



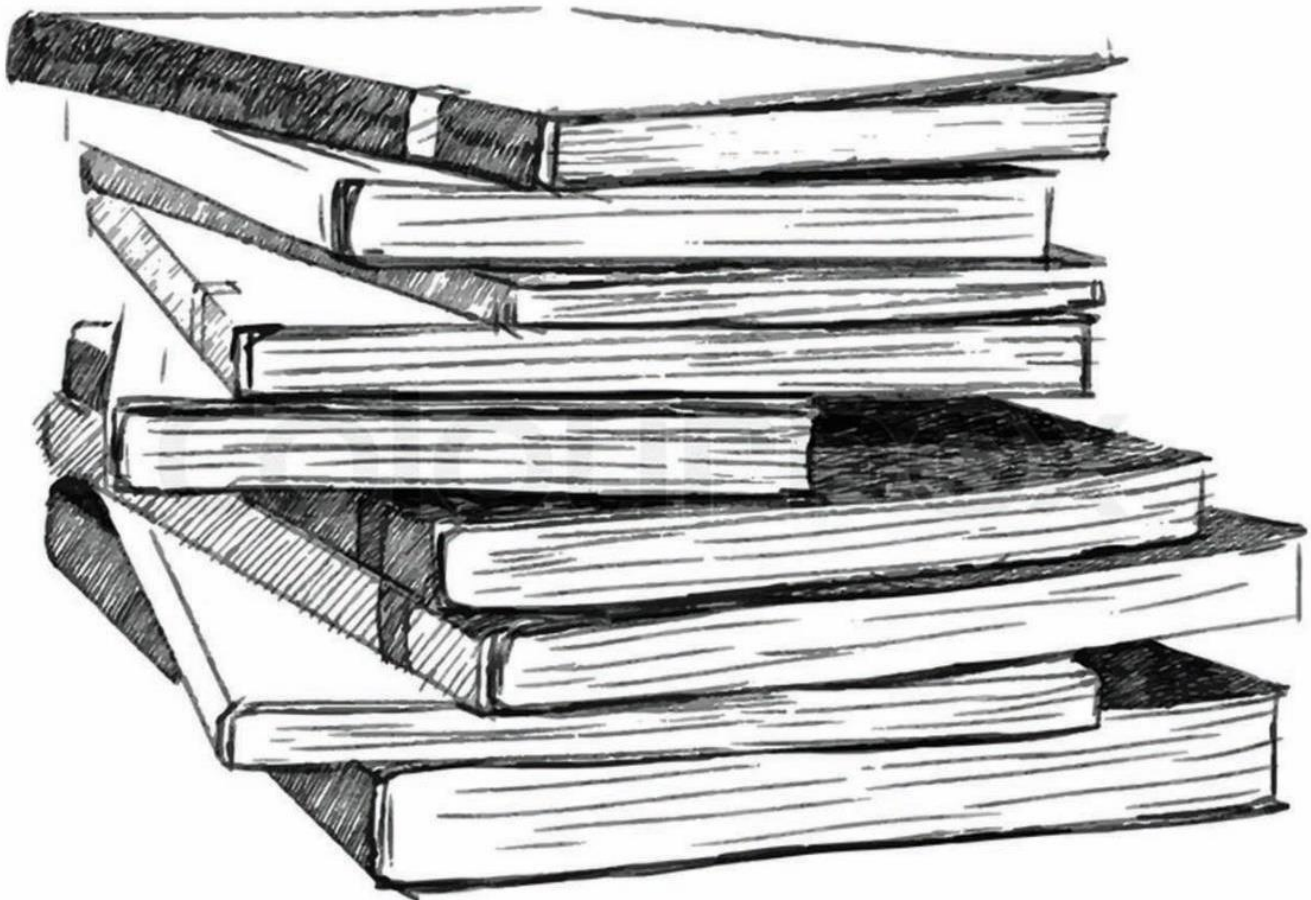
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FOREWORD

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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Author: Ms. Pooja

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Analytical Study of Literary Style in Ralph Waldo Emerson's Nature

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The Trauma and Self-purification of Lester Farley in *The Human Stain*

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Abstract— Philip Roth's *The Human Stain* uses Lester Farley, a traumatized Vietnam veteran, to expose America's human stain-the moral corruption festering beneath postwar society. This paper argues that Farley's transformation from idealistic soldier to murderer is not a personal failure but a systemic indictment. Through fragmented trauma narratives, Roth reveals how Farley's war-induced PTSD collides with societal abandonment, culminating in his targeting of Coleman Silk, the symbol of the success and discourse power Farley is denied. The ice-fishing finale, where Zuckerman's silence replaces legal judgment, becomes Roth's ultimate critique: America's violence and hypocrisy, not individual pathology, birthed Farley's tragedy. By synthesizing trauma theory, cultural criticism, and masculinity studies, this analysis reframes Farley as Roth's tragic vessel for condemning national amnesia and cyclical violence.



Keywords— Philip Roth, *The Human Stain*, Trauma Study, Masculinity

I. INTRODUCTION

The Vietnam War of the 1960s and 1970s was a war with no winners. It had no clear mission and was hard to put into words. According to statistics, from 1965 to 1973, more than three million American soldiers served in Vietnam. Nearly 400,000 were killed or wounded. The psychological trauma caused by this war was beyond measure (Holsinger 360). This war tore apart the nation and pushed many veterans to the margins of society (Tal 76). More disturbing are statements such as Heilman's, "the enduring trauma of Vietnam has been the disruption of the American story" (221).

Philip Roth, spoke openly about this period. In a 1974 interview with Walter Mauro, he denounced the "morally out of control" American government of the Vietnam War years, a period he called "the most 'politicized' of [his] life"(Roth, *Reading Myself and Others* 18). Through historical reflection, he described the United States as a "foreign invader" and deeply felt the "dispossession and powerlessness" that dominated the anti-war movement(19). This long concern about the war and its social effects finally appeared in the last book of his American Trilogy-*The Human Stain* (2000).

The novel focuses on the scandal of Coleman Silk, an

African American professor passing as a Jew, and his taboo relationship with the cleaning woman, Faunia Farley. But it is Lester Farley, Faunia's ex-husband who kills both Coleman and Faunia, who is the key to understanding Roth's critique on society. However, critical interpretations of Lester Farley have been mixed. Some critics claim Roth relied too much on old clichés when creating the image of veteran. Aimee Pozorski also points out, "Les Farley, as a figure for the devastating effect of the Vietnam War on the American psyche, has been met with critical silence over the last decade" (112). This silence reflects how official discourse in American society controls the right to speak and systematically ignores the pain caused by war.

This paper argues that seeing Lester Farley as a simple, stereotyped "mad veteran" or a failed character is a misunderstanding of Roth's deeper intention. Roth's seemingly limited and negative depiction of Farley is not a flaw. It is a carefully crafted critical strategy. By tracing Farley's path from a hopeful young man, to a soldier who suffered a spiritual death in Vietnam, to a man with severe PTSD and a murder, Roth exposes the inhuman nature of the Vietnam War. He also criticizes how American society abandoned its veterans after the war, causing them to suffer a second trauma. In the end, Farley's character and his meeting with Zuckerman stand as Roth's most painful and powerful charge against the "human stain"-he hidden guilt and corruption rooted deep within American society.

II. VIETNAM: SPIRITUAL DEATH AND UNHEALED WOUNDS

The tragic life of Lester Farley finds its roots deep in the jungles of Vietnam, where humanity was devoured by war. Like many young Americans who joined the army with the belief that they were going to "save the Vietnamese people" and spread the ideals of democracy and freedom (Gao 89), Farley once described himself as "a loyal American" who volunteered for "not one tour but two," determined "to finish the goddamn job" (Roth, *The Human Stain* 66). However, the brutal reality of war quickly

shattered any idealistic illusions.

Philip Roth does not offer a complete account of Farley's war experience. Instead, through fragmented but emotionally charged flashbacks and Farley's inner monologues, he reconstructs the psychological breakdown of a man destroyed by trauma. Farley recalls, "The second time he goes berserk" (67). The word "berserk" accurately captures the irreversible mental damage caused by war and marks the critical moment when Farley begins to descend into madness. These fragmented memories are filled with extreme violence and dehumanizing actions: "he'd cut off ears because he was there and it was being done" - and even more shockingly, "he'd slashed some pregnant woman's belly open" (67). These are not heroic actions, but horrifying results of war's annihilation of humanity, proof of Farley's mental collapse under fear, hatred, and the pressure to survive. These unforgettable experiences explain his desperate declaration years later: "I died in Vietnam" (74). This seemingly paradoxical statement reveals the essence of his spiritual death-the idealistic, emotionally normal man that Farley once was had been destroyed in the war, leaving only an empty shell haunted by trauma.

Farley's return to America was not a homecoming but an entry into a new arena of trauma. Like many veterans, Farley is excluded from a society that praises patriotism in rhetoric but neglects the psychological realities of those it sent to war. As Susan Jeffords argues, post-Vietnam American culture attempted a "wholesale regeneration of masculinity" through revived myths of patriotism and heroism (135), but this ideological reconstruction excluded men like Farley, whose sense of self was built not on myth but on real violence and trauma. In the cultural reconstruction of masculinity, post-Vietnam War America attempted to restore male authority through national myths of heroism and control, yet failed to accommodate those like Farley, whose masculinity was built on actual, destructive wartime experiences. At the social level, America's mainstream speaks highly of the heroic performances of the

veterans during the war, while individuals who engaged in the war have suffered great pain. The dissonance between the sanitized national myth and Farley's lived, brutal reality became a foundational element of his ongoing mental collapse and social alienation. He was a casualty twice over: first by the war, then by the society that sent him.

Consequently, after returning home, Farley suffers from persistent PTSD. "Flashbacks are a typical symptom of trauma, involving repeated intrusions of the traumatic event into memory or recurring visual scenes" (Li 29). Memories of the battlefield constantly invade Farley's daily life, blurring the line between past and present. One symbolic moment occurs when he tries to rescue his children from a burning house. Before breaking in, he "smelled the smoke" (Roth, *The Human Stain* 68), which instantly activates the hyper-alert survival mode he developed in Vietnam: "The only way he'd survived in Vietnam was that any change, a noise, the smell of an animal, any movement at all in the jungle, and he could detect it before anyone else: alert in the jungle like he was born there" (69). In an instant, his family home transforms into the Vietnamese jungle. Though he cannot see anything, he says, "but all of a sudden he could smell the smoke and these things are flying over his head and he began running" (69). The "things flying over his head" suggest phantom helicopters, showing how the domestic tragedy is fully consumed and replaced by war memory. This collapse of time and space illustrates how Farley can no longer distinguish between home and battlefield.

The war has severely damaged Farley's emotional response system, leaving him numb and dissociated. This numbness is most chillingly reflected in his reaction to the death of his children. On one hand, he blames their deaths on Faunia's neglect and, in therapy, repeats mechanically, "My kids are dead, but my body is numb and my mind is blank. Vietnam" (74). On the other hand, after pulling them from the fire, he stubbornly insists, "They-were-not-dead," and adds, "Two tours in Vietnam you're not going to tell him what dead is" (69). This contradiction is not mere

denial. It is a sign of deep emotional detachment and trauma. Farley is incapable of truly processing grief and instead fills that void with war-scarred language and empty denials.

Farley remains in a constant state of high alert, as if still living on a battlefield. He reacts violently to even minor changes in his environment. His obsessive stalking and threatening of Faunia reflect his uncontrollable rage and the outward projection of his trauma. He blames her for all his failures, seeing her as the source of his suffering. During his marriage to Faunia, he exercised control over their relationship through violence. Even after their divorce, he continued to assert ownership over Faunia: "[a]fter the divorce, she told Coleman, Farley had spied on her all the time" (55). This distorted attribution is a common cognitive symptom in PTSD.

Haunted by fallen comrades and his own violent acts, Farley is crushed by survivor's guilt. He asks, "Why them and not me? Sometimes he thought they were the lucky ones" (214). "Trauma is not only about experiencing death, but about surviving it and not understanding why. The wounded person is haunted by flashbacks...because their survival is unimaginable" (Self 206). Clearly, Lester is not only confused about his own state of being, he is also unable to understand or heal from his trauma. In everyday life, any chance event can bring back memories of death from the past, calling him to fight again and triggering strong reactions. Farley's guilt and nihilism reveal how war has stripped him of his basic belief in the value of life.

Farley has been repeatedly institutionalized for treatment, but "any medicine could only relieve physical pain, not heal the wounds of the soul" (Gao 89). This hopelessness culminates in his attempt to heal through symbolic acts, such as visiting the "Moving Wall", a traveling display of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Judith Herman divides trauma recovery into three stages: rebuilding trust and control, remembering the trauma, and reintegrating it (156). This suggests this display could be a step towards integrating his trauma. Friends encourage him, viewing it as "face with it" (Roth, *The Human Stain* 241).

For Farley, the Moving Wall represents a chance to confront his past and find peace. His friends encourage him, and he even tries eating Chinese food to manage his racial anxiety. But when he finally stands before the wall, he feels nothing: “Les knew all these stories of what could happen the first time, and now he is there for the first time, and he doesn’t feel a thing. Nothing happens” (241). The wall, as a public symbol of loss and commemoration, fails to reach the private, inexpressible horror and guilt embedded in Farley’s soul. Rather than providing healing, it confirms his worst fear: “now he knows for sure he’s dead” (242). The symbolic promise of collective healing is empty for individuals with deep, personal trauma like Farley. This failure pushes him further into isolation and propels him towards his violent resolution: the murder of Faunia and Coleman.

Although Zuckerman gives Lester an anti-hero image of the Vietnam War. Instead, he gives a voice to the American Vietnam experience. Through Lester’s memories of the war, Zuckerman creates a deeper character beyond a simple surface. By using a series of family flashbacks, Roth places family tragedy alongside war scenes, tragically repeating the trauma of the war.

While in the surface of this story, Zuckerman gives Lester an anti-hero image of the Vietnam War, Roth is not presenting a stereotyped veteran. He utilizes Lester’s memories not just for pathos, but to give voice to the complex, often unspeakable American Vietnam experience. Utilizing Zuckerman’s narrative reconstruction, Roth delves beneath the surface of the “berserk” veteran. The deliberate juxtaposition of the children’s death and combat flashbacks within Lester’s consciousness tragically illustrates how the war’s trauma perpetually re-enacts itself, entering his present and distorting his perception of reality. Roth thus uses Lester not as a cliché, but as a profound exploration of how unprocessed war trauma destroys the possibility of a coherent self and a livable present.

III. AMERICA’S BETRAYAL: CULTURAL TRAUMA AND THE MAKING OF A KILLER

Lester Farley’s tragedy starts with the mental death and PTSD he suffered in Vietnam, but this is not where it ends. What truly pushes him into the abyss of violence is the systematic abandonment he faces from American society after the war, and the “cultural trauma” (Gao 89) that hangs over the entire nation. This second trauma deeply twists his thoughts and emotions, making him externalize the pain he can no longer bear. In the end, he aims his anger at Coleman Silk, a man who symbolizes everything he has lost and the society that has cast him out.

Farley was once a young man who went to war with the idealistic belief of “spreading democracy and freedom” (Gao 84). Yet when he came home, he was met not with honor or care for his wounds, but with strange looks and cold rejection. As Kali Tal sharply points out, the Vietnam War caused a deep divide within American society and left its veterans pushed to the margins (53). Farley became one of these special veterans, a man broken both mentally and physically. In Vietnam, he was part of a war, but when he returned home, he was treated as a burden and a source of fear. He was unemployed, a failure in every area of life, unable to fit into society. “American soldiers fight for their country. However, after the war... ‘They are brutal, corrupt, dictatorial and completely despised by people’” (Barnard 107). They are isolated from others. The war created alienation, a force that destroys soldiers’ families and lives. This total rejection caused Farley’s social death. The war gave him a sense of purpose and belonging, but after the war, society gave him only labels: “veteran”, “mentally ill person”, “failed husband”, and “abuser”. These labels stripped away his sense of belonging and deepened his identity anxiety. He lost any place he had in his family, his work, and society, becoming a complete outsider.

For America, the Vietnam War was more than a military defeat; it was a deep crisis of legitimacy and a cultural disaster. The war weakened the country politically,

damaged its economy, and destroyed its culture. Americans' pride and sense of superiority suffered a huge blow. The Vietnam War became a brutal reality that Americans refused to revisit, refused to acknowledge, yet could never forget. When Vietnam veterans came home, the wounds of war were torn open again. The anger and shame that came from defeat were placed upon the very people who had suffered the most. These veterans became meaningless sacrifices in this war. Aimee Pozorski pointed that "Les Farley, as a figure for the devastating effect of the Vietnam War on the American psyche, has been met with critical silence over the last decade" (112). This silence in criticism reflects a larger social silence: an official control of discourse and an ignoring of the individual trauma caused by the war.

This collective repression and silence meant that society never truly accepted its responsibility for the war. Instead, it shifted its feelings of defeat, anger, and shame onto the veterans. Farley became a scapegoat for the nation's collective trauma. People felt disgusted by the marks of war he carried, which deepened his exclusion and isolation. This is the second killing of the Vietnam veteran's humanity. Twisted by war and rejection, Farley began to torment his wife, ignoring his duties as a father, and finally acted out his long-suppressed guilt and anger by targeting the innocent Coleman. This brutal act became a release for the deep shame he felt about the killings in Vietnam and a desperate attempt to justify the guilt he felt for surviving when others had died. Under the crushing pressure of identity crisis, social death, and unexpressed trauma, Farley's sense of reality became badly distorted. He needed a concrete target for all the anger and pain he felt. At first, he put the blame for all of his failures and misery on his ex-wife, Faunia, calling her selfish and promiscuous. Yet Faunia herself was a social outcast. She is a cleaner, an illiterate woman pushed to the margins. The person who truly sparked Farley's anger and became the target of his final revenge was Coleman Silk.

The emergence of Coleman Silk in Faunia's life is the seismic event that fractures Farley's already fragile world.

On the surface, Coleman is the interloper, the man who has taken what Farley considers his property-Faunia. This is a direct assault on Farley's already wounded male pride and possessive instincts. He responds with the only tools his tough masculinity understands: surveillance and the threat of violence. "Lester Farley had sent her to the hospital twice in the year before their divorce...(Roth, *The Human Stain* 44)After the divorce, she told Coleman, Farley had spied on her all the time... (55) Farley attempts to maintain a symbolic male sovereignty through violence, surveillance, and intimidation. Such behavior is deeply rooted in a concept of gender hegemony, which holds that women are subordinates of men. Thus, the appearance of Coleman is not just that of another man, but a force that completely subverts the legitimacy of Farley's male role.

More significantly, Coleman does not conform to the prototype of the masculine man as understood by Farley. He is older, physically impotent, and an intellectual accustomed to controlling through language and reason, which stands in a sharp contrast to the violence, intuition, and physical strength represented by Farley. Faunia's choice of Coleman, in Farley's eyes, is almost a betrayal of traditional masculinity: instead of choosing a stronger man, she has thrown herself into the arms of a person who is seen as having lost his masculinity. This is a ridiculous and intolerable humiliation in Farley's value system.

However, Coleman's true threat to Farley lies far deeper than the romantic triangle. Coleman is the antithesis of everything Farley is not and can never be. He is the embodiment of the social success and cultural capital utterly denied to Farley. Once a respected university dean and professor of Classics, Coleman possesses the prestige, intellectual authority, and societal dignity. These all is that Farley craves but has irrevocably lost.

Moreover, the manner in which Coleman wins Faunia's affection is a direct refusal of Farley's perceived traditional kind of masculinity. Coleman, older and physically diminished, relies on language, reason, knowledge, which all the very tools of the social system

Farley cannot access and even comprehend. Farley, in stark contrast, has lost the ability to express himself verbally, possesses no socially recognized communication forms. He became silent, paranoid, and passive. He can only achieve his self-worth through physical violence and paranoid fantasies. Coleman's relationship with Faunia, built on conversation, intellectual connection and mental equality, is utterly alien to Farley. In his value system, Faunia's choice is incomprehensible, even perverse: she rejects a stronger man and chooses for one who, to Farley, appears to have lost his masculinity. Faunia's choice feels like a profound betrayal of the traditional masculinity Farley clings to. It is an attack on Farley's worldview.

In this sense, Coleman becomes far more than a rival. He is the symbol within the entire social evaluation system that has judged Farley worthless. He is the manifestation of the forces that have caused Farley to feel utterly deprived and excluded. Coleman is the mirror reflecting back the brutal truth Farley cannot bear to face: his comprehensive failure not just as a husband, but as a man and a member of society. He is the winner who belongs to a world that is not his own. As R.W. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity elucidates, "hegemonic masculinity is sustained through dominance and institutional recognition; when this dominance is threatened, men may resort to violence in a last effort to reestablish power" (839). Farley embodies this destructive potential. His stalking, intimidation, and eventual murder are not expressions of love or even primarily of jealousy over Faunia; they are pathological responses to an existential crisis of masculinity. Unable to compete within Coleman's world of language and reason, unable to reclaim Faunia through socially sanctioned means, he resorts to the only way he understands: destroy.

Farley's hatred for Coleman is both complicated and extreme: it is both jealousy and resentment, making him a loser and an avenger at the same time. Coleman becomes, in Farley's eyes, someone who must be removed. Not because Coleman is truly evil, but because he reflects a truth

that Farley cannot bear to face: the brutal reality of being completely rejected and abandoned by society. It is significant that Les reappears at the end of the novel, for his crazed desire to cleanse the world of Faunia and Coleman is the counterpart to the frenzy of the politically correct crowd at Athena College (Safer 223). Farley's murder is a desperate and twisted form of "expiation of blood by blood" (Roth, *The Human Stain* 7). It is an attempt to gain a sick sense of control by destroying those he believes embody the "stain" of a society that has caused him deep pain and trauma. Through this brutal act, he aims to protest violently against the society that abandoned him. In this way, the violence of war finds a tragic continuation in peacetime. Farley's brutal act is a bitter result created by both social rejection and cultural trauma. Farley, once a war victim, is ultimately twisted into a brutal perpetrator by despair.

IV. THE ICE LAKE: SELF-PURIFICATION EXCLUDED FROM MAN

Lester Farley's murder of Coleman Silk and Faunia is a kind of expiation of blood by blood, an explosion of despair caused by a man destroyed by war and abandoned by society. This act of violence is a crime, but Philip Roth does not end the story with a simple judgment or a legal trial for an individual. Instead, he carefully designs the intriguing ending. Nathan Zuckerman encounters with Farley on a desolate, ice-covered lake. This scene is not a random detail, but the climax of Roth's critical intent. Through the symbolic ice-fishing scene and Zuckerman's silent choice, Roth shifts the focus of judgment away from Farley as an individual murderer, and instead puts American society itself on trial.

After the murder, Farley does not hide in the crowd. Instead, he chooses to stay in a remote place in the middle of winter, fishing alone on ice that is a foot and a half thick. This is a form of self-imposed exile. He chooses to stay far from people—far from the corrupt society that once rejected him and would now judge him as well. "The frozen lake becomes an isolated, primitive 'unexplored land'" (Yuan

109). Here, Farley talks to God while fishing, cleaning the dust from his heart on the pure ice, seeking a kind of self-purification in the court of his own soul. In this way, he separates himself from a world full of hypocrisy, prejudice, and social violence.

Farley says his goal is “away from man, close to God” (Roth, *The Human Stain* 331). This doesn’t mean traditional religion, but a search for the most basic, original connection. It means a quiet conversation with nature and some higher force or a true self that has not been polluted by society, history, or culture. Here, “man” means the empty shell of civilization, what the author calls “the human stain” while the silence and whiteness of the ice lake give Farley a space to filter his trauma and deeply reflect. This ice-fishing is a chance for Farley to return to an almost primitive state. In Roth’s writing, “nature” has both an instinctive and an intelligent side (“to be intelligent”), seeking an open body and a release from social constraints (Zhang 86-87). Farley’s solitude on the ice lake can be seen as an attempt, in an extreme moment, to return to a more “natural” state of being which is closer to the original self before war and society twisted him, a Rousseau-like moment of self-examination.

The scene on the ice lake is often seen as a symbol of purification (Zhang 86; Yuan 109; Yang 73). The clean, white surface of the ice suggests the possibility of washing away dirt. But this “purification” is not a simple moral redemption. As Yuan sharply pointed out, Farley is “purifying himself in the court of his own soul” (Yuan 109). It is an inward, lonely, and deeply painful state. By admitting, “She was a lovely woman. Entirely blameless” (Roth, *The Human Stain* 339), he begins to deconstruct the way he lived and to confess his guilt for the accident. This shows that, in his lonely exile, he may have started to understand a long-suppressed truth. Yet this purification is tragic: it comes with guilt that can never be undone, with permanent mental scars, and a total break from society. It is not a path to heaven, but a desperate attempt to find a moment of peace on the edge of hell. Through this scene,

Roth paints a sad picture of a soul destroyed by society, struggling to survive amid the ruins.

Zuckerman, as the story’s narrator and the only creator of this story, is the only one who truly understands Farley’s crimes—the stalking, the threats, and the intentional murder and as well as the tragic truth about the death of Coleman and Faunia. At first, he goes back and forth between the police station and Athena College, trying to restore the names of these two victims and send their killer to court. At that point, he still believed in the justice and morals of society. But the encounter with Farley on the ice lake greatly changes Zuckerman’s thought. Through this conversation, he “sees a lonely soul rooted in deep darkness, a true heart that has never been shaped or controlled by civilization” (Gao qtd in Yuan 109). What he sees is not just a murderer, but a man destroyed by the war machine and abandoned by a cold, uncaring society. Zuckerman understands Farley’s spiritual death, the roots of his PTSD, and the suffocating despair and social forces that shaped his crime.

In the end, Zuckerman chooses silence and does not hand Farley over to the police or society. This choice has deep critical meaning. Zuckerman understands that turning Farley over to a court—whether it is a court of law or a court of public opinion like at Athena College would only repeat the unreasonable act that destroyed Coleman. That campaign was based on misunderstanding and prejudice, taking away Coleman’s voice and dignity. To send Farley who is silenced, shaped, and defined by society’s prejudices into the same system would be another form of unfairness and cruelty. It’s just a replay of Coleman’s tragedy. Zuckerman knows that a court of society cannot understand the complexity of tragedy, nor can it ever touch the root of the crime.

Zuckerman’s silence comes from a deep understanding that Farley’s personal crime is truly the result of society’s sins. Farley is first a victim of the nation’s war policies, and then a target of society’s systemic abandonment and cultural repression. His violence came from the society that created and then rejected him. Punishing Farley as an individual

will never bring justice for the war, expose society's hypocrisy and coldness, or acknowledge the collective amnesia that surrounds trauma. Zuckerman chooses to be a silent witness rather than an accuser. His silence is itself a quiet but powerful protest. It shows how the existing ways society tries to resolve tragedy through law and superficial moral judgment. However, all has completely failed. It forces readers to turn their attention to those truly responsible: the society that started an unjust war, abandoned its own soldiers, and sank into hypocritical displays of virtue. Zuckerman promises to "write about people like [Farley]" (Roth, *The Human Stain* 340), to mark these wounds and their roots in history, making sure they will not be forgotten.

Through Farley's transformation from a wounded soldier on the battlefield, to an abandoned outcast, and finally to a twisted murderer in self-exile on the ice lake, Roth clearly draws a line of cause and effect from society's crimes (the war) to the destruction of the individual. Farley's life and ending stand as a powerful protest against the "the human stain" of society. He is both a product of society's sins and a living proof of its guilt. As Aimee Pozorski sharply points out, "as a nation, the United States has not moved beyond the fratricidal conflict inextricable from its founding" (110). Farley's tragedy is an explosion of that deep-rooted violence within the nation, a symptom of the Vietnam War's long-lasting pain.

Through the title of *The Human Stain* and Farley's story, Roth finally shows that the "stain" is not only about Coleman's hidden identity or Farley's personal crimes. The real "stain" is this: war turns men into killing machines and creates deep wounds that can never be fully healed. The government starts the war but then abandons its soldiers. Society blames its failures on the veteran. The tragedy of Athena College attacking Coleman is a sad reflection of Farley's violence. Both reveal how different forms of obsession with "purity" can tear apart the social bond (Zhang 84). Society refuses to face the truth of the Vietnam War, trying to cover its pain with symbols like the "Moving

Wall", but this forgetting only plants the seeds for new tragedy.

The ending of the novel makes Roth's warning even stronger: if American society does not deeply rethink its obsession with war, its hunger for power, its systemic abandonment of individuals, and its collective amnesia about its own "stain," then the tragedy of Farley—a human disaster caused by war trauma and social rejection—will continue to repeat itself throughout history. Farley's lonely ice-fishing scene becomes a sharp and cold mirror, reflecting the deep stains and historical struggles at the heart of American society.

V. CONCLUSION

Lester Farley's career is Roth's searing critique of America's human stain. Farley targets Coleman not from inherent evil, but because Coleman embodies the success, discourse, and social legitimacy that a war-traumatized, abandoned veteran is denied. His violence is the inevitable eruption of unhealed wounds inflicted by Vietnam and compounded by national neglect. The ice lake's haunting imagery, where Zuckerman bears witness but refuses societal judgment, underscores Roth's ultimate thesis: Farley's tragedy is America's crime. By silencing Farley's story until the epilogue and having Zuckerman finally "write about people like [him]" (Roth, *The Human Stain* 340), Roth forces readers to confront the nation's cycle of violence and its victims. Unless America confronts the war's true legacy: its corruption of identity, its systemic betrayal, and its culture of forgetting. If not, the human stain will perpetuate new tragedies. As Roth warns through Farley's solitude on the ice, salvation lies not in purifying scapegoats, but in cleansing the society that creates them.

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From Verona to Almore: Locating Cultural Hybridity in Habib Faisal's Film *Ishaqzaade*

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Abstract— *The presence of William Shakespeare in India is older and maybe more multifaceted than in any other country outside the Western world. Over the past few decades, Shakespeare's reputation has been established in India through various film adaptations of his works in different languages. Although both adaptation and appropriation involve reimagining Shakespeare's works, adaptation seeks to maintain a connection to the original material while creating something new, whereas appropriation entails repurposing Shakespearean elements to convey completely different meanings or serve alternative artistic visions. This article will examine Habib Faisal's Hindi film Ishaqzaade (2012) to unveil cultural hybridity. When adapting Shakespeare to the silver screen, Bollywood or Hindi film industry plays a dominant role, although Shakespeare has been adapted to other regional languages like Bengali, Kannada, Malayalam, and so on. The regional language adaptations of Shakespeare try to capture the local colour through Shakespeare, as does the Bollywood film industry. This paper explores how Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet has been converted into a prolific site for the cinematic survey of the cultural hybridity of the Hindi-speaking people of India.*



Keywords— *Culture, Hybridity, Marriage, Sexuality, Shakespeare*

Introduction

Unlike any other non-western country, William Shakespeare's presence in India is more ubiquitous and older. Shakespeare's massive appeal has also been expanded beyond literal adaptations and appropriations and has been reworked in media and movies. A canon of the Indian Shakespeare film is established with 115 titles of feature films from 1923 to 2016. It is interesting to note that Shakespeare on film and media is one of the most dynamic and difficult subfields of Shakespeare studies. Throughout the colonial era, he rose to the status of being the embodiment of rich cultural taste. Shakespeare's works were reproduced by Indian film directors using the local cultural registers and ideas. This process of localization is not a very abrupt one; rather, Shakespeare's plays have been reinvented through cultural appropriation. In essence, when putting Shakespeare's works on screen, Indian filmmakers used components of their own culture, customs, and socioeconomic setting. This made it possible for them to

connect the universal themes of Shakespeare's works with Indian sensibilities and experiences and to connect more strongly with the local audience. Shakespeare's timeless stories were given new life and significance in an Indian setting through this process of cultural appropriation, adding to a rich and varied fabric of artistic expressions. Although both adaptation and appropriation involve reimagining Shakespeare's works, adaptation seeks to maintain a connection to the original material while creating something new, whereas appropriation entails repurposing Shakespearean elements to convey completely different meanings or serve alternative artistic visions. In *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon and Siobhan O'Flynn opined that Shakespeare adaptations in particular could be seen as a form of homage or a challenge to established cultural authority.¹ Shakespeare adaptations can be seen in one of two ways: as a sort of tribute or as a challenge to preexisting cultural authority, especially when they are reinterpreted in different artistic mediums like films, plays, or novels. Shakespeare's works can be adapted as a sincere

tribute to his creative brilliance and an acknowledgement of his ongoing effect on world culture, on the one hand.

Romeo and Juliet in Bollywood Cinema

Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* has a long history of popularity as evidenced by the play's several film adaptations in different Indian languages as well as in several successful theatrical performances. One of the main reasons that made *Romeo and Juliet* popular in Hindi cinema is its plot that has been used in several Hindi films - *Ek Duuje Ke Liye* (1981), *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* (1988), *Saudagar* (1991), *Ishaqzaade* (2012), *Issaq* (2013), *Goliyon ki Raas Leela: Raam-Leela* (2013), to name a few. It is to be noted that romance is a staple of Hindi cinema – “the genre of romance has been timeless in Bollywood. The evolution of cinema and storytelling ran parallel to the presentation of love on the silver screen”ⁱⁱ. Hindi Filmmakers have always found it very easy to attract the audience with the story of *Romeo and Juliet*. Subsequently, more or less in every Bollywood film that has romance as an important part of its story will have several references to the *Romeo and Juliet* story, either in whole or in parts.

In the Nehruvian period, the theme of romance was often presented as a narrative subplot and was employed together with other strategies to discover the mapping of social tensions – films like *Do Bigha Zameen* (1953) by Bimal Roy focused on the condition of rural India trapped in agrarian debt, as well as the state's disregard for rural distress, while Raj Kapoor's *Shree 420* (1955) was a social commentary of urban India, *Mother India* (1957), and *Ganga Jamuna* (1961) explored the themes of feudal tyranny and rural poverty. The 70s saw the emergence of the ‘angry young man’ and gangster-action film; in which women characters had restricted screen presence - *Zanjeer* (1973), *Deewar* (1975), *Don* (1978). Films in the 80s were a mix of romance with action *Karz* (1980), *Namak Halaal* (1982) *Tezaab* (1988); although, there were a few exceptions in Hindi films where the primary storyline was surrounded by a romantic love tale, and *Prem Rog* (1982) is one of them. However, in the late 1980s romance was established as a dominant element in films thanks to economic liberalization.ⁱⁱⁱ The economic reforms had a wide-ranging impact on the Indian film and music industry. By reducing red tape and promoting incentives for global corporations to establish operations in India, economic liberalisation prepared the ground for the introduction of satellite television.^{iv} Satellite television networks provided filmmakers with a new platform for promoting and selling their films. An increment in the budget too helped in the growth of the Indian film industry. As Tejaswini Ganti points out, “[T]he dramatic increase in budgets since the 1990s generates the potential for greater profits as well as

the risk of greater losses, leading to the near disappearance of the average-earning film.”^v The reduction of taxes and the arrival of new technology and multinational companies like Sony and Universal paved the way for more investment and avenues in the Indian film and music industry.

Bollywood's obsession with Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* can be traced back in 1973 when Raj Kapoor's *Bobby* hit the silver screen. Although Akhtar Hussain's Hindi language film *Romeo and Juliet* (1948) is considered one of the earliest attempts to present the *Romeo and Juliet* story in Indian cinema. Critics have found that the story of *Romeo and Juliet* is also depicted in the Hindi film *Heer Ranjha* (1970) by Chetan Anand although, the story was based on the Punjabi legend of Heer and Ranjha which resonate with Shakespeare's play of the ‘star crossed lovers.’ Films like *Love Story* (1981), *Ek Duuje Ke Liye* (1981), *Sanam Teri Kasam* (1982), *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* (1988), *Saudagar* (1991), *Ishaqzaade* (2012), *Issaq* (2013), *Raam-Leela* (2013) referred to above continued the trend.

Relocating Shakespeare: From Verona to Almore

Shakespeare's works have been translated and adapted into different contexts, cultures, languages and mediums. Boika Sokolova and Katy Stavreva (2020), Ania Loomba (1998), Jyotsna Singh (2019), Poonam Trivedi (2000) and Dennis Bartholomeusz (2005) all add to the continuing discussion of the potential and limitations of cross-cultural Shakespeare performances as well as the influence of so-called ‘glocal’^{vi} productions. At the turn of the century, the ‘glocal’ was said to have the great promise of combining the strength of global brands with local empowerment to produce novel hybrid forms. However, Poonam Trivedi notes that under the framework known as Asian or pan-Asian Shakespeare, intercultural works are likely to be restricted to ‘metropolitan areas’ and highlight the concerns of a globalised elite.^{vii} Jyotsna Singh, on the other hand, offers a more optimistic explanation, arguing that via the use of “travelling Shakespeares” in local, “non-metropolitan” centres of knowledge, postcolonial artists and makers may ‘decolonize’ or subvert Shakespeare^{viii}. As a result, these Shakespeare adaptations dissociate themselves from the language and methodology of the classic Western Shakespeare tradition and reinvent themselves for a new time and place. Sujata Iyengar defined the ‘travelling theory’ as a sequence of beginning events spanning a distance travelled through time and space as such notions come into fresh attention and come across circumstances involving embracing or protesting the encounter of the concept and its alterity; this acceptance and resistance result in the culmination of the process, where the concept

becomes integrated and reshaped by its fresh uses, and finds itself in a new time and place.^{ix}

The popular Hindi film has received a lot of criticism recently, specifically for exemplifying a public sphere overwhelmingly reflective of people's accomplishments and feelings. Additionally, it clearly reflects "a national and increasingly international cinematic idiom."^x However, Poonam Trivedi observes that- "little attention has been paid to the hybrid genealogy, the diverse seeding sources, or the inspirational resources that have provided the ground for the growth of something that has become as recognizably indigenous as the Hindi film."^{xi} While speaking of the Hindi film, the Bombay film industry popularly known as the Bollywood industry has acquired a brand value and achieved some taglines like Indian, and national to dominate both the national and international market. Additionally, Hindi is the most widely spoken language and a recognised national language (together with English) is perhaps one of the factors that led to the title of Bollywood films as national cinema. Interestingly, as Jonathan Gil Harris suggests the "[S]o-called 'Hindi' films are not purely Hindi: they are more accurately a khichdi of Hindi and Urdu (occasionally seasoned by Punjabi, Bhojpuri and English)."^{xii} The situation is changing, however, as blockbuster successes from regional film industries like Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, and Tamil continue to rule the worldwide market. Still, Bollywood movies possess an idiosyncratic characteristic feature. According to Mira Reym Binford a typical Bollywood film has a

distinctive aesthetic of its own. Its narrative structure does not depend on psychologically consistent characters, plausible plots, coherence, or unity of composition. Realism, in the sense of visual or psychological authenticity, has not been valued. The mandatory song-and-dance sequences, like operatic arias, tend to serve as both narrative and emotional points of culmination and punctuation.^{xiii}

Shakespeare has been relocated to Bollywood films via Parsi theatre that evolved into bay talkies. Naseeruddin Shah, the actor, stated in an interview that "the roots may look lost, but every big story in the Hindi film industry is from Shakespeare."^{xiv}

***Ishaqzaade*: An Overview**

Unlike sentimental love stories, where lovers exchange their emotive and tender feelings, Habib Faisal's film *Ishaqzaade* offers a fierce antagonism to romantic love that transcends the communal line. *Ishaqzaade* is set in the fictional town of Almore and tells the story of a pair of loggerheads, Zoya and Parma, who belong to two opposing

political houses, the Qureshis, and the Chauhans. Parma is far from the stereotypical lover boy. He is the nasty, unrefined person with a rifle who wants his dada (grandfather) to win the election by any means necessary. Zoya, on the other hand, is a topper in her college. She takes responsibility for guaranteeing her father's success and demands that his waistcoats be adjusted to fit her since she hopes to become an MLA herself in the future. Despite their strong religious and political convictions, this unusual pair finds themselves drawn to one another. Their relationship falls into the domain of sexual and social politics rather than being the innocent and ideal romance of youth and are sexually attracted towards one another after their initial antagonism. The relationship between the two is distinguished by its involvement in the intricate web of sexual and social politics, deviating from the commonly associated purity and idealism of youthful amorous affairs. Notwithstanding their initial hostility, they eventually discover a mutual attraction on a physical plane.

When Parma and his gang break into a 'jashn' (party) at Zoya's house and abduct the dancing girl, Zoya retaliates this humiliation by chasing Parma and his gang. She slaps Parma in front of the college when he urinates on her father's campaign poster. Following this the movie brings in several such violent events. After being humiliated by Zoya, Parma plans a whole wedding ritual to take revenge on her. Moreover, Parma's retaliation against Zoya goes beyond just satisfying his grudge. It is also used for political benefit, to discredit the election campaign of the Qureshis and further degrade Zoya and her family. It is intriguing to see how the concept of romantic, emotional love has been transformed into a sexual and political trap to defame the Qureshis in the public eye.

This defamation not only harms Zoya's family reputation but also butchers her ambition of becoming an MLA. Zoya separates herself from her family and society as a result of this incident. Following that, she enters the Chauhan family to take revenge on Parma but is stopped by his widowed mother. Parma and Zoya's reckless behaviour is admonished by Parma's widowed mother, who endeavours to shield them when her father-in-law makes threats towards Zoya. Regrettably, while defending the couple, Parma's widowed mother is slain by the eldest Chauhan. She appeared to be a crucial link between the two individuals. The pair are now on the run. Parma had vowed to her mother that he would safeguard Zoya at all times. They soon find themselves in a brothel, sharing a room there before getting back together and getting married once more. In the hopes that her father will accept them, Zoya seeks her family's blessings on Eid after being reunited with them. However, things begin to deteriorate. Zoya is faced with a profound internal conflict as she grapples with the choice

between her affection for the man from the opposing kin and her unwavering devotion to her own family. The decision to either pursue her amorous inclinations or remain true to her familial obligations becomes increasingly distressing, ultimately presenting a formidable challenge to her sense of self as both a daughter and an individual in love. Furthermore, The Chauhan and Qureshi clans who are searching for them arrive at the brothel to kill them and begin to pursue them. Realizing that they have been rejected by their families and that there is no escape from their family, Zoya and Parma commit suicide by embracing and shooting each other.

Adaptation

According to the Cambridge English Dictionary, 'adaptation' refers to 'the process of changing to suit different conditions.' Building on Homi Bhabha's observation that "ideas and things are 'repeated, relocated and translated in the name of tradition'", Julie Sanders opines that the process of repositioning can kindle new utterances and creativity.^{xv} Linda Hutcheon in her book *A Theory of Adaptation* considers an adaptation as a "deliberate, announced, and extended revisitation of prior works"^{xvi}, which implies that a film version of a literary work is a retelling with changes rather than a facsimile.

Quoting Julie Sanders, Mark Thornton Burnett claims that 'adaptation' is fundamentally helpful since it indicates an "attempt to make texts 'relevant'...via proximation and uploading and a transposition that takes a text from one genre and delivers it to new audiences...in cultural, geographic and temporal terms"^{xvii}. Burnett suggests "when a film is generated from a play, a new text is fashioned out of an old one, and we are sensitized to how both interrelate."^{xviii} (5). Thus, such interpretations assist us in disengaging the literary comprehension of those moments, which have become embedded in our collective memory as a result of being presented from a predetermined angle and being continuously conveyed to successive generations in classrooms.

However, I propose a *mise-en-scène* analysis of the film *Ishaqzaade* to highlight how the film explores the theme of cultural hybridity and how *mise-en-scène* elements construct the cultural and ideological politics in this film and also offers a social criticism of this adapted film. *Mise-en-scène* is a French term that suggests everything that is arranged in front of the camera, including the composition, sets, characters, costumes, and lighting.

Locating Cultural Hybridity

My essay here imports the conceptual frames of cultural hybridity as a mode to understand the

contextualization of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in Habib Faisal's movie *Ishaqzaade*. The frame of cultural hybridity presents not just an incidental value to analyze Shakespeare's contextualization in *Ishaqzaade* alone, but it also functions as an analytic one with considerable scope to negotiate the present cultural design to reconstruct our social and psychological gaps that connect culturally shared indications with newly emerging signs of difference. In fact, Homi K. Bhabha states, "Hybridity, in our global moment, has become a ubiquitous form of cultural universalism, the proper name of a homogenising pluralism."^{xix}

The term 'hybrid' has emerged from biological and botanical sciences. According to *Oxford Learner's Dictionary*, the term refers to 'an animal or plant has parents of different species or varieties.' Robert J. C. Young opined that only since the second part of the nineteenth century the word hybridity has been used to describe racial mixing. By this time the term had received a negative connotation. In the 1980s, the concept of hybridity underwent a deliberate repositioning in the context of post-colonial studies. Scholars like Edward W. Said (1935–2003), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (b. 1942) and Homi K. Bhabha (b. 1949) contend that because every culture has been impacted by the global exchange of people, artefacts, signs, and information, today's culture is essentially hybrid, creating a space where representations of identity and difference can clash. But hybridity or hybridization is not a simple outcome of economic, social and technological alteration. Hybridity can be seen as an explicit manifestation of a fundamental outline in world history. As a result, the term has two connotations in the humanities discipline: one is cultural-political, while the other is counter-cultural. Despite having such connotations, hybridity comes under a large world pattern. In fact, Bhabha opines,

...hybridity has been recruited into the service of global homogeneity. The large-scale global frame pluralises the conflicting rights and interests of demographic, democratic and global differences. The specifics of site, locality, history and territory are seen as nothing more than the moving parts of a larger pattern that only becomes meaningful when it is subsumed into a synchronic global design. Hybridity provides a new narrative twist to the same old story of the inexorable rise and rise of the global hypothesis.^{xx}

In postcolonial and cultural studies, the idea of cultural hybridity is examined from a variety of theoretical and disciplinary perspectives. In the age of globalisation, it

is also seen in the framework of cultural interactions, interventions, and exchanges. These negotiating processes provide cultural hybridization to its historical transformation and authority. Additionally, Bhabha's idea of cultural hybridity is a crucial analytical tool for understanding the complex phenomena of cross-cultural interaction and the emergence of new cultures and identities throughout the postcolonial period. Interestingly, Bhabha broadens the meaning of the term hybridity by applying it to culture and hierarchy. In fact, he suggests that "Cultural hybridity as an ethical and political force is an artifice of subaltern agency; it emerges in the interstices of power blocs, at the margins of political society, in the liminal times and spaces between what Gramsci calls the 'dialectical nexus' between social contradictions that are organic and those that are conjunctural"^{xxi}. Based on Gramsci's observation of 'relations of force', Bhabha opined that the idea of cultural hybridity lies on the boundary between the organic and the conjunctive.

However, building on Burke's observation that hybridity is responsible for cultural transformation, Andreas Ackermann, in his essay "Cultural Hybridity: Between Metaphor and Empiricism", opines that the term roughly has three metaphors: borrowing, mixing, and translating. Frequently used as a critical term, cultural borrowing suggests that the borrower's culture is not sufficiently unique. Edward Said, in his book, *Culture and Imperialism*, suggests that "The history of all cultures is the history of cultural borrowing."^{xxii} On the other hand, a more technical term identified as acculturation denotes a subordinate culture absorbing characteristics from the dominant culture. Hence, it is akin to assimilation, a term widely used in negotiations of the cultural change that occurs during migration. Secondly, while framing 'cultural mixing', it can be measured that, for a very long time, the idea of hybridity, combination, 'hotchpotch,' or 'mishmash' was primarily seen as a type of disorder. Similarly, the term 'mestizaje,' a type of Spanish-American interpretation of hybridity, is used to refer to both physical 'interbreeding' and a metaphorical combination of cultures at the same time. Finally, 'cultural translation' can be associated with 'linguistic turn' and to cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz's (1926–2006) idea of 'culture as text.' While defining translating culture, terms such as, 'appropriation', for instance, seek to discover the reason behind a decision to choose some pieces from a catalogue while rejecting others. In other words, we need to investigate who appropriates what and why. Similarly, the notion of 'syncretism' advocates for inquiry into how much the various components of culture have merged. Yet, while using the metaphor of translation, one must also be aware of the cultural elements that are tough to interpret as well

as, the cultural elements that can be lost when translating across different cultures.

Ishaqzaade: A Contextual Reimagining of Romeo and Juliet

The transposing of *Romeo and Juliet* as *Ishaqzaade* is a spatial alteration marked by the liminality of the suburban space where the story unfolds. Set in an imaginary town in northern India, *Ishaqzaade* reflects a clear indication of the regional transformation in post-liberalization India. While describing the changing scenario of the film industry in an interview, Habib Faisal said, "When I set it in Janakpuri or Lajpat Nagar it becomes more relatable".^{xxiii} The small-town-based films, which primarily target the Indian audience, emphasise the contrast between urbanisation and provincialism.

From the very onset, the movie explores the theme of cultural hybridity. Set in the imaginary town of Almore, the movie narrates different cultural tropes as a manifestation of cultural hybridity. Peter Burke in his book *Cultural Hybridity* opines that "A common response to an encounter with another culture, or items from another culture, is an adaptation, or borrowing piecemeal to incorporate the pieces into a traditional structure."^{xxiv} As a result of cross-cultural interactions, traditional structures change by borrowing from and incorporating alien features. Continuity is ensured by adaptation, which entails absorbing foreign customs only when they are suitable and modifying them to match preexisting standards. When civilizations are enriched while retaining their core characteristics, borrowing piecemeal means accepting certain components without alteration. By encouraging tolerance, creativity, and connection on a global scale, these interactions help to create a diversified cultural environment. Further, Burke also suggests that "The process of 'tropicalization' so often discussed and so tirelessly advocated by the Brazilian intellectual Gilberto Freyre in so many domains, from architecture to cooking, makes a good example of the process, although it is necessary to distinguish different kinds of adaptation."^{xxv} In *Ishaqzaade* Parma, the protagonist, appears to pay tribute to Salman Khan's *Dabangg* by wearing trousers of the same name. He appears with the word 'Dabangg' printed on the back of his pants. As Sinha suggests, 'Habib Faisal's film unfolds with Parma's repetitive negotiation with his own masculinity.'^{xxvi}

The movie opens with a few school-going students and a pair including a boy and a girl passing vulgar comments to each other. Unlike Shakespeare's Juliet who is pretty much sensible and a well-behaved lady, *Ishaqzaade*'s little Zoya is like a firecracker, who is bullying her fellow boy mate by calling him and his father a 'fool' and later on

'dog'; on the other hand, young Parma responded by saying her 'chipkali' (lizard), followed by 'souor' (swine). It's noteworthy to observe that the school van carrying students carried the words 'ALMORE CANVENT, ENGLISH MEDIUM' on its side. The word 'canvent' could have been written as 'convent'. It's possible to see this shift in word usage to fit pronunciation as an example of hybridity, in which speakers from various locations rearrange words to make them easier to pronounce.

Being a member of a 'mardon ki haveli' (a 'household of men'), and being aware of 'mardon ki zubaan' (a 'parlance of men'), Parma acts in a stereotypically deferential and obedient manner in the presence of his mother. However, he is motivated to prove his 'mardangi' in front of the family elder because the father's absence, who might have validated his position within the familial lineage, prevented him from doing so. On the other hand, his cousins Dharma and Karma are given priority by his grandfather. Parma's ongoing struggle to overcome this sense of belonging leads to moral transgression and brutal masochism. At the slightest provocation, he destroys a local fuel vendor's storage area. He also kidnaps a dancer when she is performing at the home of one of his enemies. Finally, he deceives to get Zoya to pretend to be his wife using sexuality as his weapon.

In Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Romeo is a love-sick adolescent boy with raging hormones who is rambling around in intoxication. He fell in love with Rosaline after seeing her. She doesn't know that Romeo is there. He then struggles to clear her thoughts from his head. His friends, a group of young men that spend time out together make laughs of him for it. It's a fantastic, organic, lifelike start to a play and a perfect introduction to this innocent youth who must deal with the harsh reality of a hostile environment. "Love" for Romeo "is a smoke made with the fume of sighs, / Being purged, a fire sparkling in lovers' eyes, / Being vexed, a sea nourished with loving tears." (I, i, ll. 181-183) Interestingly, Romeo, a virgin in Shakespeare's play (III.ii.13), feels entirely powerless when tragedy strikes due to his immaturity and loneliness. But in *Ishaqzaade*, Parma, the prototype of Romeo is not lovesick like him; rather he goes beyond sensible affection towards the woman and is overtly sexual. When the adult Parma first appears, he praised Chand, a local prostitute, by saying, "Chand ki body atom bomb/ Chand ki figure kar de dang" (Chand's body is an atom bomb/ Chand's figure is killing!). Romeo adores Juliet's beauty from the beginning to the end. He declares, "I ne'er saw true beauty till this night" (I.v. 1.54) at the Capulet feast and, "Death hath had no power yet upon thy beauty" (at the grave). (V.iii. 1. 92). But he approaches her with reverence. However, Romeo's version of 'pilgrimage' is referred to in a derogatory way. At his

grandfather's birthday party, Parma was told to call Chand for a dance performance; but unfortunately, he forgot. After asking, his friend said 'Hum kya Udhar tirath kar rahe the' (it is not like we were on a pilgrimage). Parma displays his macho attitude right away, not because he wants to rule over others but rather because he is vulnerable on the inside. As a result, he is always trying to validate his masculinity in front of his family clan. After betraying Zoya, Parma celebrates his manhood explicitly in the song, 'Chokra Jawan' (the boy's become a man), which highlights his acceptance into the Chauhan family's political heritage. While Parma is validating his 'mardaani', Zoya, on the other hand, seems to exploit her so-called 'feminine' persona. In contrast to Shakespeare's Juliet, Zoya entered the scene by purchasing a pistol from a nearby gun dealer and selling her new earrings. After then, Zoya's father and other family members were talking about her wedding when she is not at home; nonetheless, Zoya's late appearance and sarcastic comments about her future husband demonstrate her aggressive and direct mindset. She slapped Parma in front of everyone, reflecting her personality once more. The element of cultural hybridity can be located in Zoya's slapping, Parma's betrayal of Zoya, the background of political rivalry, and a fiery love relationship between these two, showcasing 'our modernity.'

In *Ishaqzaade*, I suggest, that there are examples of a hybrid adaptation in which the intricacies of the hybrid structure show a complex reading of the nature of intercultural exchange. The ease with which pieces of Shakespeare's text and sub-urban-based Hindi film fit together to demonstrates the mechanics of such interchange.

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- ⁱ Linda Hutcheon and Siobhan O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation* (Routledge, 2013) p. 93
- ⁱⁱ Yashika Mathur, 'Valentine's Day 2022: The Changing Face of Romance in Bollywood', <https://www.outlookindia.com/art-entertainment/love-through-the-lens-the-changing-face-of-romance-in-bollywood-news-32112>"
- ⁱⁱⁱ Jyotika Virdi, *The Cinematic Imagination* Chapter 6
- ^{iv} Tejaswini Ganti, *Bollywood: A Guidebook to Popular Hindi Cinema* (Routledge, 2004) p.35.
- ^v Ibid, p. 37.
- ^{vi} Glocal – a mixture of global and local. The word described by Ana María Fraile Marcos as a 'hybrid oxymoron' (2014: 5). In her introduction to *Literature and the Global City: Reshaping the English Canadian Imagery*, Fraile Marcos suggests that the British Sociologist Roland Robertson was responsible for popularizing the term in the English-speaking world.
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The Deconstruction of the US Government During the COVID-19 Pandemic Using Pictorial Metaphor – Take Wuhe Qilin CG Cartoon “*White House Painter*” as an Example

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Abstract— *The rise of social media and the advancement of digital technology have opened new avenues for the global dissemination of digital political cartoons and the construction of public opinion fields. Digital political cartoons consistently engage in the construction of ideology-laden metaphors, employing sophisticated artistic techniques and rich visual discourse to generate significant value in international communication and public opinion guidance. They also provide new perspectives and channels for the construction and expression of national image. This paper adopts a visual metaphor research approach to analyze the types of image metaphors utilized in Wuhe Qilin’s digital political cartoon White House Painter. Through five distinct metaphorical categories—“text-derived visual metaphor,” “metaphor of difference,” “light metaphor,” “color metaphor,” and “multi-element interaction metaphor”—the study examines its content presentation, value orientation, and communicative effects. It further explores diverse forms of deconstructing the U.S. national image and offers new insights for the construction and expression of China’s national image within social networks.*



Keywords— *digital political cartoon; White House Painter; Wuhe Qilin; visual metaphor; counter-discourse deconstruction*

I. INTRODUCTION

During the pandemic, the Trump administration of the United States repeatedly fabricated defamatory terms such

as “Wuhan virus” and “Chinese virus,” aiming to disseminate falsehoods and rumors through media and governmental discourse, shift blame onto the Chinese

government, and exploit the pandemic to attack and smear China in an attempt to gain international public opinion support. Such practices severely violate scientific principles and disregard basic human conscience. The World Health Organization has repeatedly stated that there is no scientific basis to support the "virus origin theory".

Facts demonstrate that in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chinese government and people have made all-out efforts to control the outbreak and implemented multiple measures to safeguard public health and safety. These efforts have received widespread recognition and support from the international community. In contrast, the U.S. government has been the source of disregarding basic survival needs of its people and bringing disaster to the global population. In response to the duplicitous blame-shifting tactics of the U.S. government, Chinese illustrator Wuhe Qilin created the digital political cartoon *White House Painter*, whose schematic imagery directly targets the U.S. government and satirizes its deliberate fabrication of lies to conceal the truth of administrative failures during the pandemic.

