through Jane Bennett's articulation of "thing-power" in *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010). For Bennett, material objects and forces have a vitality that allows them to shape events and

to affect human behavior in ways that cannot be reduced to human intention (Bennett, 2010, p.8). This framework provides one interpretive lens, among others now at work in Bishop's scholarship, through which "Questions of Travel" can be read as a site of negotiation between materials, in which the landscape functions not as an inert object of description but as a co-participant in the experience the poem records.

Scholarship on Bishop has long been preoccupied with her craft of observation, her geography of exile, and her nuanced representations of displacement and belonging (Costello, 1991, p.112; Travisano, 1988, p.73). In the last

decade, there has been a clear move towards explicit ecocritical and posthumanist readings of her work. In "Elizabeth Bishop's Evolutionary Poetics" (2016), Sarah Giragosian theorizes the queer Darwinian and biopolitical dimensions of Bishop's poetics, tracing her engagement with the aesthetic-political philosophy of John Dewey and with Darwinian evolutionary thought in the radicalized literary culture of the 1930s. Giragosian argues that these affiliations shaped a "queer posthuman politics" in Bishop's early work (Giragosian, 2016, p.480). While Giragosian does not employ Bennett's terminology of "vibrant matter" or "thing-power," his argument is theoretically related to Dewey and Darwin, rather than new materialism. Nonetheless, Giragosian establishes a useful precedent that Bishop's poetics can be read productively as engaging non-human vitality and posthuman politics in ways that exceed the conventional biographical or psychoanalytic frames. This article takes a different theoretical route to a related destination, asking what becomes visible in "Questions of Travel" specifically when its elemental actors are read through Bennett's twenty-first-century vocabulary of material agency rather than through Giragosian's Dewey-and-Darwin-inflected genealogy of Bishop's earlier biopolitical commitments.

The closest precedent to this article is the study of "Questions of Travel" by Yazdanmehr Gordanpour and Tahereh Rezaei, published in *Revista de Estudios Norteamericanos* in 2021. Gordanpour and Rezaei argue that Bishop's poetry is "acutely form-conscious" and that this form-consciousness registers a nature that is "ontologically independent from human understanding" (Gordanpour and Rezaei, 2021, p.284). In their reading, they pay close attention to Bishop's formal subversions, her use of repetition, simile, and shifting grammatical subjects, to show how the poem's form enacts an ecopoetic sensibility attuned to the ethics of human presence in a nonhuman world. This is a substantial and directly relevant treatment of the same poem from an ecocritical viewpoint, and any subsequent reading of "Questions of Travel" through new materialist theory must take its measure rather than treat it as a minor precursor.

What this article argues is not that the account of Gordanpour and Rezaei is incomplete in some general sense but that it is working at a different level of description than a thing-power reading does and that the difference matters. The argument of Gordanpour and Rezaei is mainly formal: how Bishop's poetic technique registers an awareness that nature exceeds human comprehension. Their analysis is still, in an important way, an account of human representation of nonhuman independence. A thing-power reading, in contrast, does not see the waterfalls, rain, mountains, and streams primarily as objects of representation whose formal

treatment reveals an ecological ethic but as entities that are themselves ascribed, in the poem's own terms, a kind of operative agency forces that act with "trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own" (Bennett, 2010, p.viii). The difference is not always clear-cut, and the two approaches are compatible rather than opposed, but it does lead to a different set of questions. Importantly, this article does not base that compatibility on assertion; it argues that Bishop's own poetic form, the use of the conditional mood, the kinetic syntax, and the refusal of totalizing description offers a linguistic methodology for precisely the negotiation that the theoretical dispute between Gordanpour and Rezaei's formalism and Bennett's vitalism stages. The poem is not simply a site to which we bring the theoretical dispute; it is a site in which that dispute is actively worked out in language.

It is worth mentioning another, more genre-specific precedent. In a 2022 study of material agency in the travel narratives of Dorothy Wordsworth, April McGinnis draws on James Gibson's theory of environmental affordances and Andrew Pickering's concept of nonhuman agency to argue that the "cluttered" landscapes in Wordsworth's travel writing "persistently conduct" the traveler's attention toward the material continuity between human traveler and nonhuman environment (McGinnis, 2022, p.44). McGinnis's study demonstrates that the pairing this article pursues material agency theory and the genre of travel writing is in itself an active area of inquiry. Does "Questions of Travel" pose a related, but distinct, question? Whereas McGinnis's "cluttered" landscapes operate cumulatively, through an accumulation of obstacles that slowly reorients the walker's attention, Bishop's poem stages four separate elemental encounters: waterfall, rain, mountains, and streams, each operating through a different register of material force.

A word is also needed about the relation of a thing-power reading to the psychoanalytic and biographical approaches to Bishop's landscapes, which remain influential. For example, Cassandra Laity links Bishop's rockscapes to "primordial" maternal desire and queer longing (Cassandra, 2016, p.430), a reading that still packs quite a punch for sections of Bishop's work, especially poems like "At the Fishhouses." A new materialist reading does not replace this tradition. It is working at a different register, asking not what the landscape reveals about the speaker's interiority, but what the landscape is staged as doing. The rhetorical energies of the poem in "Questions of Travel" are devoted to the latter question: the waterfalls blind, the rain saturates, the mountains dwarf, and the streams set the pace. These are not exclusively tropes of human feeling, though they are not exclusively independent of it either and the tension between these two possibilities is, this article suggests, part of what

the poem stages. The poem's placement of this tension in a specifically Brazilian landscape, one encountered by a traveler coded by biography and by the volume's own cultural positioning as a visitor from a North American frame of reference, means that the theoretical tension between human representation and non-human vitality cannot be neatly disentangled from the political tension between the traveler's interpretive resources and the landscape that resists them. This entanglement, which the poem stages without resolving, runs through all four of the close readings that follow.

Four careful readings, each devoted to one of the poem's major elemental figures, waterfall, rain, mountains, and streams, develop the argument. These four elements are conceived as exerting "thing-power" through various modes and temporalities: the waterfall through a sudden perceptual interruption; rain through indiscriminate saturation and the subversion of navigational technology; the mountains through monumental, withdrawn immobility that transcends human comprehension; and the streams through kinetic velocity that dissolves boundaries and exerts its rhythmic pressure. A fifth section brings these four modes together in a structural argument about the poem's sequencing and juxtaposition of them. The choice of waterfall, rain, mountains, and streams as the elemental set that organizes this article is not arbitrary, although it must be explicitly defended against the fuller inventory of nonhuman actants that populate Bishop's Brazilian poems among them, "the toucan", the "fat brown bird," and the "fire balloons" of "Brazil, January 1, 1502" and "The Armadillo." These four elements were chosen for two reasons. First, they occupy structurally significant load-bearing positions in the poem: the waterfall and streams in the establishing description of the opening stanza, the rain at the volta that turns toward the poem's central question, and the mountains as the recurring backdrop against which the human "trip" is staged. Second, each is subject to the proleptic or agentive grammatical treatment ("would be," "must have," "keep traveling") that this article identifies as the formal signature of material agency in Bishop's work. Animal figures, on the other hand, are usually syntactically subordinated as objects of address or apostrophe ("Sure are big creatures." "Look! It's a she!"), rather than being ascribed the independent verbal agency that this study traces. This is not to say, to be clear, that an analysis based on faunal rather than elemental agency would be illegitimate in fact, such an analysis, sensitive to the poem's "noble pantomimist" trees and its "self-pitying mountains," could fruitfully extend the present argument but rather to clarify that the four-element typology traces a particular grammatical phenomenon (the proleptic construction)

rather than purporting to cover the poem's nonhuman population comprehensively.

The Waterfall's Interruption: Perceptual Agency, Formal Anticipation, and the Limits of the Gaze

In "Questions of Travel" the line 'the waterfalls would be blinding' foregrounds the waterfall as a force that can overwhelm human perception, not merely as a scenic ornament (Bishop, 1965, p.93). The verb "blinding" dislodges the human mastery of sight, placing the waterfall as a conditioning entity of the traveller's sensory horizon rather than submitting to the traveller's contemplative gaze. The blinding action of the waterfall is consistent with Bennett's idea of thing power: it does not simply break the speaker's vision but, within the logic of the poem, asserts its own material momentum against the traveller's desire to see. The phrasing of the bishop refuses to domesticate the waterfall into a picturesque spectacle. The formal mechanism by which it does so deserves attention. The conditional mood, 'would be blinding', does not diminish the threat but enhances it. This construction works rhetorically as prolepsis, a figure of classical and Renaissance poetics in which the speaker anticipates an event that has not yet happened, admitting the force of the waterfall before any encounter happens. The speaker does not narrate a past blinding; she is already, in the present of the poem, structured by the effects of the future blinding. This is the more specific thing that Bishop's poem does in its formal way that Gordanpour's and Rezaei's accounts cannot fully capture. Where that account registers the mood of conditionality as a grammatical choice that encodes the traveller's awareness of a nature she does not control, attention to prolepsis reveals a tighter argumentative structure: the waterfall does not wait to act on the traveller when she arrives at it. It has already performed, via the proleptic conditional, a reorganisation of the traveller's perceptual stance in the present tense of the poem. This is not form as a symbol of an independent nature but form as the act of material agency itself.

A thing-power reading adds another dimension: the proleptic conditional makes an non-actual anticipated waterfall already exert actual perceptual force on the traveller's present. This is not the same as 'the form registers the speaker's awareness of nature's independence'. It is closer to what Bennett means when she attributes 'trajectories, propensities, or tendencies' to nonhuman entities (Bennett, 2010, p.viii). Regardless of whether one accepts Bennett's ontological claims about the vitality of matter, the interpretive effect of reading the proleptic conditional as a site of material agency rather than simply a grammatical marker of the speaker's psychological stance is

to emphasise a temporal structure in the poem that a formal account alone can describe but not fully account for.

Here the postcolonial dimension of the poem needs to be named rather than deferred; named, that is, through Bishop's own lexical choices rather than simply asserted as a general framework laid over a universal material event. The poem's central question: "Should we have stayed at home and thought of here? Where do we stand today?" (Bishop, 1956, *Complete Poems*, p.93) casts the whole Brazilian landscape experience as one of touristic deliberation, a matter of whether or not to have been "here", not a description of inhabited ground. This framing is pointedly extended to the poem's treatment of sound and history: birdsong, elsewhere in Bishop's work a marker of ambient or intimate nature, becomes here "the weak calligraphy of songbirds' cages" (Bishop, 1956, *Complete Poems* p.93), an image that renders the nonhuman world as a form of inscription, one the traveller can recognise as writing without being able to read it. The following simile is equally revealing: rain sounds "so much like politicians' speeches: / two hours of unrelenting oratory" (Bishop, 1956, *Complete Poems* p.93), reducing meteorological excess to the register of national political discourse the traveller cannot understand. The "blinding" of the waterfall is therefore not simply an excess over perception in the abstract but an excess over a perceptual apparatus that the poem has already designated by means of its imagery of illegible "calligraphy", untranslatable "oratory", and its structuring question of whether to have come "here" at all as the apparatus of a North American visitor trying to understand Brazil through the inherited categories of travel writing. To read the agency of the waterfall only through Bennett's universal lexicon of thing-power, without attending to this lexical marking of the gaze as foreign and interpretive, risks what scholars working in the frame of "tropical materialisms" have identified as a characteristic move of new materialist theory: importing a Euro-American theoretical vocabulary to narrate encounters with non-Euro-American landscapes in ways that may obscure rather than illuminate the colonial and touristic histories that structure those encounters (Benitez and Lundberg, 2022, p.3–5). The article is not suggesting that Bennett's framework cannot apply to "Questions of Travel" but that the framework's situated dimension is authorised by the poem's own diction: its illegible calligraphies, its untranslatable oratories, and its constant weighing of having "come" against having "stayed at home". The article argues that the proleptic construction Bishop uses for the waterfall is continuous with this lexicon of the foreign-as-text, not separate from it.

It is important to recognise that this reading rests on theoretical commitments that are not uncontroversial. Benjamin Boysen has argued that the new materialist trend

of "strategic anthropomorphism" (the ascription of intention-like "trajectories" and "propensities" to matter) violates its own logic and can obscure the specifically semiotic and linguistic character of the phenomena it describes (Boysen, 2018, p.228-32). Boysen's view is that the article's description of the waterfall's 'agency' could simply be seen as a feature of Bishop's grammar and the reader's interpretive activity. The fact that Gordanpour's and Rezaei and Bennett's approaches are "compatible rather than opposed" does not suffice to answer this objection. Instead, we want to argue that Bishop's formal restraint, her famous impersonality, her refusal of Romantic apostrophe, and her syntactic preference for constructed passives and conditionals over active assertions are just the linguistic methodology that Boysen's critique implicitly demands. Bishop's poetic form does not anthropomorphise the waterfall by endowing it with desire or intention; it does something more demanding. The verb "blinding", Bishop places in a proleptic conditional to register the material force of the waterfall without attributing consciousness to the force. On this reading, the formal restraint of the poem is not an occasion to abandon the thing-power framework but a model for how that framework can be held with the analytical precision that Boysen's "semiophobia" critique requires, attending to the genuine causality of non-human elements without collapsing that causality into the grammar of human agency. The formal analysis does not just illustrate the theoretical claim; it judges it.

A brief engagement with a body of thought largely external to the Euro-American new materialist canon this study otherwise surveys would help sharpen the decolonial stakes of this article's argument. Such is the case of Amerindian perspectivism as developed primarily through the ethnographic work of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro in Amazonia. The perspectivist argument is that Western cosmologies separate humans from animals on the ground of better cognition, while Amerindian cosmologies claim that humans and nonhumans share an underlying "human" subjectivity in which each species sees itself as human and other species including humans as animals (Eduardo, p.23). This framework does not map onto "Questions of Travel" in any direct ethnographic sense. Bishop's poem is not an Amerindian text, and its speaker is explicitly positioned as a North American visitor and not a participant in Indigenous Amazonian cosmology. Here, perspectivism is relevant comparatively and diagnostically, not ethnographically: it foregrounds the cultural-historical specificity of the "thing-power" that Bennett and other new materialists attribute to matter. Amerindian perspectivism distributes subjectivity symmetrically: nonhuman beings have interior viewpoints commensurate with human ones, mediated by figures like the shaman who can move between perspectives, with the

gap in perspective bridged by shamans whose gift of adopting nonhuman subjectivities enables them to see other species as they see themselves. Bennett's vital materialism, by contrast, grants agency to matter but in an asymmetrical way: things "act" upon a human observer who remains in the position of the one acted upon, the one for whom the waterfall is "blinding". Viewed through this comparative lens, Bishop's poem does not fit neatly into either slot. The speaker lacks the perspectival mobility of the shaman, as well as the command of the landscape in its totality; the proleptic grammar identified by this article matter's actions narrated in advance of and independent of the speaker's perception indicates, but does not realise, the symmetrical distribution of agency that perspectivism describes as already constitutive of Amerindian relations to the nonhuman. This comparison is offered not to assimilate Bishop's poem to an Indigenous epistemology it does not inhabit but to specify, by contrast, the historically situated and asymmetrical structure of the "vital matter" the poem's grammar stages a structure that remains legible as the apprehension of a visitor, however much that apprehension strains against its own limits.

Rain: Saturation, Duration, and the Compromising of Cartographic Mastery

Where the waterfall works by sudden, expected interruption, rain, in "Questions of Travel", works by pervasive, indiscriminate saturation. Bishop conceptualises rain not as a passive weather event, but as an environmental presence that realigns the conditions of travel. The poem's catalogue rain falling on "the travellers, the animals, the children" (93) effaces distinctions of kind by situating all beings within a common field of exposure, reducing hierarchies of significance into what Bennett would call an "assemblage," a confederation of human and nonhuman elements held together by a shared material condition (Bennett, 2010, p.23–24). Repetition emphasises the temporal nature of rain, as Bishop states, "The rain is falling" (93), which lengthens duration and creates a rhythm of unfolding in the poem, which disallows the reader and the traveller to set the pace of experience. Rain's mode is this durational quality versus the waterfall's anticipatory, episodic mode. Rain is a condition, not an event, a presence sustained that the poem keeps in view instead of passing.

One of the most significant images in the poem is the rain-compromised map of the traveller. Thus the postcolonial reading, urged above, is not optional but inescapable. The map is not a neutral instrument of orientation; it is a historically specific technology of spatial mastery. In the context of a poem staging a North American traveller's encounter with Brazil, the map bears the full weight of what Mary Louise Pratt has called the "imperial eye," the organising, classifying gaze through which European and

North American travellers have historically transformed unfamiliar places into legible, manageable spaces. Rain makes the traveller's map less reliable. It does not just inconvenience her; it actually undermines the instrument through which she has been trying to domesticate and navigate a Brazilian landscape on her terms. The indiscriminate rain falling as much on "travellers", "animals", and "children" as on one or the other, regardless of hierarchies of observer and observed, accomplishes exactly the levelling of anthropocentric categories that Bennett's assemblage-thinking exhorts, but in a landscape whose relation to the traveller is not simply ontological but also historical and political.

Where this article gestures to the "map" as a colonial and imperial technology, that observation becomes historically specific in the context of scholarship on the cartographic history of the Americas. Colonial-era maps were not just documents of land but were tools for the rhetorical and political construction of territory: early cartographic representations of the Americas operated as literary and visual maps that not only did not simply represent the land but also helped to write the space into existence for a European audience, constructing a cultural perspective through which the territory was viewed and demonstrating power over the conquered space and people. More generally, the 'linguistic turn' in Latin American colonial studies has demonstrated that structures of spatial perception and representation which are culturally based have been an important part of the colonial process, with maps and conceptions of geography serving as one of the main cultural forms in which power was exercised. Read against this scholarship, a moment when a rain or volcanic event makes a landscape "unrediscovered" or resistant to inherited nomenclature is not merely an illustration of a generic encounter between human technology and nonhuman force; it is a staging, in miniature, of the failure of the cartographic apparatus that Craib and others identify as constitutive of the colonial relation to Latin American territory, an apparatus the poem's speaker, as inheritor of that tradition of travel writing, carries with her even when she does not explicitly invoke it.

This echoes Timothy Morton's description of weather as part of a "ecological mesh" that resists any fantasy of human mastery over natural systems (Morton, 2010, p.274). Rain, for Morton, is precisely the sort of thing that defies localisation and intentionality: it is everywhere and nowhere, affecting everyone equally, indifferent to the traveller's desire to stand outside it and watch. But it should be said straightforwardly, rather than with more confidence than the text warrants, that the poem's treatment of the map is suggestive rather than emphatic: the compromised

reliability of the map is read best as one example among several of the poem's more general attentiveness to the limits of human instruments of orientation in conditions that the poem does not frame as fully within human control. What can be said with greater confidence is that the instrument that rain compromises the reliability of the map is not a culturally neutral object and that rain's indifference to the map's organising categories is not here a mere ontological fact. It is a political fact, too, enacted on a landscape with its histories of being mapped and measured and made navigable for outside eyes.

The manner of rain's operation in the poem has a distinctively wide reach. Rather than the expected singular force of the waterfall, rain reorders the shared conditions experienced across the poem's catalogue of beings. It is a kind of indiscriminately reaching reach where rain performs something like Bennett's "vitality of matter" a vibrancy the poem stages as operating outside of any one figure's intention or desire (Bennett, 2010, p.3). Bishop's rain is a present, enveloping thing, making the traveller's movement dependent on conditions that the poem does not suggest are under her control. Crucially, at the same time, it also makes the traveller's interpretive frame contingent in the same way as the apparatus of observation, cartography and classification she has brought with her from North America. The rain doesn't care where the map comes from or any of its theoretical pretensions; this, the poem seems to say, is the most politically consequential thing about it

The Mountains: Scale, Withdrawal, and the Colonial Uncanny

If the waterfall functions by predicted cessation, and rain by saturation, the mountains in "Questions of Travel" have a third, qualitatively different way of being present: an imposition of scale that the poem depicts as beyond ordinary perception. Bishop does this with her usual precision: the mountains are "too big to be seen" (93), a phrase that registers not merely a failure of appreciation but a more radical problem an object that, on the terms the poem provides, cannot be organised as an object of perception at all. This formulation has an obvious affinity with Graham Harman's object-orientated ontology, which posits that objects 'withdraw' from full apprehension, maintaining a depth which exceeds any relation in which they are engaged (Harman, 2018, p.12). Bishop's mountains can be read as dramatising something like this withdrawal: their vastness is not only quantitative but, in the terms of the poem itself, a kind of refusal to be assimilated into the frame the traveller brings to them. The phrase "piling up, piling up" (93) is repeated, reinforcing this sense of accumulation and ongoing process: the mountains are not static scenery but a slow, continuing accretion, and the repetition itself enacts, at the level of the line, something of the effect it describes a

formal device characteristic of Bishop's technique more generally, in which sonic and syntactic repetition performs the phenomena the poem names. This article does not add to the first discovery of this device; rather, it reads its effect specifically through the vocabulary of withdrawal: the repetition not only mimics accumulation but also enacts a failure of closure, never arriving at a final, totalising image of the mountains. A couple of caveats are in order here. First, however, a note on citation practice: Here cited is Harman's *Object-Orientated Ontology: A New Theory of Everything* (2018), an introductory synthesis of arguments developed with more technical apparatus in earlier works such as *Tool-Being* (2002) and *The Quadruple Object* (2011). This earlier writing develops the notion of "withdrawal" more fully and connects it to a particular argument about the relation between the "real" qualities of an object and its "sensual" qualities as they appear in any relation. The present article takes the 2018 synthesis as a point of entrance for a readership that might not be specialists in object-orientated ontology, but the more rigorous formulation of the concept in Harman's earlier work would repay further engagement in any extended treatment of withdrawal as it operates across Bishop's geological imagination more broadly.

Second, and more consequentially, the application of a theoretical vocabulary constructed largely in dialogue with Western philosophical traditions, Heidegger in Harman's case, Spinoza and Deleuze in the case of much new materialist thought to a poem set in Brazil and concerned with a traveller's encounter with a landscape coded as foreign to her raises a question this article cannot and will not pass over. Scholars working under the rubric of "tropical materialisms" have argued that new materialist and posthumanist theory has been developed largely from "European temperate contexts and is informed by Western philosophies" and that its application to tropical and postcolonial settings requires a "decolonising" attention to "Indigenous cosmologies, ancient philosophies, and 'animist materialism'" that have understood "matter's liveliness" in ways that long precede Bennett's and Harman's formulations (Benitez and Lundberg, 2022, p.3). In this vein, Neera M. Singh has argued that the "celebration of liveliness and entanglements" at the centre of the new materialist and posthumanist "nonhuman turn" is a gesture whose "healthy corrective" already exists within "feminist, Black and Indigenous scholarship and practices", but whose Western-genealogised iteration too often proceeds as if these alternatives did not (Singh, 2022, p.85).

These critiques bear directly on this article's reading of the mountains. "Questions of Travel" stages a traveller coded, by the poem's own biographical and textual context, as a visitor from a temperate, North American frame of

reference encountering a Brazilian landscape whose scale exceeds her interpretive resources. Reading this encounter through Harman's withdrawal, without further examination, risks reproducing precisely the gesture Singh and the contributors to *Tropical Materialisms* describe: importing a Euro-American theoretical vocabulary to narrate an encounter with a non-Euro-American landscape in a way that may obscure the colonial and touristic histories that structure that encounter in the first place. This article does not claim to resolve this tension and a full accounting of it would require engagement with scholarship on Bishop's Brazilian writing and its relationship to mid-century U.S. Brazilian cultural and political relations that lies beyond this article's scope. What can be said, more modestly, is this: the mountains' "withdrawal" in this poem may be read not only as an instance of a general ontological condition (Harman's claim is that all objects withdraw, regardless of context) but also, more specifically, as a formal registration of the traveller's position her inability to read this landscape according to the interpretive categories she brings with her. On this more modest reading, "withdrawal" names not a universal property of objects but a relational failure specific to this traveller in this place. The poem's interest may lie precisely in not specifying which of these two readings the universal-ontological or the situated-relational it intends. The mountains' "too big to be seen" is not only an ontological statement about the limits of perception; it is also, in the context of a poem concerned throughout with what it means for this person to be in this landscape at all, a statement about the limits of her perception, in this place, shaped by this history of looking. What refuses to be organised as an object of perception is also, this article proposes, what refuses to be made available for the North American traveller's mode of appropriating landscape as knowledge. The poem's formal refusal the repetition that never closes, the phrase "too big to be seen" that names failure without resolving it is the poem's way of holding these two readings without deciding between them, and flagging this ambiguity, rather than resolving it in favour of the universalising reading that an unqualified application of Harman's framework would suggest, is the more responsible critical procedure.

Streams with Kinetic Agency, the Mesh, and the Limits of Lyric Scale

The streams of "Questions of Travel" achieve the elemental quartet of the poem in a fourth mode: kinetic velocity. The streams are pictured in perpetual motion, as opposed to the waterfall's expected pause, the rain's constant saturation, and the mountains' immense immobility. "Streams and waterfalls tumbling, tossing" (Bishop, 1965, p.92) emphasises the ceaseless energy of those flows; Bishop's kinetic diction "tumbling, tossing" enacts in its syntax

something of the movement it describes, the paired participles running on without a connecting pause. The phrase "streams and waterfalls tumbling, tossing" (92) and the waterfall in the first section of the poem ("the waterfalls would be blinding" (93)) are not necessarily the same textual instance, and the above analysis does not depend on it. The article thematically organises the poem's elemental quartet of waterfall, rain, mountains and streams for the purpose of analysis; it does not claim that each element appears only once within the poem's text. The argument is not that there is some one-to-one correspondence between an element and a single line. It is about the modes of agency each element has as a recurring figure. These flows can be read through what Bennett calls "vital materialism": the recognition that nonhuman entities have trajectories and tendencies that do not wait upon human recognition (47). The mountains assert themselves in resistant stillness, whereas the streams are depicted as pure motion, their pace setting a tempo the traveller does not control. Their velocity also indicates a breaking down of boundaries: the streams 'hurry too rapidly down to the sea' (93), taking the attention of the poem with it on its way, in a way that does not pause for the contemplative gaze of the traveller.

The idea of the 'strange stranger' from Timothy Morton is useful here: a figure that is 'familiar as a category... but fundamentally alien as an entity' (Morton, 2010, p.277), encountered again and again but never fully grasped. This article is not the first recent application of Morton's "mesh" and "strange stranger" vocabulary to poetry; Alwyn Roux's 2021 study of Juliana Spahr's *Well Then There Now* in the *Journal of Literary Studies* uses precisely this vocabulary to read Spahr's poems of "inter-connectivity", asking, in Morton's terms, "Who or what is interconnected with what or with whom?" and showing how the "strange stranger lives within (and without) each and every being" across Spahr's collection (Roux, 2021, p.8–9). Roux's study demonstrates both the continued relevance of this vocabulary to contemporary ecopoetry and a model for how it might be extended beyond a single citation: Roux traces the "mesh" across an entire collection's network of human and nonhuman relations, rather than applying it to an isolated image. In contrast, the usage of "strange stranger" in this article is more restricted, following primarily one recurring image, rather than mapping a network of relations through the poem, as Roux does for Spahr's collection. This distinction is, in part, an issue of genre and scale: "Questions of Travel" is a far shorter and more tightly composed text than the collection Roux analyses. But it is also a limitation of the present analysis, to be acknowledged rather than elided: the streams' 'strange stranger' quality, as read here, names a local effect the traveller's momentary

encounter with a familiar-yet-alien current rather than a structuring principle operating across the whole of the poem's network of human and nonhuman relations. Read in its entirety, with the companion poems in the 1965 volume, whether "Questions of Travel" might sustain a more extended "mesh" reading along the lines. Rather than answering the question of what Roux develops for Spahr, this article asks, perhaps fruitfully for future work on Bishop's Brazil poems read as a sequence.

Scale, Sequence, and the Poem's Structural Argument

The four previous sections have treated some elemental figure, each one by itself. It asks a different question: not what each element does in isolation, but what work the sequencing and juxtaposition of these four figures in the poem itself perform. This question is usefully framed by Jakob Olsson's study of "posthuman ecologies" in contemporary poetry in *Studia Neophilologica* (2021). Olsson examines how recent poetry enacts 'shifts in scale' and 'intermediations' between radically different orders of nonhuman entities, arguing that such shifts are bound up with a 'problematisation of anthropocentrism' that operates through the experience of scale-shifting itself, rather than through any single image (Olsson, 2021, p.143). Olsson's main texts are contemporary digital-age poems with an idiom that is quite unlike Bishop's; yet the structural insight that scale-shifting between registers of nonhuman agency can itself be a vehicle for posthumanist critique, regardless of what any one register represents can be carried over to "Questions of Travel."

Seen in this light the shifts between the four elemental figures within the poem might be considered a systematic shift across scales and temporalities: the waterfall's anticipated, nearly instantaneous perceptual event; the rain's durative, continuous state; the mountains' geological, nearly static deep time; and the streams' rapid, surface-level movement. None of these temporalities is privileged as the poem's 'true' register; the traveler moves among them without the poem providing a stable vantage from which all four could be held in view simultaneously. This is a kind of 'intermediation,' in Olsson's terms, not a synthesis that resolves the four registers into a single coherent picture but a structure that holds incommensurable temporalities in proximity, with the traveler as the figure who must move between them without the benefit of a perspective that would unify them.

This reformulation addresses a structural problem in earlier versions of this argument, where the relation between the four elements was primarily characterized as a "dialectic" that ended in a conflict between mountains and streams. The problem with that formulation was that it implied that the

poem's argument goes somewhere that the mountains/streams pairing is a sort of thesis toward which the poem's structure progresses. The present formulation, based on Olsson's account of intermediation, makes a more modest claim: that the structure of the poem is one of unresolved scale-shifting, where the cumulative effect is not a synthesis but an accumulation of incommensurable encounters that the traveler and the reader must hold without final reconciliation. So the mountains and streams are the most extreme pair, geological stillness versus kinetic surface motion, but this juxtaposition is one instance of a general structural principle. Through this lens, what the structural sequencing of the poem exposes is a structural argument about the epistemological position of the traveler. Any change of scale, from the single, instantaneous experience of the waterfall to the durative condition of rain to the geological withdrawal of the mountains to the kinetic surface motion of the streams, precludes the possibility of a stable, unified observation post. The traveler cannot see all four time registers at one go; she is only able to travel through them, one after the other, never reaching the synoptic view that the conventions of travel writing, with their characteristic distancing and totalization of landscape, would require. So the poem's formal sequencing is also a formal critique of the traveller's epistemological assumptions and, by extension, of the genre conventions she brings from a North American tradition of travel writing to a Brazilian landscape that the poem stages as actively resistant to those conventions.

CONCLUSION

This essay has read "Questions of Travel" through Jane Bennett's concept of 'thing-power', paying attention to the way the poem's waterfalls, rain, mountains and streams are staged as entities with their own trajectories, tempos and in the case of the mountains in withdrawal from the traveller's interpretive frame. The article has sought to build upon rather than replace the form-conscious ecopoetic reading of Gordanpour and Rezaei (2021) by asking what becomes visible when the poem's elemental figures are read not simply as objects whose formal treatment registers an independent nature but as entities the poem's grammar and structure stage as exerting force themselves. The key methodological move has been to demonstrate how Bishop's formal restraint her proleptic conditionals, her kinetic syntax, and her refusal of totalising description operates not simply as illustration of new materialist claims but as a linguistic practice that performs, tests, and arbitrates them in significant ways.

Importantly, this article has also sought to deliver on a promise that much new materialist literary criticism makes,

but does not keep: to weave the postcolonial and decolonial dimensions of analysis into the readings themselves, rather than relegating them to a late-section acknowledgement. In each of the four elemental readings a co-present concern has been sustained whose perception is being reorganised, whose cartographic mastery is being compromised, and whose interpretive resources are being exceeded. The Brazilian landscape in this poem is not an ontological abstraction. It is a historically situated geography with its relations to the mode of arrival, observation and classification of the North American observer. Reading the rain's compromise of the traveller's map as merely one example of material agency, without considering the type of instrument the map is, in this place and time, would reproduce precisely the unmarked universalism that Singh and Benitez and Lundberg identify as the characteristic limitation of new materialist theory in its Euro-American genealogised form (Singh, 2022, p.85; Benitez and Lundberg, 2022, p.3–5).

What this reading yields is not a univocal overarching claim about Bishop's "proto-posthumanism", a frame this article has intentionally eschewed, both on account of the term's potential to produce an anachronistic claim about Bishop's own intellectual investments and because, as the discussion of Giragosian's actual argument makes clear, Bishop's documented intellectual investments in biopolitics and evolutionary thought followed a very different theoretical genealogy (Dewey, Darwin) than the one this article has employed (Bennett, Harman, Morton, Alaimo). This article proposes instead a more limited claim: that reading "Questions of Travel" through Bennett's vocabulary of thing-power brings into focus a set of temporal and modal distinctions among the poem's elemental figures anticipation, duration, withdrawal, and velocity that a reading focused on form as the register of nature's independence, while compatible with these distinctions, does not foreground in the same way; and that attending to the poem's proleptic and syntactic formal resources reveals

This article has also sought to model a mode of engagement with new materialist theory that takes seriously the critiques that theory has made. They are not objections external to the project of reading Bishop's poem through new materialist theory: Boysen's objection that new materialism's attributions of agency to matter may amount to an unacknowledged anthropomorphism and the objections of Singh and the contributors to Tropical Materialisms that the theoretical vocabulary this article deploys carries an unmarked Euro-American genealogy whose application to a Brazilian landscape requires more than passing acknowledgement. They are considerations, as this article has suggested, which the reading itself must sustain, from the first elemental encounter to the last.

Future scholarship might usefully extend this enquiry pursued here in a few directions: a fuller engagement with Kim Fortuny's chapter-length treatment of "Questions of Travel" and its account of the poem's politics of travel; an extension of the "mesh" reading of the streams along the lines Roux develops for Spahr's collection, considered across the full sequence of Bishop's Brazil poems, not a single text; and, most importantly, a sustained engagement with the postcolonial and decolonial critiques of new materialism that this article has only been able to partially integrate, asking what an account of "thing-power" in Bishop's Brazil poems might look like if it began from the "tropical materialisms" Benitez and Lundberg call for, rather than arriving at that question – as this article still partly does – only partway through. "Questions of Travel" does not answer the question of how a traveller perceives the forces of the landscape through which she moves, nor the question of what it means for a Euro-American observer to use a Euro-American theoretical vocabulary to describe a Brazilian landscape that has its own histories of being theorised, surveyed, and made available for foreign observation. The poem uses questions again and again and without resolution in four different registers of elemental force. In this article I try to read that unsettledness as significant in itself, as a feature of the poem's structure rather than a gap to be filled by theory, while being attentive both to the possibilities and limits of the theoretical vocabulary used to do so.

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The Poetic-Pictorial Interplay in Wallace Stevens's "Credences of Summer"

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Abstract— Wallace Stevens, a stylist master and aesthetic philosopher, has dedicated his poetic career to grasping the essence of reality and imagination, especially the dynamic mechanism of their integration. In "Credences of Summer," Stevens articulates his twin pillars of poetic system, reality and imagination, through a dialogue with modern painting. Drawing on the techniques and aesthetic principles of both Impressionist and Cubist art, he creates an interplay of poetry and painting. Using Impressionist brushstrokes, Stevens explores the limitations and contradictions of independent reality; through Cubist forms and multiple perspectives, he delves into imagination's constructive and deconstructive power, while showcasing the dynamic union of reality and imagination.



Keywords— Credences of Summer, Intermediality, Poetics, Wallace Stevens

I. INTRODUCTION

As one of America's most respected 20th-century poets, Wallace Stevens is both a master stylist and a philosopher of aesthetics. According to J. Hillis Miller, Stevens's poems "are poems about poetry. They contain within themselves discussions of what they are and of what they mean." (Miller, 2000, p. 4) ^[1] Stevens's poetic philosophy undergoes a process of germination, experimentation, and formation, spanning his entire creative career. Reality and imagination stand as two foundational concepts in his poetic system. In "Credences of Summer," which he wrote nine years before his death, he constantly explores the essence of reality and imagination and their intricate relationship.

Scholars have long been captivated by the concepts of imagination and reality in Wallace Stevens's poetry. However, the majority have reduced this pair of concepts to a binary opposition, thereby examining the waxing and waning of these two opposing concepts throughout Stevens's poetic development. Helen Vendler notices this binary distinction in Stevens criticism, and she chooses to replace it with the term "magnitude," (Vendler, 1984, p. 62) ^[2] which also derived from Stevens. Indeed, Stevens's views on imagination and reality have undergone a lengthy

developmental process, culminating in a systematic perspective in "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," written in 1947: the fusion of reality and imagination, that is, "the First Idea" and symbol's alignment, achieving poetic ideals in a moment of transparency, providing ultimate satisfaction and pleasure, which is the supreme fiction.

Critics at home and abroad have focused on analyzing the formation process of Stevens's poetic philosophy. In addition to examining his direct statements in diaries, letters, and essays, some critics have investigated his reception and critique of poetic philosophies from predecessors such as Plato, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Walt Whitman, and Paul Valéry as reflected in these texts. There are also some scholars paying attention to Wallace Stevens's engagement with and response to art aesthetics as an integrated whole. For instance, through a meticulous analysis of "Stevens's interactive relationship with the 'expressive theory' literary tradition," (Cheng, 2012, p. 1) ^[3] Cheng has elucidated the origin and evolutionary trajectory of Stevens's view of abstract within his poetic philosophy.

Apparently, the development of Wallace Stevens's poetic thought is not limited to influences from poets and

philosophers; it is also profoundly nourished by ideas from other modern art disciplines, most notably the impact of modern painting. Stevens repeatedly acknowledged his debt to painters, and his poetry has grown richer through these artistic engagements. In the paper "The Relations Between Poetry and Painting," which Stevens read at the Museum of Modern Art in 1951, he expounded on the intrinsic connections between the two art forms, asserting that in our time, from literature to painting, there is a shared pursuit of "the greatest truth" (Stevens, 1997, p. 750) ^[4]¹ through reality or fiction. Furthermore, his renowned poem "The Man with the Blue Guitar" is widely regarded as "bearing a striking intermedial resemblance to Picasso's Cubist paintings" (MacLeod, 1987, p. 359) ^[5], serving as a compelling testament to Stevens's practice of poetic-pictorial resonance. The relationship between Wallace Stevens and avant-garde art is profound and complex. Though he "positioned himself on the periphery of modernism as an overall movement," (Taylor, 2009, p. 103) ^[6] he never hid his appreciation for and borrowing from avant-garde art. According to the mainstream view in Stevens criticism, his formal innovations influenced by avant-garde art are widely acknowledged, yet he always maintained a distance from the mainstream avant-garde. As Lee Margaret Jenkins notes, "Stevens himself was never an avant-garde in terms of politics or art." (Jenkins, 2000, p. 18) ^[7] Owing to his friend "Walter Conrad Arensberg, who was a participant in the 1913 Armory Show and a collector of avant-garde art," (MacLeod, 1993, p. 4) ^[8] Stevens had the opportunity to enter the core arena of New York's modern art activities and interact closely with avant-garde artists such as Marcel Duchamp and Albert Gleizes. "I have taste for Braque and a purse for Bombis," (Benamou, 1959, p. 48) ^[9] a letter to his Paris art dealer demonstrated Stevens's attraction to impressionism and cubism.

On this basis, it is possible and practical to analyze Stevens's poems through an inter-media lens, especially by focusing on the pictorial elements of the poems. This kind of intermedial analysis will not only decode the obscurity and abstraction of the poems but also challenge the disciplinary boundaries between literature and visual arts, thereby enhancing readers' understanding of Stevens's poetic philosophy. "Credences of Summer," written by Wallace Stevens in 1947, emerged during a period when he had almost established a mature poetic framework. Yet

his philosophical inquiry into the essence and interplay of reality and imagination remained ceaseless. The poem's rich natural imagery embodies profound visual elements like color, line, and cubist structures to reflect a dialogue with modern painting, particularly Impressionist and Cubist traditions. This paper, therefore, analyzes the poetic-pictorial interplay in "Credences of Summer," revealing Stevens's view of reality and imagination through his interaction with modern visual arts.

II. IMPRESSIONIST DEPICTION: THE HEALING YET UNATTAINABLE INDEPENDENT REALITY

In the essay "The Relations Between Poetry and Painting," Stevens mentions two important areas in which painting has had an impact on poetry: technique and aesthetics. Though he does not cite his own creative work as an example, it is still acceptable to regard this essay as a self-analysis. This judgment points in part to the analytical direction of an inter-media study of Stevens's poetry, which is to focus on the pictorial techniques that Stevens migrates through his poems and the aesthetic philosophies that he holds similar to those of modern painters.

Michel Benamou holds that "Stevens's poems tell even more about his independence on art than his lectures and pictures do," (Benamou, 1959, p. 48) and "Credences of Summer" is a convincing example. As a ten-canto nature poem, it vividly portrays vibrant natural scenes while conveying Stevens's philosophical meditations. Stevens's exploration of the essence of reality and imagination unfolds through this sequence: he begins by presenting reality as an independent entity, then exposes its inherent limitations and contradictions, and ultimately envisions a constructed complex where imagination and reality merge and fuse seamlessly. Notably, when depicting landscapes as symbols of independent reality, Stevens adopts an impressionistic approach through his selection of imagery to capture fleeting sensory impressions and atmospheric nuances akin to the brushstrokes of Monet or Renoir, yet translated into poetic texture.