Metaphor serves as a core mechanism for understanding abstract and complex political themes, fully revealing and elaborating on political subjects. It provides a critical pathway for analyzing the persuasive nature of political discourse and underlying ideologies. This explains why metaphor studies in political discourse—whether from a unimodal (text-only) or multimodal perspective—have sustained enduring scholarly attention. Currently, most academic research in this direction focuses on political cartoons.

Forceville (1996) introduced "multimodal metaphor" by integrating cognitive linguistics with multimodal discourse studies to address the limitations of unimodal (purely linguistic) metaphor research in cognitive linguistics. He linked modalities to fundamental human sensory channels—auditory, visual, olfactory, gustatory, and tactile—and categorized them into five types: (1) pictorial

or visual modality; (2) auditory or sound modality; (3) olfactory modality; (4) gustatory modality; and (5) tactile modality. The representation of multimodal metaphors relies on distinct modalities corresponding to different perceptual symbols in humans, which in turn align with sensory stimuli received through perceptual channels. El Refaie (2015) used the term 'pictorial metaphor' to refer to images of specific, recognizable objects, scenes, and persons". Krstić et al. (2020) argued that visual metaphors in political cartoons make political concepts more accessible, concretizing political imagery through metaphorical representations and facilitating a comprehensive understanding of how major political processes are presented as tangible objects of interpretation. They found that metaphorical thinking is expressed not through singular, explicit metaphors but through more complex combinations of visual and linguistic elements. The use of multimodal metaphors often reflects the political stance and ideology of discourse producers. Multimodal metaphors help uncover ideologies embedded in political multimodal discourse, and multimodal metaphor theory plays a significant role in understanding the metaphorical thinking and meaning construction within such discourse.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

(1) Research on Image Deconstruction Through Pictorial Metaphor

The existing literature primarily unfolds across three dimensions: visual metaphor theory, multimodal semiotic analysis, and the construction of national image within crisis contexts. Pictorial metaphor, as a core rhetorical strategy in political cartoons, constructs critical narratives through the interaction of images and text. Forceville's multimodal metaphor theory is adopted to emphasize the mapping mechanism between source domains (e.g., tools, actions) and target domains (e.g., political strategies) to expose contradictions in the exercise of power.

In the context of the pandemic, political cartoons often deconstruct the government's authoritative image through satirical symbols and situational irony. Their effectiveness relies on the audience's consensual understanding of cultural symbols. Research on deconstructing the U.S. government's image largely focuses on logical paradoxes in its pandemic policies and the evasion of international responsibilities. Cheng Jintao (2014) used American political cartoons as case studies to analyze the construction mechanisms of pictorial metaphors. For example, the visual narrative of "an unmanned car with an American flag driving toward a fiscal cliff" metaphorically represents the blindness and crisis risks of the Obama administration's fiscal policies, while the symbol of the "White House roof" reinforces the critique of the government's decision-making incompetence. Wang Hui and Xin Bin (2019) analyzed how American media indirectly deconstruct the U.S. government's advocated multilateralist image through visual metonyms (such as a "broken chain" symbolizing the collapse of the trade system), revealing the self-contradictory logic of its policies. Such analyses often integrate cognitive framing theories and semiotic tools to reveal how images activate public awareness of issues like "democratic deficits" or "double standards."

However, existing studies still exhibit two major limitations: (1) a lack of systematic analysis of cross-cultural communication practices by Chinese creators (e.g., the works of Wuhe Qilin); (2) an absence of empirical testing on the audience reception of visual metaphors, necessitating further integration of multimodal discourse analysis and cognitive psychology frameworks to deepen the research.

(2) Research on Wuhe Qilin's Works

Existing studies on Wuhe Qilin are limited to a few publications. Hu Mengyuan (2021), grounded in Wuhe Qilin's digital news cartoon collections, employed theoretical approaches such as textual analysis and visual

methodology to examine the survival forms, textual and visual connotations, and value orientations of these collections. Her work interprets the content presentation, dissemination mechanisms, and communication effects of digital news cartoons, exploring their influence on public opinion. Wei and Zhang Yukun (2021), drawing from the "encoding/decoding" theory, investigated the ideological construction and expression in political cartoons. Bao Daoguang and Wei Xing (2021), starting from the success of Wuhe Qilin's works in breaking through Western ideological containment, explored innovations in the dissemination mechanisms of socialist ideology and the re-creation of the international ideological public opinion field. Yang Dingdu (2021) analyzed the reasons behind the popularity of Wuhe Qilin's *Peaceful Army* on overseas social media platforms, revealing the potential of news cartoons for guiding public opinion under the impetus of digital technology and social media platforms in the new media era.

To date, few studies have analyzed the content of Wuhe Qilin's digital political cartoons to examine the deconstruction of the U.S. government's discursive image through pictorial metaphor. Only Xiao Chuhan and Chen Zhuo (2022), through visual metonyms like the "politicization of virus origin tracing" (e.g., combining a laboratory symbol with a dollar sign), criticized the U.S.'s stigmatization strategies and hegemonic actions. Therefore, as a representative and typical case, analyzing Wuhe Qilin's work *White House Painter* holds significant value for research on national image construction in digital political cartoons.

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS, THEORY AND METHOD

1. Research Questions:

(1) What metaphors are present in Wuhe Qilin's artwork *White House Painter*?

(2) How do these metaphors function in deconstructing the U.S. national image?

(3) What implications do digital political cartoons hold for the international dissemination of the Chinese government's discourse?

2. Pictorial Metaphor Theory

Forceville (1996) introduced "multimodal metaphor" by integrating cognitive linguistics with multimodal discourse studies to address the limitations of unimodal (purely linguistic) metaphor research in cognitive linguistics. He linked modalities to fundamental human sensory channels—auditory, visual, olfactory, gustatory, and tactile—and categorized them into five types: (1) pictorial or visual modality; (2) auditory or sound modality; (3) olfactory modality; (4) gustatory modality; and (5) tactile modality.

Based on Forceville's research, Niu Hongbao (2022) conducted an in-depth exploration of pictorial metaphor. He argued that research on pictorial metaphor must integrate theories of visual semiotics, philosophy, and aesthetics, addressing four core issues: the similarities and differences between pictorial and verbal metaphor, types of pictorial metaphor, the operation of pictorial metaphor, and the relationship between pictorial metaphor and meaning. Regarding the types of pictorial metaphor, he categorized them into seven varieties: "pictorial metaphors with textual sources," "juxtaposition mapping" or "juxtaposed depictions," "juxtaposed differential tension" (i.e., "differential metaphor"), "superimposed identification" or "identification metaphor," "light metaphor," "color

metaphor," and metaphors involving "multiple interacting elements." These categories illustrate the experiential patterns of pictorial metaphor.

IV. METHODOLOGY

Through a detailed analysis of the types of pictorial metaphors and image schemas in *White House Painter*—including "text-derived pictorial metaphors," "metaphors of difference," "light metaphors," "color metaphors," and "metaphors of multi-element interaction"—along with specific image schemas such as "disinfectant," "dog," "Maneki-neko (fortune cat)," "books," "Chinese characters," and "five-pointed stars," this study elucidates the role of digital political cartoons in deconstructing the U.S. national image and offers insights for the construction of China's international image.

V. DISCUSSIONS OF PICTORIAL METAPHOR TYPES AND IMAGE SCHEMAS IN *WHITE HOUSE PAINTER*

As shown in the following CG cartoon (Fig 1), *White House Painter* was composed by Wuhe Qilin to depict the image of the government of The United States during the epidemic time. Through five dimensions of pictorial metaphors developed by Niu Hongbao (2022), we analyze the images present in this CG cartoon, the mechanisms of government image deconstruction, and Chinese discourse strategies of international dissemination.



Fig. 1 The House Painted composed by Wuhe Qilin

4.1 “Text-Derived Pictorial Metaphors” Reflect Chinese Public’s Critical Awareness of the U.S. Government

“Text-derived pictorial metaphors” refer to visual metaphors constructed based on pre-existing textual metaphors. *White House Painter* is set against the backdrop of the U.S. government’s use of media discourse to stigmatize China and propagate anti-China rhetoric during the COVID-19 pandemic. Wuhe Qilin stated on Weibo that the cartoon was inspired by a private message from a netizen. After its release, it garnered extensive views, discussions, and endorsements from Chinese netizens, reflecting the public’s acute awareness of the U.S. government’s duplicitous practices.

4.2 “Metaphors of Difference” Expose the Hypocrisy of the U.S. Government’s Duplicity

In this type of pictorial metaphor, two distinct graphical elements are juxtaposed within the visual space. However, they do not form a direct depiction or mapping of one onto the other, nor do they achieve a fusion of source and target domains. Instead, they maintain difference and tension, generating ambiguity or irony through this relational dynamic.

White House Painter features two central figures: then-U.S. President Donald Trump engaged in a media interview, and U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo vigorously painting within the White House office. This juxtaposition creates a tension of non-identification through difference. When disparate elements are placed together, a semantic relationship emerges—its specific meaning shaped by the constructed context. By employing the fundamental structure of “metaphors of difference,” Wuhe Qilin vividly portrays the U.S. government’s prioritization of smearing China over protecting its own citizens’ health and safety during the pandemic, effectively conveying its hypocrisy and dereliction of duty to every viewer.

4.3 “Light Metaphor” Reflects That the U.S. Fabrication of Discourses to Smear China Cannot Evade the Scrutiny of Truth

The realization of visibility in “light metaphor” is achieved through color effects, which strictly fall under the category of color metaphor. By the Italian Renaissance, perspective technique, as a technology for the present viewer, rationalized vision by mathematizing visual observation. On one hand, it introduced natural light as a

condition for observation into painting; on the other hand, it transformed the light as a condition of visibility for the present viewer into a rational light manifested through chiaroscuro order. Thus, light appears in painting in three identities: as natural light—the condition of visibility in perspective; as the bearer of divine light; or as the bearer of rational light.

In *White House Painter*, the primary light sources include the media spotlight and sunlight streaming through the window. The media spotlight illuminates the U.S. government's image of fabricating false information, while the sunlight from the window represents the light of truth, illuminating the table covered with words such as "China," "Chinese," and "five-pointed stars cut by scissors." This signifies that the U.S. actions are not upright and are exposed under the light of truth—i.e., the consensus of international cognition—and are destined to fail.

4.4 "Color Metaphor" in Shaping the Image of the U.S. Government

Like "light metaphor," "color metaphor" specifically belongs to the domain of visibility in images. Genuine color metaphor primarily builds upon the form or shape of the image to express internal emotions and moods, endowing the work with a holistic emotional relationship. According to Goodman's view, it is untenable to claim that a painting or a certain color "expresses" sadness or joy. Neither colors nor images inherently possess sadness or joy. In a strict semiotic sense, any expression is merely exemplification or labeling. To say that a certain color is sad is to use that color to exemplify or label the emotion of sadness, much like traffic lights label "prohibition" or "permission"—red and green themselves carry no inherent meaning of "stop" or "go".

Wuhe Qilin's portrayal of Western national images is filled with absurd elements, exhibiting strong aggressiveness, provocation, and threat, reflecting an imbalanced national image fraught with power conflicts. The painting constructs and displays the true negative

image of Western countries through oppressive and gloomy tones such as dark and somber colors. In *White House Painter*, the color palette is highly destructive and aggressive. The contrasting colors of deep red and dark blue evoke discomfort in viewers. The blood-red paint brushed onto blue, spiked "viruses" metaphorically exemplify the U.S. government's internal emotional attitude of using China as a "scapegoat" and "shield."

4.5 "Multi-Element Interaction" Metaphor: Exploring the Deconstruction of the U.S. Image in Digital Political Cartoons

In this type of metaphor, unlike in "metaphors of difference," it is not possible to clearly distinguish dominant vehicles and tenors, source domains and target domains, nor the cross-domain interactive mappings or blends between these dominant tenors and vehicles, source and target domains. Instead, it involves a collection of metaphors formed through the juxtaposition, superposition, and interaction of multiple schematic images.

White House Painter contains numerous schematic images, including: invading blue monsters, a Chinese flag being painted with blood-red pigment, cut-out five-pointed stars, crumpled five-pointed stars, a Maneki-neko (fortune cat) on the desk, golf clubs by the door, toilet paper on the table, disinfectant, drafts covered with "China" and "Chinese," *the Bible*, U.S. dollars, *the Declaration of Independence*, a shepherd dog, and a diary, among others. Each has its own complex iconographic origins. However, when juxtaposed and superimposed within a new interactive relationship, they forge a new contextual order, and each image unit acquires new contextual meanings. Compared to the aforementioned six types of pictorial metaphors, the "multi-element interaction" type requires the creation and construction of complex schematic associative clues or logic for interaction.

The cartoon scene is set in the U.S. White House Oval Office, representing the U.S. government's fabrication of facts to smear China. The invading blue monsters

represent the COVID-19 pandemic; the blood-red pigment symbolizes the U.S. government's disregard for its people's lives and health, akin to "profiting from human blood"; the cut-out five-pointed stars represent China, with Pompeo busy painting the blue monsters with the Chinese flag, metaphorizing his actions of framing, slandering, and defaming China. Pompeo steps on a chair, whose three legs press down on *the Bible*, the U.S. Constitution's *Declaration of Independence*, and U.S. dollars, indicating that the U.S. government is willing to use faith, rule of law, and economy as stepping stones to make its framing appear more credible. A shepherd dog holding a diary in its mouth metaphorically represents Chinese writer Fang and her *Wuhan Lockdown Diary* during the pandemic. The diary, filled with subjective and fabricated false statements, became a tool for the U.S. to stigmatize China. In 2020, its English edition was published by U.S. publisher HarperCollins and listed on Amazon, becoming a bestseller promoted by U.S. publishers, with editions in multiple languages including German. It even made the front page of the *Los Angeles Times*. The remaining four shepherd dogs metaphorize the other members of the "Five Eyes" alliance besides the U.S.—the UK, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. The collars around their necks are derived from the "Alliance flag," representing "white supremacy," hinting at the U.S. manipulation and utilization of these four countries and their subservience to the U.S. Among the six five-pointed stars cut from the cardboard, one is already pasted on the blue monster, three are scattered on the ground, and two are crumpled into balls. The crumpled stars represent previous U.S. attempts to smear China that failed to achieve their goals, while the missing star metaphorizes that the U.S. government's attempts to stigmatize China are futile and ultimately doomed to failure. The toilet paper on the table metaphorizes the U.S. hoarding of toilet paper in the early stages of the pandemic, and the disinfectant alludes to Trump's tweet suggesting "injecting disinfectant" as a treatment for COVID-19. The Maneki-neko subtly

references the Trump administration's business-oriented nature, prioritizing economic interests over the value of people's lives and health. The entire image is rich with interconnected elements, forming a complete logical system for deconstructing the image.

VI. CONCLUSION

The rapid dissemination of Wuhe Qilin's work can be attributed not only to its unofficial stance, which vividly exposes the hypocrisy of Western nations while highlighting China's peace and sincerity through caricature, but also to the rise of social media and advancements in digital technology. Digital content now exhibits characteristics of communication, resonance, interaction, and regeneration during its dissemination. As a medium, digital technology successfully transcends the constraints of traditional national image construction and propaganda, enabling the deconstruction and subversion of national images through a highly aggressive and radical approach. Behind the exaggeration, metaphor, and satire in Wuhe Qilin's work lies a successful exploitation of the social dissemination attributes of digital political cartoons, breaking through conservative forms of external communication and Western ideological barriers.

This insight suggests that we should leverage social media platforms and digital political cartoons to enable nations to reconstruct their images via the internet, thereby becoming a crucial means of expressing national discourse and countering ideological hegemony.

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Tribal culture and Marginalisation as depicted in *Kocharethi*: The Araya Woman

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Abstract— *Kocharethi: The Araya Woman* is a mouthpiece of the life, the ways and practices of Malayarayars, the tribal people who abide in the Western Ghats of Kerala. The paper employs a thematic and discourse analysis by keeping a cultural and environmental perspective. It is also a tale of interdependence between nature and culture and resists the misrepresentations of the community. The poor and ignorant people of Araya community are evicted from their land and their resistance is crushed down ruthlessly. Lack of awareness and accessibility to standard health facilities coupled with alcoholism add misery to their lives. Natural disasters make them all the more vulnerable to the exploitation of upper caste money lenders who are better organised.



Keywords— backward, debts, exploitation, ignorance, lack of awareness, natural disaster, poverty, resistance.

Narayan's debut novel *Kocharethi* was translated from Malayalam into English as "*Kocharethi: the Araya Women*", by Catherine Thankamma. *Kocharethi* is the story of the people of Mala Araya tribe which belong to the border area of Kerala during the early years of twentieth century. It is through Kunjippennu's perspective that the story unwinds. It is she who strikes in the key theme of the novel by breaking off the tradition by refusing to marry her maternal uncle's son. This kind of cross-cousin marriage was a common practice among the tribal community. Kunjippennu questions the tradition and becomes the harbinger of a cultural change when she marries Kochuraman -an orphan, much to the displeasure of the karanavars or the elderly members of her tribe. Nature and climate of Western Ghats which forms the backdrop of the novel also has a role in Kunjippennu's story as the course of their happy married life is reduced to mere ashes by a forest fire in which their son dies and the house is destroyed.

In the wake of dire poverty that follows, Kochuraman takes to alcoholism. The financial backwardness of the community makes them soft targets to the money lenders and landlords who tactfully get them involved in debts and

gradually became successful in ruthlessly evicting them from their forest land. Politicians also join hands with these loan sharks and the unholy nexus continued to suppress and dominate the tribal community.

For the Araya community "It is always us, a feeling of being one with the hills and waters, animals and men" (Jayasree, 2012, p. xvi). This inclusive lifestyle was the basis of their collective identity. They practiced sustainability as a part of their life as they lived in full harmony with nature. The land always provided for their needs and they never attempted to fulfil their greed. This was in contrast with the commercial planters who encroached in to this natural haven as a ground for exploiting the resources including teak, rosewood, tea, pepper, cashew etc. The novel is a quest for native identity in the midst of modern encroachments and exploitative tendencies.

Tribal beliefs, rituals, customs & ceremonies

The rituals of the araya people are the warp and woof of their co-existence with nature. Their household deities and the related myths connected them with the essence of nature which were incomprehensible to outsiders. Their rituals associated with birth and death in the family and community

show their oneness with nature. The araya women believe that the 'theendari' bird's cry can indicate the beginning of their menstrual cycle. 'Pettinukonduvaral' is a ceremony of bringing the pregnant woman to her native house in the seventh month of pregnancy.

Kunjippennu was asked to touch one of the two identical packets. She did accordingly. They opened the wrapping-it contained the piece of iron. That meant the child was a boy. If Kunjippennu had touched the stone the child would be a girl. That was the belief (*The Araya Woman*,36)

They also had certain superstitions as that a dead person takes rebirth in the family as a new-born. They also believed that the cry of a particular crow as a messenger of imminent death. Kotha's death of bear attack confirms their belief. As per their customs cooking fire cannot be lit in the house where death has just happened. 'Pula' or the period of isolation after death and birth was observed

Pula the period of isolation was to be observed for fifteen days. During that period it was a taboo to touch weapons. They would not enter cultivated lands, visit dwellings of kinsfolk, use oil, perform any rites or appear before idols. Liquor and women are strictly forbidden. On the fifteenth day they would have the ritual bath. On the sixteenth a festive meal would be served to relatives and friends. (*The Araya Women*, 81)

They believed in sorcerers and magic healers while treating illnesses. When Kadutha fell ill, Ittyadi treated her with the 'Panchalamkara pooja' which consisted of five sacred things. Their ignorance and inability to count and keep accounts were exploited by the traders. As Gopalan and Arayar says: When we have pepper and cashew nut, the Christian and Muslim traders haunt our homes. Otherwise, no dog will come this way. (*The Araya Woman*,100)

They were easily exploited by these merchants .They are evicted from their land through treacherous plans. Thumb impressions of these innocent tribals are used to cheat them of their land and property. They are forced to sell their produce like pepper and cashew for low prices as they do not know the market value of these goods. Kunjadichan is one who is exploited in this way and loses his land to Kunjamothalali who says:

What's gone is gone. Don't worry over it.
It must be around two acres. Give it to me.
I want to grow some tapioca there. I'll
settle your loan in Hassan's shop. Here,
I'm giving you one hundred rupees as

well. Buy ten idangazhi of rice, some tobacco and dried fish now itself. Just put your thumb mark on this paper. (*The Araya Woman*, 69)

Only education can liberate tribal community from this dire state of exploitation. The arrival of Kochuraman in the village brings about changes in the community. He is an Ashan and with the help of other villages establish the Saraswati Vilasam Kalari where children start to learn enthusiastically.

Aashan explained to them the importance of education: Knowledge was greatest wealth. Thieves could not take it away; the more you gave, the more it became. Have you not heard that? 'It is not enough that your children learn to cultivate tapioca and yam and climb trees. They should study, become confident, wear good clothes, get government jobs.'(*The Araya Woman*, 147)

It was Parvati's classmate, Kochumadhavan who tries to convince Kochuraman and manages to persuade Kochuraman about the advent of modernity. He says:

It is all right acha. She passed the exam, didn't she? She's the first girl from this hill to pass the sixth form exam. Now she should get a job. It's the time for change. We cannot turn a blind eye to that fact. If they like each other you should agree to their marriage. (*The Araya Woman*, 183)

Kocharethi, is thus an analysis of the history of the tribal community and its attempts to come to terms with the modern society. Narayan do not attempt to romanticise the novel. The narrative is an eye opener to the attempts of marginalisation from being the proud owners of land and masters of indigenous wisdom to a community bereft of their cultural and social identity.

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Intercultural Communication Conflicts and Competence Enhancement from Multicultural Dimensions: An Empirical Analysis Based on Cross-Cultural Cases

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Abstract— Against the background of globalization and the intensive implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative, the frequency and depth of intercultural communication have reached an unprecedented level, making communication conflicts caused by cultural differences a core issue that must be addressed in fields such as international Chinese education. Grounded in Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory, Ting-Toomey's Face-Negotiation Theory, and Berry's Intercultural Competence Model, this study takes the researcher's firsthand cross-cultural interaction cases involving China-South Korea, China-U.S., and China-Italy dyads (with the researcher assuming the roles of event organizer, Chinese language teacher, and international student respectively) as empirical samples. It systematically analyzes the influence mechanisms of key cultural dimensions—including power distance, individualism versus collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation—on communicative behaviors in international Chinese education scenarios. The findings indicate that cognitive biases derived from insufficient perception of cultural dimension differences constitute the primary source of intercultural communication conflicts, while three-dimensional strategies consisting of systematic cultural cognition construction, targeted empathic ability training, and scenario-based behavioral adjustment are key pathways to enhancing intercultural communication competence. Following an analytical logic of "theoretical framework construction—case empirical validation—enhancement path refinement," this paper not only supplements empirical evidence for the application of cross-cultural communication theories in international Chinese education but also provides actionable practical guidance for Chinese language teachers, international education managers, and overseas students, thereby enriching the empirical research system of intercultural communication in the field of international Chinese education.



Keywords— Intercultural communication; Cultural Dimensions Theory; Communication conflicts; Intercultural competence; International Chinese education.

I. INTRODUCTION

With the deepening of globalization and the continuous advancement of China's international educational exchange programs, intercultural communication has evolved from a marginal scenario to a daily routine in the field of international Chinese education. According to the 2024 China International Education Development Report, the annual number of cross-border educational exchanges involving China has exceeded 12 million person-times,

among which international Chinese education has become the largest exchange platform, covering more than 180 countries and regions with over 50 million learners worldwide. However, the report also highlights a prominent issue: 37.2% of surveyed Chinese language teachers, 45.6% of international students, and 31.8% of international education managers reported experiencing explicit communication conflicts due to cultural differences, while 62.3% admitted to having encountered implicit

misunderstandings that affected communication effectiveness. This data reveals that cultural differences have become a more intractable obstacle than language barriers in intercultural communication within international Chinese education.

The core challenge of intercultural communication lies in the cognitive misalignment of unspoken cultural codes between communicators, which Hofstede defined as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group from another" (Hofstede, 2011). In international Chinese education scenarios, this collective programming is specifically reflected in multiple dimensions: in classroom teaching, American students may directly question the teacher's teaching design, while Korean students tend to remain silent even if they have doubts, which is a manifestation of differences in power distance; in after-class interactions, Chinese teachers' concern about "whether students have eaten" may be regarded as an invasion of privacy by Western students, reflecting the conflict between collectivism and individualism; in academic cooperation, Italian students' flexible attitude towards deadlines often causes misunderstandings with Chinese teachers who emphasize punctuality, which is closely related to uncertainty avoidance. These phenomena indicate that only by deeply grasping the intrinsic logic of cultural dimensions can we effectively resolve intercultural communication conflicts.

Despite the increasing attention paid to intercultural communication conflicts in international Chinese education, existing research still has obvious limitations. First, the integration of theory and practice is insufficient. Most case studies focus on narrative descriptions of conflict phenomena, such as recording the process of misunderstandings between Chinese teachers and foreign students, but lack in-depth interpretation based on mature cross-cultural communication theoretical frameworks. Second, the proposed enhancement strategies for intercultural competence are overly generalized. Most studies put forward macroscopic suggestions such as "strengthening cultural learning" and "enhancing communication skills," which lack operability due to the absence of scenario-specific design and empirical verification. Third, the research scope is relatively narrow, mainly focusing on Sino-US and Sino-European interactions, while ignoring the communication characteristics of cultural circles with close geographical and cultural ties to China, such as East Asia.

To address these research gaps, this study selects three typical cross-cultural interaction cases with distinct cultural attributes: South Korea (a high-power distance and collectivist culture), the United States (a high-individualism

and low-power distance culture), and Italy (a medium-uncertainty avoidance and individualist culture). The researcher's multiple roles (event organizer, Chinese teacher, international student) ensure the diversity and authenticity of the case samples. By integrating Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory, Ting-Toomey's Face-Negotiation Theory, and Berry's Intercultural Competence Model, this study adopts an analytical framework of "theoretical deconstruction—case validation—path refinement" to explore the formation mechanism of intercultural communication conflicts and construct a three-phase enhancement path of intercultural competence. The research aims to provide academic achievements with both theoretical depth and practical value for international Chinese education practitioners and researchers.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Cultural Dimensions Theory

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory is the most influential theoretical framework in the field of cross-cultural communication. Initially proposed based on a large-scale survey of IBM employees in 40 countries and regions, the theory was gradually expanded from the initial four dimensions to six core dimensions: Power Distance (PD), Individualism versus Collectivism (IDV), Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI), Masculinity versus Femininity (MAS), Long-Term versus Short-Term Orientation (LTO), and Indulgence versus Restraint (IND) (Hofstede & Minkov, 2015). This theory provides a quantifiable and operational analytical tool for understanding cultural differences, and its validity has been verified in multiple fields such as education, management, and communication.

For international Chinese education, the following four dimensions have the most direct guiding significance:

First, Power Distance refers to the degree to which members of a society accept and tolerate hierarchical inequalities in power distribution. Cultures with high power distance (such as South Korea, with a PDI of 60) emphasize strict hierarchical order, and status and age are important criteria for interpersonal communication. In educational scenarios, this is reflected in students' respect for teachers' authority, reluctance to question teachers' viewpoints, and the use of honorific language to distinguish status. In contrast, cultures with low power distance (such as the United States, with a PDI of 40) advocate equal interpersonal relationships, and students are more likely to express their opinions and even challenge teachers' authority (Hofstede, 2010). The PDI of China is 30, which is between high and low power distance, showing a "context-dependent" characteristic—hierarchy is emphasized in formal scenarios, while equality is advocated

in informal interactions.

Second, Individualism versus Collectivism reflects the core value orientation of a society. Individualistic cultures (such as the United States, with an IDV of 91) prioritize individual interests, personal autonomy, and self-expression. In intercultural communication, individuals from such cultures pay more attention to personal boundaries and tend to express their needs directly. Collectivist cultures (such as South Korea, with an IDV of 18) emphasize group interests, harmony, and interdependence. Interpersonal communication in such cultures is more inclined to consider the feelings of others and avoid direct conflict (Hofstede & Minkov, 2015). China, as a typical collectivist culture (IDV of 20), emphasizes "group harmony" and "interpersonal connection" in communication, which is often reflected in Chinese teachers' care for students' daily lives.

Third, Uncertainty Avoidance refers to the degree to which a society tolerates ambiguous and uncertain situations. Cultures with high uncertainty avoidance (such as Germany, with a UAI of 65) pursue stability and clarity, advocating strict rules and procedures to avoid risks. In educational scenarios, this is manifested in the emphasis on punctuality, adherence to teaching plans, and the pursuit of "standard answers." Cultures with low uncertainty avoidance (such as Italy, with a UAI of 75, showing medium-low characteristics in educational scenarios) have a higher tolerance for ambiguity, advocating flexibility and innovation, and are more willing to accept changes and uncertainties (Hofstede, 2010). Chinese culture shows a "dual characteristic" in uncertainty avoidance: it emphasizes rules in formal education but allows flexibility in informal interactions.

Fourth, Long-Term Orientation versus Short-Term Orientation focuses on the time perspective of a society. Cultures with long-term orientation (such as China, with an LTO of 87) emphasize persistence, thrift, and long-term goals, and are more willing to invest in long-term development. In international Chinese education, this is reflected in Chinese teachers' emphasis on students' long-term language proficiency improvement and cultural adaptation. Cultures with short-term orientation (such as the United States, with an LTO of 26) pay more attention to immediate results and personal happiness, and students may be more concerned about the immediate effectiveness of learning and personal interest experience (Hofstede & Minkov, 2015).

Minkov's research (2018) found that cultural dimensions have situational variability, and the same culture may show different characteristics in educational, workplace, and family scenarios. This reminds us that when applying the theory to analyze intercultural communication

conflicts in international Chinese education, we should avoid mechanical application and combine specific scenarios for dynamic interpretation.

2.2 Face-Negotiation Theory

Proposed by Ting-Toomey (1988) and revised many times later, Face-Negotiation Theory is an important theoretical framework for explaining cross-cultural communication conflicts from the perspective of face management. The theory holds that "face"—the positive social value that individuals claim for themselves in interpersonal interactions—is the core of intercultural communication conflicts, and cultural differences determine the types of face needs and conflict handling strategies of individuals (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998).

Ting-Toomey categorizes "face" into three types: individual face (the desire for personal autonomy and respect), relational face (the desire to maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships), and group face (the desire to safeguard the interests and image of the group to which one belongs). This classification effectively explains the differences in conflict behaviors between different cultural groups. Collectivist cultures (such as China and South Korea) prioritize relational face and group face. In communication, they are more willing to suppress personal needs to maintain group harmony and interpersonal relationships. For example, Korean teachers may tolerate inappropriate behaviors of guests to avoid damaging the cooperative relationship between the two schools. Individualistic cultures (such as the United States and Italy) prioritize individual face, and individuals are more likely to express personal opinions and safeguard personal rights, even if it may cause interpersonal conflicts. For instance, American students may directly question the rationality of Chinese teachers' teaching arrangements to safeguard their right to receive quality education (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001).

In the context of international Chinese education, Face-Negotiation Theory can effectively interpret the essence of many typical conflicts. In terms of teacher-student interaction, Chinese teachers' criticism of students in public is intended to maintain teaching order (group face), but it may be regarded as an insult to personal dignity (individual face) by Western students; in terms of inter-school cooperation, Chinese institutions' emphasis on ceremonial norms is to safeguard institutional image (group face), while Western institutions may pay more attention to "efficiency and practical results" (individual face of participants). These conflicts are essentially the result of the mismatch between the face needs of communicators from different cultural backgrounds.

With the development of digital technology, Ting-

Toomey (2018) added the "digital face negotiation" dimension to the theory, pointing out that the characteristics of online communication (such as anonymity and delayed feedback) have changed the way of face management. This expansion has important guiding significance for current international Chinese education, which is increasingly dependent on online teaching.

2.3 Empathy and Intercultural Competence Model

Berry's Intercultural Competence Model, proposed in 2002, clarifies the core components and formation process of intercultural competence, providing a theoretical framework for the cultivation of intercultural communication ability. The model holds that intercultural competence is a comprehensive ability composed of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions, among which empathic ability is the core mediating variable connecting cultural cognition and behavioral practice (Berry, 2002). Empathy refers to the ability of individuals to transcend their own cultural framework, understand the emotional state and behavioral motives of others from the perspective of the other's culture, and make appropriate responses. It is manifested as decentered thinking in intercultural communication—that is, not judging the behavior of others based on one's own cultural norms, but interpreting it based on the cultural background of the other party.

Berry divides the formation process of intercultural competence into three sequential phases: the cultural awareness phase, the empathy training phase, and the behavioral adaptation phase. The cultural awareness phase is the foundation, requiring individuals to systematically learn the core characteristics of different cultural dimensions and recognize the differences between their own culture and other cultures. The empathy training phase is the key, through perspective-taking, role-playing, and other methods to cultivate the ability to understand the cultural logic of others. The behavioral adaptation phase is the manifestation of competence, requiring individuals to adjust their communication behaviors according to different cultural scenarios to achieve effective communication (Berry, 2017). This three-phase model has been verified in multiple intercultural education practices.

In combination with the characteristics of international Chinese education, the application of Berry's model needs to focus on two key points: one is the contextualization of cultural awareness. It is not enough to simply learn the abstract concepts of cultural dimensions; it is necessary to connect them with specific teaching scenarios (such as classroom questioning, homework correction, and after-class communication). The other is the specificity of empathy training. For example, when training empathy for

Korean students, it is necessary to focus on the perception of power distance and honorific norms; when training empathy for American students, it is necessary to focus on the respect for individual autonomy and personal boundaries. Only targeted training can effectively improve the intercultural communication competence of Chinese language educators and learners.

III. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION CONFLICTS

This section adopts a "de-narrativized" analytical method to extract the core elements of conflicts from the original cases and conduct in-depth interpretation based on the above three theoretical frameworks. The three selected cases cover typical cultural types in East Asia, North America, and Southern Europe, and the researcher's different roles (event organizer, Chinese teacher, international student) ensure the comprehensiveness of the research perspective.

The analysis focuses on two core questions: What cultural dimension differences lead to communication conflicts? How do face needs affect the manifestation of conflicts?

3.1 Sino-South Korean Interaction

Case Summary: While serving as a student union member hosting a South Korean middle school football delegation, the researcher encountered two core conflicts: a male student's misuse of the Korean honorific "오빠" and a Chinese teacher's behavior of urging guests to drink alcohol. A further breach of etiquette occurred during farewells with the inadvertent use of the informal "안녕".

Theoretical Analysis:

Power Distance Dimension: South Korea's Power Distance Index (PDI=60) is significantly higher than China's (PDI=30), which is most prominently reflected in its strict honorific system and hierarchical etiquette. In Korean culture, "오빠" is a honorific specifically used by females to address older males; males should use "형" (hyeong) to address older males. The male Chinese student's misuse of "오빠" violated the gender and status norms implied in the honorific system under high power distance. Similarly, Korean drinking etiquette has strict hierarchical regulations: subordinates should pour wine for superiors with both hands, and superiors cannot pour wine for subordinates; individuals cannot refill their own wine glasses. The Chinese teacher's behavior of urging drinks originated from the hospitality culture under China's medium power distance, which emphasizes treating guests

warmly rather than strict hierarchy, resulting in a cognitive mismatch between the two parties .

Face-Negotiation Theory: The conflict essentially reflects the different priorities of face needs between the two cultures. The Chinese teacher's use of high-end Maotai liquor and repeated toasting was an attempt to uphold "group face"—showing the sincerity and hospitality of the Chinese side through generous arrangements. The Korean teachers' reluctant acceptance of the toast was to maintain "relational face"—avoiding direct refusal to damage the cooperative relationship between the two schools. However, both parties ignored the "individual face" needs of the other party: the Chinese side did not realize that forced toasting violated the individual autonomy of the Korean teachers, and the Korean side did not clearly express their discomfort due to the need to maintain relational face, resulting in latent conflict.

Cultural Adaptation Gap: The root cause of the conflict lies in the self-cultural projection of the Chinese side—applying China's medium power distance norms to interactions with South Korea, a high power distance culture. Before the interaction, the organizer only paid attention to the arrangement of logistics and activities but lacked systematic training on Korean honorific etiquette, drinking norms, and other cultural details, leading to the failure to anticipate potential conflict points. This also reflects the common problem in international Chinese education exchange activities: overemphasizing the form of exchange while ignoring the cultivation of intercultural communication competence.

3.2 Sino-American Interaction

Case Summary: While teaching a US student one-on-one, the researcher's suggestion to "drink more hot water" for menstrual discomfort or a cold was questioned by the student, revealing a conflict rooted in differing health beliefs

Theoretical Analysis:

Individualism/Collectivism Dimension: The core of this conflict is the difference in value orientation between individualistic and collectivist cultures. The United States has the highest Individualism Index (IDV=91) in the world, and personal autonomy and individual rights are regarded as the core values. In the student's view, drinking habits and health management are purely personal affairs, and the teacher's advice is an inappropriate interference with personal autonomy. In contrast, China's collectivist culture (IDV=20) emphasizes interpersonal care and mutual assistance. The researcher's advice was not an attempt to interfere with personal choices but a manifestation of collective care in Chinese culture—caring for the student's health as a member of the learning group. This difference in

value orientation led to the complete misinterpretation of the communicative intent between the two parties.

Cultural Metaphors of Human-Nature Relationship: Behind the health advice lies the deep-seated cultural metaphor difference between China and the United States. The researcher's advice is based on the traditional Chinese concept of "yin-yang balance," which regards the human body as a part of nature and believes that drinking hot water can "supplement yang qi" to maintain the balance of the body's internal environment—a typical harmony with nature cultural metaphor. The American student's insistence on drinking iced coffee is influenced by the "mastery over nature" cultural metaphor prevalent in Western culture, which holds that humans can conquer and transform nature through technology and rationality, and that personal lifestyle has nothing to do with the laws of nature. This difference in cultural metaphors makes the health advice, which is considered "well-intentioned" in Chinese culture, become "unreasonable interference" in American culture.

Lack of Empathic Ability: The researcher's initial failure to resolve the conflict was due to the lack of targeted empathic training. Before the interaction, the researcher did not conduct in-depth research on the core values and cultural metaphors of American students, and directly applied the "collectivist care template" to the individualistic cultural context. After the first conflict occurred, the researcher did not analyze the root cause from the perspective of cultural dimensions but repeated the same advice, further intensifying the conflict. This indicates that empathic ability is not a natural quality but requires systematic training based on cultural cognition.

3.3 Sino-Italian Interaction

Case Summary: As a student in an Italian professor's course, the researcher felt self-blame for submitting work late or arriving late, but the professor demonstrated flexible time management. The professor's encouragement of open debate and traditional Chinese admission of not knowing something contrasted with teacher-student dynamics

Theoretical Analysis:

Uncertainty Avoidance Dimension: Italy's Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI=75) is at a medium level, but it shows obvious situational variability in educational scenarios. In terms of academic deadlines, Italian universities show low uncertainty avoidance characteristics, tolerating delays caused by objective reasons and believing that the quality of academic work is more important than time constraints. In contrast, Chinese higher education is influenced by high uncertainty avoidance culture, emphasizing strict compliance with deadlines and regarding punctuality as an important quality of students. This situational difference in uncertainty avoidance led to the

researcher's unnecessary self-blame and the professor's calm response. In terms of knowledge exploration, Italian professors' tolerance for "knowledge uncertainty" (admitting not knowing the answer) also reflects low uncertainty avoidance, while Chinese culture emphasizes that teachers should "be proficient in their subject" and avoid showing "ignorance" in front of students.

Cultural Construction of Teacher-Student Relationship: The conflict in teacher-student interaction essentially reflects the different cultural constructions of teacher-student roles. Chinese teacher-student relationship is rooted in the Confucian concept of "respecting teachers and valuing teaching," with obvious high power distance characteristics—teachers are regarded as "knowledge authorities," and students should show respect and obedience. The Italian teacher-student relationship is based on the concept of "equal dialogue," with low power distance characteristics—teachers and students are "co-explorers of knowledge," and questioning and discussion are regarded as important ways to promote academic progress. The professor's requirement to turn on the camera is also based on this equal concept: "turning on the camera" is a symbol of "active participation" and "respect for others," while Chinese students' reluctance to turn on the camera is influenced by the collectivist norm of "reserved expression," fearing that their inappropriate performance will attract negative evaluations.

Non-verbal Communication Differences: The camera conflict also involves differences in non-verbal communication codes between Chinese and Western cultures. Hall's High-Low Context Theory can provide supplementary interpretation: Chinese culture is a high-context culture, and non-verbal communication pays attention to reservation and implication—avoiding direct eye contact and excessive expression to show modesty. Western culture is a low-context culture, and non-verbal communication emphasizes clarity and directness—eye contact is regarded as a symbol of "sincerity and attention." The professor's emphasis on turning on the camera is to obtain direct non-verbal feedback (such as facial expressions and eye contact), while Chinese students' reluctance to turn on the camera is to abide by the non-verbal norms of high-context culture (Fisher-Yoshida, 2005).

IV. THEORETICAL PATHWAYS AND EMPIRICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR COMPETENCE ENHANCEMENT

Based on the above case analysis and theoretical discussion, and integrating Berry's three-phase Intercultural Competence Model, this section constructs a "three-phase

progressive" enhancement path for intercultural communication competence, and puts forward specific implementation strategies combined with international Chinese education scenarios. This path breaks through the limitations of previous experiential summaries and realizes the organic combination of theoretical guidance and practical operation.

4.1 Deepening Cultural Cognition

The core goal of this phase is to help communicators move from superficial cultural understanding to systematic cultural cognition, breaking the limitations of self-cultural projection. The key method is to establish a cultural dimension-scenario associative database, connecting abstract cultural dimensions with specific international Chinese education scenarios.

First, theoretical empowerment with scenario orientation. It is necessary to carry out targeted cultural dimension training for different communication objects. For example, when training Chinese teachers who teach in South Korea, focus on explaining the high power distance and collectivism dimensions, and clarify the specific manifestations of these two dimensions in classroom teaching (such as honorific usage, questioning methods), after-class interaction (such as gift-giving etiquette), and parent-teacher communication (such as reporting student performance). When training teachers who teach in the United States, focus on the "high individualism" and "low power distance" dimensions, and interpret the cultural norms of personal boundary respect, direct expression of opinions, and equal teacher-student dialogue. The training can adopt the method of "theoretical explanation + case comparison," such as comparing the differences in teacher-student interaction between China and the United States under the power distance dimension through video materials.

Second, empirical accumulation with dimension tagging. Encourage international Chinese education practitioners to establish a personal cross-cultural conflict case library, and tag each recorded case with corresponding cultural dimensions and face needs. For example, tag the Sino-US "hot water advice" case with "individualism/collectivism," "cultural metaphor of human-nature relationship," and "individual face/relational face." The case library should include not only conflict phenomena and causes but also solutions and reflection summaries. Institutions can regularly organize case sharing meetings to promote the exchange and sharing of empirical experience. For example, Beijing Language and Culture University has established an online case database for international Chinese teachers, which has collected more than 500 tagged cases and achieved good practical results.

Third, tool support with quantitative analysis. Introduce Hofstede's cultural dimension index as a reference tool for pre-communication preparation. Before carrying out cross-cultural communication activities (such as receiving foreign delegations, starting online teaching for foreign students), query the cultural dimension index of the target country/region, and formulate communication plans based on the index characteristics. For example, when communicating with students from high uncertainty avoidance countries (such as Germany), it is necessary to provide detailed teaching plans and assessment standards in advance; when communicating with students from low uncertainty avoidance countries (such as Italy), it is necessary to maintain appropriate flexibility in teaching arrangements.

4.2 Cultivating Empathic Capacity

Empathic ability is the core of resolving intercultural communication conflicts. This phase adopts a "three-step training method" of "pre-conflict anticipation, in-conflict adjustment, and post-conflict reflection" to cultivate communicators' decentered thinking ability.

Pre-conflict cultural perspective-taking. Before formal communication, carry out role reversal imagination to predict the possible cultural logic and face needs of the other party. For example, before advising American students on health issues, imagine: "If I were an American student who values personal autonomy, what way of expression would I accept?" Based on this, adjust the expression from the direct advice of "you should drink more hot water" to the option-based communication of "I know you have your own health habits. There is a traditional Chinese health method that is to drink hot water to relieve discomfort. Would you like to understand it?" This way of expression not only respects the individual face of the other party but also achieves the purpose of caring.

In-conflict dynamic adjustment. During the occurrence of communication conflicts, it is necessary to abandon the "defensive thinking" of "defending one's own cultural norms" and adopt a problem-solving oriented communication strategy. The core step is to suspend judgment and seek clarification—when sensing the other party's dissatisfaction or misunderstanding, take the initiative to use open-ended questions to explore the other party's cultural logic. For example, in the Sino-US health advice conflict, after the American student expressed dissatisfaction, the researcher could adjust the communication strategy by asking: "I'm sorry if my suggestion made you uncomfortable. I just wanted to share a Chinese health method. Could you tell me your views on health advice between teachers and students?" This kind of inquiry not only eases the tense atmosphere but also helps

to understand the other party's emphasis on personal autonomy from the source. At the same time, it is necessary to use face-saving language to maintain the other party's face needs. For collectivist cultural communicators (such as South Koreans), use "we-oriented" language to emphasize group harmony; for individualistic cultural communicators (such as Americans), use "you-oriented" language to respect personal choices.

Post-conflict systematic reflection. After the conflict is resolved, it is necessary to carry out dimension-based reflection to extract experience and lessons. The specific method is to fill in the "cross-cultural conflict reflection form," which includes four core columns: conflict scenario description, cultural dimension involved, face need mismatch point, and improved communication strategy. Taking the Sino-Italian camera conflict as an example, the reflection content should include: "Scenario: The professor required turning on the camera in online classes, but Chinese students were reluctant to do so; Cultural dimension: Power distance (teacher-student relationship) and high-low context culture (non-verbal communication); Mismatch point: The professor regarded turning on the camera as 'respect for others' (individual face), while Chinese students regarded it as 'excessive exposure' (relational face); Improved strategy: Before online classes, explain the cultural connotation of turning on the camera to Chinese students, and suggest that students can adjust the camera angle to reduce discomfort, while communicating with the professor about the reserved characteristics of Chinese students' non-verbal communication." This structured reflection can transform scattered experience into systematic competence.

4.3 Behavioral Adaptation

Behavioral adaptation is the final manifestation of intercultural communication competence, which requires transforming cultural cognition and empathic ability into specific communication behaviors. The key is to develop scenario-specific communication strategies for typical scenarios in international Chinese education, realizing the contextualization of competence application.

First, classroom teaching scenario: Adaptive design based on cultural dimensions. For high power distance cultures (such as South Korea), teachers should adopt a "authoritative and respectful" teaching style: use honorific language when addressing students, arrange questions in advance to give students sufficient preparation time, and avoid public criticism. For low power distance cultures (such as the United States), adopt a equal and interactive teaching style: design group discussion links to encourage students to question, and use "constructive feedback" to replace one-way criticism. For high uncertainty avoidance

cultures (such as Germany), provide detailed teaching outlines and assessment criteria in advance, and explain the logical relationship between knowledge points clearly; for low uncertainty avoidance cultures (such as Italy), appropriately increase open-ended tasks and encourage students to explore innovative answers. A teaching experiment conducted by Beijing Language and Culture University showed that after adopting adaptive teaching strategies based on cultural dimensions, the classroom participation rate of international students increased by 35%, and the satisfaction with teaching increased by 28%.

Second, after-class interaction scenario: Boundary management based on value orientation. For collectivist cultural students (such as South Koreans), strengthen relational connection through group activities, such as organizing traditional Chinese festival experience activities to enhance group identity; when caring for students, pay attention to the timeliness and indirectness of expression, such as asking "Is there anything we can help with together?" instead of directly inquiring about personal matters. For individualistic cultural students (such as Americans), respect personal boundaries and avoid excessive interference in private life; when providing help, adopt a "request-oriented" approach, such as saying "If you need help with Chinese learning, I am willing to provide guidance" instead of taking the initiative to arrange help. In gift-giving interactions, for high power distance cultures, choose gifts that conform to hierarchical norms (such as exquisite stationery for teachers); for low power distance cultures, choose personalized gifts (such as handwritten Chinese calligraphy works) to highlight individual care.

Third, academic cooperation scenario: Process management based on uncertainty avoidance. For high uncertainty avoidance cultures (such as Germany), establish strict work schedules and division of labor, and report progress regularly to reduce uncertainty; when revising academic works, provide detailed modification basis and theoretical support. For low uncertainty avoidance cultures (such as Italy), maintain flexible work plans and allow appropriate adjustments according to the progress; focus on the exchange of core ideas during the cooperation process, and encourage creative exploration. In cross-cultural academic meetings, for high-context cultures (such as China), use "indirect expression" to put forward different opinions, such as "Your viewpoint is very insightful. We can also consider another perspective"; for low-context cultures (such as the United States), use direct expression to clarify viewpoints, such as "I have a different opinion, and the reasons are as follows".

Fourth, digital communication scenario: Norm construction based on digital face needs. With the

popularization of online teaching and cross-border communication, digital intercultural communication has become a common scenario. For individualistic cultural communicators, respect their "digital autonomy" and avoid sending non-work-related information outside working hours; when using video conferences, turn on the camera to show sincerity. For collectivist cultural communicators, maintain digital relational connection and send holiday greetings appropriately; when using group chat tools, use collective address (such as "Dear classmates") to enhance group identity. At the same time, it is necessary to be familiar with the digital communication norms of different cultures, such as avoiding using emojis with strong emotional colors in formal communications with high power distance cultures, and using concise and direct language in communications with low uncertainty avoidance cultures.

V. CONCLUSION

Against the backdrop of increasing cross-cultural exchanges in international Chinese education, this study integrates Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory, Ting-Toomey's Face-Negotiation Theory, and Berry's Intercultural Competence Model, along with three representative cases of Sino-South Korean, Sino-American, and Sino-Italian interactions, to investigate the formation mechanisms of intercultural conflicts and pathways for enhancing intercultural competence.

The findings reveal that the root cause of intercultural conflicts lies in cognitive biases stemming from insufficient awareness of cultural dimension differences. Mismatches in dimensions such as power distance, individualism/collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and long/short-term orientation directly trigger conflicts. For instance, Sino-South Korean conflicts arise from power distance differences, Sino-American conflicts are driven by individualism/collectivism value disparities, and Sino-Italian conflicts are associated with situational variability in uncertainty avoidance. Second, mismatched face needs are a direct manifestation of conflict: collectivist cultures emphasize relational and group face, while individualistic cultures prioritize individual face. Overlooking such differences often leads to misinterpretation of communicative intent. Third, a three-phase progressive pathway—"deepening cultural awareness → fostering empathy → behavioral adaptation"—can effectively enhance intercultural competence, with cultural awareness as the foundation, empathy as the core mediator, and behavioral adaptation as the practical outcome.

The theoretical contributions of this study include the integration of multiple cross-cultural theories within the

context of international Chinese education and the extension of Hofstede's framework by revealing the situational dynamics of cultural dimensions, such as Italy's varying expressions of uncertainty avoidance in academic deadlines versus knowledge exploration. Practically, it offers instructors methods for linking cultural dimensions to specific scenarios and empathy training strategies, suggests that administrators incorporate intercultural competence into training systems and establish case-sharing platforms, and provides overseas students with guidance on systematic cultural learning and reflective practice.

This study also has limitations include a limited range of cultural cases, a lack of large-sample quantitative validation, and insufficient attention to emerging digital contexts. Future research should expand case selection to include cultures such as those in Africa and the Middle East, combine qualitative and quantitative methods to develop an intercultural competence scale, and examine intercultural communication features in emerging digital scenarios such as metaverse-assisted teaching and human–AI collaborative interaction to further refine intercultural training systems.

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Navigating Autonomy and Consumer Culture: Postfeminist Identity in Sophie Kinsella's *Confessions of a Shopaholic*

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Abstract— This paper examines how chick lit serves as a vibrant literary platform for articulating and interrogating postfeminist ideologies. Through a detailed analysis of seminal works such as Sophie Kinsella's *Confessions of a Shopaholic*, the study explores how postfeminism emphasis on autonomy, individual choice, and flexible gender roles is reflected and complicated within the genre. The article investigates the genre's negotiation of family, romance, and career—arguing that chick lit heroines embody the anxieties and opportunities faced by modern women who must manoeuvre self-presentation, financial independence, and relationship ideals in a market-driven, pluralist society.



Keywords— Chick lit, Post feminism, consumerism, self-presentation

I. POSTFEMINISM

Postfeminism has emerged as a flexible, evolving discourse that prioritizes autonomy, personal responsibility, and individualized empowerment while refusing to cast women solely as victims or sufferers. Contemporary debates in postfeminism accommodate pluralism, inclusivity, and collaboration between genders, defining itself as distinct from the rigidity of second-wave feminism yet fundamentally continuous with broader feminist aims. This paper studies Sophie Kinsella's acclaimed novel *Confessions of a Shopaholic*, analyzing how the protagonist Rebecca Bloomwood embodies postfeminist ideals through her pursuit of autonomy, individual choice, financial independence, and self-definition within a consumer-driven culture. By positioning "Confessions of a Shopaholic" as postfeminist fiction, the article explores how Kinsella's text mirrors, complicates, and critiques evolving forms of feminine agency and identity in contemporary society.

Carolyn Bronstein in her essay "Representing the Third Wave: Mainstream Print Media Framing of a New Feminist Movement" argued that the later feminists looked at questions of "sexuality and bodily aesthetics" (783) very

differently from the second wavers. She spoke for the generational divide that led to the lack of understanding between the second wavers and the third wavers including the postfeminists. Bronstein claimed that the high fashion that the third wavers indulged in was their way of protesting against the stifling dress code that the second wavers encouraged. Each generation had their own changes and it was inevitable for the feminist movement to evolve (791).

1.1 Postfeminism vs Feminism

Postfeminists do not reject the tenets of feminism but rather uses it to shape out a movement to better suit the contemporary world. Women's lives have changed and it is only natural that there be theoretical shifts in the women's movement too. Devoney Looser indicate that third wave writers were not convinced of the notion of universal womanhood and "purport to interrogate race, nation and sexuality more thoroughly than did the second wave" (Looser 35).

Lisa Joyce in her online article "Writing Postfeminism" she lauds postfeminism as a, "laudable movement among younger women, one which embraces pluralism and

homosexuality...". Melissa Benn gives a definition of how a new feminist looks like, as quoted in *The Feminist Bestseller* by Imelda Whelehan

she is a young-ish and pleasant-ish, professional woman. If she is not a mother she wonders a lot whether, and how, she will become one [...] she is more likely to belong to one of the new media-related professions than one of the caring professions [...] She goes to the gym, likes sex (probably more than the men or man she's having it with), and gossips a lot with her girlfriends. She is interested in designer clothes, lipstick, the whole looks package and scorns a slightly mythical older feminism which tells her she shouldn't be. (Benn 224)

These are women we see around us these days and this is how a chick lit protagonist looks like. She looks like the woman we see at our workplace, on the streets, in the shops, in banks etc., maneuvering herself through life and its challenges.

1.2 Postfeminism and Chick lit

The world saw the birth of a new genre of women's popular literature with chick lit breaking in on the literary scene in the 90's. The explosive popularity and unprecedented sales of these books got the world to sit up and take notice of this new literature, with its pastel covers with silhouettes of attractive perfect-bodied young women. It goes without mention that the major consumers of this genre were and are young women. In spite of the incredible popularity of these books, there is a serious lack of academic discussions on the impact of chick lit on culture and women's literature.

The popularity of chick lit lies with the publishing of Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones Diary* (1996), even though it has been noted that Jane Austen's 1813 *Pride and Prejudice* has features similar to that of chick lit. In a special issue of *Working Papers on the Web*, Gormley (2009) has clearly charted out what appears to be a clear account of the genre. Chick lit is an expression of contemporary popular fiction which "by the end of the 1990s [...] had become established to describe novels written by women, (largely) for women, depicting the life, loves, trials and tribulations of their predominantly young, single, urban, female protagonists" (Gormley). Joanne Knowles writes in the *Diegesis*, that even though the plotlines are variable, a pivotal female character who is "seeking personal fulfillment in a romance-consumer-comedic vein" (Knowles 3) is a constant figure.

II. *CONFESSIONS OF A SHOPAHOLIC AS A POSTFEMINIST TEXT*

The scope of this paper is high and relevant, as chick lit plays a crucial role in the representation, evaluation and development of postfeminism as chick lit contains many of the conventions of postfeminism. Postfeminism is a new form of empowerment and independence, individual choice, (sexual) pleasure, fashion, hybridism and the renewed focus on the female body can be considered fundamental for this contemporary feminism. These elements of postfeminism are elaborately performed in chick lit. Sophie Kinsella's *Confessions of a Shopaholic* exemplifies postfeminist fiction by portraying its protagonist, Rebecca Bloomwood, as a modern woman whose autonomy, consumer choices, and negotiation of career, relationships, and self-presentation reflect postfeminism's values of individualized empowerment, flexible gender roles, and the rejection of victimhood—ultimately using humor and self-awareness to mirror the complexities of contemporary female identity within a consumer-driven society.