In the first three cantos, Stevens intends to depict the objective external environment, which exists independently of consciousness. And it is referred to in this analysis as the independent reality². In the first canto,

¹ All prose and poetry by Stevens cited in this paper are taken from Stevens, W. (1997). *Collected Poetry and Prose* (F. Kermode & J. Richardson, Eds.). New York: Library of America, so repeated citations are omitted.

² The term "independent reality" actually refers to reality in Stevens's poetic system, and it is used in this paper to emphasize the characteristic of reality being independent of consciousness.

this external environment is portrayed as beautiful nature: summer arrives with lush green grass, birds singing, and vibrant roses bringing "a weight of fragrance." The verses present a vivid, dynamic summer landscape, immersing readers in a triple sensory experience of sight, sound, and smell. "The roses are heavy with a weight / Of fragrance and the mind lays by its trouble." (p. 322) Here, Stevens employs synesthesia, imbuing the intangible scent with a physical sense of weight to emphasize its intensity. Simultaneously, the "weight" of the fragrance counterbalances the "weight" of mental burdens, allowing the mind to relax. This prepares the psyche to approach nature's fullness and attain the timeless essence of summer. Nature guides the mind to relinquish troubles and arrive at a symbolic, abstract threshold: "This is the last day of a certain year / Beyond which there is nothing left of time [...] There is nothing more inscribed nor thought nor felt." (p. 322) This threshold marks the end of a specific time, no longer shaped by inscription, thought, or feeling. Instead, it symbolizes existence itself, unmediated by consciousness, thereby forming the independent reality. At this moment, the mind merges with the external world. This union "must comfort the heart's core against / Its false disasters," (p. 322) where "false disasters" correspond to the earlier "trouble." They are burdens rendered illusory because they are products of memory, which is inherently imaginative and excluded from independent reality. Merging with reality seems to evade the debilitating consequences of both time and imagination. Within this independent reality, the poet envisions "fathers," "mothers," and "lovers." (p. 322) The plural forms universalize the scene: "fathers" standing protectively, "mothers" touching and speaking to symbolize emotional support, and "lovers waiting in the soft dry grass" evoking warmth, sincerity, and non-erotic love. Together, these figures embody an idealized harmony, free from the distortions of subjective perception, anchoring the poem's vision of a transcendent, unmediated reality.

After depicting the beauty and purity of independent reality, Stevens reaffirms his ultimate pursuit of it in the following two cantos, elevating it to a metaphysical concept: "Let's see the very thing and nothing else. [...] Trace the gold sun about the whitened sky / Without evasion by a simple metaphor." (p. 322) In his poem "Gubbinial," Stevens once compared the sun to a "strange flower," "jungle feathers," "animal eye" (p. 69) and so on to emphasize the importance of imagination. Here, however, he rejects metaphors as tools to comprehend the world, because metaphors describe reality through resemblance, mediated by imagination. Stevens instead desires to see and know the world directly, bypassing the

mind's embellishments. This aligns with his recurring symbol of the "man of glass" in his poem, symbolizing a phenomenologically epistemological quest for transparency, where perception is unmediated by subjective filters. In these two cantos, Stevens unveils the essential nature of independent reality: it is an experiential world constructed by humans through their perception of the objective physical world, yet fundamentally, it remains a metaphysical concept about reality itself.

In Canto III, Stevens employs two metaphors to refine the independent reality: the mountain and the old man. These are two symbols of extremity: the mountain representing the pinnacle of geographical height, and the old man embodying the zenith of human life. By drawing parallels between these two images, Stevens emphasizes the extremity of independent reality: it is a peak that demands arduous effort to reach, and it signifies an endpoint in both spatial and temporal terms. This endpoint is the refuge. Considering the earlier references to "arrested peace" in the foliage and "right ignorance," which directly evoke Adam and Eve's time in Eden, the term "refuge" here carries religious undertones: since humanity's expulsion from Eden for eating the forbidden fruit, people have been cast into a state of perpetual spiritual exile, with no place to rest. Stevens positions independent reality as a secular alternative to religious faith, arguing that it not only evades the debilitating consequences of both time and imagination but also serves as a permanent spiritual sanctuary.

It is evident that Stevens consciously emulated the brushstrokes of Impressionist painting in his depiction of independent reality, particularly through his use of color and shared aesthetic principles. With concise language, he paints an impressionistic colorful scene: lush green grass, vibrant red roses, a golden sun, and a cerulean sky. Though sunlight is never explicitly mentioned, its presence is felt as a luminous veil cast over all things, mirroring the Impressionists' preoccupation with light. Just as Impressionist painters rejected traditional dark tones in favor of vivid, unmixed colors to subvert convention, Stevens's palette aligns with the brilliance of summer. Impressionists often use complementary color contrasts to heighten dynamism. For example, in Monet's *The Water Lily Pond* (1900), crimson water lilies mingle with their tea-green reflections in the water. Similarly, in the first canto, Stevens juxtaposes green grass and red roses, establishing a radiant, crystalline tone for the summer landscape.

Stevens's affinity for an Impressionistic color palette is no coincidence. Many scholars have noted his use of Impressionistic colors in his early poetry, especially in *Harmonium*, where vivid hues and light-suffused imagery

dominate. In this poem, "dry grass (mows)" serves as a pivotal image, which can be interpreted as Stevens's subtle allusion to Monet's renowned painting series *Les Meules* (dry grass). This group of oil paintings elevates the mundane subject of haymows into a poetic expression of the interplay between light, color, and time. In an unpublished letter to a Paris art dealer, Stevens wrote: "I share your pleasure in the Impressionistic school. In the pictures of this school, so light in tone, so bright in color, one is conscious of the medium. The pictures are like nature." (Benamou, 1959, p. 50) For Stevens, Impressionist painting could directly capture sensory experience through color and light to depict nature, without mediation by abstraction or metaphor. The Impressionists' intuitive pursuit of light and shadow is, in essence, a longing for translucent vision. Monet even wished to temporarily lose his eyesight to re-experience the primal sensation of "seeing" the world. They yearn to infinitely approach and reflect reality, a quest for transparency that deeply resonated with Stevens's own pursuit of independent reality. Thus, by adopting the Impressionists' brushstrokes to render the beauty, purity, and healing power of independent reality, Stevens achieved a natural unity of form and purpose in his poetry.

However, Stevens does not stop at a wholesale embrace of Impressionism. As Dean Rader notes, unlike his contemporary William Carlos Williams, who pursues formal equivalences between poetry and painting, Stevens focuses more on "the poetic reconstruction of abstract concepts." (Rader, 1996, p. 267) ^[10] Stevens's nuanced stance toward independent reality remains a key point of scholarly debate. His attitude toward independent reality is deeply ambivalent: on the one hand, he views it as a pure form of truth, capable of soothing human anxieties and unrest by grounding perception in the tangible world; on the other hand, he recognizes its inherent contradictions, which are rooted in its very nature as an unattainable ideal, a state perpetually out of reach.

In Cantos II and III, Stevens employs oxymoron three times. The independent reality brings "right ignorance" and "the barrenness of the fertile thing." The old man, who symbolizes independent reality, possesses "an understanding that fulfills his age" yet is also "a feeling capable of nothing more." (p. 323) Through these three paradoxes, Stevens constructs a self-negating logical chain: independent reality claims to offer pure objectivity, yet by rejecting subjective engagement, it devolves into a cognitive wasteland; it pursues eternal stability, yet by resisting time and change, it becomes a metaphor for death. At the beginning of Canto IV, Stevens points out directly "one of the limits of reality / Presents itself in Oley [...]" It is/ A land too ripe for enigmas, too serene.

There the distant fails the clairvoyant eye." (p. 323) When independent reality fully arrives, its mystery dissipates, stripped of the power to ignite imagination. The surface serenity masks a stagnation of intellectual vitality, which is a metaphor for death itself. "Clairvoyant" here means "having or exercising the faculty of clairvoyance,"³ while "clairvoyance" denotes "prevision or the power... of predicting future events." The future, as a temporal concept, inherently implies the unknown. Yet independent reality resides at the end of time, where all that follows is predetermined. In this state, prevision becomes superfluous, and imagination finds no ground to alight. More ironically, in conceiving and presenting the metaphysical concept of independent reality, the poet has inevitably employed imagination, just as the "translucent" sensations evoked by Impressionist paintings are themselves products of technique, a technique whose very selection is mediated by human imagination. Thus, independent reality cannot be apprehended directly, without a medium. The poet's desire to apprehend an independent reality grows increasingly ambivalent.

III. CUBIST STRUCTURES: THE CONSTRUCTIVE IMAGINATION AND ITS FUSION WITH REALITY

Stevens highlights the inherent ambivalence of independent reality, emphasizing how its refusal to change renders it barren. This is a notion that readily evokes his famous dictum in "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction": "it must change." (p. 336) He rejects the idea of poetry as a vessel for fixed truths, arguing instead that poetry must rupture rigid forms and meanings through change. Yet this change does not imply detachment from reality; rather, it must engage forces of what is real, harnessing imagination to capture reality's fluidity. In "Credences of Summer," Stevens draws from Cubist painting, employing Cubist techniques like geometric imagery and multiple perspectives to distort and re-imagine reality. More crucially, he shares with Cubism a commitment to poetic imagination as a tool for dismantling and reassembling the visible world. In the 1910s, Stevens established friendships with modernist artists and critics, including William Carlos Williams, Marcel Duchamp, and Walter Conrad Arensberg, and Arensberg exposed Stevens to cubism and profoundly impacted him. In the essay "The Relations Between Poetry and Painting," Stevens invokes the perspectives of two pivotal cubists, Pablo Picasso and

³ The definitions are sourced from the Oxford English Dictionary (OED).

Georges Braque. He himself repeatedly engages in Cubist experimentation within his poetry. Beyond the previously mentioned "The Man with the Blue Guitar," his "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" employs multiple perspectives to refract a single theme, exemplifying the influence of Cubism.

In "Credences of Summer," the Cubist influence is most pronounced in Canto V and VI. In Canto V, Stevens employs imaginative distortion to manifest the power of time, and with remarkable subtlety, this canto achieves a closed circularity in theme, structure, and philosophical inquiry. Just as Cubist painting strives to sculpt three-dimensional space within two dimensions, Stevens here creates parallel circles in multiple layers, abstracting reality into poetic lines through geometric imagery.

"One day enriches a year. One woman makes / The rest look down. One man becomes a race, / Lofty like him, like him perpetual." (p. 324) The opening verses establish a thematic framework where singularity expands into universality, and the ephemeral ascends into the eternal. The individual composes the collective, while "the one" and "the many" mutually define one another: the collective's essence is revealed through the individual, and the individual is subsumed by the collective, forming an abstract circular structure. This reflects Stevens's fascination with the generative tension between fragmentation and wholeness. Stevens repeatedly uses "one," a word that evokes circularity both phonetically and visually, to resonate with this theme. The repetition of "I" and "p" sounds in "Lofty like him, like him perpetual," alongside the anaphoric "like him," creates a phonetic circularity, mirroring the poem's conceptual recursion. This interplay of sound and structure mimics Cubism's fracturing and reassembly of form.

More importantly, this transformation from the one to the many is wrought by time. Stevens celebrates time's generative force with fervor: "it displays its strength / The youth, the vital son, the heroic power." (p. 324) Within time's continuum, imagination furnishes myriad ways to layer and reconfigure reality, whether through a day composing a year, a man engendering a race, or a woman rising above kinship to become a queen. The relationship between the one and the many undergoes imaginative distortions, creating a sense of metamorphosis. Imagination distorts and fuses reality to forge new realities, ensuring that at every temporal juncture, imagination and reality remain inextricably intertwined. Each moment becomes a palimpsest where the old is overwritten by the new, yet traces of the original persist, much like the Cubist canvas that fractures and reassembles form while retaining its material history.

In structuring the sequence of cantos, Stevens adheres to a subtle yet deliberate pattern: transitioning from singular depictions of independent reality toward revelations of imagination's power and representations of their fused totality. In Canto V, the presence of imagination lingers as a latent force, while in Canto VI, it bursts forth unabashedly before the reader. Here, the "rock," a symbol of truth, is split into halves: one half a "green mountain" (evoking independent reality as established in Canto III), the other half "placid air" (symbolizing imagination). The rock and its surrounding air are mutually defined yet distinct in both visual and spatial terms, mirroring the dialectic Stevens articulates: "It is not only that imagination adheres to reality, but, also, that reality adheres to the imagination and that the interdependence is essential." (p. 663) Stevens takes evident pride in this metaphor of the rock, further elaborating its implications in his 1954 collection *The Rock*. The "green mountain" explicitly anchors truth in the tangible world of independent reality, while the "invisible air" represents imagination's intangible yet indispensable role. Through a Cubist physical juxtaposition, their coexistence directly materializes the fusion of reality and imagination. Stevens's method here is both literal and metaphysical: by rendering the abstract interdependence of these forces as a concrete formation, he insists that truth emerges not from either pole alone but from their combination.

That is a mountain of horizontal structure. Stevens shifts his metaphor into a vertical structure, re-configuring the mountain as a stratified interplay of planes: "A mountain luminous half-way in bloom / And then half way in the extreme light / Of sapphires flashing from the central sky, / As if twelve princes sat before a king." (p. 325) The horizontal axis initially juxtaposes reality (blossoms rooted in earth) and imagination (sapphires descending from the sky). This is also a Cubist-inspired duality. By pivoting to the vertical, Stevens layers these elements into a dynamic continuum in which the earthly and celestial interpenetrate. The mountain's base anchors in tangible immediacy in "bloom" while its summit dissolves into the abstract radiance of "extreme light." This structural metamorphosis mirrors his philosophical conviction: truth resides not in fixed binaries but in the dynamic fusion. The blossoms, with their beauty and refreshing vitality, evoke visceral delight. The sapphires' fleeting brilliance captures the paradox of imagination's eternal dynamism, that is, simultaneously transient and timeless. This image, which symbolizes imagination, itself embodies Stevens's poetic imagination. The sapphire is deeply rooted in religious tradition, and the scene of "twelve princes sat before a king" readily conjures the

image of the Twelve Apostles surrounding Christ. By transforming these religious allusions, Stevens elevates his discourse on truth to the level of faith. The mountain, half-embraced by earthly blossoms and half-illuminated by celestial sapphires, becomes a sacred site where reality and imagination converge.

The constructive power of imagination is dual-edged: its transformative re-imagining of reality can also deconstruct it. The line "The trumpet of morning blows in the clouds and through / The sky" (p. 325) in Canto VIII heralds the arrival of a new day, marking the passing of the previously depicted independent reality and the full emergence of imagination. Thus, in Canto IX, Stevens deconstructs the idealized independent reality through the cock's perspective. He adapts Picasso's assertion that "a picture is a horde of destructions" to "a poem is a horde of destructions" (p. 767), affirming the use of deconstruction to rupture conventional poetic forms, thereby revealing the flux of reality and approaching truth. Stevens executes a perspectival shift from human to cock in this canto. The altered vantage point naturally transforms the observed landscape, generating a sense of deconstruction. This maneuver constitutes his appropriation of Cubist techniques, particularly multiple perspectives, where fractured viewpoints destabilize monolithic interpretations. The cock's perch on the "bean pole" becomes a geometric axis, reordering spatial and symbolic hierarchies. While it makes "a sound / Which is not part of the listener's own sense," (p. 326) alien to human sensibilities, it embodies the dissonance central to Cubism's aesthetic of simultaneity and rupture.

The cock symbolizes religious rebirth and resurrection, while its sound likewise heralds the arrival of imagination. The cock chooses to "watch the willow with one eye." This monocular gaze represents the extreme expression of fragmented vision, rejecting humanity's reliance on "complete and coherent" perception and using the "one-sidedness" of a single eye as a deconstructive tool. From the cock's perspective, the garden, originally pure, beautiful, and evoking warmth and joy, transforms into "an abandoned spot," a scene of "decay." "And fill the foliage with arrested peace, / Joy of such permanence, right ignorance." (p. 323) This peace, eternal joy, and "right ignorance" allude to the idyllic life of Adam and Eve in Eden before the Fall. Yet now, seen through the cock's eyes: "The gardener's cat is dead, the gardener gone / And last year's garden grows salacious weeds." (p. 326) The garden is shrouded in death; roses, once symbols of non-erotic love, mutate into "salacious weeds" emblematic of desire. The garden's masters, Adam and Eve, have fallen, and the once-sacred space succumbs to decay, leaving only "Tristesses." Through the intervention

of French, a foreign language, Stevens compels readers to re-examine the narrative from this cock's perspective, demonstrating imagination's formidable power to deconstruct reality.

Thus, Stevens successfully employs Cubist techniques in this poem to manifest both the constructive and deconstructive power of imagination and its fusion with independent reality. To write poetry that approaches truth, one must integrate independent reality and imagination. The poet first internalizes reality through processes of simplification, reduction, generalization, and conceptualization of the external physical world, thereby forming an idea. Concurrently, he abstracts imagination through acts of combination, distortion, fusion, and deconstruction, crafting symbols of profound universality. According to Stevens's later elaborations on his poetics, the fusion of reality and imagination, the alignment of "the First Idea" with symbol, achieves the poetic ideal in moments of lucidity, offering epiphanic insight. This is what he terms the supreme fiction. Importantly, the fusion of reality and imagination is not static, and it does not signify an endpoint; this process remains dynamic and ongoing. As Stevens states, "the relation between the imagination and reality is a question, more or less, of precise equilibrium." (p. 647) Achieving this "precise equilibrium" requires a process of dynamic balance, where the forces of reality and imagination continuously contend, and meaning remains perpetually in a state of becoming, awaiting each new instance of dynamic equilibrium.

IV. CONCLUSION

Focusing on the intermediality of poetry can offer researchers a more open perspective: viewing Stevens's poetry as a component of the grand artistic movements of the 20th century and observing the formation of his personal poetic system under the influence of his interactions with other contemporary artistic ideas. In "Credences of Summer," Stevens articulates his twin pillars of poetic system, reality and imagination, through a dialogue with modern painting. Using Impressionist brushstrokes, Stevens explores the limitations and contradictions of independent reality; through Cubist forms and multiple perspectives, he delves into imagination's constructive and deconstructive power, while showcasing the dynamic union of reality and imagination.

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From context to text and from text to context: Orwell in the contemporary scopic regime

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Abstract— *This article develops a critique of contemporary society through a close theoretical engagement with George Orwell's 1984, read not as a prophetic text but as what Georg Lukács termed realist fiction: a narrative form capable of grasping social totality. Drawing on critical theory, visual culture studies, and contemporary analyses of surveillance and algorithmic governance, the article proposes the concept of scopic regimes to analyze how visibility and occlusion are socially produced and normalized. By examining practices of diffuse surveillance, disinformation, the editing of truth, and the administration of fear, the article argues that contemporary societies increasingly resemble an anomalous social order in which the vulnerable are rendered invisible and residual populations are structurally managed. Rather than claiming a direct fulfillment of Orwell's dystopia, the analysis traces structural resonances between totalitarian mechanisms depicted in 1984 and current forms of market-driven, algorithmic, and media-mediated power. The article concludes by conceptualizing communication without communion as a defining feature of the present, one that undermines solidarity, weakens the moral contract, and calls into question the viability of human rights as the foundation of modern social life.*



Keywords— *Scopic regimes, dystopia, algorithmic governance, visual culture, communication without communion*

I. INTRODUCTION

The palimpsest of the unseeable in today's world can be explained by excesses of violence, poverty, marginalization, and pollution, for the disproportionality of its existence contradicts the euphoric dream with which modernity was born: the idea of a world united in its diversity under a universal equality. Today, by contrast, union is experienced through horror, terror, and the continuous, roaming, and perpetual war that guarantees it (Kundera 2004, 21). Elements that contribute to its perpetuation are the rhetorics of hatred and deficiency that abound in this era of global communication. The palimpsest of the unseeable generates the idea of the exhaustion of modernity and its resignation in the face of the impossible—precisely those excesses that kept growing until modernity resigned itself to being unable to overcome them.

Bauman says that *1984*, published in 1949 by Orwell, included all people within a surveillance system from which no one could escape; that is, everyone was immersed in the alienation sought by Big Brother. Today, he says, Big Brother consists in detecting people who do not fit, deporting them, or taking them to the place where they belong (2005, 169). In this sense, there exists a mass of residual people who are disciplined by institutions (asylums, prisons, refugee camps, urban ghettos) articulated with others (formal and informal) that manage residues through processes of exclusion (disappearances, violence, poverty, displacement, wars, organ trafficking, human trafficking, genocides). This allusion to the link between the Orwellian dystopia and contemporary social reality compels us to ask about the forms of surveillance in that novel and current forms (Arteaga 2014; Alev & Kocadaf 2019; Patil 2025). Forms of surveillance are creating social

profiles structured within regimes of vision that render certain groups invisible; that is, they force the occlusion of certain social group profiles. This kind of social occlusion is explained by the symbolism promoted by surveillance regimes. Thus, the unseeable—or the unseeables—derive from the ways in which judgments are defined according to scopic regimes.

This paper explores the social profiles that are being created from structures that ultimately project scopic regimes (Jay 2003) intended to discipline social forms by drawing the boundaries of the plausible, occluding the existence of subaltern and dominated social sectors—the occluded or the unseeables. For example, the developmentalist scopic regime founds a social imaginary that, by positioning development as an unquestionable goal, justifies forced displacements in order to locate projects in territories that are presumed to translate into development; amid this process, there are people who “get in the way,” which transforms them into excluded subjects of the system, into residual populations that must be managed. This component opens the door to neofascist policies of racial cleansing based on phenotype and to genocidal sweeps of entire regions to locate tourist enterprises. But what is most radical about the regime is precisely that it occludes the people who suffer displacement and genocide, for what matters is development.

Another example: the scopic regime founded on the supremacy of whiteness generates formulas for whitening territories through gentrification or public hygiene, in order to deal with the needy by expelling them from whitened territories; this same logic is observed in economic blockades against entire countries that end in long-term managed genocides, which generate international migration that is also managed as a residual population within the states through which migrants transit (Fernández 2022), in addition to the illegal sale of organs in markets characterized by class differences (Scheper-Hughes 2005). All these social consequences occlude residual peoples and persons who can be characterized as displaced and disappeared (Gatti 2010), poor (Cortina 2017), or ethnified peoples. The formulated scopic regime “dazzles” sight and gaze away from those who suffer the consequences of “getting in the way” of the hegemonic meaning of the scopic regime.

Hence, at least the scopic regimes of development and whiteness generate social forms that call into question the applicability of Human Rights for all, and with it the Enlightenment project of equality, liberty, and fraternity, since in this perspective or gaze upon the social, the dominant erect themselves as the privileged (claims such as right-wingers being better than left-handers, or assuming

oneself to be God’s chosen people) and those who hold development in their hands (transnational entrepreneurs articulated with powerful state governments). If this gaze becomes hegemonic, in Gramsci’s (2017) sense, we witness a vision that defines what is plausible and desirable, thereby making it socially visible (in terms of importance or relevance). Upon this world an excessive violence is erected, in which subaltern groups are the first to suffer it as occluded subjects through formulas that order what should be seen and what should be occluded. These visions translate into the “normalization” of social becoming.

II. METHODS

This article is a reflection on the type of society constructed from a global scopic system that provides the bases for systems of surveillance and cultural discipline that ultimately delimit what is seeable and what is occluded. The methodological strategy I follow is that of the cultural essay, which oscillates between anthropological reflexivity and the literary analysis of realist fiction as the dystopia that Orwell’s *1984* proposed as a social system. Lukács stated that realist (dystopian, I add) fiction seeks to “capture” the organizing meaning of the social totality (2010). In this essay I move from text to context to account for the general meaning—the ethos or scopic regime—that characterizes our contemporary society. An observable weakness is precisely the general sense I reach through this strategy; nevertheless, this generality allows us to see that today the crisis of modernity (human rights, equality in diversity, fraternity in the security of life, freedom as a right) is constructing new perspectives that occlude large social sectors that are being rendered vulnerable. With this warning, I do not wish the reader to conclude that Orwell’s dystopia has been fulfilled; rather, based on a reading of *1984*, I point to a set of factors that present striking similarities. I work from the 2005 edition of *1984* published by Editorial Tomo.

III. RESULTS

It is shown that a literary work can operate as an analytical device to understand historical and cultural processes, allowing the identification of structural trends that exceed the specific contexts of its production. Some examples: an analogy between Orwellian “doublethink” and certain contemporary dynamics of information circulation, where the coexistence of contradictory narratives and the loss of context hinder critical deliberation; although there is no longer a single information control center, multiple media devices participate in continuous processes of selection, simplification, and reinterpretation of collective memory; finally, a significant resonance is highlighted between the

permanent war of 1984 and the contemporary persistence of prolonged conflicts that contribute to the reproduction of structures of power and exclusion.

One assumption is the identification of an emerging scopic regime that organizes social visibility through digital technologies, surveillance devices, and symbolic production mechanism that determine who is recognized and who remains invisible. Thus, contemporary marginality is a structural outcome that turns certain groups into residual populations. Unlike the control depicted in 1984, current surveillance operates in a decentralized, algorithmic, and potential manner. Social control is exercised through the constant possibility of observation, classification, and sanction.

Another finding states that digital technologies not only mediate communication, but also reorganize the criteria by which individuals and groups acquire visibility, legitimacy, and recognition. In this context, one of the conceptual contributions is the formulation of the notion of “communication without communion”, understood as a paradox of hyperconnected societies that simultaneously experience a weakening of moral bonds, solidarity and responsibility towards others. Thus, the dynamics of surveillance, exclusion, communicative fragmentation, and global violence put modern ideals of equality, human dignity, and universal rights under strain.

IV. DISCUSSION

Scopic Regime: Visibility and Occlusion

By *scopic regime* is meant a social vision governed by parameters that users (the subjects who look) do not question—precisely because they are not critically reflected upon. It is a paradigmatic and hegemonic perspective embodied or “naturalized” in a shared worldview. It involves standardized ways of viewing, consuming, and producing images of our world (Jay, 2003). This vision emerges as a hegemon in dispute with different and subaltern visions that suffer and endure its consequences (marginalization, poverty, criminalization, displacement, extermination). What is at stake is the achievement of the intersubjective sense of the real; that is, moving beyond a local and immediate reading of life to incorporate the visions of powerful or hegemonic groups. Although this ideological or mental alignment is always contested by groups that find opportunities to dispute that sense, dominant technologies contribute to the hegemonic vision insofar as they filter symbols into local experiences. The gaze or perspective is subsumed within the worldview—that is the scopic regime—namely, the sharing of paradigmatic perspectives or ideas of power that feel crystallized to the extent that we imagine them to be shared

by everyone, which leads us not to question them. In 1984, Orwell’s novel, the possibility of escaping that mental alienation was impossible, given the omnipresent totalitarian system of Big Brother who sees everything; nonetheless, the possibility of disputing it does appear, even if it fails. In other dystopian novels, such as Disch’s *On Wings of Song* (1979; 2003), a certain emancipation can be achieved through fragmentation into parcels of interest framed by cultural or religious pluralisms that vie for power (Arteaga 2024), amid the state’s indifference.

As stated earlier, I will repeatedly draw on Orwell’s dystopia as realist fiction in Lukács’s sense—that is, as a narrative intention to encompass the social totality through social types and subjects or characters that illustrate an era while seeking to convey its moral stance. Realist fiction, following Lukács, stands in opposition to naturalistic description, which is constructed from a partial spectator of a contingent environment and fails to achieve an understanding of society as a whole (2010). In this respect, turning to Orwell’s dystopia does not mean that many of its propositions can be directly applied to present-day reality, although much of what Orwell posited as an imagined future social object (realist fiction), from within the society of his time, can today be found in different yet recognizable forms within those fictive speculations (Alec and Kokadac 2019; Patil 2025). Thus, drawing on Orwell’s realist fiction, I outline general features of our time’s moral social contract; this is what it means to move from text to context and from context to text.

In the narrative of Orwell’s novel, no one remains outside surveillance. This idea of totality corresponds to an omnipresent and totalitarian state that has been internalized in citizens’ mentalities through an everyday life built upon socializations permeated by fear and daily exercises devoted to hatred. Fear is grounded in the sensation of being permanently watched through telescreens, devices through which the programming of hatred exercises is also carried out. These mechanisms for administering collective fear and hatred operate through the Thought Police, who are always present in the surveillance of citizens. In our present time, telescreens are found in our mobile phones connected to the global network; however, the administration of fear is not constructed through them directly, but rather through the sense that anyone can be rendered vulnerable within a society that can see everything. It is not that one is always being watched, but it is clear that the algorithm that monitors us can be used in situations of vulnerability or criminalization, whenever those institutions decide to do so. This form of non-totalizing surveillance is diffuse in character (Alec and Kodakal 2019); that is, it constitutes an emergent scopic regime sustained by a fear of being surveilled, observed, and sanctioned by empowered actors,

generating a kind of behavioral domestication through exposure to being seen and tracked.

It is striking that a technology that emerged precisely to liberate individuals from the power structures of the market and the state (Baricco 2019) has resulted in a nearly Orwellian society—albeit one of diffuse surveillance—carried out through mobile screens and personal computers. Today, fear and the presence of the state of diffuse surveillance are reinforced by telescreens (the interfaces of our mobile phones) and by ever-present opportunities to deploy hatred at any moment (social networks designed for that purpose). I reiterate: fear; the sensation of diffuse surveillance (which can victimize someone by virtue of being observed and thus compelled to follow a disciplinary mandate); the use of technology (mobile phones and computers); and the practice of everyday hatred conducted through communication applications are the main organizers of contemporary collective meaning insofar as they define what can be seen and what must be occluded—and, more emphatically, who can be seen and who must be occluded.

In today's world, we see through mobile screens, and what we observe is a series of images without paradigmatic content, sustained by atomized truths produced according to the emitter without the need for argument or response. This form of communication without a paradigmatic foundation leads us to a world of the deaf—intense communication without communion. In it, we have lost what is common to humanity, that which would compel solidarity with the suffering other and the primary cooperativism that enabled the species' evolution—a key component of the sense of being at peace with oneself; this would be the moral pact insofar as one is in solidarity with the sufferer (Levinas 2002). Hence, this communication without communion can be described as the basis of the occlusion of the sufferer; that is, of subaltern and vulnerable groups spread across the planet whom we have ceased to look at, particularly in the twenty-first century.

The current scopic regime is experienced through the use of communication technology. It surveils through algorithms and, in doing so, deceptively provides a sense of freedom (Byung-Chul 2014). Added to this package is the equally deceptive illusion that just as one is free, so too are others. This uncritical extension of freedom generates a sense of equality extended to all insofar as technological use is concerned. This fact negates the sufferer and occludes subaltern groups. Projected within this generalizing illusion is communication without communion—that is, the applicability of a sense of freedom supposedly exercised by everyone. Now, if some lack it, it must be imposed on them at any cost. Typically, the groups that endure this imposition

are those marked by ethnicity and sexual diversity. This displacement compels us to consider the amount of egoism and cooperativism required to achieve a society of balanced coexistence capable of realizing a moral contractualism (Cortina 2012). Note that I do not speak of a society of human rights, international law, or Enlightenment principles; rather, I refer to a society of coexistence that allows everyone to realize their singularity within a world of universal rules, where each people and each person can deploy their way of being without being subjected to hegemonic relations that impede such realization.

Erasing History and Constructing Hatred

Both in the contemporary regime and in the Orwellian regime of the novel, history—being malleable—becomes an instrument for domesticating memory. In doing so, remembrance is used as an alienating device insofar as it functions as a marker of a single mode of thought: without fractures, without dislocations, flat and one-dimensional, in which everyone assumes their thinking to be original, without realizing—without being aware—that it is shaped there by the State or Big Brother, and here by the market and the mercantile actors who have captured the State. The resonances with *One-Dimensional Man* are striking, for the greater the serial production, the greater the cultural one-dimensionality (Marcuse 1968).

Orwell states that nothing survived, in that dystopian society, the effort to remember. The Ministry of Truth continuously edited history according to the interests of the totalitarian State. Editing truth—or history—actually means administering collective memory, for memory is a permanent exercise in giving meaning to the present in relation to becoming. Today we witness a world in which YouTubers and opinion-makers seek to rewrite history: former heroes are constructed as criminals, while contemporary pedophilic criminals highlight their actions by feigning heroism. History is occluded within narratives that minimize context, presenting themselves as images stripped of historical content and argument. In the novel, this emptying of meaning is embodied in the phrases “war is peace,” “freedom is slavery,” and “ignorance is strength,” all of them constructed as immutable truths whose infallible quality is sustained by the fear of questioning them. These are contradictions of meaning whose aim is to empty ethical content of its historical morality.

Today, propaganda has invaded the media, which strive to construct a scopic regime that occludes violence by presenting it as necessary in order to build societies in the image and desire of the hegemon. Television media have shown that truth is edited through agenda setting (McCombs 2006), orienting what is important as opposed to what is not; what is plausible as opposed to implausible;

what is desirable to see as opposed to what is not. Likewise, information and communication technologies operating on social networks have implemented bots (automated systems designed to replicate tasks on social networks) and trolls (individuals who intentionally generate conflict within digital networks), whose aim is to manipulate public opinion, even when this manipulation rests on deficiency and the editing of truth. As Merleau-Ponty (1986) interprets it, one does not see; one judges. This strategy takes advantage of that fact, for it is “mounted and slid” over judgment rather than over the supposed rational standpoint of the listener. Such actions have resulted in the deployment of social hatred through social networks.

In Orwell’s dystopian society there is a scheduled daily broadcast of the Two Minutes Hate via telescreens. Today, this manifests in the use of social networks—especially X—where permanent hatred is enacted through short texts that do not convey reasoned arguments but rather images of rancor and resentment. If in the novel it was once a week, today it occurs at every moment. At the convergence of editing truth within a context of collectivized hatred, freedom of expression can be destroyed while claiming to defend it (that is, defending the right to lie or to edit truth). In the Orwellian novel, audiences consistently produced individuals or personalities willing to allow themselves to be deceived. This component is a marked device in today’s society, which desires to be deceived by social networks. People do not wish to construct their own criteria, but rather to find in decontextualized texts and in images or memes elements that help them confirm their ideas, even when those ideas are mistaken or are the product of algorithmic deception.

This world of lies constitutes the global social context in which we live today and which was the staff of Orwell’s dystopian society; its foundation rested not on truth but on the confirmation that one’s own stubbornness was a truth—that is, if my atomized truth is confirmed in “some meme,” then it must be true. “Everything melted away into the mist once the past was erased, the erasure itself forgotten, and the lie became truth” (Orwell 2005, 82). The possibility of edited truth or collectivized falsehood rests on the opacity of the past, a plot organized by the Party. Today it is the market, and business elites embedded in State power, who are responsible for transmitting and ordering public opinion as the criterion of what must be seen, occluding the issues and social sectors that must be obscured and devalued. In the novel these were the proles; today they are the residuals (Bauman 2005; Cortina 2017).

“Inside his head there was not a single thought that was not a slogan” (Orwell 2005, 73). Everything suggests that today authenticity and originality are grounded in forms of

consumption of commercial brands and television advertising. The issue is alienation as the control of the mind: making people feel free when they are governed (Byung-Chul Han 2014); making them feel original when they aestheticize themselves through market slogans and products (Douglas 2008). In the novel, this was the result of the past and the external world being considered creations of the mind (Orwell 2005, 87)—a complete pragmatic subjectivism. Since the mind was controllable, the past could also be controlled. The new narratives that dispute the truth of events, that turn madmen into heroes and heroes into criminals, are an expression of the new world we inhabit. We are witnessing a world in which the criterion of reality is mediated by things and by virtual things (González Ortiz 2024; Foladori 2001).

Managing Fear in Anomalous Society

In the operation of the Thought Police, the family was part of the apparatus: anyone who deviated from the line of prescribed thought was forced back into it through torture or vaporization. Fear was the procedure through which alienated thoughts were maintained. “The usual procedure was simply that people who had fallen from grace disappeared and were never heard of again, without any information as to what had happened to them” (Orwell 2005, 51). The resonances of this passage are striking for several continents of the world today, as they lead to the idea of a kind of administration of residual humans—those who have fallen from grace, the excluded, the superfluous (Bauman 2005; Gatti 2010)—who are rendered vulnerable to disappearance. Orwell notes that disappearances were common, but certainty about whether people had died did not exist (Orwell 2005, 164). Today we witness this anomaly: the inability to provide calm and justice to people given the impossibility of mourning—that is, the impossibility of restoration (González Rodríguez 2014). It is an anomaly that prevents mourning precisely because there is doubt regarding the death of the disappeared.

This notion of the excluded, of residual populations, is already intuited in *1984* when it states that labor in the equatorial regions was not indispensable for the functioning of the global economy (Orwell 2005, 187). The step from being among the excluded, or under the administration of the residual, to becoming one of the disappeared is a small one. While the novel refers to a totalitarian state that encompasses everyone (including those who are expendable for labor), in the present, the administration of the excluded refers to the public management of those who cannot care for themselves—that is, those who are not necessary for capital accumulation (the unemployed, the elderly, people with disabilities, etc.). They are administered through fear and the horror of disappearance.

Fear also has another face. “The children were horrible... the parents were afraid of their own children, and one of the worst things that happened to them was not being allowed to go to an execution” (Orwell 2005, 30–31). This is a society in which violence is normalized; its spectacularization makes this possible, since children found it entertaining to attend. In the fictional construction, primary relations between generations have been broken. There is also a destabilization of authority relations grounded in family statuses and roles. The girl who denounces her father, Parsons, because he said something against the Party in his sleep (Orwell 2005, 233) is emblematic. In the dialogue with O’Brien it is stated: “We have cut the links between child and parent, and between man and man, and between man and woman. No one dares trust a wife or a child or a friend any longer. But in the future there will be no wives and no friends” (Orwell 2005, 265). This statement is forceful: it aims to eliminate primary relations of interaction, community, and trust. Contemporary individualistic atomism may well be the social model globalization seeks to impose. To achieve this, it is necessary not only to destroy primary trust between generations but also between the sexes. This is what communication without communion entails (as developed by digital technology): that is, without community—the fundamental basis from which hatred can be exercised. Within this same escalation, fear functions as a disorganizing organizer of trust in others and as a structuring force of distrust aligned with Big Brother. In some sense, the society of intense contemporary violence brings us closer to this system of collective separation and individual pursuit of salvation and self-realization.

Yet despite the force exercised by Big Brother, the novel still allows us to imagine dissent—although without escape. In Orwellian social life, love, the primary basis of relations between the sexes, becomes the basis of torture that leads prisoners to discover their worst fears, driving them to betray themselves; this is the function of the Ministry of Love. If fear is sufficiently horrific, the only thing the tortured person desires is for it to happen to someone else, projecting the impossibility of empathy and solidarity. When there is horror, solidarity with the sufferer becomes impossible, since fear is constructed in the form of horror (Kundera 2004). This is the society of anomaly—that is, one in which there is no possibility of restoring the victim (González Rodríguez 2014). Today we are witnessing a society that has moved from anomie to anomaly; this is precisely what constitutes the weakening of the moral contract.

Happiness in Orwellian society translates into a complete hedonism achieved by questioning nothing. Whoever lives without asking, without questioning, will be the happiest

(the same formula proposed in *Brave New World* [2025], published by Huxley in 1932). Those who manage to be happy are those who do not question; those who do question are returned by fear and re-aligned with the norms dictated by the State. In today’s world, fear is the cultural organizer of the social: on the one hand, violence is horrific; on the other, the threatening gestures of powerful states are assumed as warnings by other states. The terror with which military actions are announced and the public spectacularization of violence ultimately organize society into a complicit silence born of fear of reprisals.

Institutional functioning in the Orwellian world imprisons Winston alongside common criminals, without distinguishing him as a political prisoner. It is assumed that everyone who arrives in prison is there for a reason; once inside, the nature of the offense or cause no longer matters—they become hostages of the system. This resonates with how prisons function today as spaces of confinement for people in tragic conditions; once inside, it no longer matters whether they will receive a sentence or remain perpetually under prosecution. Common prisoners fear nothing; political prisoners remain silent, afraid. Room 101 functions as the site of torture—that is, as the instance that orders a return to the channel of aligned thought. There, the existence of *el apando* (Revueltas 2014) is projected as an emblem of unspeakable torture.

Newspeak and Doublethink

Articulated with the erasure of history and, consequently, of memory—through the falsification or editing of truth—is *Newspeak*. Newspeak was intended to close off the possibility of thinking; it was designed to alienate. Once Oldspeak disappeared, every link to the past was broken (Orwell 2005, 30). This involved the synthetic use of words to limit the possibility of thought; the subjugation of language means limiting future thought (Alev and Kocadal 2019). Contemporary examples of Newspeak can be found in the use of social media, where argumentation and theoretical or political paradigms are sacrificed in favor of the spectacular impact produced by images and synthetic sentences assembled from small fragments of ideas. Often, syntactic compression forces the use of spellings that do not correspond to scholastic grammar; at other times, communication companies sanction the use of certain words according to unilateral and opaque criteria. Today, we must ask whether these synthetic ideas and emerging graphic forms succeed in narrowing the radius of mental action, as Newspeak did in Orwell’s novel. One empirically observed practice is that, at a book fair in Mexico, some publishing houses display classic novels with introductions written by public opinion figures from private media—that is, they seek to align interpretation with market opinion-makers.