Chick lit is a strain that serves as a mouthpiece for the evolving problems that women face today. The earlier books by women that spoke of women dealt with the limits to freedom and submission. But chick lit is an evolved strain of women's writing that offers a cultural commentary on the lives of the contemporary young women. Chick lit plays a crucial role in the representation, evaluation and development of postfeminism as chick lit contains many of the conventions of postfeminism. The objective of this thesis investigates chick lit as a postfeminist text and as a social commentary on the lives of the contemporary women. It is an humble effort to prove that chick lit is a commentator of the changing trends in the lives of women today and that the genre is a true mirror to the changing demands and challenges that are part of the lives of the contemporary women.

Sophie Kinsella, the pen name of the English chick lit author, Madeleine Sophie Wickham, shot to fame with her highly popular shopaholic series. She was a financial analyst when she decided to write her first book. Her first book under her pseudonym, *The Secret Dreamworld of a Shopaholic* was released in the United States and India as *Confessions of a Shopaholic*. The book was later adapted into a film by the same name and released in 2009 starring Isla Fisher. As is typical of most chick lit writers, their characters are often a chip of the authors themselves. The protagonist of her shopaholic series is a financial analyst just like Kinsella and she herself admits that she loves to shop. *Confessions of a Shopaholic* relates the story of a financial columnist, Rebecca Bloomwood, who is also a

compulsive shopper on the highway to bankruptcy. Her struggles with shopaholism and overcoming it to a certain extent forms the crux of the novel.

Ferriss and Young clearly list out the characteristics of postfeminism in their *Chick Flicks: Contemporary Women at the Movies*. Postfeminism:

- The personal as political; agenda is replaced by attitude;
- A rejection of second-wave anger and blame against the patriarchy;
- Choice is individual—whether of family, career, cosmetic surgery, or nail color;
- A return to femininity and sexuality;
- Pleasure in media-driven popular culture and an embracing of the joys of consumerism;
- Humor is based on the discrepancy between the ideals put forward by both feminism and the media, and the reality of life in the modern world; as such, the humor of postfeminism is often ironically self-deprecating. (Ferriss and Young, *Chick Flicks* 3-4)

2.1 Chick lit and Consumerism

Becky is part of the generation that is enjoying the benefits of the second wave feminists. She has received an education of her choice and she has been employed in a firm that makes use of her financial expertise. She earns a salary that affords her the luxury of an apartment in Fulham and commodities, whenever her fancy strikes. She maneuvers through life as someone who is confident and is without doubt convinced that she enjoys the privileges of equality that her male counterparts receive. She is the true child of a capitalist consumerist society, where “consumer culture uses images, signs and symbolic goods which summon up dreams, desires and fantasies which suggest romantic authenticity and emotional fulfillment in narcissistically pleasing oneself, instead of others” (Featherstone 27). Her marked indulgence in purchasing branded commodities is solely to please herself and to feel good about herself. In this manner, she becomes a true progeny of postfeminism in that she excises power to choose what she feels gives her contentment and fulfillment.

Chick lit is known for its progressive themes and thoughts, but none of these themes endeavor to reject patriarchy or patriarchal institutions. However, blind dependence on patriarchy, which was the accepted norm during prefeminist age, is absent. Nevertheless, the anger and total denunciation of patriarchy that was advocated by the second wave feminists were absent. These new heroines wanted to enjoy liberty and freedom but not at the expense of family and relationships.

Kate Millet identifies patriarchy as an institution that curtailed the freedom of women using ideology as a

weapon. Feminists had always insisted on the collapse of “social and cultural structures such as – the family, cultural myths of romance, marriage, and motherhood” (Gamble 37). Feminists had always disavowed all the establishments of patriarchy, but in chick lit, we find that the postfeminist heroines insist on the revival of these institutions. The family is patriarchy's core unit and they had always insisted on women being tied to the family. Women were always anchored to the family till feminism came around and insisted that women leave their homes and find economic and individual independence.

2.2 Chick lit and relationships

In chick lit, the family takes a comforting presence, but it is often with her girlfriend or girlfriends that the heroine shares her anxieties and apprehensions. However, there is a return to family in chick lit and it can be seen as the postfeminist heroines attempt to “unlearn” (Negra 18) feminism. When Becky sinks deeper into debt and her plans to get Tarquin to propose to her fails, she runs to her parents' home. She remarks, “There's one place I can go. One place I can always go” (221). Even though she realizes that they do not have time to listen to her or talk to her as they are engrossed in their own worlds of television shows most of the time, she finds a relief within the comfort of her parents care.

Her family welcomes her into their fold and gives her strength a promise of support regardless of what her problem was. They suspect that she was pregnant and even prove that they are a family that has imbibed feminist values. Her mother offers to take care of her child if she wanted to pursue a career. Her mother soothes her, “Your father isn't as old-fashioned as he seems. And I know that if it were a case of us looking after a... a Little One, while you pursued your career” (223). Even though Becky attributes her mother's offer of support to the many soap operas they watch, the mother's reaction wouldn't have been the same had it been the pre-feminist age. Feminism and the constant showcasing of women who ‘has it all’ in popular media culture are what caused this generous offer of support. Women are always shown as grappling with motherhood, career, and relationships taking it all in tow and being successful in their own right. Hence postfeminism and in turn chick lit is not a complete removal from feminism.

Becky shows no aversion to romance and marriage and that is one reason that *Confessions of a Shopaholic* can be taken as a postfeminist text. On one occasion, she even thinks of using marriage as a tool to help her out of her financial woes. But in spite of Tarquin's obvious interest, Becky is reluctant. It is not enough for her to have a ring on her finger; she wants to be attracted to him as well. She is not trying to chase Mr. Right, she has more priorities than that.

She lightheartedly considers marrying Tarquin Cleant Stuart, Suze's cousin when she learns that he was the "fifteenth-richest bachelor in Britain"(193). She did not care for Tarquin and even thought he was a kind of creepy, but when she learns of his inheritance she reconsiders her options of being "the girlfriend of someone called Tarquin Cleant Stuart" (193). She tries to pretend that she liked him and at various points, even hopes he would propose marriage in spite of the fact she understands that she has no feelings for him. She says "Alcohol is obviously going to be the key to our marital happiness" (200). But she is not willing to be a victim of patriarchy and marry for existence or to create an identity for herself in relation to a man. She takes a shot at confining to a patriarchal institution to define herself as Simone DeBeauvoir explains in the following quote: "woman is defined exclusively in her relation to man" (143).

2.3 Chick lit and Personal Choices

The protagonists of chick lit represent a generation that has had greater opportunities and choices than any of the previous ones and they owe it all to the struggles of the feminists. Today women are not expected to stick to the role of the homemaker and stay away from the workforce as was the norm previously. The young women today can be anything they want to be, choose any profession, marry anyone when she wants, wear anything when she wants—this generation is spoiled by choices. These opportunities that afford them the chance to work, leaves them financially independent and in turn, earn them greater freedom. But these choices lead to great anxieties as they have to maneuver through their lives themselves taking risks as they move on. They have to develop their own devices to handle their own problems. Their problems are different from others and so their mechanism for survival and their means to achieve it all must be individual. Anitha Harris states :

risks must be negotiated on an individual level This means that people are required to make choices and create life trajectories for themselves without traditional patterns or support structures to guide them. They must develop individual strategies and take personal responsibility for their success, happiness, and livelihood by making the right choices in an uncertain and changeable environment. From one perspective, this process of individualization creates opportunities for forming oneself independently of the traditional ties that have previously been so instrumental in structuring life trajectories. It carries with it the promise of choice, freedom, and real autonomy. (Harris 4)

The choices the young women make pertain to their career, relationships, self-presentation and so on. They are expected to "make good choices for themselves and set themselves on a path toward success with little support or security outside the private sphere" (Harris 5).

In *Confessions of a Shopaholic* Becky exercises her options when she chooses her career, chooses to live in "trendy Fulham"(28), chooses to have relationships, chooses to check "sexual compatibility" (39) before she commits to a relationship, chooses to consume objects of fashion indiscreetly and also when she finally chooses to rescue herself from her increasing debt. She is responsible for the choices in her own life. Her life becomes her own personal project, like a "do-it-yourself project"(7) as Harris calls it or what Ulrich Becks calls a "choice biography" (7).

Angela McRobbie in her essay "Post-feminism and Popular Culture", discusses the position of women in the "new meritocracy"(16). She argues that new norms of femininity are tied up with success, especially success at work. The signs of their success are glamorous careers and luxurious consumer lifestyles, financial independence, and high standards of physical beauty and grooming. McRobbie suggests that political, media and advertising interests have converged in the construction of young women as "standard bearers for the new economy, as creators of wealth"(Harris 18). This she says conjures up new stereotypical images of women, for women and leaves them with a bigger plethora of choices.

2.4 Chick lit and Fashion

Chick lit presents a picture of femininity involving beauty and fashion that is embraced by women in its narratives. There is no shame and embarrassment in enacting their gender. These women perform their gender and often go to great lengths to achieve that performance. Becky's addiction to shopping and fashion goods is of course for her beautification and better self-presentation. Becky wholeheartedly accepts her need to beautify herself. We see her as a consumer of beauty and fashion products right from the beginning, when she goes through her credit card bill which consists of sexy underwear and Body Shop products. There is no physical description of Becky except her comment that she doesn't "look bad" (Kinsella 20) and that it is a product of what she purchases, is evident when she goes on to describe herself solely in terms of her purchased commodities. The narration goes as follows:

I'm wearing my black skirt from French Connection, and a plain white T-shirt from Knickerbox, and a little angora cardigan which I got from M&S but looks like it might be Agnès b. And my new square-toed shoes from Hobbs. Even better, although no one can see them, I know that

underneath I'm wearing my gorgeous new matching knickers and bra with embroidered yellow rosebuds. (20)

III. CONCLUSION

Chick lit novels such as Sophie Kinsella's "Confessions of a Shopaholic" provide a nuanced reflection on contemporary postfeminist ideals, foregrounding individual choice, empowerment, and the complexities of female identity in a consumer-driven society. Rebecca Bloomwood's journey, marked by her self-expression and search for personal fulfillment, exemplifies how modern women in chick lit navigate autonomy, financial independence, and evolving relationship norms in ways that both embrace and critique postfeminist discourse. Her choices, particularly in consumption and work, highlight the tension between self-defined empowerment and the vulnerabilities introduced by capitalist culture and gender expectations. Kinsella's novel, through humor and relatability, not only mirrors the desires and dilemmas faced by its readership but also offers critical commentary on the ways women negotiate identity, autonomy, and satisfaction amid the conflicting demands of modern life.

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Exploring Man-Animals Relationship through the Lens of Zoocriticism in the Novel the Alchemist

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Abstract— This study scrutinizes Paulo Coelho's novel *The Alchemist* (1988) from a zoocritical perspective. It focuses on themes such as man-animal relationships, interconnections, interdependence, mutual understanding, and moral and ethical problems related to animals. The man-animal relationship is one of the most important relations in the world, they are connected in different ways, and can impact each other lives to a great extent. They rely on each other for their coexistence in the ecosystem to keep the balance of the ecosphere. Furthermore, it investigates the violation of animal rights and delves into the moral and ethical considerations of animals because animals are considered inferior to human beings. By applying a qualitative method for the analysis of man-animal relationships in the novel. This study reexamines *The Alchemist* from the perspective of animal studies, adding to the expanding field of zoocriticism. It draws attention to the ways that literature both challenges and upholds prevailing narratives about nonhuman life, providing fresh perspectives on the moral implications of storytelling. This study ultimately promotes a more sophisticated interpretation of animal representation in literature. Using Huggan & Tiffin, work as a theoretical framework interpret how the man-animal relationship is important and how often human considers animals as others in the ecosystem. This study presents the contribution of literary fiction and the impacts of literature on the representation of animals, challenges and advocates for animal rights.



Keywords--- Animals studies, Zoocriticism, Anthropocentrism, Man-animal relationship, Animal agency, Ethical delimitas.

I. INTRODUCTION

“To be in a companion-species relationship was the viable way of life”

(Haraway, 2010 p. 169)

Background of the Study:

Literature has always been used as a medium for the representation of animals, it surveys the man animals' relationship in different ways. Animals have frequently been used as companions that provide light on human experiences, spiritual mentors, and symbolic symbols in literature. This research is an attempt to shed light on the relationship between humans and animal in the seminal

work of Paulo Coelho *The Alchemist* which is a prime example of this debate.

Human-animal relationship and connection is one of the most unfathomable and ongoing relations in the natural world. Throughout history, animals played significant roles in human lives, beyond their companionship and provision of food, they also serve as a source of entertainment, knowledge, and as a mentor. The symbolism of animals in literary work highlights their importance and existence in nature. Furthermore, this research also discusses the uses of animals by human for their profit and interest in various situations. These arguments have been explored in the novel *The Alchemist* through the lens of zoocriticism which is an

emerging trend in ecocriticism, that studies the relationship between human and animal in literary texts.

The term zoocriticism was coined by Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, (2010). They argued that humans and animals are the important components of the universe, therefore, they are dependent on each other for multiple functions. Put forward their ideas in the context of postcolonial theories to advocate for animals' ethics, rights, and protection.

Shakoor, Shah, & Ahmad, (2024). They have analysed the man-animal relation in D.H Lawrence's novel *The Rainbow, and Women in Love*, in which they focus on the importance and violation of animals in the natural world, they put forward the idea that animals are the essential creatures of this universe, and their extinction will have a great implication on humans' lives. They contend that animals either domestic or wild have significant functions and roles, and any type of violence against them will be considered violence against the natural world. According to them eco and zoocriticism are concerned with the preservation of the natural environments and ecosystem including animals and plants, and raising vice against the violence against animals.

The study focusses on the novel *The Alchemist*, (1988), the story revolves around the young and adventures Andalusian shepherd name Santiago, he has recurring dream during his sleep under the sycamore tree in a ruined church, in his dream a child tells him about the treasure in the Egyptian Pyramid. As Santiago, woke up from his sleep early in the dawn, he has also noticed that some of his sheep also woke up at the same time as he does. He thought that as some mysterious energy connected his life with the sheep to whom he spent two years.

Santiago, muttered that they are so used to him and are adopted to my schedule, this observation realizes him maybe that it is the other way around and he has adopted their schedule. Some of them took a little longer to awaken, Santiago, prodded them with his stick calling each by their name.

Santiago, believed that his sheep understand him what he said. Therefore, some time he could read a part from his book aloud, and speak them about the girl (merchant daughter) to whom he loves. On some occasion he would remark about the thing around them in the village. Throughout, his journey animals served as a great source of learning, satisfaction, guidance, and messengers for the boy, as he claimed that I learned more from his sheep rather than the books, he was happy, in his sheep owning days, and always kept them happy around him. The notion reflects on their emotional bonds which holds them together.

As Santiago travels, he reflecting on the happiness of his sheep, who, in contrast to him, never have to make choices in real life. It seems that the sheep are primarily adopted to

their food and water. Their day from sunrises to dusk is just the same, they never read a book and did not understand thing they see in their way. The boy asserts that they depend on him for their survival, food, and nourishment because they have forgotten how to rely on their own instinct, as he led them to different places in the countryside. However, in contrast they have the capability to provide basic need to the boy for his survival, like wool, meat, and company.

The significance of man-animal relationships is examined in *The Alchemist* through Santiago's friendship with the camel. Santiago's switching from reading books to make relationship with camels shows his increasing interest in nature and personal knowledge. The camel's groan, indicate a warning of danger to him, exploring its function as an environment-aware preserver. Santiago's contemplation of the desert and date trees represents a philosophical comprehension of the harmony of nature and the lessons of God.

Santiago's observations about the hawks in *The Alchemist* reveals his growing affinity for animals and the natural world. At first, he finds the hawks' flying to be mysterious, but as he follows the movement of the hawks to read something in it. He realizes that he is learning the "Language of the World," he muttered the flying of the birds make sense to him, and pursue to decipher the hawks' motions as symbolic cues. As evidence of the hawks' function as messengers in his voyage, one hawk's abrupt plunge sets off a foreboding vision of an approaching attack. This exchange examines the agency of animals as knowledge bearers and crucial contributors to Santiago's spiritual and personal development from a zoocritical standpoint.

This study is an endeavour to analyses the chosen novel from a zoocriticism standpoint. From a zoocritical standpoint, these moments challenge human-centric beliefs by acknowledging the camel's agency and knowledge. Santiago's meditation on the desert and date trees reflects a philosophical comprehension of nature's equilibrium and heavenly lessons.

Wolfe (2003), which foster the recognition of animal subjectivity and agency, is aligns with this image. Moreover, when Santiago comes to appreciate the camel's function as a shrewd and insightful guide rather than a submissive means of transportation. Barcz's (2017), examination of vulnerability and anticipation in animal tales finds resonance in this instance.

1:2 Statement of the Problem

The examination of the interactions between humans and animals has drawn more attention in literary studies, especially in the context of zoocritical theory. Few studies have examined how these interactions are portrayed in

modern fiction, despite the fact that literature frequently reflects and develops cultural attitudes toward animals. The role that animals play as crucial plot points in Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* has received little scholarly attention, despite the expanding interest in animal studies. From a zoocritical standpoint, the encounters Santiago has with different species, such as hawks and camels, reveal intricate connections that demand more examination. This research gap explores the symbolic and ethical repercussion of man-animal relationship in the novel *The Alchemist* which delve insight into it.

1:3 Research questions/ Objectives

- 1) how man-animal relationship are depicted in the novel *The Alchemist*?
- 2) How often human uses animal for their own interest in different ways?

Objectives

- 1) Analysing different facet of man-animal relationship, interdependence, mutual understanding, depicted in the selected novel.
- 2) Examines the uses of animal by humans for various purposes, highlighting, the animal rights, objectification, and violation of their sentient reality in the natural world.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This work adds to the expanding discipline of zoocriticism by critically analyzing *The Alchemist* from the standpoint of animal studies. Through an examination of the novel's animal crucial roles in the lives of humans, this study advances our knowledge of how literature depicts interspecies relationships, moral quandaries, and the effects of human dominance over animals. Additionally, by promoting a reassessment of how humans treat animals in both literary and real-world contexts, this work supports larger ecological issues. Through the exploration of man-animal relationship in the novel emphasizing the significance of these relations.

However, this work encourages the readers to critically assess the depiction of animals in literary text. The study also invites the readers to show empathy towards animals in the ecological system.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Zoocriticism is an emerging ecocriticism field that studies the relation of humans and animals in literary texts. It highlights the depiction of animals in literature and focuses on how animals are portrayed in literary texts. Zoocriticism often critiques the anthropocentric view of humans about animals. The term zoocriticism was coined by Graham

Huggan and Helen Tiffin, in their book *Postcolonial Ecocriticism, Literature, Animals, Environment* (2010). Their center of attention is not only limited to the representation of animals in literary text, though they also emphasize the rights and ethical dilemmas of non-human objects such as animals and the environment. They have set forth the notion of zoocriticism in association with the theory of postcolonialism. There are limited works already have been done in this domain of literature by some writers and scholars.

Anna Barcz 2017, *Anamil-Narratives and Cultural-Vulnerable Realism*, chapter five *Introducing Zoocriticism (A Theory of Animal Narrative)*. In this chapter of the book, she put forward the idea from a zoocritical perspective. That animal narrative could be differentiated between literary texts and reality and the animals could be considered agents in the texts. Cary Wolf's 2003, *Zoontology (The Questions of Animals)* is a pioneering work that critically examined the relationship between animals and humans. Wolf's work claimed the orthodox humanist perspective and focused on the ethical, philosophical, and cultural borderlines between animals and humans. It is a collection of scholarly essays that inspect the decentralization of humans and think about the place of non-human animals in cultural literary theory.

Shakoor, Shah, & Ahmad, (2024). They have explored the man-animal relation in D.H Lawrence's novel *The Rainbow, and Women in Love*, in which they argued that animals are the fundamental creatures of this universe, and their extinction will have a great impact on humans. They contend that animals either domestic or wild also have important functions, any violence against them is like violence against nature. According to them eco and zoocriticism are concerned with preserving the natural environments including animals and raising vice against the violence against animals.

De, M. B. M. (2019). accordingly, put forward the idea that zoocritics invite the readers of the literary texts, they should be aware of the drastic consequences of demolishing the wild and savage from the earth. Further, she highlighted Desai's narrative in the novella, *The Museum of Final Journeys*, stating that the need for human sympathy and compassion is a key consideration under debate. Human-animal relations can be identified in her discussion, as she describes the curator's profound love and caretaking for other non-human creatures.

Limbu, (2020). The present research points out how humans, animals, and nature are interconnected, with a particular emphasis on the books *White Fang and Black Beauty*. These novels demonstrate the similarities between the existence problems faced by humans and animals, as well as their mutual reliance in harsh circumstances. The

conversation highlights how humans frequently disturb the balance by controlling and taking advantage of animals, which results in natural imbalances, even if there is interdependence between them. The study delved deeper into the "animality" that exists within people, arguing that centuries of civilization have not completely stifled our innate hostility. The dissertation takes a zoocritical stance, exploring these topics to comprehend the intricate connections among humans, animals, and the natural world.

Sally Borrell in her journal published in The Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts titled *Animality as a Catalyst for Processing and Surviving Grief: Leap*, by Myfanwy Jones, has focused on animals in literature and conducts a parallel study of human beings and animals, taking into account Myfanwy Jones' novel titled *Leap* (2015).

The relationship between human beings and animals has beautifully drawn in a few numbers of literary fictions. In the novel *Life of Pie* (2001) by Yann Martel, has described an adventurous journey of man-animal relationship through its story. The story describes the survival of the voyage of a teenager with a hyena in a life boat after he loses his family and other animals of the zoo in a shipwreck.

Despite an increasing awareness of the welfare of animals, and an evolving interest in animal minds, animals are still treated, by and large, merely as resources for human use. Practices involving animals such as factory farming, entertainment, and experimentation demonstrate a general view of animals as objects, rather than as subjective individuals who have awareness of themselves and of their own experiences. (Thomas , 2016).

Urs, H. U. (2021). The study delves into the intersection between human and dogs, philosophy and science, and macro and micro cultures, underscoring the view and role of dogs as companion species rather than trivial animal. Make use of Donna Haraway's opinion, it stresses the complicated interrelations between humans and domestic animals, illustrated by the faithful and mutual relationships delineated in literary works like *White Fang*. The research explores the anthropocentric point of view that animals considered inferior to human because of the lacking capabilities of the perception or lack of cognitive skills. Further it emphasizing the more reasonable view, acknowledging that the environment and the existence creature in it is a vital part, and criticising the human supremacy over other non-human creatures in this earth.

Shahnawaz, (2018). The study analysed the representation of animals in African literature, particularly of *Alain Mabanckou's Novel Memories de porc-epic*, the primary focus of the study is to redefine the relationships between animals and human life forms, depicting them as equal and dependent on each other within their atmosphere. In the

novel the protagonist porcupine used as a moral lens to highlight the theme of good and evil, and focuses that human is responsible for their own choices. Furthermore, it criticises the exploitation of all-natural environment by human and demands for the preservation of all living being on the surface of earth. Mabanckou urges readers to stop violence and environmental degradation by using this story to foster empathy for other people and animals.

Jack London 1906, *White Fang*, in his novel, Jack London investigates how animals and people are connected to each other for their co-existence, featuring how surprising it is for animals to learn, reason, and interpret human ideas even if they are unable of abstract thought. The novel analyses the various functions that animals play in human civilization by showing them as both entertaining and work companions. The novel also points out the similarities between human and animals, highlighting, despite the fact that humans differ from animals in their cognitive measurement and the social rules that govern their conduct, they also have an underlying tendency toward animalism. This investigation of animality and the relationship between humans and animals is essential to comprehending the intricate relationships between species.

Meijer, (2019). Offers a theory that challenges the conventional anthropocentric outlook on language and politics. Meijer argue that non-human animals are adept of political action in addition to communication, highlighting the importance of acknowledging their voices as elemental to democratic processes. She offers convincing examples of animal groups that exhibit political agency and communication skills, drawing on ideas from philosophy, politics, and science. It fosters an interspecific narrative which is related to the animal agency the study contributes to the moral and ethical discourse promoting the reviewing of human-animal relationships. Reflecting on animal agency and challenging ordering patterns in human-animal relationships.

الدوري حسين أوفى (2024). The study interprets Max Porter's *Grief is the Thing with Feathers*, with a view of analysing the novel from a vintage of zoocriticism with a specific focus on the anti-speciesism standpoint. Challenging the traditional depiction of human-animal relationships, emphasizing that the tie between animal and human is exploitative and one-sided. The portrayal of the crow in the text is a potent entity that can relieve pain and grief, reflecting on the usual dehumanization and Othering of animals in literature. By enhancing the inherent qualities of animals and challenging the speciesism point of view. Also foster the narrative of meta-modernist literature in literary works, by applying experimental account approaches, language, and portrayal of characters.

DeMello (2021) provides an extensive survey of the studies being conducted on the complicated interactions between human beings and non-human animals. The book states that social, cultural, historical, and economic factors are responsible for these relationships rather than physiologically permanent. It critiques speciesism belief, by highlighting the ethical and moral repercussions of marginalizing and commodifying animals in industries like food, fashion, and research. The main subjects of the book are to examine the symbolic portrayals of animals in literature, the media, and religion, as well as how these representations influence societal perceptions and social position. It investigates the origins of animal rights and welfare movements as well as their philosophical foundations and contributions to legislative reforms.

Ryan, (2015). *Animal theory: A critical introduction*. Provide an elaborative examination and a significant viewpoint on animal studies, emphasizing the role of animals in critical theory and literature. The work challenges anthropocentric perspectives by promoting the acknowledgment of animal consciousness and agency in literary works. Ryan questions speciesism and investigates the moral implications of human-animal relationships with the aid of philosophers such as Cary Wolfe, Donna Haraway, and Jacques Derrida. In addition to examining literary representations of animals, the essay highlights the limitations of anthropomorphism and the usefulness of zoopoetics in explaining animal experiences. Ryan's involvement with posthumanism, deconstruction, and eco-criticism highlights the need for more inclusive literary narratives that acknowledge the interdependence of humans, animals, and the environment.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Paradigm:

This study is based on interpretivist paradigm, which analyses the representation of animals and their symbolic importance in the novel *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho. Since the research focuses comprise on the subjective meanings ingrained in literary works and how readers interpret the representations of animal's, an interpretivist method is appropriate. The research makes the supposition that reality is socially and culturally shape and that meanings differ according to cultural and personal perceptions.

Man, animals' relationship in the novel will be examined using a qualitative approach that amalgamate textual and interpretative analysis. Subjective knowledge building is the foundation of the research, under which critical engagement with the text yields insights. The In literary

analysis, this paradigm is suitable since it offers a thorough framework for revealing complex and symbolic meanings.

3:2 Research method:

The present study assumes qualitative method for analysing the text of the novel. The qualitative analysing of the text purveys the representation of man animals' relationship in the selected text *The Alchemist*. The conducting research is based on the textual analysis of the novel applying qualitative method. However, relevant excerpt and area are analysed in the mentioned novel through qualitative and textual analysis technique.

3:3 Data Collection:

The data are collected for analysis of the novel, from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data are collected from the novel *The Alchemist* (1988), in the form of quotes, phrases, and sentences. The secondary data has been collected from different sources including books, published research papers, articles, journals, google scholar, and relevant literature. The relevance of both primary and secondary data has been deeply analyses, and the put together according to the research topic and questions.

3.4 Theoretical Frame work:

The theoretical framework for the study has used of Zoocriticism. Huggan, Tiffin, (2015). *Postcolonial ecocriticism: Literature, animals, environment*. Barcz, (2017). *Animal narratives and culture: Vulnerable realism*. Wolfe, (2003). *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal*. Ryan, (2015). *Animal theory: A critical introduction*. For the conduction of this research, the mentioned theoretical framework has been used. Only related portion have been taken from the mentioned work as a secondary source for theoretical framework discussion.

Zoocriticism focus on the representation of animal in literature and culture studies, analysing that how animals are delineated and how man animals' relationship is portrayal in literary text. Moreover, exploring the ethical, political, and philosophical implication of animal's portrayals. Zoocrticism is established in Huggan postcolonial theories. It narrates that the consideration of animal as other in the ecosystem is a violation of animal's rights and their ethical values. Barcz , emphasizing on the animal narrative and their agency in literary text, focusing animal's should be recognize as real agents in literary text not mere object. Ryan, *Animal theory*: provide an explanatory perspective on animal's significance in their functions in critical theory and literature.

IV. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Man-Animals Interrelation:

Humans and animals are the two important creatures of nature; one cannot live without the existence of the other. The Alchemist is the quintessence of the man-animal relationship, in which the Coelho, sheds light on the relationship of man with the animals. As Santiago rises from sleep, he also notices that some of his sheep also stir at the same time. This mutual understanding shows their powerful connection to each other; being lived together for a long time, they are accustomed to one another, even knowing the schedule of each other.

The interrelation can be seen throughout the journey of Santiago with animals in the novel. As Coelho (2010) asserts that Santiago "had noticed that [...] most of his animals also began to stir. It was as if some mysterious energy bound his life to that of the sheep" (p. 4). This remark conveys that even if they do not communicate directly, yet they can speak altogether, as Santiago, muttered that his sheep know his schedule, the concept shows their mutual understanding.

In zoo criticism we study the relation of human being with animals in a literary text. According to Higgins (2020), "genuine human-animal interchange and communication can take place" (...p. 214).

Paulo Coelho presented the man-animal relation in his novel *The Alchemist*, wherein, he explains, that how man and animals are in connection to one another, how they depend on each other, and how they can understand each other for being living together. As we can perceive, the relationship between man and animals can be due to some internal factors such as emotions and empathy, which keep them together like in symbiotic relations. However, the themes of interrelation, mutual influence and routine highlight the strong bond and connection between the animals and humans. The illustration suggests that coexisting closely with animals promotes the sharing of energies and habits, which sparks the curiosity of readers to consider the interdependence of humans and nature. As Coelho (1988) argued "They are so used to me [...] he muttered" (p. 4)

The relationship between the boy to his sheep is well-built, as he has given each sheep a specific name and is calling every sheep by a particular name. Additionally, the boy believes that his sheep can understand him. Therefore, sometimes he could read a part from his book to them, and he hoped that it had a certain impression on them, he could tell them about his situation as a shepherd, about his loneliness and happiness in the fields, about the things he has observed while crossing the village. Coelho (1988) wrote "The boy prodded them, one by one, with his crook,

calling each by name. So, there were times when he read them parts of his books that had made an impression on him, or when he would tell them of the loneliness or the happiness of a shepherd in the fields". (p. 4). Exploring the idea of physical presence, emotional and intellectual bonds between humans and animals, and the experience of coexisting can satisfy both humans' and animals' emotional needs.

Humans are always seeking comfort for internal satisfaction and animals can be a great source of their contentment. This relationship emphasizes unification between all living creatures on the earth, it also highlights the significance and integrity of non-human living things. Additionally, the boy's bond with his sheep reflects his relationship with nature. Although, for humans, animals are not only a source of gratification but also a substantial source of goods and money. As Santiago drove his flock to the merchant's shop, he hoped to sell enough of their wool to cover his basic expenses. As stated by Huggan and Tiffin (2020), the debate on domestic and wild animals' emotions is growing, provoking the scientific reconsideration of the emotional capacities of animals, for instance, elephant mourning (p. 175). Exploring that animals have emotions and feelings they are not just being, advocating for animals' protection and rights, and questioning the anthropocentric point of view, emphasizing that not only humans have emotions other non-humans like animals also have emotions and feelings.

4.2 Animals as a companion and mentor:

Paulo Coelho has deeply analysed the relationship of animals with humans in his overrated novel, *The Alchemist*. He suggests that animals are not only a source of entertainment and profit for humans; however, they are also a great source of knowledge as well. Animals can contribute to the process of learning; they have the capabilities to teach us different lessons. Humans can learn a great deal of knowledge from animals if he/she tries, as in the novel, Santiago learned different lessons from his sheep in various ways, as he visited several places while travelling with his sheep. Since he was unable to pay for lodging to visit other locations in his country, he learnt a lot from his adventure with his sheep, which makes them an invaluable source of knowledge for him.

Coelho (1988) declared "Well, usually I learn more from my sheep than from books," he answered. (p. 5). The excerpt, underscores the significance of experiential learning of knowledge over hypothetical knowledge, focusing on, that wisdom often comes from real-life experiences and experimentation instead of the existing knowledge in the books. In the case of Santiago, he has learned considerable practical lessons from his sheep, such

as forbearance, discipline, adaptability, tolerance, and the importance of the existence and role of nature connected to human life.

As a companion animals can have a significant role in human lives. Their basic, unequivocal love and loyalty permit them to be tremendous friends with humans. Animals provide a pure and unwavering presence. Coelho (1988) argued, "People say strange things, the boy thought. Sometimes it's better to be with the sheep, who don't say anything" (p. 20).

In contrast to humans who frequently share different opinions, have expectations, or make judgments to complicate relationships. Without requiring spoken conversation, they offer consolation, ease tension, and foster a sense of community. This concept is best illustrated by Santiago's sheep in *The Alchemist*, who provide him with a peaceful, calming companionship that enables him to think and achieve serenity. As friends, animals serve as a reminder of the value of living in the now and the beauty of simplicity, which makes them indispensable allies on life's journey. As stated by, Steingo (2024), non-symbolic elements such as love and intimacy can enhance human-animal relationships and promote deeper connections and companionship rather than depend entirely on symbolic communication (p...86).

4.3 Mutual influence and dependence:

Coelho (1988), "They were content with just food and water, and, in exchange, they generously gave of their wool, their company, and—once in a while—their meat". (p. 7).

The writer reflects on the mutual influence and dependency among all living beings, as they are all part of the ecosystem and have a substantial impact on each other, emphasizing the harmony and coexistence of living. Santiago and his sheep are mutually dependent on each other, as Santiago, sheep rely on Santiago for their food, water, protection, and guidance, it indicates that they are solely dependent on him, in exchange, they provide him their wool, meat, and company which accomplish his basic need of life. The notion that animals and people impact one another's existence is further supported by this mutual influence and independence. Hence, it critiques the anthropocentric belief that non-human beings have no contribution to the world of human beings.

4.4 Human Perception of Animals:

The only things that concerned the sheep were food and water. As long as the boy knew how to find the best pastures in Andalusia, they would be his friends. Yes, their days were all the same, with the seemingly endless hours between sunrise and dusk; and they had never read a book in their young lives, and didn't understand when the boy

told them about the sights of the cities. They were content with just food and water. (Coelho, 1988, p. 7)

Considering, the human perception of animals, Coelho, demonstrated the real nature and behaviours of human beings toward non-human beings, especially, regarding animals in the ecosphere, reflecting on their cognitive and understanding capabilities, often human beings considering their selves superior and non-human beings inferior in the living world. Santiago the protagonist of the novel shows his real anthropocentric comportment toward his sheep, he thinks that animals are only concerned with their food and water, and do not know anything about the world in which they are living. This suggests that humans frequently subjugate animals and violate their rights in several ways.

Anthropocentrism is the point of view, believing that human is the crux of the universe, and considering other beings are mere objects. A zoo-critical examination of *The Alchemist* shows that Coelho's delineation of sheep, which limits them to submissive animals whose only function is to fulfil human requirements, extends anthropocentric orders. The description underestimates their inherent worth by neglecting their ability to exhibit subtle emotions and social behaviours. Animal lives are commercialised and a service-oriented notion of animals is maintained by the narration, shaping their existence around supplying wool, meat, and friendship. Furthermore, normalising the sheep's exploitation and stifling their agency is achieved by obliterating their point of view and projecting contentment onto them. These representations are contested by a zoo-critical perspective, which promotes stories that see animals as sentient entities with an inherent value greater than human efficacy.

How does one present the approach of literature read from a realistic perspective towards wild nature if we postulate its status as autonomous towards the human world? [...] while anthropocentrism causes the exploitation and subjectification of animals. Therefore, this cannot be. (Barcz p. 16). Barcz explores how literature challenges anthropocentric worldviews and tackles speciesism in the burgeoning fields of posthumanism and zoo criticism. She critiques the anthropocentrism opinion, for the violation and subjugation of animal rights, and exploitation of their agency and intrinsic value.

Human dominance and animal subjugation:

"They trust me, and they've forgotten how to rely on their own instincts, because I lead them to nourishment". (Coelho (1988), P. 7).

Notably, the argument reflects on the power dynamics and dominance of human beings over animal agencies, and moral and ethical values. For centuries humans have shown dominancy over the non-human creatures of the world they

consider them inferior and often subjugate their rights in many ways. Moreover, *The Alchemist* depicts a power dynamic in which animals depend upon humans for survivorship, featuring human domination and animal enslavement. The statement "they've forgotten how to rely on their own instincts" illustrates how domestication causes animals to lose their autonomy by suppressing their innate skills and values. This dynamic serves as a metaphor for more general problems of exploitation and control in nature.

The human being, in the process of his emancipation, shares the fate of the rest of his world. The domination of nature involves the domination of man. Each subject not only has to take part in the subjugation of external nature, human and nonhuman but to do so must subjugate nature in himself. (Horkheimer, W. Adorno).

The assertion when humans dominate nature, both other people and their own innate tendencies are subjugated. Ironically, freedom leads to new kinds of domination, where natural binds to nature are suppressed by reason. This critique emphasizes how social injustice and environmental exploitation have intertwined effects.

V. CONCLUSION

The fundamental goal of this scholarly work is to reevaluate the analysis of *The Alchemist* from a zoo critical vintage point, with a particular emphasis on Santiago's encounters with the animals such as sheep, camels, and hawks. As this analysis has shown, the novel's animals are not only symbolic; they also significantly influence Santiago's adventures in search of the treasure, drawing on various themes of interconnection and moral dilemmas in human-animal relationships.

The findings focus on the importance of non-human measures in literature as well as in day-to-day life, they advance the area of animal studies in literary works. By applying the application of zoocriticism, the study centre's focus is man-animal relationships however, the study also reflects on the orthodox anthropocentric narratives which only give importance to human beings and present debate and arguments over the moral representation of animals. There is a substantial research gap that still exists for further evaluation of animal representations in Coelho's works, as the study pays attention to certain relationships due to scope limitations.

Via other theoretical frameworks to extend the topic or by contrasting *The Alchemist* with other novels that have the same ideas and themes, further research is possible on this approach. Considering, animals as active participants in literature can enhance moral and inclusive viewpoints,

which alters our understanding of human-animal interactions in both fiction and everyday life.

Despite these disclosures, the study recognizes its limitations. There is plenty of opportunity for additional investigation into other characters and their ties to the animal kingdom, as the research centres on a few human-animal interactions in *The Alchemist*. Furthermore, although this study makes use of well-established zoocritical frameworks, a more comparative approach that looks at related topics in other literary works can enhance the conversation even more. Future research may also look into how various cultural viewpoints affect how animals are portrayed in Paulo Coelho's writings or literature more generally.

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The Colonial Narrative and Postcolonial Interpretation of *Robinson Crusoe*

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Abstract— This article takes the classic colonial literary work of the 18th century, *Robinson Crusoe*, as the research object. By analyzing the historical background of British colonial expansion in the 18th century and Defoe's life experiences, and applying post-colonialist theory, it delves deeply into the colonialist logic contained in the novel from two dimensions: narrative construction of colonialism and post-colonialist criticism. The research found that Defoe legitimized Robinson's colonial behavior by using colonial narrative strategies such as civilization, language and religion through the character of Robinson, and revealed the process of Friday's "otherization" and cultural transformation by means of the binary opposition framework of "self and other". In his novels, Defoe not only participated in the construction of colonial discourse but also implicitly criticized the injustice of the maritime empire through Robinson's experience on the deserted island, conveying modern reflections and presenting to readers the inherent contradictions and ideological tensions of colonial narratives.



Keywords— *Robinson Crusoe, Colonial Narration, Post-colonialism, Otherization*

I. INTRODUCTION

Robinson Crusoe (1719) is an adventure novel written by the 18th-century British author Daniel Defoe. Since its publication, it has been widely read and interpreted by scholars both at home and abroad. In traditional literary criticism, Robinson is often regarded as a model of bourgeois individual struggle for his tenacity, resilience and wisdom in fighting against the harsh natural environment and eventually becoming the master of the deserted island. However, with the development of literary criticism theories, especially the rise of post-colonialism, the novel has revealed more complex ideological connotations, allowing us to re-examine the character of Robinson—he is no longer merely an adventure hero but

rather an embodiment of early colonizers, and his experience on the deserted island is a literary metaphor for the colonial process. Looking back at the period when *Robinson Crusoe* was created, the work was published in 1719. The 18th century was the golden age of British colonial expansion, and at that time, a "colonial justification" was prevalent in British society, which held that the British had the responsibility to spread "civilization" and "Christianity" around the world. The rise of the bourgeoisie and the expansion of overseas trade simultaneously required ideological support, and *Robinson Crusoe* was a product of this historical context. As An Sufang pointed out, this novel was "the first time that the image of the bourgeoisie was presented through a literary

work after the bourgeoisie stepped onto the historical stage”[1]. This article aims to re-interpret *Robinson Crusoe*, a classic sample of 18th-century British colonial literature, from the perspectives of colonial narrative and postcolonial critical theory.

II. THE RATIONALITY OF DEFOE’S CREATION OF *ROBINSON CRUSOE*

Defoe was born into a middle-class family in London and belonged to the emerging bourgeoisie. During his youth, he engaged in various commercial activities, including the trade of knitted goods and the manufacture of tiles, and also participated in political activities, serving as a government intelligence agent. He keenly observed that long-distance trade had aroused people’s desires and vitality. In this era of transition between the old and the new, commerce opened the door to a new order. Throughout his life, he wrote numerous works on trade, politics, and religion, demonstrating a close concern for Britain’s colonial endeavors. Historian G. M. Trevelyan even referred to the early 18th-century Britain as “Defoe’s Britain.” Because Defoe was a representative of the emerging bourgeoisie, the character of *Robinson Crusoe* he created epitomized the fundamental traits of early colonists. Robinson was born into a bourgeois family and was not content with a peaceful and comfortable life. From a young age, he had an extraordinary spirit of adventure and a strong sense of business. It can be seen from the novel that Robinson was fond of taking risks and participated in many voyages and trade activities, including his initial trip to Guinea, his subsequent management of a plantation in Brazil, and the slave trade voyage that eventually led him to be stranded on a desert island. These experiences, to a certain extent, typically reflected the lifestyle and value orientation of the 18th-century British bourgeoisie represented by Defoe.

III. NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTION OF COLONIALISM

Robinson Crusoe constructs and legitimizes the colonial logic through a series of narrative strategies such as dream metaphors, naming ceremonies, and religious subjugation. After being stranded on the deserted island, Robinson quickly regards it as his territory and establishes

his ruling position through labor reform, naming rights, and legal systems. This process appears to be the “civilization” of the deserted island, but in essence, it is a form of colonial possession. Robinson uses the typical language of agricultural capitalism in the 17th and 18th centuries to call the land he cultivated “enclosure.” He also, like most upwardly mobile industrialists of that time, admired the honor of the noble class, and thus built “Shanty Towns,” established “country houses,” fortified “castles,” and crowned himself the “governor” and “king” of the island [2]. To escape the deserted island, Robinson used a dream metaphor. After waking up, he believed that he should save a “barbarian” in order to live on the island. Defoe legitimized the colonial expansion behavior through this dream metaphor as a rationalization of Robinson’s survival on the deserted island. Robinson regarded this “barbarian” as a “tool.” And as an upper-class figure, he named him “Friday.” Moreover, Robinson taught him English and Christianity, making him his servant. This relationship was glorified as “education” and “salvation,” but it was actually a form of colonial domination. Fan Meiyu pointed out in *Postcolonial Interpretation of Robinson Crusoe*: “Friday had no resistance consciousness and eventually lost his cultural identity, becoming a silent ‘other’.” [3]. Robinson represented European civilization, possessing technology, knowledge, and religious beliefs; while the natives on the deserted island were depicted as “barbarians,” with cannibalistic customs and primitive lifestyles. Robinson’s naming of the animals on the island also exposed his colonial mentality: he regarded all other animals as potential enemies and rivals, called the birds that ate his grains “thief of grains,” and punished them by showing them public executions like those of thieves in Britain. This behavior of treating animals as “criminals” and punishing them reflects Robinson’s attempt to impose British laws and order on the natural environment of the deserted island, which is a typical colonial mindset [2].

In *Robinson Crusoe*, Defoe used language and religion as key roles in providing legitimacy for colonial actions. Language is not only a communication tool but also a carrier of power relations. The first word Robinson taught Friday was “Master” and required Friday to address him with this. Language teaching is one-way, and this one-way nature itself symbolizes the “civilization”

indoctrinating “barbarism,” which is a manifestation of power relations. By teaching Friday English, Robinson not only enabled Friday to understand his orders but also instilled his values and way of thinking into him. More profoundly, after Friday accepted English, he unconsciously accepted the power structure and hierarchical relationship contained in the language. He not only taught Friday English but also spread Christian doctrines to him, making him abandon his original beliefs and behavior patterns. Robinson, through reading the Bible and repentance, believed that he was an “elect of God” and had superiority, thus being able to carry out colonial activities on the island in the name of God [3]. This process was described as a “renaissance” and “salvation,” but it was actually a cultural colonization. Through religious transformation, Robinson not only conquered Friday’s body but also his mind, making him accept the status of being enslaved. When he successfully transformed Friday into a Christian, Robinson not only gained a religious sense of satisfaction but also strengthened the legitimacy of his colonial mission.

IV. THE “SELF-OTHER” FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF POSTCOLONIAL THEORY

Postcolonial theorist Said proposed in *Orientalism* that colonialism is not only a political and economic practice but also a discourse practice. Through the construction of the binary opposition of “self” and “other”, it provides legitimacy for colonial rule [4]. According to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory, after Robinson completed the primitive accumulation of physiological and safety needs on the deserted island, Defoe deliberately directed his path to the realization of the need for belonging towards the violent possession of the “other”, this narrative choice exposed the inherent contradiction of the binary opposition thinking of Enlightenment rationalism-when civilized people encounter an identity crisis in the isolated island space, they must reconstruct their self-subjectivity by creating an image of the “wild man” as the other mirror. In *Robinson Crusoe*, Robinson’s “self” identity is constructed by negating the “other”. Robinson compared Friday’s loyalty and obedience with “the fast plowing of oxen and the sharpness of the axe”,

seemingly praising Friday’s ability and his loyalty to himself, but in fact, he transformed Friday’s body into a quantifiable tool, completing the symbolic castration of his cultural subjectivity. That is to say, the objectification of Friday is the negation of his human subjectivity as an individual, he is no longer a human with complex emotions, but is regarded as a “human-shaped tool” serving the colonialist group [5]. Fan Meiyu pointed out: “Robinson constructs his ‘self’ identity through two ways-himself and the ‘other’”. On his own part, by recording his daily experiences, he brings the advanced European cultural ideas to the island...and another more important way is to negate the ‘other’. Robinson negates the local’s cannibalistic nature through caricaturing it, to prove the ‘other’s’ ignorance and ugliness, thereby revealing the superiority of ‘self’ [3]. Defoe held this view in the novel: he believes that the locals are savage and eat each other. Robinson, as a new type of civilized cultural disseminator, logically believes that he should change the locals’ eating habits, no longer eating each other, but instead using goat milk and bread. He is actually constructing a materialistic civilization hierarchy order, by linking the dietary habits and moral progress, Defoe disguises the colonialization behavior as the dissemination of universal values. The locals are imagined and alienated as “cannibals”, while the colonists become the dual embodiment of civilization and morality. The process of Robinson’s self-identity construction reflects a typical colonial mentality. He considers himself “civilized”, “rational”, and “devout”, while the opposite is that the indigenous people are “savage”, “uncivilized”, and “superstitious”. This binary opposition thinking provides a psychological basis for his colonial behavior. As other relevant researchers have said, “In Robinson’s eyes, the relationship between people is, of course, first a contractual relationship, a lending relationship, and a master-servant relationship. He complacently regards the slave trade of black people as a profitable risky business”. This instrumental rational thinking is a typical characteristic of bourgeois colonizers.

Friday plays a typical “other” role in the novel, and his image and the process of his transformation reflect the cultural hegemony of colonial discourse. Starting from Robinson naming Friday, Friday lost the right to

self-expression, his language, religion, and cultural identity were systematically eliminated, becoming a “colonized subject”. Only later, Friday said: “God is greater than our Benariki (Friday’s original belief in the natural god)”. This indicates that Friday has subconsciously negated his own belief. Zhang Jingyuan pointed out that in the power structure of colonialism, the cultural characteristics and national consciousness of the colonized people are suppressed, leading to “distortion of cultural essence”. The local residents and the elite intellectuals accepted the culture of the colonizers. When they observed various cultural phenomena in their own homeland, they often unconsciously applied the standards and theories used by the colonizers to examine and evaluate matters [7].

V. FROM CRITIQUE OF COLONIALISM TO REFLECTION ON MODERNITY

Robinson Crusoe is not only a colonial text but also a literary expression of the paradox of modernity. On the one hand, *Robinson Crusoe* embodies modern individualism, rational spirit, and labor ethics, which are the core values of modern society; on the other hand, it also represents colonial violence, cultural hegemony, and ecological destruction, which are the dark sides of modernity. Marx pointed out keenly, “The solitary and isolated hunter and fisherman, as set forth by Smith and Ricardo, belong to the unimaginative fiction of the 18th century. This is the kind of story like *Robinson Crusoe*.” but at the same time, he emphasized that the image of *Robinson Crusoe* is “a premonition of the ‘civil society’ that was prepared since the 16th century and advanced in a big way in the 18th century” [8]. The island life of *Robinson Crusoe* presents the internal contradictions of modernity: rationality and violence, freedom and oppression, progress and destruction coexist. Through labor, he transformed the island and demonstrated human conquest of nature, also indicating the ecological crisis caused by modern human-central; he established a personal kingdom, reflecting the dream of self-liberation, and also showing how individualism evolves into the domination of others; he spread Christian civilization, expressing the impulse of enlightenment, and also revealing the destruction of diversity caused by cultural hegemony. These

contradictions are the specific manifestations of the paradox of modernity.

Defoe in *Robinson Crusoe* unfolds a dialectic between nature and civilization through *Robinson Crusoe*’s island life. When he first landed on the island, *Robinson Crusoe*’s thinking was still imprisoned by the symbols of civilization. He found gold coins in the shipwreck, but in the face of the issue of survival, the gold coins were of no use, and their value was illusory. Not only the gold coins, but also in the civilized society, time is abstract and is regulated by calendars and clocks. But on the island, the absence of calendars and clocks made *Robinson Crusoe* begin to have an unclear sense of years. As time passed, he no longer needed to know what day of the week it was, he only needed to know when the rainy season would come and when the sowing season would arrive. His sense of time gradually integrated into nature, into the rhythm of the cycle of nature. The island provided *Robinson Crusoe* with an opportunity for self-reflection, enabling him to recognize the divine will and the natural law, understand the foundation of morality and order, the origin of wealth and civilization. Through direct contact with nature, *Robinson Crusoe* gradually realized the falsity of the civilized world and the truth of natural laws, this process reflects Defoe’s profound reflection on modern civilization [9].

VI. CONCLUSION

This article conducts a detailed textual analysis of *Robinson Crusoe* to reveal the colonial narrative strategies including dream metaphors, naming rituals, and religious subjugation. Defoe showcases *Robinson Crusoe*’s cultural hegemony and symbolic deconstruction over Friday through the colonial narrative. Robinson’s dreams expose the profound collusion between Enlightenment rationality and colonial violence; his “reasonableness” is actually a cognitive violence that dehumanizes others. Further, the legitimacy of civilized conquest is based on the alienated human needs, and the individual’s belonging needs are ingeniously transformed into the desire for colonial possession. Naming and religious subjugation complete the deepest cultural colonization, erasing the original identity through symbolic dominance. Defoe constructs the binary framework of “self-other”, and through Maslow’s

hierarchy of needs theory, Robinson seemingly intends to change the local people's dietary habits, but in reality, it is merely a whitewash of his colonial expansion logic.

In the current era where the globalization process reshapes the way human civilizations interact, *Robinson Crusoe* demonstrates the internal contradictions of modernity and the dialectics of nature and civilization. Humans need to reflect on themselves, clarify the foundation of morality and order, and the origin of wealth and civilization. Therefore, in today's increasingly accelerated globalization process, *Robinson Crusoe* is no longer merely a model of colonial literature; it also provides a reflection blueprint for the way people communicate with each other and handle matters.

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Negotiating Power and Identity: A Post-Colonial Discourse of *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Tempest*

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Abstract— This study delves into the nuanced dimensions of post-colonial identity within Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Navigating the turbulent seas of colonialism and imperialism, the narratives unravel the human repercussions of external dominance and economic exploitation of indigenous communities. Drawing on Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), the research adeptly employs a balanced application of colonial and postcolonial theories to analyze the transformation of the protagonists, Robinson and Prospero, from isolation to mastery after saving their respective servants. The exploration emphasizes the depiction of colonizers appropriating native lands, altering traditions, and shaping intricate dynamics between master and servant, challenging prevailing authorial perspectives on race, gender, and ethnicity. Key findings uncover issues of subjugation, religious conversion, power abuse, dominance, and linguistic hegemony within the context of power politics. This research contributes to a nuanced understanding of the interplay between colonizer and colonized, enriching literary discourse and fostering a comprehensive understanding of postcolonial identity in these literary masterpieces.



Keywords— post-colonialism, economic exploitation, subjugation, power politics, dominance

I. INTRODUCTION

The term "Post-colonialism" encapsulates the struggles of indigenous peoples globally in the early 21st century, particularly in the representation of race, ethnicity, culture, and human identity following the attainment of independence by many colonized nations. It explores the interactions between the colonizer and the colonized, with a significant focus on European imperial power. This critical theory encompasses the examination of history, culture, literature, and discourse, with a focus on the impact of European imperialism. The historical context of post-colonial literature involves a comprehensive engagement with the experiences of colonialism, encompassing slavery, migration, suppression, resistance, and the examination of discourses such as history, philosophy, anthropology, and linguistics. This paper positions postcolonialism not only as a reflection on conditions under imperialism and

colonialism but also as a lens for analyzing the aftermath of these historical periods.

Defining "Post-colonialism"

The term "post-colonial" is employed in at least three distinct but interconnected ways. Primarily, it can be viewed temporally, delineating a specific historical period. For instance, the Middle East was under the control of empires until the 20th century, with European colonial empires dominating in the 19th and early 20th centuries. As the 20th century progressed, colonial rule fragmented, giving rise to various post-colonial states that emerged in the aftermath of colonial empires (Said 112).

Secondly, "post-colonial" is sometimes used to describe a particular type of state and politics. Many post-colonial states in the Middle East inherited colonial institutions, with leaders often originating from military backgrounds linked to former colonial powers. Internal security services, such

as Saddam Hussein's secret police in Iraq, were established by the colonial powers to control populations from above, protecting the state from internal dissent rather than external military threats (Said 112). Critics argue that these institutions persisted in their function of maintaining state control over society even after the end of colonial rule, contributing to the prevalence of non-democratic governance in post-colonial states (Smith 78).

Furthermore, post-colonial states, being imposed from the top down, exhibited weaknesses in policy implementation. Societies within these states, however, demonstrated strength as people relied on social networks, such as tribes or village notables, rather than the state to fulfill their needs. Consequently, post-colonial states faced challenges in executing policies, often resorting to unjust measures (Smith 78). Additionally, these states were susceptible to coups, which occurred multiple times in the Middle East post-colonial period. The nature of coups, led by small groups of military officers, reflected a lack of trust in inherited state institutions, complicating efforts to align state and societal actions with the coup leaders' objectives (Johnson 45).

In summary, the multifaceted definition of "post-colonial" encompasses temporal transitions, institutional inheritances, and power dynamics, providing a nuanced understanding of the complexities inherent in societies emerging from colonial legacies.

Research Question

How does the representation of post-colonial identity in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* contribute to the authors' (of this article) understanding of the consequences of external control, economic exploitation, and the dynamics of power within the context of colonial and post-colonial narratives?

Research Methodology

This research employs a qualitative approach, delving into the intricate realm of postcolonial identity in the context of two seminal literary works: Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. The methodology centers on an exhaustive analysis of secondary data, emphasizing existing literary criticism, scholarly articles, and critical analyses that scrutinize and illuminate post-colonial themes inherent in these narratives.

Data Collection: The primary data sources comprise a comprehensive array of literary critiques, academic papers, and analytical studies that explore the nuances of postcolonial identity. These sources include reputable journals, academic publications, and recognized literary databases. The data extraction process involves meticulous curation of insights, arguments, and perspectives from

scholars and critics, forming the foundation for a nuanced understanding of postcolonial dynamics in the selected literary works.

Data Analysis: The collected data undergoes systematic, rigorous analysis. This involves categorizing and synthesizing information, identifying recurrent themes, and discerning the subtle intricacies of post-colonial identity. Through a thematic approach, the analysis aims to uncover the multifaceted layers embedded in the characters, plotlines, and cultural landscapes depicted in *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Tempest*.