The intention is to obstruct free reading in favor of a guided, muzzled one. Similarly, the use of synthesis without paradigm or argument corresponds to images, memes, or emoticons, whose meanings have become universalized and function as shortcuts for thought and symbolization.

Doublethink is articulated with the production of deficiency in order to control reality and domesticate the intersubjective sense of reality. In the novel, holding simultaneously—or keeping present—two contradictory ways of thinking—*war is peace, freedom is slavery, ignorance is strength*, for example—are oxymorons constructed by the Ministry of Thought depicted in the novel. Today, this factor can be understood as a crisis of ideologies, in which individuals may hold positions of the left or the right without assuming the epistemological contradiction. This derives from the absence of historical sense and submission to slogans—that is, to the emptiness produced by orienting life according to advertising. Reasonable objectivity has yielded to emotional appeals. The possibility of this emergence stems from the lack of arguments and theoretical and political paradigms within which contemporary society operates. Examples include left- and right-wing ideologies that no longer differentiate party positions, a condition that opens the door to “atomized truths” on social media, where each synthetic statement is taken as an “individual truth,” out of context or within decontextualized textual formats. This factor indicates that contradiction is not exclusive to totalitarian regimes but also to democratic ones that seek to impose their point of view, their scopic system. The adulteration of the past consists in sustaining antagonistic opinions simultaneously.

In the novel, doublethink is an intentional deformation (by the Ministry of Thought, where Winston works, incidentally) of reality as it is processed in the minds of citizens. Today, this can be observed in intellectuals who have renounced truth and objectivity (as well as their reputations) in order to defend their economic interests and frameworks of privilege under regimes that allowed them to be critical while receiving rewards. It consists of denying the existence of reality while simultaneously enunciating an invented reality, in order to claim a convenient sense of reality; this is what it means for such intellectuals to deform reality. Audiences internalize this deformation in their minds in the key of discomfort. Information is used in a diffuse manner; its transparency is largely rhetorical, to the point that it becomes confusing.

There Is Always War. Today

One of the defining facts of the present is war, which appears as extended and permanent across all continents. While the central wars are those staged in Europe and Western Asia, Africa has endured wars (and famines) for

years (Gómez 2023); the conflict between North Korea and South Korea, as well as the violence linked to drug trafficking in the Americas, are examples of how wars have become “naturalized” insofar as they remain unresolved. The “naturalization” of war (and violence) becomes feasible in a world dominated by fear, hatred, adulation, and a perpetual social atomism in which truth is almost a personal device. Such a social profile fosters a mentality that values war over sovereignty.

This idea of the “naturalization” of a world at war with no possibility of resolution leads us to Orwellian geopolitics, in which three states exist in permanent war and cannot be defeated. This image shifts the discussion from text to context if we consider the contemporary emergence of a new world order in which three powerful states exist in a balance of deterrence against a potential nuclear escalation. In Orwell’s novel, those states fight to appropriate labor; today, wars are generated over raw materials and energy resources.

The three powers or states that govern Orwell’s world largely represent the ideologies we experience today, albeit with notable changes. For example, in Oceania the ideology of Ingsoc prevails, a kind of corporate system that could be applied to the Western Hemisphere; in Eurasia, Neo-Bolshevism, a renewed ideology that could be anchored to present-day Russia, albeit now capitalist; and in Asia, a Chimo term translated as the worship of death but perhaps better expressed as the annihilation of the self (Orwell 2005, 196)—that is, communism? Beyond these general correspondences, it is important to note that citizens of Orwellian Oceania are not allowed to know anything about the other ideologies; they are taught to condemn them as barbaric insults against morality and common sense (Orwell 2005, 196). While this is not directly verifiable today, it is a fact that many actors in public opinion and the entertainment industry use their fame to confuse and negatively persuade audiences about other socioeconomic systems through videos, condensed texts, memes, or images. It has been observed that YouTubers speak without paradigmatic argumentation about Russia or China, confining them to authoritarian caricatures that would appropriate even one’s socks or television. Propaganda “slides” over opinion-makers across social media as well as television and radio.

A key contemporary factor is the persistent sense that ideologies have been exhausted and that political parties have become “pragmatic weathervanes” seeking not social benefit but the privileges participation in political contests affords their members. The same can be extended to sociopolitical systems known as capitalism, socialism, and communism, since the corporate and financial world seems

to absorb the logics of all three socioeconomic systems. It is striking that in Orwell's world this fact appears so clearly when he refers to the three powerful states as follows: "In truth, the three ideologies can hardly be distinguished, and the social systems they support are the same. In all three there is the same pyramidal structure, the same worship of a semi-divine leader, the same economy oriented toward perpetual war. Hence, not only can the three superstates not conquer one another, but they would gain no advantage if they did. On the contrary, they help one another by remaining in conflict" (Orwell 2005, 196). Returning from context to text, it seems that today the global order is maintained by fear of annihilating all that is human; hence, administered and perpetual war serves to keep society's structure intact—each powerful state with its region, and all states with their class privileges untouched.

In a world of perpetually administered war, what becomes most evident is the crisis of Human Rights. These critical experiences include imprisonment without due process; tortured prisoners; attacks on civilian zones; the intentional killing of children; public executions; generalized violence; a weakened moral pact; the incarceration of people based on skin color; the use of hostages for military and political purposes; mass deportations of populations; countries transformed into massive prisons; criminal elites; the loss of national sovereignties; organ trafficking justified through narratives of saving lives; and disputes over truth within an extremely polarized society. The resonances of *1984* are striking when we think about today's times of war and violence. These factors ultimately serve to further vulnerabilize the weakest. As argued in this work, the scopic regime now being constructed renders the vulnerable invisible insofar as they lie at the margins of elite interests. In this emerging new world order, the quality of Human Rights as the platform of the modern social pact is called into question, while the egoism of atomized elite self-interest emerges as the regime seeking to impose itself.

V. CONCLUSIONS

In Orwell's world, the Ministry of Peace plans war; the Ministry of Truth administers the lies; the Ministry of Love implements torture; the Ministry of Thought administers memory by altering the historical narrative; the Ministry of Plenty administers hunger. The images projected by this Orwellian world are those of an upside-down world, a feature already noted by Galeano (1998). This possibility can only be realized in a world of perpetual war.

The dominant mental state addressed in this text is controlled madness (Orwell 2005, 216), that is, functional schizophrenia (Binswanger 1956), which derives from a world that produces eccentricities—those who plan

violence and war from their dominant desks, or encourage it from the comfort of their (still) non-vulnerabilized regions—and melancholies sustained by the conviction of belonging to unseen groups, to minorities or to the poor who are not looked at because they do not matter to anyone. The contemporary scopic regime has placed historically vulnerable groups within the palimpsest of the unseeable. Where they were once cared for, they now no longer matter, for they are treated as untreatable and inevitable residuals, according to prevailing cultural frames of reference.

In today's world, subjected to advertising and to the editing of truth carried out by the media, and to the deceived feelings of freedom and authenticity that networks provide through algorithms, reality seems to coincide with each individual's mentality. The algorithm delivers precisely "what we were already thinking" into our minds. Hence, reality seems to dwell in our minds—not as an external factor but as a Berkeleian subjective expression (Pitcher 1983): reality exists only insofar as I think it. This same process of atomizing reality according to the mind that perceives it—of atomizing truth or the criterion of reality—is projected through the use of mobile phones and computers that immerse us in virtuality and turn it into a criterion of reality (Baricco 2019). What we once did is repeated not by our choice but because the algorithm presents it as a desired alternative. This leads us to think that devices possess a certain capacity for agency (Foladori 2001) and influence over our thought and behavior; this interaction suggests that subjective mind and objective reality are not merely intertwined—they are the same.

Another outcome of the new scopic order that becomes visible is the lack of necessity for complete theoretical paradigms, replaced instead by fragments expressed through memes, images, or summaries constructed as "fired-off" truths in texts without context. These atomized truths do not seek truth, but rather the approval. In this game, the possibility of looking at the sufferer is lost, because the goal is not to help but to stand out; not to support the vulnerable, but to gain visibility in a world determined to occlude those in need.

In this article, I have followed the trail of Orwellian fiction in *1984*. I have regarded that narrative as realist fiction to reflect on certain coincidences with the contemporary world of the year 2026. Lukács argues that realist fiction has the virtue of addressing social reality as a totality (2010). For this reason, rather than adopting the stance of a mere reader of reality, I used Orwell's novel to articulate components of our contemporaneity. While it cannot be claimed that the totalitarian social world imagined in the novel can be directly mapped onto the present, there are several coincidences with contemporary resonance—such as

modern surveillance, which, although neither constant nor omnipresent, is diffuse (Alev and Kocadaf 2019); that is, it exists in algorithmic form, ready to be deployed at any moment. The sense of being surveilled through mobile phone screens has come to stay within this new cultural framework emerging from the individualized or personalized use of technology. This diffuse surveillance might well be called digital, artificial, or algorithmic.

Likewise, contemporary disinformation is relevant insofar as it characterizes a society that, by editing truth under the pretense of safeguarding interests, excludes from its logic the vision of what is human—that is, what truly matters: people. To change history is to dominate memory and, with it, the possibility of the moral subject. For this reason, contemporary society is constructing a scopic system that defines who may be seen and who may not, who is inside and who is outside. Within this logic, recognition by the algorithm is more valuable than recognition by people. Social networks are steering us toward an irrationality in which people no longer hold the same importance as investments, technology, money, or energy resources. It becomes more important to accumulate likes on social networks than to show solidarity with the vulnerable. This phenomenon—characteristic of a time in which technology has become the key mediator of social relations—is what I call *communication without communion*.

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Review of *Pragmatics of Internet Humour* by Francisco Yus

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Abstract— This review offers a critical examination of Francisco Yus's *Pragmatics of Internet Humour* (2023), a comprehensive work that systematically applies Relevance Theory within a cyberpragmatic framework to the analysis of internet humour. The book's eight chapters progress from theoretical foundations and incongruity-resolution typologies, through definitions and classifications of internet humour, to contextual constraints interactive humour on messaging apps, humour on social networking sites, meme-mediated communication, and non-propositional affective effects. This review highlights the book for extending Relevance Theory into online communication, integrating it with Incongruity-Resolution Theory, and offering a replicable analytical framework supported by rich empirical data across messaging apps, social networking sites, and memes. However, three limitations are noted: the absence of a concluding synthesis, a somewhat limited scope in explaining humorous meaning, and issues with the presentation of visual materials. Overall, the book is deemed as a valuable resource for pragmatics, discourse analysis and internet communication research.



Keywords— Cognitive Pragmatics, Cyberpragmatics, Internet humour, Memes, Relevance Theory

I. INTRODUCTION

As the internet becomes deeply embedded in our daily life and online communication turns indispensable, internet humour has emerged as a notable topic. While existing research lacks a strong cognitive-pragmatic foundation to explain how humour is generated, interpreted, and contextualized in digital environments. Against this circumstance, the book entitled *Pragmatics of Internet Humour*, published in 2023 and authored by Francisco Yus, addresses this gap by systematically applying Relevance Theory to online humorous communication.

This work not only advances theoretical integration between cyberpragmatics, cognitive linguistics and

humour studies but also offers a robust analytical lens for examining multi-modal, interactive, and collectively produced digital discourse. The book provides significant insights into interface construction, audience participation, and meaning negotiation in network community, making it a valuable resource for scholars in cognitive-pragmatics, media studies, and digital communication, as well as for content creators and platform designers seeking to understand the mechanics of internet humour generation and engagement.

II. REVIEW OF EACH CHAPTER

This book consists of 8 chapters. Chapter 1 presents a clear panorama for the whole book, preparing us to delve

deeply into the realm of internet humour. It achieves this by establishing the book's theoretical foundation in Relevance Theory and cognitive pragmatics, arguing that humour arises not from textual content itself but from inferential and contextualization processes performed by audiences. It also outlines key mechanisms such as explicature development, implicature derivation, and context retrieval, through which humorous effects are generated. The author emphasizes the predictability of inferential strategies, which humour creators exploit by guiding interpretations and then subverting expectations. Furthermore, the chapter highlights distinctive features of internet-mediated humour, including new user roles, multi-modal discourse forms, interactive interfaces, and diverse, active audiences. These internet-specific factors necessitate an adaptation of classic Relevance Theory assumptions, particularly regarding intention, context accessibility, and interpretive responsibility. This chapter concludes by summarizing the main content of each chapter, which lays the groundwork for readers to explore a relevance-theoretic analysis of internet humour.

Chapter 2 provides an in-depth exploration of the relationship among Relevance Theory, humour and internet communication. It firstly outlines foundational concepts of Relevance Theory, highlighting the notions of intention, inference, and the inherent drive for relevance-seeking. It also distinguishes between the cognitive principle of relevance, which governs general attention focus toward potentially relevant inputs, and the communicative principle of relevance, which applies specifically to intentional communication. Building upon Relevance Theory, this chapter provides that humour comprehension fundamentally aligns with general communicative principles, where the human cognitive system is geared towards maximizing relevance by seeking a positive effectiveness between cognitive effects and processing effort. The addressers can take advantage of some inferential strategies to trigger humorous effect such as logical forms, reference assignment and disambiguation. Additionally, this chapter attaches great importance to the dynamic influences of context and mutuality of information on comprehending humour, which will lead to various plans and expectation of humour-generating. The last section specifies the incongruity-resolution humorous

strategy, which is divided into discourse-based type and frame-based type. It further proposes a typology of twelve incongruity-resolution patterns, systematically combining parameters of incongruity type—discourse and frame, location--setup and punchline, and resolution type—discourse-based, frame-based and implication-based. The included content all illustrates the accessibility of Relevance Theory into the analysis of internet humour, which lays a solid theoretical foundation for the discussion of internet-specific issues in the following chapters of this book.

Chapter 3 highlights the specific scope of internet humour for the purpose of the research of this book. Based on Shepherd and Carolyn's (1988) cyber-genres, the author concludes the types of internet humour from his perspective, including replicated internet humour, spontaneous internet humour and hybrid internet humour. The second one will be mainly focused on the analysis, which "were either created on the Net or designed offline exclusively to be uploaded and interpreted online" (Yus, 2023, p. 63-64). Moreover, this chapter also reviews the existing academic viewpoints upon the features of face-to-face humour and online humour. The differences proposed by Fiadotava (2020) offer a broaden understanding for further analysis, which appear mainly on performative devices, spatiotemporal level and temporal patterns of communication. Lastly, this chapter classifies three types of humorous internet discourses according to its modal. Textual one relies on word play, nicknames, text alteration or emojis to generate humour. Visual type is processed with the development of technology to share humorous points through some visual forms such as humorous photos and videos. Multi-modal one is the main trend in recent years, which usually combines text with images, memes or short videos. This chapter provides the foundational definition and classification system for internet humour, establishing a clear scope for the book's analysis by distinguishing it from offline humour and exploring its unique forms and environments.

From author's point of view, the comprehension of internet humour relies on adequate inference of schematic discourse with certain context so that the explicature and implicature can be obtained. Chapter 4 delves into the contextual constraints on the effectiveness of internet

humour, which consist of interface-related contextual constraints and user-related contextual constraints. The former is illustrated with vivid examples on messaging apps and social networking sites. It is proved that interface affordances such as asynchronous information or limited screen size will influence users' communicative practices. The latter is discussed by demonstrating how the users' personality and inherited attributes such as sex, ethnic origin and nationality influence their perception of humour. The author specifically introduces the pervasive influence of gender stereotypes on internet humour which heavily affects the production and reception of humour, particularly sexist jokes. The internet can amplify their spreading due to anonymity and context collapse, leading to various audience's reactions based on the resonance of personal beliefs with those stereotypes. While a minimizing effect often alleviates the offensiveness of such humour, counter-movements like (post-)feminist humour also spare no effort to utilize the cyberspace to challenge these entrenched stereotypes.

Chapter 5 focuses on the interactive humour on messaging apps, with specific concern on the construction and management of turn for the purpose of generating the sustained humour. This chapter begins with the exploration of the suitability of Relevance Theory applied into the analysis of humorous conversations in messaging apps. And then five elements in the analysis of humorous interactions emerge: framing devices, reactions, sociocultural parameters, reasons or goals and genres. The author also mentions the pragmatical significance of laughter and different shapes of laugh particles, which unfolds that there is no intrinsic relationship between their presence and humorous effects. The core of the chapter presents a quantitative and qualitative analysis of a corpus of Spanish WhatsApp interactions to identify prototypical turn-taking patterns. The results reveal that while humorous interactions can be initiated in various ways, a single image is the most frequent opener. However, these often result in brief, two-turn exchanges closed with an emoji. Sustained humour more commonly happens when a humorous text plus emoji is used to shift an ongoing conversation into a playful mode. In the last section, a cross-cultural comparison with Chinese WeChat use suggests that different interface affordances and cultural

norms such as politeness in high-context cultures do influence humorous interaction. This chapter ends up that users still manage to navigate platform constraints to co-generate humour through supportive strategies.

Chapter 6 discusses humour on social networking sites. The author deems that the social networking sites are the humour repositories where the users also play the roles of producers. Featured with persistence, searchability, replicability and invisible audiences, these platforms can support several kinds of humorous discourses and interactions. Through the respective analysis of humour production on different subjects--single user, compiled, collective and corporate, various kinds of humour strategies can be figured out, including incongruity-resolution, self-deprecation, jocular mockery, mutual awareness of context accessibility, implicated premises and conclusions and so on. Each subject shows their own purposes and matched strategies to achieve their humorous effects. It can be concluded that the interface affordances of social networking sites present an ideal venue for humour-generating with certain non-propositional effects such as the affective bonding and the sense of belonging.

Chapter 7 delves into the meme-mediated humorous communication. It begins with the basic notions on the features of internet memes, including fidelity, fecundity and longevity, while they will also change according to some specific contextual environments. In order to let readers fully understand the different forms of memes, the author states the interdependent combinations between text and image, which are the most frequent and pragmatically significant. Furthermore, it deals with the incongruity-resolution patterns applied to memes for humor interactions. The most distinctive type for memes is discourse-image based one, allowing the viewer to back-track and compute new verbal-visual implicatures. Additionally, meme families exploit the ad hoc visual referent adjustment where the identical images are narrowed or broadened by accompanying captions, sustaining template productivity with preserving recognizability. This chapter also specifically highlights the unique role of Covid-19 memes, which reveals the salient function of the collective awareness of pandemic. Covid-19 memes further reveal that when collective

common ground is salient, Throughout, relevance-theoretic explicature derivation, implicature recovery, and context accessibility will operate in parallel, guiding the viewers to integrate typographic, visual and inter-textual cues into a coherent humorous interpretation of related memes.

Chapter 8 is the last chapter which explores other relevant affective effects on the internet communication. The author initially proposes that users always communicate propositions, simultaneously display feelings, emotions or other non-propositional information. These effects will also emerge in internet humour. Then, the author illustrates relevant non-propositional effects from internet humour according to the perspectives of personal, interactive, medium-sized group, and large group level. Through the analysis, it can be concluded that individual and collective identity are constructed due to successful comprehension of humour, appearing with some common non-propositional affective outcomes such as self-esteem, bonding or bounding effects, self-worth and so on.

III. EVALUATION

Apparently, this book analyzes the internet humour with various kinds of online discourses from the perspective of cognitive-pragmatic viewpoint. Theoretically and practically, this book not only makes great contributions to further studies on relevant topics but also offer some hints for humour-generation in the cyberspace.

First and foremost, in the aspect of theoretical level, this book provides a meaningful and novel understanding of internet humour, particularly in the analysis of the external and internal factors that influence the successful comprehension of humour discourse. In addition, Yus expands the applicability of Relevance Theory from the conventional field into the online communication. He illustrates the suitability of this theoretical framework by demonstrating comprehensive and insightful research on internet humour interaction. He also constructs the combination between Relevance Theory and Incongruity-Resolution Theory with abundant examples and data, which offers an adaptable and replicable framework of analysis for future internet humour communication. Furthermore, this book mentions the

significant notions of contextual constraints and non-propositional effect, which show the author's comprehensive consideration towards internet humour and offer the possible direction for future studies on internet communication and humour interaction. Moreover, in terms of practical level, this book covers the large number of specific analysis of humour with adequate data in messaging apps, social networking sites and memes. Throughout this analysis, several kinds of humour-generating strategies are shown up for the readers. This approach can enlighten the relevant subjects to rethink and adjust their plans for the purpose of humour-generating. Specifically speaking, the designing of platforms makes significant impacts on humorous effectiveness, including its interface size or tools. Yus also stresses the quality of users themselves will influence the interpretation of humour such as their familiarity of interface, their knowledge of internet technology or even their personalities.

Nevertheless, from my point of view, there is still some limitations that should be considered. Firstly, this book ends up in a hurry without a concluding chapter of the key findings of the entire work. This circumstance may lead to readers to retrieve some information back to each chapter again and again if necessary. Secondly, when it comes to the understanding of the specific analysis on different humorous discourses, the author does offer some supporting explanation for readers to understand their humorous punchlines. However, these explanations emerge mainly for the consideration of phonetic or semantic differences, resulting in some humorous discourses being under-comprehended. It will be more advantageous if full factors of comprehending humour can be taken into account, such as the readers' cultural, social and religious backgrounds. Lastly, a series of figures, tables and diagrams are accompanied by specific analysis. But they are not readers-friendly enough when they are quite long or complex, because the explanation or conclusion are often given before them. This form may hinder reading productivity and engagement. A parallel modal that shows explanation or conclusion and figures, tables and diagrams simultaneously is highly suggested.

IV. CONCLUSION

In summary, Francisco Yus's *Pragmatics of Internet Humour* can be regarded a valuable resource to the research on internet humour. It provides a thorough cognitive-pragmatic exploration of internet humor, grounded in Relevance Theory and discourse analysis. By bridging theory and practice, this work not only advances academic research on internet humour but also presents practical frameworks for understanding humor in online environments. It offers valuable theoretical and empirical insights applicable to researchers, content creators and communicators in the cyberspace. Despite its specialized focus, the book also remains accessible and instructive for both experts and newcomers to the relevant field, making it a thought-provoking resource in the studies of internet communication.

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A Narratological Analysis of Internal Focalization and Identity Construction in Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters*

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Abstract— *Bharati Mukherjee's Desirable Daughters* presents the experiences of migration, cultural negotiation, and personal transformation through the perspective of Tara Chatterjee Bhattacharjee. The novel is particularly significant for its use of internal focalization, which allows readers to perceive events through Tara's consciousness and subjective understanding. This paper examines how internal focalization functions as a narrative strategy in the construction of identity in the novel. Drawing upon Gérard Genette's concept of focalization and later narratological developments by Mieke Bal and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, the study analyses the relationship between narrative perspective and identity formation. Through Tara's memories, reflections, and interpretations, the novel presents identity as a dynamic process shaped by migration, family history, cultural displacement, and self discovery. The study argues that internal focalization is not merely a technical narrative device but a structural principle through which Mukherjee explores the complexities of diasporic identity. The paper demonstrates that the reader's understanding of characters, events, and cultural realities is mediated through Tara's evolving consciousness, making identity an ongoing process of negotiation rather than a fixed condition.



Keywords— *Bharati Mukherjee, Desirable Daughters, Internal Focalization, Narratology, Identity, Diaspora*

I. INTRODUCTION

Bharati Mukherjee occupies an important position in contemporary Indian American literature because of her exploration of migration, cultural transformation, and identity formation. Her fiction frequently portrays characters who move across geographical and cultural boundaries and attempt to reconstruct their identities within unfamiliar social environments. Among her novels, *Desirable Daughters* (2002) provides a nuanced representation of diasporic experience through the life of Tara Chatterjee Bhattacharjee, an Indian woman living in the United States. The novel explores the tensions between tradition and modernity, memory and experience, and cultural inheritance and personal freedom.

Narrative perspective plays a significant role in shaping the reader's understanding of these themes. Rather than presenting events through an objective narrative voice, Mukherjee filters the narrative through Tara's consciousness. As a result, readers encounter people, places, and events through her perceptions, memories, emotions, and interpretations. This narrative strategy corresponds to what Gérard Genette identifies as internal focalization, a mode of narration in which the narrative information is restricted to the knowledge and perspective of a particular character (Genette, 1980).

Internal focalization has attracted considerable attention in narratological studies because it influences how readers interpret narrative reality. According to Mieke Bal (1997), focalization concerns the relationship between vision and narrative representation, while Rimmon-Kenan (2002)

argues that focalization determines the angle through which narrative information is presented. In *Desirable Daughters*, Tara functions as the primary focalizer, and her perspective shapes the reader's understanding of family relationships, cultural identity, migration, and personal transformation.

The importance of focalization in the novel becomes particularly evident in the representation of identity. Tara's identity is not presented as stable or complete. Instead, it emerges gradually through memories of childhood in Calcutta, reflections on family traditions, experiences in America, and encounters with different cultural expectations. The movement between past and present reveals identity as a process of continual reconstruction. Through Tara's perspective, Mukherjee presents identity as fluid, fragmented, and constantly negotiated.

This paper examines how internal focalization contributes to the construction of identity in *Desirable Daughters*. Using narratological concepts developed by Genette, Bal, and Rimmon-Kenan, the study analyses the ways in which Tara's perspective shapes narrative meaning and influences the representation of selfhood. The paper argues that internal focalization serves as a central narrative strategy through which Mukherjee explores the complexities of diasporic identity in a globalized world.

II. TARA CHATTERJEE AS THE INTERNAL FOCALIZER

The narrative structure of *Desirable Daughters* is primarily organized through the consciousness of Tara Chatterjee Bhattacharjee. The events of the novel are presented not through an objective narrative perspective but through Tara's perceptions, memories, reflections, and interpretations. As a result, the reader gains access to the fictional world through her subjective viewpoint. In narratological terms, Tara functions as the principal internal focalizer whose consciousness mediates the narrative experience.

According to Genette, internal focalization occurs when narrative information is restricted to what a particular character knows, perceives, or experiences. In *Desirable Daughters*, the reader's understanding of family history, cultural traditions, migration, and personal relationships is shaped by Tara's perspective. Information is not presented as an external reality independent of the character. Instead, it emerges through Tara's interpretation of events and experiences. This narrative strategy creates an intimate relationship between the narrator and the reader.

The significance of Tara's focalization becomes evident from the opening sections of the novel. Her recollections of childhood in Calcutta are not presented as historical records but as personal memories filtered through her present

consciousness. The past is reconstructed through selective remembrance, emotional reflection, and subjective interpretation. Consequently, the reader encounters family traditions and cultural practices through Tara's evolving understanding rather than through an authoritative narrative voice.

Tara's role as focalizer also influences the representation of other characters. Characters such as Padma, Parvati, Bishwapriya, and Tara's parents are introduced through her observations and evaluations. The reader's perception of these characters is therefore shaped by Tara's emotional responses and personal judgments. This limitation of perspective reinforces the subjective nature of the narrative and highlights the central role of focalization in constructing meaning.

The narrative frequently moves between Tara's present life in America and her memories of India. These transitions are significant because they reveal how focalization connects memory with identity. Tara does not merely remember the past; she continually interprets and reinterprets it from the standpoint of her present experience. Her understanding of family, culture, and selfhood changes as she reflects upon earlier events. Internal focalization therefore becomes a means through which the narrative explores the relationship between memory and identity formation.

Another important aspect of Tara's focalization is its ability to reveal psychological complexity. The narrative records her uncertainties, conflicts, fears, and desires in considerable detail. Through this access to her inner consciousness, readers witness her struggle to negotiate multiple cultural identities. She is neither completely detached from her Indian heritage nor fully assimilated into American culture. Her perspective reflects the tensions and contradictions that characterize diasporic existence.

The use of internal focalization also contributes to the thematic exploration of displacement. Tara's experiences in America are often interpreted in relation to memories of India. The contrast between these cultural spaces is not presented objectively but through her personal perception. Consequently, displacement emerges as a psychological condition as much as a geographical reality. The reader experiences cultural difference through Tara's consciousness, making the narrative deeply personal and emotionally resonant.

Thus, Tara's role as the internal focalizer is fundamental to the narrative structure of *Desirable Daughters*. Through her perspective, Mukherjee transforms the novel into an exploration of memory, migration, and self discovery. Internal focalization allows the narrative to present identity not as a fixed essence but as a continuous process of reflection, negotiation, and reconstruction.

III. INTERNAL FOCALIZATION AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY

One of the most significant functions of internal focalization in *Desirable Daughters* is its role in the construction of identity. Through Tara Chatterjee's perspective, Bharati Mukherjee presents identity as a dynamic and evolving process rather than a stable or predetermined condition. The narrative does not offer a fixed definition of who Tara is. Instead, her identity emerges gradually through memories, personal reflections, cultural encounters, and changing self-perceptions. Internal focalization serves as the primary narrative mechanism through which this process is represented.

The novel portrays Tara at a stage in life when she is attempting to understand her place between different cultural worlds. Having left India and established a life in the United States, she occupies a position that is neither completely Indian nor entirely American. Her consciousness reflects the tensions associated with migration and cultural transition. Because the narrative is filtered through her perspective, readers experience these tensions directly rather than through external description. Internal focalization thus transforms identity into a lived psychological experience.

Memory plays an important role in this process. Throughout the novel, Tara repeatedly returns to memories of her childhood, family history, and cultural upbringing in Calcutta. These memories are not presented simply as recollections of past events. Instead, they function as interpretative acts through which Tara reassesses her understanding of herself. The past becomes meaningful because it is continually reexamined from the perspective of the present. Through this interaction between memory and reflection, identity appears as something that is constantly reconstructed rather than permanently established.

The story of Tara's family, particularly the narrative surrounding her ancestors, occupies an important place in her consciousness. These family histories provide cultural and historical frameworks through which she attempts to understand her own experiences. However, Tara does not accept these inherited narratives without question. Her reflections reveal both admiration for and distance from traditional expectations. Internal focalization allows readers to observe this process of negotiation as it unfolds within her mind. Identity therefore emerges through a dialogue between personal experience and inherited cultural memory.

The relationship between individual freedom and cultural tradition forms another important aspect of identity construction in the novel. Tara's experiences often reveal tensions between traditional social expectations and modern individual aspirations. Because these tensions are presented

through her consciousness, the reader gains access to the emotional and psychological dimensions of cultural conflict. The narrative does not simply describe competing values. Instead, it demonstrates how such values influence Tara's understanding of herself and her place in the world.

Internal focalization also contributes to the representation of fragmented identity. Tara's perspective frequently shifts between different temporal and cultural contexts. Her memories of India coexist with her experiences in America, creating a narrative structure that reflects the complexity of diasporic existence. The movement between these different worlds suggests that identity cannot be reduced to a single cultural affiliation. Rather, it is shaped by multiple influences that coexist within the individual. Through Tara's focalization, Mukherjee illustrates the hybrid nature of diasporic identity.

Another significant feature of the novel is the way in which self-knowledge develops through reflection. Tara's understanding of herself is not complete at the beginning of the narrative. Instead, the act of narration itself becomes a process of self-exploration. As she remembers, interprets, and evaluates her experiences, she gradually arrives at new insights regarding family, culture, and personal autonomy. Internal focalization therefore functions not only as a method of presenting experience but also as a means of generating self-awareness.

The subjective nature of focalization is particularly important in this context. Since readers encounter events through Tara's perspective, they recognize that identity is shaped by perception and interpretation. Different experiences acquire meaning because of the way Tara understands them. The narrative emphasizes that identity is not merely determined by external circumstances but is also constructed through personal reflection and interpretation. This emphasis on subjectivity reinforces the novel's exploration of individual agency within broader social and cultural structures.

Furthermore, internal focalization allows Mukherjee to challenge simplistic representations of immigrant identity. Tara's experiences reveal that migration does not involve a straightforward movement from one culture to another. Instead, it produces complex negotiations between memory and experience, belonging and alienation, continuity and change. Through Tara's consciousness, the novel presents identity as an ongoing process of adaptation and redefinition.

Thus, internal focalization occupies a central position in the narrative structure of *Desirable Daughters*. By presenting events through Tara's perspective, Mukherjee transforms identity from a static category into a process of continual reconstruction. Memory, cultural inheritance, migration, and personal reflection interact within Tara's consciousness

to produce a multidimensional understanding of selfhood. Internal focalization therefore functions not merely as a narrative technique but as a structural principle through which the novel explores the complexities of diasporic identity.

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The analysis of *Desirable Daughters* demonstrates that internal focalization is a central narrative strategy through which Bharati Mukherjee explores the complexities of identity formation. By restricting narrative information primarily to Tara Chatterjee's consciousness, the novel presents identity as a subjective and evolving experience rather than a stable social category. The reader's understanding of family, culture, migration, and selfhood is mediated through Tara's perceptions, memories, and reflections. As a result, identity emerges not as a predetermined reality but as a process of continual interpretation and reconstruction.

The study reveals that internal focalization allows Mukherjee to portray the psychological dimensions of diasporic existence with considerable depth. Tara's perspective reflects the tensions between tradition and modernity, homeland and diaspora, cultural inheritance and personal freedom. These tensions are not presented through external commentary but through the focalizer's own experiences and reflections. Consequently, readers encounter identity as an ongoing negotiation shaped by multiple cultural influences.

Memory functions as an important component of this process. Tara's recollections of childhood, family history, and cultural traditions repeatedly intersect with her present experiences in the United States. Through internal focalization, these memories become active elements in the construction of identity rather than simple representations of the past. The narrative illustrates how personal identity is shaped through the continuous reinterpretation of experience. The past acquires meaning through present reflection, and present experience is understood in relation to remembered histories.

The analysis also indicates that internal focalization contributes significantly to the representation of hybrid identity. Tara occupies a space between cultures, and her perspective reflects the complexities associated with this position. She neither rejects her Indian heritage nor fully assimilates into American culture. Instead, her identity develops through a process of adaptation, questioning, and self examination. Internal focalization enables the narrative to capture this process with nuance and psychological realism.

From a narratological perspective, the novel demonstrates the close relationship between focalization and meaning. The reader's interpretation of events depends largely upon the perspective through which those events are presented. Since the narrative remains closely aligned with Tara's consciousness, the construction of identity becomes inseparable from the act of perception itself. The novel therefore supports the narratological argument that focalization is not merely a technical feature of narrative discourse but an important mechanism through which literary texts generate meaning.

The findings of this study suggest that Mukherjee's use of internal focalization is fundamental to her representation of diasporic identity. Through Tara's perspective, the novel presents identity as fluid, multidimensional, and continuously evolving. The narrative structure reinforces the idea that selfhood is shaped by memory, cultural experience, and personal interpretation. In this sense, internal focalization functions as both a narrative technique and a thematic principle that governs the novel's exploration of identity.

In conclusion, *Desirable Daughters* illustrates how internal focalization can be employed to represent the complexities of identity in contemporary diasporic fiction. By positioning Tara as the primary focalizer, Mukherjee creates a narrative that foregrounds subjectivity, memory, and self reflection. The study demonstrates that internal focalization plays a crucial role in shaping the reader's understanding of identity and contributes significantly to the artistic and thematic achievement of the novel. The novel thus offers a valuable example of how narratological techniques can deepen the representation of human experience and cultural transformation in contemporary literature.

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Quantifying Proficiency Gains: Evaluating the Efficacy of a One-Month TOEIC Preparation Program

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Abstract—This study examined the comparative test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) Reading and Listening (RL) performances of 194 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students from Taiwan enrolled at the Center for English Language Studies (CELS) of Lapulapu-Cebu International College during the 2024–2025 academic year. Using a descriptive quantitative research design, the study analyzed students' pretest and posttest TOEIC scores to assess the efficacy of an intense English immersion program lasting one month. Four to five focused language modules that provided 24 hours of in-person training per course made up this pedagogical intervention. The 90-minute daily sessions operationalized structured language exposure using a Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) framework that balanced performance-driven communicative output activities specific to standardized test domains with real-world listening and reading input. Results revealed a notable improvement in students' overall proficiency, with the mean score increasing from 423.25 ($SD = 152.57$) in the pretest to 503.89 ($SD = 173.25$) in the posttest. A paired sample *t*-test indicated a statistically significant difference between the two means ($t = 11.93, p < .001$), confirming the positive impact of the intervention. Furthermore, 85% of participants demonstrated score gains, and 48 students advanced to higher CEFR levels. The findings suggest that focused instruction, task-based learning, and consistent TOEIC-oriented practice significantly enhance learners' communicative competence. This study underscores the effectiveness of short-term intensive English programs in improving EFL students' test performance and overall language proficiency.



Keywords— TOEIC RL, EFL learners, language proficiency, test performance, English instruction, CELS, CEFR level

I. INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly interconnected world, English proficiency has become a fundamental requirement for academic success and professional advancement. As English continues to dominate international communication, business, and education, the ability to use the language effectively is considered a key factor for global competitiveness (Crystal, 2012). To assess English

proficiency, standardized language tests such as the Test of English for International Communication, Reading and Listening (TOEIC RL) have gained significant importance, particularly among non-native speakers seeking educational and career opportunities abroad (Educational Testing Service [ETS], 2023).

The TOEIC test, developed by ETS, is designed to measure the English listening, reading, speaking, and writing

abilities required in real-world workplace contexts (Powers & Kim, 2019). It serves as an objective benchmark of communicative competence, allowing institutions and employers to evaluate individuals' readiness for participation in international settings. For foreign students, especially those studying or planning to work in English-speaking environments, TOEIC scores often determine eligibility for admission, scholarships, internships, or employment opportunities (Lee, 2020). Hence, TOEIC performance not only reflects linguistic ability but also influences students' academic trajectories and future career prospects.

Moreover, the process of preparing for the TOEIC test may foster broader language learning outcomes. Research suggests that test preparation enhances learners' motivation, promotes strategic learning behaviors, and improves their overall communicative competence (Choi, 2021; Green, 2014). Consequently, the TOEIC RL test can be seen not only as an evaluative tool but also as a catalyst for language development and intercultural competence among foreign students.

Given its growing role in international education and employment, it is essential to examine the significance of the TOEIC RL test among foreign students who studied in the Philippines. This study aimed to present the test performances of the international students of Lapulapu-Cebu International College (LCIC) and draw implications on the influence of studying in Cebu particularly in the Center for English Language Studies (CELS) as reflected in their pre test and posttest achievements.

Research Objectives

This study evaluated the pedagogical efficacy of a short-term intensive English immersion curriculum—specifically looking at the Quantifying Proficiency Gains: Evaluating the Efficacy of a One-Month TOEIC Preparation Program—among Taiwanese EFL learners enrolled at the Center for English Language Studies (CELS) of Lapulapu-Cebu International College during the 2024–2025 academic year. The empirical findings from this investigation served as the objective foundation for a strategic institutional action plan.

Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the pretest and posttest performances of the experimental group?
2. Is there a significant difference between the pretest and posttest performances of the experimental group?
3. What changes are observed in the students' CEFR proficiency levels following the intensive program

4. Based on the results of the study, what implications can be drawn and an action plan can be proposed?

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This study's theoretical framework is intended to assess the pedagogical effectiveness of the Center for English Language Studies' (CELS) short-term concentrated Test of English for International Communication Reading and Listening (TOEIC RL) preparation program. The study blends two complimentary supporting cognitive frameworks and anchors itself inside one fundamental macro-theory of second language learning in order to rigorously explain the linguistic changes seen throughout the student cohort. When taken as a whole, these interconnected models create a coherent causal chain that explains how high-stakes linguistic output demands, strategic structural scheduling, and intense task engagement work together to accelerate global language proficiency transitions within a thirty-day timeframe.

The overarching anchor theory governing the instructional delivery of the intervention is Michael Long's operationalization of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), which extends from the foundational tenets of the Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1996, 2015). Long maintains that second language learning does not occur through the passive, rote memorization of structural grammar principles or isolated vocabulary lists typical of traditional foreign language schools. Instead, linguistic development is dramatically accelerated when adult learners are integrated within authentic, goal-oriented communication situations where they must actively negotiate for meaning (Long, 2015). When students encounter communication breakdowns or understanding hurdles during a targeted communicative activity, they are cognitively pushed to "notice the gap" between their current interlanguage state and the correct target structure (Schmidt, 2001).

While TBLT provides the interactive structural container for classroom delivery, Merrill Swain's (1985, 2005) Pushed Output Hypothesis serves as the first supporting theory to explain the precise mechanism behind the dramatic proficiency gains achieved by the students. In particular, the study's empirical data showed that a significant percentage of the students who were progressing were able to overcome the persistent "A2 proficiency plateau" and effectively cross the independent B1 criterion. Because the environment lacks the strain necessary to promote active grammatical restructuring, lower-intermediate foreign language learners often gain high levels of passive input comprehension but stay frozen at a basic user level, according to Second Language Acquisition research (Richards, 2015).

In order to close this gap, Swain's approach proposes that learners can only achieve real linguistic fluency and structural revision when they are methodically "pushed" by their learning environment to produce coherent, accurate, and contextually appropriate language (Swain, 2005). Three crucial metacognitive functions are served by this pushed output, according to Swain: a noticing function where learners identify their internal production limitations; a hypothesis-testing function where they try out novel syntactic forms; and a metalinguistic function where they deliberately consider structural accuracy (Swain, 1995, 2005).

By allocating half of the institutional grading weight to a continuous track of weekly Mini-Tests and rigorous Unit Assessments, the CELS curriculum directly initiates these three functions. The classroom becomes an active production crucible instead of a passive listening lecture thanks to this rigorous testing atmosphere, which serves as the exact catalyst needed by the Pushed Output Hypothesis. Students are forced to perform sophisticated syntactic processing—analyzing precise word endings, verbal inflections, and passage coherence in Parts 5, 6, and 7 of the reading syllabus—instead of basic semantic guessing due to the temporal and structural demands of these evaluations. The lower-tier pupils are eventually able to overcome the false-beginner ceiling and become self-regulated, independent language users thanks to this persistent effort.

Lastly, the study uses the Interleaving Effect, which was developed by educational psychologists Richard Schmidt and Robert Bjork (1992) and supported by John Sweller's (1988) Cognitive Load Theory, as its second supporting framework to explain the distinct statistical distribution found in the post-test results. A crucial distinction in educational design is made between "interleaved" practice schedules, in which several distinct skills are methodically mixed and alternated within a brief period of time, and "blocked" practice schedules, in which a single skill is isolated and fully practiced before going on to the next topic (Schmidt & Bjork, 1992). While sequential, blocked schedules frequently create the appearance of quick mastery during immediate classroom exercises, a wealth of cognitive research shows that blocking often results in catastrophic cognitive fatigue and long-term skill attrition during real-world standardized testing scenarios where quick attentional switching is required (Dunlosky et al., 2013).

III. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study utilized a quantitative approach using a quasi-experimental, single-group pretest-posttest design. This design was selected to measure the systematic effects of the one-month intensive pedagogical intervention on one group where true random assignment was not structurally feasible due to institutional grouping. Descriptive quantitative techniques were supplementary implemented to map out frequencies, percentages, and baseline profile distributions across CEFR bands.

Research Participants

All 194 respondents are university students from Taiwan, specifically National Kaohsiung University of Science and Technology and Chaoyang University of Technology. The participants completed a pretest in TOEIC RL as administered in their respective schools in Taiwan as their pretest performance before their arrival in the Philippines and were placed into specific CEFR levels.

Research Instrument

This study used the official, standardized institutional Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) Reading and Listening (RL) examination created by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) as the main assessment of improvements in language proficiency. A 100-item Listening Comprehension section (Parts 1 to 4) lasting roughly 45 minutes and a 100-item Reading Comprehension section (Parts 5 to 7) lasting 75 minutes make up the instrument's two main components, which are administered over a strict two-hour period. The combined maximum scale score is 990 points.

Pre-Intervention Testing (Baseline Profile): The official institutional TOEIC scores that the Taiwanese EFL students received from their individual home universities in Taiwan before they departed. The students' individual schools formally certified and sent these baseline measures to create their initial, entry-level English proficiency profiles.

Post-Intervention Testing (Exit Profile): The CPILS (Cebu Practical Academy of Center for Premier International Language Studies), testing center in Cebu, Philippines, officially administered the posttest at the end of the one-month intensive curriculum. To preserve tight concept validity and avoid item-exposure or test-retest bias, this posttest used a parallel, secure version of the institutional ETS TOEIC exam.

Research Procedure

This study looked at a highly structured, brief, intensive language intervention given over a four-week period at the Center for English Language Studies (CELS)

in order to thoroughly assess improvements in English competence. This program's pedagogical architecture was created to integrate Taiwanese EFL learners into a high-density, multi-layered linguistic environment, going beyond conventional rote-memorization methods. An approved institutional pretest administration of the TOEIC Listening and Reading exams in Taiwan was used to establish baseline metrics prior to the start of the intervention. Upon arrival, participants were immediately transitioned into a rigorous academic schedule consisting of four to five concurrent, specialized English language courses. A total of 96 to 120 rigorous teaching hours per student were required each month, with each subject requiring precisely 24 contact hours of direct, in-person instruction.

The intervention's first half was solely devoted to auditory processing techniques. The four subsections of the TOEIC Listening exam—Photographs (Part 1), Question-Response (Part 2), Short Conversations (Part 3), and Short Talks (Part 4)—were methodically taught in Classes 2 through 7 after an introductory orientation. A series of whole-group, small-group, and individual exercises were used in the classroom every day. Recurring mini-tests were used to monitor students' recollection of the material.

On the other hand, text-based processing became the focus of the second part of the curriculum. Classes 10 through 14 concentrated on structural and contextual decoding strategies after Class 9 established a localized baseline using a 100-item Reading Pre-Test. Instruction focused on

context signals for text completion (Part 6), phrase mechanics and syntactic endings for incomplete sentences (Part 5), and skimming/scanning techniques for reading comprehension passages (Part 7).

The concepts of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) served as the methodological foundation for the instruction of these diverse courses (Ellis, 2003). By striking a balance between performance-driven communicative outputs and rich, real-world reading and listening inputs, instructors intentionally operationalized theories of second language learning. Daily lessons allowed students to participate in simulated real-world tasks, work together on group language productions, and explore interactive language functions in place of passive lectures.

The administration of an official, institutional TOEIC Reading and Listening exam at the end of the one-month period marked the conclusion of this intensive pedagogical cycle, enabling direct empirical tracking of how this multifaceted, adaptable intervention affected overall educational efficacy.

IV. ANALYSIS AND RESULT

This section presents the comparative test performances of the respondents between the pretest and posttest as shown in the tables.

Mean and Standard Deviation of the Pretest and Posttest Scores

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of the Pretest and Posttest Scores of the Students

Test	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Verbal Interpretation
Pretest	423.25	152.57	Moderate performance with high variability
Posttest	503.89	173.25	Improved performance, scores still varied

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the pretest and posttest scores of the experimental group. The results show that students obtained a pretest mean of 423.25 (SD = 152.57), indicating moderate prior knowledge with substantial score dispersion among learners. After one month of study as an intervention, the posttest mean increased to 503.89 (SD = 173.25), reflecting an improvement in overall performance. The standard deviation remained relatively high, suggesting that while most students improved, learning gains differed across individuals.

This outcome aligns with prior studies emphasizing the impact of structured language interventions and test-oriented training on learners' communicative competence and performance (Green, 2014; Choi, 2021).

The results can be explained through the lens of Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982), which posits that language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to comprehensible input slightly above their current proficiency level. The TOEIC-oriented activities and authentic listening and reading materials used at CELS likely provided such input, allowing students to internalize language structures in meaningful contexts. Additionally, Swain's Output Hypothesis (1985) supports the idea that frequent opportunities to produce language—through speaking, writing, and comprehension exercises. This enables students to test their linguistic hypotheses and refine their accuracy and fluency, which are reflected in their posttest improvements.

Paired t-Test on the Difference Between Pretest and Posttest Scores

Table 2: Paired t-Test on the Difference Between Pretest and Posttest Scores

Comparison	Mean Difference	t-value	df	p-value	Decision on H ₀	Interpretation
Pretest vs Posttest	80.64	11.93	193	< 0.001	Reject H ₀	Significant difference exists

To determine whether the increase in mean scores was statistically significant, a paired samples t-test was conducted, as reflected in Table 2. The analysis yielded a t-value of 11.93 with 193 degrees of freedom and a p-value < 0.001, which is below the 0.05 level of significance. This indicates that the observed improvement from pretest to posttest is statistically significant and not due to random chance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and it can be concluded that the intervention had a significant positive effect on students' performance.

The results further resonate with Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) principles, which highlight the role of meaningful, goal-oriented activities in language learning (Ellis, 2003). CELS's use of real-life communicative tasks, simulated test items, and integrated skill training likely contributed to the learners' enhanced listening and reading comprehension. This aligns with Lee (2020), who found that targeted TOEIC preparation incorporating authentic tasks and feedback significantly improves learners' test performance and confidence.

Pretest and Posttest CEFR

Table 3: Pretest and Posttest CEFR Linguistic Profile of the Students

CEFR Level	Pretest Count	Percentage	Posttest Count	Percentage
A1	12	6.19%	2	1.03%
A2	169	87.11%	134	69.07%
B1	12	6.19%	52	26.80%
B2	1	0.52%	6	3.09%

The empirical findings reveal an overwhelming upward migration across the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) thresholds, shifting the institutional profile from basic to independent language users. 93.30% of the cohort was highly concentrated in the lower bands at the baseline pre-intervention phase, with 6.19% in the A1 level and 87.11% in the A2 level. This intense focus draws attention to a common phenomenon among East Asian EFL learners, known as the "false-beginner plateau," in which adult students have a sizable passive vocabulary but are stuck at a basic user level because they are unable to actively

navigate structural syntax or handle text constraints under standardized conditions (Richards, 2015).

Following the one-month intensive curriculum, this lower-tier cluster experienced a dramatic decompression: the A1 bracket collapsed to just 1.03%, while the A2 population decreased to 69.07%. At the same time, the upper-intermediate B2 band rose to 3.09% and the independent B1 band surged from 6.19% to 26.80%. From a baseline of 6.71% to an exit measure of 29.89%, this indicates a fourfold increase in independent operational language users (B1 and B2 combined).

Distribution of CEFR Level

Table 4: Distribution of CEFR Level Advancements Post-Intervention

Number of students	Pre test CEFR Level	Post test CEFR Level	Shift
45	A2	B1	A2-B1
3	B1	B2	B1-B2

Table 3 presents the distribution of CEFR level advancements post-intervention. It provides important information about the developmental milestones reached by the Taiwanese EFL cohort. Notably, 45 students (93.75%) successfully completed the transfer from the A2 to the B1 level out of the 48 students who showed an upward trend across global proficiency bands. The A2 level is often described in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) literature as a persistent "proficiency plateau" or false-beginner ceiling, when learners find it difficult to transition from formulaic input to self-regulated language production (Richards, 2015).

The use of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) as an educational framework for high-intensity, short-term courses is strongly supported by this quick increasing trend. Long's (2015) Interaction Hypothesis states that language acquisition happens when students negotiate meaning during communication breakdowns, which makes them aware of interlanguage gaps. Students are rarely encouraged to engage in active linguistic rearrangement in the conventional grammar-translation frameworks characteristic of foreign language contexts.

Additionally, three students attained advanced vertical growth, moving from the B1 level to the B2 level, according to the data. Given the short one-month duration of the intervention, this particular cross-band migration is statistically and pedagogically significant despite being less in number.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it is imperative to conclude that the lessons, drills, task-based learning activities, practice tests and overall learning experiences provided by the Center for English Language Studies had positively impacted the English Proficiency Level of the EFL students.

Overall, the study also confirms that short-term intensive English programs, when grounded in communicative and task-based pedagogies, can yield measurable gains in EFL learners' proficiency. The students' progression in TOEIC RL scores and CEFR levels demonstrates the effectiveness of CELS's curriculum design, reinforcing the importance of structured input, interactive learning, and performance-based assessment in second language development.

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Women in STEM: Navigating Gender Disparities in AI and Computer Science

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Abstract— *STEM education is crucial for providing knowledge and technologies that drive economic growth and foster societal development. However, the disproportion of women in STEM careers is a worldwide problem, caused by the gender gap in education. This inequality affects various aspects, including publications, salary levels, senior roles, annual production, and resource distribution. The rapid emergence of technology, particularly in the realms of artificial intelligence and computer science, has led to a profound transformation in the landscape of STEM disciplines and associated gender dynamics. In the 20th century, the hierarchy of scientific disciplines was distinctly gendered, with traditionally masculine fields like engineering, computer science, and mathematics commanding higher earning potentials and social status. As AI and digital technologies gain prominence, these fields continue to dominate the job market, offering higher salaries and career opportunities. This shift highlights the need for greater inclusivity and diversity in STEM education and professions. This study will examine the participation of women in emerging fields, such as Computer Science and Design, Data Science, Information Technology, and Computer and Information Technology, by analysing enrolment data for the Indian Institute of Technology and the Indian Institute of Information Technology. Further data from the All-India Survey on Higher Education surveys from 2011 to 2022 are analysed to understand the trend regarding women's participation in higher technical education. The study aims to examine gender, inequality, and social differences to understand the disciplinary choices of women in STEM fields.*



Keywords— *Gender disparity, Computer Science, Information Technology, STEM and Artificial Intelligence.*

I. INTRODUCTION

A worldwide market, unbounded by national borders, has emerged as a result of globalisation. The changes in the skills needed for new professions are a direct result of the interplay between universities, businesses, and industries. There has been a corresponding shift in the valuation of natural/pure sciences, which are considered less valuable than applied sciences and professional skills, as well as a further strengthening of the stratification between the arts and sciences (Chanana, 2006). The significance of STEM

(science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education in developing a knowledge-based economy is pertinent. STEM fields foster innovation, technological advancements, and economic growth, which are crucial for both national and global prosperity in an increasingly digitalised world. Equipping the next generation with the skills required for the modern job market is central to this vision, and STEM education plays a crucial role in shaping future opportunities for students. Through various legislative and program initiatives, the Indian government

has been diligent in promoting women's participation in the workforce over recent decades (Bhardwaj & Anshima, 2025). Nevertheless, a significant global issue is the underrepresentation of women in STEM fields. The STEM fields, especially computer science, engineering, and mathematics, are notoriously men-dominated and pay exceptionally well. Unfortunately, women still face significant barriers to advancement in these fields, despite efforts to increase gender parity. Biology, physics, and chemistry take a back seat to bioscience-related courses, like molecular biology, microbiology, biochemistry, and biophysics. Advanced degrees in fields such as management, mass communication, and fashion technology have reached the pinnacle of academic achievement. (Chanana, 2006).

Artificial intelligence (AI) term has been coined by John McCarthy in 1956 and Alan Turing, Turing Test, Herbert A. Simon, Allen Newell, Marvin Minsky, Norbert Wiener, Geoffrey Hinton, Yann LeCun and Yoshua Bengio etc., have truly paid attention to it due to its complexity and the lengthy process of developing the concept. The field of artificial intelligence (AI) has been gradually emerging and is gaining increasing acceptance. Over the last several decades, artificial intelligence (AI) has evolved into a vast field that encompasses numerous subfields, including mathematics, linguistics, computer science, and artificial psychology (Wang & Xie, 1999), among others (Shao et al., 2022). Recent years have witnessed significant progress in data science and AI, resulting in widespread adoption across various fields. A thorough examination of the application of data science and AI reveals their revolutionary influence in numerous sectors, including healthcare, banking, advertising, transportation, and more. Organisations can now gain valuable insights, optimise their operations, and develop innovative goods and services. Data science and artificial intelligence have revolutionised decision-making procedures by utilising data analytics, machine learning, and deep learning algorithms. (Costa & Aparicio, 2023). Davenport & Patil (2012) argue that the data science is the most alluring career path in the modern era which comes under scrutiny from academics across a wide range of disciplines. For example, McCQuillan (2018a) describes data science as "machinic Neoplatonism" because it encourages a deficit of critical thinking in societal analysis and decision-making.

The definition of data science has also been the subject of conflicting opinions. Some have argued that data science is merely statistics with a new name (Statistics Views, 2013), while others contend that it encompasses nearly every scientific discipline (Fowler, 2015; Mayernik, 2023). Class IX and class XI students in connected schools will begin studying artificial intelligence in the 2020–21 school year,

per the Central Board of Secondary Education's (CBSE) implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP). The Diksha portal and other artificial intelligence projects were brought up by Minister of State for Education Annpurna Devi during a discussion in the Lok Sabha in August 2022. This platform is built using open-source software and leverages AI approaches to provide self-paced learning. It offers content for school education in both states and UTs. (One country, one digital platform) It also offers QR-coded energised texts for every grade. As of March 28, 2023, there are 16.82 million students registered in various courses on DIKSHA. The highest number of learning sessions attended was in Karnataka (9.32 million), followed by 6.10 million in Rajasthan, and 4.45 million in Odisha. The concept of cloud-based education is gaining traction in India as a means to enhance both the digital and physical accessibility of educational resources. Companies like Miko provide children with companion robots powered by artificial intelligence (AI). These robots can communicate, react, teach, entertain, and understand the child's needs, emotions, and preferences (IBEF). Despite progress in technology and AI, women remain significantly underrepresented in its development and leadership, particularly in the field of AI (Maafo, 2025).

Women represent just 29% of researchers in science and development (R&D), decreasing to 12% in specialised AI roles. Only 16% of university faculty engaged in AI research are women, highlighting a notable lack of diversity in academia and research fields. Moreover, women account for only 30% of AI professionals, and the gender disparity grows in leadership, with women holding merely 18% of C-suite positions at AI startups. In many countries, data on women's participation often depend on broad STEM or ICT statistics, which can hide more specific disparities in areas like AI. For example, there is a 44% gender gap in software development roles, compared to a 15% gap across general ICT jobs. Notably, the gender gap in science R&D roles is 21%, whereas in AI research positions, it reaches 38%. There is a 15% gender gap among ICT professionals, which increases to 44% in the field of software development. These disparities become more significant as roles move from entry-level to leadership positions in technology. In AI companies, the gender gap is even more evident: a 23% difference at the director level in STEM workplaces and a 32% gap at C-Suite positions in AI startups (UNESCO, 2024, p. 19; Maafo, 2025).

Women constitute nearly 15% of the technical staff and 18% of the total scientists at the CSIR labs (Ranjana, 2022). The current strength of women students in the biological cluster exceeds that of men, followed by the Chemical Sciences and the Physical and Information Sciences. The proportion of women students in the Engineering Sciences cluster is

approximately one-third of the total applications and final selections. The Biological Sciences had the highest percentage of women students at 57%, while the Engineering Sciences cluster had the lowest proportion of women students at 34%. There is a growing gender disparity in engineering and information technology, according to the latest Universum India Talent Survey 2019. Just 26% of students in these fields are women. Nearly three times as many men as women were involved in engineering (74% vs. 24%). The research conducted by the Oxford Martin School estimated that robots would replace 47% of American occupations; nations in the developing world, including Ethiopia, China, Thailand, and India, are even more vulnerable. In the future, intelligent machines will assist in healthcare, support the elderly and individuals with disabilities, and even educate and care for our children. Women are the ones we already know will be hit the most. The research conducted by the World Economic Forum (WEF) predicts that 5.1 million jobs would be lost globally by 2020, with women bearing the brunt of these employment losses. There will be a shift in the gender ratio in fields where women currently make up a disproportionate share of the workforce, like architecture, engineering, computers, math, and manufacturing, as well as in workforces where women currently make up a large percentage, like office and administrative jobs, due to these technological changes. Nearly 4 million men will lose their jobs while 1.4 million see an increase (a ratio of more than five to one) (Hayasaki, 2017).

II. EMERGENCE OF AI AND DATA SCIENCE

The rapid rise of artificial intelligence (AI) and computer science over the past few decades has transformed the landscape of STEM disciplines. These fields, once niche areas of study, have become central to technological development and are now among the most lucrative and prestigious career paths available. The increased demand for AI and computer science professionals has generated a growing job market, with high salaries and significant opportunities for innovation. Several industries, including the education sector, are undergoing significant transformations due to the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI). Artificial intelligence (AI) may revolutionise higher education by changing the way students learn, increasing their interest in class, and ultimately improving graduation rates. In the STEM fields, particularly, the incorporation of AI shows great potential for fostering creativity, analysis, and problem-solving skills in students. For pupils to succeed in today's technologically advanced society, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education is crucial (Alalawi, 2024;

Nagaraj, 2023). Emerging from the intersection of mathematics, statistics, and computer science, data science is finding use in a wide variety of fields and industries, including commerce, healthcare, academia, transportation, and many others. At the same time, data science education is emerging as a distinct field of study.

Education in data science is growing in tandem with other fields such as social science, business analytics, engineering, statistics, and computer science. In 2016, the US National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine established the Committee on Envisioning the Data Science Discipline: The Undergraduate Perspective (Haas et al, 2019). Education in data science is growing in tandem with other fields such as social science, business analytics, engineering, statistics, and computer science. Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning (AI & ML) is a top area for jobs and research, with more jobs in this domain than in any other B.Tech. Program in CSE alone. Incorporating a wide variety of AI approaches and intricate instructional components is a significant issue for AI-STEM, the application of AI in STEM education. Professionals knowledgeable in various areas of data science have been in high demand for data science employment over the past five years (Xu & Ouyang, 2022; Mike et al., 2023).

III. GENDER DISPARITIES AMONG EMERGING DISCIPLINES

The United States has persistent gender gaps in science education, with fewer women students than men students participating in numerous areas. The National Science Foundation (2000), the National Science Board (2000), and the National Centre for Education Statistics (2000a, 2000b) support the idea that women are still underrepresented in scientific and STEM fields, even though these fields are among the most prestigious and influential in the United States (Heller et. al., 2016; Hanson et al., 1999). This gender gap in representation in science is a direct result of the prevailing bias that exists within the field. (Hanson 2004). Some of the barriers to participation of women in STEM are gender bias during recruitment, promotions, difficulty in balancing varied roles, the stigma of sexual harassment and the mindset. In India, 11% of colleges are exclusively for women, with the majority offering arts and commerce rather than science, as per Kundu (2019). This could be due to the belief that boys are better at science and girls are not. Among the many fields where women are under-represented, 70% are enrolled in education, 69% in health and welfare, 56% in the natural sciences (including biology), 36% in STEM on average, and 29% in information and communication technology (ICT) (Equals

Research Group referenced in UNESCO, 2019, p. 23). Even more dismal are the figures in Europe, where women make up just 34% of STEM graduates and 17% of ICT graduates (European Commission, 2021). Comparatively, 9.2% of men tertiary graduates get degrees in information and

communication technology, while only 2.4% of women graduates do so (Herrera & Koeszegi, 2022).

Status of Women's Enrolment in Higher Technical Education

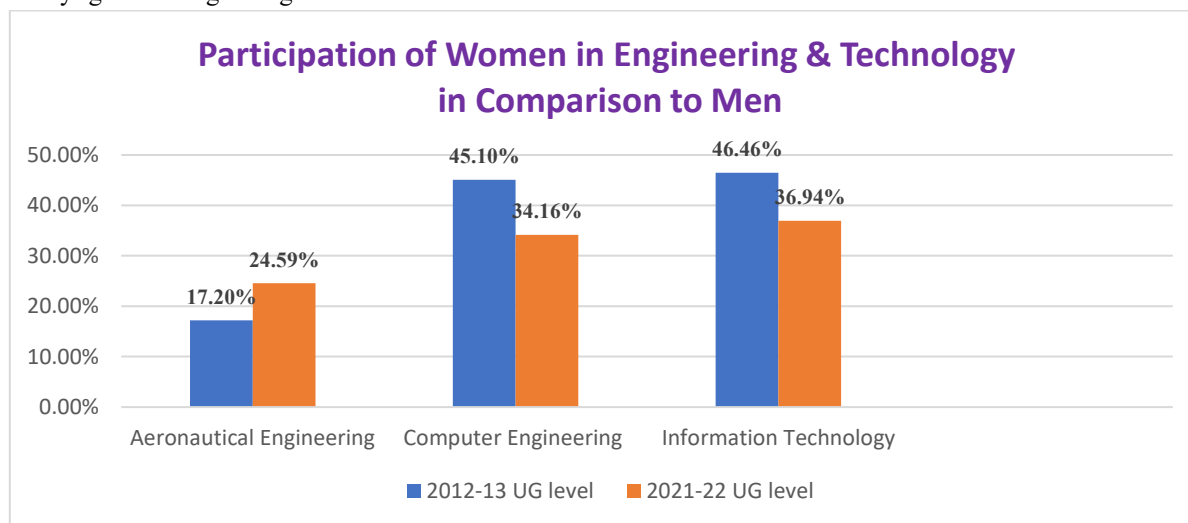


Fig.1: Representing participation of women in Engineering & Technology in comparison to men from 2012-22 (AISHE)

The AISHE report shows that women's enrolment in Aeronautical Engineering, Computer Engineering, and Information Technology is 17.2%, 45.1%, and 46.46% respectively, at the undergraduate level for the year 2012. In ten years (AISHE 2021-22), a different scenario is revealed; in Aeronautical Engineering, women's enrolment rose to 24.59% but in Computer Engineering and Information Technology, it decreased to 34.16% and 36.94% respectively, at the undergraduate level. Emerging disciplines, including Data Science, IT & Computer, AI & Data Science, AI & Machine Learning, and Automation

Robotics, have women's enrolment rates of 27.9%, 37.8%, 33.15%, 32.80%, and 16.04% at the undergraduate level.

The Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) are a network of premier educational institutions in India, offering undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral programs in various domains like Computer Science, Electronics, Data Science, and Artificial Intelligence. With 25 IITs across India, some are "Institutes of National Importance" (INIs) and others are part of the public-private partnership model.

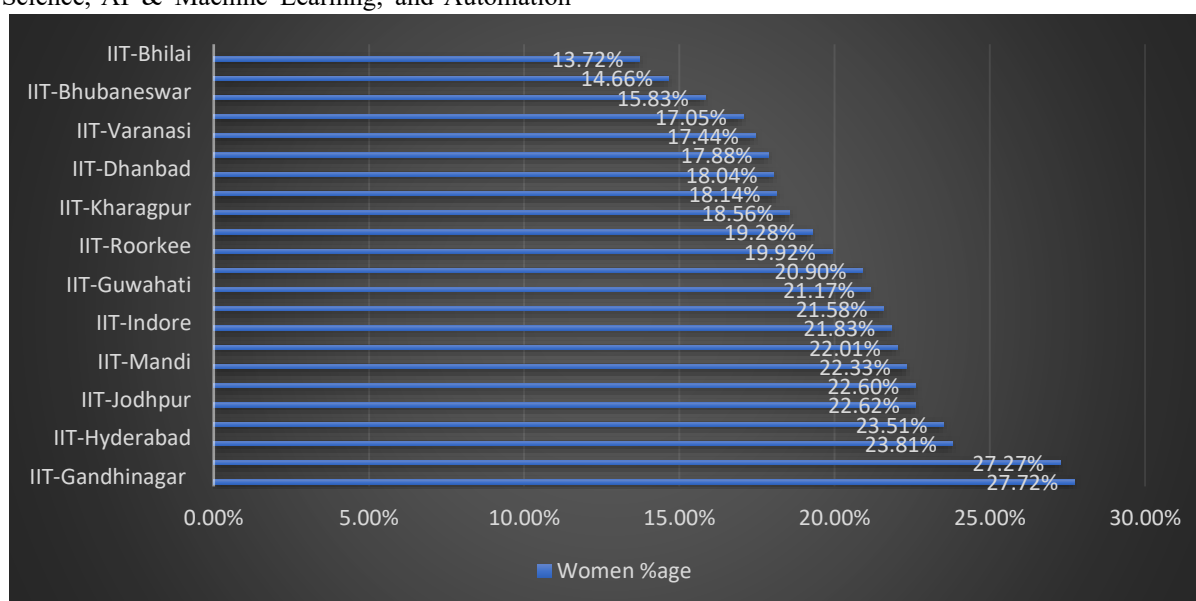


Fig.2.: The enrolment of women in percentage in comparison to men in IITs (2020)

In 2020, women's enrolment in Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) accounted for less than 30% of total student enrolment, highlighting the gender disparity in STEM education and careers. Despite progress, women continue to be underrepresented, particularly in undergraduate programs related to Computer Science and Engineering (CSE). IIT-Gandhinagar technical institute in Gujarat has the highest enrolment of women, with 27.72%

and IIT-Bhilai (Chhattisgarh) has the lowest enrolment, with 13.72%. It can be presumed that women may be underrepresented in AI and Data Science courses. Berman & Bourne (2015) suggest that the new field of data science and AI professions potentially offer a rare opportunity to disrupt the traditionally male-dominated fields of computing and engineering, narrow the gender gap in STEM and make diversity a priority.

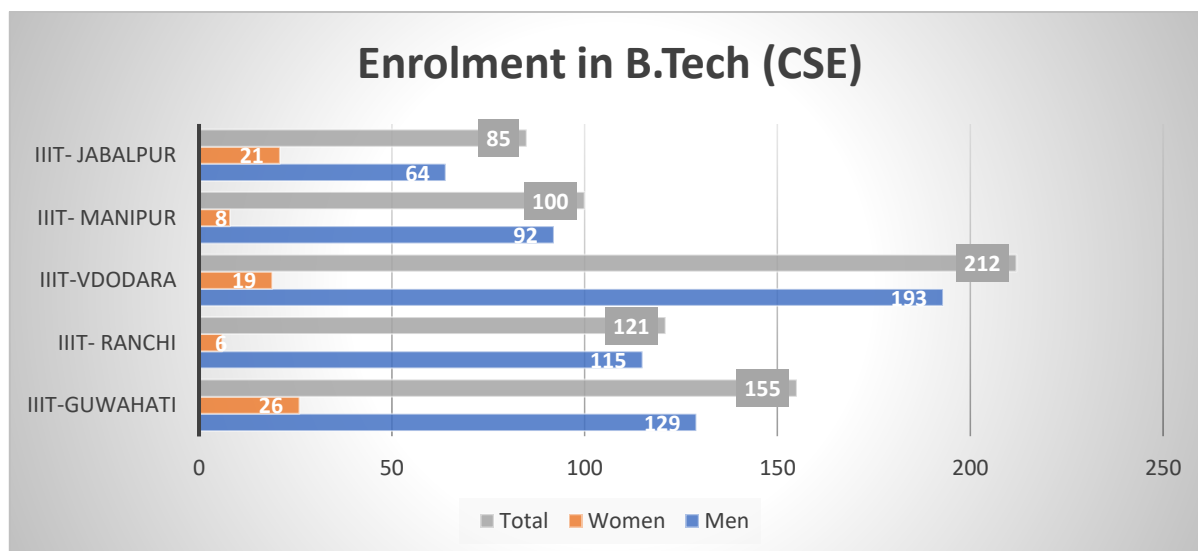


Fig.3.: Representing enrolment in the B. Tech Programme (CSE) in different IITs in 2020.

According to the latest data, women constitute approximately 25-30% of the student population in many IITs, although the percentage varies across different institutes. In top institutes like IIT-Delhi, IIT-Bangalore, and IIT-Hyderabad, there has been a gradual increase in the intake of women in undergraduate IT programs. Indraprastha Institute of Information Technology Delhi

(IIT-Delhi) introduced a PG Diploma in Data Science and AI in 2020. That year, 20.5% of enrollees were women and 79.5% were men; notably, women comprised a higher proportion of PhD program enrolments compared to B.Tech. and MTech. programs. At IIT-Jabalpur, 24.7% of students in the B.Tech. The CSE program has women, while 25.5% of CSE PhD students are women.

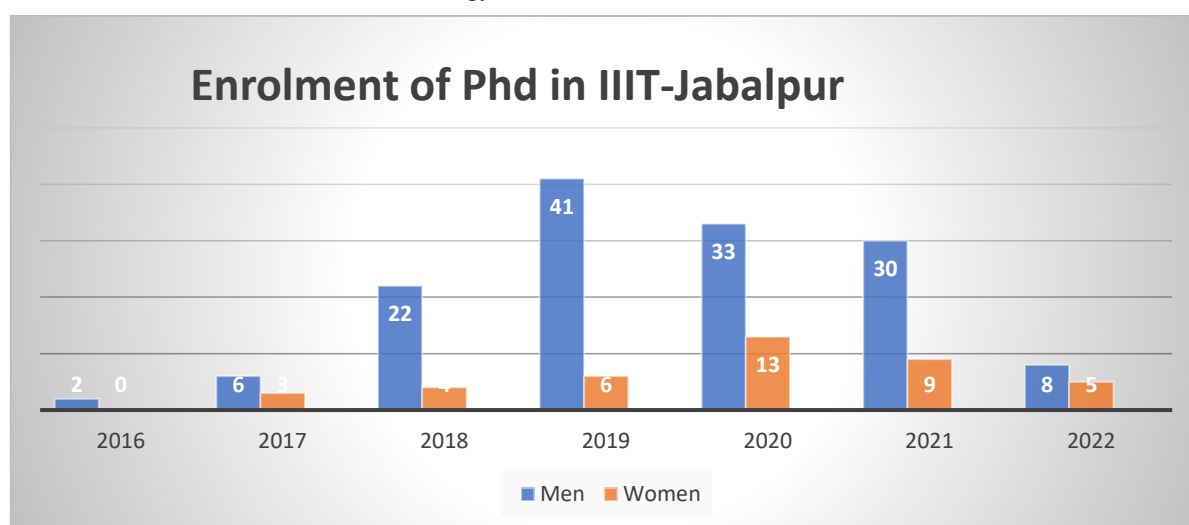


Fig.4.: Representing enrolment of Men and Women in PhD of IIT-Jabalpur (2016-22)

The annual report of IIIT-Jabalpur and IIIT-Guwahati shows a slight decrease in the gender gap in PhD programmes post-lockdown. In the Computer Science program at IIIT-Guwahati, the number of men and women is 18 and 10, respectively. Dutta (2016) found that post-marital, women's attitudes and expectations are influenced by broader social structures and family interactions. Career choices are influenced by material conditions and personal traits, which are affected by social class, age, ethnicity, and gender. This underscores the significance of factors like family interactions and material circumstances when making career decisions. (Raggl & Troman, 2008). In IIIT-Vadodara, women's enrolment was 17.74% in B.Tech. (AI and Data Science) programmes for the batch 2020-23. IIIT-Ranchi had enrolled 13.5% women in CSE & Electronic Communication Engineering (ECE) B.Tech. programmes for the batch 2017-20. However, in IIIT-Allahabad, women's enrolment in B.Tech. and M.Tech. (IT) The percentages were 21.79% and 19.62% for the batch 2019-23. Women's enrolment in the IIIT-Guwahati was 10.84% in B.Tech. for the batch 2015-19. The IIIT-Bhagalpur had enrolled 9% women in B.Tech. CSE in batch 2017-20 and 7.6% in B.Tech. ECE. Women's enrolment in IIIT-Manipur in B.Tech. CSE and B.Tech. ECE 9% and 5.5% for the batch 2017-20.

Although India graduates the highest percentage of women in STEM globally (around 40%), their representation in STEM employment remains low at just 14%, indicating a need for improvement. The under-representation of women in master's and doctoral programs must also be addressed promptly (Aggarwal et al., 2022). Worldwide, women make up 53% of graduates and post-graduates; however, it is only 43% at the PhD level, compared to 57% men. The average percentage of women in research institutes and industries is 28%. At the senior level, there are fewer women in leadership positions, and as a result, in decision-making and policy-making, the gender gap is more apparent (Gonzalez et al., 2019).

IV. CONCLUSION

The gender parity in STEM, particularly in AI and computer science, is a significant challenge despite efforts to improve gender equity in education and employment. The historical gendering of STEM fields has created a legacy of inequality that affects women's participation and advancement in high-growth, high-paying disciplines. Gender bias is a significant hurdle in achieving inclusive development, which is possible only with the equal participation of women in every field. Women today comprise an integral part of the workforce, but they still have a long way to go due to the absolute domination enjoyed in this field by men. When it

comes to data and AI, women are under-represented in fields that require a high level of technical expertise, like the technology and information industry, and over-represented in fields that do not, like healthcare. Statistically, women outnumber men in executive roles across some industries; nevertheless, the gender gap is particularly pronounced in the IT sector and AI roles. The notion of "masculine" versus "feminine" sciences extended beyond cultural attitudes to affect institutional practices. Engineering programs were historically designed to appeal to men, while women were actively discouraged from pursuing technical fields due to prevailing stereotypes about their capabilities. This created a persistent cycle of underrepresentation, as the lack of visible women role models contributed to fewer women entering and advancing in these fields.

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Dynamics of Violence: A Study of the Selected Works of Manjula Padmanabhan

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Abstract— This article reconceptualises violence in the work of the Indian playwright and novelist Manjula Padmanabhan, arguing that her dramatic and fictional worlds dramatise violence not as a series of discrete, spectacular events but as a continuum that extends from the visible and direct, through the structural and systemic, to the cultural and symbolic. Drawing on Johan Galtung's triad of direct, structural, and cultural violence and Slavoj Žižek's distinction between subjective and objective violence, and supplementing these with Giorgio Agamben's account of bare life, Achille Mbembe's necropolitics, and Pierre Bourdieu's symbolic violence, the study offers close readings of three works that span two decades and two genres: the one-act play *Lights Out* (1984; published 2000), the award-winning dystopian drama *Harvest* (1997), and the speculative novel *Escape* (2008). It contends that Padmanabhan's signal achievement is to render perceptible the objective violence that ordinarily remains invisible precisely because it constitutes the normalised background against which subjective violence appears as aberration. In *Lights Out*, bystander apathy exposes the cultural violence that licenses and aestheticises gendered assault; in *Harvest*, the commodified organ-donor body materialises the necropolitical and structural violence of global capital; and in *Escape*, state-sponsored gendercide reveals the terminal logic of a patriarchal order that has rendered an entire category of life ungrievable. The article concludes that Padmanabhan's characteristically open endings reposition the spectator-reader from complicit passivity toward implicated responsibility, transforming the recognition of violence into an ethical demand.



Keywords— Manjula Padmanabhan, violence, structural violence, necropolitics, bystander apathy, gendercide, Indian English drama, dystopia, biopolitics, postcolonial body

I. INTRODUCTION

Few contemporary Indian writers have anatomised violence with the persistence and conceptual range of Manjula Padmanabhan (b. 1953). A playwright, novelist, cartoonist, illustrator, and journalist, Padmanabhan rose to international prominence in 1997 when *Harvest*, her fifth play, won the inaugural Onassis Award for Theatre, chosen from more than 1,400 entries submitted from over seventy countries. Yet the critical preoccupation with that single triumph has tended to fragment the reception of her oeuvre: *Harvest* is read through the optics of postcolonial commodification and the global organ trade; the earlier one-act play *Lights Out* is approached as a feminist intervention into the representation of sexual assault; and the later

speculative novels *Escape* and *The Island of Lost Girls* are framed within the rubric of gender dystopia and ecofeminism. What this compartmentalisation obscures are the conceptual thread that binds the works together: a sustained, evolving meditation on the nature of violence itself.

This article takes that thread as its subject. It argues that across two decades and two genres, Padmanabhan develops a single, cumulative insight: that violence is most consequential not when it erupts spectacularly into view but when it has been so thoroughly naturalised that it ceases to register as violence at all. Her texts repeatedly stage the moment in which the invisible architecture of harm becomes briefly perceptible, and then ask what the spectator

or reader will do with that perception. To make this argument legible, the study reads three works as a connected sequence rather than as discrete case studies: *Lights Out* (written 1984, published 2000), *Harvest* (1997), and *Escape* (2008). Together, these texts move outward in scale, from the single domestic apartment in which a middle-class couple debate whether to intervene in a rape they can hear but not see, to the one-room tenement annexed by a transnational corporation that purchases the bodies of the poor, to the depopulated nation-state from which women have been all but exterminated. Read in sequence, they trace an expanding cartography of harm.

The article's central claim is that Padmanabhan's work is best understood as a dramaturgy of *objective* violence. Borrowing Slavoj Žižek's terms, subjective violence is the kind visible, eventful, attributable to an identifiable agent that we are conditioned to recognise as violence; objective violence is the systemic and symbolic background that sustains the very normality against which subjective violence is measured (Žižek 2008). Padmanabhan's signal manoeuvre is to invert the usual hierarchy of visibility: the eruptions of direct violence in her texts a scream from a neighbouring building, the arrival of surgical "guards," the hunt for the last surviving girl function less as spectacles in themselves than as apertures through which the spectator glimpses the structural and cultural violence that has made them possible. The remainder of this article develops that claim. After outlining a theoretical framework that synthesises Galtung, Žižek, and a cluster of allied thinkers, it offers three close readings before drawing the works together in a concluding discussion of complicity, witnessing, and the ethics of the open ending.

II. RECONCEPTUALISING VIOLENCE: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The colloquial understanding of violence is narrow and event-centred: it names a discrete act, performed by an identifiable perpetrator, that inflicts visible physical harm upon a victim. The most productive theoretical work of the last half-century has consisted precisely in widening that frame. Johan Galtung's foundational distinction between *direct*, *structural*, and *cultural* violence remains the indispensable point of departure. Direct violence is the personal, intentional act that the colloquial definition recognises. Structural violence, by contrast, is impersonal and indirect: it is "built into the structure" of a society and "shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances," such that avoidable deprivation, exploitation, and premature death occur without any identifiable actor pulling a trigger (Galtung 1969: 170–171). Two decades later Galtung completed the triad with *cultural violence*:

those aspects of a culture religion, ideology, language, art that can be "used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence," rendering exploitation and assault to look, even feel, "right or at least not wrong" (Galtung 1990: 291). The three forms are mutually reinforcing: cultural violence supplies the legitimating discourse, structural violence the durable conditions, and direct violence the periodic, visible enactment.

Žižek's *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (2008) sharpens the political stakes of this widened frame. Subjective violence, he argues, is "experienced as such against the background of a non-violent zero level"; it is "seen as a perturbation of the 'normal,' peaceful state of things." Objective violence, conversely, "is precisely the violence inherent to this 'normal' state of things," both the symbolic violence embodied in language and forms of representation, and the systemic violence that is the "often catastrophic consequence of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems" (Žižek 2008). The crucial corollary is epistemological: because objective violence is invisible, any attention transfixed by spectacular subjective violence is, in effect, complicit, for it accepts as neutral the background that is itself violent. To *see* objective violence, therefore, requires an act of representational defamiliarisation, which is exactly the work that imaginative literature is equipped to perform.