Objective: The overarching objective of this qualitative research is to unravel the complexities of post-colonial identity as manifested in these literary masterpieces. By leveraging existing scholarly discourse, the study aims to contribute a nuanced perspective to the ongoing conversation surrounding post-colonial themes in literature. Through an exploration of secondary data, the research seeks to provide fresh insights that enrich understanding of the intricate dynamics of identity, power, and resistance within the colonial contexts depicted in *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Tempest*.

Limitations: It is crucial to acknowledge the limitations inherent in this research methodology. The study relies solely on secondary data and is contingent on the perspectives presented in the selected literary critiques and analyses. The inherent subjectivity of literary interpretation poses a challenge, underscoring the need for a comprehensive, diverse selection of sources to mitigate bias and provide a well-rounded understanding.

In essence, this research methodology adopts a qualitative lens, drawing on the wealth of existing scholarly discussions to unravel the layers of postcolonial identity woven into the fabric of *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Tempest*.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the realm of postcolonial literature, the works of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* have been the subject of extensive analysis. These classics, rooted in the colonial context, offer rich material for scholars examining the complexities of post-colonial identity, power dynamics, and cultural representation.

Edward Said's seminal work *Orientalism* (1978) has been pivotal in shaping postcolonial studies, providing a theoretical framework for understanding how Western literature constructs and represents the East. Said's insights, although not directly applied to *Robinson Crusoe* or *The Tempest*, offer a foundational understanding of the broader colonial discourse that permeates these texts.

Moreover, Homi K. Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994) introduces the concept of hybridity, emphasizing the blending of cultures and identities in the post-colonial context. Bhabha's ideas become relevant when examining how the characters in *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Tempest* negotiate their identities in the aftermath of colonization, especially in encounters with the "other."

The postcolonial lens has been extended to Shakespearean studies, with critics such as Ania Loomba in "Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism" (2002) shedding light on the racial and colonial dimensions of Shakespeare's works. Loomba's insights apply to *The Tempest*, where the character of Caliban has been a focal point for discussions on race and subjugation.

However, despite the wealth of scholarship on post-colonial readings of these texts, a nuanced exploration of the agency and perspectives of the colonized characters, such as Friday in *Robinson Crusoe* and Caliban in *The Tempest*, remains relatively underexplored. While existing studies address power dynamics and cultural representation, there is a potential research gap in fully understanding how these characters, often relegated to the periphery, navigate their postcolonial identities and contribute to the broader discourse of resistance and agency.

Research Gap

The existing literature has provided valuable insights into the post-colonial dimensions of *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Tempest*, focusing on power structures, cultural representation, and broader colonial discourse. However, a notable research gap emerges in the nuanced exploration of agency and identity negotiation of colonized characters within these narratives. The experiences of Friday and Caliban, as representative figures of the colonized "other," have not been fully unpacked in terms of their own subjectivities, resistances, and contributions to post-colonial discourses. Thus, a research opportunity exists to delve deeper into the perspectives and agency of these characters, shedding light on their complexities and enriching our understanding of post-colonial identity in literature.

History of post-colonial literature

Post-colonial literature addresses the aftermath of colonialism, featuring works that explore the experiences of racial minorities in the West, including Native and African Americans in the US, British Asians and African Caribbeans in the UK, and Aborigines in Australia and Canada. This broad term encompasses various works, such as Samuel Beckett's *Murphy*, Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, and Shakespeare's *Othello*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *The*

Tempest, among others. Edward Said's *Orientalism* is considered pivotal in shaping postcolonial studies, emphasizing the relationship between knowledge production and the consolidation of colonial rule. Post-colonial literature thus provides a diverse and nuanced perspective on historical transitions, socio-cultural locations, and epochal configurations, drawing inspiration from a range of sources, including challenges posed by feminist, gay, lesbian, and ethnic studies.

Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) is considered pivotal in shaping postcolonial studies. In *Orientalism*, Said argued for seeing a direct relationship between the knowledge that Asian scholars produced and how it was redeployed in the constitution of colonial rule. It should be acknowledged, however, that whatever the developments were that led to the formation of the field of postcolonial studies, it has to be seen more in terms of a long process rather than a series of events, with the central impulses of this process coming from a variety of sources, sometimes outside any concern with colonialism. These may be traced in a variety of approach, such as in the changing face of global politics with the emergence of newly independent states; in the wide-ranging re-evaluation begun in the 1980s of the exclusionary forms of western reason and in the access of their complicity with imperial expansion and colonialist rule; in the debates that raged about empiricism and culturalism in the social sciences from the 1960s; and in the challenges to dominant discourses of representation from feminist, gay, lesbian and ethnic studies in the 1970s and 1980s.

Postcolonial literature represents all these conditions and draws on various sources and inspirations. It includes works such as Samuel Beckett's *Murphy*, Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, and Ingolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers*, among many others. Shakespeare's *Othello*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *The Tempest* have been taken as key texts for the application of postcolonial modes of analysis. This suggests that postcolonial literature is a broad term that encompasses literatures by people from the erstwhile colonial world, as well as by various minority Diasporas living in the West. Post-colonialism has also been a term used to reinterpret Western canonical literature from a variety of fresh and diverse perspectives.

Colonialism versus Post-Colonialism: A Critical Examination within *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Tempest*

The literary works of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* provide compelling narratives that encapsulate the ethos of their respective eras, reflecting the pervasive ideologies of European colonial expansion and imperial dominance (Said 49; Boehmer 45). Crusoe's solitary existence on the uninhabited island in *Robinson Crusoe* is not merely a tale of survival but a narrative shaped by the colonial mindset, where he imposes European norms on the island, claims territory, and asserts mastery over indigenous elements (Boehmer 45; Pratt 587). Similarly, Prospero's manipulation of the island and its inhabitants in *The Tempest* mirrors the colonial attitude of subjugation and cultural assimilation, highlighting the power dynamics inherent in colonial enterprises (Said 49; Bhabha 85).

However, the postcolonial lens, emerging in response to the legacies of colonial rule, invites a critical reevaluation of these narratives (Bhabha 85; Spivak 271). In the context of *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Tempest*, the post-colonial discourse prompts a reassessment of the characters' agency and the consequences of their actions, inviting scrutiny of the silenced voices—the indigenous characters often relegated to the periphery (Pratt 587; Spivak 271). The post-colonial perspective not only examines the immediate effects of colonialism but also delves into the enduring impact on identity, culture, and power structures (Said 49; Bhabha 85). It calls for an acknowledgment of the complexities and contradictions inherent in the colonial experience, opening avenues for a more inclusive and nuanced understanding (Boehmer 45; Pratt 587).

The tension between colonialism and post-colonialism within these literary works reflects broader societal shifts and the evolving discourse surrounding imperialism (Said 49; Bhabha 85). As scholars engage in a critical dialogue with these texts, they navigate the intricate terrain between the legacies of colonial oppression and the emerging narratives that seek to reclaim, reinterpret, and challenge the prevailing norms (Boehmer 45; Pratt 587). The juxtaposition of colonialist and post-colonial perspectives within "Robinson Crusoe" and "The Tempest" offers a literary microcosm that invites readers to interrogate the historical narratives woven into the fabric of these enduring classics.

Post-Colonialism and Political Identity

Colonial empires, in most instances, did not willingly relinquish their territories, prompting anti-imperial movements among colonized peoples seeking independence. Central to these movements was the role of political identity, often consciously constructed in

opposition to the imperial order. This paper explores the nuanced manifestations of political identity in the Middle East during anti-imperial movements, examining the interplay of ethnic nationalism, territorial nationalism, and religion in shaping these identities. The subsequent rise to power of anti-imperial movements following the end of colonial empires and the ensuing coups was framed in the name of an allegedly authentic, indigenous political identity, representing a reclamation of history suppressed by colonial powers. However, the diversity within post-colonial states, coupled with the challenge of reconciling conflicting identities, posed complex questions about the nature of true independence and the need for a new political order.

Identity Construction in the Middle East: Political identities in the Middle East varied across regions and movements, incorporating elements of Arabism, Islam, and national affiliations. For instance, Egypt witnessed the coexistence of the Muslim Brotherhood and Nasser, both emphasizing Arabism, Islam, and Egyptian identity but with differing emphases. Similarly, socialist perspectives viewed identity through a class prism. Cultural and historical amalgams of identity were instrumentalized in Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq, reflecting the complexities of identity formation within anti-imperial movements.

Diversity and Elite Challenges in Post-Colonial States: Despite the emphasis on purportedly authentic political identities, post-colonial states were characterized by internal diversity, including elites and minorities whose identities did not align with those championed by anti-imperial movements. The lower or lower-middle classes often dominated the stressed political identities, leading to challenges in integrating elites and minorities into the post-colonial categorizations. Post-colonial rulers grappled with the dilemma of defining true independence—whether it sufficed to be formally independent or if a complete departure from the old colonial order, including its representatives, was necessary for the establishment of a new system rooted in an authentic political identity.

Slavery, Subjugation, and Social Class in *Robinson Crusoe*

Within the narrative of *Robinson Crusoe*, themes of slavery, subjugation, and social class intricately intertwine, offering a nuanced exploration of power dynamics and identity construction. Crusoe's encounters with slavery during his second sea voyage and his subsequent actions reveal complex attitudes toward human bondage and social hierarchy.

Instances of Slavery in *Robinson Crusoe*: The first instance of slavery occurs during Crusoe's second sea voyage when he is captured by Moorish pirates and

enslaved in the town of Salée. Paradoxically, despite having experienced slavery himself, Crusoe becomes eager to engage in the slave trade, establishing an enterprise in West Africa. This transformation in attitude raises questions about the impact of personal experiences on one's ethical stance. Another form of slavery is depicted when Crusoe saves a man, named Friday, who pledges total submission in return. Crusoe, despite eagerly anticipating human companionship, maintains a clear separation in social class, exemplified by the act of renaming Friday and emphasizing the master-servant relationship.

Social Class and Power Dynamics: The text highlights the significant role of social class in Crusoe's interactions, as seen in his imposition of a new identity on Friday and the subsequent portrayal of himself as a ruler or "king" of the island. The arrival of an English ship reinforces Crusoe's perception of his island as peopled, reflecting a sense of power and control. The theme of who holds authority aligns with the broader ideas of enslavement and social class, illustrating how power dynamics shape Crusoe's understanding of his role on the island.

Robinson Crusoe offers a complex exploration of slavery, subjugation, and social class, presenting a nuanced portrayal of power relations and identity construction. Crusoe's evolving attitudes toward slavery and his assertion of dominance contribute to a broader discussion on colonial ideologies and their impact on individual behavior and societal structures.

The Construction of "Others" in Robinson Crusoe

In Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, the depiction of the desert island serves as a geographical backdrop where indigenous people, notably "Friday," are strategically positioned as racial others. This construction of "others" is employed to underscore the perceived superiority and dominance of Robinson Crusoe, reflecting his colonialist perspective. The transformation of "Friday" is not aimed at civilizing him in the conventional sense but is a calculated effort to secure complete obedience. This strategic transformation includes altering "Friday's" original lifestyle, teaching him English, and indoctrinating him with Christian teachings (Zeng 2015).

Slavery Relationship between Friday and Robinson Crusoe: The theme of the master-slave relationship is pervasive in *Robinson Crusoe*, reflecting the prevalent dynamics of slave trade during Crusoe's era. The master-slave dialectic is first evident when Crusoe is captured by the Moors and subsequently becomes a slave. This dynamic extends to his relationship with Xury, a boy he rescues, who willingly remains obedient even after being sold to a pirate. The central and most crucial illustration of the master-slave relationship is observed in Crusoe's interaction with Man

Friday, representing a microcosmic reflection of the European citizen-African slave relationship prevalent during the time. Crusoe, having established mastery over the entire island, nature, and animals, extends his dominance over human beings, viewing himself as a king or emperor (Zeng 2015).

Kinship and Capitalism in Master-Servant Relationship: The relationship between Robinson Crusoe and Friday encompasses elements of love, mutualism, and spiritual connection, with Crusoe imparting Christian doctrines to Friday. Additionally, the master-servant relationship is characterized by a division of labor, reflecting capitalist principles with equal shares. This complex relationship underscores various facets, including spiritual, economic, and social dimensions (Zeng 2015).

Ambiguities in the Master-Slave Dynamic: The relationship between Crusoe and Friday is multifaceted, featuring elements of a father-son dynamic alongside a clear master-slave element. The act of naming, where Crusoe assigns the name "Friday" to his servant, signifies a demonstration of extreme superiority. Despite the ambiguity, Friday appears grateful for his servitude, symbolized by placing Crusoe's foot on his head as a gesture of swearing perpetual servitude. Crusoe, in turn, expresses satisfaction with Friday's presence, highlighting the significance of human companionship after Crusoe's extended isolation (Defoe 206).

The construction of "others" in *Robinson Crusoe* is a deliberate narrative strategy employed by Defoe to underscore the hierarchical relationships between Crusoe and indigenous characters. The master-slave dynamics within the novel offer a nuanced exploration of power, identity, and cultural superiority prevalent during the colonial era.

Unveiling Layers of Influence and Controversy in Robinson Crusoe

Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, a seminal work in the literary canon, has endured for over three centuries, leaving an indelible mark on global literature and shaping the trajectory of the novel. Despite its structural peculiarities and a plot fraught with errors, this narrative of a shipwrecked mariner has not only captivated readers but also contributed significantly to the evolution of the novel as a literary form.

Innovative Narrative Elements: Scholars argue that *Robinson Crusoe* represents a groundbreaking achievement in the fusion of narrative elements, standing out as one of the earliest novels to incorporate the diverse components that have come to define the genre. Originating as a fiction seemingly based on factual events, the novel transcends a mere account of Alexander Selkirk's misfortunes,

transforming into a gritty survival story with a myriad of themes.

Multifaceted Themes: Beyond its façade as a survival narrative, *Robinson Crusoe* unfolds as a thought-provoking parable of Christian sin, a critique of capitalist individualism, and an exposé of imperialist paranoia. The narrative weaves a complex tapestry, delving into the triumph of the human spirit amid adversities, inviting readers to contemplate issues beyond the surface plot.

Controversial Perspectives: Examining the story from the perspective of the indigenous inhabitants, *Robinson Crusoe* takes on the mantle of a myth of invasion. Crusoe, portrayed as a sunburned goblin, imposes European belief systems on the natives, prompting critical evaluations of cultural imposition. The character of Friday, while seen by some as slavishly subservient, can be reinterpreted as a hero with humility and grace under pressure, offering a model for resilience across cultures.

Racial and Moral Dilemmas: The narrative introduces characters like Friday and Xury, both entangled in a web of moral and racial complexities. Friday, ostensibly saved from cannibals, grapples with a portrayal that upholds white supremacy ideologies. Xury, a cheerful lad, becomes subject to Crusoe's casual sale, reflecting the moral dilemmas of the protagonist in the pursuit of his own survival.

Visual Motifs and Moral Commentary: Defoe's mastery of visual motifs is evident, particularly in the symbolism of Crusoe's gun. This powerful image signifies both the technological superiority of Europeans and the moral deficiencies inherent in their actions. The narrative critiques the notion that warfare alone does not constitute a true civilization.

Robinson Crusoe emerges not only as an adventure tale but as a layered narrative inviting scrutiny from diverse perspectives. Its endurance through time is a testament to its complexity, sparking debates on imperialism, race, and morality. As we navigate its nuanced terrain, we unearth a narrative that transcends its apparent simplicity, inviting readers to question, reflect, and engage with the controversies and influences embedded within its pages.

Power Dynamics in Shakespeare's The Tempest: A Critical Analysis

William Shakespeare's play, *The Tempest*, is a rich tapestry of themes that delve into the complexities of human relationships, societal structures, and the exercise of power. While exploring elements such as gender roles, love, and the influence of the environment, Shakespeare's overarching message revolves around the multifaceted nature of power. This research aims to dissect the various

dimensions of power as portrayed in *The Tempest*, highlighting the responsibilities, complexities, and consequences associated with its exercise.

Exercise of Power through Titles: One prominent aspect through which Shakespeare portrays the exercise of power is through the titles of different characters. The central character, Prospero, exemplifies this as the Duke of Milan, wielding authority not only through his title but also through the knowledge contained in his books. The power dynamics shift as Prospero declares himself the leader of the island he lands on, asserting dominance over the indigenous inhabitants, Caliban and Ariel. The title becomes a tool for manipulation, subjugating others to Prospero's will.

Manipulation and Desire for Power: The play further explores the theme of power through characters like Stephano, a butler, who, despite lacking inherent power, becomes a figure of authority for Caliban. The desire for power prompts Stephano to plot against Prospero, revealing the allure and dangers of unbridled ambition. Shakespeare presents a cautionary tale, showcasing the severe consequences of the insatiable craving for power.

Greed, Betrayal, and the Corrupting Influence of Power: Through the character of Antonio, Shakespeare delves into the corrosive nature of power fueled by greed. Antonio's betrayal of his own brother, Prospero, to assume the title of Duke of Milan illustrates how power can eclipse moral values. The narrative unfolds as a commentary on the ease with which individuals become consumed by the pursuit of power, leading to disregard for the lives affected by their actions.

Negativity in the Pursuit of Power: Shakespeare, through various characters like Antonio and Caliban, portrays a cyclical pattern of negativity associated with the pursuit of power. The play suggests that irrespective of one's identity or actions, the desire for power creates a continuous cycle. The playwright draws parallels with the political landscape of England during his time, incorporating historical events to emphasize the perpetual nature of power struggles.

Responsibility and Abuse of Power: In addition to portraying the acquisition of power, Shakespeare underscores the responsibility that comes with it. Prospero's disregard for his position as Duke of Milan leads to his downfall, emphasizing the consequences of abusing power. The mistreatment of Caliban serves as a critique of leaders who fail to respect their subjects, reflecting Shakespeare's commentary on the leaders of his era.

The Tempest serves as a microcosm of power dynamics, offering a nuanced exploration of its facets and consequences. Shakespeare uses characters and relationships to convey his thoughts on power, responsibility, and the intricate interplay between rulers and

the ruled. This research seeks to unravel the layers of meaning embedded in the exercise of power in *The Tempest*, contributing to a deeper understanding of Shakespeare's timeless exploration of this universal theme.

Language and Power Dynamics in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*: A Postcolonial Perspective

Language plays a pivotal role in postcolonial studies, reflecting the power dynamics and relationships between colonizers and the colonized. In *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare, the interplay of language serves as a lens through which the intricate power structures are examined, echoing the broader discourse on colonialism. This research delves into the significance of language in the play, exploring its implications on power relationships, resistance, and the quest for identity in a postcolonial context.

Colonial Imposition of Language: In the colonial context, language often becomes a tool of dominance, imposed by colonizers upon the colonized. The character Stephen in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* grapples with the imposition of the colonizer's language, symbolizing the struggle faced by many during colonization. Similarly, *The Tempest* portrays this power dynamic, particularly evident in the relationship between Caliban and Prospero. Michel Foucault's Discourse Analysis becomes instrumental in understanding how language is utilized by the colonizers to assert authority and demand submission.

Foucault's Discourse Analysis in *The Tempest*: Foucault's theory elucidates the role of language in explicit lordship, with colonizers using specific vocabularies to reinforce their dominance. Prospero's teachings to Caliban exemplify this, as he imparts words like 'master' and 'slave' to control and categorize. Caliban's resistance, articulated through curses, reveals language as a form of resistance against those in power. The struggle against inequality is evident, with Prospero maintaining distinct relationships with Ariel and Caliban, reflecting the power structures of the time.

Homi Bhabha's Concept of Mimicry: Shakespeare's exploration of colonial themes aligns with Homi Bhabha's concept of 'mimicry.' Caliban's attempts to learn the language, behavior, and culture of Prospero reflect the desire for recognition through imitation. However, Caliban's refusal to fully adopt the colonizer's lifestyle showcases his resistance and the preservation of his identity. Bhabha's notion of colonial mimicry as a desire for a reformed Other resonates in Caliban's complex relationship with Prospero and Miranda.

Hegemony and Colonial Domination: Antonio Gramsci's idea of hegemony finds resonance in Prospero's portrayal as a colonial imperialist in *The Tempest*. Prospero's dominance

is established without direct violence, creating a hegemonic power that governs through consent. The play illustrates the arrival of Europeans in new territories, marking the beginning of hegemonic control and colonial imposition.

Postcolonial Questions of Identity and Culture: As the play concludes with themes of reconciliation, justice, and forgiveness, the lingering question emerges: Can the colonized minds regain their identity and culture? The decolonization process raises profound queries about the tortured minds of the colonized and the possibility of creating a new utopian world free from the remnants of colonial influence.

The Tempest, through its nuanced exploration of language and power dynamics, provides a window into the complexities of colonial relationships. The interplay of language becomes a means of resistance, negotiation, and the quest for identity in a postcolonial world. This research contributes to the understanding of how Shakespeare navigates the discourse of colonialism, offering insights into the enduring impact of language on power structures and the quest for cultural reclamation.

Unraveling Complexity: A Comparative Analysis of Power Dynamics in Prospero's Relationships with Caliban and Leggs

Prospero, a central character in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, exhibits a complex and evolving relationship with Caliban, reflecting the nuances of power dynamics on the island. This research draws parallels between Prospero's connection with Caliban and that of Felix with Leggs in Margaret Atwood's *Hag-Seed*. Examining the intricacies of authority, control, and evolving sentiments, we explore how these relationships unfold, intertwine, and shape the characters' fates.

Prospero and Caliban: A Dynamic Shift: At the outset, Prospero emerges as a controlling and dominant figure, asserting authority over Caliban by labeling him a "slave." Threats of physical harm underline Prospero's abuse of power, creating a hostile dynamic. The relationship, however, evolves over time, shifting from initial cooperation to animosity after Caliban's attempt to assault Miranda. Prospero's enslavement of Caliban, utilizing magical powers, marks a turning point, leaving the future of their association uncertain. The complexity of their connection raises questions about the endurance of animosity, the potential for friendship, or the likelihood of separation.

Interpreting the Relationship: Interpreting *The Tempest*, our analysis draws parallels with *Hag-Seed*, where Felix and Leggs share a relationship akin to Prospero and Caliban. Both pairs navigate through challenges, supporting each other during obstacles. Felix, much like Prospero, serves as

a mentor, rectifying past failures. Leggs, mirroring Caliban, finds purpose and redemption through this relationship. The similarities in their dynamics prompt reflections on mentorship, redemption, and the intertwining of destinies.

Comparing Caliban and Leggs: A critical interpretation explores Caliban's pre-Prospero life on the island, positing similarities with Montaigne's cannibals. Caliban, akin to Leggs, initially thrived freely on abundant natural resources. Prospero's arrival and influence lead to a significant shift in Caliban's demeanor, aligning with Tom Lindsay's argument that Prospero's control and training disillusion Caliban. This analysis highlights the impact of power dynamics on personal evolution and relationship complexities.

Similarities and Conflicts: As the research delves deeper, it becomes evident that the relationships between Prospero and Caliban, as well as Felix and Leggs, are fraught with complexities and conflicts. The multifaceted nature of these connections serves the overarching goal of *Hag-Seed* to provide readers with a comparative lens through which to view the characters and storyline of *The Tempest*. These relationships resonate with the diversity of interpretations, allowing for various perspectives on the characters' interactions.

The relationships between Prospero and Caliban, as well as Felix and Leggs, encapsulate the intricate web of power dynamics, mentorship, and personal evolution. The evolving nature of these connections serves as a rich ground for exploration, offering readers varied interpretations and insights. Through a comparative analysis, this research contributes to a nuanced understanding of how power influences relationships in the literary realms of both Shakespeare and Atwood.

Research Findings: Exploring Power Dynamics and Colonial Themes in *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Tempest*

This study delves into the thematic parallels between Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, specifically examining power dynamics and colonial themes within the narratives. Through a comparative analysis of the two works, it became evident that both narratives reflect the complexities of power relationships in colonial contexts.

In *Robinson Crusoe*, the protagonist's dominance over Friday and his imposition of European values highlight colonial power dynamics. Crusoe's initial status as a castaway evolves into a position of authority, mirroring the imperialistic tendencies of the time. The narrative raises questions about the ethical dimensions of Crusoe's rule over the island and the consequences of imposing cultural superiority.

Similarly, "The Tempest" presents an intricate exploration of power through the character of Prospero, who governs the island and exerts control over Caliban and Ariel. The play encapsulates the colonial mindset of the era, emphasizing themes of dominance, submission, and the clash of cultures. Prospero's paternalistic rule raises inquiries about the moral implications of wielding power over those deemed subordinate.

This comparative research finding underscores the universality of colonial themes and power struggles, portraying how literature serves as a reflection of historical contexts. The exploration of these themes in both works provides valuable insights into the societal dynamics and power structures prevalent during the respective periods of their creation. Further analysis could unveil nuanced perspectives on the characters' agency, resistance, and the enduring impact of colonial legacies.

III. CONCLUSION

This comprehensive exploration of two seminal works, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, reveals profound parallels in their portrayal of power dynamics and colonial themes. In *Robinson Crusoe*, the narrative unfolds the complexities of imperial dominance as Crusoe's solitary sojourn transforms into a narrative of cultural imposition and authority over Friday.

Likewise, *The Tempest* intricately weaves a colonial tapestry through the character of Prospero, establishing authority over the island and its inhabitants, Caliban and Ariel. Both works exemplify the prevailing colonial mindset of their respective eras, delving into questions of dominance, cultural clash, and the ethical ramifications of wielding power.

The comparative analysis underscores the universal nature of colonial narratives, illustrating how literature serves as a mirror to historical contexts. The study sheds light on the nuanced dynamics of agency and resistance within the context of power structures prevalent during the periods of the works' creation. Through these narratives, we glimpse into the enduring impact of colonial legacies and the perpetual struggle for autonomy amid the echoes of historical dominance.

As these works stand testament to the complexities of colonialism, further research could deepen our understanding of the characters' agency, the subtleties of resistance, and the lasting reverberations of colonial influences on contemporary perspectives. The narratives provide a compelling lens through which to examine the intricate intersections of power, identity, and cultural

clashes, transcending the boundaries of their temporal origins.

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Studying the Representation of 'Desi' Queers in Select Graphic Texts from the 21st Century

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Abstract— Focusing on the limited amount of Indian and Indian origin/desi representation in comics and graphic novels, especially its emergence and popularization in the last two decades, this dissertation seeks to explore the portrayal of LGBTQIA+ people in India and Indian originated community in graphic literature and also contextualises these graphic texts in the light of the anti LGBTQIA+ legal and social environments in India and Indian originated communities, and further situates them within a larger arc of representation of queer story in the Indian and Indian originated community. The primary texts under examination are printed graphic novels and Indian comics anthologies in India like Kari (2008), Apsara Engine (2021), Jukebox (2021), Keeping in mind the timeline and contemporary ages and society's treatment of the queer people especially in India, it mainly focuses on why there is a lack of representation of queer people, especially 'Desi' queer people in comics and graphic novels, the accuracy of the representation, their treatment & acceptance in the society as shown in these graphic novels, & how the narrative for the desi queer people changes over the years post 2000s? Also interestingly, why do so many authors often take the help of mythology and alternate realities to portray the stories of queer people in their graphic novels instead of portraying them in reality? Alongside these grounds, this dissertation will also take on how these queer graphic novels challenge the cis-heteropatriarchal norms of the society.



Keywords— Comics, 'Desi', Mythology, Queer.

I. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Vanita, Ruth. and Kidwai, Saleem. (eds). Same-Sex Love in India:

Readings from literature and history. New York and Basingstoke:

Palgrave. 2001.

In their ground-breaking book "Same-Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History," Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai examine same-sex relationships in India using both literary analysis and historical investigation. The book provides a thorough analysis of the topic, relying on a variety of sources such as religious texts, poetry, plays, and historical records, In this survey of the literature of India throughout decades

The book provides a comprehensive analysis on the topic of the representation of the same sex love in Indian literature, culture and history, dated as far back as

2000 years old. The book is an important contribution to the field of south Asian Queer Studies. It offers a comprehensive analysis of the topic from the wide range of sources, including mythological texts. Religious texts, poetry, plays, historical documents etc. in various Indian languages such as Bengali, Tamil, Hindi, Marathi, Urdu, Sanskrit, etc. It talks about the complex and ambiguous meaning that same sex love has held in Indian culture and society. The book takes interdisciplinary approach with the help of wide range of different cultural, language texts and also the wide range of Hindu, Muslim and British colonial texts.

One of the central arguments that Ruth Vanita and Kidwai make is that the impact of British colonialism and the

imposition of Victorian morality helped the eradication of historical and literary tradition of same sex love from the Indian society and culture. The authors show evidence that same sex love was not only existed in India, but also was celebrated in various parts of India throughout the ages. The book also says how understanding this history can be a way to challenge the modern-day homophobia that can be seen in India.

The book breaks the myth of homosexuality is a trend borrowed from the western culture by showing the evidence from the various age-old myths, folklore, other literary pieces and evidence from various places of India that proved same sex love has always existed in India. The book is about more than just the sexual or the erotic aspect. It also explores how the romantically intimate relationship between the people of the same sex or the gender identity has occurred in literature, mythology and across time and space, as well as the societal and cultural reaction to such relationships. The book shows the ways the same relationships have been celebrated, accepted and also on the other hand stigmatised in the Indian society.

The book also pays attention to the diversity of the of the same sex relationship in India. The authors talk about different types of and the complex same sex desire in different times and regions and talks about the way gender, class, caste, religion, etc plays a role in these differences, found in the various literary texts across the regions over times.

The book also examines the legal and social status of same sex love in modern contemporary India. The book provides an overview of the law and policies of contemporary India and social norms that highlight and shapes these relationships.

In conclusion, "Same-Sex Love in India" is a significant addition to the field of South Asian queer studies. With the aid of numerous sources and engagement with a variety of viewpoints, the writers present a thorough and nuanced account of the development of same-sex relationships in India. Also, they produce

1.2. Vanita, Ruth. Queering India: same-sex love and eroticism in Indian culture and society. New York, NY: Routledge, 2002.

Queering India: Same-Sex Love and Eroticism in Indian Culture and Society is a book written by Ruth Vanita that examines the presence of homosexuality and queerness in Indian history, literature, and society. The book has received a lot of praise for its perceptive and nuanced approach to comprehending the complexities of same-

sex love and sexuality in Indian culture. It has been hailed as a groundbreaking work in the field of queer studies in India.

The notion that same-sex relationships and eroticism have a lengthy and varied past in India is one of the main themes of Queering India. Vanita contends that same-sex relationships were generally accepted in pre-colonial Indian society and that both Indian literature and mythology contain numerous instances of same-sex love and yearning. Vanita, for instance, talks about the friendship between the Hindu deity Krishna and his male companion Sudama as well as the erotic poems of Tamil poet Andal. Vanita disproves the notion that same-sex love is a Western influence into India by pointing out these instances.

Vanita acknowledges that colonialism had a significant impact on how same-sex desire was perceived in India, but she also notes that it did so in a more subtle manner. After India gained independence in 1947, the law that had been in effect during colonial rule that made homosexual behaviour illegal, remains in force. According to Vanita, it has only been in recent years that queer voices have begun to resurface in India because of the chilling effect this legal ban had on the expression of same-sex desire in Indian culture.

The intersections of gender and sexuality in India are also a topic of Vanita's work. She contends that there is a long history of gender non-conformity in Indian society and that same-sex desire is frequently entwined with non-normative gender identities. In order to demonstrate the complexity of gender and sexuality in India, Vanita uses examples like the hijra community, who are frequently perceived as neither males nor females in Indian culture.

The way that Queering India participates in the current political discussions in

India about gender and sexuality is another significant element of the book. In India, a rising queer movement, according to Vanita, is challenging prevailing views on sexuality and gender. In addition, she points out that there is a considerable reaction against the queer movement, especially from conservative religious organisations.

In conclusion, Queering India makes a major contribution to the field of queer studies and offers a detailed analysis of same-sex lust and desire in Indian society and culture. Vanita has created a work that is both academic and approachable by consulting a broad variety of sources and participating in current political debates. The book disproves the notion that same-sex lust is a Western import into India by tracing the development of same-sex eroticism and love in Indian society over a long and rich history.

1.3. Bhadury, Poushali. "“There is no such thing as a straight woman’: Queer female representations in South Asian graphic narratives.” *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 22(4), 424-434. 2018.

In this article, Bhadury explores the representation of queer female identities in the south Asian graphic narratives. She argues that these narratives criticise the binary gender of sexuality norms and challenges the idea of fixed notion of femininity is society. She talks about that even though there is growing visibility for the queer people in the South Asian region, the queer female identities still often tends to get overlooked. Analysing these limited range of graphic narratives containing queer female identities, Bhadury talks about how they disrupt the heteronormativity of society, and helps to show other marginalised sexuality and identities

The article opens with historical and cultural background of the south Asian graphic narratives, and the current state of LGBTQ2+ rights in South Asia. She notes that both has long history in South Asia but only recently gained some positive recognition. She notes This shift in perception has created new opportunities for marginalised voices, including queer females, to share their stories.

Bhadury then examines particular instances of queer female representation in South Asian graphic narratives, like Kari, Dhee, and a few Indie comics. She observes that many of these tales are marked by a fluidity of identity (Like in Kari), with characters frequently shifting between gender and sexual categories. Bhadury contends that this fluidity allows for a more nuanced understanding of sexuality and gender, as well as a challenge to the binary oppositions that rule dominant discourses.

She provides examples of South Asian graphic narratives featuring queer female characters and examines how these characters are portrayed, highlighting the various strategies employed to communicate queer identities and experiences and also highlights how these representations question dominant narratives and stereotypes, and how they can be used to empower marginalised groups.

In conclusion, Bhadury's work adds to the body of knowledge about queer representation in South Asian graphic narratives. Bhadury provides a new perspective on the role of graphic narratives in social and political change by emphasising how these narratives challenge traditional gender and sexual norms.

1.4. Wood, Andrea.” *Feminist Studies* 41 (2):293-334. 2015.

In this article, Andrea Wood examines the importance and influence of lesbian romance comics as a medium for representing and honoring lesbian love tales. The article is a part of a larger body of work that explores graphic

literature history and their cultural and social significance, particularly in relation to queer representation.

Lesbian romance comics, according to Wood, are an effective means of bringing attention to a marginalized group whose stories have typically been ignored by the media. According to Wood lesbian women can examine their own identities in these comics and find positive representation of themselves. She also adds that these lesbian romance comics challenge the prevalent societal narratives about gender and sexuality.

The foundation of Wood's paper is a review of previous works on lesbian romance comics. She looks at various cartoons from the 1980s to the present, including "Hot, Throbbing Dykes to Watch Out For" and "Dykes to Watch Out For." Wood examines these comics from a feminist cultural studies perspective, focusing on the topics, representations, and effects they have on readers.

The discussion of how lesbian romance comics have changed over time is one of Wood's article's major contributions. She observes that early comics frequently emphasised coming-out tales and the difficulties of being a queer in a heteronormative culture. But more recent comics have broadened their scope to cover a broader range of experiences, like dating, parenthood, and political action. According to Wood, this change is a result of queer identities being accepted more widely in popular society. Analysis of the effect of lesbian romance comics on readers is another significant contribution of Wood's article. She observes that these comics frequently have a strong emotional resonance for lesbian women, giving them a sense of validation. According to Wood, this feeling of acceptance can help to combat the marginalisation and invisibility that many queer women deal with on a daily basis.

In conclusion, she contributes to the discussion of how comics can be used to question established narratives and give a platform to underrepresented voices by highlighting the significance of lesbian romance comics for female readers.

1.5. Vanita, Ruth. ““Wedding of Two Souls’: Same-Sex Marriage and Hindu Traditions.” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, vol. 20, no. 2, 2004, pp. 119–35. JSTOR.

In her essay, Ruth Vanita examines Hinduism's potential for same-sex unions. According to the article, same-sex love and desire have a long past in Indian literature and society, and Hindu scriptures can be used to support same-sex marriage. She mentions the long history of same-sex relationships in India, including "gandharva marriages" (marriages between women) and "kliba marriages" (marriages between men).

Vanita starts off by talking about the idea of "sakhi-bhava," which is a Hindu word for the powerful emotional and spiritual bond between two women. The Ramayana and the Bhagavata Purana, among other works, both contain references to sakhi-bhava, which the author claims is proof of same-sex love's acceptance in Hindu tradition. Vanita also explores the concept of

"yugadharma," which refers to the notion that social and religious customs should change with the times. According to her, same-sex marriage is a logical extension of yugadharma, and Hinduism should now accept and acknowledge same-sex relationships.

Vanita also examines the representation of same-sex relationships in Hindu writing. She shows tales involving the god Krishna and his male companion Arjuna as well as the myth of the goddess Mohini, who assumes a male shape in order to wed Shiva. She claims that these tales show that same-sex relationships were not only acceptable in Hinduism but also praised and venerated.

The topic of same-sex marriage's formal recognition in India is also covered in

Vanita's article. She notes that while same-sex unions are presently illegal in

India, there is a growing movement for LGBTQ+ rights there. According to her, Hinduism's acceptance of same-sex unions could contribute to the development of a more welcoming and inclusive society.

In conclusion, Ruth Vanita's article makes a significant addition to the understanding of LGBTQ+ problems in Hinduism. Her research disproves the notion that same-sex marriage is an alien thought to Hinduism and offers proof that it has existed there for centuries. Vanita emphasises Hinduism's tolerance and acceptance of gender and sexual diversity by delving into its past and literature.

1.6. Making Space: Queer Comic Anthologies by Jennifer Camper

Jennifer Camper's *Making Space: Queer Comic Anthologies* is a significant contribution to the expanding subject of queer comics studies. The book examines the ways queer voices have found spaces in LGBT comic anthologies, which have traditionally been dominated by straight, white men. The editor provides a complex and perceptive analysis of the topic by drawing on interviews with queer comics artists and editors as well as her own experiences as a comics artist.

One of the central arguments of the article is that LGBT artists have benefited greatly from the exposure and respect that queer comics anthologies have given them in the comics community. Camper emphasises the value of the anthology structure, emphasising how it can feature work

that might not otherwise be seen by mainstream publishers and promote a variety of voices and writing styles. She also highlights the support and nurturing of LGBT artists that queer comics communities have provided, as well as the part they have played in fostering a sense of community and shared experience

The way queer comics have questioned conventional gender and sexual norms is another key topic of *Making Space*. According to Camper, LGBT comics creators have been at the fore of this exploration of non-normative gender identities and sexualities and that comics can be an especially potent medium for exploring these topics. She also emphasises the value of representation in comics and how, for queer readers, finding themselves mirrored in a comic book's pages can be a very affirming experience.

In conclusion, *Making Space* adds significantly to the field of queer comics studies and makes a strong case for the value of queer comics anthologies and groups. In order to question social norms and carve out spaces for themselves and their work, LGBT artists have used comics as a platform, as highlighted in the book. The book also shows the interactions between queer comics and more general cultural discussions about LGBT rights, as well as the contribution of these comics to the development of queer creator and fan communities.

II. INTRODUCTION

The rise of the representation of queer people, especially of Indian origin in visual literature in the 21st century happened due to several reasons.

Globalisation made people aware of what is going on around the world, which included the global notion and how the world's perception towards queer identity was changing gradually to a positive note. Globalisation in the 21st century is made possible largely because of the advent and advancement and rise and use of technology, and most importantly, the rise of social media.

The rapid growth of social media helped spread awareness about queer life. The people from South Asian countries and diasporas came into contact with the rest of the world and the discussion about queer folk became mainstream gradually. People started constructing and discussing queerness through literature and arts to spread awareness and help the 'desi' queer people to find their identity and become comfortable with it. What I mean by 'desi' shall be substantiated soon hereafter. The genre of graphic texts also started to become popular with the rise of the cybernetic nexus. Comics and graphic novels started to become less about a genre only meant for children, but more for people across age groups. It also started to have its own

subgenres and became one of the prime mediums to spread awareness about important social issues. As graphic narratives include both the textual and the visual elements, it becomes easy to disseminate messages for the human mind. So, in the midst of spreading awareness of

various social issues, the issue of the LGBTTTQQIAA+ have also come to light. Graphic artists have started to pick up on this issue.

A significant example of a graphic novel containing an Indian/Indian origin character can be found in Amruta Patil's graphic novel *Kaari* (2008). And even though the number of graphic novels with desi queer characters is very less, the few works that have been created to show desi queers are still noticeable. This dissertation will explore some of these titles that focus on desi queer representation, namely Amruta Patil's *Kaari*, Nidhi Chalani's *Jukebox* and Bisakh Som's *Apsara Engine*.

The term 'Desi' is a colloquial term meant to designate the people of south Asia, or the people who belong to the South Asian diaspora, according to a paper by Sunaina Maira, a professor of Asian American Studies at the University of California, Davis, and author of a book on South Asian youth culture titled *Desis in the House*. The protagonists of all three primary texts either belong from India or hail from the south Asian diaspora, and they are the part of the LGBT+ community. They can be considered as the representatives of the desi queer people in the practice of graphic novels in the 21st century. Reason scarcity has limited the representation of Indian queer people in comics, resulting in a lack of diverse characters and narratives. The comic book industry in India is relatively new and small compared to other countries. Moreover, the censorship laws and societal stigmas surrounding queer identities have made it challenging for creators to include queer characters in their work. This has resulted in a lack of representation of Indian queer people in mainstream comics.

Ruth Vanita talks about how it's only after the colonial invasion that India became so hostile towards the queer community thanks to the coloniser's ideologies and law enforced by them, like the enforcement of law in section 377 criminalizing all kinds of acts of homosexuality that they specified under unnatural sexual activities. As Ruth Vanita mentions, Homosexuality was never a western idea, but homophobia is, contradicting the idea or myth that homosexuality was a culture brought to the south Asian subcontinent by the western colonisers. "One of our aims is to make accessible many little-known or neglected texts to a general as well as a scholarly readership. Many societies foster the homophobic myth that homosexuality was imported into their society from somewhere else [...] We

hope that this book will help open the way for further research" (Vanita, 2000: xxiii)

Cultural taboos can be another reason, as India is a conservative society where queer people are often stigmatized and discriminated against, in most parts of India, there is still a significant social stigma attached to being queer. The conservative mind-set of people in India makes it difficult for creators to represent queer people in mainstream media, and This can make it difficult for Indian queer people to come out and share their stories with the world. This leads to a scarcity of representation of Indian queer people in comics. Another reason can be Lack of awareness and education: There is a lack of awareness and education about queer issues in India. Many people in India are not aware of the existence of queer people, their rights, and struggles. This makes it difficult for creators to represent queer people in comics.

Also, India has a strict censorship policy that restricts the depiction of certain themes and topics in media. Queer representation is one such topic that is often censored in India. This leads to a scarcity of representation of Indian queer people in comics.

Despite the representation of Desi queers in graphic novels being very limited due to various socio- cultural and legal issues, it is still important to analyse these representations in order to give them more visibility. Not much work has been done on the representation of Indian queer characters in graphic texts and that is what my dissertation seeks to work on.

III. STUDYING THE REPRESENTATION OF 'DESI' QUEERS IN SELECT GRAPHIC TEXTS FROM THE 21ST CENTURY

3.1. Evolution of Queer Representation in Graphic Narratives:

Kari was the first graphic novel in the English language written by an Indian woman, with queer characters. The novel explores the idea of sewage generation in the metropolitan city of Mumbai. The protagonist, Kari, is unapologetically queer and fluid, she is 'unusual [...] deeply introverted, asocial and queer' protagonist (Gravett). She is constantly compared with the sewer by the narrator and Kari herself, as she 'trawl[s] the drains dream after dream, [and] can smell the sewer everywhere' (Patil, 2008: 41),.

There is a sense of melancholy in Kari's character that partially is due to her identity. The novel explores themes of sexuality, gender, and identity, with Kari questioning her own sexuality and struggling to come to terms with her attraction to women. In her article "Can You See Her the

Way I Do?': (Feminist) Ways of Seeing in Amruta Patil's *Kari*" (2008), Surangama Dutta mentions that "... the exploration of Kari's identity as a queer woman, as she keeps returning to the sewers over and over again through the text makes Kari's gender identity [is] equally nebulous" (Dutta 2008:1). Kari, the lesbian protagonist, struggles throughout the novel to fully embrace the label of certainty, that of being a 'lesbian'. She says in the novel, "I roll the word 'lesbian' in my mouth and it feels strange there. Sort of fleshy, salivating, fresh off the boat from Lesbia, and totally inappropriate." (Patil, 2008: 79). Poushali Bhadury's assertion about Kari's gender identity argues, Scholars and reviewers alike have usually described Kari as a lesbian character. However [...] she aspires to the elusive "genderless" quality kd lang possesses' [...] and push[es] towards a non-binary, androgynous identity.' (Bhadury, 2018: 428)

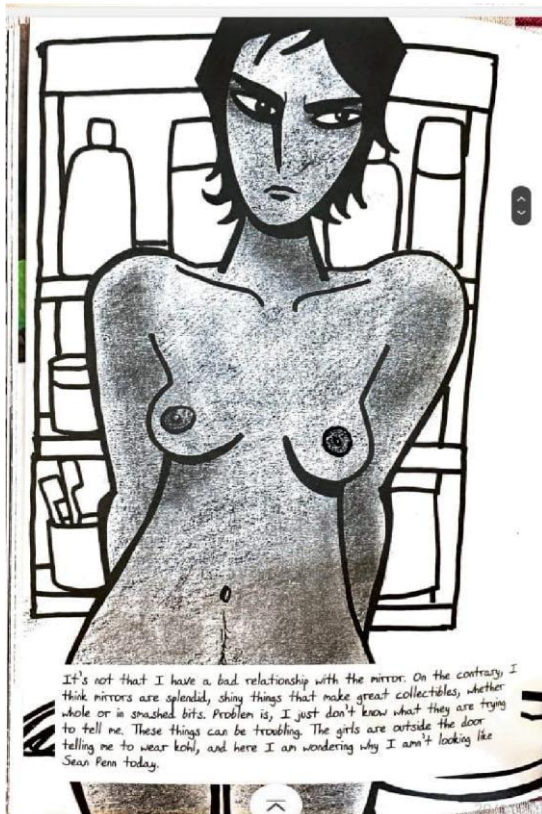


Fig. 1: Kari's gender dysphoria (Patil, 2008:60)

The queer sensuality also shown through Kari's perspective, as she uses fruit symbolism to express her attraction towards the female body;

I play with fruit [...] Avocado, kiwi, mangosteen. There are some fruits you do not want to venture into alone. A peach, for one, creature of texture and smell, sings like a siren. A fruit that lingers on your fingertip with 'unfruitlike' insistence, fuzzy like the down on a pretty jaw. Figs are dark creatures too, skins purple as loving bruises. A fig is one

hundred percent debauched. Lush as a smashed mouth. There, I said it again:

Lush. (Patil, 2008: 66)

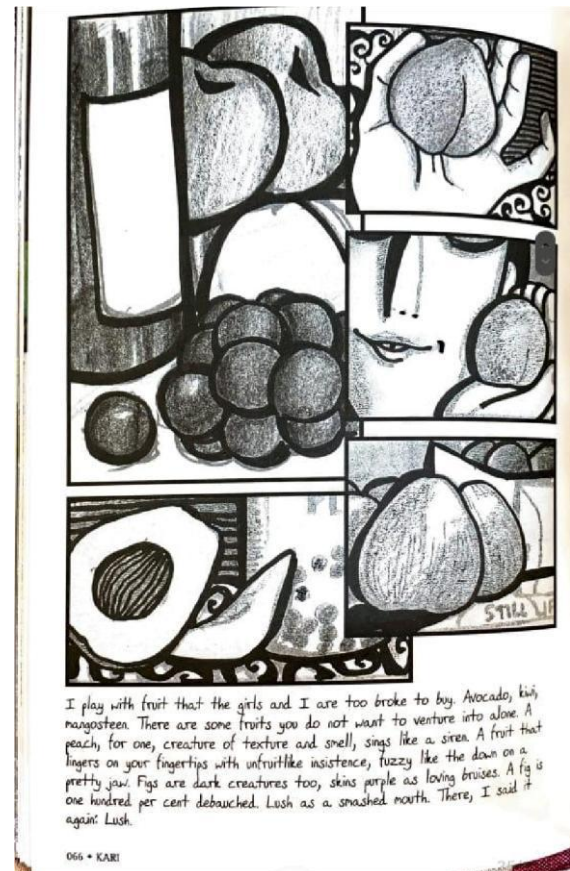


Fig. 2: Using Kari to show queer sensuality (Patil, 2008:66)

Through Kari's experiences, the novel portrays the challenges faced by queer individuals in a society that often does not accept them. The novel also depicts the vibrant culture and diversity of Mumbai, and addresses issues of class and social inequality. The use of bold artwork and poetic language gives the novel a dreamlike quality that adds to its emotional impact. Overall, *Kari* is a powerful and thought-provoking graphic novel that offers a nuanced and empathetic portrayal of queer identity and experiences in contemporary India.

Jukebox by Nidhi Chanani, on the other hand, is a graphic novel published in 2021 that shows two cousins going to an old record company to find out Shahi (one of the cousins)'s father Gio got transported to different musical eras through a magical jukebox and ultimately, find the father. The novel shows these people's journey to magical or past eras of music through the Jukebox to find themselves, cure estranged relationships, and the family coming to terms with their members' sexuality. Naz, the other cousin confides in her uncle Gio about her being

bisexual and asks for his support to help her come out to her parents. Gio gladly accepts her and assures her that he will help. Later, when Shahi asks her why she is so concerned and eager to find her uncle, Naz comes out to her as well. Shahi, even though heartbroken that she didn't trust enough to tell her first, accepts her nevertheless. At the end of the story, readers find out Naz's father accepted her, but only with hope that she may still end up with a boy. Even though it can be a little problematic of a view, there is perhaps still a modicum of hope regarding the other family members showing acceptance. It's also one of the few representations of an Indian queer Muslim character. Afraa Idrees in her thesis for bachelor of technology, "The Brown Stripe in Pride: Exploring South Asian Queer Liberation through Graphic Design", talks about the importance of representation of queer Muslim identity, as she examines the "I Am" campaign of the LGBT Muslim Project, which combines images of

LGBT Muslims with the text that dispels common misconceptions about both Islam and queerness. Idrees contends that the combination of the bold typeface and a simple layout emphasise the complexity and diversity of gay Muslim identities, while also having a strong aesthetic impact.



Fig. 3: Queer acceptance in society and hopefulness
(Chanani, 2021: 66)

Apsara Engine is a comic anthology consisting of several comics by Bishakh Som. Many of the pieces in this anthology/album are either queer, or queer coded. As Bedatri D. Choudhury in her book review for "Hyperallergic" mentions, it is "A Queer, South Asian Utopia Comes to Life in This Graphic Novel". For instance, *Pleasure Palace* envisions a post-modern 'zenana' that is a fusion of the utopias. The story begins with an older woman amuses a persistent young man who is trying to connect with the protagonist by going on a journey with him and telling him a tale that sounds legendary about her former life as a monarch, and her relationship with her friend "Maya", who had to sacrifice herself for narrator's duty towards nation, slowly the young man understands this story is nothing but a metaphorical way of narrator telling her own life experience and when he questions her on it, she asks him to follow her. They arrive at her destination, which turns out to be a paradise for women, where the woman is centered in the strength of her many varied and lived experiences. *Meena & Aparna* highlights the conflicts that arise between female friendships. A gathering of two friends is strangely charged with unspoken tension, which eventually erupts. The comic is queer coded, it shows the tension, the awkwardness and the problems of homo erotic female friendships. *Swandive* follows Onima and Amrit, two self-described Desi trans-persons who meet and bond at an academic conference, where Onima gives a talk on trans geographies. Together, they embark on a magic realism inspired adventure that turns Onima's speculative remarks into a fully realised vision, through a futuristic map that Onima draws with their blood. It examines trans identity, a subject that Som, who is trans herself, has previously addressed. However, *Apsara Engine* has, what might be said to be a trans-aesthetic, even when Som isn't directly discussing trans related issues. The book is a testament to how having a transgender experience may give one a completely fresh perspective on what it is to be human, eschewing conventional classifications and upsetting well-known narrative patterns. The comics in *Apsara Engine* explores different emotional modes, narratives, and identities through the comics and conceives the idea of an optimistic, inclusive future.



Fig. 4: Swandive (Som, 2020: 150)

From these three graphic texts about Indian and Indian originated queer people, keeping in mind their timeline, one can also see the changes in representation of queer people, their portrayal and treatment over the past decade. For example, in *Kari*, we see the protagonist as a gloomy, dark, and melancholic character. She represents the metropolitan city she lives in and its sewage system that she loves so much for saving her life; and also wants sewage treatment for the better of the city's survival. She is also melancholic because of her queer identity. Throughout the novel, one can observe that the colours are muted, the panels are mostly dark, and everyone exhibits an expression of gloominess.

Kari is in search of her identity, in a society that is not accepting of her sexual orientation. Given the time the graphic novel is written, the contemporary legal status of India is still not accepting of queer sexuality, with the Act 377 criminalizing same-sex relationships. Surangama Dutta states,

“the text also generates a rich, intertextual narrative that visualises the many moods of its reclusive protagonist, in a powerful, intertextual way. This Heteroglossia, combined with an experimental use of ‘ink, marker, charcoal and oil bar, crayon and found images’, captures Kari’s psychological landscape in all its complexity, creating a unique narrative framed by her interiority.” (Dutta, 2008:1)



Fig. 5: Use of dark, muted colours and expression to show the melancholic queer character (Patil, 2008, Kari:14)

On the other hand, *Apsara Engine* and *Jukebox* are written respectively in 2020 and 2021, almost more than a decade after *Kari*. So even though there is still some gloominess in the portrayal of the graphic texts (More in *Apsara Engine* than *Jukebox*), it's still visibly less than that of *Kari*. It may be because of the changes and progress of society's attitude and treatment towards the queer community in the last decade; and also the decriminalization via dismantling Act 377. Also, both the authors of these two novels are a part of the Indian diaspora in America, mainly writing about people in the South Asian diaspora. Living in a first world country where queer people have more rights and acceptance perhaps helps a lot to frame a positive outlook. Even though they still struggle with complete acceptance, like for example in *Jukebox*, where Naz talks about her father's reaction to her coming out, "That there's still a chance I marry a man and have kids [...] It'll take time" (Chanani, 2021:206) they still find hope and better treatment than 'Kari'. The use of vibrant and less muted colors and more cheerful expression of characters, especially in *Jukebox* is significant, as it is also directed towards the children, so that empathy can be nurtured from an early age.



Fig. 6: Use of more vibrant colours in *Jukebox* (Chanani, 2021:206) and *Apsara Engine* (Som, 2020:155)

3.2. Queer and Myth- making:

It is interesting to note that the majority of the graphic texts tend to portray the queer characters, with the help of fictionalized mythology, either in this or some alternate universe; whether it is by using the character's name from some mythological entities, or by sending them to alternate realities. In *Kari* and *Apsara Engine*, we see many queer protagonists in the novels to have mythological names. In

some comics in the album of *Apsara Engine* anthology and in *Jukebox*, one sees the alternate universe somehow related to queer characters. In *Kari* by Amruta Patil, Kari and her girlfriend, Ruth, both bear the name of two mythological creatures from the mythology. Ruth is taken from the bible Ruth, biblical character, a woman who after being widowed remains with her husband's mother. The story is told in the Book of Ruth, part of the biblical canon called Ketuvim and Kari from Norse mythology where Kari is the old Norse God of the North Wind Ruth Vanita, in many of her books and articles, states the relation of ancient India and its mythology as well as culture's relation with homosexuality. She shows how India, for centuries, has acknowledged the existence of homosexuality. It has had both positive and not so positive reactions to it. Vanita and Kidwai mentions in their book,

Our study suggests that at most times and places in pre-nineteenth-century India, love between women and between men, even when disapproved of, was not actively persecuted. As far as we know, no one has ever been executed for homosexuality in India. This does not mean, however, that there were no difficulties to be overcome. Even when love between men or between women was not trivialized, viewed as inferior to love between men and women, or ignored (and it often was treated in all these ways), even when it was romanticized and to some degree encouraged, society rarely provided institutions that allowed it to be chosen and lived out as primary, in refusal of marriage. People who managed to express same-sex love in this way displayed tremendous creativity in shaping their own lives as well as patterns of community. In the modern world, these communities have often been composed of men and women, and homoerotically inclined persons have provided each other with support, regardless of gender. (

Vanita, 2000: xviii)

The reason that so many authors rely on mythology and alternate universe tropes while depicting the queer characters, or even that scholars like Ruth Vanita perhaps uses ancient India, its religion, mythology and cultures and texts to justify the legitimacy of queer people especial in India, is because mythology has been used in Indian comics as a way to create inclusive and relatable characters. Many mythological stories have queer themes and characters, such as the story of Shikhandi, Arjuna as Brihannala, Krishna as Mohini in the opus of *Mahabharata*. *Apsara Engine* features queer characters inspired by Indian mythology For example, from the comic *Meera and Aparna* where the names of the protagonists both Meera and Aparna are both taken from mythology, like Aparna who is in Indian mythology the daughter of Himavat, the god of snow and the Himalayas and Mena or from the comic *Swandive* where

the name of the character Maya is also taken from mythology, Maya the goddess of illusion. Mythology perhaps offers a space to explore and represent queer people in a non-threatening way. Many Hindu mythological texts have queer characters and stories. These characters have been depicted in various forms, such as the androgynous Ardhanarishvara, who is half male. Alternate reality has also been used to create inclusive and relatable characters in Indian comics. By creating alternate worlds where queer identities are accepted and normalized, creators can explore queer narratives and experiences without the constraints of societal stigmas. For example, the comic book series *Priva's Shakti* features a super-heroine who fights against gender-based violence in an alternate reality where women are empowered. Alternate reality offers a space to explore and represent queer people in a world that is different from our own. This allows creators to create a world where queer people are accepted and normalized. This can be a powerful tool in changing people's perceptions and attitudes towards queer people. The use of alternate realities in depicting Queer characters provide creators with the opportunity to create planes where socio-cultural stigmas do not exist. In the comic "name??" from the comic anthology *Apsara Engine*, creator Bishakh Som uses an alternate reality to explore queer relationships and identities. By removing societal pressures, the comic is able to focus on the complexities of queer relationships.