Three further concepts extend this framework to the specific terrains Padmanabhan maps. Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer* (1998) supplies the figure of "bare life": the human being stripped of political and legal status, reduced to mere biological existence, who may be killed without the killing registering as either homicide or sacrifice. Achille Mbembe's "Necropolitics" (2003) names the corollary sovereign capacity "to dictate who may live and who must die," identifying the contemporary deployment of power not merely to discipline life, as in Foucault's biopolitics, but to administer death and to consign whole populations to the status of the "living dead." And Pierre Bourdieu's account of *symbolic violence* most fully elaborated in relation to gender in *Masculine Domination* (2001) describes the "gentle," misrecognised violence by which dominated subjects come to perceive the social order that subordinates them as natural and inevitable, internalising the very categories of their own domination. Taken together, these vocabularies allow violence to be tracked across registers, the bodily and the systemic, the spectacular and the imperceptible, the act and the structure, and it is this layered model that the following readings bring to bear on Padmanabhan's texts.

A methodological note is in order. The readings that follow are close textual analyses informed by these

frameworks rather than applications of a single master theory. Padmanabhan's texts are not illustrations of Galtung or Zizek; they are themselves theorisations of violence in dramatic and narrative form, and at several points they anticipate or complicate the conceptual apparatus brought to bear on them. The aim is a reciprocal illumination in which theory clarifies the texts and the texts, in turn, test and extend the theory.

III. THE ARCHITECTURE OF INACTION: CULTURAL VIOLENCE AND THE SPECTATOR IN *LIGHTS OUT*

Padmanabhan's *Lights Out*, first drafted in 1984 and later anthologised in the Seagull collection *Body Blows: Women, Violence and Survival* (2000), grew out of a piece of journalism prompted by a friend's eyewitness account of a sexual assault witnessed from an apartment in Santacruz, Mumbai, in 1982. The one-act play unfolds entirely within the sixth-floor flat of Leela and Bhaskar, an upper-middle-class couple who, evening after evening, hear the screams of a woman being assaulted in the unfinished building opposite. The dramaturgical decision that organises the entire work is one of strategic withholding: the assault is never shown. It exists only as sound cries, scuffles, the noise of bodies filtered through the windows and, more importantly, through the increasingly elaborate interpretations the characters construct to explain it away.

This formal choice is the play's principal instrument of critique. By placing the violence offstage and the spectators onstage, Padmanabhan reverses the conventional economy of theatrical attention. The dramatic action is not the assault but the conversation about the assault the protracted, almost ritualised deliberation over whether what is happening is in fact happening, whether it is their concern, and what, if anything, ought to be done. The audience is thereby positioned not as witness to a crime but as witness to a witnessing, and is made to watch the precise mechanisms by which a society talks itself out of intervention. In Galtung's terms, the play stages cultural violence in the very act of its operation: we observe, in real time, the legitimating discourses that convert an atrocity into a non-event.

Those discourses are catalogued with mordant precision. Bhaskar and his friend Mohan cycle through a series of rationalisations, each of which functions to relocate the screams outside the domain of moral obligation. Perhaps it is a religious ceremony; perhaps it is a domestic quarrel and therefore private; perhaps the woman is of a class or kind whose suffering does not demand response; perhaps to telephone the police would be to invite trouble upon themselves. Each hypothesis is a small act of symbolic

violence in Bourdieu's sense, an exercise in misrecognition that naturalises inaction. The men's deliberations are not the failure of an ethical framework but the smooth functioning of one framework in which class insulation, the gendered partition of public and private, and a propertied anxiety about respectability cooperate to produce a perfectly reasoned paralysis.

Leela's position is more complex and is the play's affective centre. She alone is unable to convert the screams into background noise; she hears the woman's voice in her sleep and is rendered hysterical by it. Yet her response is not intervention but a frantic sealing of the domestic envelope, closing windows, drawing curtains, shutting the children's door as though the violence could be unmade by being unheard. Her terror is genuine, but it is also a privatised, self-protective response that leaves the structure of inaction intact. In this Padmanabhan refuses an easy gendered consolation: the woman who feels the horror most acutely is no more able to act than the men who explain it away, because the architecture of inaction is not a matter of individual callousness but of a shared social grammar. The play's bleakest suggestion is that empathy, uncoupled from a vocabulary of responsibility, collapses into the same passivity as indifference.

There is, moreover, a disquieting eroticisation in the men's spectatorship that the play stages to indict. As they strain to interpret the sounds and to reconstruct the scene from auditory fragments, the woman's agony is incrementally transformed into a spectacle to be parsed, debated, and in a register the text registers with revulsion consumed. The assault becomes, for the watchers, a kind of theatre, and Padmanabhan implicates the play's own audience in this dynamic, for we too are listening, interpreting, waiting. The metatheatrical mirror is deliberate: the apartment is a private box from which a violation is observed without being interrupted, and the parallel to the auditorium is exact. The play thereby turns the apparatus of dramatic pleasure into an ethical accusation, asking whether the act of watching suffering for meaning is not itself a mode of participation.

Read against the framework set out above, *Lights Out* is a study of the relation between cultural and direct violence. The rape in the opposite building is the eruption of subjective, direct violence, but the play's true object is the cultural violence in the watching flat the legitimating apparatus that ensures the direct violence will continue unimpeded. Crucially, the perpetrators of the assault are never characterised, never given psychology or motive. This is not an oversight, but the argument: to anatomise the rapists would be to locate the violence in aberrant individuals and thereby to exonerate the social order. By

keeping the assailants faceless and training its entire attention on the respectable witnesses, the play insists that the scandal is not the existence of men who rape but the existence of a society organised to permit them to do so. The open, unresolved ending, the screams continuing, the intervention never made, withholds catharsis precisely so that the burden of response is transferred, unmetabolised, to the spectator beyond the stage.

IV. THE COMMODIFIED BODY: STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE AND NECROPOLITICS IN HARVEST

If *Lights Out* anatomises the cultural violence of inaction within a single class and a single city, *Harvest* enlarges the frame to the planetary scale of global capital. Set in a near-future Mumbai, the play imagines a transnational corporation, InterPlanta Services, that brokers the purchase of healthy organs from the destitute poor of the global South for transplantation into wealthy clients in the global North. The unemployed Om Prakash, unable to find work, signs a contract that commits not only his organs but his entire bodily existence to an anonymous American recipient named Ginni, who monitors and controls the family through a screen. In exchange, Om's one-room tenement is fitted with appliances, food, and sanitation, and his wife Jaya and mother Ma are drawn, with him, into a regime of total surveillance designed to keep the donor body pristine until it is required.

The play's premise literalises structural violence in Galtung's precise sense. The mechanism that consumes Om is not a person but a structure a contract, a corporation, a market in which no individual can be located as the author of harm. Ginni, the apparent agent, is herself eventually revealed to be an image, a manufactured interface; the violence is distributed across a system that operates with the bland efficiency of a service industry. The donors are not assaulted; they are processed. This is exploitation rendered as logistics, and its horror lies in its legality, its consent, and its calm. Om has, after all, agreed. That the agreement is the product of an economic coercion so total that it forecloses any genuine alternative is exactly Galtung's point: structural violence produces "unequal life chances" that constrain the moral options of the poor while preserving the fiction of free choice.

Agamben and Mbembe sharpen what the play does to the body. Once contracted, Om is reduced to bare life: a biological reserve maintained for its harvestable organs, stripped of the autonomy that would make him a political subject while being kept scrupulously, even obsessively, alive. His health is no longer his own; it is the property of the recipient, and the elaborate hygiene regime imposed

upon the household, the germ-free zone, the dietary control, the regulation of when and how he may use the bathroom, is the biopolitical administration of a life that exists only to be drawn upon. This is necropolitics in Mbembe's sense, but with an instructive inversion: sovereignty here exercises its power over death not by killing but by deferring death, keeping the donor in a suspended state of living-for-the-purpose-of-dying. The body of the poor man of the global South becomes, precisely, the "living dead" sustained as a resource, denied as a person.

The play is equally attentive to the colonial genealogy of this arrangement. The traffic of organs runs unidirectionally, from South to North, from the dark and crowded tenement to the sanitised, disembodied affluence represented by the screen. Critics have rightly read the play as a fable of how the first world "cannibalises" the third to satisfy its own appetites, and the metaphor of cannibalism is apt: *Harvest* stages globalisation as a literal incorporation of one body into another, an alimentary relation in which the wealthy are sustained by the dismemberment of the poor. The neo-colonial extraction of raw materials, historically of minerals, labour, and land, is here updated to the extraction of the body itself, the last commodity frontier. What Frantz Fanon described as the colonial relation's foundation in the appropriation of the colonised body finds, in Padmanabhan's conceit, a grimly literal twenty-first-century form.

Yet *Harvest* is not a play of pure abjection, and its treatment of resistance distinguishes it sharply from *Lights Out*. Where the earlier play withholds any act of agency, *Harvest* locates a residual capacity for refusal in Jaya, Om's wife, who alone declines to be seduced by the comforts the contract supplies. When the apparatus finally seeks to claim her to convert her, too, into a body for use, she refuses the terms of the transaction outright. In the play's celebrated final confrontation, she withholds the one thing the system requires, her consent and her living presence, and threatens self-destruction as the single act of sovereignty still available to a person who owns nothing but her own death. Her defiance is ambiguous and costly; it secures no liberation and offers no programme. But it marks the point at which the commodified body reclaims itself by refusing to be consumed, asserting a negative freedom, the freedom to deny against a structure that has monetised every positive capacity. In Žižek's terms, Jaya's refusal is a flicker of subjective counter-violence directed, at last, not at another victim but at the objective violence of the system itself.

The dramaturgy reinforces the thematic. The disembodied screen through which Ginni surveils and commands the household is a precise emblem of objective violence: power that is everywhere and nowhere, that acts

without a locatable body, that cannot be confronted because it has no face to confront. The contrast between the hyper-embodied poor sweating, eating, defecating, ageing in their single room and the bodiless, image-borne affluence that consumes them is the play's structural axis. *Harvest* thus completes a movement begun in *Lights Out*: where the earlier play exposed the cultural violence that legitimates harm, the later one exposes the structural and systemic violence that institutionalises it, converting the body of the poor into raw material for a market that has perfected the art of consuming persons while observing every formality of consent.

V. GENDERCIDE AND THE UNGRIEVABLE: SYSTEMIC VIOLENCE IN *ESCAPE*

Padmanabhan's novel *Escape* (2008) carries the logic of her earlier work to its terminal conclusion. The novel is set in an unnamed country, sealed off from the rest of the world and ruled by a triumvirate of cloned "Generals," in which women have been systematically exterminated. Reproduction has been severed from women altogether: men replicate themselves through cloning, and femaleness has been redefined as contamination, the women of the past dismissed as a "vermin tribe." Into this depopulated landscape, Padmanabhan places Meiji, a girl raised in concealment by three brothers, her "uncles", who is, so far as anyone knows, the last surviving female. The plot follows the uncles' desperate attempt to smuggle her out of the country before she is discovered, a journey that doubles as Meiji's gradual, painful discovery of her own difference and of the meaning of the category "woman" that has been erased from her world.

Where *Harvest* dramatises structural violence as economic extraction, *Escape* dramatises it as policy the elevation of misogyny from a diffuse social condition to an explicit programme of extermination. Gendercide is the novel's premise, and its conceptual force lies in the way it makes visible, by extrapolation, a violence already present in the world the reader inhabits. The skewed sex ratios produced by sex-selective abortion and female neglect in parts of contemporary South Asia furnish the novel's grim referent; *Escape* simply completes the trajectory, asking what a society organised around the elimination of women would look like once the elimination is complete. The speculative form here performs precisely the defamiliarising function that the recognition of objective violence requires: by carrying an existing structural tendency to its logical endpoint, the novel renders perceptible a systemic violence that, in its ordinary distributed form, remains beneath the threshold of attention.

Judith Butler's account of the differential distribution of grievability illuminates the novel's deepest stratum. In a world that has defined the female as vermin, women are not merely killed but rendered *ungrievable* placed outside the frame within which a life counts as a life whose loss would register as loss. The violence of *Escape* is therefore not only the direct violence of extermination but the prior, framing violence that determines whose disappearance can be mourned. Meiji's predicament is the embodiment of this condition: she cannot understand what she is because the very category through which she might know herself has been expunged from language and memory. She is a subject without a name for her own subjecthood, which is symbolic violence in its most absolute form, not the misrecognition of one's domination, as in Bourdieu, but the foreclosure of the conceptual resources by which domination might be recognised at all.

The novel also extends Padmanabhan's persistent concern with surveillance and the administered body. The Generals are "continuously radio-linked," fused into a single distributed sovereign through sub-retinal implants; their power, like Ginni's screen in *Harvest*, is panoptic, faceless, and total. Meiji's life is one of perpetual hiding and observation, her body managed and concealed, her selfhood deferred. Here, the Foucauldian disciplinary apparatus and the Mbembean necropolitical converge: the regime both administers life down to its biological substrate and reserves to itself the sovereign decision over which forms of life may exist. The ecological register of the novel deepens the indictment. The land has been rendered barren by radioactive contamination, and Padmanabhan draws an explicit homology between the extermination of women and the despoliation of nature both are reproductive capacities that the regime has declared expendable, the fertile cast out as surplus. The violence done to women and the violence done to the earth are revealed as expressions of a single logic of domination that equates control with the elimination of whatever it cannot fully master.

And yet, as in *Harvest*, Padmanabhan refuses to surrender the possibility of resistance. Meiji's slow movement from drugged ignorance toward self-knowledge is itself a counter-violence against a system predicated on the erasure of her consciousness; the very fact of her continued existence is a refutation of the regime's totalising claim. The uncles' sacrificial labour to preserve her, costly and uncertain in its outcome, asserts the persistence of an ethical bond in a world engineered to extinguish it. The escape of the title is partial, perilous, and incomplete the narrative resists any triumphal resolution but it preserves, against the logic of extermination, the bare survival of the category the regime sought to annihilate. As in her dramatic work, Padmanabhan declines catharsis, leaving the reader

with a survival too fragile to console and too stubborn to dismiss.

VI. THE CONTINUUM OF VIOLENCE: COMPLICITY, WITNESSING, AND THE OPEN ENDING

Read in sequence, the three works compose a single, expanding argument about violence. *Lights Out* isolates the cultural violence of legitimization the discourses and dispositions by which a society licenses harm and excuses itself from response. *Harvest* exposes the structural and systemic violence of an economic order that converts the bodies of the poor into commodities while preserving the formalities of consent. *Escape* follows the systemic logic to its terminus, imagining the complete extermination of a category of life rendered ungrievable in advance. The movement is one of increasing scale and decreasing visibility of the agent from the identifiable, if faceless, rapists in the building opposite, to the diffuse corporate apparatus that has no body, to the cloned distributed sovereign in whom agency has dissolved entirely into system. As the perpetrator recedes, the violence intensifies. This is Padmanabhan's central, cumulative insight: the most devastating violence is the least attributable, because attribution is the precondition of resistance, and a violence without an author is a violence that can present itself as nature.

Three motifs recur across the works and consolidate the argument. The first is *the body as the surface on which macro-violence is inscribed*. In each text, an abstract systemic logic of patriarchal contempt, capitalist extraction, and exterminatory misogyny is made legible by being written upon a specific, gendered, vulnerable body: the screaming woman, the harvested donor, the hidden last girl. Padmanabhan's materialism insists that structures are never merely abstract; they are always, finally, enacted upon flesh, and it is the flesh that bears the cost the structure conceals. The second motif is *surveillance and the disembodiment of power*. From the watching apartment, to Ginii's screen, to the radio-linked Generals, power in Padmanabhan's worlds increasingly observes without being observed, acts without being locatable, and thereby renders itself immune to confrontation a precise figuration of the invisibility that defines objective violence.

The third and most ethically charged motif is *complicity and the position of the witness*. Each work is structurally organised around an act of watching: the couple who listen to the assault, the family who are watched and who watch their own commodification on a screen, the reader who observes Meiji's concealment. Padmanabhan is relentless in implicating these acts of witness in the violence

they observe. To watch and not to act, her texts insist, is not neutrality but participation; the spectator who consumes suffering for meaning, whether the men in the flat or the audience in the auditorium, occupies a position continuous with the violence on display. This is why her endings refuse resolution. The unbroken screams of *Lights Out*, Jaya's unresolved last stand in *Harvest*, the incomplete escape of *Escape* each withholds the catharsis that would allow the spectator-reader to discharge the discomfort of witnessing and return to equilibrium. The open ending is not a failure of closure but an ethical strategy: by denying the audience release, Padmanabhan transfers the unmetabolised burden of response from the stage or page to the world beyond it.

In this the work performs the very operation that the theoretical recognition of objective violence demands. If objective violence is invisible because it constitutes the background of normality, then the task of a politically serious art is to defamiliarise that background to make the structural and the cultural briefly perceptible as violence rather than as the way things simply are. Padmanabhan's withholding dramaturgy and her refusal of catharsis are the formal instruments of this defamiliarisation. They convert the spectator from a position of complicit passivity, in which the violence of the normal goes unseen, into one of implicated responsibility, in which the spectator can no longer plead ignorance of what has been shown. The recognition of violence becomes, in her hands, an ethical demand that the text deliberately declines to satisfy on the audience's behalf.

This reading also clarifies the relation between Padmanabhan's realism and her turn to speculative and dystopian form. The movement from the documentary realism of *Lights Out* to the science-fictional premises of *Harvest* and *Escape* is not a retreat from the real but an intensification of the project of making it visible. Speculation, in Padmanabhan, is a method of extrapolation: by carrying an existing structural tendency commodification, gendercide to its logical endpoint, the dystopian form renders perceptible a violence that, in its ordinary distributed condition, remains beneath notice. The estranging device of the near-future or the alternate world is, paradoxically, a realist instrument, a way of seeing the present more clearly by displacing it. Her dystopias are diagnostic rather than predictive; they describe the logic of the now rather than the contingencies of the future.

VII. CONCLUSION

This article has argued that Manjula Padmanabhan's selected works constitute a sustained and evolving dramaturgy of violence, one whose conceptual ambition has been obscured by the tendency to read her texts in isolation

and within separate generic frames. Read together, *Lights Out*, *Harvest*, and *Escape* trace a continuum that runs from cultural through structural to systemic violence, and they share a single formal and ethical commitment: to render perceptible the objective violence that ordinarily passes for the neutral background of social life. By inverting the usual hierarchy of visibility placing spectators rather than perpetrators at the centre, withholding the spectacle in order to expose its enabling conditions, and refusing the catharsis that would let the witness off the hook Padmanabhan transforms the recognition of violence into an unfinished ethical task that she deliberately bequeaths to her audience.

The significance of this achievement extends beyond the study of a single author. Padmanabhan's work offers a model for how imaginative literature can perform the conceptual labour that the most demanding theories of violence require: the labour of making the invisible visible, of restoring agency and attribution to harms that present themselves as natural, and of converting the spectator from consumer to witness and from witness to participant. In an era increasingly governed by faceless and distributed forms of power algorithmic, corporate, infrastructural her insistence that the gravest violence is the least attributable acquires a renewed and uncomfortable pertinence. Future scholarship might productively extend this framework to *The Island of Lost Girls* and to her short fiction, and might examine in greater depth the formal mechanics of the open ending across her corpus. What this study has sought to establish is that, beneath the variety of her genres and the two decades that separate her earliest from her latest work here considered, Padmanabhan returns again and again to a single, urgent proposition: that to see violence truly is already to be answerable to it.

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The Emergence of Changed Women in Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*

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Abstract— *The status and role of Indian women have undergone various changes in the society across the years. Mostly, their status depends upon the roles which are allocated to them by religion, tradition, class, caste and beliefs. Indian women have persistently faced challenges including gender discrimination and societal expectations entrenched in rigid traditional norms. The pursuit of gender equality by women has emerged as a global phenomenon. Over the course of time, a perceptible shift has occurred. The twentieth century has seen a rise in women's consciousness regarding their existence, desires, self-definition and destiny. Social and legal reforms have empowered women to resist patriarchal and oppressive structures as well as to redefine their roles. This paper examines the emergence of changed women in India within the framework of socio-cultural transformation and gender discourse. By focusing on both historical contexts and contemporary realities, it provides a thorough account of the transformation in women's lives and the myriad challenges they continue to overcome. It also touches upon the driving forces behind the transformation. Anita Desai is one of the prominent Indian novelists of the post-independence era. She possesses a feminist perspective that explores the struggles of women against the oppression of patriarchal structures. Her feminine sensibilities, empathy and compassion depict a comprehensive representation of the modern Indian woman, encompassing her desires, aspirations and discontentment. This study seeks to explore the challenges and transformative experiences of Indian women in Anita Desai's highly acclaimed novel *Clear Light of Day* (1980) that have shaped and continue to reshape their lives. It highlights the diverse trajectories of women and how they strive to overcome social and patriarchal obstacles in their search for independence, voice and individuality, emerging as changed women.*



Keywords— *Women, Nation, Tradition, Patriarchy, Individuality, Gender*

Introduction

India is a land of multiple cultures, religions, castes and languages with a dynamic history accentuated with relentless interaction and amalgamation of the migrating people and invaders. The status of Indian women has been subject to numerous changes throughout recorded Indian history. Generally, it is seen that women were suppressed within the patriarchal system and were relegated to household work. They were idealised as wives and mothers and their household responsibilities came to be regarded as sacred duties. In a patriarchal society, women are coerced

into a state of slavery in the name of traditions and customs. They possessed little individuality of their own and were prey to a set of values and rigid social practices that inhibited their autonomy. It is evident from the Indian culture that women are treated as the form of goddesses, whereas, on the other hand, they are mistreated, experience the practices of female infanticide, female foeticide and other forms of physical and verbal abuse.

In the nineteenth century, reform movements against the social evils that impacted women began in India. Western liberalism and the patriotic concepts disseminated through

Western education and Christian social initiatives significantly influenced the Indian Renaissance of the nineteenth century. During the British period, some substantial progress was made in eliminating inequalities between men and women, especially in matters of education, employment, social and political rights which affected women's status in various ways. The social reformer Raja Ram Mohan Roy, played an important role in the abolition of Sati in 1829 and was actively supported by the Governor-General of India, Lord William Bentinck. It was due to the efforts of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856 was enforced. His pamphlet entitled *Marriage of Hindu Widows* came out in 1856 and he conferred an appeal to the government on the existing problem. Jyotirao Phule worked for the abolition of caste system and women's liberation in India. He opposed child marriage and polygamy as well as advocated for widow remarriage and women's education (Jayawardena 82, 84). Apart from these social reformers, Christian missionaries also endeavoured to secure various rights for women. Like William Carey, the founder of the English Baptist Missionary Society (1792), worked for the abolition of such practices as infanticide and sati. Thomas Smith, John Fordyce and Hana Catherine Mullens also worked for zenana missions and opened schools for girls. Their social activities were directed towards bringing about moral reforms in Indian society and helped in the liberation of Indian women.

In the post-independence era, a new image of the Indian woman has emerged. She redefines her 'self' as she becomes aware of her role and contribution in the management of the family and society. The graph of a woman's journey from possession to person has provided her with experiences that she has used to investigate the future possibilities for her fruitful contribution in the age of globalisation. Indian women have undergone a significant transformation, transitioning from voiceless, idealised, docile, and self-sacrificing women to vocal, liberated, assertive and practical beings. They no longer desire to live a life of subjugation, but rather to break free from the constraints of age-old traditions and live life to the fullest. The transition from tradition to modernity has become increasingly challenging for Indian women. They are striving hard to balance their personal aspirations with their obligations to their family and society.

Literature, especially fiction, mirrors contemporary societal realities and has consistently served as an effective instrument for fundamental transformation. It is a valuable source for observing the evolving nature of identities and a useful genre for investigating the ideological construction of narratives. In post-independence Indian English fiction, the changed woman is conscious of her individuality and

has been fighting for her rights as a human being. She appears to be engaged in a continual struggle for equality with men. The changed woman resents being subjected to oppressive restrictions. Her thirst for recognition is awakened. She seeks to find her position and place in the society. In the world of literature, women writers through their innovative and revolutionary ideas have daringly broken every barrier. The works of Kamla Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Geetha Hariharan, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur, Ruth Pravar Jhabvala and Kiran Desai are notable exponents of feminist consciousness. They have shown that women have started questioning the age-old, rigid traditional practices and patriarchal domination. These writers have tremendously worked for women's liberation and their works have left an indelible impression on the readers.

Anita Desai is one of the most lauded and widely known contemporary women writers of Indian English literature, exclusively in the works of Indian fiction. She was born on June 24, 1937, in Mussoorie, India. As the daughter of a German mother, Toni Nime and an Indian Bengali father, D. N. Mazumdar, she is a perfect representation of the bicultural heritage of postcolonial India. She is a prolific author of many novels and short stories and has been nominated three times for the Booker Prize. Her era was one of transition, ushering in a new set of norms, ideals and morals. Anita Desai is an acute observer of the society and the status of women in contemporary society particularly captivates her interest. She has a deep understanding of Indian culture from which she draws inspiration for her novels' settings and characters. Desai incorporates social and gender issues into her writing. The majority of her works explore, from a feminine point of view, the complexity of modern Indian culture and society, while at the same time drawing attention to the struggles many Indian women face in order to preserve their sense of self-identity. Desai's women strive to transcend the societal restrictions set by a tradition-bound patriarchal culture.

In her novels, she portrays the social and cultural changes that India has gone through, paying close attention to the trials of women suppressed by Indian society. She explores the psyche of her female characters, observing their ongoing struggle to maintain a balance between their own selves and the expectations of society. Woman in her novels needs freedom and justice to her personality and her individuality which the existing patriarchal system with its unequal distribution of power does not grant her. Her works are adored because of her unique writing style, the originality of her characters, and the subject matter that is grounded in reality. Anita Desai possesses an outstanding narrative power. Her characters are distinct from one another in every manner and each one possesses a unique set of traits. Her

protagonists embody her worldview; they exchange ideas and go on quests to find their purpose in life.

This paper presents the emergence of changed women in India within the framework of socio-cultural transformation and gender discourse. The study explores the challenges and transformative experiences of Indian women in Anita Desai's novel *Clear Light of Day*. This study follows qualitative approach to analyse the novel *Clear Light of Day*. The method involves a thorough reading of the novel to recognise the emergence of changed women through its characters. Desai's *Clear Light of Day* (1980) serves as the primary source for the study. The secondary sources comprise of the academic texts on emergence of women over a period of time in India, scholarly articles and research works.

Transformed Souls in Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*

Anita Desai's novel *Clear Light of Day*, published in 1980, presents a real picture of women in modern India with psychological struggles, disappointments and the unpredictable course of their lives. The novel focuses on the interpersonal relationships of the Das siblings- Bimla (Bim), Tara, Raja and Baba and how they come to terms with changing realities and understand themselves and each other. The novel presents women characters who possess their own prejudices, inclinations, objectives and perspectives. Anita Desai shows the transformation in the patterned outlook of women. The novel portrays women's struggle to reclaim their lost identity. Bim, the central character in the novel, is a self-composed, independent, courageous and authoritative woman who has never tried to evade from the hard realities of life. She perpetually grapples with issues of identity and liberation. She embraces life as a challenge and rejects the accepted fate of a woman to marry, challenging the normative idea of marriage and dependence on men. Her perspective on education, life, family and marriage distinguishes her from the typical Indian woman.

Bim faces a variety of challenges, including the responsibility of the family after her parents' death, her brother Raja's abandonment of the family, the handling of her mentally retarded younger brother, Baba and pursuing her career are not the ordinary ones but they are great challenges of the time. It was not Raja who assumed the paternal role as is customary in Indian tradition, but rather Bim, despite the fact that such a task should have been morally undertaken by her brother. Although Bim lives in a patriarchal society where men give protection to the family but in this case, the protection and care are given by a woman who is considered as a weaker sex. It is clear that there has been a significant shift in societal norms.

Bim emerges as a New Woman who rejects the conventional role of women. Despite the fact that she was not a biological mother like her sister Tara, she served as a mother figure to her siblings. Tara, through marriage, escapes her chaotic family, whereas Bim possesses a resilient nature that empowers her to endure difficulties. In response to life's challenges, her 'self' rises to meet them, rather than retreating. Bim considers Joan of Arc and Florence Nightingale her ideals, as they defied the conventional roles of a woman.

In the novel, Bim responds critically to the early marriages of Jaya and Sarla (the Misra sisters) who embody traditional beliefs and accept their subservient role as women. Bim had expressed the importance of educating women, despite their marriage, in her criticism of two sisters who reside in an adjacent residence:

'But they're not *educated* yet,' Bim said sharply. 'They haven't any degrees. They should go to college', she insisted. because they might find marriage isn't enough to last them the whole of their lives. (Desai 214-215)

Bim believes that marriage alone is insufficient for sustaining the entirety of the girls' lives. In order to overcome life's challenges, women need to be economically independent. Her apprehension comes true when the two Misra sisters were abandoned and returned to their parents' residence shortly after their marriage.

Bim is an educated woman and teaches in college. Her ambition encompassed two dimensions: to be emotionally and financially independent. She instructs her students to transform from the woman of the past into a new self. She advocates for a sense of self-respect. She inculcates in young women the importance of independence and the ability to make decisions. In a conversation with Tara, Bim once said:

I'm always trying to teach them, *train* them to be different from what we were at their age – to be a new kind of woman from you or me. (Desai 236-237)

Women's independence and education are crucial for their empowerment. There is a wonderful reminder of why a girl's education is important is given by Kamla Bhasin, a distinguished feminist activist, poet, and author, in her poem *Because I am a Girl, I Must Study* (*Kyunki Main Ladki Hoon, Mujhe Padhna Hai*). It is a striking articulation of her convictions. It was written as a reply to a father's question about why his daughter should study when he has sons. The poem constitutes a dialogue commenced by the girl's father, followed by the remaining five stanzas in which the girl child articulates her fears, anxieties, challenges and

aspirations, for which she has only one remedy, the sole path to progress is education.

...To fight men's violence, I must study.

To end my silence, I must study.

To challenge patriarchy, I must study.

To demolish all hierarchy, I must study.

Because I am a girl, I must study. (qtd. in Bhagat)

These lines eloquently illustrate the profound impact of education in liberating women. It is essential to educate them to stand up for themselves in the face of the numerous challenges they encounter due to their gender.

The myth of changeless and typical femininity is transformed by the diversity of women's existences. Bim in the novel has the courage to become a mother figure in taking care of her siblings as well as holding a manly position in the family by taking all the responsibilities of the house. She declines to adhere to the conventional role of a woman. In the novel, Dr. Biswas remarked on Bim's altruistic devotion to her family and her sacrifices. His exclamation reveals the annals of her sacrifices to attain such a position:

Now I understand why you do not wish to marry. You have dedicated your life to others - to your sick brother and your aged aunt and your little brother who will be dependent on you all his life. You have sacrificed your own life for them. (Desai 148)

Bim becomes furious at his erroneous interpretation as he cannot perceive her as a courageous woman who wants to be independent. Desai depicts Bim as an individual who confronts life with fortitude. She is regarded as a victorious individual in life. In the novel, Tara and her husband Bakul come to this realisation, that "Bim had found everything she wanted in life" (Desai 240).

In the novel, she not only changed her attitude but also emerged from her domestic insularity. Bim was upset with her brother Raja for writing a letter as her landlord, forgetting that he was also her brother. Bim's affection for her brother had received too many setbacks and she had felt humiliated by his behaviour. The resentment that she experienced was entirely justified. However, Bim undergoes a transformation at the end of the novel when she extends her forgiveness to Raja for the unforgivable letter he had written to her years prior, as she recognises that the

bond of the family is greater than anything in the world. The transformation occurs because she sees things in a new light. This new light brings a kind of revelation to her. In the final episode of the novel, Bim is reminded of a line from T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*:

Time the destroyer is time the preserver. (Desai 277)

Subsequently, her thoughts shift to her house and her family. She grasps the fact that everyone who resided in the old house were born of the same soil and are bound to one another by unbreakable ties. This basic connection can't be broken by time itself. Thus, she becomes a transformed soul. There is a significant change of heart in the protagonist towards the end of the novel. Bim pushes away her pessimistic outlook on life:

Bim could see as well as by the clear light of day that she felt only love and yearning for them all. (Desai 251)

Bim examines the flaws of others through a lens of understanding. She experienced significant hardships in life; however, ultimately, she identifies certain values that are worthy of appreciation and contribute to a meaningful existence. Bim is able to transgress some gender boundaries. She takes up the familial responsibilities that are normally assigned to men, enabling her to defeat the patriarchal forces. In the male-dominated society, it is universally regarded that the man is the head of the family and is responsible for the family's welfare and unity. However, in this instance, Bim is the first to take the initiative in uniting the family and overlooking others' mistakes. This shows an emergence of a New Woman who is able to manage the family and career singlehandedly. Bim, in spite of doing so much for the family was taken for granted by them. Today, in every Indian family there is a Bim, a woman who seldom has the privilege of self-definition and does not see herself in a heroic light. The society takes her for granted.

Tara, the younger sister, experiences isolation both at home and in school during her growing years. She discovers to her dismay that she is not able to acquire the emotional stability her siblings possess, nor can she participate in their intellectual pursuits. Tara felt left alone because her elder siblings, Bim and Raja were closer to each other in their childhood.

Throughout her childhood, she had always stood on the outside of that enclosed world of love and admiration in which Bim and Raja moved. (Desai 39)

In addition to being ostracised by her family members, Tara was also made to feel inferior and ignorant compared to her

outgoing sister, Bim and brother, Raja. While they are active and extroverted, Tara is more reserved and timid.

Tara is like a traditional woman waiting for marriage as her ultimate goal. Her sole aspiration was to be a mother. Desai analysis, Tara was an optimistic girl who had made her own choice to get married. For Tara, marriage serves as an escape from an unusual, loveless and discontented household. Tara is married to a diplomat named Bakul who works for the Indian Foreign Service, and they have two daughters. Being settled in a foreign country, she comes to India to stay with her elder sister and brother at their home in Old Delhi. By staying in her childhood home, Tara reconnects with her memories, family and childhood experiences. This helps her to understand her past and the emotional distance that had grown between her and Bim. She realises that it can be reconciled rather than escaped, which displays her emotional maturity.

Tara's insecurity persisted even after her marriage, as she continued to cling to her husband. She tries to adjust herself to Bakul's lifestyle and expectations by suppressing her own feelings and opinions. Her husband alone made all the decisions and she was compelled to obey. Although Tara was not dissatisfied with her husband's obedience, the question that ultimately troubled her was, for how long? She acknowledges that she does something that she never likes.

Later, in the novel, Tara rebels against Bakul's overbearing control over her life. She rejects Bakul's invitation to visit relatives, opting instead to remain at home with Bim and Baba.

She felt she had followed him enough, it has been such an enormous strain, always pushing against her grain, it had drained her of too much strength, now she could only collapse, inevitably collapse. (Desai 27)

Tara's refusal to follow him indicates a meaningful resistance to patriarchal authority. It marks her transformation from a passive, dependent woman to someone who begins to assert her own feelings and choices. She is in quest of her true self.

Tara's endeavours to pacify Bim serve to reignite all of Bim's previous affection and love for Raja. Her presence helps the family move toward reconciliation and harmony at the end of the novel when Bim begins to reconsider her anger for Raja and even forgives him. Tara is a bridge between her two elder siblings, bringing them together even though they ignored her when they were children. She acts as a peacemaker between them.

Although Tara is shown as a weak character in the novel as she is shy, childlike, and easily distressed, even in her maturity but she ultimately emerges out to be a resilient

woman who understands the significance of family and motherhood as well as adapts to the circumstances. However, unsatisfactory her marriage was, Tara has attained her own peace and happiness, shown towards the end of the novel with her role as a contented mother. Tara's marriage was imperfect but she managed to keep the family together. She has the audacity to confront life's obstacles. She faces all the challenges with resolute conviction and shows an unwavering courage, proving true to the notion of a New Woman. She evolves from a timid child and submissive wife into a woman who achieves emotional balance and self-understanding.

Through the character of Aunt Mira, the author depicts the plight of a Hindu woman who became a widow at a young age. In the house of her in-laws,

She was left stranded with his family and they blamed her bitterly for his death: it was her unfortunate horoscope that had brought it about, they said. ... they eyed her unpleasing person sullenly and made jokes loudly enough for her to overhear. There was laughter, till they grew bored. She stayed with them so long that she became boring. They suspected her of being a parasite. It was time she was turned out. (Desai 165-166)

Aunt Mira has been called as a harbinger of misfortune and her in-laws have treated her as a domestic slave. She endures a challenging life. She was married at the age of twelve and widowed at the age of fifteen and soon after her husband's death, she was compelled to compensate for her guilt as a "maid of all work" (Desai 159). She was the victim of a cruel society. Desai presents a pathetic picture of an Indian widow who is constantly dressed in white and experiences a range of taunts, hardships and insults. In such a traditional society, widowhood is considered the most grievous form of adversity. They were subjected to various forms of degrading treatment. In Indian culture, the trajectory of Aunt Mira shows the extent to which women's potential is limited by family structures and restrictive gender roles. After enduring excessive hardships in her in-laws' house, she went to her relatives, the Das family, where she restored her sense of self. There, she assumes the role of a mother and serves as the anchor to the children- Bim, Tara, Raja and Baba. She provides them with love and attention they lacked from their own mother. She tries to endure and seeks to overcome the challenges. Despite the fact that she has experienced varying degrees of victimisation, she possesses the requisite courage and fortitude to care for this family when the parents neglect their responsibilities. She fulfils an invaluable duty to look after the mentally disabled child, Baba. Aunt Mira also serves as a significant source of support for Tara. She

becomes the central figure in the lives of the children. Aunt Mira is:

Quick, nervy and jumpy - yet to the children she was as constant as a staff, a tree that can be counted on not to pull up its roots and shift in the night. She was the tree that grew in the center of their lives and in whose shade they lived. (Desai 169)

She is admired for her notable sacrifices in nurturing and ensuring the well-being of the family. She also longs for affection and protection and is delighted in receiving it from the children, if not from others. However, later in the novel, her addiction to alcohol as a result of the burden of responsibilities, emotional breakdown and the scars of her past ultimately leads to her tragic death.

Although being widowed, Aunt Mira redefined herself. She had acquired the ability to adapt and remain patient in the presence of ill-treatment and hard times. Her transformation lies in her shift from a helpless widow to a caring and responsible guardian. As a character in the novel, she embodies the spirit of service. Being an unwanted widow, a life devoid of love and purpose, she finds fulfilment in caring for the children.

CONCLUSION

Anita Desai's women are reflective regarding their conditions. They are new and challenging in terms of time as they rise and rebel against the general current of patriarchal society. They begin to explore their potential and strive for the fulfilment of their needs, thereby becoming the transformed souls. Women in *Clear Light of Day* exemplified the contemporary Indian woman, engaged in a continuous struggle for emancipation. In their pursuit of individuality, liberty and identity, they act and respond in radical ways to the established conventional framework. Their protest is not solely for equality but also for the recognition of their rights and place in the family and society. The advancement and welfare of a nation can be assessed by how it treats its women. Rigid conventional mindset still continues to govern numerous facets of women's lives, limiting autonomy even in progressive environments. The persistent quest for gender justice in India is a narrative of resistance and transformation, where each accomplishment is hard-won and each right is perpetually negotiated.

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The Invisible Shackles of Affection: Women Under Familial Love in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Oleander Girl*

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Abstract— This paper examines the impact of familial love and relationships on the development of women's identities in Indian-Bengali families, as depicted in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel *Oleander Girl* (2012). Similar to other feminist authors, she advocates for feminism through her literary contributions and social activism. Feminism has been dealing with different reasons for the marginalization of women in the patriarchal social structure, but to discuss the condition of women in the smallest unit of society, that is, the family, would throw light on the role of the family in the development, transformation and making of the personalities of women. Women in the world had to navigate society to find their place, but in country like India where family has a huge role to play the struggle starts at home. The research article primarily emphasizes the characteristics of Bengali individuals, given the novel's context of an Indian-Bengali family.



Keywords— Bengali women, Family, Feminism, marginalization, patriarchy

Family in social sciences has received several relevant definitions but no universal definition. Many hypotheses have been developed according to the diverse history, culture and situation that sought to define a family; hence, it became difficult for the social scientist to settle down to one theory. But on setting the technicalities aside the term family brings up the idea of one's close blood relatives, the smallest unit of a society. In India, the term family does not just limit to the reference of one's close blood relatives, rather it is a sense that keeps them emotionally tied to their essential responsibilities, duties and their complete existence as a person. Anyone who is a part of the family is meant to live according to the family norms through living up to its expectations and fulfilling the preconceived assumptions and demands. It is not viewed as a burden, but in reality, a kind of deep, satisfying delight is there in completing all these assumed responsibilities for one's family. However, with the setup of patriarchy in society, the labor areas for males and females have been assigned in a family in such a way that women live in a false ideology of an ideal woman for their families. The men are

accountable for earning money, but on the other hand, women have been endowed with countless chores to complete. These continuous chores which were established by the social order, had kept the women hidden from the outer world and slowly, in a male-dominated society, the household became synonymous for women as a person. Esha Dey ponders on the responsibilities of males and females in the Indian family in her study paper as; "The male is the official head of the family, who is the provider of food, shelter and clothing and also the defender against the attack from other males. The female is the bearer of children and nurtures all members of the household." (145) The vicious circle of female oppression got strengthened from such expected roles of males and females, along with other grounds of patriarchy.