Fig. 7: Finding solace in their identity through help of alternate universe, (Som, 2020: 256)

IV. CONCLUSION

In the preface to Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai's groundbreaking anthology, *Same sex-desire in India* (2000), Vanita profoundly expresses, 'Love need not take an explicitly sexual form, but it is nearly always expressed in the language of poetic excess and metaphoric power' Vanita, 2000: xiv). To show love through all forms of it, proper representation is needed. The representation of Indian queer people in comics has been limited due to several reasons, but creators have found ways to overcome this by using alternative methods. By including diverse characters and narratives, comics can serve as a powerful tool for representation and social change. It is perhaps essential for the comic book industry to continue to embrace diversity and inclusivity for its readership. The comics "Kari," "Apsara Engine," and "Jukebox" are examples of how these techniques can be used to tell compelling stories about Indian/Indian originated queer people. As society continues to progress towards greater acceptance and inclusivity, it is important that creators continue to push the boundaries of representation in comics.

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Who Shaped the Renaissance? — The Path of Artistic Revival from the Perspective of Patrons' Social Roles

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Abstract— During the Renaissance, literary and artistic creation reached its peak level, fostering literature and artists represented by Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo and others, and creating classic works that will be remembered for generations to come. However, the works of this period could not have achieved such splendour without the contribution of patrons. These patrons provided funding and shelter for artists, so many artists travelled to Rome to exchange ideas and produce a large number of works of art, while patrons were able to enhance their political status and increase their social influence through patronage. Together they propelled the Renaissance to greatness. Taking the Renaissance as the research background, this paper takes patrons as the research object. Firstly, according to the social status of patrons in this period, they are classified into three categories, the church, the nobility and the guilds. Secondly, the psychological activities of the patrons and their potential purposes and motives are analysed through specific examples of patronage. Finally, the influences that patrons brought to literary and artistic works are explored. This paper aims to reveal the central role of the patronage system in the cultural ecology of the Renaissance and to provide a new perspective for understanding the interaction between art and social structures.



Keywords— European Renaissance, Patrons, Artists, Medici Family

I. INTRODUCTION

During the Renaissance, literary and artistic creation reached its peak level, fostering literature and artists represented by Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo and others, and creating classic works that will be remembered for generations to come. However, the works of this period could not have achieved such splendour without the contribution of patrons.

There were three general types of patronage of the arts in the Renaissance: religious patronage, royal or noble patronage, and guild patronage. The nobility was the most important patrons, and the Pope, who was above the royal family, also assumed the role of patrons. In addition, during the Renaissance, the social classes in Europe changed, with the rise of the middle class represented by wealthy merchants. The spread of scientific knowledge and the development of university education nurtured not only aristocratic families but also many children of merchants, and as an emerging force their ideas were full of humanism.

For example, they became the main group of people who paid to see plays at the theatre and supported the operation of the theatre. This was to some extent a form of patronage. On the other hand, their values also had a significant impact on literary works, and in order to gain more income, writers had to make adjustments to cater for the values of a wider range of people when creating their works. Therefore, all these patrons of different class composition provided patronage for the development of literary arts. Although the Christian Church, headed by the Pope, remained an extremely important force for art patronage, the palaces, numerous wealthy families and citizens throughout the Western world were all involved in art patronage at the time for their own purposes and motives. Through the study of the classification of art patrons, we are not only able to understand the motives and purposes of the patrons, their choice of objects, and the influence of the content and form of their patronage, but more importantly, we are also able to see the differences and distinctions between the different types of patrons.

These patrons provided funding and shelter for artists, so many artists travelled to Rome to exchange ideas and produce a large number of works of art, while patrons were able to enhance their political status and increase their social influence through patronage. Together they propelled the Renaissance to greatness.

1.1 Research Questions

Taking the Renaissance as the research background, this paper takes patrons as the research object. Firstly, according to the social status of patrons in this period, they are classified into three categories, the church, the nobility and the guilds. Secondly, the psychological activities of the patrons and their potential purposes and motives are analysed through specific examples of patronage. Finally, the influences that patrons brought to literary and artistic works are explored. On this basis, the paper seeks to explore the following research questions:

Q1: Which are the patronage patterns in the Renaissance?

Q2: What are the psychological motivations of the patrons?

Q3: What are the influences of patrons on the Renaissance?

1.2 Literature Review

In recent years, academic experts and scholars have achieved relatively good results in the study of patronage. Some researchers have discussed Italian, English, and French patronage in literature, theatre, and the fine arts during the Renaissance, tracing the situation of patronage before the Renaissance (Bartlett, 1983). Peter Burke analyses the systems of patronage that emerged in Renaissance society and divides them into five: the family patronage system; the made-to-measure patronage system; the market system; the academy system; and the grant system (Stieber & Burke, 1989). The British art historian Gombrich details the reasons for the Medici family's patronage of the arts and its influence on Renaissance artworks in his masterpiece *The Early Medici Family as Patrons of the Arts* (Gombrich, 2000). In summary, the academic research for Renaissance patrons is more comprehensive and in-depth, and these research results provide reference for the writing of this paper.

From practical point of view, although the development of arts funding has gone through a long evolution, especially in the West has established a relatively perfect arts funding system. However, the survival of artists today is still in jeopardy. *The Situation of Berlin Artists and the Gender Gap*, published by the Institute for Strategic Development (IFSE) and the Berlin Visual Artists' Association (bbk berlin), reveals that 90% of artists are unable to rely on their pensions in their later years; 80% of artists are unable to afford their studio rents; and only 10% are able to earn their full annual income from their artworks (Wöbken, 2018).

According to the report, these figures are not only a reflection of the current situation of artists in Berlin, Germany, but also a true reflection of the current situation of artists around the world. In this way, the study of the history of patronage can provide historical insights into the development of contemporary literature and art.

The topics about the Renaissance have always been the key research issues in European history. For a long time, research on the Renaissance has mostly taken artists and their works as the main object of study, and patrons also contributed to the development of the Renaissance, so the significance of patrons cannot be ignored. Current academics usually only examine art patronage as a social factor influencing artists' creation. Researchers have mostly focused on specific artists and styles of work. However, the social structure of the entire West, including Italy, had changed dramatically during the Renaissance, and patrons were no longer a single concept. According to the socio-economic conditions of the Renaissance, art patrons can be analysed in categories. Art patrons or organisations not only showed obvious differences in their motives and subject matter, but also in their choice of objects, as well as their influence on the form or style of works of art. Thus, with the unique perspective of patrons, this paper aims to explore in depth the relationship between patrons and art creation, which can lead to a deeper understanding of the development of culture, society and art at that time. Through historical documents, the psychological motives of early patrons are restored to help us understand the direction of literary and artistic development.

II. PATRONAGE PATTERNS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF LITERARY ARTS

Patronage is an important work in cultural and artistic activities, which refers to the giving of a certain amount of money, facilities and services by individuals, organisations or the government to help the development of cultural undertakings. Patronage usually includes poetry, sculpture, painting, music, theatre and so on. The main body of patronage consists mainly of religious groups, monarchs, aristocrats and other privileged classes at the top of social power. They were the patrons of the arts and the enjoyers of the arts. Patrons employ and feed art creators, collect and buy art works, and provide art creators with livelihood security. Arts funding is the power system that supports the development of the arts.

2.1 Religious Groups Represented by the Popes

Under the impact of the Renaissance wave, the popes showed an enlightened interest in the scholarly explorations of the humanists and became great patrons of the arts. Cardinals built lavish residences for themselves, while at

the same time they invested heavily in painting and sculpture. Monasteries and churches became the preferred objects of papal artistic patronage in the 15th century. Through his influence on society, the popes directly intervened or potentially guided on a variety of levels, from artistic technique to artistic themes. Artists had to follow instructions in order to gain a career. For example, Pope Urban VIII brought ecclesiastical art patronage to its peak. He made the Baroque artist Gianlorenzo Bernini an "imperial painter" by placing him in the Vatican under near-exclusive artistic patronage for 21 years (Verstegen, 2007). Bernini created the famous *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*, the tomb of Urban VIII, the bronze canopy of the altar of St. Peter's in the Vatican, and other important buildings at the request of the Pope. Pope Sixtus IV was also a devoted patron of the arts, and it is estimated that the total number of paintings and buildings he sponsored during his reign was the highest of any pope in the 15th century (Verstegen, 2007).

While the popes were the largest and most important patrons of religious groups, churches and monasteries everywhere also hired famous artists to decorate these buildings. For example, the monastery of St Mark, now in Florence, employed Fra Angelico, c., a famous painter of the time, to paint frescoes for the rooms of the monks. Also Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper* was a wet fresco for the dining room of the Convent of Maria in Milan.

2.2 Royal Patronage Represented by the Medici Family

During the Renaissance, the Royal patronage of the arts was mostly in the form of issued edicts, palace performances and paintings. Theatre troupes were often sponsored by the crown to stage plays at court, and theatre performances thus became part of court culture (Sandoz, 1982). In the 15th century, the Medici family ruled all of Florence for 60 years, so this paper uses the Medici family as an example. For the Medici family, their patronage was not only for the love of art and the appreciation of artists, but also for political demands, and through this patronage of the arts, they gained public attention and support. The patronage of the Medici family can be seen in their different aesthetics, but all for the same political purpose, indirectly influencing the art style of Florence in this period.

The family's first patron was Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici, who opened the Medici Bank, giving the Medici family the financial strength to secure future patronage of literature and the arts. He patronised Masaccio, whose masterpiece was *The Holy Trinity*, famous for its outstanding architectural background, a milestone in humanism, and whose success also helped to increase the influence of the Medici family in society at the time (Zhao, 2023). Cosimo di Giovanni de' Medici was the son of Giovanni di Bicci de'

Medici. Unlike his father, he preferred the field of architecture, and the engineer Filippo Brunelleschi was patronised by him. Filippo Brunelleschi's masterpiece was the dome of the Basilica di Santa Maria del Fiore. This event became the turning point for the Medici family to cross over from merchants into the aristocracy. Another important patron of the Medici family was Lorenzo de' Medici. He was born at the height of the Italian Renaissance. He patronised artists such as Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo and Raffaello Sanzio da Urbino and also founded schools. Sandro Botticelli was one of the leading figures of Renaissance fine art, and Lorenzo de' Medici invited Botticelli to live in the Medici Palace so that he could concentrate on his work without worrying about food, clothing, or shelter. Botticelli created *The Adoration of the Magi* based on the Medici family. In the centre of the picture was the Virgin Mary with the Holy Child on her lap, and in the picture were Lorenzo and Botticelli. Such a painting that includes the Saint, the Medici family and the painter himself is very unique. The painting was initially placed in the St Mary's Basilica in Florence, which gives an indication of its status and importance. Botticelli and his patron, Lorenzo de' Medici, both had an unlimited love of art and together they contributed to the artistic development of the Renaissance. Michelangelo's *Portrait of Giuliano de' Medici, Duke of Nemours* was modelled on Lorenzo's son. Raffaello Sanzio da Urbino also produced many works through Lorenzo's patronage, such as *The School of Athens*. He also painted a portrait of Lorenzo de' Medici, which was auctioned in London in 2007 for 230 million yuan (Liu, 2013).

2.3 Patronage by Guilds

The patterns of arts patronage changed as a result of capitalism in embryo. The artist community is restless in the decline of the old model of patronage and free in the new model of funding (Wright et al., 1983). Guild patronage was formed a little later than the first two patterns and came with the seeds of capitalism. During the Renaissance, merchants had an undisputed position in the economy, but religion was still the dominant ideology in society. The thousands of years of church control over people's thinking could not be changed overnight, so merchants were still at a very low social status. However, as the guilds grew and money was used to build municipal projects in the cities, the power of the guilds gradually rose from economic to political social attributes.

The guilds used art patronage to build their identity. In Florence, for example, the wool guild was one of the richest of the 21 guilds at the time. In the fifteenth century, the guilds' most common patronage were donations and decorations to churches and hospitals. The construction of the Cattedrale di Santa Maria del Fiore lasted two long

centuries (1294-1467) and most of the costs were borne by the wool merchants' guilds.

III. PSYCHOLOGICAL MOTIVATIONS OF THE PATRONS

Tracing the motives of patrons for art sponsorship, there are some differences in the motives and purposes of sponsorship due to different identities of patrons. Art forms, develops and dies out based on a wide range of social and cultural scenarios. Therefore, when studying art patronage, we should not only consider the personal interests of the patrons, but also pay attention to the social and cultural context of the time. From a historical perspective and social aspect, we should examine the art works formed by art creators based on artistic traditions and social pressures as well as the profound impact of art patronage. The religious ideology of the Middle Ages has always strictly limited the creative spirit of artists. During the Renaissance, the development of art patronage was the first to break the religious constraints on art, and the individual style of artists was widely recognised and appreciated. As rulers and important patrons of the arts at the time, the Medici family promoted the development of Florentine culture (Yu et al., 2019). The motives of the royal family for art patronage, represented by the Medici family, can be broadly divided into two categories, firstly, out of the inner drive, i.e., the belief in God in their hearts and the pleasure that works of art brought them; and secondly, out of the external drive, i.e., the ruler's political needs (Yu et al., 2019).

In terms of politics, the intention of religious groups to invest for political purposes is very obvious. For example, Pope Julius II, in order to re-establish the prestige of the Holy See in the Christian world, made a great effort to build a large number of outstanding architects and sculptors gathered in Rome. The royal family also invested for political purposes. The Medici family started out in the banking industry and gradually gained political status, but they expanded their economic power by lending money, an act that was not recognised in society at the time, so the Medici family resorted to humanism to seek recognition of their wealth, often using art to conduct social activities.

In terms of psychological salvation, as the way of accumulating wealth conflicts with Christianity, building monasteries or embodying devotion to God in works of art becomes a form of self-compassion or salvation for the patrons. For example, Cosimo was a devout Christian from the beginning, but his wealth led to a strong religious antipathy. Wishing to find a balance between his religious devotion and his desire for wealth, Cosimo, tormented by illness, appointed Michelangelo to design and build the Convento di San Marco for the salvation of his soul.

City Guilds sponsorship has a distinctly different purpose than the other two types of sponsors. Most of the city guilds' art patronage was for profit. In terms of hobbies, religious rulers and aristocratic patrons also fulfilled their love of art and their role as status symbols to a certain extent by hiring good artists to serve them. They used art as a show-off tool for status and wealth. It is also for the purpose of showing off that patrons often chose the more famous or outstanding artists for their patronage.

IV. THE INFLUENCES OF PATRONS

4.1 The Influence of Patrons on Artistic Style

These types of patronage showed slight differences in artistic style and subject matter. The style of art patronage represented by the guilds was more in line with the trend of the times, catering to the aesthetics of the public, and for profit with little personal interest. The supremacy of papal power can be felt in the patronage of art represented by the Pope. Every work of art sponsored by the Pope manifested the Pope's political intentions and personal preferences. In the patronage of art represented by the princes and nobles, the personal interest was more obvious, and the themes and styles were more diversified, not only limited to paintings and sculptures, but also monuments, coins and so on. At the same time, these works were also a manifestation of power and glory, and therefore extremely luxurious.

4.2 The Positive Influence of Patrons on Literary and Artistic Works During the Renaissance

During the Renaissance, art patronage helped artists get rid of their status as craftsmen and provided creative space, which greatly promoted the overall development of Western art. The prevalence of art patronage allowed more and more people to enter the field of art, and many talented artists were discovered, bringing a steady stream of development to the art world. On the one hand, if an artist accepts a commission from a patron, after the work is completed, his reputation will continue to be mentioned in high society along with the existence of the artwork. This allowed patrons to receive constant commissions from the upper classes and to quickly become famous and wealthy. On the other hand, the patrons in the Renaissance were also thinking rational connoisseurs with a deep understanding of both science and aesthetics, willing to encourage the complexity of imagery creation that inspired artists to innovate. For example, Leonardo da Vinci applied scientific knowledge to painting, optics, maths and perspective, with a passion for mechanical engineering, which led to the creation of the *Trattato della pittura* causing quite a stir at the time. There was also Filippo Brunelleschi who even discovered the principle of perspective.

4.3 The Negative Influence of Patrons During the Renaissance

Although patrons have promoted the development of literature and art, we have to admit the objective fact that patrons' control over the content and subject matter of art has deprived literature and art of free space and brought about certain negative effects. Before the rise of modernism, artistic creation was never meant to express the artist's personal feelings, but often embodied the wishes and aesthetic interests of the patrons. Therefore, the British art historian Gombrich believes that until the 15th century art works were the works of patrons (Gombrich, 1994).

As Renaissance artists enjoyed the opportunities afforded by patrons, they also inevitably embraced the downsides of these patronages. Most artists, at a young age, entered the guilds to learn. Beginning as apprentices, orders from employers were distributed to various workshops for processing, and apprentices helped their masters fulfil these orders while learning the craft under them. Apprentices are expected to fulfil a large number of orders each day, and the artistic style needs to conform to the employer's requirements. At this time, the artist's creativity was directly restricted by the patron's status, aesthetics, and preferences, and the artist's freedom of creativity was constrained through the signing of a contract. It can therefore be said that the works of art were the works of the patrons. We can imagine that without the patronage of the Medici family, the Renaissance would have been different from what it was today. The audience had too much power over the choice of plays, so that the playwrights deliberately catered to their tastes, resulting in the plays becoming more and more commercialised, abandoning academic reflection on reality, and depriving these plays, paintings, sculptures, and buildings of their original depth of thought.

V. CONCLUSION

From the church and the royal family to the guilds, such a patronage network was formed from the upper classes of the rulers to the general public. Through sorting out the patterns of art patronage, it is not difficult to find that the relationship behind art patronage actually embodies a kind of power relationship. The patrons hold the right to speak and take the initiative through capital, information and their own power. However, the creators of art need to rely on the help of the patrons to realise the transformation of value. Patrons support the creative activities of artists for different purposes, and in order to obtain sponsorship, artists create works according to the requirements of patrons. Artists' creative activities were influenced by patrons in terms of subject matter, content, and colours, so patrons had a role to play in influencing the direction of art development. But it

is also because of the support of the art patrons, which helped the artists to tide over the difficulties and had a good environment for the creation of art. Western art was able to advance steadily. To sum up, art patrons in the process of art development has played a very important promotional role, precisely because of the existence of the patrons, so that art grows stronger.

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Gender, Power, and Prophecy: Reimagining the Feminine in *Macbeth*

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Abstract— *Shakespeare's Macbeth* is a tragedy deeply saturated with anxieties surrounding gender, power, and the instability of identity. The play's portrayal of Lady Macbeth and the Weird Sisters disrupts conventional early modern notions of femininity, positioning women as both the source and the threat of male ambition. Through acts of prophecy, persuasion, and defiance, these figures blur the boundaries between masculine authority and feminine transgression. This article employs a feminist-critical framework, supported by psychoanalytic and new historicist perspectives, to interrogate how *Macbeth* reimagines the feminine as a locus of power that is simultaneously subversive and contained. Lady Macbeth's invocation to "unsex me here" and the witches' manipulative prophecies illustrate how female voice and agency are rendered both potent and perilous within a patriarchal world order. Ultimately, the play's resolution reasserts masculine control, yet the haunting presence of feminine power continues to destabilize that authority. By examining the intersections of prophecy, gender, and ambition, this study contributes to Shakespearean and feminist scholarship by illuminating *Macbeth* as a text that stages not only the fear of female dominance but also the persistent allure of feminine knowledge and autonomy.



Keywords— *Macbeth*, gender, power, prophecy, feminist criticism, Shakespearean tragedy

I. INTRODUCTION

Written in the early seventeenth century, *Macbeth* emerges from a cultural moment deeply invested in rigid hierarchies of gender and authority. The early modern period in England was shaped by patriarchal ideology, which positioned men as rational, active, and dominant, while women were expected to embody obedience, chastity, and silence. Female speech, knowledge, and ambition were often viewed as dangerous deviations from the natural order, and discourses surrounding witchcraft reflected widespread anxieties about women who transgressed domestic or spiritual boundaries. Within this social and ideological framework, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* dramatizes the destabilizing consequences of such transgressions, exposing the fragile balance between gender, power, and morality.

At the heart of the play lies a persistent tension between femininity and agency, staged most vividly through the figures of Lady Macbeth and the Weird Sisters. Both

occupy ambiguous positions that challenge patriarchal constructions of womanhood: Lady Macbeth invokes the unnatural in her plea to be "unsexed," seeking masculine strength to pursue ambition, while the witches wield prophetic authority that defies both religious and gendered hierarchies. The supernatural thus becomes a space through which female characters articulate forbidden desires and assert influence in a world that denies them direct power. The central problem *Macbeth* negotiates is how femininity, when intertwined with knowledge and ambition, becomes a site of both empowerment and anxiety—an unstable force that threatens to overturn the moral and gendered order upon which patriarchal society depends.

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* operates at the intersection of gender, power, and the supernatural, revealing early modern England's deep-seated anxieties about female agency. Within a patriarchal culture that equated masculinity with reason and authority and femininity with weakness and submission, Shakespeare constructs a world where

women—both mortal and supernatural—disrupt these established hierarchies. The play's central figures of Lady Macbeth and the Weird Sisters embody competing and intertwined visions of feminine power: one rooted in ambition and psychological manipulation, the other in prophecy and occult knowledge.

The problem *Macbeth* negotiates lies in its complex portrayal of femininity as both transgressive and constrained. Lady Macbeth's desire to "unsex" herself and assume masculine traits challenges the social order that limits women's agency, yet her eventual collapse reaffirms the patriarchal association between female will and moral corruption. Similarly, the Weird Sisters' prophetic authority destabilizes masculine power by placing the course of political destiny in female hands, even as their supernatural nature renders them monstrous and otherworldly. Through these figures, Shakespeare explores the tension between empowerment and containment, suggesting that female agency can only exist within the realm of the unnatural or the forbidden. *Macbeth* thus becomes a dramatic negotiation of the feminine—where prophecy and ambition serve as metaphors for the dangerous allure of women who dare to speak, act, and know beyond their prescribed roles.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Feminist and psychoanalytic readings of *Macbeth* have long explored how Shakespeare's construction of gender reflects the tensions between power, sexuality, and identity in early modern culture. Janet Adelman, in *Suffocating Mothers* (1992), interprets *Macbeth* through a psychoanalytic lens, arguing that the play dramatizes male anxieties about maternal influence and female dominance. For Adelman, Lady Macbeth embodies the threat of the engulfing mother whose power destabilizes Macbeth's sense of masculine autonomy; her invocation to be "unsexed" reveals not only her desire for masculine agency but also the deep-seated fear of the feminine as contaminating and uncontrollable.

Coppélia Kahn, in *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* (1981), similarly reads *Macbeth* as a tragedy of masculine insecurity. She contends that Macbeth's violence and ambition are driven by his need to affirm his manhood within a patriarchal code that equates masculinity with dominance and emotional repression. Lady Macbeth, by manipulating these ideals, exposes the performative nature of gender and the fragility of masculine identity.

Carol Thomas Neely, in *Women and Men in Othello* (1985) and related essays, extends this discussion by situating Shakespeare's women within broader social and ideological constraints. She emphasizes how *Macbeth* dramatizes the limited spaces available for female speech and power, showing that women who exercise agency—like Lady

Macbeth and the witches—must do so through subversive or supernatural means.

Collectively, these critics highlight how *Macbeth* negotiates the boundaries of gender and power, positioning the feminine as a site of both fascination and fear, a tension that continues to animate feminist Shakespearean scholarship.

Research Questions

This study is guided by two central research questions that frame its analysis of gender, power, and the supernatural in *Macbeth*:

1. How does *Macbeth* imagine feminine power through the figures of Lady Macbeth and the Weird Sisters?
2. How does prophecy intersect with constructions of gender and authority in *Macbeth*?

Together, these questions aim to uncover how *Macbeth* reimagines the feminine as both a source of power and a site of anxiety, situating the play within the broader cultural discourse on gender and transgression in early modern England.

Thesis Statement

This article argues that *Macbeth* reconfigures the feminine as a paradoxical site of both subversion and containment, where female power is simultaneously alluring and threatening. Through the figures of Lady Macbeth and the Weird Sisters, Shakespeare interrogates early modern constructions of gender, revealing how prophecy, ambition, and speech serve as contested forms of female agency. While the play momentarily empowers its women through knowledge and influence, it ultimately reasserts patriarchal control by associating feminine power with moral disorder and supernatural transgression. *Macbeth* thus stages a complex negotiation between gender and authority, exposing the cultural anxieties surrounding female autonomy in a male-dominated world.

THE FEMININE AND THE SUPERNATURAL: PROPHECY AS GENDERED DISCOURSE

In *Macbeth*, the Weird Sisters serve as potent embodiments of transgressive femininity, wielding prophetic authority that destabilizes the male-dominated social and political order. Shakespeare presents them as liminal figures, neither fully human nor entirely supernatural, whose ambiguous identity allows them to operate outside conventional gender norms. Their prophetic pronouncements—"All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Glamis! ... Thane of Cawdor! ... that shalt be king hereafter!"—not only foretell future events but also catalyze the central characters' ambitions, positioning the witches as instigators of moral and political upheaval. Through their speech, the witches

exercise a form of knowledge denied to most women in early modern society, challenging the patriarchal assumption that authority, reason, and foresight are inherently masculine traits.

Their transgression extends beyond social expectations of femininity to encompass spiritual and natural law. By manipulating fate and influencing human action, the witches occupy a space traditionally associated with male power—strategic calculation and control over destiny. Yet their supernatural status simultaneously renders them threatening and morally ambiguous, reflecting contemporary anxieties about women who possess agency beyond domestic or socially sanctioned roles. The Weird Sisters' ability to speak truth and shape outcomes disrupts the linear hierarchies of gender and power, making prophecy a distinctly gendered discourse: it grants women influence while highlighting male vulnerability. In this way, Shakespeare stages the feminine as both fascinating and dangerous, underscoring the cultural tension between female knowledge, ambition, and patriarchal authority.

The Weird Sisters as Embodiments of Transgressive Femininity and Prophetic Authority

In *Macbeth*, the Weird Sisters exemplify transgressive femininity by occupying a space that defies early modern gender expectations. Unlike conventional women, who were expected to be passive, obedient, and domestic, the witches exercise agency through speech, knowledge, and manipulation of destiny—qualities traditionally coded as masculine in the patriarchal worldview. Their very existence challenges social norms: they are liminal figures, neither fully human nor entirely supernatural, which allows them to operate outside the constraints of natural and social law.

The sisters' prophetic authority further amplifies their transgression. By foretelling Macbeth's rise to power and Banquo's descendants' future kingship, they wield influence over events without direct action, demonstrating the power of knowledge and persuasion. Their speeches—cryptic, repetitive, and rhythmically chant-like—position them as agents who destabilize the linearity of time and the hierarchy of authority. Through prophecy, they manipulate ambition, provoking Macbeth to act in ways that ultimately disrupt social and political order.

Moreover, the witches' femininity is intimately tied to their threat. Their supernatural status allows them to embody desires and powers that early modern society feared in women: ambition, cunning, and control over fate. At the same time, they are morally ambiguous, which reinforces contemporary anxieties about female knowledge and autonomy. Shakespeare thus presents the Weird Sisters as a complex articulation of feminine power: their transgression

lies not only in defying gender norms but also in their capacity to destabilize authority through prophetic insight, making prophecy a distinctly gendered discourse in the play.

The Weird Sisters and the Destabilization of Patriarchal Order

The Weird Sisters in *Macbeth* destabilize the patriarchal order primarily through their control over knowledge and manipulation of fate. Unlike characters who derive authority from social status or martial prowess, the witches wield power through information—prophecy—that challenges traditional hierarchies. By foretelling Macbeth's ascent to kingship and Banquo's royal lineage, they introduce the possibility of male ambition being shaped by female influence. This inversion unsettles patriarchal norms: men, expected to control their destinies through rational action, become dependent on knowledge provided by women who operate outside the sanctioned social order.

Their speech is particularly destabilizing. The witches employ cryptic, incantatory language—rhythmic, paradoxical, and ambiguous—which compels Macbeth to interpret and act upon it according to his desires and fears. Phrases such as “Lesser than Macbeth, and greater” or “Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none” create a psychological tension that provokes action while leaving moral and causal responsibility ambiguous. By controlling the timing and content of knowledge, the witches manipulate not just Macbeth's ambition but the unfolding of political events, suggesting that authority is contingent, fragile, and responsive to feminine influence.

Moreover, the witches' actions highlight a broader anxiety about female power: their ability to intervene in human affairs and shape outcomes defies both natural law and social expectation. In doing so, they expose the instability of patriarchal control, demonstrating that power need not be tied to gendered hierarchies. Through prophecy and manipulation, the Weird Sisters position the feminine as an agent capable of influencing fate, destabilizing male authority, and revealing the porous boundaries of early modern power structures.

Prophecy as a Metaphor for Female Voice and Forbidden Knowledge

In *Macbeth*, prophecy functions as a powerful metaphor for female voice and forbidden knowledge, highlighting both the allure and the threat of women who transgress societal boundaries. The Weird Sisters' prophetic pronouncements grant them a unique form of authority: through speech alone, they shape events and influence the ambitions of men. In a patriarchal context where women were largely denied access to political or intellectual power, prophecy becomes a symbolic space in which feminine agency can operate. The witches speak truths that are socially and

morally unsettling, demonstrating that knowledge itself can be disruptive when wielded outside accepted gender norms.

Similarly, prophecy embodies the tension between revelation and transgression. By foretelling Macbeth's rise to power, the witches articulate knowledge that men desire but cannot control, thereby positioning women as gatekeepers of both information and fate. Their voice is "forbidden" not because it conveys falsehood, but because it challenges the natural and social order: women speaking authoritatively about the future violates early modern anxieties about female speech and autonomy. This duality—powerful yet dangerous, revelatory yet illicit—renders prophecy a metaphorical representation of female influence: it is a means through which women exercise agency while simultaneously provoking patriarchal anxiety.

Ultimately, Shakespeare uses prophecy to dramatize the complex dynamics of gendered knowledge. The witches' foresight exemplifies how female voice can be both instrumental and threatening, illuminating the cultural fear that women who speak, predict, or know beyond prescribed limits can destabilize male authority and social hierarchy.

Situating the Weird Sisters within Renaissance Anxieties about Witchcraft, Female Speech, and Agency

The Weird Sisters in *Macbeth* can be understood as reflections of pervasive Renaissance anxieties about witchcraft, female speech, and the limits of women's agency. In early modern England, witchcraft was closely linked to fears of female subversion: women who engaged in supernatural practices or claimed knowledge beyond domestic and social spheres were perceived as threats to both spiritual and political order. The Weird Sisters embody these fears, combining the supernatural with distinctly feminine traits to present a form of power that challenges patriarchal authority. Their ambiguous status—as neither fully human nor fully supernatural—allowed contemporary audiences to project anxieties about female cunning, seduction, and manipulation onto them, making the witches both fascinating and frightening.

The play also highlights broader concerns about female speech. Women in Renaissance society were expected to remain silent, deferential, and confined to private, domestic spaces. In contrast, the witches speak boldly, authoritatively, and publicly, asserting control over information and influencing men's decisions. Their speech destabilizes hierarchical and gendered expectations, positioning women as active agents in the social and political realm.

Furthermore, their agency—exercised through prophecy—represents a transgression of natural and social law. By intervening in human affairs and shaping events, the witches demonstrate that female knowledge and influence

need not conform to patriarchal limits. In situating the Weird Sisters within these cultural anxieties, Shakespeare dramatizes the tensions surrounding women's power in Renaissance England, presenting femininity as a site where fear, fascination, and social transgression converge.

LADY MACBETH AND THE PERFORMANCE OF POWER

Lady Macbeth represents a human counterpart to the supernatural power of the Weird Sisters, embodying a performance of feminine agency that challenges patriarchal norms through ambition, speech, and manipulation. Unlike the witches, whose power is otherworldly, Lady Macbeth exercises influence within the human realm, shaping events through psychological persuasion and strategic action. Her famous invocation—"Come, you spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here"—reveals her desire to shed socially prescribed femininity, which she associates with weakness and passivity, in order to assume a form of authority aligned with masculine aggression. In doing so, she not only asserts control over her own identity but also manipulates Macbeth, aligning his ambition with her own designs for power.

Lady Macbeth's speech and behavior destabilize traditional gender hierarchies. She reverses the expected dynamics of marital authority, directing and challenging her husband in ways that invert societal norms. Her rhetorical strategies—appealing to Macbeth's masculinity, questioning his courage, and framing murder as a path to honor—demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of social and psychological leverage, suggesting that femininity can be both performative and strategic.

However, her power is both enabling and self-destructive. By seeking to transcend gender limitations, Lady Macbeth temporarily attains agency, but her eventual psychological unraveling—manifested in sleepwalking and obsessive guilt—reflects early modern anxieties about the dangers of female ambition. Shakespeare thus presents Lady Macbeth as a complex figure: she exemplifies the potential of the feminine to wield influence and assert authority, yet her trajectory also reinforces the cultural perception that women who transgress social and moral boundaries risk collapse or containment. In this duality, Lady Macbeth performs power while simultaneously revealing its precariousness within a patriarchal world.

Lady Macbeth's Invocation to "Unsex Me Here" and the Challenge to Gender Norms

Lady Macbeth's invocation to "unsex me here" in Act 1, Scene 5 stands as one of the most striking articulations of gender transgression in *Macbeth*. In this moment, she calls upon supernatural forces to strip her of feminine qualities—such as compassion, nurturing, and moral restraint—which

early modern society associated with women. By rejecting these socially prescribed traits, Lady Macbeth seeks to appropriate traditionally masculine attributes—ruthlessness, decisiveness, and the capacity for violence—that she believes are necessary to pursue power. This deliberate rejection of gendered expectations challenges the patriarchal assumption that women are inherently passive, weak, and morally bound.

The invocation also reveals the performative nature of gender in the play. Lady Macbeth does not simply express desire for power; she actively seeks to transform her identity, suggesting that gender can be manipulated to achieve social and political ends. In aligning herself with darkness and the supernatural, she asserts agency in a world where her natural social position would otherwise limit her influence. Her language—imperative, forceful, and transgressive—further underscores her rejection of feminine passivity and demonstrates how speech itself can function as a tool of empowerment.

At the same time, the invocation embodies the tension between ambition and societal constraint. While Lady Macbeth temporarily transcends her prescribed gender role, the unnaturalness of this transformation foreshadows the psychological and moral consequences that follow. Shakespeare thus positions her act as both a challenge to gender norms and a commentary on the cultural anxieties surrounding female agency: women who step beyond the boundaries of their prescribed roles gain influence, yet in doing so, they threaten the established patriarchal order and risk destabilization.

Lady Macbeth's Manipulation of Macbeth and the Redefinition of Ambition and Courage

Lady Macbeth's power is most clearly exercised through her manipulation of Macbeth, revealing her ability to redefine socially constructed notions of ambition and courage. In Act 1, Scene 7, when Macbeth hesitates to murder King Duncan, Lady Macbeth challenges his masculinity and frames ambition as an active, decisive pursuit of power. By questioning his courage—"When you durst do it, then you were a man"—she equates manhood not with birth or status but with the willingness to seize opportunity through decisive action. In this way, Lady Macbeth reshapes the cultural understanding of gendered virtue: courage and ambition are no longer inherent masculine traits but qualities that can be invoked, challenged, or performed.

Her manipulation extends beyond rhetoric into psychological control. Lady Macbeth anticipates Macbeth's fears and moral hesitations, addressing them strategically to align his actions with her own designs. She portrays murder as both a practical step toward kingship and a test of resolve,

thereby transforming an act of moral transgression into a demonstration of strength and determination. By doing so, she positions herself as the architect of ambition, guiding Macbeth's trajectory while asserting indirect but potent authority over him.

This dynamic also exposes the instability of patriarchal power: a woman's insight, rhetorical skill, and understanding of social perception allow her to influence events more effectively than the formally empowered male. Yet Shakespeare complicates this empowerment by showing that such manipulation, while temporarily effective, carries psychological consequences for both participants. Lady Macbeth's ability to redefine courage and ambition highlights the performative and socially constructed nature of these traits, emphasizing the fluidity of gendered power and the cultural anxieties surrounding female influence in early modern England.

Lady Macbeth's Psychological Transformation: From Power to Guilt and Madness

Lady Macbeth's trajectory from commanding influence to psychological unraveling functions as Shakespeare's exploration of the consequences of gender transgression. Initially, she embodies authority, ambition, and strategic intelligence, orchestrating Duncan's murder and shaping Macbeth's actions to fulfill her designs. Her boldness and rejection of conventional femininity—exemplified in her invocation to "unsex me here"—position her temporarily outside the patriarchal order, demonstrating the potential of female agency when unbound by societal constraints.

However, Shakespeare carefully stages the limits of this transgression. As the repercussions of Duncan's murder unfold, Lady Macbeth becomes increasingly consumed by guilt, anxiety, and psychological instability. The very traits—ruthlessness, manipulateness, and ambition—that enabled her initial power transform into sources of torment. Her sleepwalking and obsessive hand-washing in Act 5 symbolize the internalization of moral and societal censure: a woman who assumed masculine authority is now haunted by the unnaturalness of her actions. This collapse illustrates the cultural anxieties surrounding women who overstep prescribed boundaries, suggesting that transgressive femininity is both potent and perilous.

Shakespeare's portrayal also underscores the gendered dimensions of psychological consequences. While Macbeth externalizes his ambition through violence and political action, Lady Macbeth internalizes her transgression, suffering in isolation. Her descent into madness serves as a commentary on the societal pressures that regulate female behavior: stepping beyond gendered limits can yield temporary empowerment but ultimately invites containment, punishment, or erasure. Through Lady

Macbeth's psychological transformation, the play interrogates the tension between female agency and patriarchal norms, illustrating the delicate and fraught negotiation of power, ambition, and gender in early modern society.

Lady Macbeth's Downfall and the Re-inscription of Patriarchal Control

Lady Macbeth's eventual downfall reinforces the patriarchal framework that her earlier actions had temporarily disrupted, rendering her power tragic rather than liberatory. While she initially wields remarkable influence—manipulating Macbeth, orchestrating Duncan's murder, and redefining courage and ambition—her authority exists largely within the performative and transgressive spaces of the play. Her deviation from socially sanctioned femininity, though temporarily empowering, violates early modern expectations of women's roles, making her vulnerability to psychological collapse almost inevitable within the cultural logic of *Macbeth*.

The consequences of her transgression—guilt, madness, and eventual death—serve as a narrative mechanism through which patriarchal control is reasserted. By internalizing the moral and social consequences of her ambition, Lady Macbeth is removed from the political and social sphere she had briefly entered. Her psychological torment contrasts sharply with Macbeth's continued external exercise of power, emphasizing that female agency in the play is constrained by gendered limitations: women may exert influence, but their authority is circumscribed and ultimately unsustainable.

Shakespeare's treatment of Lady Macbeth thus frames feminine power as simultaneously seductive and dangerous. Her downfall transforms her from a figure of potential liberation into a cautionary embodiment of patriarchal anxieties: transgressive women may temporarily disrupt social hierarchies, but the prevailing order—embodied in male authority and moral expectation—ultimately contains and neutralizes them. In this sense, Lady Macbeth's power is tragic, illustrating the cost of stepping beyond the boundaries imposed by a patriarchal society while highlighting the cultural tension between female agency and male-dominated structures of authority.

THE MASCULINE RESPONSE: POWER, ANXIETY, AND THE FEMININE THREAT

In *Macbeth*, male characters' interactions with Lady Macbeth and the Weird Sisters reveal the deep-seated anxieties that patriarchal authority experiences in response to female power. Macbeth himself embodies this tension: his ambition and desire for kingship are catalyzed by the witches' prophecy and amplified by Lady Macbeth's manipulation, illustrating how male authority is destabilized

by women who possess knowledge, foresight, or rhetorical skill. Rather than acting as fully autonomous agents, men in the play are often reactive, responding to the influence of feminine figures whose power lies in subtlety, persuasion, and control over information. This inversion of expected gender hierarchies produces both fascination and fear, highlighting the perceived threat posed by autonomous female agency.

The witches' prophecy exemplifies this dynamic by granting insight that men cannot access independently, positioning the feminine as a source of both desire and danger. Similarly, Lady Macbeth challenges Macbeth's masculinity by equating courage with the willingness to commit murder, thereby redefining gendered norms and placing him in a position of dependency. His repeated vacillation and reliance on her guidance reveal the fragility of patriarchal self-assurance when confronted with assertive women, exposing anxieties about male identity, control, and the social consequences of yielding to feminine influence.

Shakespeare thus dramatizes the interplay between masculine power and the feminine threat: the presence of women who transgress conventional roles unsettles male authority, forcing men to negotiate ambition, moral responsibility, and social expectation in ways that reveal both vulnerability and compulsion. The masculine response in *Macbeth* underscores the central tension of the play: the capacity of the feminine to inspire, manipulate, and destabilize highlights the porous boundaries of power in a patriarchal world, demonstrating that the threat of female agency is both socially constructed and dramatically potent.

Macbeth's Relationship with the Feminine: Dependence and Fear of Emasculation

Macbeth's interactions with the Weird Sisters and Lady Macbeth reveal a complex and often contradictory relationship with the feminine, marked by both reliance and anxiety. From the outset, he is drawn to the witches' prophecy, which ignites his ambition and sets the trajectory of the play. The witches provide knowledge that he cannot access on his own, positioning him as dependent on feminine insight to navigate his rise to power. This reliance, however, is double-edged: the information they offer is partial, ambiguous, and psychologically manipulative, leaving Macbeth vulnerable to interpretation and moral compromise. In this sense, the feminine becomes both enabler and destabilizer, shaping events while simultaneously provoking his uncertainty and fear.

Lady Macbeth similarly embodies the tension between attraction to female authority and fear of emasculation. When she challenges his courage—"When you durst do it, then you were a man"—Macbeth is forced to confront his masculine identity and prove it through violent action. His

willingness to submit to her rhetorical pressure underscores the permeability of male authority in the face of feminine influence, yet it also generates deep anxiety. Macbeth's sense of manhood becomes contingent on his ability to perform ruthlessness, highlighting early modern cultural fears about women who wield power over men, whether through persuasion, knowledge, or manipulation.

Shakespeare thus portrays Macbeth's relationship with the feminine as one defined by dependence, desire, and dread. Women in the play—both supernatural and human—function as catalysts for his ambition while simultaneously exposing the fragility of patriarchal identity. Through this interplay, the drama interrogates how masculine authority is constructed in opposition to, yet reliant upon, feminine power, illustrating the psychological and cultural tensions that arise when gender hierarchies are destabilized.

Male Ambition Mediated Through Feminine Influence: The Witches and Lady Macbeth

In *Macbeth*, male ambition is rarely autonomous; it is consistently shaped, provoked, and mediated through feminine influence. Both the Weird Sisters and Lady Macbeth act as catalysts for Macbeth's rise and moral deterioration, demonstrating that female agency—whether supernatural or human—plays a central role in the unfolding of political and personal power. The witches initiate his trajectory by offering cryptic prophecy, planting the seed of ambition in his mind. Their knowledge is partial and ambiguous, compelling Macbeth to interpret and act upon it according to his desires and insecurities. In this sense, the witches mediate his ambition indirectly: they provide information and opportunity, but the consequences of action rest on his choices, blending influence with psychological manipulation.

Lady Macbeth, in contrast, mediates ambition through direct psychological and rhetorical intervention. By questioning Macbeth's courage, framing murder as a test of masculinity, and orchestrating the plan to kill Duncan, she translates his latent desire into decisive action. Her influence demonstrates how male ambition can be guided—and even compelled—by feminine intellect and determination, revealing the permeability of patriarchal authority. Macbeth's dependence on her demonstrates that male power in the play is contingent: it is enabled and shaped by women who operate within and beyond social norms, whether through supernatural foresight or calculated persuasion.

Together, the witches and Lady Macbeth illustrate the intricate interplay between gender and ambition. Shakespeare positions feminine figures as both provocateurs and arbiters of male action, suggesting that patriarchal power is neither absolute nor self-contained.

Male ambition, rather than arising purely from internal drive or social mandate, is mediated and magnified through the presence, knowledge, and strategic agency of women, highlighting the tension and interdependence between masculine authority and feminine influence in the play.

Masculinity in *Macbeth*: Fragility, Violence, and the Feminine Threat

In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare constructs masculinity as simultaneously fragile and violent, particularly in response to feminine influence. The male characters' sense of power and identity is repeatedly tested and destabilized by women—both supernatural and human—who wield knowledge, persuasion, or moral challenge. Macbeth himself exemplifies this dynamic: his masculinity is contingent upon external validation and performance, especially in relation to Lady Macbeth's provocations and the witches' prophecies. When Lady Macbeth questions his courage—equating hesitation with weakness—Macbeth's self-conception as a man is threatened, compelling him to commit regicide to reassert his masculine authority. Similarly, the witches unsettle him through ambiguous foresight, making his sense of control dependent on interpreting and acting upon their words.

The play links masculine fragility with violence: male characters respond to the threat or challenge posed by the feminine with aggression and bloodshed. Macbeth's violent actions—murder, tyranny, and paranoia—can be read as attempts to restore a threatened masculinity, demonstrating how early modern anxieties about female power translate into male coercion and brutality. In this framework, violence becomes both a performative assertion of gender and a means to contain or suppress the destabilizing influence of women.

By portraying masculinity as reactive, socially contingent, and inseparable from violent assertion, Shakespeare emphasizes the cultural tension between male authority and feminine agency. Women's power—whether through prophecy, manipulation, or moral challenge—exposes the fragility underlying male dominance, revealing that patriarchal control is neither innate nor absolute. In *Macbeth*, the interplay between fragile masculinity and violent assertion underscores the centrality of gendered anxiety, showing that male authority is constructed and maintained in constant negotiation with the feminine threat.

REIMAGINING THE FEMININE: SUBVERSION OR CONTAINMENT?

Macbeth presents the feminine as a complex site of both subversion and containment, exploring the tension between female agency and patriarchal authority. Lady Macbeth and the Weird Sisters exemplify this duality: they possess knowledge, influence, and rhetorical power that destabilize

social and gender hierarchies, yet the play ultimately frames their potency within limits dictated by early modern cultural norms. The witches, as supernatural figures, embody transgressive femininity, offering prophecy and insight that catalyzes Macbeth's ambition while remaining outside human society. Their power lies in ambiguity and foresight, making them unsettling and disruptive, yet they are ultimately external to political and moral order—they provoke action without participating in its governance.

Lady Macbeth, in contrast, demonstrates human, performative feminine power. She manipulates, strategizes, and redefines courage and ambition, temporarily reversing traditional gender hierarchies. Yet her influence is circumscribed by psychological and societal constraints. Her descent into guilt, madness, and death exemplifies the containment of transgressive female power: while she disrupts patriarchal norms, her punishment restores the cultural and moral equilibrium, reaffirming male authority. Shakespeare's treatment of Lady Macbeth thus illustrates the precariousness of female agency within a patriarchal framework—women may wield significant power, but the consequences of overstepping prescribed roles underscore the cultural anxiety surrounding feminine autonomy.

Through the interplay of these figures, *Macbeth* both imagines and limits feminine power. The play interrogates the potential for subversion—through prophecy, persuasion, and ambition—while simultaneously demonstrating the mechanisms of containment, including moral, psychological, and social pressures. In doing so, Shakespeare offers a nuanced reimagining of the feminine: one that is compelling, disruptive, and fraught, reflecting early modern anxieties about gender, power, and the boundaries of agency.

Empowerment or Punishment: The Fate of the Feminine in *Macbeth*

In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare presents feminine figures in ways that temporarily empower them, yet ultimately enforces punitive containment, reflecting early modern anxieties about female agency. Both the Weird Sisters and Lady Macbeth exercise forms of influence that disrupt patriarchal norms: the witches provide knowledge that directs Macbeth's ambition, while Lady Macbeth manipulates, persuades, and redefines courage and ambition. In these moments, women act as catalysts for action, demonstrating intellectual, psychological, and even moral authority that challenges male dominance. Their power is compelling, visible, and, for a time, transformative.

However, Shakespeare's narrative consistently reinscribes limits on this power. The witches, though enduringly potent, remain external agents—they provoke but do not govern human affairs, suggesting that transgressive feminine

influence is threatening yet ultimately contained outside the social order. Lady Macbeth's trajectory is even more telling: her initial authority and strategic skill yield to guilt, madness, and death. The psychological unraveling of Lady Macbeth functions as both narrative and moral containment, illustrating that transgressive female ambition cannot coexist with patriarchal structures without consequences.

Thus, *Macbeth* offers a nuanced depiction of the feminine: it empowers women as agents of influence and disruption, yet it simultaneously punishes and constrains them to restore social, moral, and gendered equilibrium. Shakespeare does not deny women agency, but he frames its exercise as inherently precarious, reflecting cultural anxieties about the subversive potential of female power. The play presents feminine empowerment as provocative and consequential, yet ultimately contingent on patriarchal containment, highlighting both the allure and the danger of transgressive femininity.

The Paradox of Female Power: Dependence on Male Downfall and Supernatural Transgression

In *Macbeth*, female power is paradoxical: it manifests vividly, yet it is inextricably tied to male vulnerability or supernatural intervention. Both Lady Macbeth and the Weird Sisters exemplify this dynamic. The witches' authority derives from their position outside the human social order—they can predict, manipulate, and provoke, but only because they operate as supernatural beings. Their power is potent precisely because it is external, ambiguous, and removed from conventional hierarchies; they catalyze action but do not bear responsibility for human consequence. Their influence exposes male weakness, revealing that masculine authority is fragile when confronted by knowledge or insight beyond its control.

Lady Macbeth's power similarly depends upon male susceptibility. Her ability to manipulate Macbeth—questioning his courage, framing ambition, and orchestrating Duncan's murder—only succeeds because Macbeth's desire for kingship and fear of emasculation make him receptive to her influence. Her agency is enacted through the disruption of male resolve rather than autonomous political or social authority. The paradox emerges: female power in *Macbeth* is effective and transformative, but it is contingent—it exists only when it exploits male ambition, weakness, or moral hesitation, or when it operates through forces outside natural and social law, such as prophecy or witchcraft.

Shakespeare's construction of female power thus highlights both its allure and its instability. Women in the play can be disruptive, persuasive, and commanding, yet their authority is never entirely self-sufficient; it depends on male complicity, societal transgression, or supernatural

mediation. This paradox reflects early modern anxieties about gender, illustrating that while femininity can subvert, influence, and destabilize, it is ultimately circumscribed by patriarchal structures that limit the permanence and legitimacy of female agency.

Modern Reinterpretations: Reclaiming Feminine Agency

Contemporary feminist criticism and modern adaptations of *Macbeth* have sought to reinterpret the play's depiction of female power, emphasizing agency rather than punishment. Scholars and directors increasingly frame Lady Macbeth and the Weird Sisters not merely as transgressive or cautionary figures but as complex agents whose influence highlights systemic gender constraints. Feminist readings often reposition Lady Macbeth's ambition and strategic acumen as expressions of intelligence and resilience, rather than moral failings, drawing attention to the limited avenues available to women in a patriarchal society. Her descent into guilt and madness, in these interpretations, is understood less as inevitable punishment and more as a commentary on the psychological cost of navigating a male-dominated world.

Similarly, the Weird Sisters are reimagined in contemporary adaptations as symbols of female knowledge and foresight rather than merely malevolent supernatural forces. Productions have portrayed them as autonomous, empowered figures whose prophecy reflects insight rather than malevolent manipulation, emphasizing the legitimacy and potential of feminine authority. In literary criticism, scholars have explored the witches as embodiments of marginalized or suppressed feminine knowledge, suggesting that their "threat" to patriarchal power mirrors ongoing societal anxieties about women's intellectual and social influence.

These modern reinterpretations reclaim feminine agency by highlighting the structural limitations imposed by patriarchy and by emphasizing the creativity, intelligence, and subversive potential of women. Rather than simply punishing or containing female characters, contemporary readings celebrate their power and interpret their transgressions as acts of resilience, critique, and survival. In doing so, feminist scholarship and adaptations shift the focus from the dangers of female ambition to the systemic obstacles that shape, constrain, and provoke it, offering a more nuanced and empowering understanding of Shakespeare's feminine figures.

III. CONCLUSION

This study has examined *Macbeth* as a text deeply invested in exploring the dynamics of gender, power, and prophecy.

Through the analysis of Lady Macbeth and the Weird Sisters, the article has shown how Shakespeare constructs the feminine as a site of both subversion and containment. Lady Macbeth demonstrates the performative and psychological dimensions of female authority, temporarily destabilizing patriarchal norms before her ambition collapses under guilt and societal pressures. The Weird Sisters, in turn, embody transgressive, supernatural power that catalyzes male ambition while remaining external to the social order, highlighting the interplay between prophecy, knowledge, and gendered influence. Male responses—especially Macbeth's reliance, anxiety, and violent assertion of authority—underscore the fragility of masculinity when confronted with assertive or enigmatic femininity.

Macbeth thus stages the tension between patriarchal fear and fascination with female power, depicting women as both compelling and threatening, capable of shaping action yet constrained by cultural and moral boundaries. This duality illustrates early modern anxieties about the instability of gender hierarchies and the consequences of transgressing them, suggesting that female agency in the play is potent but inherently paradoxical: it exists through male susceptibility or supernatural mediation and is ultimately circumscribed by societal norms.

The broader implications of this study extend to understanding the intersections of gender, prophecy, and voice in early modern drama, emphasizing how femininity functions as a lens through which cultural anxieties about authority, knowledge, and ambition are expressed. Reimagining the feminine in *Macbeth*—particularly through modern feminist criticism and adaptations—resonates with contemporary concerns about agency, structural constraint, and the reclamation of marginalized voices, demonstrating the enduring relevance of Shakespeare's exploration of gendered power.

Modern feminist criticism interprets Lady Macbeth's ambition, strategic insight, and rhetorical skill not simply as dangerous transgression, but as responses to systemic gender constraints in a patriarchal society. Her psychological collapse, rather than being read as inevitable punishment, can be seen as a commentary on the costs women bear when navigating male-dominated structures—highlighting the structural oppression that limits female agency.

Similarly, contemporary interpretations of the Weird Sisters recast them as embodiments of female knowledge, autonomy, and foresight rather than purely malevolent forces. This aligns with feminist interests in reclaiming marginalized voices, recognizing the legitimacy and potency of feminine authority, and questioning societal

frameworks that suppress women's influence. In these readings, the "threat" posed by women is reframed: it is not their ambition or intellect that is inherently dangerous, but the patriarchal anxiety that such qualities provoke.

By foregrounding women's agency, insight, and strategic action, contemporary feminist thought transforms *Macbeth* into a text that interrogates gendered power dynamics rather than merely reinforcing them. Reimagining the feminine in this way resonates with broader feminist concerns about structural inequality, the reclamation of voice, and the visibility of women's intellectual, social, and political influence—underscoring the enduring relevance of Shakespeare's exploration of gender, power, and prophecy.

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Unionism at Wesleyan University Philippines (WUP): The WUP Faculty and Staff Association (WUPFSA) Experience

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Abstract— This research investigated the experiences of union members from Wesleyan University Philippines (WUP) based on the WUP Faculty and Staff Association (WUPFSA). Employing a descriptive research design, the research sought to determine the advantages gained from being a member of the union and challenges faced by its members during the 2024–2025 academic year. A sample of 108 respondents was chosen using simple random sampling. The information indicated that union members agreed overwhelmingly that unionism had a favorable effect, with most in agreement that the union successfully guards members' rights, tends to specific needs, and reinforces a good sense of unity and fellow feeling among workers. The most highly recognized value was the perception of unity and belonging that comes with union membership, followed by its ability to negotiate improved working conditions and enhance employee morale and job satisfaction. While these are noted in positive terms, union members also reported moderate difficulties that affect their experiences. Some of the outstanding issues were recurrent resistance from the administration in putting agreed-upon benefits in place, communication breakdowns between the university administration and the union, and uncertainty regarding job security. The enforcement of the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) also became an ongoing issue. These results imply that although the union is generally effective in providing assistance and enhancing solidarity, there remains a need to streamline communication avenues and maintain consistent enforcement of agreements. In general, the research indicates both the positive contribution of unionism at WUP as well as areas in need of strategic focus to improve labor relations and organizational harmony further.



Keywords— CBA, Job Satisfaction, Labor, Unionism, WUPFSA

I. INTRODUCTION

Labor unions play a significant role in safeguarding the rights and welfare of workers across various industries (Abdul Wahab, Abdul Rahim & Abdullah, 2023; Ibrahim & Razali, 2023), including the academic industry. In higher learning institutions, workers and academic staff unions are representative voices that advocate for fair work terms, individual growth, and a more representative form of governance. In Wesleyan University Philippines (WUP), the WUP Faculty and Staff Association (WUPFSA) has been a key force in the efforts to raise the

workers' issues and in the fostering of a culture of solidarity and cooperation (Campagnaro & D'urzo, 2021).

WUP unionism is not merely a product of legal advocacy but also a key contributor to academic cohesion, job contentment, and morale among staff (Patel, 2013). The union serves as a representative through collective bargaining and negotiates pay, benefits, and conditions of work so that the staff and faculty are aided professionally and personally. WUPFSA is also very active in the resolution of grievances, promoting employee-

administration cooperation, and creating programs that meet particular member needs.

This study endeavors to understand the perceptions concerning unionism among WUP's staff and teaching staff. It evaluates the way the workers view the benefits of being unionized, including job security, tranquillity of mind at work, and professional growth opportunities (Karathanos-Aguilar & Ervin-Kassab, 2022). Additionally, the study seeks to identify some of the issues encountered by union members, including enforcement of policies, communication failures, and representation in decision-making. Knowledge of unionism's strengths and weaknesses in WUP will be central to improving labor-management relations and institutional development.

To acquire more detailed results, the study accumulated evidence from WUP faculty and staff through a systematic survey. The survey contained demographic information, Likert-scale items to rate the perceived benefits and challenges, and areas where the union's efforts needed improvement. The respondents rated statements regarding union effectiveness, job satisfaction, involvement, and issues that continued to exist in all their roles in the university.

While the proactive activity of WUPFSA has been in practice, there is a necessity to identify how employees and administrators perceive the actual benefits and issues of unionism. The study aims to assess the union's performance in promoting the well-being of employees and identifying areas that need improvement to improve union-management coordination at Wesleyan University Philippines.

II. METHODOLOGY

This research used the descriptive research design. It described the benefits of unionism to its members and challenges encountered by the union members. According to Sirisilla (2023), "Descriptive research design is a powerful tool used by scientists and researchers to gather information about a particular group or phenomenon. This type of research provides a detailed and accurate picture of the characteristics and behaviors of a particular population or subject." The 108 respondents were chosen using simple random sampling. "A simple random sample is a randomly selected subset of a population. In this sampling method, each member of the population has an exactly equal chance of being selected (Thomas, 2023)". The study covers the school year 2024-2025.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Benefits of Unionism

Table 1. Benefits

Benefits of Unionism	Wm	Verbal Description
1. The union at Wesleyan University Philippines helps protect the rights of its members.	4.40	Strongly Agree
2. Union membership contributes to higher job security for faculty and staff.	4.25	Strongly Agree
3. The union effectively negotiates for better salaries and benefits on behalf of its members.	4.15	Moderately Agree
4. The presence of a union fosters a harmonious relationship between employees and management.	4.16	Moderately Agree
5. The union provides valuable support in resolving workplace conflicts and grievances.	4.30	Strongly Agree
6. Union activities contribute to higher morale and job satisfaction among employees.	4.35	Strongly Agree
7. The union's programs and initiatives address the specific needs of its members.	4.40	Strongly Agree
8. Being part of the union encourages greater participation in university governance and decision-making.	4.30	Strongly Agree
9. The union helps promote professional growth and development opportunities for its members.	4.30	Strongly Agree
10. The union plays an important role in maintaining academic peace and stability within the university.	4.30	Strongly Agree
11. The union's advocacy has led to improvements in working conditions at the university.	4.35	Strongly Agree
12. I feel a sense of solidarity and community because of my membership in the union.	4.45	Strongly Agree
Overall Weighted Mean	4.31	Strongly Agree

Table 1 shows the benefits of unionism as described by the union members. They strongly agreed that the benefits are very good, as reflected in the overall weighted mean of 4.31. The highest in terms of weighted mean is the item “12. I feel a sense of solidarity and community because of my membership in the union” (Wm=4.45). It was followed by the items “1. The union at Wesleyan University Philippines helps protect the rights of its members and 7. The union’s programs and initiatives address the specific needs of its members”, both with a weighted mean of 4.40. Additionally, “11. The union’s advocacy has led to improvements in working conditions at the university and 6. Union activities contribute to higher morale and job satisfaction among employees (Wm=4.35)”.

Results from Table 1 indicate the perceived value and success of unionism among Wesleyan University Philippines' union members. The respondents showed strong agreement that their membership in the union offers substantial gains, reflecting that the union is hard at work and effective in helping and defending its members. The general positive attitude signifies that the union is serving to respond to the concerns and desires of the university's staff and maintaining its integral position in the workplace.

Of the benefits, most forcefully recognized by members were the feeling of solidarity and sense of community produced by union membership (Boyd & Martin, 2022; Pei et al., 2024). The belonging suggests that the union has successfully constructed a collective identity and promoted cooperation and support among workers. Also, strong agreement was observed in the perception of the union's involvement in safeguarding the rights of the members and representing particular needs, suggesting the union is perceived as a reliable association. These answers prove that the programs and initiatives of the union are both responsive and relevant to its members.

The implications of these results are significant to the university administration as well as to other labor unions. To the university, the information highlights the need to preserve a respectful and cooperative relationship with the union, acknowledging its role in facilitating a good work climate. For other unions, this is an example of successful member mobilization and advocacy that demonstrates how putting member needs and morale first can increase satisfaction and organizational unity. A powerful, respected union plays a role in both employee welfare and institutional achievement (Madhura, 2020)

2. Challenges Encountered by Union Members

Table 2. Challenges

Challenges Encountered by Union Members	Wm	Verbal Description
1. Union members sometimes experience difficulties in ensuring that management fully implements the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA).	4.25	Strongly Agree
2. The union occasionally faces challenges in addressing disputes related to changes in university policies.	4.05	Moderately Agree
3. Union members feel that their concerns about workplace policies are sometimes not addressed as quickly as they would like.	4.05	Moderately Agree
4. The union sometimes encounters resistance when advocating for the continuation of agreed-upon benefits.	4.30	Strongly Agree
5. Union members occasionally feel uncertain about job security due to changes in university policies.	4.25	Strongly Agree
6. Communication between the union and university management could be improved to better address members' concerns.	4.30	Strongly Agree
7. Union members feel that their input in decision-making processes at Wesleyan University Philippines is not actively considered.	4.05	Moderately Agree
8. Union members sometimes find it challenging to stay fully informed about updates and developments related to union activities and negotiations.	4.10	Moderately Agree
Overall Weighted Mean	4.17	Moderately Agree

The overall challenges encountered by the union members are seen as moderate by them, as reflected in the overall weighted mean of 4.17. The highest rated challenges according to the survey are the items: “The union

sometimes encounters resistance when advocating for the continuation of agreed-upon benefits (Wm=4.30)”; “6. Communication between the union and university management could be improved to better address members’

concerns (Wm=4.30)”; “1. Union members sometimes experience difficulties in ensuring that management fully implements the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) (Wm=4.25)”; and “5. Union members occasionally feel uncertain about job security due to changes in university policies (Wm=4.25)”.

The results suggest that members of the union experience their problems as moderate in general. Although the union is seen to be performing well in most aspects, members still face significant problems that erode their confidence and experience as part of the organization. These issues underscore endemic problems in communication, agreement implementation, and the general relationship between the university management and the union (Chang et al., 2022), which imply that there has been improvement, but some obstacles continue to impede maximum functioning.

The most salient issues members have pointed out are resistance from management whenever the union fights for the retention of benefits already agreed upon, and breakdowns in communication between the union and the administration, especially when there is a change in top management position. These issues point to a lack of regular communication and shared understanding, which can erode trust and prevent progress on key matters. Moreover, anxieties regarding the complete enforcement of the Collective Bargaining Agreement and job insecurity anxieties speak to systemic matters which need a clearer framework for enforceability and more open policy revisions from the university (Karimi, 2020; Leroy-Dyer, 2023).

The significance of the findings is double. Firstly, for the union, there is a need to consolidate communication strategies and bargaining formats to ensure agreements are fulfilled and members are secure and informed. Second, for university management, these findings must be a stimulus to interact more constructively with the union and treat it as a key partner in sustaining labor harmony and institutional stability. If properly addressed together, these issues can create a better trust-based and productive work culture for all parties.

IV. CONCLUSION

Unionism at Wesleyan University Philippines is greatly perceived positively by its members. The high level of solidarity, safeguarding of rights, and sensitivity to member needs emphasizes the union's important role in bridging a supportive and enabling working environment. These advantages emphasize the union's functionality not just as a representative unit but likewise as a key source of

morale, job satisfaction, and group identity among university workers.

Yet the existence of moderate challenges indicates that there are still aspects that require improvement, most especially in communication and policy enforcement. Though the union is mostly effective in its ability to provide core functions, some issues left to be resolved, like resistance to the implementation of benefits and ambiguities regarding job security, indicating the need for increased collaboration with university management. Resolving these issues through open communication and regular policy enforcement will be key in enhancing the union's influence and keeping its members' trust intact.

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Professors' Feedback Strategies for Correcting Syntactic Errors in EFL Students' Writing: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract— *Effective feedback is a cornerstone of second language writing instruction, particularly in addressing syntactic errors that hinder students' linguistic development and communicative competence. This study investigates the strategies employed by university EFL professors to correct syntactic errors in students' written compositions. Using a qualitative research design, semi-structured interviews were conducted with twelve EFL professors from diverse non-native English-speaking university contexts. Data were analysed using thematic coding in NVivo software, revealing four primary feedback strategies: direct correction and explanation, encouragement fostering autonomous learning, individualized feedback tailored to student needs, and varied feedback approaches. The study situates these strategies within the theoretical frameworks of interlanguage theory and error analysis, highlighting their effectiveness in promoting both syntactic accuracy and learner autonomy. Implications for EFL pedagogy, curriculum design, and teacher training programs are discussed, emphasizing the importance of adaptive, student-centered feedback practices.*



Keywords— *EFL writing, syntactic errors, feedback strategies, qualitative research, university professors*

I. INTRODUCTION

Writing in a foreign language is widely recognized as one of the most challenging skills for learners, particularly at the university level. Among the difficulties learners face, syntactic errors—such as incorrect word order, subject-verb agreement errors, tense misuse, and misapplication of grammatical rules—are especially pervasive and can significantly impede communication and comprehension (Ellis, 2008; Ferris, 2010). These errors often stem from first language interference, limited exposure to target language syntax, and developmental stages in learners' interlanguage systems (Corder, 1967; Selinker, 1972).

University students are expected to write academically with a high degree of grammatical accuracy, which makes the role of instructors' feedback particularly crucial. Feedback serves not only to correct errors but also to guide learners in developing self-monitoring and autonomous writing skills (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Previous studies have shown that effective feedback contributes to improved syntactic competence, increased motivation, and higher writing

confidence among EFL students (Bitchener & Knoch, 2008; Liu & Brown, 2015).

Despite the importance of feedback, there is considerable variation in how professors provide it. Differences arise from teaching experience, disciplinary context, cultural expectations, and pedagogical beliefs, leading to diverse strategies in error correction (Hyland, 2003; Ferris, 2011). Understanding these strategies is essential for informing teacher training programs, improving feedback practices, and ultimately enhancing students' writing performance.

The present study addresses the following research questions:

1. What feedback strategies do university EFL professors employ to correct syntactic errors in student writing?
2. How do professors adapt their feedback to individual learners' needs?
3. What are the perceived challenges and benefits associated with these feedback strategies?

By exploring these questions through a qualitative lens, this study seeks to provide insights into effective feedback practices that can be generalized across non-native English-speaking university contexts.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Syntactic Errors in EFL Writing

Syntactic errors are common in EFL learners' written compositions and reflect developmental and interlanguage processes (Corder, 1967). Such errors include incorrect verb tense, subject-verb agreement, article misuse, preposition errors, and word order violations. Persistent syntactic errors can reduce the clarity, coherence, and academic quality of writing, which underscores the need for effective corrective feedback (Ferris, 2010).

Several studies highlight the influence of L1 interference in producing syntactic errors. For instance, learners whose first language has different word order structures often struggle with English sentence construction (Odlin, 1989). Additionally, learner errors may result from overgeneralization of grammatical rules, developmental stages in second language acquisition, or insufficient exposure to authentic language input (Ellis, 2008).

2.2. The Role of Feedback in Writing Instruction

Feedback is broadly defined as information provided to learners regarding their performance, intended to improve future outcomes (Shute, 2008). In EFL writing, feedback can be corrective, focusing on identifying and rectifying errors, or facilitative, aimed at promoting self-regulated learning and critical reflection. Corrective feedback can be **direct**, offering explicit corrections, or **indirect**, signaling errors and encouraging learners to self-correct (Ferris, 2006; Bitchener & Knoch, 2008).

Research shows that feedback effectiveness depends on its timing, clarity, and alignment with learners' proficiency levels. Immediate feedback is more effective for persistent errors, whereas delayed feedback can promote self-assessment skills (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Feedback also interacts with learner motivation; positive, constructive feedback enhances engagement, whereas overly critical feedback can demotivate students (Liu & Brown, 2015).

2.3. Professors' Feedback Strategies

Professors employ a variety of feedback strategies in EFL writing classrooms. **Direct correction and explanation** are commonly used for frequent or systematic errors, providing learners with clear models of correct usage (Ferris, 2011). **Encouragement and facilitation** support autonomous learning, prompting students to reflect on their mistakes and develop self-correction skills (Vygotsky,

1978). **Individualized feedback** involves adapting correction to students' specific needs, considering factors such as language proficiency, prior knowledge, and learning style (Hyland, 2003).

Empirical studies highlight the benefits of **varied feedback approaches**, combining written comments, oral discussion, peer feedback, and digital tools to reinforce learning (Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Li & Li, 2020). However, challenges remain, including managing large class sizes, balancing accuracy and fluency, and addressing diverse learner expectations.

2.4. Feedback and Learner Motivation

Motivation is a key factor influencing how students respond to feedback. Studies indicate that students are more likely to act on feedback when it is constructive, supportive, and aligned with their goals (Dörnyei, 2001). Professors who combine correction with encouragement can foster positive attitudes toward writing, increase self-efficacy, and promote persistence in language learning (Ushioda, 2011).

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Objectives

To identify and describe the different feedback strategies used by university EFL professors to correct syntactic errors in students' written compositions.

To examine how EFL professors adapt their feedback approaches to address the individual needs, proficiency levels, and learning styles of their students.

To explore and analyze the perceived challenges and pedagogical benefits associated with various feedback strategies in the context of EFL writing instruction.

3.2. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative, exploratory design to investigate professors' feedback strategies. Semi-structured interviews were used to capture rich, detailed insights into their practices, allowing flexibility for participants to elaborate on their approaches and reasoning (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.3. Participants

Twelve university EFL professors participated, representing various non-native English-speaking universities. Participants were purposively selected based on teaching experience (5–20 years) and expertise in teaching academic writing. Six participants were male, and six were female. Disciplines taught included linguistics, literature, and general EFL courses.

3.4. Data Collection

Interviews were conducted via online video conferencing, lasting 45–60 minutes. Questions focused on feedback strategies for syntactic errors, rationale behind chosen methods, adaptation to learner needs, and perceived effectiveness. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

3.5. Data Analysis

Transcripts were analyzed using NVivo software. Open coding identified initial categories, which were refined into four main themes: direct correction and explanation, encouragement fostering autonomous learning, individualized feedback, and varied feedback strategies. Sub-themes were developed to capture nuances, such as types of direct feedback, levels of autonomy promotion, and methods of tailoring feedback.

3.6. Trustworthiness

To ensure credibility, member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with participants for validation. Peer debriefing was used to reduce researcher bias. Dependability was enhanced through detailed documentation of coding and thematic analysis.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

Participants provided informed consent, and confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing names and institutions. The study adhered to ethical guidelines for human subject's research.

IV. RESULTS

4.1. Direct Correction and Explanation

Professors frequently employed direct correction, particularly for recurring or critical syntactic errors. Sub-themes included:

- **Explicit correction with rule explanation:** "I highlight incorrect verb forms and explain the tense rules, so students understand why it is wrong."
- **Error modeling:** Providing model sentences to demonstrate correct syntax.
- **Immediate versus delayed correction:** Some professors corrected in real-time during tutorials, while others returned annotated assignments.

4.2. Encouragement and Autonomous Learning

Encouraging self-correction was emphasized to foster autonomy:

- **Prompting reflection:** Students were asked to identify and correct errors themselves.

- **Resource guidance:** Professors recommended grammar guides and online tools.
- **Balancing support and independence:** "I avoid giving the answer immediately; instead, I guide them to the solution."

4.3. Individualized Feedback

Feedback was adapted to student proficiency, motivation, and prior performance:

- **Differentiated detail levels:** Novice writers received more detailed explanations; advanced learners received concise prompts.
- **Personalized examples:** Professors used student-specific sentences to illustrate corrections.
- **Addressing recurring patterns:** Focused feedback on repeated error types.

4.4. Varied Feedback Strategies

Professors used multiple modalities:

- **Written annotations:** Highlighted errors with marginal notes.
- **Oral feedback:** One-on-one sessions allowed immediate clarification.
- **Peer-assisted review:** Encouraged collaborative error detection and correction.
- **Digital feedback:** Some professors used online platforms to provide interactive corrections.

V. DISCUSSION

The study highlights that effective feedback in EFL writing is multi-dimensional, combining direct correction with autonomy-promoting strategies. Direct feedback supports accuracy, while facilitative approaches develop self-regulation. Individualized and varied feedback enhances engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes.

Findings align with prior research emphasizing the need for adaptive, context-sensitive feedback (Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Bitchener & Knoch, 2008). Professors' strategic blending of correction types demonstrates professional judgment, balancing error correction with learner autonomy.

The study also illustrates practical challenges, such as time constraints, diverse student proficiency levels, and large class sizes. Addressing these challenges requires teacher training programs to focus on feedback literacy, enabling professors to deliver effective, efficient, and learner-centered feedback.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined EFL professors' feedback strategies for correcting syntactic errors, identifying four main approaches: direct correction, autonomy encouragement, individualized feedback, and varied strategies. Effective feedback requires flexibility, responsiveness, and a balance between explicit instruction and learner independence.

Recommendations:

1. Combine direct and indirect feedback to balance accuracy and autonomy.
2. Tailor feedback to individual learners' proficiency and needs.
3. Encourage self-reflection and resource use to promote autonomous learning.
4. Utilize multiple feedback modalities to accommodate diverse learning styles.

Future research should explore longitudinal impacts of these strategies on syntactic development, cross-cultural differences in feedback, and integration of technology-enhanced feedback tools.

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Rewriting the Mythic: Cultural Hybridity and Speculative Reimagination in Samit Basu's *The GameWorld Trilogy*

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Abstract— Samit Basu's novel *The GameWorld Trilogy* presents a vibrant reworking of Indian myth through the imaginative framework of speculative fiction. This paper explores how Basu reconstructs mythic themes from Indian epics and folklore while blending them with the conventions of fantasy and modern storytelling. Building on Homi Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity and insights from fantasy studies, the research shows how Basu uses humor, parody, and intertextuality to reshape inherited narratives for a global readership. His writing transforms myth into a living, dynamic force that speaks to contemporary realities of identity, colonial history, and cultural change. The study argues that *The GameWorld Trilogy* is not only a playful work of fantasy but also an intellectual project that redefines myth and imagination in twenty-first-century Indian English literature.



Keywords— Cultural hybridity, fantasy, mythic rewriting, Samit Basu, speculative fiction.

I. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Indian writing in English has moved beyond realism to embrace new imaginative forms such as fantasy and science fiction. Among the most innovative of these writers is Samit Basu, whose *The GameWorld Trilogy* blends epic motifs, folklore, and popular culture in ways that engage with both local and global literary traditions. Basu's novels demonstrate how postcolonial Indian authors use speculative fiction to reclaim myth as a living, evolving resource rather than a relic of the past. His creative reworking of myths from the Mahabharata, Ramayana, and regional folktales brings Indian cultural memory into dialogue with the global fantasy tradition (Subramanian 43). The result is a narrative world that is humorous, ironic, and deeply reflective of India's multicultural identity. This paper examines how Basu's trilogy performs a "rewriting of the mythic" through cultural hybridity and speculative imagination.

Research Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to explore how Samit Basu's *The GameWorld Trilogy* comprising *The Sinoqin Prophecies*, *The Manticore's Secret* and *The*

Unwaba Revelations reimagines and reconstructs Indian mythological narratives within the creative framework of speculative fiction. The research aims to examine the ways in which Basu fuses ancient mythic patterns with modern cultural and literary sensibilities to articulate a distinct postcolonial imagination. Specifically, this study seeks to analyze the narrative techniques such as irony, parody, intertextuality, and humor through which Basu questions conventional notions of heroism, divinity, and destiny that dominate traditional myth-based storytelling. Another important objective is to investigate how Basu's deployment of cultural hybridity, as conceptualized by Homi K. Bhabha, functions both as an aesthetic strategy and as a form of cultural negotiation. The study also intends to identify how the blending of Indian mythic imagery with global fantasy tropes generates a new literary idiom that reflects contemporary Indian identity in a globalized world.

Research Questions

Building upon these objectives, the study is guided by the following research questions. How does *The GameWorld Trilogy* reinterpret and reconstruct traditional Indian myths for a modern, globally aware readership? In

what ways does Basu's creative process embody cultural hybridity as both a thematic and structural device? What narrative and stylistic mechanisms such as intertextuality, parody, and genre blending enable Basu to transform mythic material into a commentary on present-day sociocultural realities? Finally, how does the trilogy's mythic reimagining contribute to the broader evolution of Indian English speculative fiction as a postcolonial literary form?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly attention to Indian speculative fiction has expanded notably in recent years. Suparno Banerjee in *Indian Science Fiction, Patterns, History and Hybridity* (2020) argues that speculative narratives in India serve as laboratories for cultural negotiation, where myth and modernity coexist. Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay similarly observes that Indian speculative fiction represents "a dialogue between technological modernity and inherited mythic imagination" (*Science Fiction Studies* 257). Classical theoretical approaches to myth by Northrop Frye and Roland Barthes continue to shape the analysis of mythic structures. Frye defines the mythic as "a symbolic narrative embodying collective hopes and fears" (Frye 135), while Barthes describes myth as "a form of speech" that adapts to culture's shifting needs (Barthes 109). In the Indian context, Meenakshi Mukherjee's *The Perishable Empire* and Shashi Deshpande (2007) emphasize how mythic retellings in Indian English literature reflect national memory and social transformation. In fantasy studies, Aishwarya Subramanian notes that Basu's fiction "marries the self-awareness of postmodern fantasy with the cultural richness of Indian narrative tradition" (44). Anjali Nerlekar sees Basu's work as a "postmodern transformation of the epic" (86). Amal Chatterjee (2015) and Priya Joshi (2010) have explored how popular Indian fiction reclaims myth as a means of addressing colonial history and contemporary identity. Additionally, Rini Bhattacharya Pandey (2021) and Ananya Jahanara Kabir (2011) investigate how myth functions as a living discourse in modern Indian writing, while Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* contextualizes these retellings within broader postcolonial resistance. Despite this growing body of scholarship, detailed analyses of Basu's trilogy remain scarce. This paper, therefore, contributes to filling this gap by examining how Basu reworks myth and hybridity within Indian fantasy to create a distinctly postcolonial mode of storytelling.

Myth, Modernity, and the Postcolonial Imagination

Samit Basu's *The GameWorld Trilogy* embodies the coexistence of myth and modernity, presenting a fictional universe where the sacred and the secular interact

dynamically. In Basu's narrative, myth is neither discarded nor blindly preserved, it is repurposed to mirror the tensions of a society negotiating between inherited traditions and contemporary aspirations. The trilogy's playful engagement with epic structures, heroes burdened with doubt, gods stripped of omnipotence, and prophecies mocked through irony illustrates how myth can evolve into a site of cultural reflection. By fusing traditional Indian motifs with the narrative pace of global fantasy, Basu exposes the adaptability of mythic imagination in a postcolonial world. His fiction suggests that mythology is not a static inheritance but a living discourse that responds to modern anxieties about technology, globalization, and identity. The collision of ancient cosmologies with futuristic settings underscores a key postcolonial insight that modernity in India is always entangled with its mythic past. In this sense, Basu's work extends beyond entertainment, it analysis that how storytelling itself functions as cultural memory, shaping how nations imagine their place in an interconnected, rapidly changing world.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study follows a qualitative textual analysis grounded in postcolonial theory and myth criticism. The central theoretical anchor is Homi K. Bhabha's notion of cultural hybridity, which describes how cultural meaning is created through negotiation rather than opposition (Bhabha 55). Basu's fiction exemplifies this hybrid process, blending Western fantasy models with South Asian narrative traditions. The analysis also draws from Northrop Frye's archetypal criticism and Tzvetan Todorov's theory of the fantasy. Frye's idea of the mythic mode (Frye 136) and Todorov's definition of the fantasy as the hesitation between reality and the supernatural (Todorov 33) illuminate how Basu uses mythic structures and speculative tropes to engage with questions of power, culture, and belonging.

IV. DISCUSSION

Basu's mythic rewriting reflects the hybrid consciousness of postcolonial India, where cultural identity is never singular. Using humor, irony, and parody, he dismantles hierarchical notions of the sacred and secular. In doing so, Basu constructs what Bhabha calls a "third space of enunciation" (Bhabha 56), where conflicting cultural voices coexist and interact. His trilogy redefines the function of myth, instead of revering it as divine truth, Basu treats myth as a dynamic storytelling grammar open to reinterpretation. This aligns with Roland Barthes's idea of myth as an evolving semiotic system.

The novels also echo Edward Said's claim that rewriting inherited stories becomes an act of reclaiming narrative authority in postcolonial societies (Said 25).

Furthermore, Basu's humorous dismantling of epic tropes democratizes myth. His characters unlike the flawless heroes of classical epics reflect contemporary anxieties about morality, technology, and globalization. Through intertextual layering, Basu aligns with Jack Zipes's argument that fantasy and fairy tales "sustain a living dialogue with culture's ethical imagination" (Zipes 14). In global terms, Basu's work situates Indian fantasy alongside Western contemporaries like Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett, yet retains a distinctive South Asian texture. By merging cultural idioms, he creates a model of "world fantasy" that is both Indian in spirit and transnational in form.

V. FINDINGS

The present study finds that Samit Basu's *The GameWorld Trilogy* redefines the role of myth in contemporary Indian English fiction by transforming inherited cultural narratives into spaces of creative negotiation. Through his use of parody, irony, and intertextuality, Basu dismantles the solemnity traditionally associated with epic and mythic discourse, thereby democratizing myth for modern readers. His blending of Indian mythic archetypes with western fantasy conventions reveals a complex process of cultural hybridity, where elements from different traditions coexist without hierarchy. The research further discovers that Basu's world-building embodies postcolonial self-awareness and his characters, moral ambiguities, fragmented identities, and ironic heroism reflect the uncertainties of a society shaped by colonial memory and global modernity. The findings also indicate that Basu's narrative technique mixing humor with philosophy and folklore with science creates a distinctly Indian form of speculative fiction that both critiques and celebrates cultural multiplicity. Myth in Basu's fiction is not presented as a fixed, sacred structure but as a dynamic and adaptive framework that evolves with changing times. This transformation of myth into a living discourse underscores the postcolonial writer's ability to reclaim narrative authority, reframe identity, and articulate new modes of belonging through imaginative storytelling.

VI. CONCLUSION

Samit Basu's *The GameWorld Trilogy* demonstrates how myth and fantasy can serve as powerful instruments for cultural reinterpretation. His novels not only entertain but also interrogate questions of identity,

authority, and creative freedom. By fusing ancient mythic motifs with speculative imagination, Basu revitalizes the relationship between tradition and modernity. His approach transforms Indian fantasy into a space of intellectual exploration where humor, hybridity, and imagination coexist. Basu's contribution lies in showing that mythology need not remain frozen in the past, it can evolve, adapt, and speak meaningfully to the complexities of the present world.

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ChatGPT as a tool for Enhancing Explanation Letter Writing Skills

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Abstract— This study investigated the effectiveness of ChatGPT as an instructional support tool in enhancing the explanation letter writing skills of Technical Writing students at Cebu Doctors' University. It aimed to address students' recurring difficulties in applying the correct format, organization, elaboration, tone, and grammar, language usage, and mechanics in formal written communication. Employing a quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design supported by a perception survey, the research examined measurable improvements in students' performance following a ChatGPT-assisted intervention that incorporated guided modeling, interactive feedback, and revision-based activities. Fifty (50) first-year students from the EXCEL-Med Program participated in the study. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and a paired sample t-test. Findings revealed statistically significant improvements across all five writing elements, with the largest effect observed in format, organization, elaboration, and tone, and a moderate improvement in grammar, language usage, and mechanics. Students' perception ratings further indicated strong agreement that ChatGPT was easy to use, enhanced confidence and understanding, and effectively supported skill development. Overall, the study concludes that ChatGPT-assisted instruction significantly improves students' explanation letter writing performance and fosters confidence and awareness in responsible AI use. The results emphasize the potential of integrating AI-based tools as complementary pedagogical aids that support the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) by promoting digital literacy, communication competence, and ethical technology use in higher education.



Keywords— AI-assisted instruction, ChatGPT, English teaching, explanation letter writing skills, Philippines

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale of the Study

Writing is universally recognized as one of the four core language skills, alongside speaking, reading, and listening (Ling, 2016). It serves as a fundamental medium for expressing ideas, engaging in critical thought, and participating in academic and professional discourse. At the university level, writing proficiency reflects a student's ability to communicate with clarity, precision, and logical organization which are skills that support success in coursework, research, and workplace communication (Asnas & Hidayanti, 2024; Bailey, 2015). Academic writing, in particular, demands adherence to formal

structures, evidence-based reasoning, and a coherent flow of ideas.

Within the broader scope of academic and professional communication, the explanation letter holds a distinct position. Although often classified as a professional genre, it is frequently required in academic contexts. For instance, when students provide justifications for absences, late submissions, or special requests. Writing such correspondence requires the integration of multiple competencies such as structuring information logically, maintaining an appropriate tone, presenting reasons persuasively, and ensuring grammatical accuracy. These

competencies are essential for both academic achievement and professional credibility.

In the Philippine higher education context, explanation letter writing is commonly addressed within Technical Writing or Purposive Communication courses, which aim to develop students' ability to produce clear, concise, and purposeful communication for real-world applications (Chang, 2024). This skill is particularly relevant because it synthesizes clarity, tone, and logical reasoning into a format frequently required in both academic and professional situations.

Despite its importance, many students continue to face persistent challenges in producing high-quality written work. Large-scale assessments such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in the United States report that nearly two-thirds of students are writing below expected levels (Institute of Education Sciences, 2025), and similar patterns are evident internationally. Research highlights that language learners often struggle with grammar (Roxas, 2020; Sajjad et al., 2021), vocabulary (Mumtaz, 2021), sentence structure (Ahmed, 2019), and translation accuracy (Ma, 2021). Beyond these surface-level issues, higher-order skills such as organizing ideas, adapting tone to audience, and developing persuasive arguments also remain common difficulties.

In the Philippines, these challenges are further intensified by structural realities within the educational system. Large class sizes, often exceeding recommended student-teacher ratios, limit opportunities for personalized feedback (Solomon, 2025). Instructional time is divided among multiple competencies, reducing focused practice in specialized writing tasks like explanation letters (Galang, 2021). Many institutions also lack access to writing centers, peer tutoring, or online resources proven to enhance writing proficiency when available (Ubaldo, 2021). Moreover, writing assessment often emphasizes surface correctness over developmental aspects such as coherence, tone, and audience awareness (Esternon & Diva, 2024). Consequently, students lack sustained guidance to refine higher-order writing abilities.

Advances in artificial intelligence (AI) offer new opportunities to address these challenges by providing accessible, flexible, and personalized writing support. ChatGPT, developed by OpenAI, can generate human-like text, correct grammar and style, suggest alternative phrasing, and offer instant feedback on organization and tone (Javaid et al., 2023). Its accessibility via web and mobile platforms enables students to engage in self-directed writing practice, fostering independent learning.

Research supports its educational potential across contexts. In Asia, studies show improvements in

organization, clarity, and motivation among students using AI-assisted writing tools (Song & Song, 2023). In the Philippines, De Jesus et al. (2024) found that students valued ChatGPT's ability to generate ideas and structure responses, while Caratiquit and Caratiquit (2023) observed its positive influence on academic motivation and overall performance. Similar benefits have been reported internationally, including gains in higher-order thinking and writing proficiency when ChatGPT is integrated into learning environments (Wang & Fan, 2025).

ChatGPT's value lies in its ability to provide immediate, progressive feedback that supports continuous improvement in student writing. Studies show it helps overcome challenges in organization, coherence, grammar, and vocabulary through targeted suggestions (Huang & Tan, 2023). For language learners, it reduces anxiety, provides reliable explanations, and enhances motivation (Su et al., 2023; Ali et al., 2023; Kohnke et al., 2023). Furthermore, its versatility extends beyond writing instruction to language acquisition and research support (Barrot, 2023).

However, concerns remain. Over-reliance on AI can hinder critical thinking and originality (Zhai, Wibowo, & Li, 2024), and inaccuracies or illogical outputs may occur without human oversight (Amaro et al., 2023). Ethical issues of authorship and academic honesty have also emerged, as plagiarism detection tools struggle to identify AI-generated text (Liebrenz et al., 2023). In response, best practices emphasize guided use under teacher supervision, encouraging students to critically evaluate AI outputs and apply them ethically (Viorennita et al., 2023; Ray, 2023).

While the benefits of AI in academic writing are well documented, limited research exists on its application to specialized genres such as explanation letters, especially within Philippine higher education. Addressing this gap informs discipline-specific pedagogy and supports the responsible integration of AI in curricula (Villarino, 2025).

Thus, this study explored the potential of ChatGPT as a supplementary tool for enhancing explanation letter writing skills within a structured Technical Writing curriculum. In alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education), this research promotes the integration of ICT-based and AI-assisted strategies that foster digital literacy, critical thinking, and effective communication skills. By focusing on a genre that bridges academic and professional contexts, this study aims to provide actionable insights for preparing students to meet 21st-century communication demands.

1.2 Theoretical Background of the Study

This study is anchored on three complementary theories that explain how ChatGPT can enhance students'

writing performance: the Cognitive Process Theory of Writing (Flower & Hayes, 1981), the Formative Assessment Theory (Black & Wiliam, 1998), and the Theory of AI-Enhanced Academic Writing (Talili, 2024). Together, these frameworks provide a coherent foundation for understanding how AI tools can support cognitive, pedagogical, and ethical dimensions of writing instruction.

The Cognitive Process Theory of Writing views writing as a recursive and dynamic process involving planning, translating, and reviewing (Flower & Hayes, 1981). Rather than a linear task, writing requires continuous problem-solving and decision-making (Moran, 2019). Recent studies demonstrate that generative AI tools can facilitate each stage by offering prompts for brainstorming and organization, lexical alternatives during drafting, and instant feedback for revision (Liu, 2022). In this study, ChatGPT functions as a cognitive scaffold that helps students plan, structure, and refine their explanation letters, improving tone, coherence, and grammatical accuracy. This cyclical interaction fosters continuous learning and aligns with Ceylan's (2019) view that scaffolded digital tools enhance students' ability to produce organized and audience-appropriate texts.

The Formative Assessment Theory (Black & Wiliam, 1998) emphasizes the value of timely and actionable feedback in improving learning outcomes. Studies affirm its effectiveness in writing instruction, especially when feedback is structured and immediate (Haq et al., 2020; Zahaf, 2019; Zhan & Yan, 2025; Dai et al., 2023). Within this framework, ChatGPT serves as a real-time formative assessment tool that provides personalized feedback on grammar, organization, and tone (Mahapatra, 2024). By evaluating and deciding whether to accept or modify AI-generated suggestions, students develop metacognitive awareness and self-regulation (Lipnevich & Smith, 2022). Moreover, ChatGPT addresses the challenge of large class sizes by delivering scalable, individualized feedback that complements teacher support (Abdelrahman, 2020).

The Theory of AI-Enhanced Academic Writing (Talili, 2024) provides a modern perspective on the responsible integration of AI in education. It identifies the following four key dimensions: technological augmentation, cognitive efficiency, ethical responsibility, and policy implementation. ChatGPT automates lower-order writing tasks such as grammar checking and formatting, freeing students to focus on higher-order reasoning and rhetorical strategy. With guided use, it promotes efficiency and ethical literacy, ensuring that AI functions as a support tool rather than a substitute for creativity and critical thinking. This approach is particularly relevant in the Philippine higher

education context, where limited access to writing support underscores the need for scalable, ethically guided technological solutions.

Collectively, these theories explain how ChatGPT can serve as both a cognitive and formative aid within an ethically grounded, technology-enhanced writing pedagogy by supporting students' development of clarity, organization, and professionalism in explanation letter writing.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

This research aimed to ascertain the effectiveness of ChatGPT in enhancing explanation letter writing of Technical Writing students at Cebu Doctors' University during the academic year 2025-2026 as the basis for a teaching guide. Specifically, it answered the following sub-problems:

1. What is the students' initial performance in writing explanation letters in terms of the following elements: format, organization, elaboration, tone, and grammar, language usage, and mechanics?
2. What is the final performance of the students in writing explanation letters after using ChatGPT as an enhancement tool based on the aforementioned elements?
3. Is there a significant difference in the explanation letter writing performance of students before and after using ChatGPT as an enhancement tool?
4. What are the students' perceptions on the effectiveness of ChatGPT in improving their explanation letter writing skills in terms of: ease of use, confidence and understanding, effectiveness and skill development, reliance and feature comparison?
5. Based on the findings, what teaching guide can be developed?

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section discusses the research methods that were used in the study. This includes the description of the chosen design for the purpose of this study, explanation of its entire flow, information of the environment, details of the respondents and how they were chosen, instruments that were used for data gathering, procedures that were carried out, statistical treatment of data, and the procedure in scoring the different variables.

2.1 Design

This study employed a one-group quasi-experimental design to examine the effectiveness of ChatGPT in improving the explanation letter writing skills

of Technical Writing students at Cebu Doctors' University. The participants were first-year students from the EXCEL-Med program, who engaged in a structured writing intervention integrating ChatGPT as an instructional support tool. A pre-test–post-test approach was used to measure students' writing performance before and after the intervention. During the process, students received guided instruction on using ChatGPT prompts for drafting and revising explanation letters. The study aimed to determine whether AI-assisted writing could lead to measurable improvement in students' writing performance and to provide insights into the use of ChatGPT as a supplementary tool for enhancing academic writing instruction.

2.2 Flow of the Study

This study employed a structured procedure to assess the effectiveness of ChatGPT-assisted instruction in improving students' explanation letter writing skills. The process began with a pre-test in which students composed an explanation letter without AI support to establish baseline performance, evaluated using a rubric measuring format, organization, elaboration, tone, and grammar. A three-hour instructional session followed, focusing on the ethical and effective use of ChatGPT as a writing support tool. Students received guided practice in prompt formulation, idea generation, drafting, and revision while emphasizing academic integrity and critical evaluation of AI feedback. During the intervention, students wrote a new explanation letter using ChatGPT under teacher supervision, applying its suggestions to refine clarity, coherence, and tone. A post-test was then conducted without ChatGPT assistance to determine skill transfer and improvement. Paired pre- and post-test results were compared to measure learning gains. Additionally, a perception questionnaire gathered students' feedback on ChatGPT's ease of use, effectiveness, and contribution to writing confidence. Insights from all phases informed the development of a ChatGPT-integrated teaching guide for writing instruction.

2.3 Respondents

The respondents of this study were 50 first-year students from the EXCEL-Med Program at Cebu Doctors' University enrolled in the Technical Writing course during the first semester of the academic year 2025–2026. This course and group were chosen because Technical Writing emphasizes clarity, conciseness, and purpose-driven communication which skills directly aligned with the study's focus on enhancing explanation letter writing through ChatGPT assistance.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	10	20%
Female	40	80%
Total	50	100%

All 50 students in the class participated, allowing for full representation of the target population and ensuring a consistent instructional environment under the same teacher and curriculum. Inclusion criteria required that participants be Filipino, officially enrolled in the course, and willing to provide informed consent. By engaging this defined cohort, the study aimed to evaluate students' learning outcomes and perceptions of ChatGPT-assisted instruction, generating insights applicable to similar educational settings integrating AI tools into writing pedagogy.

2.4 Instruments

Two main instruments were used for data collection: a writing rubric and a student-perception questionnaire. The researcher-developed explanation letter writing rubric evaluated five elements—format, organization, elaboration, tone, and grammar, language usage, and mechanics—based on established standards in technical writing instruction. It was reviewed and validated by three language instructors from Cebu Doctors' University to ensure accuracy, relevance, and clarity. The perception questionnaire, adapted from Zebua and Katemba's (2024) study on students' use of ChatGPT for writing improvement, was contextualized for explanation letter writing in a technical writing course. It consisted of statements rated on a five-point Likert scale from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5) and underwent expert validation to confirm reliability and content appropriateness. Together, these instruments ensured the reliable assessment of both students' writing performance and their perceptions of ChatGPT as a support tool in academic writing.

2.5 Data Gathering Procedures

The study was conducted with formal approval from Cebu Doctors' University, endorsed by the College of Medicine, the Research Office, and the EXCEL-Med Program. The participants were 50 first-year EXCEL-Med students enrolled in the Technical Writing course during the first semester of academic year 2025–2026. All qualified students who provided informed consent were included. An orientation session was first held to explain the study's

objectives, procedures, and ethical considerations, followed by the administration of a pre-test where students wrote an explanation letter without ChatGPT assistance to determine baseline writing performance. The intervention consisted of a three-hour instructional session on the ethical and effective use of ChatGPT as a writing support tool. Students practiced prompt formulation, idea generation, and revision using ChatGPT feedback under teacher supervision. A post-test was then conducted, requiring students to write another explanation letter without ChatGPT to assess improvement. Finally, a perception questionnaire was administered to gather students' feedback on ChatGPT's ease of use, effectiveness, and contribution to writing development.

2.6 Statistical Treatment

Several statistical treatments were used to analyze the data. Frequency and percentage distributions summarized the participants' demographic profile, while the mean and standard deviation described their pre-test and post-test scores. A paired sample t-test determined whether significant differences existed between students' writing

performance before and after the intervention, and Cohen's d measured the magnitude of improvement across the writing components. For the perception questionnaire, weighted mean and standard deviation were computed to describe students' responses, which were interpreted using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5).

2.7 Scoring Procedure

Two main scoring procedures were employed in this study. Both the pre-test and post-test writing samples were evaluated by three raters—the researcher and two language instructors—using a researcher-developed rubric assessing five key elements: format, organization, elaboration, tone, and grammar, language usage, and mechanics. Each criterion was rated on a four-point scale, and the mean of all raters' scores was computed to derive a single composite score for each participant. These mean scores were then interpreted based on the established performance scale to determine each student's overall writing proficiency level.

Explanation Letter Writing Performance Scale

Score	Categories	Description
0-4	Did Not Meet Expectations	Shows very weak writing performance. The student demonstrates poor understanding of letter format and organization, with unclear ideas and frequent grammatical and mechanical errors. Tone is inappropriate or inconsistent, and elaboration is minimal or missing. (0–74% accuracy)
5-8	Fairly Satisfactory	Demonstrates limited writing ability. The student partially follows the correct letter format but often misplaces parts or omits essential details. Organization is inconsistent, ideas lack coherence, and grammar or language errors are frequent. (75–79% accuracy)
9-12	Satisfactory	Shows developing writing skills. The student generally uses the correct format and structure, presents ideas with some organization and elaboration, and maintains an acceptable tone. However, minor lapses in grammar, language use, and mechanics remain. (80–84% accuracy)
13-16	Very Satisfactory	Demonstrates solid writing proficiency. The student correctly applies letter format and tone, organizes ideas logically, and elaborates effectively with only a few grammatical or mechanical errors. (85–89% accuracy)
17-20	Outstanding	Exhibits excellent writing competence. The student consistently applies the correct format, presents ideas coherently and persuasively, maintains an appropriate tone, and writes with grammatical accuracy and fluency. (90–100% accuracy)

In addition, participants completed a perception questionnaire designed to evaluate ChatGPT's effectiveness as a writing support tool across the same five components. Responses were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). The questionnaire data were analyzed using descriptive

statistics, with mean scores computed and interpreted according to the corresponding scale intervals. Higher mean values indicated strong positive perceptions of ChatGPT's usefulness and its contribution to students' writing confidence, clarity, and coherence, while lower scores

reflected limited agreement or reservations about its effectiveness.

Five-point Likert Scale

Likert scale interval	Likert-scale	Likert-scale Description
1.00 - 1.79	1	Strongly Disagree
1.80 - 2.59	2	Disagree
2.60 - 3.39	3	Neutral
3.40 - 4.19	4	Agree
4.20 - 5.00	5	Strongly Agree

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Students' Initial Writing Performance

Table 2 presents the pre-test mean scores of students in explanation letter writing, assessing five key elements: format, organization, elaboration, tone, and grammar, language usage, and mechanics. The results reveal students' baseline proficiency prior to the ChatGPT-assisted intervention, providing a foundation for evaluating subsequent improvement in writing performance.

Table 2. Pre-test Mean Scores of Students in Explanation Letter Writing

Element	Mean	Interpretation
Format	57	Did not meet expectations
Organization	60.33	Did not meet expectations
Elaboration	62.5	Did not meet expectations
Tone	64.33	Did not meet expectations
Grammar, Language Usage, and Mechanics	57.17	Did not meet expectations

The pre-test results showed that students' initial performance in writing explanation letters was generally below satisfactory across all five evaluated elements—format, organization, elaboration, tone, and grammar, language usage, and mechanics. Many struggled to apply proper structure, organize ideas coherently, and maintain an appropriate formal tone. Errors in grammar and mechanics were also common, confirming earlier findings that student writers often face challenges in coherence, accuracy, and adherence to writing conventions (Roxas, 2020; Ahmed, 2019). Difficulties with format were most evident, as many

students omitted or misplaced essential components such as the heading, salutation, and closing. These results parallel findings by Faller (2018), Comeo (2025), and Igsi et al. (2025), who reported similar weaknesses in letter layout among Filipino learners. In terms of organization, students' ideas were often fragmented and lacked smooth transitions—patterns consistent with studies by Diep and Le (2024) and Manarpiis (2017), which emphasized poor cohesion as a recurring issue in ESL writing. Limited elaboration was also apparent; most students failed to extend their ideas or provide adequate justification and supporting details. Comparable findings from Nenotek et al. (2022) and Deocades and Domile (2024) show that underdeveloped paragraphs and insufficient explanations are common among second-language writers. Issues with tone included the use of informal or abrupt language, reducing professionalism—echoing Tongpoon-Patanasorn (2020) and Alafnan and Rudio (2023), who identified similar lapses in formality and politeness. Finally, persistent problems in grammar, language usage, and mechanics, such as subject-verb disagreement and incorrect punctuation, aligned with reports by Ishtiaq et al. (2025) and Cuyos et al. (2024). Overall, these findings highlight the need for structured, feedback-driven instruction to strengthen both foundational and higher-order writing skills among students.

3.2 Students' Final Writing Performance

Table 3 presents the post-test mean scores of students in explanation letter writing after the ChatGPT-assisted intervention. This assessment evaluated the same five components—format, organization, elaboration, tone, and grammar, language usage, and mechanics—to determine the extent of improvement in students' writing performance following the integration of AI support in instruction.

Table 3. Post-test Mean Scores of Students in Explanation Letter Writing

Element	Mean	Interpretation
Format	89	Very Satisfactory
Organization	80.17	Satisfactory
Elaboration	83.17	Satisfactory
Tone	81.33	Satisfactory
Grammar, Language Usage, and Mechanics	62.33	Did not meet expectations

After the ChatGPT-assisted instruction, students showed substantial improvement across all elements of explanation letter writing—format, organization, elaboration, tone, and grammar. The results indicate that

integrating AI feedback with teacher guidance effectively enhanced their ability to produce coherent and professionally structured correspondence. Marked improvement in format and organization reflected students' growing mastery of structure and logical sequencing. ChatGPT's model outputs and guided prompts helped them internalize layout conventions and maintain paragraph unity, consistent with earlier findings that AI scaffolding promotes coherence and genre accuracy (Chen & Gong, 2025; Giray & Aquino, 2024; Suarez et al., 2025). Students also displayed stronger elaboration, providing clearer explanations and richer details. ChatGPT's interactive feedback encouraged justification and expansion of ideas, supporting results from Nguyen et al. (2024) and Cabuquin et al. (2024). Similarly, gains in tone showed heightened awareness of formality and politeness through AI-assisted rephrasing and modeling (Rafique et al., 2025; Gatlabayan, 2025). However, improvement in grammar and mechanics was moderate. While ChatGPT offered corrective feedback,

sustained mastery requires explicit instruction and guided reinforcement (Polakova & Ivenz, 2024; Cuyos et al., 2024). Overall, the findings affirm ChatGPT's effectiveness as a supplementary tool that enhances higher-order writing skills when paired with teacher facilitation, while emphasizing the continued importance of formal grammar instruction for lasting proficiency.

3.3 Difference Between Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores

Table 4 presents the comparison of pre-test and post-test mean scores in explanation letter writing to determine the extent of improvement following the ChatGPT-assisted intervention. This analysis aimed to identify significant differences in students' performance across the five writing elements—format, organization, elaboration, tone, and grammar, language usage, and mechanics—after exposure to guided AI-supported instruction.

Table 4. Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Mean Scores in Explanation Letter Writing

Elements		Mean	SD	Mean Difference	Interpretation
Format	Post-test	89.00	8.32	32.00	Significant
	Pretest	57.00	14.32		
Organization	Post-test	80.17	10.23	19.84	Significant
	Pretest	60.33	12.09		
Elaboration	Post-test	83.17	12.43	20.67	Significant
	Pretest	62.50	12.85		
Tone	Post-test	81.33	10.59	17.00	Significant
	Pretest	64.33	11.17		
Grammar, Language Usage, and Mechanics	Post-test	62.33	10.55	5.16	Significant
	Pretest	57.17	12.93		

The results confirmed that the ChatGPT-assisted intervention significantly improved students' explanation letter writing performance across all assessed elements. Large gains in format, organization, elaboration, and tone highlight the tool's effectiveness in strengthening higher-order writing skills, while modest improvements in grammar and mechanics indicate the need for continued explicit instruction. These findings mirror global research showing that AI-assisted writing enhances macro-level

competencies such as structure, coherence, and tone more effectively than micro-level grammatical precision (Mahapatra, 2024; Deng et al., 2024; Li et al., 2025; Wang & Fan, 2025). Philippine studies similarly report substantial progress in organization and tone alongside persistent grammar challenges (Gildore et al., 2023; Igsi et al., 2025; Espartinez et al., 2024). The results further support the Cognitive Process Theory of Writing (Flower & Hayes, 1981) and Formative Assessment Theory (Black & Wiliam,

1998), demonstrating that ChatGPT facilitated planning, translation, and review through timely, targeted feedback that encouraged self-revision. Overall, the intervention effectively enhanced students' global writing competence while reinforcing the continuing need for teacher-guided grammar instruction to sustain accuracy and critical awareness in formal written communication.

3.4 Students' Perceptions Toward ChatGPT

Table 5 presents the results of the student perception survey, which aimed to assess learners' views on ChatGPT as a writing support tool. The questionnaire measured perceptions in terms of ease of use, confidence and understanding, effectiveness and skill development, and reliance and feature comparison. These responses provided valuable insights into how students experienced and evaluated the integration of ChatGPT in their writing process.

Table 5. Students' Perceptions of ChatGPT in Enhancing Writing Skills

Dimension	Overall Mean	Interpretation
Ease of Use	4.4	Strongly Agree
Confidence and Understanding	4.47	Strongly Agree
Effectiveness and Skill Development	4.57	Strongly Agree
Reliance and Feature Comparison	3.89	Agree

Students expressed positive perceptions of ChatGPT as a writing support tool, describing it as easy to use, effective, and confidence-building. They found its interface intuitive, its feedback immediate, and its features adaptable to different writing needs. This aligns with the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989), which emphasizes that simplicity encourages adoption. ChatGPT was also viewed as enhancing confidence and understanding. Students reported that it helped them clarify ideas, organize content, and better grasp writing conventions. The tool's modeling and feedback promoted self-efficacy and reduced writing anxiety, consistent with studies showing that AI-assisted feedback improves motivation and clarity. In terms of effectiveness, learners appreciated ChatGPT's role in refining grammar, improving organization, and strengthening coherence, consistent with international findings on AI-driven writing improvement (Chen & Gong, 2025). While students valued ChatGPT's usefulness, they maintained moderate reliance,

preferring to pair it with teacher feedback and independent judgment. This balanced approach reflects responsible use of AI in learning (De Jesus et al., 2024). Overall, students perceived ChatGPT as an accessible and effective complement to instruction—one that enhances confidence, clarity, and skill development while reinforcing ethical and independent writing practices.

3.5 Pedagogical Implications and Teaching Guide Development

The integration of ChatGPT within Technical Writing instruction offered valuable pedagogical insights. Its use supported process-based learning by providing instant feedback, aiding idea generation, and encouraging self-directed revision. Nonetheless, aspects such as grammar and mechanics still require explicit, teacher-led instruction. These observations align with Talili's (2024) Theory of AI-Enhanced Academic Writing, which advocates ethical, guided AI integration in higher education. Based on the findings, a ChatGPT-Assisted Teaching Guide was developed as a supplementary framework for classroom use. The guide integrates AI-supported tasks with teacher-facilitated discussion to strengthen clarity, organization, elaboration, and tone in formal correspondence. It also includes prompts, scaffolding strategies, and reminders on responsible AI engagement. Although not reproduced in this article, the guide serves as a practical reference for educators seeking to apply AI tools within process-oriented writing pedagogy. Overall, ChatGPT may be considered a beneficial supplementary tool when used under appropriate supervision. It can enhance clarity, coherence, and tone while fostering reflective and ethical writing practices. Future research may explore its long-term impact across other writing genres and learning environments.

IV. FINDINGS

The findings revealed that students' initial performance in writing explanation letters was generally below satisfactory across all five components: format, organization, elaboration, tone, and grammar, language usage, and mechanics. Many students had difficulty applying the correct letter format, organizing their ideas coherently, providing sufficient elaboration, and maintaining an appropriate tone for formal communication. Their grammatical accuracy, language usage and mechanics also showed inconsistency, indicating a need for structured and guided writing instruction. Following the implementation of the ChatGPT-assisted intervention, students' final performance demonstrated significant improvement in all writing components. They showed a clearer understanding of proper letter format, stronger

organization and flow of ideas, richer elaboration of supporting details, and more consistent use of formal tone and register. Moderate improvements were also evident in grammar, language usage, and mechanics, suggesting that AI-assisted feedback complemented teacher guidance in refining students' written outputs. A significant difference was observed between the students' pre-test and post-test results, indicating that the integration of ChatGPT in writing instruction produced a meaningful positive impact on their overall writing proficiency. The intervention proved particularly effective in enhancing higher-order writing skills such as structure, coherence, and elaboration while accuracy-related aspects improved moderately and would continue to benefit from teacher-led instruction and practice. The results from the perception survey further supported these findings. Students expressed strong agreement that ChatGPT was an effective and user-friendly tool that enhanced their ease of writing, confidence, understanding, and overall skill development. They appreciated its real-time feedback and organization support, which helped them generate ideas and refine their drafts. While they acknowledged its many advantages, they also recognized the importance of teacher feedback to ensure originality and correctness.

In summary, the study established that ChatGPT-assisted instruction significantly improved students' explanation letter writing skills across all dimensions and fostered positive perceptions toward the responsible use of AI in academic writing. The findings affirm that technology, when effectively integrated with teacher facilitation, can serve as a valuable support in developing students' higher-order writing competence.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that ChatGPT-assisted instruction significantly enhanced the explanation letter writing skills of Technical Writing students. Students' performance improved from unsatisfactory to very satisfactory levels, particularly in format, organization, elaboration, and tone. Moderate but meaningful gains were also observed in grammar, language usage, and mechanics, underscoring the need for continued emphasis on accuracy-based instruction. Overall, guided use of ChatGPT proved effective in developing students' competence and confidence in formal writing.

It is recommended that ChatGPT be integrated as a supplementary tool in writing instruction to support organization, clarity, and coherence in student outputs. However, its use should remain teacher-guided to ensure originality, ethical engagement, and critical thinking. Continuous emphasis on grammar and mechanics is advised,

while future studies may further explore AI-assisted approaches across different writing genres and educational contexts.

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A Quantitative Review of Ancient Chinese Book Digitization: Research Trends and Development Based on DeepSeek-V3 and BER Topic

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Abstract— This study conducts a comprehensive quantitative analysis of the development and research trends of ancient Chinese book digitization over the past three decades. By employing advanced tools such as CiteSpace for bibliometric analysis, the BERTopic deep learning model for topic modeling, and the large language model DeepSeek-V3 for semantic trend interpretation, the research identifies the developmental stages of the field, eight major thematic areas, and emerging directions such as gamification, knowledge services, and AI model integration. Drawing upon a corpus of 562 peer-reviewed journal articles retrieved from the CNKI database, the study applies both statistical and semantic techniques to uncover key author clusters, topic evolution, and knowledge networks. This work contributes to the understanding of how digital and intelligent technologies are transforming the preservation, dissemination, and reuse of ancient texts, and provides theoretical support for the innovative transmission of traditional Chinese culture in the digital era.