Family has always been the most sacrosanct traditional institution in Indian society since the start of civilization. It has been considered above any single individual but with the relevance of every single member. Although with the passage of time, patriarchy established the males as the head of the family. Since man became the defender and

provider of the family, all resources and decisions came in his hands. Women in this due course of time were left only with two images, either the bearer or the destruction of the family. A firmly defined male perspective had historically marked descriptions of women's roles in India. Traditional Hindu legal codes and stories as gathered by Manu in *Manusmriti*, defined a woman's purpose in life as the bearing of children and emphasized the need for male control over her at all stages of her life. Legends and religious writings gave pictures of goddess Durga or Kali, who were either a docile wife and indulgent mothers or a destroyer. The woman of the house is supposed to face the whole duty of maintaining the family thread unbroken and linked together. Dasgupta and Lal state in the opening of their book, "The survey shows that the imaginary ideal of an Indian family requires the wife to be eagerly glad to sacrifice personal aspirations for the larger 'good'..." (13)

The existing paradigm of social structure of that time rendered the male superior in every regard and transformed the female into the other. They maintained their power by deleting and denying the female's independent identity. This constant subversion of women inspired feminism in the West, and various campaigns for the cause of women produced the alterations in women's existence. Having been inspired by the social upliftment in the West, women in third-world countries likewise raised their voices for improvements in their conditions. The autonomous personality of a woman of her own in India has become a new, astounding reality and a departure from the medieval past over the past few decades. Earlier, women were always a part of the family, but never an autonomous whole. This question of identity never arose earlier because all the discrimination and subjugation were accepted as normal by everyone, by the oppressor as well as the oppressed, due to the false consciousness among women, which is obviously passed on to them by their mothers and sisters within the patriarchal society, which never lets them think of a world where they are equal to their male counterparts. Instead, they were brought up in such a way that they viewed their house as their universe; more than that was the male arena where women were outlaws. The established roles for men and women by patriarchy made men paramount and limited women to the family.

In Bengal, with the penetration of the Western school of thought, the rational thinking in schooling and broadmindedness grew among the males, and their views towards their women altered considerably. The desire to draw women out of the four walls of their house for social activities prepared the way for the edification of women. But the education of women did not start merely with the concept of emancipation of womenfolk, but it was for the social image of their husbands, who wanted to flaunt an

educated and sophisticated life partner among their friends in the British circle. Judith Walsh also brings out the same in her study paper, 'Increasingly during the last half of the nineteenth century, Western educated Indian boys resisted the idea of marriage to illiterate girls who knew nothing of the culture of the western world in which their husbands would live and earn'. (4) And in the same way, the education offered by the parents was greater for seeking a better partnership for their daughters. On the whole, there was no thought to make the women independent and strong enough to have control on their own lives. Even in the twenty-first century, women are conditioned and raised in such a way that they become the centre of the familial system. The complete duty of keeping a family blissfully joined together is laid on her shoulders, that too without any authority in decision-making and finances.

Chitra Banerji Divakaruni is a second-generation American writer of Indian heritage and her awareness of the realities of Indian women is unparalleled. She is an Indian-Bengali by origin and has a first-hand experience of the Bengali society and family. Her novel *Oleander Girl* (2012) is also constructed on a Bengali backdrop and has Bengali-families in the heart. It is a tale of a young girl, Koroby Roy, who was orphaned at her birth and nurtured by her maternal grandparents. The tale begins on the eve of her engagement to her lover, Rajat, son of a high-profile family. But all the bliss changes into a chaotic and drastic upheaval with the dying of her grandfather Mr. Bimal Roy as it uncovers all the financial issues of Roy family and the sad secret of Korobi's life. This secret pushes her on a quest for her identity, which further puts her in uncomfortable situations. Though the story is about Korobi's search for her roots but it also best exemplifies the family's impression on the female characters of the work. The protagonist of *Oleander Girl*, Korobi, which means oleander, was named by her mother thus, as she wanted her daughter to have the hardiness of an oleander, as she lacked that attribute. The four female characters in the family frame in the story complete the picture of a Bengali woman.

Anu, the protagonist's mother, was extremely intelligent and talented, but lost her love and her life just because she could not shake off her guilt of crossing the limits her father had set. She was swinging in nowhere as she could neither be with her parents nor with her love entirely due to her conventional guilt-filled thinking because of her upbringing of „family first“ and the promise she had given to her father. She had dared to choose and decide a person as husband for her life without her father's concern, which was like a crime for a girl who had always done what her father had decided and dictated to her. She was a woman brilliant enough to have bagged a scholarship to study

abroad, but this achievement was of no significance to her lawyer father, who had already decided her fate by fixing her marriage of his choice. In reality, decent education for females meant beneficial partnership in the marriage market in all the cultures of India, as writes Vrinda Nabar on the new trend of education for girls in India:

Middle- class ladies are educated mostly as a concession to a cosmetic social change. Given the new executive atmosphere, a pleasant wife has become a vital appendage. Matrimonial ads typically list at least a BA degree as one of the necessary assets of a would be bride. Large numbers of girl-women are now enrolling for degrees as a result, while many depart halfway if a "good match" is procured. (68)

Anu accepted that alliance without even seeing that man because she had always consented to her father's choice; for her, his happiness was foremost. But her wish to study abroad transported her to a far distant nation where she was happy and independent, doing things of her choice, to live her life as she had then taken charge of her life. "In America she grew adventurous. She would tell us in her letters about folk dance courses and performances she had seen in San Francisco. She visited the huge redwood and observed migrating whales." (58) But the upbringing is always a part of one's personality and perceptions; she could not accept the condemnation of her father over her decision of having a partner of her choosing. She could not get it through to suffer that severity given by her father, and to seek permission from her father, she came to India but could never return to her love and life.

Sarojini Roy, the eldest lady in the tale, was an exact picture of a complete woman of a man's expectations; dutiful, loving and complying in every sense and situation. She always obeyed her spouse, loved him more than her life. She did not complain even when her husband compromised her life for the sake of his family name, which he feared would end up with him. He had her give birth to his child even after the doctor had warned them after three miscarriages. He confined her duty to only a feeding hand to their daughter and eventually to their granddaughter as everything else was decided by him for Anu and Korobi. He also made Sarojini to break off from their only daughter Anu, after Anu's decision to go against him. When she objected, he threatened to renounce her, "I will have nothing to do with a wife who does not stand beside me in a crisis, he said". (59). He never told Sarojini the authenticity of their daughter's life and death. She was manipulated by him in all imaginable ways. Even after the death of Anu he had her promise on god to keep the truth a secret from their granddaughter. He indulged her in his

crime of secrecy and lies to a father and a daughter about each other's existence. "All my life I've cared just about what he desired. Obeyed even when my conscience cried out against it".(59) Dasgupta and Lal write about the condition of a married woman in an Indian family in the introduction of their book as "Woman within a family has been regarded as the outsider who is expected to conform to the regulations of the marital home, with very low or non-existent agency". (18) But after his death, she felt free from the confines of her spouse and confessed the truth to her granddaughter. She mustered the strength to speak up the truth, which may have cost her the loss of her granddaughter. As a mother and grandmother, she constantly lavished affection; in fact, her motherly gestures inspired even the extreme characters like young Rajat and the brilliant politician Bhattacharya.

Divakaruni also highlights the possibilities of a woman, how she can handle both career and family together through Jayashree Bose, Korobi's would be mother-in-law, a businesswoman. Through her character, the author presents her idea that when love, freedom and support are provided to a woman, she may generate the best of the results in all aspects of life. As, Divakaruni has often been mentioned, thanking her family for their assistance at home and in her work. She herself is an example in real life of such women, who managed different fields and proved herself due to the love, trust and independence granted by the family. Jayashree is a woman from an affluent family, yet this affluence is the result of her own hard work. She is a lady with a strong will, who knows how to draw others to her bargain. She is a master in worldly matters and manages most of her deals autonomously. She defies the stereotype of people about working women that for them, family becomes secondary. Instead, her priority had always been her spouse and children; she never kept her work before her family. The safety and happiness of her family constantly lingered in her mind. Divakaruni offered a twenty-first-century mother-in-law through Jayashree, who is, if not supporting is at least not a hindrance in the life of her prospective daughter-in-law. This character even contradicts the concept of stereotypical mothers-in-law in the Indian setting.

Korobi, the protagonist of the tale is a small girl raised up by her grand-parents. She was kept away from the hectic and stylish life of Kolkata by her grand-father. She did most of the things to please her grand-father, even her good scores were simply for him. Her grand-father agreed to her choice for marriage at an early age due to his former experience with his daughter's decision, who had chosen a black American as a life partner, which he could never accept. But as soon as the greatest secret of her life was disclosed to her, she went in quest of her African American

father. She jeopardized her bright and lucrative future for her need for a complete family picture that illustrates the importance of a family in a woman's life. She did not want to hide any facts from her would-be in-laws, but her fiancé asked her to wait for the perfect time. She never wanted to betray anyone, even when she understood that her new identity was not very acceptable in a Bengali household, but she showed the strength to venture out in a totally new country in quest of her father, as she had longed for her parents since her youth. In the new country, she had different challenges, but did not give up the goal to find her father. She did all feasible things to find her father and at last found him. But that meeting with her father came with a shock, as she got to know that her parents were never married. She became humiliated of her identity, which was absolutely inappropriate in an Indian Bengali community. Her desire for her family image took her to that tricky circumstance. "Some kinds of success are worse than failure. It would have been better not to have found my father than to live with this awful shame." (246) But as her anger melted down, she understood the situation which her parents had undergone. She merely craved his acceptance and blessings. Towards the end of the story, one can also see the strength of Korobi, when she breaks off the engagement but does not beg to prove her truth, which is like saying no to the *agnipariksha* to show the chastity that Sita had to face in Ramayana. She sought to return to a normal life with her grandma and leave her fiancé to uncover the truth and realize his error on his own.

CONCLUSION

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni wove several women characters of different colors in her story. They always keep their family as their priority, no matter what their age is. The oldest or the youngest women in the family feel the same obligation towards the family, but their style of expression may be different. They are ready to sacrifice even their most loving item in the name of family. When the family supports the woman, she can achieve the pinnacle of success in all areas, be it on the personal front, be it on the public front, as can be witnessed in Mrs. Basu and Korobi. And when a woman is not supported by her family, she is doomed, even when she is brilliant or educated. She is unable to move beyond the wishes of her family; she is saddled with the weight of responsibilities, commitments and family name, which does not let the woman stand for her choices and decisions, as in the case of Anu and Sarojini. So, it should be for everyone in the family that they love and respect ideology, perspectives, objectives and choices of each other and give liberty to all (particularly women who have been denied any unique

identity for eons) so as to have their own life and personality.

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Positive Discourse Analysis of Diplomatic Speeches from a Transitivity Perspective—A Case Study of the 2024 International Situation and China's Diplomacy Symposium Speech

及物性视角下外交演讲的积极话语分析——以 2024 年国际形势与中国外交研讨会演讲为例

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Abstract— This paper uses Foreign Minister Wang Yi's speech at the 2024 Symposium on International Situation and China's Diplomacy as the corpus to explore the representation of discourse in diplomatic speeches and its positive implications through a combination of transitive systems and positive discourse analysis. The study found that the materiality process in speeches is dominated by the material process, followed by the relational process and the verbal process. The psychological process and the behavioral process use less significant distribution characteristics. The material process strengthens the persuasiveness and appeal of the discourse by emphasizing the effectiveness of actions, while the relational process and the verbal process build the consensus of national identity and values and jointly shape China's image as a responsible major country. The study reveals that diplomatic discourse achieves the unity of the practicality and affinity of foreign policy through linguistic representation, providing a new perspective for analyzing the linguistic features of diplomatic discourse and the construction of national image.



Keywords— Transitivity, Positive discourse analysis, Diplomatic speech

I. INTRODUCTION

Diplomatic speech, as an important component of

diplomatic activities, is an important communication discourse for a country's external exchanges. It plays a

crucial role not only in conveying diplomatic ideas and positions but also in shaping the country's image. According to Li (2003), a political speech is a speech delivered on national affairs and diplomatic relations aimed at promoting propositions, expressing attitudes and positions, and a diplomatic speech is one of them, where national leaders can clearly express their policies and positions, thereby building and maintaining their image on a global scale. Positive Discourse analysis (PDA), proposed by J. R. Martin in 1999, emphasizes the positive and affirmative elements in discourse to guide readers with positive ideas and create a harmonious society (Zhu, 2006). Since then, research on PDA has been on the rise in China, especially showing its importance in the process of building a harmonious society. In the three-dimensional model of "power - identity - discourse" for the construction of diplomatic image, the concept of flexible diplomacy is proposed, emphasizing the use of "soft power" to go beyond the binary opposition of Western soft and hard power and demonstrate the social connotation of peace and responsibility of major powers (Ye, 2023). This model emphasizes the core role of diplomatic discourse in the construction of the national image, echoing the core idea of PDA, which is to promote the positive construction of the national image through the practice of positive discourse. Existing studies have mostly explored transitive systems from the perspectives of ecolinguistics and critical discourse analysis, but in the field of diplomatic speech discourse, research from the combined perspective of transitive and positive discourse analysis is still insufficient. This study aims to reveal in depth how transitive processes and participants in diplomatic speeches work together to construct positive meaning, providing a new perspective for understanding the discourse characteristics of diplomatic speeches and international communication.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Research related to physical property systems

Systemic functional linguistics holds that language has three purely rational functions: conceptual, interpersonal, and discourse. The empirical function is an important component of the conceptual function, referring to how people express their thoughts, beliefs, feelings, etc.

about the subjective and objective world through language, focusing on the proposition "content" of the message. Transitive systems reveal semantic relationships between various processes and the participants and environmental components they require. It is the most important semantic system for representing empirical functions (Huang, 2002). Most of the existing research focuses on the analysis of objectional systems from the perspective of ecolinguistics, exploring the positive international ecological image of responsibility, commitment and action reflected in the diplomatic speeches and statements of leaders through the analysis of international ecological discourse (Xu & Gao, 2023). The dominant beneficial discourse indicates that China is committed to establishing a good international community ecological discourse system and promoting the sound development of the international community ecosystem (Zhang & Han, 2021). And some studies combined the perspective of temporality and ecological discourse analysis to investigate the ecological consciousness contained in educational discourse and the implementation of ecological education in teaching practice (Yu & Wang, 2020), the empirical function of poetry translation (Huang, 2002), and the ecological view of "harmony between man and nature" in the English translation of pastoral poetry (Chen, 2019). The ecological language characteristics of different fields and genres, such as the ecological orientation of domestic and foreign media news reports (Yuan, 2018; Sun & Guo, 2022). Furthermore, some scholars have focused their analysis on the social and cultural dimensions that constitute discourse, interpreting the generation mechanism of discourse from the perspective of social practice and using critical discourse to analyze the image of China constructed in foreign media reports (Cao & Zhao, 2019). The economic inequality reflected in discourse changes in mainstream British media such as *The Guardian* and the *Daily Mail* (Gomez-Jimenez & Bartley, 2023) and the African national anthem constructed negative images of colonizers and positive images of Africans through temporality structure and lexical choice, Emphasizing themes of freedom and land ownership (Mwinlaaru & Nartey, 2022). It can be seen that the current focus on the empirical function of language in representing the world is on the six major process analyses of transitive systems, and the

research perspective mostly starts from critical discourse analysis and ecological discourse analysis, combined with discourse such as speeches, textbooks, news reports, national anthems and poetry translations, to explore the discourse characteristics, ecological consciousness and image construction reflected in different styles and fields. There is a lack of exploration of the integration of transitive systems with other discourse analysis models, and there is insufficient attention to China's discourse in diplomatic Settings in the international community and the image of a major power it reflects.

2.2 Research related to positive discourse analysis

Positive discourse analysis (PDA) was proposed by J.R.Martin in 1999, and "hopeful discourse" has increasingly drawn the attention of many scholars (Yang & Zhao, 2018), moving from critical discourse analysis that focuses on "critical thinking" to more positive and affirmative directions, guiding readers with positive ideas, To create a beautiful and harmonious world. There are studies on the construction of national consciousness in news commentary from the perspective of positive/critical discourse analysis, which integrates the positive and critical discourse analysis framework and analyzes the critical attitude and praise in commentary from the attitude resource subsystem of evaluation theory (Qiu, 2024), and most studies start from evaluation theory and combine the positive discourse analysis model. Not only focused on image construction in news reports on various topics (Qian, Rob, 2016), but also explored attitude resources in the English translation of white papers (Yang & Cai, 2024), national image in the English translation of government work reports (Wang & Chen, 2024), and evaluation resources in diplomatic speeches and diplomatic discourse (He, 2021; Jiang, 2024) et al., it can be found that the scope and text of these studies on positive discourse analysis focus on news reporting and political discourse, and combine positive discourse analysis more with evaluation theory or attitude subsystems to analyze the interpersonal rational function of language influencing other people's behavior and how these attitude resources construct national image and convey positive meaning.

At present, an increasing number of studies are beginning to adopt a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis methods, using large-scale corpus data

for in-depth research to reflect the self-shaping and other shaping of the national image in order to obtain a more comprehensive research perspective. Less often, transitive systems are combined with positive discourse analysis, although some scholars have noted the connection between transitive analysis of positive discourse analysis and the city image in news reports (Lu & Duan, 2024) and the national image in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative and language security in foreign reports (Chen & Chen, 2023), Less attention has been paid to the study of diplomatic discourse, especially diplomatic speech discourse, and there is a lack of exploration of the combination of transitive systems and the construction of positive meaning. Diplomatic speeches are mainly about conveying information, being objective and straightforward, and often expressing positions and attitudes in a declarative tone. Through positive discourse analysis and transitivity analysis, the actors in each process of diplomatic speeches and their roles and responsibilities can be revealed, thereby gaining insights into the process of national identity construction. This study aims to explore the distribution of various processes in the transitive system of diplomatic speeches and the information conveyed by the actors as the basis for language to describe the subjective and objective world and to construct positive meanings.

III. THEORETICAL BASIS

3.1 And physical property systems

By deconstructing the process meaning potential of human real-world experiences, the transitive system reveals semantic relationships among the three core components of process, participant, and environmental component. This system is the most important semantic representation tool for the function of experience, providing theoretical support and methodological framework for studying how human experience is expressed through language. In transitive systems, human experience is deconstructed into six basic types of processes, namely the material process, the mental process, the relational process, the behavioral process, the verbal process and the existential process. Each type of process is associated with specific semantic functions and the construction of real experiences. Participants and

environmental components are closely associated with the process. Participants are the main dominators of the transitive process and determine the meaning direction of the process; Environmental components provide background information about the process, describing the specific context of the process in terms of time, space, or other conditions. Therefore, transitive property analysis requires a comprehensive study of the selection of processes, participants, and environmental components in order to reveal systematic relationships among them.

3.2 Positive Discourse analysis

Unlike the exposure and criticism of critical discourse analysis, positive discourse analysis is based on praise and construction, advocating that discourse analysis should adopt a positive and friendly attitude to analyze discourse and strive to promote the building of a relaxed, conciliatory, and coexisting human society through discourse analysis (Zhu, 2006). Positive discourse analysis is concerned with discourse on major national or international issues such as diplomacy, mediation, negotiation, conference and consultation, and the Foreign minister's speech at the symposium on international situation and China's diplomacy has a strong logical similarity to the path and vision of positive discourse analysis. When Zhang Delu and Zhang Ke (2022) proposed the comprehensive framework of multimodal positive discourse analysis, they noted that the analytical framework of positive discourse, on the one hand, implants the framework of discourse analysis in systemic functional linguistics on the basis of critical discourse analysis, and on the other hand, it also has multimodal characteristics, highlighting the role of socio-cultural factors in interpretation, that is, highlighting the goals of positive discourse analysis.

Positive discourse analysis advocates for a "multifunctional" analytical approach that takes into account empirical, interpersonal, and discourse functions. The current academic community mainly uses evaluation theory as the research framework for positive discourse analysis, often focusing on the interpersonal meaning of discourse and to some extent ignoring the complementarity of empirical and interpersonal functions (Hu, 2012). Transitive systems are the main representation of empirical functions and the presentation of meaning in small

sentences. The exploration of positive discourse analysis based on transitive systems by exploring the author's cognition of the subjective and objective world, interpreting conceptual meaning, and using socio-cultural cognitive models to explain the positive meaning constructed by language tools is of great significance for the improvement and development of positive discourse analysis methods.

IV. RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1 Corpus sources

The corpus for this study is selected from the full text of the speech delivered by Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the 2024 International Situation and China's Diplomacy Symposium in Beijing. The speech text, as an important part of the country's diplomatic discourse, is highly representative and typical, reflecting both China's diplomatic stance and policy propositions and demonstrating the country's sense of responsibility and positive image in international affairs. Based on a small corpus of about 18,405 symbols, totaling 16,968 characters, the speech text was divided into small sentences as the basic analysis units, and detailed transitive analysis and positive discourse analysis were conducted through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Specifically, this study uses UAM Corpus Tool 6.0 software to label and classify the corpus sentence by sentence, statistically analyze the process type distribution characteristics of the short sentences in the speech, and in combination with the semantic functions of the participants and environmental components, explore the role of different process types and their actors' roles and responsibilities in the construction of positive meaning. Based on the transitive theory framework of systemic functional linguistics, this study explores the diplomatic image and positive meaning conveyed through language practice.

4.2 Research Questions

This study focuses on Foreign Minister Wang Yi's participation in the 2024 International Situation and China Diplomacy Symposium in Beijing under the title "*Riding the Trend of the Times with A Strong Sense of A Strong Sense of Responsibility*". This study combined quantitative and qualitative analysis of the short sentences from the

speech “Responsibility” aimed at answering the following questions:

- (1)What are the overall distribution characteristics of the process types in short sentences in speeches?
- (2) What are the representations and positive implications of each process type in the speech?

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After multiple manual annotations and quantitative statistics on the target Corpus using UAM Corpus Tool 6, the distribution of physical process types in the full text of Foreign Minister Wang Yi’s speech at the 2024 Symposium on International Situation and China’s Diplomacy in Beijing was obtained (see Table 1).

Table 1 Overall Distribution of Transitive process types

Process types	Frequency	Frequency (%)
Type of substance	269	70.1
Relationship Type	60	15.6
Speech processes	27	7.0
Mental processes	20	5.2
Behavioral processes	8	2.1
In total	384	100

The statistical results show that various process types appeared a total of 384 times in the foreign minister’s speech. Among them, the material process had the highest frequency, accounting for 70.1%, followed by the relational process, accounting for 15.6%. The verbal process and the psychological process appeared less frequently, accounting for 7.0% and 5.2% respectively. The behavioral process had the lowest frequency, accounting for only 2.1%. Material processes, as the core process type of the discourse, centrally reflect the description of specific behaviors and actions in the speech. This feature conforms to the common function of an annual diplomatic speech, which emphasizes action and results to enhance persuasiveness and practical appeal; More relational processes highlight China’s position and identity in the international community; The verbal process, which is used to quote and paraphrase conversations or speeches in diplomatic activities, is a necessary transitive process to enhance the authority and credibility of the content; Mental processes, which are mainly used to convey internal perceptions, emotions and

attitudes, are less common in diplomatic speeches because speeches are generally more focused on showing external behaviors and logical relationships and less on subjective feelings; Behavioral processes mainly involve specific physical actions, and the low-frequency use of behavioral processes is associated with the formality and functionality of the discourse. Diplomatic discourse, because it focuses on describing the macroscopic framework of action, rarely involves simple physical actions. Overall, the empirical significance of the foreign minister’s speech is mainly reflected through the material process, followed by the relational process, and relatively less in the verbal process and mental process, which are generally in line with the linguistic characteristics of the speech discourse at international conferences.

5.1 Analysis of material processes

A material process is a type of process that represents the process of doing something and describes the actual behavior and events in the real world. The actor who initiates the action is the actor, and the recipient of the action is the target. The material process features are prominent throughout the discourse. Through material sentences, the speech approaches from multiple perspectives such as diplomatic actions, economic development, regional cooperation, global governance and cultural exchange, and combines general description with examples to aim to objectively and comprehensively expounding the rich achievements and positive impacts of China’s diplomacy in 2024. The general description provides a global perspective and strategic framework, while the examples support the general proposition from different fields and cooperation dimensions with specific cases and data, making the content more objective, comprehensive and persuasive, reflecting the height and effectiveness of diplomatic speeches. Specific material processes such as: Working together to advance science and technology (Example 1), international logistics achievements (Example 2), promoting regional infrastructure construction (Example 3), etc. Abstract material processes frequently use “advance”, “promote”, “safeguard”, “build”, verbs with positive meanings, such as “make”, with their unique semantic characteristics, form a discourse picture of China’s participation in global governance. Among them, “make” and “build” are more

frequently used in the material process, with a combined usage rate of up to 9.11%. The targets are respectively efforts (made efforts) and a community (build a China-Brazil/China-Vietnam/China-Africa community). Whether at the negotiating table of addressing the global climate crisis or in the process of promoting international cooperation and national social building, "made efforts" vividly demonstrate China's firm determination to fulfill its international responsibilities through concrete actions. The word "build" is used in conjunction with expressions such as "build a China-Brazil community", "build a China-Vietnam community", and "build a China-Africa community". The expression "building a community" not only conveys China's commitment to establishing deep cooperative relations with other countries and sharing the fruits of development, but also highlights the practical implementation of the sense of a community with a shared future for mankind in bilateral and multilateral cooperation. These verbs express a metaphorical or abstract sense of "action" or "outcome", highlighting China's initiative, sense of responsibility and global influence on the international stage.

Example 1: China worked with fellow Global South nations to jointly launch an Initiative on International Cooperation in Open Science.

Example 2: The China-Europe Railway Express has provided over 100,000 freight train services in total.

Example 3: The China-kyrgyz-uzbekistan railway project was signed.

In the material sentences of the speech, the author mainly uses "We", "China's diplomatic service" and "China" to reflect the subjective consciousness in China's diplomacy. The use of this subject emphasizes the collectivity and practicality of China's diplomacy, and through the community of "we" undertaking various international actions, it shows China's active role as a responsible major country. The repeated use of "China's diplomatic service" and "China" further indicates that China's diplomatic practice is driven systematically and institutionally, representing an active diplomatic act at the national level. Furthermore, the actors of some material clauses are composed of noun phrases that China uses alongside other countries (Examples 2 and 3), in which China does not position itself as a leader or giver of

international affairs, but participates in the global development process as an equal partner. By jointly promoting major projects with other countries, China conveys to the world its determination to actively promote a fair, just and inclusive development order, and through specific cooperation projects, it transforms the concept of win-win cooperation into practical actions, presenting an image of an all-round practitioner and maintainer.

In general, the material process describes the concrete actions, covering a wide range of areas from domestic to international, from regional cooperation to global governance, demonstrating the practicality and pertinence of China's diplomacy, not just remaining at the grand policy level, while demonstrating through multilateral cooperation that it is not a single driving force. Rather, it is an image of China's diplomacy that is proactive, responsible and has a wide international influence.

5.2 Analysis of Relationship processes

Relational processes, which reflect the logical relationships between things, are divided into belonging and identification categories. Through the use of relational clauses, the speech, on the one hand, represents the background of events, the attributes of things and the identities of people, enhances the persuasiveness of the text and shapes China's diplomatic identity; On the other hand, by defining the attributes of initiatives and China's diplomatic actions, positive evaluations are made to build the image of a responsible major country. Example 4 fully embodies the categorical relationship clause, which clarifies "China's" identity and attributes as "a force of unity in division and confrontation", and by emphasizing China's position, highlights China as an initiator and defender of international cooperation, providing a credible identity for the diplomatic initiative of jointly building the Belt and Road. By positioning China's diplomatic role, it further emphasizes China's responsibility and commitment in the international community and reinforces China's image as an advocate of peace and cooperation. In characterizing evaluation and judgment, Example 5 presents an identity-type relational process that positions "China" as a "responsible major power" with "greater international influence". Further reinforcing China's central role in the Belt and Road Initiative and global governance through positive evaluation of its identity.

Example 4: China will be a firm force for unity in the face of division and confrontation.

Example 5: China today is already a responsible major country with enhanced international influence.

Example 6: It is the widely shared view that the building of a community with a shared future for mankind is an important vision

Furthermore, when the relational process represents the evaluation of attitudes, the relational clauses are mainly projected through the speech process in the form of speech content, and the speakers are mainly the international community (Zhou, 2024). The speech, through the verbalization of the relational process, highlights the positive significance and international influence of China's diplomatic values while avoiding the subjective intervention of the speaker, making the speech more objective and persuasive. In Example 6, the projection of the speech process, the main clause is "widely shared view", indicating the speech process. The content, "an important vision put forth by President Xi Jinping", projects evaluations of the initiative on building a community with a shared future for mankind. It showcases the significance of the initiative through the objective perspective of a third party, highlighting it as people's important vision, while avoiding subjective intervention from the speaker, thereby enhancing persuasiveness and demonstrating the global value of Xi Jinping's diplomatic thinking, promoting China's diplomatic positions.

In summary, the relational clauses in the text demonstrate China's initiative and constructive role in addressing global challenges, and further emphasize China's responsibility in the international community through the positioning and attributes of China's diplomatic role, reinforcing China's image as an advocate of peace and cooperation.

5.3 Analysis of Speech Process

The speech process is the process of exchanging information through speaking, and its participants include the speaker, the recipient and the content of the speech. Speakers include leaders and officials, official reports and experts and scholars, etc. In Minister Wang Yi's speech, the use of the speech process conveys a series of positive diplomatic and cooperative messages through the selection

of participants and the construction of the speech content. At the same time, it shows that China, as an advocate, has put forward the values of "openness and inclusiveness" in international cooperation. Example 8, by using the parallel author "China and Brazil", flexibly employs "the international community" or specific partners as the subject of speech, which is essentially an implicit strategy of identity construction. When referring to the results of cooperation and citing international organizations' evaluations of China's initiatives, these language expressions indirectly reinforce the universality and appeal of China's diplomatic ideas through the "other perspective". The participation and recognition of other countries and international organizations not only confirm the rationality of China's diplomatic strategy, but also build a three-dimensional image of China as a responsible major country in the global public opinion field and consolidate China's active position in international multilateral cooperation. It reflects China's equal attitude in international cooperation.

Example7: President Xi Jinping called for more open and inclusive Global South cooperation.

Example8: China and Brazil jointly issued the six-point consensus on political settlement of the Ukraine crisis.

It is evident that quoting and relaying the words or ideas of national leaders in foreign speeches demonstrates the highest decision-making power and leadership of China's leaders in diplomacy. Emphasizing China's consistent stance and deliberate seriousness in the face of cooperation initiatives, multilateral mechanisms, and global issues. By using "the international community" or partners, such as Brazil and ASEAN as common speakers, it indirectly expresses the recognition of China's initiatives and actions by other partners and speakers, demonstrating the equality, openness and inclusiveness of China's diplomacy and further consolidating China's active position on the international stage. With a deep grasp of international discourse and strategic thinking on the global governance pattern, it provides a strong discourse support for China's major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics in the new era.

The two psychological process verbs in Example 10 reflect the emotional connection, that is, through "cherish",

the humanistic care in diplomacy is conveyed, highlighting the emphasis on historical friendship, gratitude to partners, showing a willingness for long-term cooperation, and further strengthening China's image as a responsible major country that respects history and values partners. These processes essentially reflect the psychological responses of the cognitive subject (here the cognitive subject can be understood as the countries of the world, the international community, etc.) to the object (China's development, diplomatic practice, etc.), which are manifested in psychological activities such as expectations and identifiers, precisely reflecting the world's expectations of China and its recognition of the success of its development path. In this psychological process, "the world" acts as the Senser, "China's development path" as the Phenomenon, and the psychological activities of expectation and identification closely link the two, clearly indicating that China's global influence is achieving a significant increase. Psychological goal phenomena are mostly positive abstract concepts such as "friendship", "cooperation", "peace and development", highlighting the value orientation of diplomacy. The psychological processes with these concepts as phenomena highlight the value orientation of China's diplomacy centered on win-win cooperation and peaceful development, and reflect the positive signals and value guidance role that China's diplomacy conveys in promoting the building of a community with a shared future for mankind.

Example 9: He believes in a global response to global challenges.

Example 10 We cherish old friends who have contributed to the friendship between their countries and China and we value the commitment and input of people from various sectors to developing friendly ties with China.

Example 11: We have safely evacuated over 10,000 Chinese compatriots from overseas high-risk regions.

Specific action verbs are not prominent in the analysis of the process of action, but the specific action verb "evacuated" in example 11 indicates the act of evacuating people from dangerous areas. The behavioral process directly shows a distinct action. "we" refers to an actor of the Chinese government or diplomatic institution, a typical behavioral process that directly reflects specific diplomatic acts, showing the clear actions taken by the

Chinese government in ensuring the safety of its citizens and their actual effects, embodying the people first of the Chinese government, being pragmatic and efficient in times of crisis, It has also created an image of a great country that cares for its people and takes on international responsibilities at home and abroad.

VI. CONCLUSION

Based on Foreign Minister Wang Yi's speech at the 2024 Symposium on the International Situation and China's Diplomacy, this paper explores the distribution characteristics of the transitive process in diplomatic speeches and its role in the construction of positive meaning by combining transitive systems and positive discourse analysis methods. The research shows that the distribution of various process types in speeches has significant hierarchical characteristics: material processes are dominant, highlighting specific descriptions of actions and outcomes; Relational processes play a secondary role in characterizing identity, status, and context; The verbal process enhances the authority and credibility of the content by citing and paraphrasing; Mental and behavioral processes, though less frequent, play a significant role in presenting subjective emotions, attitudes, and specific behaviors.

The study found that diplomatic speeches emphasize China's specific practices in international affairs through material processes, including achievements in diplomatic actions, regional cooperation, global governance and cultural exchange, presenting China's international image as a responsible major country; Through the process of relations, it clarifies China's identity and position in the international community and conveys China's commitment to peace, development, equity and cooperation; The discourse process highlighted the voice and leadership of China's diplomatic leaders and strengthened the international community's recognition of China's initiatives and policies. The use of verbs such as "build", "promote", "advance" and other expressions with positive meanings in the speech further highlighted the initiative and sense of responsibility of China's diplomacy in promoting global peace and development.

Diplomatic speeches, as an important vehicle for shaping the country's image and disseminating policies,

have successfully constructed China's international image of "putting people first", "win-win cooperation" and "a responsible major country" through the selection of transitive processes and the expression of positive words. This discourse feature not only meets the functional requirements of diplomatic discourse, but also enhances the international persuasiveness and appeal of China's foreign policy. The study provides a new perspective for understanding the language practice in diplomatic speeches and the construction of the national image, and also offers a reference for the research approach that combines the transitive system of systemic functional linguistics with positive discourse analysis. However, this study still has certain limitations, such as a relatively concentrated corpus range and insufficient data sample size. Future studies can combine more different types of diplomatic discourse to further explore the construction of positive meaning in diplomatic discourse from the perspective of cross-context and multi-text.

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Exploring Power Dynamics: Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*

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Abstract— Margaret Atwood, a renowned Canadian author, has explored the dynamics of power and its consequences, particularly with her female characters, in several of her novels. The dynamics of power are expertly portrayed by young girls in her novel *Cat's Eye*. By using her characters, Atwood deftly portrays the complex dynamics between school bullies and their victims, a theme that has been previously addressed by Graham Greene and William Golding. Constraints on idealism and oppression in all its forms are themes that run throughout *Cat's Eye*, as they have in Atwood's earlier novels. Atwood posits that women are not just the victims of patriarchal oppression. Women also perpetrate bullying and torment against their less privileged counterparts within their gender. She is subjected to bullying at school by three classmates: Cordelia, Carol, and Grace Elaine Risley, who has faced persecution since childhood, which has intensified during her adolescence. Her transient lifestyle led to her estrangement from her colleagues, making her vulnerable to her environment. Her traumatic memories were a persistent source of distress; however, she sought to reconcile with them through her artistic endeavours.

Keywords— power, gender, patriarchal, oppression, bullying, traumatic



Margaret Atwood was born in 1939 and lacked formal education during her early years, which led her to devote considerable time to reading. She completed her official education, earning both a bachelor's and a master's degree, and possesses honorary doctorates from numerous prominent universities. She was raised in a non-traditional family that prioritised her education and intellectual development over early marriage, unlike other females of her generation. Atwood is a distinctive author, one of the few whose works are included in academic literary curricula globally and simultaneously read by homemakers.

Atwood is well-known for her mythical themes and feminist views. She is renowned for her ability to convey both a personal vision and global concerns through her artwork. The narrative centers on women's artistic expression of their difficulties. She considers childhood cruelty, violence, and betrayal among young women in her retrospective tale. In this book, Atwood discussed feminism. Risley's development from childhood to adulthood is chronicled in this bildungsroman. This piece may also be referred to as a "Künstlerroman" because it follows Risley's artistic evolution. Atwood examines the process of victimisation starting in childhood in the book.

This paper aims to investigate the dynamics among women, focusing on the complexity of relationships in which women frequently suppress their identities. Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* explores the themes of memory and identity. Elaine, the heroine of the novel, is aware of the inherent uncertainty of recollection and how past experiences might influence our current life. The book is around the protagonist Elaine who tries to cope with her trauma, personal problems and fears to keep herself unique in the society.

Poets like Blake and Wordsworth often depict childhood as a pure and idyllic phase. However, it is important to recognise that children can also exhibit cruelty and indifference towards their peers. In *Cat's Eye*, Elaine Risley is obsessed with her past experiences and her relationship with Cordelia, her childhood pal and tormentor. She looks back to her past life, finding her individuality and identity. The book successfully intertwined the present and previous lives of the lead character. Furthermore, the protagonist's speech effectively embodies Atwood's creative perspective. She states, "Time is not a line but a dimension, like the dimension of space. If you can bend space, you can bend time also, and if you knew enough and

could move faster than light you could travel backward in time and exist in two places at once" (3).

The relationship between Cordelia and Elaine illustrates a power dynamic in which Cordelia has consistently dominated Elaine from childhood. Cordelia compels Elaine to engage in self-reflection, Jordison quoted, "Cordelia brings a mirror to school ... She takes it out of her pocket and holds the mirror up in front of me and says 'Look at yourself! Just look! voice is disgusted'".

The story shows that authority and oppression are not confined to age or gender. Elaine's classmates, Cordelia, Carol and Grace, always pressurised her to fit into their mould and did not like her distinctiveness. They consistently maintain dominance and compel her to comply with their desires. Elaine recognises that she is being victimised by these females, although she is uncertain how to extricate herself from the situation. A renowned Critic stated, "Elaine is a surrogate victim, representative of the category 'girl' and thus a stand-in for the other girls, who use her as a scapegoat in order to displace their own suffering as members of patriarchy here literalized in the authority of their own fathers" (Hite 137).

As Cordelia is an integral part of herself, Elaine desires to destroy her. Cordelia is the most horrible of Elaine's three female colleagues who victimise her. During pivotal moments, she finds herself powerless, as she admits:

Now she's harsher, more relentless. It is as if she's driven by the urge to see how far she can go. She is backing me towards an edge, like the edge of cliff: one step back, another step and I'll be over and falling. (Atwood 171)

Elaine is even made to go fetch her hat after Cordelia tosses it into a ravine. Elaine finds the hard environment to be a difficult struggle. As snow accumulates in her shoes, she sees the Virgin Mary in a miraculous vision, giving her the strength to head back to safety. Then the females go to other schools. Elaine proves her cerebral superiority over Cordelia, who has mental illness and gains the reader's sympathies as the story goes on. Elaine, despite reaching adulthood and intellectual supremacy, cannot shake the ghosts of her past. Only many years of passionate devotion to art can lay her sad memories to rest.

The work exposes childhood difficulties but also the masculine bias to the artistic achievements of women. Professional artist Elaine Risley travelled to her former home of Toronto for a retrospective exhibition of her oeuvre. This is a journey in both the literal and figurative senses, and it is a retrospective look at Elaine's life, beginning with her youth and ending with the present day. With her inventiveness she dismantled the patriarchal narrative of art history that declares male dominance. She tried to establish new possibilities for female artists. The

novelist represents the marginalisation of women artists and their historical contributions by the patriarchal power structures. *Cat's Eye* opens a new phase in that it foregrounds a feminine artistic sense while projecting a powerful image of feminist consciousness.

Elaine acknowledges the marginalisation of female artists by their male counterparts. Notwithstanding the intrinsic worth of their contributions, they are regarded as inferior artists. Therefore, the piece demystifies the intricacies of the relationship between Elaine and Cordelia as well as acting as a powerful criticism of the patriarchal norms that discount the creative potential of women. resources that do not reward female ingenuity. The story contains a major metaphor related to retrospectives. Elaine finds it difficult to communicate with her brother because she believes that being a man, he is unable to comprehend the emotions of women. A retrospective is a completion, a culmination, or a viewpoint from which one may look back on the past. Elaine finds it challenging to talk to her mother owing to the distance. She states "is a gulf, an abyss, that goes down and down. It is filled with wordlessness" (Atwood 98).