Keywords— Ancient books digitization; Deep learning; Large language model; Topic modeling; Digital humanities; Knowledge services

I. INTRODUCTION

Ancient books are the crystallization of human wisdom in the age of print media and embody the essence and charm of traditional Chinese culture. With the rapid evolution of media technologies, there has been a profound transformation in reading habits, knowledge acquisition methods, and modes of information dissemination. As such, exploring how to preserve, disseminate, and repurpose ancient texts under digital and intelligent media conditions has become an essential path for achieving the creative transformation and innovative development of Chinese traditional culture.

In April 2022, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council issued the 'Opinions on Promoting Ancient Book Work in the New Era', emphasizing the need to accelerate the transformation and utilization of ancient book resources by means such as excavating their contemporary value, enhancing accessibility, promoting digitization, and ensuring their

widespread dissemination. Later that year, the National Plan for Ancient Book Collation and Publishing (2021–2035) was published, offering concrete guidance for the digitization of ancient texts.

The digitization of ancient books refers to the application of digital technology to restore, develop, and utilize classical literature resources. In China, this research began in the 1970s, progressing from basic text entry and indexing to the establishment of large-scale databases, and eventually advancing to deeper levels of digital processing through computational methods. This study integrates computer-based methodologies with the research of ancient texts. Using academic papers from the CNKI database published over the past thirty years, it combines bibliometric tools, deep learning models, and large language models to quantitatively analyze the current state of ancient book digitization and forecast its future development. The goal is to support the modernization and intelligent transmission of Chinese traditional culture.

II. RESEARCH METHODS AND TECHNICAL TOOLS IN THE FIELD OF ANCIENT BOOK DIGITIZATION IN CHINA

In China, bibliometric research on ancient book digitization has primarily relied on software tools such as CiteSpace to conduct quantitative analysis, generate knowledge maps, and extract thematic trends from journal databases. For example, Li Shiyu and colleagues employed CiteSpace to analyze both domestic and international research on ancient book digitization, integrating the Five-Source Theory and digital humanities frameworks to construct a research pathway that informs future development directions. Some scholars have focused on the digitization of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) texts, using discipline life cycle theory along with tools like VOSviewer to identify developmental characteristics and thematic evolution patterns, as well as to predict future trends. Others, such as Wang Qiuyun, combined quantitative and qualitative methods to summarize the research scope, features, and trends in ancient book digitization, and proposed potential research directions for the field.

A review of existing literature reveals that scholars generally rely on traditional bibliometric tools like CiteSpace and VOSviewer for thematic analysis. These tools use built-in algorithms to extract keywords, conduct clustering, and analyze thematic trends. However, these methods are limited in capturing the deeper semantic content and core themes of the literature. To overcome this limitation, the introduction of deep learning models offers a more precise and scientifically grounded way to analyze textual content.

In this study, the deep learning model BERTopic is employed to significantly enhance both the depth and breadth of thematic extraction. BERTopic enables robust data-driven topic modeling, providing stronger empirical support for academic research. To further optimize the identification of thematic trends, this study incorporates the large language model DeepSeek-V3, developed by DeepSeek in 2024. DeepSeek-V3 is specifically optimized for Chinese natural language processing tasks and demonstrates superior capabilities in text comprehension, summarization, and information retrieval. Its powerful semantic extraction makes it particularly well-suited for trend identification in the field of ancient book digitization.

Additionally, this study utilizes the open-source network analysis software Gephi, which is cross-platform and JVM-based. Gephi supports exploratory data analysis, social network analysis, and biological network analysis through flexible data manipulation and layout options. Using Gephi's built-in community detection algorithms, this research maps the co-authorship network in the ancient book digitization field, revealing collaborative patterns

among scholars and providing empirical evidence for understanding the knowledge production model and innovation dynamics in the field.

In summary, this study integrates CiteSpace bibliometric analysis, BERTopic topic modeling, DeepSeek-V3 large language model processing, and Gephi social network visualization to conduct a comprehensive and multifaceted analysis of 30 years of Chinese research literature on ancient book digitization. These digital humanities approaches enable a deeper understanding of research trends and future development trajectories in this domain.

III. DATA SOURCES AND DATA PROCESSING

3.1 Data Sources

This study draws data from the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) database. Following the search strategy adopted by Fan Guihong and others, we used the following query: (Subject: 'Classics' AND 'Digitization') OR (Subject: 'Ancient Books' AND 'Digitization') OR (Subject: 'Ancient Books' AND 'Database'). The Boolean logic used was 'OR', the document type was limited to journal articles, and the sources were restricted to CSSCI and Peking University Core journals. The earliest publication meeting these criteria appeared in 1998; thus, the starting point for data collection was set to 1998, with an end date of May 20, 2025. A total of 891 papers were initially retrieved. After removing duplicates and irrelevant records through manual screening, 616 valid journal articles remained.

3.2 Data Processing

BERTopic is a topic modeling tool originally developed for English language texts. Therefore, prior to modeling, all Chinese texts were segmented using the Jieba Python library, which supports precise mode, full mode, and search engine mode. In this study, precise mode was chosen for its natural and accurate segmentation capabilities. Additionally, stopwords were removed using the Harbin Institute of Technology stopwords list to clean the corpus.

Some articles in the dataset lacked abstracts or keywords, which are essential for topic modeling. These records were excluded. After this filtering process, 562 valid documents with abstracts were retained for BERTopic modeling. These texts were further pre-processed and embedded using the 'gte-base-zh' model for Chinese text vectorization. Dimensionality reduction was performed using UMAP, followed by clustering with HDBSCAN. Finally, c-TF-IDF was applied to extract representative terms for each topic cluster.

This methodological pipeline ensures the accuracy and granularity of topic extraction and supports the

identification of thematic structures within the ancient book digitization research domain.

IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Annual Publication Volume Analysis: Developmental Stages and Characteristics

The number of academic publications over time is a key indicator of the developmental trajectory of a research field.

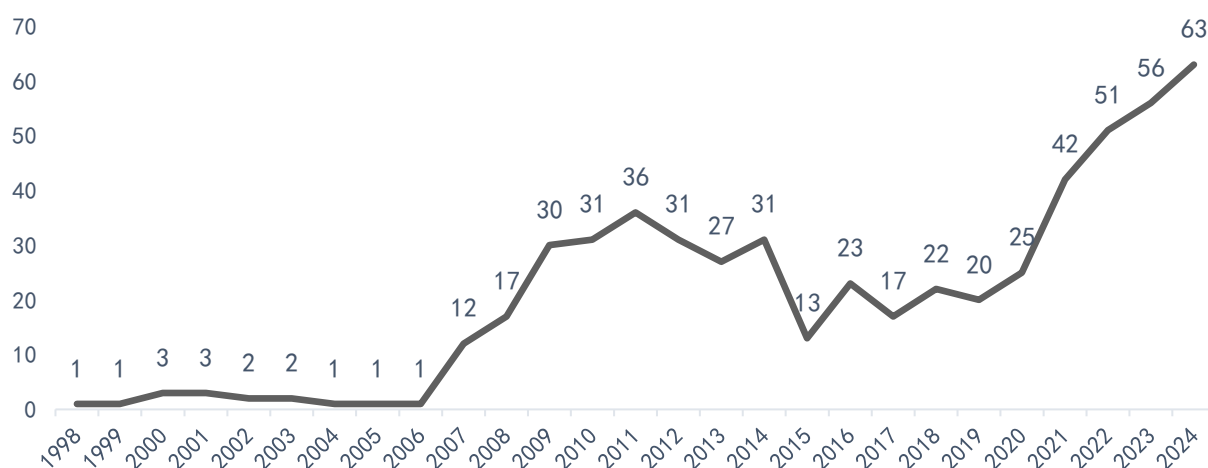


Fig.1. Annual Publication Volume on Ancient Book Digitization in China (1997–2024)

• Budding Stage (1998–2006):

During this period, research in the field was nascent, with relatively few publications. Topics primarily focused on theoretical discussions and general overviews, such as strategic development, trend analysis, and catalog construction. Most studies were conducted independently by individual scholars, and there was minimal inter-institutional collaboration. This phase was characterized by initial exploration and low network connectivity among researchers.

• Rapid Development Stage (2007–2014):

A notable surge in research activity followed the release of the 'Opinions on Strengthening Ancient Book Preservation' by the State Council in 2007. The number of annual publications increased steadily, peaking at 36 papers in a single year. This stage accounted for approximately 40% of all retrieved papers. Research themes expanded from theoretical discussions to include practical applications, such as digital standards for ancient books, case studies from abroad, and digital publishing. This period also witnessed the emergence of cross-disciplinary research involving traditional Chinese medicine databases and minority language texts. The maturation of digital technologies facilitated collaborative research groups,

By analyzing annual publication counts, we can gauge scholarly attention to the digitization of ancient books. Based on the year-by-year publication statistics (see Figure 1 in the original), the development of ancient book digitization in China can be categorized into four distinct stages:

fostering diversification of research topics and deeper academic cooperation.

• Stabilization Stage (2015–2020):

From 2015 onwards, the number of annual publications declined slightly and stabilized at around 20 papers per year. Influenced by digital humanities and computational social science, the research increasingly incorporated interdisciplinary elements, including social network analysis, data mining, GIS visualization, and knowledge graphs. This phase reflected the field's growing integration with modern information technologies, consolidating prior achievements while also opening new research frontiers.

• Breakthrough Stage (2021–present):

Triggered by the issuance of the 'Opinions on Promoting Ancient Book Work in the New Era' in April 2022, the field entered a new phase of accelerated growth. By September 2024, the annual publication volume reached a historical high of 63 articles. Recent research emphasizes emerging technologies such as computational humanities and deep learning, marking a paradigm shift from content collation to knowledge extraction and service. In particular, studies on ancient TCM texts have deepened, and successful cases in literary and theatrical ancient book digitization offer valuable models. With ongoing policy support, research output in this field is expected to continue its upward

trajectory, further advancing the innovation and dissemination of ancient Chinese culture.

4.2 Author Productivity Analysis

Core authors play a central role in shaping the development of any academic field. Author productivity, especially the volume of publications by high-frequency contributors, serves as an indicator of academic influence and research leadership. Following the Price Law formula ($N = 0.749 \times \sqrt{N_{max}}$, where N_{max} is the highest frequency of publications by a single author), the threshold for core author productivity in this study is calculated to be approximately 4.17. Applying this threshold, authors with at least 4 publications are identified as core contributors in the field of ancient book digitization.

A total of 32 high-yield authors were identified, with the top 10 listed below. Among them, Wang Dongbo ranks first with 31 publications. His research primarily focuses on computational philology and digital humanities, and he has made substantial contributions to the integration of AI with ancient book studies. He is followed by Mao Jianjun, an early pioneer in the digitization of ancient books in China. Mao’s work includes studies on electronic editions of ancient texts, copyright issues, and international digitization experiences.

Table 1. Publication Volume of Core Authors (Top 10)

Author	Number of Publications
Wang Dongbo	31
Mao Jianjun	23
Li Bin	15
Li Mingjie	12
Bao Ping	10
Zhang Wenliang	9
Chen Tao	7
Huang Shuiqing	7
Liu Jiangfeng	7
Chen Liping	6

These authors have played a pivotal role in defining the field's core research themes and have contributed significantly to advancing scholarly discourse on ancient book digitization.

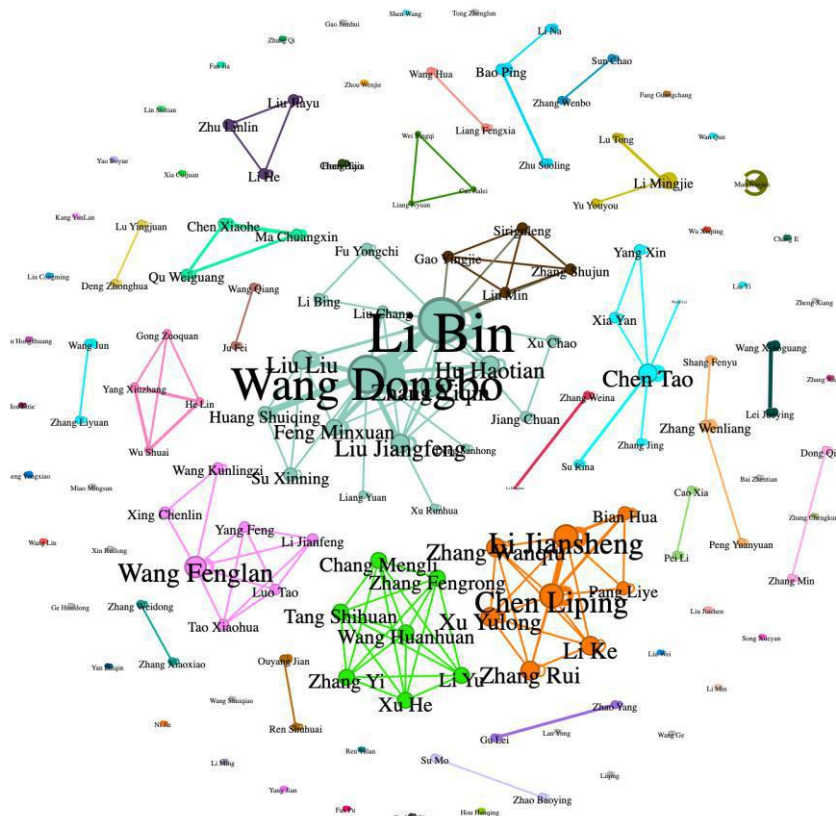


Fig.2. Co-authorship Network of Researchers in Ancient Book Digitization

4.3 Author Collaboration Network Analysis

Using Python, co-authorship data was extracted from the bibliographic metadata and structured into a co-occurrence matrix. This matrix was then imported into Gephi for visualization using the Fruchterman-Reingold algorithm to generate a network layout. The resulting author collaboration network comprises 143 nodes (authors) and 257 edges (collaborative links). The network exhibits an average degree of 3.594, average weighted degree of 9.832, a network diameter of 3, density of 0.025, modularity of

0.823, average clustering coefficient of 0.819, and average path length of 1.703.

These metrics suggest that, while no single dominant research cluster has yet emerged, collaboration among scholars is gradually increasing. Community detection using Gephi's modularity algorithm revealed 71 author clusters. To identify densely connected subgroups, a K-core filter (k=4) was applied, isolating the most cohesive co-authorship communities in the field.

Table 2. Top 5 Author Clusters in the Field of Ancient Book Digitization

Cluster	Author Cluster(s)	Research Field
Cluster1	Wang Dongbo, Li Bin, Liu Liu, Feng Minxuan, Zhang Yiqin, Huang Shuiqing, Liu Jiangfeng, Hu Haotian, Liu Chang, Xu Runhua, Li Bing, Liang Yuan, Jiang Chuan, Fu Yongchi, Su Xinning, Xu Chao, Deng Sanhong	digital humanities and knowledge services.
Cluster2	Li Jiansheng, Chen Liping, Bian Hua, Pang Liye, Zhang Wanqiu, Zhang Rui, Li Ke, Xu Yulong	TCM ancient texts and data minin
Cluster3	Wang Fenglan, Wang Kunlingzi, Xing Chenlin, Li Jianfeng, Yang Feng, Luo Tao, Tao Xiaohua	TCM databases and knowledge discovery
Cluster4	Chen Tao, Su Rina, Xia Yan, Zhang Jing, Yang Xin, Wang Lei	ancient book preservation and knowledge base construction
Cluster5	Tang Shihuan, Chang Mengli, Zhang Fengrong, Zhang Yi, Xu He, Li Yu	TCM Ancient Texts and Data Mining

These clusters reflect a field-wide orientation toward emerging research areas such as digital humanities, knowledge services, and intelligent text mining. Cluster 1, centered on Wang Dongbo and Li Bin, is particularly active in applying AIGC (AI-generated content) techniques to automatic summarization and named entity recognition in ancient texts. Clusters 2 and 5 both emphasize TCM-related studies but differ in geographical affiliation: Cluster 2 is based in Henan universities, while Cluster 5 is rooted in the Institute of Chinese Materia Medica.

Clusters 3 and 4 exhibit a hybrid focus that bridges traditional themes (e.g., preservation, cataloging) and modern technologies. These groups act as intermediaries linking historical scholarship with digital innovation. Overall, the evolving structure of author collaboration networks highlights increasing interdisciplinarity and the influence of geographic proximity, shared research interests, and technological integration.

4.4 Journal Publication Statistics: Dissemination Channels of Ancient Book Digitization Research

The distribution of publications across journals provides insights into the primary academic platforms and disciplinary orientations of a given research field. As

illustrated in Figure 3 (in the original), research on ancient book digitization in China is predominantly published in journals related to library and information science (LIS) and publishing studies.

The predominance of LIS journals is attributable to the institutional affiliation of many ancient book resources—libraries and museums—and the involvement of library professionals in digitization initiatives. As a result, provincial and university libraries have become the principal research entities in this domain. Journals such as *Library and Information Service* and *Library Work and Study* are among the most prolific in terms of article volume.

On the other hand, the publication and dissemination of digitized ancient books has attracted attention from publishing scholars, particularly in relation to new publishing models under digital media conditions. Key publishing-related journals, such as *View on Publishing*, have also contributed significantly to the literature.

In summary, ancient book digitization research is primarily disseminated through LIS and publishing journals, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of the field, which lies at the intersection of cultural heritage preservation, information science, and digital publishing.

4.5 Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis: Research Hotspots in Ancient Book Digitization

Keywords serve as concise summaries of a paper’s thematic focus. Betweenness centrality was calculated to measure the influence of each keyword within the co-occurrence network. Keywords with centrality values above 0.1 were identified as critical nodes. As shown in Table 1 (original document), 'ancient book collation', 'digital humanities', 'database', and 'ancient book preservation' all exceeded this threshold, indicating their pivotal roles in the knowledge structure of the field.

The term 'digital humanities' emerged around 2013 and has since become a key concept in ancient book digitization studies. This interdisciplinary approach, also referred to as computational humanities or humanistic computation,

involves applying digital tools to the analysis of cultural and historical texts. Early studies, such as those by Fan Jia, discussed the potential of text mining, visualization, and GIS in ancient book digitization, laying the groundwork for a paradigm shift toward data-driven cultural scholarship. More recent high-centrality keywords include 'knowledge graph', 'digital humanities', 'knowledge base', 'text visualization', and 'artificial intelligence'. These terms signal a transition in the field toward computational frameworks and AI-assisted methods, which are driving the intelligent transformation of ancient book processing and enabling the creative reinvention of traditional Chinese culture in the digital era.

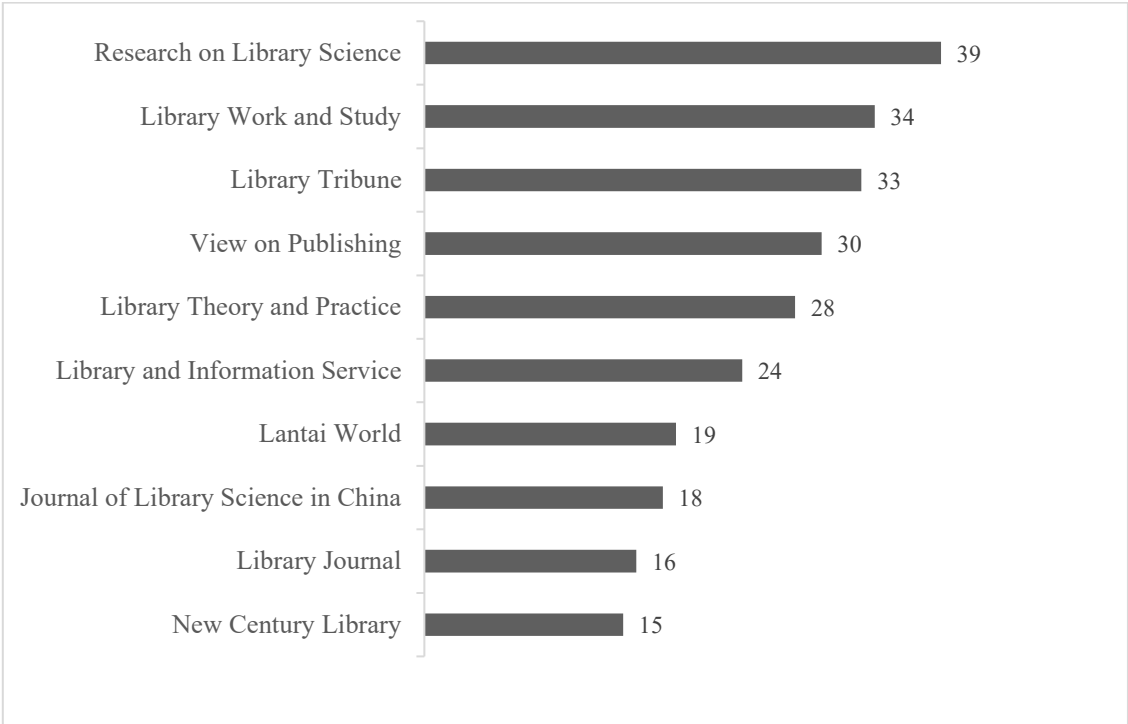


Fig.3. Journal Publication Statistics on Ancient Book Digitization (Top 10)

Table 3. Betweenness Centrality Metrics for High-Frequency Keywords

Frequency	Betweenness Centrality	Earliest Appearance	Keyword
96	0.44	2001	Ancient Books
92	0.39	2008	Digitalization
34	0.27	1998	Ancient Books Arrangement
64	0.25	2013	Digital Humanities
37	0.14	1998	Ancient Books Protection
19	0.10	2000	Database

4.6 Topic Modeling Analysis: Research Fields and Subfields in Ancient Book Digitization

Topic modeling is a widely used method in text mining to identify latent thematic structures within a corpus. In this

study, pre-processing steps included word segmentation using Jieba and the removal of stopwords. Additionally, a customized dictionary based on high-frequency keywords identified by CiteSpace was added to Jieba to enhance segmentation accuracy.



Fig.4. Topic Term Scores

The BERTopic model was then used to extract topics from the corpus. The 'gte-base-zh' language model was employed to generate text embeddings. UMAP was applied for dimensionality reduction, followed by clustering using HDBSCAN. Finally, the c-TF-IDF model was used to extract representative terms for each topic.

The resulting topic-word distribution diagram (Figure 4 in the original) illustrates the top keywords associated with each topic. The model automatically grouped the research corpus into eight primary topics, each corresponding to a distinct research focus:

Topic 1: Ancient book databases, resource construction, and digital standards – reflects infrastructure building for digitization.

Topic 2: Digital publishing and knowledge service platforms – emphasizes publishing innovations and service-oriented dissemination.

Topic 3: Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) texts and pharmacological data – focused on domain-specific digitization in medicine.

Topic 4: Classical philology, textual verification, and knowledge bases – illustrates the integration of traditional scholarship with computational frameworks.

Topic 5: Collation, preservation, and reuse methods – deals with digitization-driven approaches to text editing and conservation.

Topic 6: Deep learning, ancient text mining, and corpus processing – focuses on the use of AI in text analytics.

Topic 7: Cataloging, bibliographic standards, and metadata – addresses digital transformation in cataloging and bibliographic studies.

Topic 8: Digitization and preservation of ethnic minority ancient books – dedicated to inclusive and equitable access to diverse cultural resources.

This classification offers a comprehensive view of the current research landscape and illustrates the field's expansion into both traditional and emerging areas. The inclusion of AI, knowledge graphs, and semantic modeling indicates a shift toward a more intelligent and interconnected approach to ancient book digitization.

4.7 Evolutionary Trend Analysis

This study innovatively incorporates a large language model, DeepSeek-V3, to conduct evolutionary trend analysis, addressing the limitations of traditional bibliometric tools in deep semantic understanding and topic label generation. Using prompt engineering, DeepSeek-V3 was guided to perform automatic keyword labeling, which was then combined with semantic clustering and cosine similarity calculations to construct a topic evolution map for the field of ancient book digitization (see Figure 5 in the original).

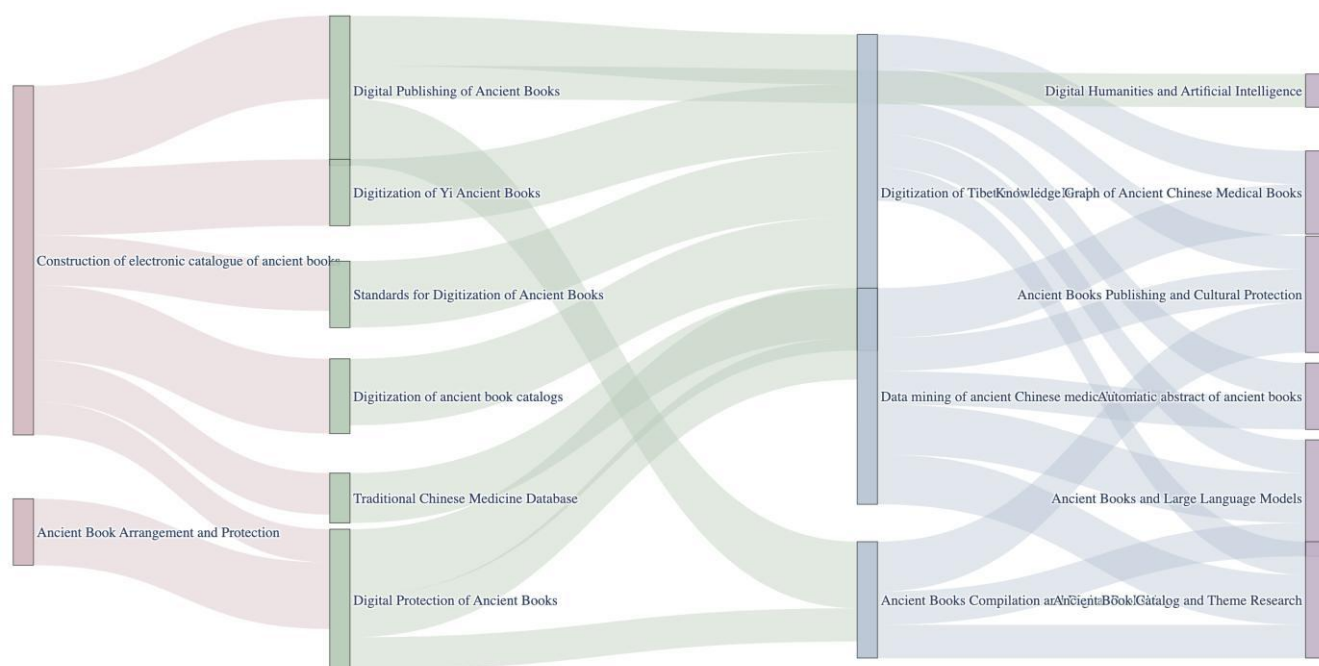


Fig.5. Temporal Evolution of Research Topics in Ancient Book Digitization

The analysis reveals a distinct multi-stage evolutionary trajectory that follows the pattern of 'Infrastructure Building – Technology Integration – Intelligent Applications – Knowledge Innovation.' This trajectory reflects a development paradigm characterized by the synergy between technological advancement and humanistic values.

- Stage 1 – Infrastructure Building (1998–2006):

This initial phase was focused on foundational tasks such as cataloguing, bibliographic registration, and basic protection of ancient texts. Efforts during this period laid the groundwork for subsequent digitization by compiling inventories and developing preservation techniques.

- Stage 2 – Technology Integration (2007–2014):

This stage was marked by the standardization of metadata, enhancement of OCR technology, and the development of structured annotation systems. Digitization projects began to adopt integrated technical frameworks and explored application-specific use cases.

- Stage 3 – Intelligent Applications (2016–2020):

The emergence of artificial intelligence led to the adoption of advanced technologies such as knowledge graph construction and natural language processing. These innovations enabled a paradigm shift in digital humanities, emphasizing data-driven and intelligent research methods.

- Stage 4 – Knowledge Innovation (2021–present):

This most recent phase focuses on deep knowledge extraction and smart publishing. Fueled by large language models and AI, the field has moved beyond technical

advancements to emphasize the revitalization, dissemination, and creative reuse of ancient texts. This stage demonstrates a holistic integration of intelligent technologies with the broader goals of cultural preservation and innovation.

This evolutionary pathway demonstrates the continuity and progression of the field, where each stage builds upon the accomplishments of the previous one. The results highlight the increasing role of intelligent systems in enhancing the depth, scale, and impact of ancient book digitization research.

V. RESEARCH SUMMARY

5.1 Summary of the Current Research Status

This study employs cutting-edge artificial intelligence technologies—including the BERTopic deep learning model, the large language model DeepSeek-V3, and the Gephi network analysis tool—along with the CiteSpace bibliometric tool, to conduct a quantitative analysis of China's scholarly research on ancient book digitization over the past three decades. The analysis reveals key information about the field's developmental stages, research themes, and trend evolution.

Ancient book digitization in China began around the 1980s. Based on topic evolution patterns and research data, the study identifies four distinct stages of development:

- Early Stage:

The focus was on building digital catalogs and preserving ancient texts. Major initiatives included the development of bibliographic metadata and cataloging standards to facilitate indexing and access. For instance, CALIS (China Academic Library and Information System) developed an early national catalog system, comprising over 7 million bibliographic entries and 1.75 million authority records.

- Rapid Development Stage:

Starting in 2006, with greater institutional support and technological maturity, the field diversified. Minority language digitization projects (e.g., Tibetan and Mongolian texts) and digital publishing platforms gained traction. Examples include digital guidelines for Tibetan ancient texts and shared-resource models for Mongolian manuscripts.

- Stabilization Stage:

After 2015, the field began to embrace digital humanities. Research shifted from mere digitization to knowledge extraction, structured data generation, and visualization. Technologies such as knowledge graphs, entity recognition, and deep learning models enabled intelligent processing of complex textual materials. In TCM research, text mining was used to identify prescription patterns in classical works. Other projects used digital annotation to build structured historical knowledge bases (e.g., for *Zuo Zhuan*).

- Breakthrough Stage:

Since 2021, the field has seen a wave of innovation spurred by policy support and technical breakthroughs. Major initiatives include the digital reconstruction of *Yongle Dadian* and multimodal interactive publishing projects such as *Shan Hai Jing: Illustrated Guide to Mythical Creatures*, which uses AR, game engines, and voice synthesis. This stage emphasizes immersive engagement, knowledge enrichment, and intelligent user interaction.

Overall, ancient book digitization in China has moved from basic data entry to advanced knowledge discovery. The integration of digital humanities and AI has improved both the depth and scope of research. Going forward, it is crucial to expand public accessibility, encourage digital creativity, and adopt intelligent systems to unlock the cultural value of ancient texts in contemporary society.

5.2 Future Development Trends

The quantitative analysis of the current state of ancient book digitization in China reveals two major developmental directions:

(1) From the perspective of knowledge organization, there is a shift toward knowledge services and AI-driven discovery via large language models;

(2) From the perspective of user experience and learning, gamification is emerging as a key direction.

- Gamification Shift: Spatial Computing Enables Immersive Interaction

In 2023, Apple released a new MR headset, heralding the arrival of the spatial computing era. This technology bridges the physical and digital worlds, creating immersive, multi-sensory environments. In the context of ancient book digitization, spatial computing enables the creation of 3D models of texts, enhancing preservation, accessibility, and user interaction.

Using technologies such as optical scanning and image processing, ancient books can be digitally reconstructed in high fidelity, simulating tactile experiences and enabling VR-based reading and exploration. Additionally, spatial analytics and visualization techniques can reveal structural patterns within ancient texts. This immersive approach supports both scholarly inquiry and public engagement, offering new possibilities for interactive and educational applications.

- Large Language Model Shift: AI Chatbots Empower Intelligent Development

The emergence of ChatGPT in late 2022 sparked a global AI revolution. In ancient book digitization, large language models (LLMs) such as OpenAI's GPT and China's Xunzi series have demonstrated strong potential. These models can perform intelligent Q&A, contextual summarization, semantic understanding, translation, and annotation.

For instance, in 2023, the major project 'Cross-Language Knowledge Base Construction of Chinese Classical Texts' released the Xunzi LLM, specifically trained on ancient Chinese texts. This model addresses limitations in earlier tools and significantly improves interaction quality, accuracy, and accessibility. By providing a user-friendly conversational interface, AI chatbots help both experts and non-specialists access and interpret classical content.

- Knowledge Service Shift: Semantic Understanding and Knowledge Graph Construction

Knowledge services aim to deliver user-centered, context-aware support by extracting, organizing, and reassembling knowledge from large information pools. Technologies like semantic parsing and knowledge graph construction are increasingly applied in ancient book digitization.

Semantic understanding involves identifying key entities, relationships, and events in textual data. Knowledge graphs structure these elements into networks of interconnected information, enabling complex querying, logical inference, and smart visualization.

For example, in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), researchers have used knowledge graphs to represent

treatment patterns and drug interactions derived from classical texts such as *Huangdi Neijing* and *Treatise on Cold Damage*. These applications demonstrate how intelligent technologies can transform static cultural content into dynamic knowledge systems, facilitating research, teaching, and innovation.

VI. RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS

This study relies primarily on CNKI journal data from the past 30 years, which does not fully capture the diversity of available information sources. Future research should consider integrating a broader range of data, including social media articles, newspaper reports, and broadcast content, to support more comprehensive topic modeling and public discourse analysis.

Additionally, although the use of large language models (LLMs) such as DeepSeek-V3 improves topic label generation, the accuracy of extracted labels still relies partly on human judgment. To address this, future studies could implement ensemble approaches, using multiple LLMs simultaneously to extract topic descriptors. By comparing and aggregating results across models, researchers may improve the reliability and representativeness of generated labels.

Furthermore, it is advisable to develop a standardized evaluation framework to objectively assess and compare the performance of different LLMs in topic labeling and semantic interpretation tasks. Such a framework would support more rigorous methodological design and reproducibility in digital humanities research.

By addressing these limitations, future studies on ancient book digitization can achieve greater methodological innovation and analytical precision. This, in turn, will contribute to the advancement of both theoretical frameworks and practical applications in the field.

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The Myth and Reality of the American Dream as Depicted in *Death of a Salesman* and *The Great Gatsby*

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Abstract— *The American Dream, which is highly regarded in American culture, is based on the belief that anyone, regardless of their background, can achieve wealth and success through hard work, determination, and pure ambition. In fictional narratives, this dream is paradoxically portrayed to highlight the inherent struggle of the ideal. Both Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman (1949) and F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby (1925) provide critical insights into the illusion of this dream and the tragic repercussions of adhering to such an ideal. This paper concentrates on these two texts and how they aim to dismantle the myths surrounding the American Dream. By examining its contradictions, shortcomings, and failures, while focusing on the characters and their personal lives, relationships, and the social dynamics influencing their existence, the researchers have constructed and analyzed the primary argument regarding how these works critique the American Dream and the idea of nationalism that transcends borders. Through the complexities and dilemmas associated with the American Dream, the realities faced by Gatsby and Loman have been revealed—their profound tragedies intertwined with the broader American tragedy.*



Keywords— *American Dream, myth, reality, values, corruption, morality*

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The concept of the American Dream began in the early 1900s when numerous immigrants arrived in America seeking financial opportunities and an improved quality of life. The American Dream embodies both the materialistic and aspirational values of society. The American Dream requires people to live flawless lives as successful, hardworking members of society. Long regarded as a fundamental myth of American identity, the American Dream is typically portrayed as the goal of upward mobility, personal achievement, and affluence gained with diligence and tenacity (Fetterley 63). But the ideal is frequently presented in literature as unreachable, elusive, and ultimately harmful. Through the lives of two protagonists, Willy Loman and Jay Gatsby, whose pursuits of wealth and fulfillment ultimately lead to their terrible

demises, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* offer critiques of the American Dream.

The American Dream has long been considered a powerful motivator for individuals in the United States. It is the belief that anyone, regardless of their origin, can achieve success through hard work and determination (Setzer 36). However, literature often critiques this ideal, highlighting the ways in which systemic issues, personal failures, and social inequalities make such aspirations difficult, if not impossible, for many. The American Dream serves as a pivotal theme in both *Death of a Salesman* and *The Great Gatsby*, although each narrative explores it from distinct perspectives. Both works explore the American Dream through the lens of their protagonists, Willy Loman and Jay Gatsby, respectively, showing how the dream is often a misleading and unattainable ideal.

Through the experiences of a middle-class protagonist, *Death of a Salesman* explores the degradation of the dream, highlighting the value of charm and outward appearances above diligence and tenacity. *The Great Gatsby*, on the other hand, highlights the shallow and materialistic characteristics that are frequently connected to the pursuit of the American Dream while examining the inherent difficulty of realizing it and the resulting feelings of disillusionment. Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman* thinks that charm and being “well-liked” are sufficient to get money and respect, but his failure reveals how naive this notion is.

In *The Great Gatsby*, Gatsby amasses wealth and status through illegal means, yet he remains unfulfilled, clinging to an idealized past with Daisy. Both protagonists equate financial success with personal worth, yet neither finds true happiness. The pursuit of wealth leads to moral decay (Gatsby's criminal dealings) and psychological collapse (Willy's mental breakdown).

The fantasy, which was once based on possibility and self-reinvention, is warped by shallow values and avarice. Willy's fixation on looks and Gatsby's lavish parties serve to emphasize the meaninglessness of worldly prosperity. Willy kills himself in the hopes that his insurance money will ensure his family's future, while Gatsby is murdered, taking his dream with him. Both conclusions highlight the negative effects of pursuing an unattainable dream.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The concept of the American Dream—the idea that individuals from any background can attain success and prosperity through diligence and perseverance—has been a pivotal subject in American literature. Two influential works, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949) and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), provide a critical analysis of this ideal, revealing its inherent illusions and shortcomings. Although both narratives delve into the detrimental effects of an unyielding quest for wealth and social standing, they approach this theme from distinct historical and societal perspectives.

The Great Gatsby offers a critical examination of the materialism and moral decline prevalent during the Roaring Twenties, showcasing how the American Dream becomes tainted by avarice and insatiable aspirations. In contrast, *Death of a Salesman* reflects the disillusionment experienced by the average individual in the aftermath of World War II, illustrating how the allure of success can lead to mental despair when reality does not align with one's ambitions. Through the tragic narratives of Willy Loman and Jay Gatsby, both Miller and Fitzgerald confront the illusion of the American Dream, revealing its emptiness and the severe repercussions of its relentless

pursuit. This paper examines how the two texts deconstruct the notion of the American Dream, revealing it as an illusion that promotes false optimism, ethical decay, and individual failure, while also emphasizing rare instances where characters discover alternative, more authentic values.

1.3 Research Objectives

By analyzing the representation of the American Dream in *Death of a Salesman* and *The Great Gatsby*, this paper aims to uncover how both Arthur Miller and F. Scott Fitzgerald critique the myth of upward mobility, success, and prosperity. The research questions outlined in this paper guide a comprehensive study of the characters' emotional and psychological struggles, their social contexts, and the larger societal forces that shape their lives. Through a combination of literary analysis, historical context, psychological theory, and comparative criticism, the paper demonstrates how these works not only challenge the ideal of the American Dream but also expose its contradictions, flaws, and ultimately its destructiveness. The research provides a deeper understanding of how both works reflect the complexities and limitations of the American Dream, offering a critique of its promise and its perils.

1.4 Research Questions

In examining the themes of the American Dream in *Death of a Salesman* and *The Great Gatsby*, the following research questions direct the analysis:

- a) In what ways do the main characters of *Death of a Salesman* (Willy Loman) and *The Great Gatsby* (Jay Gatsby) represent the ideals of the American Dream?

This question seeks to analyze the characters' personal beliefs, motivations, and desires in relation to the American Dream, examining how each character's pursuit of success aligns with or deviates from the conventional myths of the American Dream.

- b) How are the protagonists' conceptions of the American Dream influenced by the socio-economic environments of the Jazz Age and post-World War II America?

The purpose of this inquiry is to investigate how the characters' desire for the American Dream is influenced by the historical and social circumstances of the time. The study examines how Willy and Gatsby are impacted by the economic shifts that occurred in post-World War II America and the Roaring Twenties.

- c) What role do social class, wealth, and personal relationships play in the characters' failures to achieve the American Dream?

This question addresses how economic systems, class divisions, and social structures influence the characters'

pursuit of success. It considers the barriers that hinder Willy and Gatsby from realizing their dreams, focusing on the role of wealth, status, and relationships.

- d) How do *The Great Gatsby* and *Death of a Salesman* challenge the American Dream's practicality and highlight its inconsistencies?

This research question aims to identify the critiques embedded within both texts, particularly focusing on how they challenge the very premise of the American Dream as a universally attainable ideal. It explores how the authors critique the societal emphasis on wealth and material success as the ultimate measures of fulfillment.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Undoubtedly, many individuals find the American Dream elusive. This situation is not a reflection of the American system's shortcomings, but rather a consequence of the inadequate hard work and commitment demonstrated by its supporters (Adams 21). The American system offers an opportunity to all people to nourish their American Dream; some might blame the system for their troubles when it is their fault (Helterman 103). There is no quick or easy way through life, as achieving goals involves countless hard work and dedication to reaching dreams. The system is primarily understood by unfortunate people born into complicated lives, and they seem to truly understand how the system works and succeed through hard work.

The American Dream, as an essential theme in the play *Death of a Salesman*. It explains all of the male members of the Loman family's pressure to succeed. All the Loman men wish to become successful in their jobs and live a comfortable lifestyle. Biff and Happy share a dream of going into business together as "The Loman Brothers." They believe they can create a million-dollar business, and their money worries will disappear. Willy dreams of earning two hundred dollars a week, repaying his mortgage, and seeing his sons become successful salesmen (Lawrence, 548). He is again disillusioning himself. Biff is going to try and get some money from Bill Oliver, but already Willy is boating off Biff's work on a huge deal. At the end of the play, Biff says that Willy "had the wrong dreams. All, all, wrong." This statement implies that Biff thought his father had chosen a career that was very unsuited to him. It entails that Willy had set his self-expectations too high and would have only been able to be a mediocre salesman his whole life (Stanton 103). In the play, Happy, like his father, is also disillusioned by the life they pretended to lead instead of the harsh reality that they exist in (Shockley 50).

Willy spent his whole life futilely chasing the "American Dream" (Ferguson 94). Willy has been unsuccessful in

achieving the success he so desperately craves because his perception of the formula for success is fatally flawed (Becker 14). Willy believes the American Dream is only attainable for the popular and attractive few. He does not think he belongs to this elite group. Unfortunately, Willy never sees the error of his ways. To the very end, he is a firm believer in the ideology that the attractive and well-spoken individuals finish first. This conviction is the very thing that destroys him because he now realizes, in his mind, that he is not on top. *Death of a Salesman* is an outstanding play that challenges the "American Dream." We can learn from Willy Loman. We all have the urge to attain our own "American Dreams," but we must live in reality, work hard, and persist in our efforts to attain them (Scanlan 233).

Willy is regarded as a heroic figure because it is believed that he has nothing to offer but his personality and appearance. Even in the face of failure as a salesman, he feels a strong urge to carry on, since dreaming is the only way for a salesman to endure. After Willy's death, Charley says of Willy, "he's a man way out there in the blue, riding on a smile and a shoeshine. And when they stop smiling back, – that's an earthquake ... A salesman is got to dream boy" (Miller 138). Charley understands that the profession of a salesman is challenging, and that prolonged periods of struggle and disappointment can diminish both his smile and the shine on his shoes. In this play, the American Dream is portrayed as the adversary, contributing to Willy's decline, madness, and ultimate downfall (Jacobson 255).

The American Dream is basically a subjective notion, granting individuals the freedom to determine their interpretations, definitions, and experiences of this ideal. Although the ethical dimensions of the American Dream advocate for truth and justice, the competitive nature of capitalism frequently results in a divergence from these values (Vanderbilt 23). Fitzgerald himself presents the subjective nature of perceiving success and the American Dream when he states, "life is much more successfully looked at from a single window, after all" (Fitzgerald 6).

Even though Gatsby is a self-made millionaire, the community in which he lives does not embrace him, which corrupts the notion of the American Dream. Gatsby appears to be a calm individual who nevertheless embodies the American Dream until the book's conclusion. However, he is never fully accepted as a morally acceptable figure by the society in which he lives. Even after attending his parties and having a good time, people continue to rumor about his wealth (Fetterley 46). As Gatsby resides in West Egg, whereas "East Egg is reserved for the elite members of the upper class born into old

money,” he is excluded from the “inherited” elite class (Pumphrey 116). Jay Gatsby is “... the guy who seems at first to symbolize the American Dream and the hope capitalism consequently offers to all, reveals, upon closer scrutiny, the hollowness of that ideal” (Tyson 73).

By making frequent allusions to racism throughout his book, Fitzgerald further develops the notion that the American Dream has turned into a social ill within the American way of life (Stallman 31). The idea of “colored people” achieving their social standing is a terrible one for the privileged, who are living the “inherited” American Dream of the Jazz Age. Even while *The Great Gatsby*’s example of contempt for the colored race is more subtly expressed, it also exemplifies the evil that American imperialism inflicts on the “inherited” wealthy. “... It’s up to us, who are the dominant race, to watch out or these other races will have control of things,” says Tom Buchanan (Fitzgerald 13). Then his wife Daisy Buchanan replies to him by saying, “We have got to tear them down” (Fitzgerald 13).

Tom’s arrogance is evident in his refusal to attend Gatsby’s parties. Although the upper class and the bourgeoisie frequently join these gatherings, Tom thinks that he should not participate unless he receives a personal invitation from Gatsby. This excessive pride is a manifestation of the corrupt allure of the American Dream, which fuels Tom’s animosity towards Gatsby. Nick Carraway, the narrator, perceives the participants showcasing their riches without restraint (Eisinger 24). For them, the American Dream represents a distortion of their self-respect, characterized by feelings of contempt and envy towards Gatsby, even as they indulge in the champagne and luxuries he provides. Consequently, this idea evolves into a morally compromised interpretation of humanism, ultimately undermining the American Dream through materialistic pursuits. In contrast, Tom remains unfazed by this concept, as he perceives himself to be of superior status and pride compared to Gatsby (Lewis 16).

The key transformation in the tale that highlights the negative implications of the corrupted social interpretation of the American Dream is centered on the relationship between Gatsby and Daisy. Although Gatsby’s role as the central character of the narrative remains ambiguous, Daisy fails to demonstrate the qualities necessary to be considered a protagonist. Marius Bewley states that:

Gatsby is a character of mythic proportions, and no other term can adequately describe him. He represents, as Fitzgerald emphasizes from the beginning, the struggle between illusion and reality that lies at the core of American existence; he is a heroic representation of the American

romantic hero, the genuine successor of the American Dream (Bewley 226-227).

Gatsby’s devotion to Daisy and his love for her can make him an American romantic hero as Bewley suggests. The illusion of his senseless love for a woman that is outside his social class tempts him to follow a morally corrupt path in achieving a status which is already tainted by the evils of the socially materialistic American Dream. If Gatsby symbolizes the American Dream in the novel, it is evident that this dream is tainted, as he attains it through illicit means, which undermines the ideal of the diligent and virtuous individual that the dream is meant to represent (Tyson 73). From this viewpoint, readers may interpret Gatsby’s actions as driven by love. Consequently, they might argue that “all is fair in love and war,” suggesting that Gatsby had no alternative. In contrast, Daisy’s options were less constrained. Coming from a wealthy background, she could have easily chosen to marry Gatsby when he was impoverished; however, due to societal expectations within her class, she dismissed Gatsby as a potential partner capable of providing the affluent lifestyle she desired (Solomon et al. 16).

Gatsby explicitly expresses his perception of Daisy as an individual. To him, she is preoccupied with wealth and a materialistic lifestyle, leading Gatsby to question whether, if she were to return to him, it would be due to her affection for him or because he can now provide her with the material possessions, she has always desired. Gatsby expresses his thoughts on Daisy, mentioning that:

“Her voice is full of money,” he said suddenly. That was it. I’d never understood before. It was full of money — that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the jingle of it, the cymbals’ song of it... high in a white palace the king’s daughter, the golden girl ... (Fitzgerald 92).

In this context, the American Dream and the pursuit of it undermine love, the most genuine emotion in human existence.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

A combination of historical context, psychological theory, and literary analysis has been used to answer the study issues. The primary research techniques that have guided the study are listed below:

3.1 Literary Analysis

This method includes close readings focusing on characters, themes, symbols, and narrative techniques. The researchers have examined both *Death of a Salesman* and *The Great Gatsby* to see exactly how the American Dream is illustrated and examined in characters’ actions, speech,

and private thoughts. In order to determine how these people define success and failure, some of the key events such as Willy with his family and his death in *Death of a Salesman* and Gatsby's lavish parties and eventual retribution in *The Great Gatsby* have been examined.

3.2 Comparative Literary Criticism

The research has utilized comparative literary criticism to analyze the resemblances and distinctions in the representations of the American Dream by Miller and Fitzgerald. By contrasting the thematic issues and character developments of Willy Loman and Jay Gatsby, the study has aimed to illuminate how both writers critique the same concept from differing perspectives. This analysis has also involved examining the protagonists' aspirations and the various methods they employ to misunderstand or manipulate their circumstances in their quest for success, ultimately leading to their downfalls.

3.3 Historical Contextualization

This study has placed the works into their historical context in order to better understand how the socio-economic circumstances of post-World War II America and the Jazz Age influence the protagonists' conceptions of the American Dream. This involves analyzing the era's social structure, economic climate, and cultural trends. The study has examined how Willy Loman's definition of success was shaped by the rise of corporate America, consumerism, and the demise of conventional business models in the 1940s and 1950s, while Gatsby's quest for money and prestige was shaped by the extravagance and materialism of the Jazz Age.

3.4 Psychological Analysis

This analysis has investigated the emotional and psychological aspects of the characterizations of Willy Loman and Jay Gatsby. By employing psychological theory, the paper has delved into the internal conflicts faced by each character, including Willy's fixation on being well-liked and Gatsby's unattainable desire for Daisy. This methodology has examined how these internal struggles reflect broader societal pressures and lead to their tragic fates. The research has utilized psychological concepts such as self-deception, cognitive dissonance, and the psychology of aspiration to elucidate the reasons behind Willy and Gatsby's intense focus on their dreams and how these aspirations skew their understanding of reality.

3.5 Thematic and Symbolic Analysis

Both *Death of a Salesman* and *The Great Gatsby* incorporate significant symbols to critique the American Dream, such as the green light in *The Great Gatsby* and Willy's seeds in *Death of a Salesman*. This analysis aims

to explore the symbolism in these texts to understand how Fitzgerald and Miller employ metaphors and symbols to fortify their critiques of the American Dream. For instance, the green light in *The Great Gatsby* represents Gatsby's unreachable aspirations, while Willy's endeavor to plant seeds symbolizes his urgent wish to cultivate something lasting and meaningful in a life filled with failures. A close examination of these symbols will clarify how both narratives contend that the American Dream is ultimately a deceptive illusion.

3.6 Qualitative Content Analysis

A qualitative content analysis has been carried out on a variety of pertinent secondary sources, including peer-reviewed academic articles, critical essays, and analytical commentaries that explore *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller and *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald. The goal of this analysis is to identify, interpret, and synthesize common themes, viewpoints, and discussions regarding the portrayal of the American Dream in these two significant literary works. By investigating how different scholars have approached the topic—from socio-economic, psychological, and cultural perspectives—this research aims to outline the broader landscape of existing academic dialogue. Additionally, this analytical framework offers a substantial basis for contextualizing the present study, allowing it to critique and align with the prevailing scholarly debates concerning these novels and their representation of the American Dream.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1.1 The American Dream in *Death of a Salesman*

Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* offers a poignant critique of the American Dream, particularly the version that is built upon material success, popularity, and individual achievement. Willy Loman, the protagonist, embodies the ideal of hard work leading to success. A salesman by profession, Willy believes that personal connections and being well-liked are the keys to achieving the American Dream. He continually instills this belief in his sons, Biff and Happy, but as the play progresses, it becomes clear that Willy's dream is flawed and unattainable.

Willy's misguided faith in the American Dream is seen in his obsession with superficial success—success that is defined by appearances, social standing, and material wealth. This narrow view leads him to ignore the importance of self-worth, personal satisfaction, and integrity. His constant failure to achieve his goals, despite his relentless efforts, highlights the limitations of the American Dream. Willy's belief in the dream leads to his

downfall, as he becomes increasingly disillusioned with his inability to succeed. His tragic end, a suicide, represents the ultimate collapse of the ideal he had clung to.

Furthermore, Miller critiques the societal forces that contribute to Willy's failure. His inability to adapt to changing business practices and his misplaced reliance on being well-liked rather than on skills or professional development reflect the economic and social challenges faced by working-class Americans. Through Willy's tragic end, Miller demonstrates that the American Dream is often a myth, offering false hope and unattainable promises, particularly for those at the lower rungs of society.

4.1.2 The American Dream in *The Great Gatsby*

In *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald presents a more complex and romanticized version of the American Dream through the character of Jay Gatsby. Gatsby's dream is one of self-reinvention, wealth, and love. Born into poverty, he strives to become wealthy and achieve the status he believes will win him the love of Daisy Buchanan, a woman from a higher social class. Gatsby's obsession with Daisy and the idealized version of the American Dream that she represents drives him to accumulate vast wealth and throw extravagant parties in hopes of rekindling their past romance.

Unlike Willy Loman, who believes that hard work and being liked are the keys to success, Gatsby believes that wealth and material possessions will give him the social acceptance he desires. However, like Willy, Gatsby's pursuit of this dream leads to his ultimate downfall. His wealth, built through questionable means, fails to win Daisy's love, and his illusion of achieving the American Dream crumbles. In the end, Gatsby's tragic death symbolizes the failure of the American Dream to deliver the happiness and success it promises.

Through Gatsby's story, Fitzgerald critiques the notion that wealth alone can bring happiness and fulfillment. Gatsby's success is ultimately hollow, as his pursuit of an idealized version of the past prevents him from seeing the reality of his situation. Fitzgerald uses the character of Gatsby to show that the American Dream, as a pursuit of material wealth and social status, is a flawed and elusive ideal that leads to disillusionment and despair.

4.2 Effects of the Socio-economic Environments of the Jazz Age and Post-World War II America

Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman* and Jay Gatsby in *The Great Gatsby* both chase the American Dream, but their conceptions of it are deeply shaped by their respective socioeconomic environments—Gatsby by the opulence and illusion of the Jazz Age, and Willy by the

conformity and consumerism of post-World War II America.

4.2.1 Jay Gatsby and the Jazz Age

Gatsby's version of the American Dream is rooted in the 1920s—a decade marked by rapid economic growth, speculation, and a loosening of traditional social norms. The Jazz Age promised upward mobility and self-invention, particularly through wealth. Gatsby embodies this: he reinvents himself from James Gatz, a poor Midwesterner, into a wealthy, mysterious figure. His dream is not just about material success, but also about reclaiming a romanticized past with Daisy. Gatsby's pursuit reflects a belief that money and status can buy happiness and acceptance in elite society. However, Fitzgerald critiques this dream by showing that Gatsby's wealth cannot truly erase his origins or grant him the social legitimacy he desires.

4.2.2 Willy Loman and Post-War America

Willy's American Dream is shaped by the post-WWII economic boom, which emphasized stability, home ownership, and corporate success. Unlike Gatsby's romantic and extravagant vision, Willy's dream is grounded in middle-class ideals: being "well-liked," having a stable job, and providing for a family. Yet, the same economic environment that enabled widespread prosperity also created rigid standards of success and conformity. Willy clings to outdated notions of charisma over hard work and resists adapting to a changing economic landscape that values skills over personality. His failure to achieve success—and his inability to reassess what success means—leads to his psychological decline and eventual suicide.

Both characters are ultimately destroyed by their dreams, which are built on illusions. Gatsby's downfall reveals the emptiness of wealth without social authenticity or emotional fulfillment. Willy's tragedy lies in his misplaced faith in a dream that no longer matches reality. The socioeconomic forces of their times feed these illusions—Gatsby's world offers the fantasy of unlimited self-reinvention, while Willy's promotes a narrow definition of success that punishes failure harshly.

In sum, Gatsby and Willy are tragic figures shaped—and ultimately undone—by their historical moments. Their dreams, while emblematic of broader American ideals, are deeply flawed responses to the promises and pressures of their respective socioeconomic environments.

4.3 Roles of social class, wealth, and personal relationships in achieving the American Dream

In both *Death of a Salesman* and *The Great Gatsby*, social class and the allure of wealth mislead protagonists into

pursuing a version of the American Dream that is neither attainable nor fulfilling. Willy Loman, confined to the lower-middle class, treats material success and popularity as the ultimate markers of worth; yet the economic system he serves offers diminishing returns for aging salesmen, and his lack of inherited status leaves him permanently excluded from the elite networks he romanticizes. Gatsby, by contrast, amasses extraordinary wealth, but his nouveau riche status places him in the glittering margins rather than the inherited core of East Egg society. In each text, social stratification exposes the hollowness of the dream: Willy's small house and mounting debts mock his boasts of prosperity, while Gatsby's mansion, dazzling yet socially suspect, underscores how money alone cannot purchase the legitimacy required to enter "old-money" circles. Thus, both characters' failures are rooted less in insufficient effort than in a rigid class hierarchy that keeps success tantalizingly out of reach.