Elaine hates being alone, and she instantly tries to get away by staying home from school, pretending to be sick, fantasising about invisibility, and deliberately fainting. Atwood writes, "there's a way out of places you want to leave but can't. Fainting is like stepping sideways, out of your own body, out of time or into another time. When you wake up its late. Time has gone on without you" (183). Elaine's primary cause of sorrow stems from her chosen career; however, she longs for societal approval and recognition. Ultimately, she concluded that the painting profession is unsuitable for young girls. In that moment of realisation, she reflects, "Little girls are cute and small only to adults. To one another they are not cute. They are life-sized" (25).

Elaine had a disastrous relationship with Josef and subsequently falls for Jon, a painter. Jon's unfaithfulness destroys her dream existence with him forever. Her victimisation is compounded by her two spouses, Elaine's choice was to leave her spouse and go with her daughter, Sarah, to Vancouver. The complexity of inner conflict and self-identity is explored in the book *Cat's Eye*. The goal of Margaret Atwood's book is to demonstrate women's intelligence. The novelist demonstrates how the arts may be used to oppose injustice in any form.

Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and Alcott's *Little Women* might have impacted Atwood. Alcott's *Little Women* examines the development of four sisters. Despite the story's overall optimism, the four sisters must overcome many challenges to develop into healthy adults. But rather than being related by blood, the schoolgirls in *Cat's Eye* are

only associated by their "friendship". The characters in Atwood's works often lack the genuine friendship typically found among siblings. Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* have some striking similarities. In *To the Lighthouse*, Lily Briscoe is an inexperienced young painter. She attempts to depict James and Mrs. Ramsay in a painting. Charles Tansley's chauvinist claim that women are incapable of writing or painting exacerbates her self-imposed uncertainty about her artistic abilities.

Lily struggles to complete her painting during the journey to the lighthouse at the book's conclusion. She recalls memories from her past, including her enduring thoughts about Mrs Ramsay and life in general. Lily gains the understanding she needs to complete her painting from this reflection. As she completes the painting, she feels truly satisfied. Elaine and Lily are quite similar. Patriarchal society suppresses the artistic talents of both artists and creates in both artists self-doubt and other crises. Ultimately, both artists can showcase their gifts, fulfil their artistic missions, and establish their own identities as creators.

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Representing Postcolonial India: Identity, Hybridity, and Cultural Displacement in *The God of Small Things*, *The Inheritance of Loss* and *The White Tiger*

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Abstract— The emergence of Indian English fiction in the post-independence period has significantly contributed to the articulation of postcolonial identities and the interrogation of colonial legacies. Indian novelists writing in English have transformed the language of the former coloniser into a medium for representing indigenous experiences, cultural complexities, and socio-political realities. This article examines three influential Indian English novels—Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (1997), Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), and Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger* (2008)—through the theoretical framework of postcolonial studies. Drawing upon the concepts of Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Frantz Fanon, the study investigates how these novels negotiate issues of identity, hybridity, marginalisation, displacement, and resistance. The article argues that these texts collectively reveal the persistence of colonial structures within contemporary India while simultaneously exposing the contradictions of globalisation, capitalism, caste hierarchy, and cultural alienation. Roy explores the intersections of caste and colonial memory, Desai examines the fractured identities produced by migration and globalisation, and Adiga foregrounds class oppression within neoliberal India. Through different narrative strategies, the three novels challenge dominant representations of India and expose the continuing effects of colonial discourse in shaping postcolonial realities. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that Indian English fiction functions as a critical site where the complexities of postcolonial existence are negotiated and reimagined.



Keywords— Postcolonialism, Indian English Fiction, Identity, Hybridity, Cultural Displacement, Globalisation, Subalternity.

I. INTRODUCTION

The development of Indian English literature represents one of the most significant literary consequences of British colonialism in South Asia. Introduced as an instrument of colonial administration and cultural control, the English language was gradually appropriated by Indian writers and transformed into a powerful medium of self-expression. Following independence in 1947, Indian English fiction emerged as a vital literary space for exploring questions of national identity, cultural memory, social transformation and political resistance. The postcolonial novel became a particularly important form through which writers

examined the continuing effects of colonial domination upon individuals, communities, and institutions.

The intellectual foundation of postcolonial studies rests upon the recognition that colonialism was not merely a political and economic system but also a cultural and epistemological project. Colonial rule sought to construct the colonised subject as inferior, irrational, and dependent while simultaneously legitimising European superiority. As Edward Said demonstrates in *Orientalism*, colonial discourse produced a system of representation through which the East was imagined as the exotic and subordinate ‘Other’ of the West. Such representations did not disappear

with political independence; rather, they continued to influence cultural perceptions, social hierarchies, and global power relations.

Postcolonial literature emerged partly as a response to these colonial constructions. Writers from formerly colonised societies began to challenge dominant narratives by reclaiming histories, identities, and voices that had been marginalised or silenced. In the Indian context, this literary project has involved not only confronting colonial legacies but also examining the internal contradictions of postcolonial society itself. Issues such as caste discrimination, gender inequality, religious conflict, economic disparity, and cultural displacement have become central concerns of contemporary Indian fiction.

Among the most influential works of contemporary Indian English literature are Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*. Although distinct in style and thematic emphasis, these novels share a common concern with the unfinished realities of postcolonial India. Each text explores the tensions between tradition and modernity, local and global identities, and individual aspirations and structural constraints. Together they provide a compelling literary archive of postcolonial experience.

Roy's *The God of Small Things* examines the enduring power of caste hierarchies and social exclusion within a society that continues to bear the marks of colonial history. Through its fragmented narrative and linguistic experimentation, the novel reveals the complexities of identity formation in postcolonial India. Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* shifts attention to migration, displacement, and cultural alienation, exploring how colonial mentality and globalisation shape the lives of individuals across national boundaries. Adiga's *The White Tiger* offers a scathing critique of contemporary India's economic inequalities, exposing the contradictions of neoliberal development and the persistence of systemic oppression. These novels are particularly significant because they move beyond simplistic celebrations of national independence. Instead, they interrogate the social and cultural realities that continue to structure postcolonial life. Their narratives reveal that colonialism's legacy survives not only in institutions and economic systems but also in attitudes, desires, and forms of self-perception. Consequently, the postcolonial condition appears not as a completed historical stage but as an ongoing process of negotiation and contestation.

This article argues that *The God of Small Things*, *The Inheritance of Loss*, and *The White Tiger* trace three interconnected phases of postcolonial India: the persistence of caste and gender hierarchies, the emergence of

transnational displacement, and the rise of neoliberal capitalism. Read together, the novels reveal how colonial structures survive in changing social, cultural, and economic forms, challenging narratives of national progress and modernity.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Postcolonial scholarship on Indian English fiction has been shaped by the works of Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Frantz Fanon. Their concepts of Orientalism, hybridity, subalternity, and colonial psychology have provided important frameworks for analysing questions of identity, power, migration, and resistance in postcolonial literature.

Critical studies of Indian English fiction frequently explore how literary texts challenge colonial representations and negotiate complex questions of identity and belonging. Within this context, *The God of Small Things*, *The Inheritance of Loss*, and *The White Tiger* have attracted considerable scholarly attention for their engagement with social inequality, cultural transformation, and postcolonial realities.

Scholarship on *The God of Small Things* has largely focused on caste oppression, gender relations, linguistic innovation, and narrative structure. Critics have highlighted Roy's portrayal of social exclusion through the character of Velutha and her critique of entrenched social hierarchies. The novel's use of language has also been examined as a form of cultural resistance that reshapes English to express local experiences. Studies of *The Inheritance of Loss* primarily address migration, diaspora, globalisation, and cultural displacement. Scholars have explored how Desai portrays the psychological effects of colonial education, the uncertainties of migrant life, and the tensions between local identities and global aspirations. The novel's exploration of belonging and alienation has established it as a significant text in contemporary postcolonial discourse. Research on *The White Tiger* has concentrated on class inequality, corruption, capitalism, and subaltern agency. Critics have interpreted Balram Halwai's narrative as a challenge to dominant representations of modern India, arguing that the novel exposes the contradictions underlying economic development and neoliberal progress.

Although these novels have been widely studied individually, comparatively fewer scholars have examined them together as interconnected representations of postcolonial India. This article addresses that gap by placing Roy, Desai, and Adiga in dialogue with one another. Such a comparative approach reveals how caste, migration, cultural displacement, and economic inequality intersect within contemporary Indian society. By analysing the three

novels collectively, this study demonstrates how they offer distinct yet complementary perspectives on the evolving realities of postcolonial India.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts a postcolonial framework informed by the works of Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Frantz Fanon. Rather than treating postcolonialism as a single theoretical model, it draws upon key concepts from each thinker to examine the selected novels. Said's concept of *Orientalism* provides a basis for understanding how colonial discourse constructed the East as the cultural and political "Other" of the West. His work highlights the relationship between representation and power, making it useful for analysing how Indian English novelists challenge inherited colonial perceptions and reclaim indigenous experiences. Bhabha's theory of hybridity offers a framework for examining cultural negotiation and identity formation. His notion of the "Third Space" emphasises how colonial encounters generate new and complex identities that transcend rigid distinctions between coloniser and colonised. This concept is particularly relevant to the cultural ambiguities and negotiations represented in the selected novels. Spivak's notion of the subaltern draws attention to the marginalisation of voices excluded from dominant structures of power and knowledge. Her work provides a valuable lens for examining issues of caste, class, gender, and social exclusion that recur throughout the novels. Fanon's analysis of colonial psychology illuminates the enduring effects of colonial domination on individual and collective consciousness. His insights into alienation, internalised inferiority, and resistance help explain the psychological dimensions of identity crises and social conflicts portrayed in postcolonial societies.

Together, these theoretical perspectives enable a multidimensional analysis of *The God of Small Things*, *The Inheritance of Loss* and *The White Tiger*. They provide a framework for analysing how the novels represent social exclusion, cultural displacement, and economic inequality while revealing the continuing influence of colonial structures in contemporary India.

IV. POSTCOLONIAL IDENTITY AND SOCIAL HIERARCHY IN *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* offers a powerful critique of caste, gender, and social exclusion in postcolonial India. Set in Kerala, the novel reveals how colonial legacies and entrenched social hierarchies continue

to shape individual lives despite political independence. Through the experiences of a Syrian Christian family, Roy exposes the persistence of inequality and the limitations of social mobility.

The character of Velutha, an untouchable carpenter, embodies the marginalisation of the subaltern. His relationship with Ammu challenges caste boundaries and ultimately leads to his tragic destruction. From a Spivakian perspective, Velutha represents a silenced voice whose humanity and agency are denied by dominant social structures. His fate illustrates how caste oppression remains deeply embedded in postcolonial society. Roy also explores cultural hybridity through her innovative use of language. By blending English with Malayalam expressions and local rhythms, she transforms the colonial language into a medium of indigenous expression. This linguistic experimentation reflects Bhabha's concept of hybridity and challenges the cultural authority of colonial discourse. The novel further portrays characters such as Chacko and Baby Kochamma as figures caught between Western influence and local traditions, revealing the complexities of postcolonial identity.

Gender constitutes another important dimension of the novel's critique. Ammu occupies a marginal position within both patriarchal and caste-based systems. Her relationship with Velutha defies social conventions and exposes the double oppression experienced by women in conservative societies. Through Ammu's struggles, Roy demonstrates how gender and caste intersect to restrict personal freedom and agency.

The novel's fragmented narrative structure reinforces its postcolonial vision. By moving between past and present, Roy challenges linear notions of history and foregrounds personal memories over official narratives. This emphasis on "small histories" recovers experiences often excluded from dominant accounts of the nation and reveals how historical trauma continues to shape contemporary realities. It can be argued that *The God of Small Things* presents postcolonial India as a contested space marked by caste discrimination, gender inequality, and cultural conflict. By foregrounding marginalised voices and exposing hidden structures of power, Roy challenges simplistic narratives of national progress and offers a profound exploration of identity, resistance, and social justice.

V. CULTURAL DISPLACEMENT, MIGRATION, AND HYBRIDITY IN *THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS*

Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) explores the cultural and psychological consequences of colonialism, migration, and globalisation in a rapidly changing world.

Set in Kalimpong against the backdrop of the Gorkhaland movement, the novel connects local struggles with transnational experiences, demonstrating how colonial legacies continue to shape identity and belonging beyond national boundaries. Through its diverse characters, Desai reveals the complexities of living between cultures and negotiating fractured identities in the postcolonial era.

The most striking representation of colonial influence is Jemubhai Patel, the retired judge. Educated in England during the colonial period, he internalises British values and develops a deep sense of alienation from his own culture. Despite experiencing racism and humiliation abroad, he comes to view himself through the eyes of the coloniser, illustrating Fanon's argument that colonialism leaves lasting psychological scars. His emotional detachment, self-loathing, and inability to form meaningful relationships reveal the destructive effects of internalised colonialism.

The theme of displacement is further developed through Biju, the cook's son, who migrates illegally to the United States in search of a better life. Instead of achieving prosperity, he encounters exploitation, insecurity, and cultural isolation. Constantly moving between low-paid jobs and fearing deportation, Biju occupies a marginal position within American society. His experiences challenge idealised notions of migration and expose the inequalities underlying global mobility. Through Biju, Desai suggests that globalisation often reproduces rather than eliminates historical patterns of exclusion and dependency.

Bhabha's concept of hybridity is central to understanding the novel's representation of identity. Characters frequently exist between cultures, unable to fully belong either to their homeland or to the societies they aspire to join. This condition creates both possibility and anxiety, highlighting the emotional costs of cultural negotiation. The setting of Kalimpong itself symbolises this hybridity. Situated at the crossroads of multiple cultures and histories, the town becomes a microcosm of the postcolonial condition, reflecting both diversity and fragmentation.

The Gorkhaland movement provides an important political backdrop that further complicates questions of identity and belonging. By foregrounding demands for recognition and autonomy, Desai challenges unified notions of national identity and reveals the internal tensions that persist within postcolonial India. The novel suggests that independence did not resolve all forms of marginalisation, as various communities continue to struggle for visibility and representation.

As a result *The Inheritance of Loss* portrays postcolonial identity as an ongoing process shaped by migration, cultural displacement, and historical memory. Through the

intertwined experiences of Jemubhai and Biju, Desai demonstrates that the legacy of colonialism extends beyond political independence into the realms of psychology, culture, and global mobility. The novel expands postcolonial inquiry beyond the nation-state and offers a compelling exploration of belonging, alienation, and hybridity in an increasingly interconnected world.

VI. CLASS OPPRESSION, SUBALTERN AGENCY, AND NEO-COLONIAL CAPITALISM IN *THE WHITE TIGER*

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* presents a powerful critique of class inequality, corruption, and economic exploitation in contemporary India. Unlike *The God of Small Things*, which focuses on caste oppression, and *The Inheritance of Loss*, which explores migration and cultural displacement, Adiga examines the impact of neoliberal capitalism and the persistence of social hierarchies in postcolonial India. Through the voice of Balram Halwai, the novel exposes the contradictions of a nation celebrated for rapid economic growth while large sections of its population remain marginalised.

Narrated through a series of letters to the Chinese Premier, Balram recounts his transformation from a poor village servant to a successful entrepreneur in Bangalore. His story functions not merely as a tale of individual success but as a critique of the social and economic structures that restrict mobility and opportunity. As a member of the underprivileged class, Balram represents the subaltern whose experiences are often excluded from dominant narratives of national progress. Yet, unlike passive victims of oppression, he asserts his agency by narrating his own story and challenging the silence imposed upon marginalised communities.

A central metaphor in the novel is the "Rooster Coop," which symbolises the system of fear and obedience that keeps the poor trapped in servitude. Balram argues that oppression survives because individuals internalise their subordinate status and accept inequality as inevitable. This idea reflects Fanon's analysis of psychological domination. Balram's eventual rebellion represents an attempt to break free from both social and mental constraints. However, Adiga complicates this act of resistance by showing that Balram gains freedom through morally questionable means, including the murder of his employer. The novel therefore raises important questions about the ethical costs of liberation within deeply unequal societies.

The novel also critiques neoliberal capitalism through the contrast between the "India of Light" and the "India of Darkness." The former represents urban centres of wealth, technology, and global connectivity, while the latter signifies rural poverty, corruption, and neglect. This

division highlights the unequal distribution of economic development in post-liberalisation India. Although globalisation has generated wealth and opportunity for some, its benefits remain inaccessible to many. Adiga thus challenges the assumption that economic growth automatically leads to social progress.

Neo-colonialism provides another important framework for understanding the novel. While colonial rule has ended, new forms of domination operate through global capitalism, consumer culture, and market-driven aspirations. The relationship between Ashok and Balram illustrates these inequalities. Despite Ashok's liberal appearance, his privileged lifestyle depends upon the labour and subordination of people like Balram. Their relationship exposes the persistence of hierarchical power structures beneath the rhetoric of modernity and development.

Corruption further reinforces these inequalities. Politicians, bureaucrats, and business elites manipulate institutions for personal gain, limiting opportunities for genuine social mobility. Adiga portrays corruption not as an exception but as a structural feature of contemporary society. Consequently, the novel questions whether political independence has fulfilled its promises of equality and justice.

The novel thus demonstrates that *The White Tiger* offers a compelling postcolonial critique of class oppression, economic inequality, and neo-colonial capitalism. Through Balram's rise from poverty to prosperity, Adiga exposes the contradictions of contemporary development and demonstrates that political freedom alone cannot eliminate exploitation. By foregrounding the experiences of the marginalised, the novel challenges dominant narratives of national success and reveals the continuing struggles over power, representation, and social justice in postcolonial India.

VII. COMPARATIVE DISCUSSION

A comparative reading of *The God of Small Things*, *The Inheritance of Loss*, and *The White Tiger* reveals both thematic continuity and significant differences in their representation of postcolonial India. Although each novel addresses distinct social realities, all three texts demonstrate that the end of colonial rule did not eliminate structures of inequality, exclusion, and domination. Rather, colonial legacies continue to shape contemporary experiences through caste hierarchies, cultural alienation, economic disparities, and global power relations.

One of the most important common concerns shared by the three novels is the question of identity. In *The God of Small Things*, identity is deeply influenced by caste, gender, and

social norms. Characters such as Ammu and Velutha struggle against rigid structures that define and restrict their social existence. In *The Inheritance of Loss*, identity emerges as a consequence of migration and cultural displacement. Jemubhai Patel and Biju experience profound uncertainty regarding their place within rapidly changing social and cultural environments. In *The White Tiger*, identity is closely linked to class and economic status, as Balram attempts to escape the social position assigned to him by birth. The novels also engage extensively with Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity. Roy's narrative language blends English and Malayalam expressions, creating a distinctly hybrid literary form. Desai explores hybridity through characters who exist between cultures and nations, neither fully belonging to India nor to the West. Adiga presents a different form of hybridity shaped by global capitalism, where traditional social structures coexist with modern economic aspirations. In each case, identity appears fluid, unstable, and continually negotiated rather than fixed or essential.

Another significant point of convergence is the critique of power. Roy examines the intersection of caste, patriarchy, and state authority. Desai focuses on the cultural and psychological consequences of colonialism and globalisation. Adiga exposes the exploitative mechanisms of contemporary capitalism and political corruption. Despite these differences, all three novels reveal how systems of power operate to marginalise particular groups while privileging others. The representation of the subaltern constitutes another important thematic connection. Velutha in *The God of Small Things*, Biju and the cook in *The Inheritance of Loss*, and Balram in *The White Tiger* occupy positions of social marginality. Their experiences expose the limitations of national narratives that celebrate progress while ignoring persistent inequalities. Through these characters, the novels foreground voices often excluded from dominant historical and political discourse.

The role of globalisation further distinguishes the texts while simultaneously connecting them. Roy presents globalisation as a continuation of unequal cultural and economic relationships. Desai emphasises its effects on migration, displacement, and cultural fragmentation. Adiga focuses on the widening gap between economic prosperity and social justice. Together, these perspectives suggest that globalisation often reproduces rather than eliminates historical inequalities. The three novels therefore offer complementary visions of postcolonial India. Roy foregrounds caste and gender oppression, Desai examines cultural displacement and migration, and Adiga critiques class exploitation and neoliberal capitalism. Collectively, they reveal the multidimensional nature of postcolonial

experience and demonstrate that colonial legacies continue to influence contemporary social realities.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This study has examined Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* through the lens of postcolonial theory. Drawing upon the theoretical contributions of Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Frantz Fanon, the analysis has demonstrated that these novels provide powerful critiques of the social, cultural, and economic structures that continue to shape postcolonial India.

The study reveals that postcolonial identity remains a site of ongoing negotiation. Colonial history continues to influence cultural perceptions, social hierarchies, and individual consciousness. In Roy's novel, caste oppression and gender discrimination expose the persistence of exclusionary structures despite political independence. Desai's work highlights the psychological and cultural consequences of migration and globalisation, revealing the complexities of belonging in a transnational world. Adiga's novel exposes the inequalities generated by neoliberal capitalism and questions celebratory narratives of economic development. The concept of hybridity emerges as a central theme across all three texts. Whether expressed through language, culture, migration, or economic transformation, hybridity reflects the dynamic and contested nature of postcolonial identity. At the same time, the novels demonstrate that hybridity is not always empowering; it frequently produces uncertainty, alienation, and conflict.

The study further shows that the voices of marginalised individuals remain crucial to understanding postcolonial realities. Through characters such as Velutha, Biju, and Balam, the novels challenge dominant narratives and foreground experiences frequently overlooked within official histories. Their stories reveal the persistence of structural inequalities rooted in both colonial and indigenous systems of power. Ultimately, *The God of Small Things*, *The Inheritance of Loss*, and *The White Tiger* demonstrate that postcolonialism is not merely a historical condition but an ongoing process shaped by the interaction of colonial memory, cultural transformation, and global modernity. These novels challenge simplistic notions of national progress and expose the contradictions underlying contemporary Indian society. By giving voice to the marginalised and interrogating established structures of power, they contribute significantly to the continuing project of postcolonial literary and cultural critique.

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Black and White on the Dance Floor of Paul Gilroy: A Study of Multiculturalism

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Abstract— Paul Gilroy's *Black and White on the Dance Floor* investigates the dance floor in the city as a site of Black diaspora cultures and their engagement with music and dance across societies. Music and dance are not simply entertainment, says Gilroy. They are significant political and cultural activities that create our sense of self, our capacity to resist oppression, and the ways we connect with one another. Dance halls, clubs and musical performances offer alternative social spaces for underprivileged groups to resist racial, cultural and national boundaries. The study focuses on six essential components of Gilroy's theory: urban culture and diaspora, subversion of racial hierarchy, the dance floor as a social alternative, philosophy of Blackness, cross-cultural communication, and community, politics and identity. The study draws on postcolonial and cultural studies theories, such as hybridity and diaspora theory, to illuminate Gilroy's concepts. Barack Obama and Toni Morrison are role models of the practices of multiculturalism, racial consciousness, and cultural memory in their lives and works. Music and culture in today's diverse communities are areas of resistance, solidarity and identity creation, which is part of the study's argument that Gilroy's concepts are useful in comprehending these groups.



Keywords— Black diaspora cultures, dance floor as social space, resistance to racial hierarchy, cross-cultural communication, community politics and identity

I. INTRODUCTION.

Paul Gilroy is an important theorist in the fields of cultural studies, postcolonial theory and Black Atlantic studies. Music and dance, Gilroy argues in his famous article *Black and White on the Dance Floor*, are political and cultural touchstones since they offer individuals pathways to self-expression, disobedience and community building. His focus is on the experience of Black diaspora communities in the contemporary metropolitan setting, where cultural interaction is fluid and influences on both relationships and self-image. Gilroy views the dance floor as a social and political arena where issues of race, class, nationality and cultural identity are performed and discussed, not merely a place of fun. His argument is based on the "Black Atlantic," Gilroy's idea of how Black identity is formed by transnational processes of migration, enslavement, colonialism, and cultural exchange. Black identity is transnational and transethnic in this perspective. Rather, it

emerges out of continual movement and contact across the Atlantic. Music genres like reggae, jazz, soul and hip-hop are examples of this continuation of knowledge and experience. These genres, while generating new artistic and political manifestations, also archive memories of displacement, oppression, and resistance. People of diverse races and cultures can bond through mutual struggles and creative manifestations in different musical forms, regardless of where people come from. This paper combines Gilroy's ideas with Bhabha's notion of hybridity, diaspora studies and postcolonial philosophy. Hybridity is the creation of new identities out of the mixing of people from different cultural backgrounds that do not fit neatly into one national or ethnic group. Gilroy's description of the dance floor is an example of this hybridity in the way that it produces an inclusive social space where diverse cultural traditions can survive and evolve. Song and dance provide a way for people to unite, dismantle class and gender boundaries, and challenge dominant cultural narratives. The

paper then compares the theories of Gilroy with those of Toni Morrison, Barack Obama et al. Obama is a multi-ethnic political identity that connects Americans across racial lines, whereas Morrison celebrates and memorialises Black history and culture. Their work in common suggests that Gilroy's concerns are not simply musical but also political, literary, and social. Gilroy's work demonstrates the ways in which culture informs people's identities and their potential for resisting oppression.

II. DIASPORA AND URBAN CULTURE

Gilroy argues that the realities of diaspora communities residing in contemporary urban settings are linked to music and dance. The word "diaspora" describes groups of individuals that have left their home nations because of political exile, economic migration, colonisation, or enslavement. In global cities like Paris, London and New York, music is a great tool for keeping one's identity when engaging with other cultures. Cultural crossroads are, according to Gilroy, nightclubs, dance halls, and symphony halls. Black music has a powerful effect on young culture around the world, because it appeals to feelings of displacement, suffering, rebellion and ambition. "Urban music venues provide migrants and marginalised communities with the opportunity to keep their cultural traditions alive and create hybrid identities." Migration and racial inequality shaped urban experiences that shaped reggae, hip-hop, jazz and soul music. Gilroy's thoughts can be understood through postcolonial diaspora theory. Diaspora identity is always in a state of flux, shaped by cultural contacts, not frozen. According to Stuart Hall, to be an individual is more of a journey rather than a point in time. Likewise, Gilroy illustrates how different metropolitan settings create cultural mixing and growth. The dance floor is a symbol of this process since it brings people together via common rhythm, movement and history.

Barack Obama's biography is an example of the development of a multicultural identity. Obama's father was Kenyan and his mother American, thus he was exposed to many different cultures. Obama's childhood in Hawaii, Indonesia, and the mainland United States made him personally and politically familiar with hybridity. His remarks often contained themes of multiculturalism and community belonging without discrimination based on race. Like Gilroy's dance floor, Obama's political program imagined society as a shared space for involvement, not fragmentation.

Toni Morrison's writings investigate Black culture in urban and diasporic spaces. In novels like *Jazz* and *Beloved*, Morrison explores the emotional problems African Americans have as they try to keep their identity in largely

white societies. Consistent with Gilroy's idea, music is used as a cultural language in Morrison's poetry that preserves memory and community. Morrison shows how diaspora cultures can imaginatively re-imagine themselves via the perspective of urban Black experience. Thus, via interaction, migration and resistance, Gilroy's concept of diaspora and urban culture throws light on how mixed groups create new forms of culture. Music and dance are crucial instruments for community building, flexibility and survival.

III. SUBVERTING SOCIAL AND RACIAL HIERARCHIES

"The dance floor breaks down existing racial, economic, and national hierarchies," adds Gilroy. Today in the globe, race can sometimes be part of unfairness and division. But when individuals are united by music, by increasing emotional bonds, then those social barriers break down on the dance floor. Music is, for Gilroy, a resistance to power. Black musical traditions have a historical grounding in the legacy of slavery, racism, segregation and colonial harshness. Dance and music are weapons of resistance of the oppressed against racism and social oppression. For a short time on the dance floor, all are equal. People might socialise freely without the encumbrance of their prior social rank; This issue is discussed via the perspective of cultural resistance theory. Antonio Gramsci's argument is that cultural hegemony is the way elite groups maintain power, not just politically but culturally. Gilroy suggests that black music shatters this monopoly, producing new cultural stories. Jazz, reggae and hip-hop are often battling racism, economic injustice and police violence. These musical styles are speaking for the underprivileged and against the current quo.

Barack Obama's political career is a fine example of this fight against racial dominance. As the first black president of the US, Obama was a symbol of the shattering of historic racial dominance structures. His presidency provided a promise for the future, even if we know that racism is still very much alive. Obama's use of music and cultural iconography associated with Blackness to connect with a range of communities is a testament to Gilroy's thesis of culture's capacity to cut past social barriers.

Toni Morrison also used writing to protest racist institutions. Her art exposes the psychological agony of racism, the dehumanisation of black people. Traditional history often ignores black voices and experiences, but Morrison makes sure they are given the attention they deserve. Morrison's literary cosmos, like Gilroy's dance floor, is a space for the performance and celebration of blackness. Gilroy contends that the dance floor can be

politically significant in that it allows people to imagine notions of equality that are not available in mainstream culture. Music is a potent democratic weapon against social injustice and racial discrimination.

IV. DANCE FLOOR AS AN ALTERNATIVE SOCIAL SPACE

Gilroy says the dance floor provides a “alternative social space” where the socially excluded can freely express themselves. For many young people especially those from marginalised areas, cultural genres such as music and dance offer an escape from mainstream culture. Independence, creativity and companionship thrive in such environments. In nightclubs and dance halls people gather to experiment with new methods of expressing themselves, via movement, language, style and identity. Gilroy says that these venues are highly significant since mainstream society frequently restricts minority expression through racist, nationalist or conservative social norms. Homi Bhabha’s concept of hybridity is a good example of this. Bhabha claims that at the crossing of different cultures “third spaces” are created and new identities are formed. Cultural engagement need not mean total absorption into the standards of the prevailing civilisation on Gilroy’s dance floor. People contesting the hard boundaries of race and nation construct diverse identities.

Barack Obama’s multicultural identity is one way in which different social spheres interface. Obama talked a lot about the sensation of being in many realities at once. He effectively handled the difficult terrain of Black identity, white American culture, and multiculturalism in the globe at large. In his political speeches, which reflected Gilroy’s idea of alternative social spaces where different cultures can interact with each other in a creative way, he pointed to the importance of inclusion and peaceful coexistence.

Toni Morrison also writes about alternative worlds of Black unity. Both *Paradise* and *Song of Solomon* are placed outside coercive social institutions, allowing the communities to keep their cultural identity and emotional resiliency. Morrison shows how excluded people create areas of belonging in the face of their exclusion from mainstream society.

Gilroy’s alternative social environment is, by definition, dualistic in a cultural and political sense. It opens up possibilities for marginalised groups to explore ways of living together that go beyond restrictive preconceptions.

V. METAPHYSICS OF BLACKNESS

Black identity is expressed through dance and music in ways that are cultural, spiritual and emotional and what

Gilroy calls the “metaphysics of blackness.” The rich musical fabric of African America is woven with themes of enslavement, migration, grief and perseverance. The interaction of performance and rhythm are the guardian of shared memory. According to Gilroy, racial or biological categories are not just what blackness is about. It is a product of political and historical experience, one formed by diaspora and the colonial legacy. Music is a very powerful medium for remembrance, across time and space, bringing together different generations. The principles of Afrocentric theory and the study of memory give important frameworks to investigate this issue. Communal memory is a repository of memories that official histories often exclude. Blues, jazz, reggae and spirituals are profoundly felt reflections of the historic struggles and the current resilience of the black experience. Music is a way to take sadness and make it into creativity and strength. Gilroy’s philosophical examination of Blackness has notable points of resonance with the work of Toni Morrison. *Beloved* addresses the complex psychological fallout of slavery on the black identity and the profound, haunting memories of the period. Morrison cultivates cultural memory through poetic language and disjointed narrative structure. She carries the embedded musical and dance traditions of black communities, telling the emotional story of those people.

Barack Obama’s remarks reveal a profound relation to history and the subtleties of Black political thought. Obama frequently invoked the struggles of prior generations and especially the civil rights movement. The public face suggests that the goals of a modern multicultural democracy are deeply intertwined with the history of resistance and the needs of the present moment. According to Gilroy, Blackness is a performance art, one that is deeply connected to cultural and historical settings. The arts are powerful engines of recollection and of overcoming hardship.

VI. FLOOR AS MEDIUM FOR INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

“Music and dance is a universal form of communication, no matter what your cultural background is,” Gilroy says. Music and dance forms such as Reggae, jazz, hip-hop and soul have an incredible potential to cross over their initial audiences, touching universal feelings and beats. The dance floor is the natural place for the cultural interaction. No matter what language someone speaks or what country they come from, it is still possible to find common ground and express one’s feelings and views in music. In a multicultural society, Gilroy says, cultural activity creates dialogue and understanding. This notion is in line with the principles of intercultural communication. Words are not more important in the creation of meaning in communication than signs,

sounds and performances. Therefore, music serves as a worldwide language that helps to comprehend and accept beyond geographical borders.

Obama's campaign speeches were woven with a rich tapestry of multicultural conversation. He interacted with a lot of people and emphasised the need for unity between people of different races and cultures. Obama's worldwide resonance shows that national boundaries do not stop the transmission of cultural symbols and the expression of emotion. Toni Morrison uses literature as a vehicle for cross-cultural understanding. Her stories focus on the Black experience, but the overriding themes of compassion, memory, and sadness speak to readers of all backgrounds. Morrison's gift for storytelling has an incredible capacity to overcome cultural differences and build a profound sense of empathy.

In the words of Gilroy, governmental institutions find it hard to establish the same kinds of emotional bonds between people that heterogeneous communities do through music and dance. Music is a great medium of cultural interchange, which helps people from different groups to understand and appreciate each other.

VII. IDENTITY, POLITICS, AND COMMUNITY

Music and dance are at the heart of the journey of self-discovery, Gilroy says. For many people, music is a means of expressing their feelings, social experiences and political views. Dance traditions are sources of resilience for diaspora populations living under restrictive nationalisms, but they also generate a feeling of collective identity among them. Because the dance floor is political, it foregrounds issues of cultural exclusion, racism and xenophobia. Music becomes a voice for the marginalised, a way to express themselves, and a sense of belonging. Being involved in community activities nurtures a deep feeling of connection to wider social movements and common cultural heritage. The idea is a constant one in identity politics theory. The relationship between individual experience and communal problems has a vital influence in the development of a person's identity. The emotional power of music can dramatically raise people's awareness of political and social issues. Barack Obama's political identity is symptomatic of the diverse ways in which societies negotiate the complications of representation and belonging. Obama was a deep representation of Blackness and the broader ideals of democracy. In line with Gilroy's conviction in cultural unification, his advertising generally contained themes of hope, collaborative work, and social harmony. The tension between personal identification and community membership is a common theme in the work of Toni Morrison. Her writings show the Black communities

fighting against racism, and holding on to their collective dignity. Morrison says a community's ability to share stories, remember its past and express its culture is the core of its resilience. Gilroy contends that this proves an inherent bias in the arts. They therefore influence how people see themselves and their position in the social structure. The dance floor is where fellowship, government and personal expression meet.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Paul Gilroy's *Black and White on the Dance Floor* offers a critical perspective on contemporary social problems, including multiculturalism, diaspora identity, and cultural resistance. As Gilroy says: "Music and dance are social and political practices that contest racial hierarchy, preserve cultural memory and help new forms of community to emerge." This goes beyond the bounds of mere enjoyment. Music is a powerful tool in the fight for a multicultural urban identity by fusing diaspora and urban cultures. The dance floor provides a place for community participation and emotional bonding, helping to bridge racial and social divisions. It offers a unique social space and allows those on the margins to articulate themselves in ways they might not elsewhere. Gilroy's theory of blackness examines the various ways in which Black music supports collective resistance and preserves historical memory. Gilroy's thoughts clearly continue to resonate in the experiences of Toni Morrison and Barack Obama. Morrison uses literature to preserve the memory and identity of black culture, whereas Obama represents a multiracial political identity and the possibility of overcoming racial divisions. The facts presented show the relationship of culture to politics, identity and community development. The current scene with its racial strife, multiculturalism and migration makes Gilroy's argument more and more pertinent. Performing arts continue to be vital spaces for intercultural dialogue, subversion and unity. The dance floor is not just a site of unrestrained expression and cultural celebration; it is also a symbol of aspirations for an improved society and a source of deep community.

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Translation Errors and Post-editing Strategies in ChatGPT-assisted Translation of Chinese Political Texts: A Case Study of *The Report on China's Right to Development*

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Abstract— Large language models are increasingly being incorporated into translation workflows, yet their performance in politically sensitive texts remains underexplored. Political discourse poses particular challenges for machine translation because it relies heavily on specialized terminology, ideological meanings, and context-dependent expressions. Drawing on Chapter Three of *The Report on China's Right to Development*, this paper examines translation errors in ChatGPT-generated output through a comparison with revised human translations. The analysis identifies three recurring problem areas: unnatural linguistic choices, weak information organization, and non-standard rendering of political terms. These problems are traced to limitations in probabilistic text generation, insufficient domain-specific knowledge, and incomplete contextual interpretation. To address them, three post-editing strategies are proposed: register adjustment, structural reorganization, and terminology standardization. The findings suggest that while ChatGPT is capable of producing fluent drafts, high-quality translation of political texts still depends on human expertise. The study highlights the continuing importance of post-editing in ensuring linguistic accuracy, conceptual precision, and discourse appropriateness in AI-assisted political translation.



Keywords— ChatGPT, machine translation, political text translation, post-editing, translation errors

I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of artificial intelligence has significantly transformed translation practices. Among recent advancements, large language models such as ChatGPT have demonstrated strong capabilities in generating fluent multilingual output. However, despite improvements in fluency, concerns remain regarding their performance in specialized discourse domains, particularly political texts characterized by ideological specificity and institutionalized terminology.

Chinese political discourse presents unique challenges for machine translation due to its abstract conceptual structures and culturally embedded expressions. While

neural machine translation systems have improved lexical and syntactic processing, their ability to handle pragmatic meaning and discourse-level coherence remains limited.

Against this background, this study aims to examine translation errors in ChatGPT-generated translations of Chinese political texts and explore corresponding post-editing strategies.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Machine translation quality has been widely studied from both statistical and neural perspectives. Early evaluation methods mainly relied on automatic metrics such as BLEU

to measure translation quality (Papineni et al., 2002; Koehn, 2009). With the development of neural machine translation, research focus has gradually shifted from purely lexical similarity toward fluency, contextual modeling, and overall translation adequacy (Bahdanau et al., 2015; Toral & Sánchez-Cartagena, 2017). Recent studies further highlight that neural-based systems tend to produce more fluent outputs but still face challenges in maintaining semantic and discourse-level consistency.

Studies on neural machine translation suggest that although fluency has improved significantly, issues such as mistranslation, omission, and unnatural expression persist (Castilho et al., 2017). Post-editing research further indicates that machine translation errors impose varying cognitive loads on translators, particularly when structural reformulation is required (Koponen, 2016; Moorkens, 2018).

Recent studies have begun to examine large language models in translation tasks. Research has shown that while ChatGPT performs well in general translation tasks, its performance in domain-specific translation can be further improved through appropriate prompting and domain-specific guidance (Peng et al., 2023; Huang & Zhao, 2026). However, relatively few studies have systematically examined ChatGPT-assisted translation of Chinese political discourse, leaving room for further research in this area..

III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative corpus-based approach. The research corpus is Chapter Three of the Report on China's Right to Development, which is representative of Chinese political discourse with dense terminology and abstract conceptual structures.

The analysis is conducted through a three-text comparison framework involving:

- Source Text (ST)
- ChatGPT-generated Translation (MT)
- Revised Human Translation (HT)

Instances of divergence between MT and HT were identified through close reading and categorized into three types: unnatural expressions, information structure imbalance, and terminological deviation.

IV. TRANSLATION ERRORS AND THEIR POST-EDITING STRATEGIES

4.1 Unnatural Expressions

Source Text (ST):

20 世纪 70 年代, 在全球性问题的加剧以及“能源危机”的冲击下, 人们的环境意识如大梦觉醒, 各种环保组织和人士将环境问题的严峻性揭示给公众和国际社会, 有关“增长的极限”开始在世界范围内展开, 并掀起了环保运动的浪潮。

ChatGPT Output (MT):

In the 1970s, driven by the intensification of global issues and the shock of the “energy crisis,” environmental awareness suddenly awakened among people.

Revised Translation (HT):

In the 1970s, against the backdrop of growing global challenges and the impact of the “energy crisis,” public awareness of environmental issues began to rise.

Although the machine-generated translation successfully conveys the basic meaning of the source text, it exhibits a lack of naturalness in target-language expression. The phrase “environmental awareness suddenly awakened” is a literal rendering of the metaphor “如大梦觉醒,” which leads to an unnatural collocation in English.

While the verb awaken is grammatically acceptable, it is rarely used with abstract nouns such as awareness in this semantic configuration. In English, collocations such as raise awareness, increase awareness, or develop awareness are more conventional. The machine translation therefore reflects a direct mapping of source-language metaphorical structure without sufficient adaptation to target-language usage norms.

In addition, the metaphor “如大梦觉醒” functions rhetorically in Chinese political discourse to emphasize a sudden collective realization. However, English academic and policy-oriented discourse tends to favor neutral and non-personified expressions. The machine translation retains the metaphorical structure but fails to adjust its stylistic realization, resulting in a text that appears stylistically marked and less idiomatic.

By contrast, the revised translation replaces the metaphorical expression with the collocation “public awareness... began to rise,” which preserves the semantic content while aligning with conventional English usage in academic and policy contexts.

4.2 Information Structure Imbalance

Source Text (ST):

生态发展权是新时期发展权的一项子权利, 是在遵循人与社会三者和谐发展规律的基础上, 获得物质与精神成果的权利。

ChatGPT Output (MT):

Ecological development rights are a sub-right of development rights in the new era. Based on the principles of harmonious development among humanity, nature, and society, it refers to the right to obtain both material and spiritual achievements.

Revised Translation (HT):

The right to ecological development, a component of the right to development in the new era, refers to the right to obtain both material prosperity and spiritual enrichment based on the harmonious development of humanity, nature, and society.

The machine translation divides the original sentence into two independent clauses, reflecting a tendency to segment Chinese syntactic structures into shorter English sentences. While this strategy improves readability at a superficial level, it disrupts the logical hierarchy of the definition.

In the source text, the sentence functions as a unified conceptual definition. However, the machine output separates background information from the definitional core, weakening syntactic cohesion. As a result, the conceptual relationship between "sub-right status" and "definition of ecological development rights" becomes less integrated.

The revised translation restructures the sentence into a single complex sentence. The phrase "a component of the right to development in the new era" is embedded as an appositive, allowing the main subject "the right to ecological development" to remain syntactically and semantically central. This structure better reflects English academic conventions, which prioritize hierarchical integration of information.

4.3 Terminological Deviation

Source Text (ST):

中国虽然在经济发展上取得了巨大的成就，但贫富差距，城乡差距不断拉大，区域发展不平衡日益严重。基于这一发展现状，"五位一体"发展权要求在政治、经济、文化、社会、生态等领域向弱势群体进行倾斜保护。

ChatGPT Output (MT):

Although China has achieved remarkable economic success, the wealth gap, urban-rural disparity, and regional development imbalance are continuously widening. Based on this development reality, the "five-in-one" development rights framework requires inclined protection of vulnerable groups in the political, economic, cultural, social, and ecological domains.

Revised Translation (HT):

Although China has made significant progress in economic development, the gap between the rich and the poor, urban-rural disparities, and regional imbalances continue to widen. In response, the "Five-Sphere Integrated Plan" for the right to development calls for preferential protection of vulnerable groups across the political, economic, cultural, social, and ecological domains.

The term "五位一体" is a highly institutionalized concept in Chinese political discourse and is conventionally translated as "Five-Sphere Integrated Plan." The machine translation "five-in-one" represents a literal word-for-word rendering that fails to activate its established political equivalence in English discourse. As a result, the expression lacks interpretive clarity for international readers unfamiliar with the Chinese political terminology system.

Similarly, the phrase "倾斜保护" is translated as "inclined protection," which reflects a direct lexical transfer without consideration of semantic convention in English policy discourse. The term inclined in English primarily refers to physical orientation or personal tendency and is not conventionally used to describe policy-based preferential treatment. The revised translation adopts "preferential protection," which is widely used in political and policy contexts and thus ensures terminological accuracy and communicative adequacy.

4.4 Summary

Overall, the main issues in ChatGPT-generated translations of political texts are not limited to basic semantic transfer, but are more prominently reflected in stylistic naturalness, discourse organization, and terminological standardization. These findings indicate that as machine translation systems improve in fluency, their limitations shift from sentence-level translatability to discourse-level adequacy. Consequently, post-editing remains an indispensable stage in political text translation, particularly in ensuring stylistic appropriateness, conceptual precision, and terminological consistency.

V. CAUSES of TRANSLATION ERRORS AND POST-EDITING STRATEGIES

The analysis of machine-translated outputs shows that the identified errors are not random but follow systematic patterns. Based on both the corpus data and relevant literature, the causes of translation errors in ChatGPT-generated political texts can be explained from three perspectives: the language generation mechanism, the role of training data, and limitations in contextual understanding.

5.1 Limitations of the Language Generation Mechanism

Neural machine translation systems are primarily trained on large-scale corpora and rely on probabilistic prediction of target-language sequences based on contextual probability distributions. As a result, the generated output tends to favor expressions with higher statistical frequency rather than those that are pragmatically or stylistically optimal.

Castilho et al. (2017), in a comparative study of neural machine translation (NMT) and phrase-based statistical machine translation (PBSMT), found that NMT significantly improves fluency and readability, with fewer word order and morphological errors. However, issues such as mistranslation, omission, and unnatural expression remain persistent. The study further highlights that different language pairs exhibit different error profiles, and that word order errors, mistranslations, and structural imbalance continue to impose significant challenges for post-editing quality.

Moreover, previous research indicates that different types of MT errors impose varying cognitive loads on post-editors. Compared with surface-level edits such as lexical substitution or minor adjustments, structural reformulation, mistranslation correction, and idiomatic adaptation require substantially higher cognitive effort (Koponen, 2016). Importantly, even seemingly acceptable outputs may conceal deeper pragmatic or structural issues, which increases the complexity of post-editing tasks.

This pattern is evident in the present corpus. For instance, “人们的环境意识如大梦觉醒” is translated as “environmental awareness suddenly awakened.” Although the meaning is broadly preserved, the collocation is unnatural in English usage. The verb awaken is rarely used with abstract nouns such as awareness, making the expression stylistically marked and syntactically rigid.

This reflects a reliance on statistical co-occurrence patterns rather than constraints of natural collocation in the target language, leading to what may be described as “semantically accurate but pragmatically distorted” translation.

In response to such issues, post-editing should prioritize register adjustment and collocational refinement. Expressions such as awareness awakened should be revised into more conventional forms such as awareness increased or awareness began to grow, thereby improving target-language naturalness and acceptability.

5.2 Corpus-driven Terminological Deviations

The quality of machine translation output is heavily dependent on its training data. However, political discourse contains highly institutionalized terms with fixed

ideological and policy meanings, which are often underrepresented or inconsistently represented in general corpora.

Recent studies show that although neural machine translation systems have achieved substantial improvements in fluency, they still struggle with terminological consistency in specialized domains, particularly when domain adaptation is limited (Dinu et al., 2019). Such issues are not always “errors” in a strict sense, but rather non-standard expressions that are interpretable yet not conventionally acceptable.

In the present data, the term “五位一体” is translated as “five-in-one,” which illustrates this problem. While the expression is semantically transparent, it fails to reflect its institutionalized meaning within Chinese political discourse. Instead of adopting the established equivalent, the system resorts to a literal compositional strategy.

This indicates that, in the absence of domain-specific constraints, machine translation systems tend to prioritize surface form equivalence over terminological standardization, resulting in outputs that are understandable but not norm-compliant.

Therefore, post-editing should focus on terminology alignment. Translators should consult authoritative sources such as official government documents and bilingual policy texts to ensure consistency. For instance, five-in-one should be revised as The Five-Sphere Integrated Plan, and inclined protection should be replaced by preferential protection. Such standardization significantly improves both professional quality and discursive authority.

5.3 Lack of Contextual Understanding

Another major source of translation errors lies in insufficient contextual modeling. Political texts are deeply embedded in specific policy frameworks and discourse systems. Their meaning is constructed not only at the lexical level but also through pragmatic intent and discourse function.

Previous studies suggest that while neural machine translation systems have improved sentence-level semantic processing, they remain limited in handling pragmatic meaning and contextual inference (Toral et al., 2018). In particular, when dealing with abstract concepts or implicit logical relations, models tend to perform surface-level lexical substitution rather than context-sensitive interpretation.

For example, “倾斜保护” is translated as inclined protection. Although lexically aligned, the term inclined in English typically refers to physical orientation or personal

tendency, and does not convey the policy meaning of preferential resource allocation. This results in a pragmatic shift rather than a purely lexical error.

It is important to distinguish this type of error from terminological deviation discussed in Section 4.2. The issue here is not the absence of a standardized equivalent, but the failure to extend meaning based on contextual constraints, leading to what can be described as “lexically correct but pragmatically inadequate” translation.

This limitation is also evident in long and complex sentences. In definitions such as that of “ecological development rights”, machine translation often segments sentences to reduce processing difficulty. However, such segmentation weakens logical cohesion and disrupts the hierarchical structure of information.

To address this issue, post-editing should emphasize structural reconstruction. Translators need to identify core and subordinate information and reorganize them using subordination, embedding, or nominalization strategies, thereby restoring textual coherence and discourse hierarchy.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study examined translation errors in ChatGPT-generated translations of Chinese political texts, based on Chapter Three of The Report on China's Right to Development. Three main types of errors were identified: unnatural expressions, information structure imbalance, and terminological deviation.

The findings show that ChatGPT can generally convey the basic meaning of the source text with fluent output. However, problems arise at the level of stylistic naturalness, discourse organization, and terminological accuracy, especially in context-dependent political discourse.

These errors suggest that the limitations of large language models are no longer mainly related to basic comprehension, but to discourse-level and pragmatic adequacy. Machine translation may be fluent, but not always appropriate for political communication.

Therefore, post-editing remains essential. It functions not only as error correction, but also as a process of refining style, restoring structure, and ensuring terminological consistency in AI-assisted translation.

Future research may expand the dataset and apply quantitative methods to further validate these findings.

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Review of Global Parent-Child Reading Research

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Abstract— Parent-child shared reading serves as a core approach to early family education, spanning multiple research fields including pedagogy, library science and child developmental psychology. Drawing on literature from the Web of Science database, this paper systematically sorts out existing studies along two dimensions: the developmental effects of parent-child reading and global parent-child reading promotion programs. Empirical studies have verified that parent-child shared reading can remarkably enhance the linguistic, literacy and cognitive abilities of typical children, low-income children and autistic children with special needs. Reading duration, parental involvement and family cultural attainment act as key influencing variables. Internationally, sophisticated collaborative promotion models involving libraries, medical institutions and charitable organizations have taken shape, with representative initiatives such as Britain's Bookstart, Australia's Better Beginnings, and America's ECRR and ROR. These programs effectively improve household reading environments and increase the frequency of shared reading, yet they confront practical obstacles during implementation, such as disparate willingness to carry out programs among different practitioners.



Keywords— Early education, Early literacy, Family reading, Parent-child reading, Reading promotion

I. INTRODUCTION

Reading lays the foundation for the development of children's lifelong learning competencies. As a vital vehicle of early family education, parent-child shared reading for young children delivers multiple values including linguistic enlightenment, cultivation of reading habits, and maintenance of intimate parent-child bonds, and has long remained a core research focus at the interdisciplinary intersection of pedagogy, library science, and child developmental psychology. Existing literature on parent-child reading is fragmented yet broadly categorized into two strands: research on the developmental effects of parent-child reading, and research on parent-child reading promotion initiatives. Against this backdrop, the present

paper systematically screens literature from the Web of Science database to review and analyze the current state of relevant studies on parent-child reading.

II. REVIEW OF EXISTING RESEARCH

Existing relevant studies fall into two categories: research on family-involved parent-child reading, and research on family-participated parent-child reading promotion programs. On the one hand, studies concerning family-involved parent-child reading mainly focus on parental impacts on children's growth and development as well as optimization strategies. Empirical evidence confirms that parent-child reading facilitates children's linguistic competence, reading habit formation and mental

health, while parental engagement level and educational attainment exert critical effects on reading outcomes. On the other hand, research on family-participated reading promotion projects centers on the effectiveness, operational models and optimization measures of reading outreach. Such research covers a wide range of organizations, including public libraries, library associations, charitable institutions and medical and health agencies.

(1) Review of Research on the Effects of Parent-Child Reading

Parent-child reading exerts positive effects on children's reading proficiency, expressive competence, character recognition and writing skills. Such benefits are universal: they apply not only to children from middle-class families, but also significantly boost vocabulary and literacy development among children from low-income households and those with reading difficulties.

Dowdall (2020) conducted a meta-analysis of 19 randomized controlled trials and verified that shared picture book reading with parents positively improves children's reading and expressive abilities in early childhood, with such benefits closely correlated to reading duration. Findings indicate that daily shared reading exceeding 60 minutes yields the most prominent promotion of children's linguistic development. Lorio (2022) pointed out that joint parent-child reading fosters character acquisition in early education. Pecukonis (2025) studied autistic preschoolers and found that despite inherent reading difficulties, active parental involvement still generates positive progress in their language proficiency.

Bracken (2008) performed a follow-up survey of 233 low-income families. Multiple regression analysis identified parent-child reading as a prominent predictor of children's receptive vocabulary and literacy growth, demonstrating its favorable role in early character learning. Sénéchal (2002) carried out a five-year longitudinal study of 168 children from middle-class families, proving that parental reading involvement advances children's word-writing and reading capabilities.

Kumar (2016) implemented a randomized controlled trial tracking 30 adolescent mothers with infants aged 6 to 20 months at an adolescent clinic in downtown Toronto.

During three successive pediatric checkups, intervention families received new children's books, age-tailored reading guidance, librarian consultation access and public library cards, whereas control families received standard medical care. Bivariate analysis revealed that mothers in the intervention group were far more likely to cultivate reading as one of their children's favorite activities.

Family engagement is directly linked to the efficacy of children's reading promotion. Chen (2016) interviewed 200 parents of infants aged 6 to 18 months at a pediatric clinic, discovering that parents who visited public libraries and knew about children's reading programs maintained higher frequencies of shared reading compared with others.

(2) Review of Research on Parent-Child Reading Promotion Programs

Launched by BookTrust, Bookstart is the world's first national free book-gifting reading promotion program for infants and toddlers. Its pilot rolled out in Birmingham in 1992. It aims to foster children's lifelong reading interest from birth and boost their early linguistic and emotional development. At present, it covers over 90% of newborns in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, benefiting approximately 1.4 million children annually. Hall (2001) explored how early reading intervention via Bookstart shapes infants' linguistic development and confirmed that Bookstart motivates parents to engage in active verbal interaction with their babies. Controlled experiments revealed that children without Bookstart intervention lag behind their peers receiving the program in language development. Wade (1998) conducted a controlled trial on first-year school pupils and found that children who received Bookstart book packs achieved better performance in numeracy and literacy.

Better Beginnings is a statewide family literacy program developed and administered by the State Library of Western Australia. It empowers parents to act as their children's first teachers and builds solid learning foundations for all children in Western Australia through early reading and verbal interaction. Initiated in 2004, the program has run for more than 20 years and serves over 80,000 families each year across all local government areas of Western Australia. Barratt-Pugh (2011) conducted a follow-up evaluation of typical communities in Western

Australia from 2004 to 2010. The results demonstrated remarkable improvements in parent-child reading participation rates, reading quality and family literacy environments, alongside substantial growth in children's reading interest, parents' reading proficiency and library membership registrations. A survey indicated that 51% of mothers did not read with their infants before the program, while the figure dropped after implementation, with 85% of mothers engaging in shared reading and 67% maintaining daily regular sessions (compared with merely 23% pre-program). Meanwhile, the average household book collection rose from 15–20 volumes to 49, and 44% of families with no age-appropriate books built their first home book collections. Allen (2009) noted that Better Beginnings cultivated a stronger reading atmosphere at home; surveys showed that reading activities for young children could raise older siblings' reading frequency, forming an intergenerational spillover effect.

Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR) is a national early reading promotion program jointly launched by the Public Library Association (PLA) and the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC). It empowers caregivers through libraries, supplies reading resources for families, builds reading readiness for children aged 0–5, and lays groundwork for lifelong learning. More than 6,000 libraries across the United States have adopted ECRR toolkits to deliver the program. ECRR drives libraries to proactively encourage parental participation in shared reading, facilitating children's development of early literacy, print awareness, narrative skills, phonological awareness and vocabulary. ALSC researchers argued that ECRR marks a fundamental shift in library children's services: librarians previously focused solely on children rather than caregiver education, yet family involvement facilitated by ECRR generates greater impacts on early literacy acquisition.

Reach Out and Read (ROR) is a nationwide early childhood literacy promotion initiative established in 1989, the only pediatric literacy model officially endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). During routine pediatric check-ups, clinicians provide age-customized reading advice for parents, distribute free children's books after consultations, and follow up on family reading practices at subsequent visits with further guidance. ROR

posits that the first three years of life constitute a critical window for rapid brain growth and language formation. As children's primary mentors, parents exert profound influences on their cognitive, social and emotional development. The program encourages daily parent-child reading as a fixed family ritual to strengthen parent-child bonds and cultivate reading enthusiasm. Sharif (2002) surveyed 200 families across two healthcare centers and found that children participating in ROR exhibited stronger receptive vocabulary. Needlman (2005) investigated 1,647 children aged 6 to 72 months from 19 medical centers across 10 U.S. states, including 730 intervention families receiving ROR and 917 control families. After controlling for multiple confounding variables, the study found that families engaging in regular shared reading via ROR boosted children's literacy and numeracy skills, with a 1.5-fold higher likelihood of bedtime reading and picture book purchases compared with the control group. Kumar (2016) further discovered additional benefits of ROR: it increases shared reading volume and advances children's linguistic development while alleviating maternal postpartum depression. The study tracked 30 adolescent mothers within one year of childbirth in downtown Toronto and verified that ROR boosted maternal fondness for reading and mitigated depressive symptoms after delivery.

Children from low-income households are more prone to delays in linguistic and literacy development at school entry and throughout life compared with their more affluent peers. Thanks to its low-cost and public welfare attributes, ROR has secured bipartisan financial support from the U.S. Congress, ensuring low-income families can access its benefits. Nevertheless, existing research identifies obstacles to nationwide ROR rollout. Stone's research revealed divergent attitudes among medical staff during program implementation: physicians with personal shared reading experience or experience treating children who benefited from ROR actively recommend the program to families, whereas overloaded nurses and medical assistants prioritize short-term costs and display low willingness to carry out the initiative.

III. CONCLUSIONS

(1) research outcomes

Overall, academia has accumulated systematic research concerning family-engaged shared reading and its corresponding outreach programs. Prior scholarship empirically corroborates that family engagement exerts salutary effects on children's linguistic proficiency, reading habit formation, cognitive maturation and psychological wellness. Furthermore, diversified intervention programs have generated implementable operational frameworks for shared reading practices, delivering substantial theoretical and practical implications for advancing parent-child reading undertakings and optimizing the public cultural service system.

Extant literature exhibits three salient attributes: robust empirical underpinnings, multi-faceted analytical dimensions, and sophisticated outreach governance models. Concerning foundational research on family-participated shared reading, scholarly inquiries prioritize effect validation and determinant decomposition with strong applied value. First, research samples encompass heterogeneous cohorts, covering children from middle-class households, socioeconomically disadvantaged families, and neurodivergent preschoolers with autism spectrum conditions, thereby substantiating the generalizability of the developmental benefits yielded by shared reading. Second, quantitative methodologies predominate empirical investigations. Rigorous analytical paradigms, including randomized controlled trials, longitudinal cohort studies and multiple regression models, are deployed to quantitatively calibrate the marginal impacts of core covariates, namely daily shared reading duration, parental involvement intensity and familial educational capital. Third, granular, actionable research outputs furnish explicit operational guidelines for frontline shared reading implementation.

With respect to program-centric research, integrated multi-stakeholder collaborative mechanisms have been established, with extensive participation from public libraries, philanthropic foundations and healthcare institutions. Flagship international initiatives include the UK's Bookstart, the U.S. Reach Out and Read (ROR), and Australia's Better Beginnings. These schemes significantly elevate the participation frequency and quality of parent-child reading. In parallel, researchers conduct long-term outcome monitoring and critical reflective

evaluation of program limitations. While empirical evidence attests to the programs' facilitative roles in children's literacy acquisition and household reading ecology, extant studies also pinpoint tangible implementation obstacles, notably disparate implementation motivation across occupational groups.

(2) Research Prospects

Looking ahead, future research can expand in three directions. First, scholars should carry out cross-national comparative research and localized empirical investigations to enrich theoretical explanations adaptable to diverse cultural and family structures. Second, long-term longitudinal follow-up research should be strengthened to capture the long-run cumulative effects of early shared reading on adolescents' academic performance and social adaptation. Third, an integrated research paradigm combining micro-family behavior analysis and macro institutional promotion evaluation should be built, to optimize multi-agency collaborative intervention strategies and narrow the literacy development gap between disadvantaged and advantaged children. Meanwhile, more heterogeneous special groups ought to be included in research samples, so as to develop inclusive, targeted parent-child reading promotion solutions for all types of families.

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“A Landscape Scorched and Terrorised”: Counter Memory and German Colonial Violence in Abdulrazak Gurnah’s *Afterlives*

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Abstract— Dominant groups have often written official histories to justify their power. Those in power shape versions of the past that silence local voices and marginalize their lived experience. In this sense, the act of memory brings counter-perspectives that challenge the hegemonic ideology. Michael Foucault’s concept of counter-memory describes an oppositional engagement with the past. It opposes the official version of historical continuity. However, it does not reject history but reconstruct it by looking from alternative perspectives. In *Afterlives* (2020), Abdulrazak Gurnah provides a counter-hegemonic account of the East African history. The novel restores the silenced lives of individuals and communities subjected to German colonial violence. Through the intersecting lives of Khalifa, Hamza, Afiya, and Ilyas, the novel shows the brutality, displacement, and trauma caused by German rule in Tanganyika. The story focuses on ordinary people and their survival amid suffering. In this way, the novel resists colonial representations. Through a close textual analysis of the novel, this paper argues that Gurnah presents counter-memory both a narrative practice and an ethical act. Ultimately, it becomes a refusal on behalf of the dead and the dispossessed to let their histories disappear.



Keywords— counter-memory, displacement, colonial violence, historical memory, identity, storytelling, trauma.

Introduction: The Scorched Landscape as Mnemonic Site

In one of the most striking passages of Abdulrazak Gurnah’s *Afterlives* (2020), the narrator describes the German *Schutztruppe*’s brutal retaliation during the Maji Maji Rebellion, “burned villages and trampled fields and plundered food stores. African bodies were left hanging on roadside gibbets in a landscape that was scorched and terrorised.” (Gurnah 15). The violence described in these lines is more than physical destruction. Colonial warfare destroyed communities and also the traces of their existence. These acts of destruction are considered by scholars to be part of a broader pattern of Germany’s “colonial amnesia” (Perraudin and Zimmerer 1). The memories of colonial violence mostly survived outside the

histories that Germany chose to remember. *Afterlives* intervenes in this collective forgetting and revisits the German colonial domination in East Africa. The novel brings into focus the personal narratives of characters who endured these historical turmoils. Through their lives, history emerges as a terrain of struggle, loss, and remembrance.

Afterlives is a historical fiction by the 2021 Nobel prize-winning author Abdulrazak Gurnah. It was first published by Bloomsbury in 2020. The novel was later shortlisted for the Orwell prize for political fiction. It is set primarily in German East Africa (present-day Tanzania). The narrative spans from the early years of twentieth century to the period following independence. The novel

follows life experiences of characters caught between violent war, displacement and consequences of European colonialism via interwoven narratives. It centres on characters such as Hamza, a former askari in the German colonial army; his wife Afiya, who survived childhood filled with displacement and exploitation due to war; her brother Ilyas, whose disappearance during military recruitment casts a long shadow over the lives of people around him; and Khalifa, a clerk of Gujrati-african descent who binds disparate lives of all characters. Through these characters Gurnah constructs a counter-memorial archive. The title itself signifies that the afterlives shown in the novel are not triumphant survivals but scarred and partial continuation that bear marks of loss.

This paper reads *Afterlives* through Michel Foucault's concept of counter-memory. It emerges as a broader critique of history as a discourse aligned with power. Foucault contends that traditional historiography presents the past as a singular and continuous narrative. Thereby, it naturalizes present power relations which silence those on the margins. Against this, Foucault proposes a genealogical approach that reveals discontinuities, ruptures and buried histories. It asserts that the past is always a contested terrain. As Foucault argues, "history is only possible against the backdrop of the absence of history, in the midst of great space of murmuring, that silence watches like its vocation and its truth" (*History of Sexuality*, xxxi). Counter-memory breaks into this silence. Taking Foucault's insights further, George Lipsitz defines counter-memory as work that "looks to the past for the hidden histories excluded from dominant narrative" (162). In the process, it represents the past and simultaneously transform present's relation to the past.

The relevance of this framework is important in the context of German colonialism. Jürgen Zimmerer has traced the ways in which Germany's colonial history has been systematically forgotten. He argues that this history has been neglected through an ideological operation. He observes, "the knowledge about Germany's colonial past had been forgotten, had been ignored" This process manoeuvres German memory toward the Nazi period and to look away from the horrors of Deutsch-Ostafrika (Zimmerer 00:30-00:37). Scholars describe this development as an *erinnerungspolitisches* Instrument. It is an instrument of the politics of remembrance in which the colonial past has been pushed into the background of the national identity of Germany. This amnesia is maintained by the continuous production of knowledge that positions German colonialism as a predominantly white domain of memory and reinforce its historical authority. This suggests that counter-memory must withstand forgetting of the

historical incidents. It must also challenge the stranglehold over how those incidents can be known at all.

Colonial History and Suppressed Uprisings

Within this terrain of managed forgetting, *Afterlives* makes its intervention. The opening sections of the novel open with a third-person narrator who brings historical events back into focus. The novel revisits the al-Bushiri Revolt of 1888–1889, the Wahehe Rebellion, the Maji-Maji Uprising of 1905–1907, and the Battle of Mahiwa. They events are introduced not just as background context but also as social and political reality that shape the world the novel occupies,

"the revolt was suppressed by Colonel Wissmann and his newly formed schutztruppe. Three years after the defeat of the al Bushiri revolt [...] the Germans were engaged in another war, this time with the Wahehe a long way in the south. They too were reluctant to accept German rule and proved more stubborn than al Bushiri, inflicting unexpectedly heavy casualties on the schutztruppe who responded with great determination and ruthlessness" (Gurnah 5).

The tone of the narration is precise and unadorned. It is the voice of counter-history which does not idealize or mourn the circumstances. Instead, it insists on the factual detail of what official memory has forgotten. The description of Wahehe as 'reluctant to accept German rule' is significant. It attributes agency to the colonized people who have chosen resistance as a conscious political choice. These oppressed groups emerge as historical actors capable of judgement, refusal and collective action. This particular representation is the recovery of marginalized subjectivities.

The Maji-Maji rebellion is the fulcrum of Gurnah's counter-historical reconstruction. The novel describes the savage scorched-earth campaign of the German Schutztruppe in the way that resists the sanitizing language of colonial documents. The landscapes bear the marks of violence inflicted by German colonizers. This violence includes the burning of villages, the devastated crops and the public execution of Africans, along with other forms of brutality. The "yukame", or the great hunger and famine followed the rebellion which draw attention to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people. In doing so, Gurnah transforms the statistical facts of history into a lived human catastrophe. At the same time, the narrator presents the colonial administration's justification for such destruction. He notes that such violence was considered "unavoidable" by some rulers of Deutsch-Ostafrika (Gurnah 16). The novel places these claims alongside evidence of extreme

violence to expose the ideological mechanism used by colonial power to normalize and excuse its actions.

The recovery of these histories of resistance is the demand for a revision of existing histories. This helps in giving new perspectives to the past. Communities such as the Wahehe in the south, the Wanyamwezi, the Wachagga, and the Wameru, peoples who were "reluctant to become German subjects" (Gurnah 8), are presented as active agents of resistance. The narrator, in clear terms, noted steadfastness of their resistance which replaced the myth of African passivity and primitive submission.

The Askari and Ideology of Loyal Service

Afterlives challenges colonial memory through its portrayal of *Askari*, the African soldiers who served in the German schutztruppe during First World War. It refuses to accept the idealized image of the 'loyal Askari' that German military created. Gurnah dismantles this simplified image. The characters Hamza and Ilyas illustrate the experience of serving in colonial army. However, the novel does not reduce their experiences to simple categories of collaboration, coercion, and heroism. Instead, it traces the conditions and power relations under which their choices and lives have been shaped.

Ilyas's initial admiration for Germans is presented as an ideological effect rather than an objective assessment of their character. He thinks of the Germans as "gifted and clever people. They know how to organise, they know how to fight [...] and on top of that they are much kinder than the British" (Gurnah 41). The others in the conversation immediately counter him by describing the true nature of German activities. They recall the violence inflicted by the Germans and remind him that the country is filled with traces of people who were killed during colonial occupation. In doing so, the novel exposes the gap between the colonial rhetoric of civilization and the reality of conquest. The critique reaches its highest point when one character tells Ilyas, "my friend, they have eaten you" (42). This statement clearly suggests that the colonial mentality has deeply infiltrated Ilyas's mind. He has begun to see the world through the eyes of the colonizers. His praise for German domination serves as evidence of the triumph of colonial ideology. In this way, the novel reveals how imperial power regulates both space and bodies. It also shapes the way people think about themselves and their histories.

Hamza's experiences present a more complex understanding of colonial power. He serves in the German army and becomes the personal aide of an Oberleutnant. The officer treats him with a mixture of care, coercion, and abuse. Their relationship reveals one of the central contradictions of colonialism. It exposes the paradox of a

so-called civilizing mission carried out through violent systems. The officer repeatedly presents German culture as a force that can educate and civilize African people. He encourages Hamza to read Schiller. However, the officer's physical violence toward Hamza shows the hypocrisy of his claims. This contradiction is key function of counter-memory because it does not accept colonial narrative of humanitarian civilizing mission. Instead, it shows violence on which these narratives were constructed and made visible by Kulturmission.

The contrast between Hamza's and Ilyas's experiences shows two different responses to German colonialism. On the one hand, Hamza returns to his home and rebuild life within his community. On the other hand, Ilyas holds on to German ideology and eventually leaves for Europe where he dies in Sachsenhausen concentration camp. Side by side, their stories reveal diverse and contradictory ways in which Africans engaged with colonial power. The fate of Ilyas is evocative of Bayume Mohamed Husen. He was a former askari who migrated to Germany to be subsumed by Nazi persecution. Gurnah incorporates history into fiction. He recovers the largely forgotten connection between German colonialism and the racial ideologies that continued into the Nazi period.

Silence, Trauma and the Unspeakable Past

In *Afterlives*, counter-memory operates at the level of collective and political history. It also operates at the intimate realm of body. At this level, the effects of violence continue to exist even when they cannot be fully expressed through conscious narration. Hamza's experience under the German officer is narrated with vivid physicality. It turns the body into a form of archival record. During the East African campaign of the First World War, Hamza is accused of encouraging fellow askaris to desert the army. In response, Feldwebel Walther, a German officer, denounces Hamza as a traitor and brutally attacks him. Gurnah describes the resulting injury from the attack, "It caught him on his hip and ripped through flesh and bone. He heard someone screaming and then his head hit the ground with jarring force" (Gurnah 116). This graphic description shows how colonial authority is inscribed directly onto the body. These wounds endure long after the violent event itself. In this sense, scarred body of Hamza becomes a testament of colonial mayhem.

The novel does not dramatize Hamza's trauma through direct confession. Instead, the continuous effects are revealed through fragmented memories and recurring nightmares. He returns from the war irrevocably changed. The effects of Hamza's injury do not end with the physical wound. The trauma returns in his sleep even after the physical recovery of the wound. As the narrator observes,

Hamza, "woke up one night in utter darkness and realized he was the one who was sobbing in his nightmare" (Gurnah 120). The delayed return of the traumatic experience reflects what Caruth terms as "belatedness" (4). It is a phenomenon which can not be fully processed at the moment of its occurrence. Instead, it comes back later in the form of dreams, flashbacks and other modes of recognition and asks to be recognised. In the novel, Hamza's nightmare is not simply a psychological experience. It becomes a form of embodied counter-memory. The body preserves what histories have obliterated. His recurring distress shows the continuation of colonial violence beyond the historical moment. Hamza's pain breaks the silence of the colonial archive. It testifies to another history. It is a history which keep the wound open to signify the violence through body and memory.

The somatic counter-memory is equally evident in Afiya's silences. She is separated from her brother when he leaves to join the German army. She is left behind and become vulnerable to exploitation. Her physical injury bears witness to her early displacement, her left hand crippled during a period of slavery-like servitude. This wound is the embodied residue of a history shaped by colonial dislocation and neglect. Her body preserves the memories which colonial structures have overlooked. Throughout the novel, Gurnah foregrounds such embodied testimonies. Both Hamza and Afiya endure suffering and move through the world. When they meet, their connection is built on shared silences. Their mutual recognition becomes a way of honouring experiences that have never been acknowledged. By their story, Gurnah shows that violence survives beyond historical events and continues to shape personal and collective memory.

Ordinary life as historical record

Gurnah draws attention to the details of everyday life. It includes domestic routines, market transactions, relations and the everyday negotiations of work and friendship. He goes against the abstract nature of colonial histories which only show language of campaign, territories and administrative decisions. In doing so, he transforms ordinary East African life into a form of historical record. This is a profound political act. Khalifa's character is the clear example of this idea. His story does not revolve solely around war and rebellions. He is neither a soldier nor a resistance leader. Yet, his life is directly affected by the turbulent period created by German rule. He is an ordinary clerk employed by a merchant who observes the world change around him. He adapts to these changes but never embraced them. Khalifa's daily life centres on his work, his marriage to Asha, his care for orphaned Afiya and his disgust with the colonial order. Here, Gurnah shifts the

focus away from the figures who usually dominate the historical record. In this way, Khalifa's life becomes a record of what colonialism felt like from the perspective of ordinary people.

Colonial power operates through the implementation of new laws, economic restrictions, and forced labour. The German administration introduced "new regulations and rules for doing business" (Gurnah 9). Also, they extended forced labour to build roads and gardens "for the leisure of the colonists" (16). Their schools reshaped what children learn and in which language. All of these appears in *Afterlives* through experience of ordinary characters who had to live inside these changes. The same function is served by the relationship between Khalifa and Asha, and between Hamza and Afiya. Gurnah traces the bond between characters that shows how colonialism disrupted familial and social continuity. He shows that through the acts of care and solidarity people manage under oppressive conditions. In doing so, the novel restores to memory the lives of people who existed as full human beings which colonialism reduced to labour, statistics and administrative categories.

Storytelling and Transmission of Suppressed Memory

In *Afterlives*, storytelling function as a medium through which the ordinary lives of the characters are remembered and transmitted. Gurnah shows how suppressed knowledge is passed from one generation to another. It survives through oral narrative, family stories and passed down across generations. The novel foregrounds everyday acts of remembrance. These acts are performed by characters to show the ways communities preserve their own histories. Afiya, for instance, learns about her own family through the accounts that others share with her. She comes to know about what happened to her brother, Ilyas, before she was old enough to remember. These accounts are fragmentary, partial, and sometimes contradictory. Even so, they are all she has about her family story. The novel treats these accounts as legitimate forms of historical knowledge rather than rumours. When Ilyas returns to his village, a woman recognizes him and asks, "are you the one who was lost?" (Gurnah 27). This question highlights how the community has preserved his story even after his long disappearance. This suggests that the testimony of colonized should be regarded as a valid form of historical evidence, even when it challenges written records.

Similarly, the act of naming carries transmitted memory. Hamza and Afiya name their son after Ilyas, the uncle who disappeared and never returned. The name keeps alive the question of who he was, what happened to him and why did he never returned. With the name of younger Ilyas,

his uncle's absence is remembered. This is how the novel suggests that memory survives in communities. It survives through the obligation that the living feel toward those who have disappeared.

Later in the novel, younger Ilyas goes to west Germany in search of his uncle Ilyas. This journey brings together two key sources of memory in the novel. These are family narratives and historical records. The elder Ilyas continues to live in the family memory. He becomes the figure defined by absence and uncertainty. The archives later reveal what happened to him. The record shows that he was "wounded at the battle of Mahiwa in October 1917... taken prisoner and held in detention" (274) by the British before later migrating to Germany, where he passed away in Sachsenhausen concentration camp. The family story was incomplete about him, in the way all memories of violence are. It is because violence destroys the conditions under which full understanding of past is possible. Nevertheless, the family's memories preserved that Ilyas mattered to his people, that his absence was a wound, and that he deserved to be found. The younger Ilyas manages to make this discovery after independence of Tanzania. This highlights that decolonization does not automatically restore memories of suppressed. Instead, it creates conditions in which restoration is possible. The younger Ilyas's journey symbolizes what postcolonial memory requires. It requires active and deliberate research in archives by someone with the will to read against official grain.

CONCLUSION

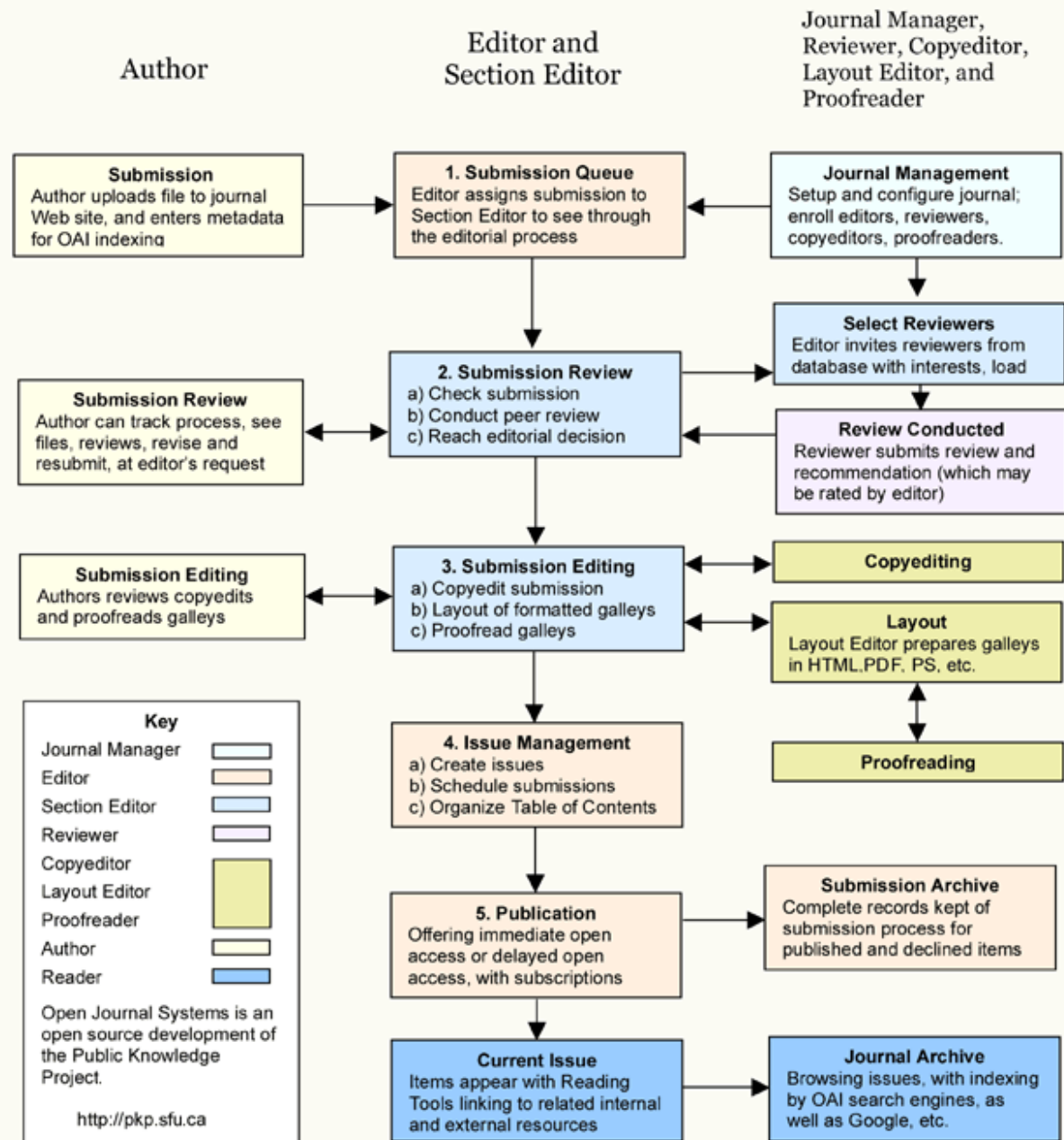
Afterlives stands as an act of counter-memory that operates at multiple levels. At the level of political history, it recovers African resistance movements and restores agency to communities such as the Wahehe and the Maji-Maji rebels. At the level of individual experience, it restores humanity of characters whose lives are shaped by imperial violence by tracing contradictory paths of Hamza and Ilyas. At the level of body, it also shows that the colonial wounds do not disappear even after political independence. They return through nightmares, physical scars, and the silence of characters when language fails to describe their trauma. Taken together, these narratives allow Gurnah to construct an archive that colonial historiography never intend to produce. He does not offer heroism of resistance literature. Alternatively, he exposes techniques of colonial power through Ilyas's tragic absorption in German ideology, Afiya's troubled childhood, and Hamza wordless nightmares of the horrors he has experienced. These characters' experiences testify to the uneven situations of survival under colonial rule. The novel insists that the dispossessed should be remembered as human beings than

victims. By recovering these afterlives, Gurnah accomplishes the representation of forgotten histories within literary and historical memory.

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