Personal relationships amplify that failure by revealing how deeply the dream is tied to interpersonal validation. Willy's vision of success is inseparable from his desire to be "well liked," a goal he projects onto his sons; when Biff rejects that metric, Willy's identity collapses. Similarly, Gatsby's accumulation of wealth has a single aim: to rekindle his past romance with Daisy. Yet Daisy's loyalty to her own class—and Tom's brutal defense of their privilege—turn Gatsby's romantic ideal into a fatal delusion. In both works, then, relationships expose the flaw in equating personal worth with external approval: Willy's family refuses to sustain his illusions, and Daisy cannot transcend the social calculus that originally led her to abandon Gatsby. The American Dream falters not merely because of economic limitations but because the emotional bonds that might redeem material striving prove contingent, fragile, and ultimately corrosive.

4.4 The Corrupted Vision of the American Dream

The American Dream, initially envisioned as a promise of equality, opportunity, and advancement through hard work and determination, undergoes a significant transformation in the 20th century, particularly in the context of industrial capitalism and consumer culture. In Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, this dream is illustrated not as an achievable ideal but as a corrupted, illusory pursuit that results in personal and moral decline. Both authors critically engage with the myth of success in American society, revealing how its distortion drives their protagonists—Willy Loman and Jay Gatsby—toward inevitable disillusionment and tragic conclusions.

In Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, Willy Loman represents the average American worker who becomes

entrapped in a mythologized version of the American Dream. Willy does not aspire to success through personal growth, skill, or innovation. Instead, he is obsessed with being "well-liked" and believes popularity and surface-level charm will bring prosperity. This shallow understanding of success reflects a societal shift in post-war America, where image and reputation increasingly overshadow substance and integrity.

Willy's vision is further corrupted by his refusal to accept change—both in himself and in the world around him. He remains emotionally tied to the past, idolizing figures like his brother Ben, who "walked into the jungle and came out rich." This narrative glorifies wealth acquired quickly and mysteriously, underscoring how the American Dream has become less about honest labor and more about luck, inheritance, or manipulation.

Miller emphasizes the tragic cost of this illusion through Willy's relationships. He alienates his son, Biff, who eventually sees through the lie of his father's dream. Biff recognizes that he was never meant for the corporate world and that living according to Willy's vision would be a betrayal of his true self. This generational conflict highlights how the dream, when corrupted, not only destroys individuals but fractures families. Willy's suicide, framed as a final attempt to secure financial success through insurance money, encapsulates the ultimate irony: he values himself more dead than alive, a chilling commentary on how capitalism dehumanizes individuals and reduces their worth to monetary terms.

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* similarly critiques the American Dream, though from the perspective of wealth and social status in the Jazz Age. Jay Gatsby, unlike Willy Loman, has achieved material success. Born James Gatz, he reinvents himself and amasses a fortune—albeit through dubious means—with the singular aim of winning back Daisy Buchanan, the woman he loves. Gatsby's dream is both personal and emblematic: it reflects a belief that the past can be reclaimed and that wealth can buy love, acceptance, and identity.

Yet Gatsby's dream is fundamentally unattainable because it is based on illusion. Daisy, the embodiment of Gatsby's desire and the American Dream itself, is shallow, self-serving, and ultimately loyal to her elite class. Gatsby fails to recognize that the social barriers that once separated them have not been erased by his wealth. In fact, his nouveau riche status, flamboyant displays of affluence, and mysterious background only alienate him further from the established aristocracy that Daisy and Tom Buchanan represent.

Fitzgerald uses the symbol of the green light at the end of Daisy's dock to represent Gatsby's dream—ever visible

but always out of reach. The novel ends with Gatsby's death and the hollow aftermath of his once-glittering life, suggesting that the pursuit of a corrupted dream leads not to fulfillment but to ruin. Fitzgerald portrays the 1920s as an era of decadence and spiritual emptiness, where the original ideals of the American Dream—freedom, self-determination, and moral integrity—have been supplanted by materialism, privilege, and moral decay.

4.5 Comparative Analysis: The Myth and Reality of the American Dream

Both *Death of a Salesman* and *The Great Gatsby* present powerful critiques of the American Dream, though they do so in different ways. While Willy Loman's failure is rooted in his inability to adapt to the realities of the business world, Gatsby's failure is tied to his obsession with a romanticized past and the belief that wealth can buy happiness (Pumphrey 23). Despite their different approaches, both characters embody the dangers of chasing an idealized version of success without acknowledging the complexities and limitations of the real world.

One key difference between the two works is the type of dream each protagonist pursues. Willy Loman's dream is focused on professional success and social acceptance, while Jay Gatsby's dream revolves around wealth and love. However, both characters share a belief in the transformative power of material success and the myth of social mobility. Both works ultimately reveal the harsh reality that the American Dream is not as attainable or rewarding as it may appear. In both texts, the protagonists' efforts to achieve the dream result in personal failure, disillusionment, and death.

Furthermore, both Miller and Fitzgerald critique the American Dream as being inherently flawed due to its reliance on superficial measures of success, such as wealth, popularity, and social standing. They suggest that the pursuit of these goals often leads to the neglect of deeper, more meaningful values, such as personal integrity, self-worth, and genuine human connection.

V. CONCLUSION

The American Dream presented in *Death of a Salesman* and *The Great Gatsby* is a failure of returning from the myth in which their offer is based. Both Willy Loman and Jay Gatsby are victims of pursuing a warped vision of success that selfishly prizes money and high social position, rather than true personal satisfaction. Through the characters, Arthur Miller and F. Scott Fitzgerald make strong attacks on the American Dream, uncover their fundamental paradoxes and limitations.

In both works, the quest of the American Dream is deadly. While the value of the American Dream is deemed huge by these works, the people who are victims of their own society which are a result of their limitation of social, economic, and personal without return in surveying their ability in gaining the American Dream. In dissecting the myth of the American Dream, *Death of a Salesman* and *The Great Gatsby* act as warnings about the perils of adopting a goal that is rooted in falsity instead of truth.

Both *The Great Gatsby* and *Death of a Salesman* reveal the American Dream as a "participated fantasy" that sustains societal order but eventually leads to disillusionment. Gatsby's parties and Willy's visions of majesty are both performances meant to validate their pursuit of success, yet neither achieves genuine happiness or fulfillment. The tragedies of these characters emphasize the troubles of conflating material wealth with particular worth and the impossibility of retrieving an idealized history.

Ultimately, these works function not only as critiques of the American Dream but also as cautionary tales regarding the personal toll of chasing it. As illustrated in Miller's play, the dream's disintegration can be as ordinary as it is tragic—Willy meets his end not as a hero but as an obscure individual, much like Gatsby's death goes unnoticed by the very society he aimed to impress. While the concept of the American Dream persists, these narratives highlight its frequently ignored truths: disparity, ethical compromise, and the vulnerability of human ambition.

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Echoes of the Deep: Feminine Resilience through the Lens of Blue Humanities in Emilia Hart's *Siren*

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Abstract— *In English Literature studies, almost every writer is obsessed with oceans and seas. Many oceanic imageries were used by the writers in their works. The fact is as a human being, we have impacted so much with oceans and seas. Literature, culture, media and even anthropologies are so much influenced by oceans and seas. The concept explained above comes under Blue Humanities. Blue Humanities refers to the vast show of water specifically oceans and bodies and how these water bodies are represented in a text. This is such a cutting edge and an emerging field that bridges the gap between literature, culture, history and anthropology, making it an exciting topic for research and studies. In this connection, one of the most famous American works of Emilia Hart, “The Sirens” explores the experiences and stories of two sisters who is separated by hundreds of years and time but are connected by the sea. This book is a blend of historical fiction, magical realism followed by mystery as the character Lucy exposes family secrets and the magical lore of the sea through her evocative dreams. Feminine Resilience in Literature prospects how female characters bounce back from their traditional roles in family to recover their identity. Themes like sisterhood, feminine resilience, and female power that is drawn from the author's family history and compassion of the ocean can be studied in this novel. This paper explores how Emilia Hart's Siren involves characters that merges Feminine Resilience and Blue ethics which is one of the core elements in the study of blue humanities.*



Keywords— *Blue Humanities, Feminine Resilience, Blue ethics, Emilia Hart.*

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary literature, the concept of Blue Humanities has become a significant modern paradigm for reconsidering and rethinking the human's relationship with water especially with oceans and seas. Writers like Steve Mentz (2009, 2020), Elizabeth De Loughrey (2019), and Stacy Alaimo (2010) have deeply portrayed sea as a powerful place which shapes society's culture, and identity. Here, literature acts as an important medium for expressing how the ocean reflects human vulnerability and resilience. Emilia Hart's *Siren* engages in this area of study that transforms symbol of risk into an image of feminine strength and adaptability. Hart's novel blends mythic storytelling with environmental and ecological ethics, showing the sea not simply as a simple environmental

landscape but as an energetic and invigorate, moral force that relocates, tests, and transmits. The protagonist's relation with the ocean becomes a metaphor for endurance and self-discovery, resounding the rhythms of tides—which is everlasting, erratic, yet stronger. Through this narrative, Hart provides a perception of feminine resilience put together in interdependence, where strength builds from connection not from control. Such a portrayal resounds with ecofeminist thought and strengthens the Blue Humanities' reliability to elongating humanness beyond the human sphere to include marine and ecological life. This paper explores that Siren conceptualize both the sea and the feminine as areas of resistance and resumptions. By fusing Feminine Resilience and Blue Humanities, the author convinces readers to recognize the spirit of women and the

ocean to experience, transform, and survive life breaking down all the struggles.

Ecofeminist and Blue Humanities Perspectives in Emilia Hart's *Siren*"

Emilia Hart's *Siren* devises an effective intersection between feminine identity, ecological awareness, and the ocean's moral agency, personifying the principles of the Blue Humanities within a clearly feminist framework. The novel's oceanic surroundings and its significant figure—the siren—set off as identical symbols of acceptance and renewal, disclosing that resilience is not an unchanged trait but a continuous process of reconstruction and harmony. Through this portrayal, Hart disassembles patriarchal myths that frame both women and nature as submissive, risky, or servile, reimagining them instead as co-creators in the intermittent dance of dissection and rebirth. The siren in Hart's narrative amalgamates the trans-corporeal connectivity that Stacy Alaimo identifies as crucial and critical to environmental ethics. Her physical and emotional boundaries dissolve into the sea's vastness, suggesting that survival depends on recognizing one's embeddedness within more-than-human networks (*Bodily Natures* 4). Hart's sensory writing often reflects this colliding of body and water, where the siren's voice "rises and falls like the tide," symbolizing both vulnerability and persistence (Hart 47). This imagery emphasizes an important shift: resilience here is not resistance against the oceanic forces but coexistence within them. The siren's song—once a tool of destruction in patriarchal myth—is transformed into a language of ameliorating, echoing what Steve Mentz calls "blue ecological awareness," where the sea becomes a medium of moral reflection and transformation (*Ocean* 22).

Moreover, Hart's ocean purposes as a character of moral complexity, not a submissive landscape. It carries witness to human exploitation and the emotional breakdown of its female protagonist. In settings, where the sea responds to barbarity—rising, revolt, or receding—Hart stimulates it as a wary force that both mirrors and expands feminine perception and opinion. This interjecting relationship agrees with Elizabeth DeLoughrey's conception of the ocean as an "archive of trauma and survival" (*Allegories of the Anthropocene* 58). The sea remembers; it carries the fragments of colonial, industrial, and emotional histories. In *Siren*, this memory becomes curative rather than oppressive—"Every shipwreck whispers through the tide," the narrator reflects (Hart 63). The ocean's depths clench both distress and the assurance of new life. The siren's drop in these waters characterizes the rescues of restrained pasts, where feminine resilience is essentially associated to environmental memory.

Through this merging between woman and ocean, Hart exposes resilience as a shared ecological quality—a form of power derived from flexibility, interconnection, and continuous transformation. This voice echoes with Greta Gaard's ecofeminist argument that women's experiences of oppression and renewal mirror the planet's cycles of depletion and recovery ("Ecofeminism and Climate Change" 25). In Hart's narrative, the siren's subsistence relies on her capacity to encircle the sea's rhythms, learning from its tempests and calms. Her strength lies in adaptability, emulating Mentz's view of the ocean as a "medium of continuous change" (*Toward a Blue Cultural Studies* 1001). Thus, feminine resilience in *Siren* is fundamentally blue—not rigorous or heroic, but streaming, connected, recurrent.

Hart's reworking of the siren myth also performs a symbolic reclamation of female voice. Conventionally, the siren's song represents attraction and devastation, a sound that attracts men to their deaths. Hart overthrows this pattern: her siren sings not to ruin but to communicate—"My song does not lure; it listens" (Hart 74). Her song becomes an ecological language, a request for peace between human and marine worlds. In this way, Hart fuses myth and ethics, crafting a narrative that lends both feminist and blue humanitarian concepts. The siren's song symbolizes an act of opposition against environmental problems and systematic silencing of women, maintaining that both sea and woman deserve to be listened. Most significantly, Hart's portrayal of feminine resilience is not emotional or metaphoric. The sea in *Siren* is inconsistent and unpredictable—sometimes sustaining, sometimes devastating—mirroring the difficulties of human emotion and environmental sustainability. "The sea loves no one, but it teaches us how to love," the narrator admits (Hart 88). This ambivalence supports Mentz's notion of the "uncertain ethics of the sea," where empathy and survival coexist with instability and risk (*Ocean* 64). The protagonist's persistence, therefore, is not portrayed as victory over misfortune but as acceptance of uncertainty, a capacity to live within the flux of change. In doing so, Hart agrees with the Blue Humanities' recognition that sustainability and kindness comes not from power but from mutual susceptibility.

Siren converts myth into an ecological allegory, where language, rhythm, and imagery constitute the fluid ethics of the Blue Humanities. The novel's narration, immersed with maritime lexicon, reproduces motion of the sea itself. Sentences often rise and fall in rhythm—"The sea was never still. It breathed with her, sighed with her, and sometimes, when she wept, it raged with her" (Hart 3)—calling readers to experience the text as a living tide. This stylistic fluidity enacts what Steve Mentz describes as the

"poetics of liquidity," in which the form of writing itself embodies the ocean's perpetual motion (*Ocean* 27). Through such rhythm, Hart shadows differences between subject and setting, suggesting that the protagonist's identity is not different from her environment but comprised by it.

Hart's characterization of the siren retrieves a figure historically defined by fear and passion. The siren's sound, once a sign of destructive femininity, becomes a device of empathy and recognition. When she says, "*My song does not lure; it listens*" (Hart 74), Hart executes an intense inversion of patriarchal myth. The sound is no more a medium or a weapon but an honest act—an acoustic embodiment of care. This transformation reverberates with Stacy Alaimo's concept of *trans-corporeality*, an analysis that all bodies are "intermeshed with the material world" (*Bodily Natures* 2). The siren's instinct to "listen" to the ocean and respond to its pulse shows an ethic of involvement and compassion rather than control. Her sound becomes a bridge between human and nonhuman, claiming a shared prevalence of exposure and persistence. Water in *Siren* also functions as a metaphor for nostalgic flashback and cultural trauma. Hart writes, "Every shipwreck whispers through the tide" (63), evoking the ocean as an archive of the forgotten and the lost. This aligns with Elizabeth DeLoughrey's conception of the sea as an "oceanic archive" (*Allegories of the Anthropocene* 58)—a fluid repository of histories suppressed by human exploitation and colonial violence. In Hart's reimagining, the siren is not merely an observer to these submerged histories but a vessel of memories. Her body, blended with water, becomes a site where ecological and emotional wounds join. This merging of female and marine subjectivities constructs resilience not as resistance to suffering but as integration of memory into being—a process of enduring through remembrance.

The narrative also offers a review of extractive and patriarchal dominance through environmental imagery. When the protagonist mourns, "*They took from the sea as they took from me—without asking, without care*" (Hart 82), Hart compares environmental exploitation with gendered violence. The sea's decline resembles the silencing of the feminine voice, revealing a shared history of dehumanization and misuse. This moment reflects Greta Gaard's statement that ecofeminism uncovers "the interwoven oppressions of women and the environment" ("Ecofeminism and Climate Change" 25). Yet Hart resists desperation; instead, she provides healing as an act of reconnection. The siren's eventual choice to sing again signals a reclaiming of action—a lyrical fixing of balance between self and world. Stylistically, Hart's language represents the resilience it describes. Her prose varies

between lyrical softness and elemental ferocity: "*The sea loves no one, but it teaches us how to love*" (Hart 88). This ambivalence mirrors the ocean's dual nature—simultaneously nurturing and destructive—and reinforces the Blue Humanities' emphasis on uncertainty as an ethical mode. As Mentz observes, "the sea's instability teaches an ethics of adaptation" (*Ocean* 64). In embracing the ocean's volatility, Hart's protagonist learns that resilience is not the ability to withstand change but to move with it. The novel's recurring imagery of tides, storms, and breath converges in the climactic moment when the siren's song merges with the tempest: "*The wind took my voice and made it thunder. The sea answered, and for a moment, we were one*" (Hart 101). This fusion symbolizes the ultimate dissolution of human/nature boundaries, expressing the ecofeminist ideal of coexistence through mutual transformation. Ultimately, *Siren* redefines resilience through a blue feminist lens, fusing emotional endurance with ecological consciousness. The sea is both metaphor and mentor—an embodiment of what Serpil Oppermann calls "narrative agency," the power of matter to shape human stories ("From Ecological Postmodernism" 32). In surrendering to the ocean's rhythm, the siren transcends the limits of individual survival and participates in the planet's continuous cycles of decay and renewal. Hart's closing reflection, "*To be part of the sea is to be infinite, to be small, and yet to endure*" (Hart 102), encapsulates this philosophy of shared vitality. Here, the boundaries between self and sea dissolve completely, yielding a vision of resilience as interdependence and affinity—the central ethical and virtuous insights of both ecofeminism and the Blue Humanities.

Siren reconsiders resilience as a blue feminist ethic—a way of being that draws strength from connection, memory, and transformation. The ocean becomes both metaphor and mentor, teaching the protagonist that endurance lies in surrender to the world's rhythms rather than in dominance over them. Through the siren's journey, Hart twists together ecofeminist and oceanic narratives, visualizing a future where the feminine and the marine coincide as partners in survival. By merging mythic femininity with environmental consciousness, Hart situates *Siren* firmly within the evolving discourse of the Blue Humanities, offering a poetic yet urgent reflection on the shared resilience of women and the sea.

Oceanic Ethics and Feminine Ecology: Theoretical Foundations for Reading Emilia Hart's *Siren*

The Blue Humanities has developed as a significant strand within environmental criticism, foregrounding the ocean as a site of cultural meaning, emotional depth, and ethical reflection. While traditional ecological discourses often privilege the land, the Blue

Humanities redirects attention to the sea's material and symbolic centrality in shaping human thought. Steve Mentz first articulated this approach through what he termed *blue cultural studies*, arguing that the sea functions as a space of "fluid thinking" and continuous transformation—a metaphor for both ecological instability and creative renewal ("Toward a Blue Cultural Studies" 999). In his later work, *Ocean*, Mentz expands this idea, suggesting that literary and cultural responses to the sea can cultivate a form of "blue ecological awareness," one that recognizes the ocean as an active participant in human and planetary histories (*Ocean* 15). This paradigm shift is crucial for reading Emilia Hart's *Siren*, where the ocean is not merely a backdrop but a living moral presence that shapes the protagonist's emotional and ethical evolution.

Complementing this oceanic turn, Stacy Alaimo's concept of *trans-corporeality* offers an essential theoretical bridge between feminist and environmental or ecological thought. Alaimo emphasizes the material interconnections between human and nonhuman bodies, arguing that the boundaries separating species, elements, and identities are permeable (*Bodily Natures* 2–3). This notion illuminates Hart's portrayal of the siren as a figure whose body and spirit are entwined with the sea's currents, embodying a resilience that flows from interdependence rather than domination. The siren's capacity to survive and adapt mirrors the sea's own cyclical endurance, reinforcing an ecofeminist ethic that values care, empathy, and coexistence.

Elizabeth De Loughrey further expands this framework by conceptualizing the ocean as an "archive of memory," a vast repository of trauma, survival, and renewal (*Allegories of the Anthropocene* 58). Her analysis of the ocean in postcolonial and ecological narratives reveals how watery spaces bear witness to histories of violence and resilience. In *Siren*, the sea similarly functions as a memory-bearing entity, echoing the pain of both women and nature silenced by patriarchal and industrial exploitation. Through her protagonist's deep communion with the sea, Hart aligns feminine endurance with the planet's capacity for regeneration, crafting a narrative that resounds with what De Loughrey describes as the ocean's "epistemology of relation" (72).

Bringing these perspectives together, the Blue Humanities and ecofeminism intersect in their shared critique of domination—whether over nature, women, or marginalized bodies. Scholars such as Serpil Oppermann and Greta Gaard argue that ecofeminism provides the ethical grounding for rethinking environmental humanities through gendered perspectives (Oppermann 440; Gaard 21). Hart's *Siren* exemplifies this synthesis: it transforms the

siren's song from a myth of seduction into a call for ecological awareness, thereby merging feminist and blue epistemologies. The siren's endurance, born from her union with the sea, becomes an allegory for both female and environmental resilience in an age of crisis. Thus, the theoretical foundation for this study rests on the intersection of the Blue Humanities' oceanic ethics and ecofeminist conceptions of relational strength. Through this lens, Hart's *Siren* is understood as a literary articulation of blue feminist ethics—a worldview that conceives resilience not as resistance against nature but as participation within its fluid and enduring cycles.

CONCLUSION

Emilia Hart's *Siren* appears as a notable contribution to contemporary ecofeminist and oceanic discourse, suggesting how feminine resilience can be visualized through the adaptable ethics of the sea. By involving with the conceptual frameworks of the Blue Humanities, the novel solicits readers to redefine the ocean not merely as a metaphorical background but as a living participant in human survivance and emotional revival. Hart's depiction of the siren's connection with the sea expresses what Steve Mentz terms a "blue ecological awareness," where identity and endurance are shaped through the mutable, unpredictable forces of water (*Ocean* 18). Through the protagonist's close harmony with the sea, Hart prepares an allegory of relational strength that mirrors Stacy Alaimo's notion of *trans-corporeality*—the understanding that human and nonhuman bodies are entangled within shared material flows (*Bodily Natures* 4). The siren's resilience is thus not the product of isolation or control but of openness and interdependence, mirroring the sea's capacity for renewal amid loss. Her transformation from a silenced mythic creature to an ecological voice underscores a feminist redemption of agency, suggesting that persistence itself can be a form of talk with the natural world.

The ocean in *Siren* functions as both witness and teacher, carrying within it the collective memory of trauma and survival—a theme resonant with Elizabeth DeLoughrey's view of the sea as an "archive of planetary history" (*Allegories of the Anthropocene* 60). In recognizing the ocean as an ethical presence, Hart's narrative aligns with ecofeminist critiques of domination articulated by Greta Gaard and Serpil Oppermann, who emphasize the necessity of empathy, care, and coexistence in rethinking environmental relations ("Ecofeminism and Climate Change" 23; Oppermann 34). By merging mythic femininity with oceanic consciousness, *Siren* advances what might be called a "blue feminist ethics"—a worldview

that resists binaries between strength and vulnerability, land and sea, self and other. The novel's final movement, where the siren accepts her inseparability from the ocean's rhythm, encapsulates this ethic: "*The sea and I breathe as one; I am not apart from its depths but a pulse within them*" (Hart 102). This image transforms resilience into an act of participation—an acceptance of fluidity as the essence of endurance. In this way, Hart's *Siren* participates in a larger cultural shift envisioned by the Blue Humanities: a movement away from anthropocentric hierarchies toward a post human understanding of shared survival. The siren's story reminds readers that both the feminine body and the sea endure through reciprocity and renewal. Her voice, echoing through the waves, becomes a metaphor for the ongoing dialogue between humanity and the planet—a dialogue rooted in empathy, memory, and transformation. Through the convergence of ecofeminism and oceanic thought, *Siren* ultimately demonstrates that feminine resilience, like the sea itself, is limitless, adaptive, and profoundly alive.

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Geographical Exile: The Dispossessed Place Between Diaspora and Loss of Land in *The Inheritance* by Sahar Khalifeh

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Abstract— This study examines representations of geographical exile in Sahar Khalifeh's novel *The Inheritance*, employing the theory of settler colonialism. The study demonstrates that exile in the novel is not presented as an individual experience or a fleeting historical event, but rather as a continuous structure reproduced generation after generation by the logic of elimination that characterizes the settler project. Through the character of Zayna, the text reveals that the homeland itself has been transformed into a strange and isolated space, no longer an extension of memory and belonging, but rather a place reshaped according to the representations of the settler. The study reveals that settler colonialism is not limited to the colonization of land but expands to encompass language, identity, family relationships, and cultural symbols. These elements become tools of obliteration, producing a sense of internal exile. It also becomes clear that return, which is supposed to be a moment of reclaiming self and homeland, turns into an experience of loss and disappointment, as the Palestinian discovers that the meaning and symbolism of the place has changed. The study reveals that Palestinians remain displaced both within the homeland and in the diaspora, and they confront a homeland devoid of authentic features. The study concludes that *The Inheritance* offers a profound literary representation of the structural and permanent nature of settler colonialism, demonstrating how exile becomes an ongoing existential condition that transcends space and time.



Keywords— Sahar Khalifeh, *The inheritance*, exile, settler colonialism, identity, place.

I. INTRODUCTION

Exile is one of the most brutal existential experiences in human history. Its meaning goes beyond mere geographical displacement to include uprooting, the dismantling of memory, and the alienation of identity. As Edward Said describes it, "Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted" (Said 173).

In the Palestinian context, exile has acquired a double dimension: it is not the result of a temporary war or border dispute, but rather the product of a long-term

settlement project that seeks to obliterate the Palestinian people's presence in both their land and their memory.

Since the Nakba in 1948, Palestinians have been experiencing a continuous forced expulsion from their homes and driven into exile, with camps and neighboring countries becoming alternative spaces for the fragmented Palestinian existence. The Israeli occupation continues to practice policies of forced displacement, settlement, and the separation wall, forcing Palestinians to live in a state of "renewed exile," even on their own land, transforming their original place into an alienated space that bears no resemblance to their history or memory (Pappe 21).

In this context, Sahar Khalifeh's novel *The Inheritance* stands out as a literary text that reshapes the

experience of Palestinian exile. Through the character of Zayna and her family, it reveals the geographical, symbolic, and psychological dimensions of exile, demonstrating how the homeland itself has become a land of exile.

Geographical exile in *The Inheritance* goes beyond its literal meaning; it represents more than just forcible expulsion and spatial alienation between the occupied land and the diaspora. In the framework of the settler colonialism experience, it is an ideological and narrative framework that exposes the fractures in memory, identity, and belonging.

The novel centers on the heroine, Zayna, who was born in Brooklyn, a county in New York, to a Palestinian father and an American mother. She returns to her homeland, Palestine, to explore her heritage. This homecoming does not manifest as an act of restoration; instead, it evolves into a novel sensation of estrangement. This indicates that the homeland has been altered, specifically molded by settler colonialism, rendering it irretrievable and irrelevant.

In this setting, "exile" is perceived not merely as a geographical exile but as a profound crisis of identity, culture, and story. Return is perceived not as self-realization but as a "shock of consciousness" that reveals the disparity between idealized recollection and a fragmented reality. The geographical exile within the novel interacts with the ideas of settler colonialism, in which the goal of colonialism transcends simple control to include the transformation of place, language, and the individual, so rendering the returnee a stranger to their homeland.

Through the lens of settler colonial theory, as formulated by Patrick Wolfe and Lorenzo Veracini, it becomes clear that exile is not a passing event, but rather a permanent structure constantly reproduced through exclusion, reconfiguration of space, and erasure of memory.

This study aims to analyze representations of geographical exile in *The Inheritance*, as a reflection of the structure of settler colonialism by answering the question: How does Sahar Khalifeh's novel *The Inheritance* reveal geographical and symbolic exile as a permanent structure of settler colonialism that reshapes Palestinian place, identity, and memory? The study seeks to highlight how the individual experiences of the characters (Zayna and her family) are transformed into a testament to ongoing exile across borders, and to demonstrate how exclusion is reproduced in spatial, symbolic, psychological, and linguistic dimensions.

The importance of this study lies in its illumination of how Palestinian literature represents exile as a collective experience and a testament to an ongoing colonial structure, rather than merely an individual tragedy. It also reveals the

literary text's ability to question settler narratives and offer an alternative reading that restores Palestinian memory. The study comes at a particularly sensitive time, as displacement and land confiscation continue in Palestine, making it relevant and of utmost necessity in the context of literary and postcolonial studies.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Inheritance has received widespread attention from critics and researchers, as it represents a central text in contemporary Palestinian literature. It embodies the social and political transformations following the Oslo Accords and raises profound questions about exile, identity, place, and return. Critical approaches have varied from postcolonial studies, identity analyses, feminist readings, and studies of memory and place. The following is a review of the most prominent of these studies and their findings.

Mona Elnamoury conducted a study entitled "Unjust Identity Quest: Khalife's *The Inheritance*: A Post-Colonial Study," to examine the novel from a postcolonial perspective, focusing on Zayna's identity conflict between Brooklyn and Nablus. The study concluded that Palestinian identity in the text is not a fixed identity, but rather a fragile and fragmented project, as Palestinians face difficulty in achieving belonging, whether in the diaspora or in their dispossessed homeland (2-4).

The study "The Concept of Identity in Sahar Khalifeh's Novel *The Inheritance*," conducted by Iman Neamah Jasim and Lajiman Jaanoori, discusses the concept of identity in the light of postcolonial theorists. Their study demonstrates that characters in the novel attempt to reconstruct their identities through language and memory. However, this identity remains constantly threatened by erosion due to the settlement structure and the Oslo Accords, making Palestinian identity in the novel a daily struggle against erasure and exclusion rather than a firm sense of belonging (13-15).

In another study, "To Go, or Not to Go: The Palestinian Realities of Exile in the Works of Khalifeh," conducted by Priyanka and Shashikantha Koudur, analyzed the novel through the theme of exile. The results showed that the absence of men due to diaspora renders women in the novel the primary bearers of national memory, preserving the survival of home and family. The study also revealed that return is not a restoration of the homeland as much as it is a shock that shows the transformation of the place due to colonialism, transforming it into a space alien to its inhabitants (442).

Similarly, Priyanka and Shashikantha Koudur conducted another study entitled "The Multiple Resistance

Strategies for Survival under Israeli Occupation in the Novels of Sahar Khalifeh," to examine the multiple resistance strategies adopted by both Palestinian men and women on a land that is under prolonged Israeli occupation. The study concluded that resistance in *The Inheritance* is not only a military confrontation, but also manifests in the details of daily life, such as clinging to language and memory, making Palestinian resistance multi-layered: political, cultural, and symbolic (18-20).

Together, these studies demonstrate that *The Inheritance* presents exile, identity, and place as central issues that transcend the individual to encompass the collective Palestinian experience. They agree that identity in the text is fractured, exile is a permanent state, and place is alienated and reshaped by settler colonialism. However, most of these studies have focused on identity or exile in isolation from the broader structural framework, highlighting the need for a new study based on settler colonialism theory to understand how the Palestinian homeland itself is transformed into a space of permanent exile.

The Concept of Settler Colonialism and Exile

In his seminal article, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," Patrick Wolfe argues that settler colonialism is not a passing event linked to a specific historical phase, but rather a permanent structure that continually reproduces itself.

This structure is characterized by what Wolfe calls the "logic of elimination" (388). The settlers attempt to eliminate the presence of the indigenous population, not necessarily through direct extermination, but also through policies of expulsion, dispossession, cultural assimilation, or the reshaping of the place so that it becomes alien to its original inhabitants. Wolfe adds his famous phrase: "settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event," a phrase that sums up the essence of the settler project (388).

In light of this analysis, exile becomes not merely a side effect of war or conflict, but an inevitable consequence of the settlement structure. Elimination not only displaces people from their land but also renders them permanently "displaceable," whether within or outside their homeland. In this sense, Palestinians experience a state of "renewed exile," as camps and diaspora become an extension of the same logic that drove them from their villages in 1948. Exile here is not a temporary experience, but an existential state that is reproduced across generations.

Lorenzo Veracini completes this analysis in his book "Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview," where he asserts that settler colonialism is not limited to the

physical control of the land but also seeks to reconstruct spatial narratives. That is, space is redefined according to the settler's representations, while the indigenous person is forced to confront a homeland devoid of its original characteristics. Hence, space intersects with exile: returning to the homeland does not mean regaining presence, but instead facing a symbolic void that reveals the absence of indigenous history and memory.

While Wolfe focuses on the logic of structural elimination, Veracini illuminates the impact of this logic on identity and memory. In the settler context, the indigenous people experience what can be called "internal exile," becoming a stranger even within their own homeland, due to the replacement of language, symbols, and social structure. This is also what Edward Said referred to when he described exile as "It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place," emphasizing that alienation is not only geographical but also existential and cultural (Said 173).

For his part, Ilan Pappé documented in "The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine" how the 1948 ethnic cleansing project was a practical embodiment of the logic of settler colonialism. Palestinian exile was not an accident, but rather a political plan aimed at reshaping Palestine as a settler space devoid of its indigenous population. Edward Said, meanwhile, emphasized that Palestinian exile cannot be separated from the settler project, as it leaves Palestinians in a state of permanent division between a lost past and an unstable present.

Connecting the concepts of Wolfe, Veracini, Said, and Pappé reveals that settler colonialism and Palestinian exile are two sides of the one coin: the former seeks to eliminate indigenous presence, and the latter represents the ongoing consequence of this elimination. Exile here is not a historical event that ended with the Nakba, but rather an ongoing structure that reproduces itself through space, language, memory, and identity. Thus, the homeland itself becomes a space of exile, and return becomes merely a confrontation with the absence of the original presence.

III. METHOD

This study will apply the two methods. First, textual analysis. It is one of the most common methods in literary studies, focusing on the text as a space rich in meaning and connotations. Textual analysis allows the reader to uncover how meanings are formed in literary texts by examining language, narrative structure, symbols, and textual space (Mackey 42-45). This approach has been applied to *The Inheritance* novel to trace representations of exile and its manifestations in the narrative. The text shows how the homeland is transformed into an alien space, and how the

colonial experience is reflected in the disintegration of identity and the dispersion of belonging. Adopting this approach allows for a deeper understanding of the text's relationship with the reader, as meanings are generated through the reading interaction and not solely by the author's intention ([Krippendorff 24–29](#)).

Second, theoretical analysis: The study draws on theoretical analysis through the framework of settler colonialism. Wolfe explains that settler colonialism is "not an event but a structure" ([388](#)), and is based on what he calls a "logic of elimination" that seeks to eliminate not only through annihilation but also through continuous displacement, dispossession, and the reconfiguration of space. For his part, Veracini distinguishes between traditional colonialism and settler colonialism, emphasizing that the latter seeks to establish an alternative homeland for settlers through the reproduction of space and memory ([3–5](#)). Furthermore, Veracini asserts that settler colonialism rewrites spatial narratives, transforming the original homeland into a space alien to its inhabitants, rendering Palestinians internally exiled even within their own land. This framework helps us understand that the experience of exile in inheritance is not an individual case, but a direct result of a permanent settlement structure ([63–70](#)).

IV. ANALYSIS

The novel opens with the following narration: "I went to the West Bank looking for him, looking for them, searching for my own face in the land of exile" ([Khalifeh 3](#)).

Beginning the novel with a meaningful and emotionally charged quote embodies a complex state of exile in which geography, identity, and existentialism are intertwined. In this context, ironically, the "West Bank," meant to be the 'homeland,' is called the "land of exile." This is a significant and dramatic reversal: Zayna no longer finds herself in her homeland, which has become an exile. As Veracini explains, settler colonialism reshapes the homeland itself as a "foreign" place for the indigenous, whereby the homeland is no longer a space of belonging but an alienated space redefined according to the logic of the settler. Veracini notes:

"The settler thus has a filiative and an affiliative connection with "home", but "home" is alternatively (or simultaneously) both the "old" and the "new" place. The settler collective can thus be seen as occupying an indigenous/exogenous sector in

the top section of the population system. ([Veracini 25](#))

This can only be comprehended within the concepts of settler colonialism theory, where the homeland is no longer yours but belongs to a colonial structure that has reshaped it, transforming it into a repellent space. Wolfe described this stage of colonialism as "Settler colonisers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event" ([Wolfe 388](#)). This is what makes Zayna's experience more than just a personal narrative; it is a reflection of an ongoing structure of "elimination" where the place becomes a living witness to the absence of the indigenous and the normalization of the settler presence.

This quote is not just a poetic metaphor. It's a full-blown existential tragedy, as Zayna searches for her mirror in a place supposedly her origin. However, settler colonialism eliminates the origin from memory and geography alike. It renders even familiar places strange and obscures the features of the self in the mirrors of a distorted homeland. Zayna continues her suffering and explains that settler colonialism does not just prevent a person from returning; it makes them not want to return.

The father's forced migration to New Jersey does not represent an 'economic fleeing,' but reflects the structure of settler exclusion that displaces Palestinians and replaces them with settlers. Wolfe points out that the logic of settler colonialism is as follows: "Settler colonialism destroys to replace... It is inherently eliminatory but not invariably genocidal" ([387](#)).

The Palestinian in exile remains subject to the same logic of colonialism because settler colonialism is not limited to Palestinian land but reproduces exclusion across borders, such that the Palestinian remains "displaceable" anywhere. Wolfe explained that "As the logic of elimination has taken on a variety of forms in other settler-colonial situations, so, in Israel, the continuing tendency to Palestinian expulsion has not been limited to the unelaborated exercise of force" ([401](#)).

Her father was convinced that America as an alternative option is more realistic than the dream itself, and the dream is just a burden that changes nothing in life. He opened a new grocery store because he understood better late than never. He concludes that memory alone is not enough to build a life: "My father didn't return home, however. He opened another grocery in New Jersey" ([Khalifeh 8](#)).

Zayna reveals that settler colonialism is not limited to a specific geographical context; it extends as a transnational power structure. Even in the supposedly safe 'exile,' Palestinians are not secure. The police, as an extension of state authority, do not act to enforce the law;

they act as a tool of ongoing exclusion: “By this time dawn had come and the police officers would have returned to the apartment to escort our relatives out of the building and possibly out of New York” (Khalifeh 10).

This quotation demonstrates the strange duality of geographical exile. Even in the land of exile (New York), the Palestinian is not granted a sense of security. There is always the possibility of expulsion. The potential expulsion from New York reproduces the experience of expulsion from the homeland. This reflects the continuity of the logic of settler colonialism. It is not enough to expel Indigenous people from their land; they must be prevented from resettling permanently in any space.

Veracini interprets this as a continuation of the structure of colonialism: the colonized are not given the possibility of stability, but rather live in a state of “renewed exile,” where displacement is reproduced as an existential condition. Veracini added that “The settler colonial situation is thus a circumstance where the tension between contradictory impulses produces long-lasting psychic conflicts and a number of associated psychopathologies” (Veracini 87).

Wolfe describes settler colonialism as not an event but a 'structure' manifested in policies of deportation, surveillance, and denial of the right to stable residence (388). This dynamic resembles the logic of a settler who seeks to displace the land's inhabitants to establish a new regime.

The theory sheds light on the harsh logic of displacement that renders Palestinians 'displaceable' in any context, even within the diaspora. Veracini explains Wolfe's perspective, "For Wolfe, settler colonialism is not a relationship primarily characterised by the indispensability of colonised peoples. On the contrary, Wolfe emphasised the dispensability of the Indigenous person in a settler colonial context" (10). This quote reveals the structural framework of settler colonialism by shedding light on Palestinians who are not only exiled from their land but are threatened even in an unstable exile.

Zaina, through her fragmented consciousness, started by exposing her geographical exile by identifying her unknown identity; she does not consider herself American despite her documents nor Palestinian despite her roots. She is not here or there. Her assertion clearly illustrates this fragmentation: “My father's birthplace was Wadi al-Rihan and mine was Brooklyn. As Zayna I was caught between two languages and two cultures” (Khalifeh 11).

This situation aligned with what Veracini described as “absent presence,” where the Palestinian remains present in memory and roots but is absent from the

prevailing structure that imposes a hybrid and fragmented identity.

This conflict is not only spatial but also linguistic, cultural and identity specific. Zaina finds herself stuck between two languages and two cultures, which causes her to belong to everything and nothing simultaneously. Zaina represents this legal exile between the 'father's language' (Arabic, mixed with nostalgia and loss) and 'the language of cultural settlement' (American English). The language raised on it is a means of adaptation, but it is a tool for its original identity, which makes it feel like it does not belong.

The settler colonialism theory as an analytical tool makes it apparent that colonialism excludes the Palestinians and recreates people who are half-memory, half-being, and identity monsters. Name, place, and language—are all semantic ruptures that express a profound dis-belonging of the Indigenous population to their land and their collective and symbolic consciousness. Zayna was born in the diaspora, not as a choice, but as a direct result of a settler structure that uprooted her father before uprooting her.

This is consistent with what is called “cultural colonization,” where the settler not only does not confine himself to spatial domination, but also seeks to reshape language and identity into tools of obliteration, rendering the Palestinian an “internal exile” even within his own language. Dolakshoria described cultural colonization as "it has deeper roots as it not only controls but also affects the psyche of the people." She further added, "cultural colonization penetrates deeply into a human's psyche" (64-65).

Zayna was born and lives in the United States, where "everything is normal," but the meaning is lost: “I lived a normal life in her [grandma's] house; in other words, I had no life at all” (Khalifeh 12). This quotation expresses the state of self-alienation and the loss of meaning in life, which profoundly expresses the psychological and social impact of exile and uprooting on the Palestinian individual. Feeling that 'normal life' is rewarded with "no life" reflects an identity crisis related to living outside the original national cultural context and under an existing colonial structure.

In this context, the logic of settler colonialism as a psychological and social structure becomes clear: just as the homeland becomes a place of exile, so too does everyday life itself become a framework for alienation, reflecting Wolfe's idea that “The logic of elimination not only refers to the summary liquidation of Indigenous people, though it includes that... It strives for the dissolution of native societies... settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event” (Wolfe 388).

This is not merely an individual complaint of any character in the novel. It is suffering that represents all the Palestinian people. It is an accurate description of the outcome of the exile produced by the settlement structure. Their lives are perfect in appearance but empty in essence. The Palestinians who were "recognised" in the Oslo Accords are technically present, but they do not have sovereignty. This "life" is comparable to that of the Palestinians.

When she tries to return home to Palestine, she discovers that returning is impossible and fraught with disappointment. Her return is characterised by two symbols: her patriotism for Palestine and a desire to find her lost self. However, she was surprised that her home no longer exists. She says: "Everything was different, everything had changed, and our store was no longer a grocery, but a huge white building that looked like a palace" (Khalifeh 20-21).

Settler colonialism is not satisfied with colonising the land and places. Colonisers symbolically reconfigured everything around them. The transformation from a "shop," symbolising roots and memory, to a "palace," representing a colonial, authoritarian occupying structure, is a symbolic expression of the expropriation of the old place and its transformation into a symbol of power and alienation. This visual representation, a manifestation of spatial separation, demonstrates how settler colonialism occupies space and reproduces it with functions that are counterproductive to the memory of the Indigenous people. It is impossible to return to Palestine because it is no longer Palestine; instead, it has been transformed into an artificial image, soft in form but harsh in essence.

This scene can be read through as an example of "spatial narrative reconfiguration": the Palestinian place is reconstructed not as a continuity of history, but as a symbolic rupture that forces the indigenous to confront a homeland without indigenous features.

According to Wolfe, for settler colonialism, "the primary motive for elimination is not race (or religion, ethnicity, grade of civilisation, etc.) but access to territory. Territoriality is settler colonialism's specific, irreducible element" (388). Therefore, Zayna's loss of her land is not only a personal tragedy but a direct embodiment of what Wolfe calls the territoriality of settler colonialism, where land is reduced to a resource to be taken from the indigenous people to be reproduced as a new settler space.

Khalifeh delves into the description of the 'father,' who represents a symbol of responsibilities, steadfastness, sacrifice, continuity, and leadership in Palestinian society. However, the novel exposes this figure when he appears exiled in himself, unable to find fulfilment anywhere. Even Zayna, when she attempts to restore a relationship with her

father, turns into an experience of loss, as in: "I compared my father in Brooklyn to the man I saw at the hospital and to the one in the photo. My father in Brooklyn was the father I knew, whereas here at the hospital he was only a corpse" (Khalifeh 41).

The character of the father in the context represents what Wolfe calls "elimination": even the generation that embodied resilience and resistance becomes, in exile, unable to continue, revealing that settler colonialism not only targets the land but also fragments the familial and symbolic structures of the indigenous people.

Zayna's description is not physical but symbolic. The Palestinian father, who is a symbol of identity in memory and reality, becomes a soulless body in the place that is supposed to be his homeland due to Israeli occupation. In Brooklyn, he was alive in memory despite his geographical exile, but in the homeland, he was physically and symbolically dead.

This reflects the failure of the return itself under the occupation. There is no place for the self in a homeland under a settler structure that continues to control land, language, and relationships. Settler colonialism does not slaughter souls but obliterates symbols and eliminates memories. This settler colonialism transforms the great father from a reference to a corpse, from a symbol to an erased trace.

As Wolfe emphasizes, the logic of settler colonialism is based on the "elimination" of the indigenous person not only as an individual but also as a collective symbol. The father, as a symbol of memory and resilience, is transformed into a meaningless body, reflecting the fact that the settlement project aims to erase the symbols that keep Palestinians rooted in their land and history.

The novel reaches its climax by saying, "He was only a corpse." The father, the homeland, the store, the memory—everything has become a symbolic corpse. The return reveals nothing; it reveals his death, not just the death of the father but the death of the image of the homeland as she dreamed of it. In this situation, the analysis converges with what Veracini describes as settler colonialism not only dominating space but also reshaping the symbols of everyday life into "symbolic corpses," that is, distorted traces that recall absence rather than presence.

Zayna continues her journey between memories and places. Her journey is characterised by the fragility of old ties and the lack of belonging in all places. Geographic exile is portrayed as a long-term psychological construct gradually created within a settler space that does not acknowledge, existentially rejects, the Palestinian return. This is what Wolfe described as settler colonialism, which is based on the elimination of the native, transforming

return from an individual hope into a structural impossibility, as settler colonialism is not a passing event but a long-term project that reproduces exile generation after generation.

Zayna shows her suffering and profound tension between memory and elimination. She realises that belonging is not achieved through the physical location but through peace of mind, which is an impossible peace in the shadow of settlements: "The smell of garbage and manure combined strangely with the scent of eucalyptus trees, filling me with sadness, oppression, and a captivating nostalgia" (Khalifeh 37). The smell of garbage and manure represents decay and neglect. In this way, Zayna symbolizes the destruction of the Palestinian social and cultural structure as well as the deprivation and oppression of the Palestinian people in their land. The scent of eucalyptus trees represents a symbol of memories that resists elimination. The combination of smell and scents symbolizes how the nostalgia for one's native land and settler violence are intertwined. The state of the uprooted Palestinian, who is living on his land but is witnessing the systematic elimination of his identity and vital space, is reflected in the feelings of grief, oppression, and "captivating" nostalgia. This scene can be read as a sensory symbol of what can be called "impossible coexistence," where the Palestinian lives in his homeland as an exile, in which the remnants of memory (the eucalyptus trees) coexist with the outputs of colonialism (garbage and manure), reflecting the fragility of belonging in a settler space designed to obliterate indigenous identity.

V. CONCLUSION

Sahar Khalifeh's novel, *The Inheritance*, reveals that Palestinian exile is not merely a fleeting historical experience or an individual tragedy specific to a generation of Palestinians. Rather, it is an ongoing structure reproduced by the settler colonial system in multiple and renewed forms. Through the character of Zayna and her family, we discover that the homeland itself has been transformed into an alien space, reshaped according to the settler's logic. It no longer constitutes a refuge or a place of belonging, but rather a new exile, added to the series of exiles experienced by Palestinians at home and abroad. Return, which is supposed to represent a moment of reclaiming identity and belonging, is transformed in the novel into an experience of loss and disappointment, as Palestinians find their homeland altered in meaning and symbolism, transformed into a confiscated space subject to new settler representations.

The novel demonstrates that settler colonialism is not limited to the physical control of land but extends to

language, identity, family relationships, and collective memory, where symbols of everyday life become "symbolic corpses" that recall absence rather than presence. The place is no longer alive with the memory of its original inhabitants. Rather, it has become framed by symbols of colonial power, reshaping its details to serve a new discourse that excludes the indigenous people and renders their presence an erased trace. Furthermore, exile takes on multiple dimensions: geographical, linguistic, and psychological. Language, which was supposed to be a vessel for identity, in turn becomes a tool for fragmentation and alienation. Family relationships that embodied resilience become fragile, and the father himself becomes a dead symbol, revealing the failure of return and the interruption of memory continuity.

By employing the theory of Patrick Wolfe and Lorenzo Veracini, it becomes clear that Palestinian exile in inheritance is neither an individual choice nor a circumstantial experience, but rather a permanent existential state that is constantly reproduced within and outside the homeland. Settler colonialism, as Wolfe asserts, is a structure, not an event, and this structure of exclusion renders Palestinians "displaceable" anywhere, whether within their own land or in exile in the diaspora. Here, the novel converges with Veracini's thesis that settlement not only seeks to dominate space but also seeks to reconstruct space, memory, and identity, making coexistence impossible and transforming belonging into a constantly threatened experience.

Thus, it can be said that *The Inheritance* does not merely present a literary narrative about the tragedy of a Palestinian family, but weaves a critical discourse that illuminates the structural and permanent nature of settler colonialism. It demonstrates that Palestinians, even when attempting to reclaim their homeland or build a new life in exile, face the same logic of exclusion in various forms. In doing so, the novel offers literary and intellectual testimony to how settler colonialism produces renewed exile across generations. It underscores the impossibility of coexistence in a space originally designed to obliterate indigenous identity and replace it with the settler.

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From Margin to Mainstream: Representation of Queer Women in Contemporary Global Cinema

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Abstract— Over the last decades, the cinema of the world has started to reveal more and more the daily existence of lesbian women in their narratives, and thus, the common obstacles of invisibility, stereotyping, and marginalization have been broken one after another. This paper looks at the subject of queer female identity in modern-day films from Hollywood, Bollywood and Europe, and it does so through the lens of authenticity, agency, and audience reception. It uses Judith Butler's *Queer Theory* (1990) and Laura Mulvey's *Male Gaze Theory* (1975) as a theoretical framework to reveal the process whereby directors and viewers deal with the line separating representation from reality. The visual and narrative techniques that are responsible for the queer storytelling are analyzed through the case studies—*Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (2019, France), *Sheer Qorma* (2021, India), and *Blue Is the Warmest Color* (2013, France). The study reveals that there is a gradual movement or change in the way same-sex desire is depicted from that of voyeuristic portrayals to emotionally complex, authentic, and intersectional representations. In summary, the author asserts that despite the fact that a lot of improvements have already been done in the area of cinematic inclusivity, the representation of queer women is still a vibrant area that keeps challenging heteronormative aesthetics, politics of the industry and world cultural narratives.



Keywords— *Queer representation, lesbian identity, cinematic authenticity, male gaze, intersectionality*

I. INTRODUCTION: VISIBILITY VERSUS AUTHENTICITY

During most of film history, queer women were primarily mute or pushed into the background. Even when they were portrayed, their characters were mostly drawn as a stereotype. More often than not, the focus in rare instances of acceptance was on the heteronormative perspective, which primarily served to thrill or to shock the general public instead of sharing real life experiences. But still, the film industry has made it possible for more diverse story lines to be told and to be seen. With the coming of such films as *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (2019) and *Sheer Qorma* (2021), queer women's tales have not just gone underground but have rather become a part of the mainstream conversation and debate on gender, sexual orientation, and identity.

The article in question maintains that being visible does not necessarily translate to being genuine. Although the

representation of queer stories is of utmost importance, the quality and perspective of that representation will decide if the stories are powerful or if they are just taking the opposite route. It has been argued by the likes of Laura Mulvey (1975) that, in the past, women's roles in cinema were mostly determined by the “male gaze” and dictated by the ruling patriarchy. In the same way, the first on-screen representations of lesbians were more about heterosexual audiences getting their role as voyeurs rather than understanding the intricate lives of the depicted women.

Judith Butler's (1990) idea of gender performativity suggested that film characters could be seen as non-fixed and socially created instead of being seen as determined by nature. Therefore, the movies turned out to be a spot where the distinctions of gender and sex could easily be put to the test and, at the same time, pointed out. The theory allows us to see the current directors reclaiming the visual story as

a tool of queer self-expression rather than being cornered into the heterosexual fantasy.

Worldwide cinema has been the main player in this change. European art films have been the first ones to create close, emotionally alive images of same-sex love and the South Asian and Hollywood movie industries are slowly coming to terms with the fact that queer identities are diverse. Nevertheless, there are still things to be questioned: Do the pictures really depict the queer women's reality? Are they still 'processed' through the power of 'others' or do they truly speak for the lesbians?

This paper investigates the evolution of queer women's visibility through case studies of three different film industries, Hollywood, Bollywood, and European cinema, along with the question of whether such a visibility has led to real representation. The issue is examined against the background of the influence of factors such as audience reception, censorship, and cultural expectations, which are all contributing to the shaping of queer femininity in films.

II. THEORETICAL LENS: QUEER THEORY AND THE MALE GAZE

Judith Butler's (1990) Queer Theory had a profound impact on the re-interpretation of gender and sexual orientation and contention that only society, and not nature, could determine such categories. Butler suggested that gender is performed by means of habitual acts, gestures, and the use of language, and this results in the very illusion of stability and normality. Gender performativity thus becomes a very strong means of exploring the ways in which filmic characters are shaped by, or resist, or, maybe, even overpower the demands of society upon their gender. In queer cinema, nowadays, women loving women very often go beyond the ordinary gender categories and present new ways of desiring and being. But, still, the freeing quality of such performances is very much dependent on the filmmakers' vision and the overall film industry setting that determines the film's creation and release.

Queer Theory posits that representation is always an undermined active process; it mirrors and reinforces the existing power relations. The incorporation of queer characters in movies is considered their meanings are influenced by the commonly accepted standards of society, the viewing public's expectations, and the economy of the film industry. In this way, the representation of queerness proves to be both a cultural act and a political statement at the same time. Looking at it this way, films are not only a source of pleasure but also a social text that fights for the presence and recognition of the subordinate communities.

Laura Mulvey's (1975) Male Gaze Theory offers a complementary yet critical viewpoint to the visual politics of cinema. Mulvey posited that the typical movie viewer is male, which consequently leads to women's viewing as objects and their being the subjects of visual pleasure. The camera, narrative, and editing are all combined to bring the viewers to the viewpoint of a heterosexual man, which is a passive woman being desired rather than an active one exercising her right. The representation of queer women in this context has always led to their intimacy and sexuality being viewed as voyeuristic fascination rather than being emotional or authentic. This dynamic has been, throughout the history of cinema, a defining factor of the lesbian or bisexual women's portrayal — as fantasies for heterosexual consumption rather than as self-defined people.

The interplay between Butler's and Mulvey's theories brings up a decisive question: Is it possible for cinema to depict queer women and not copy the rules of the patriarchal or heteronormative gaze? To illustrate, one can take Abdellatif Kechiche's *Blue Is the Warmest Color* (2013) as an example of a film that won a lot of accolades for its emotional truthfulness but also faced critique because of its long explicit scenes. The critics take the director of the scenes—a heterosexual man—and argue that he is re-enacting voyeurism and objectifying women's bodies, thus clogging the film's authenticity. The whole argument around the film is reflection of the fact that the director's point-of-view determines the meaning in a great way; therefore, to be seen but not to have any power could so easily be turned into exploitation.

Nonetheless, sci-fi movie makers Céline Sciamma's *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (2019) takes a huge step in a new direction by using the female perspective. A queer woman, Sciamma, director and writer, decides to use her camera not for the purpose of consumption but for the purpose of connection. Her emphasis on mutual looks, restrained feelings, and recognition of one another changes the visual experience from that of a voyeur to that of an empath. The film reflects the performance of gender as a relational one, which is Butler's theory, and at the same time it disengages with Mulvey's gaze through the medium of ethical authorship.

The combination of Butler's theory of performativity and Mulvey's analysis of cinema allows us to see representation as an artistic technique and a source of power at the same time. The female gaze, when led by queer subjectivity, causes a rupture in the patriarchal narrative and thus, new ways of seeing are formed. Theory of this kind seems to be best in the context of watching as participating with people supposing the role of witnesses

rather than that of consumers. Such a background of theory supports the investigation of various situations that filmmakers from diverse cultural backgrounds are able to cope with the conflict between visibility, authenticity, and audience demand in the upcoming case studies.

III. CASE STUDIES

3.1. "Portrait of a Lady on Fire" (France, 2019)

The relationship between Héloïse and Marianne remains quite clear, yet it has artworks that have only one connection, namely to portray the painted picture, not the painter herself is demonstrated in the film *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, a film by Céline Sciamma with Marianne, an 18th-century predecessor of Héloïse, as an artist. Through coverture, both the narrational and visual aspects of the film allow the lesbian love story to unfold unrestricted. The film is brilliant in not only depicting the conflict and the struggle of love amidst social containment but also in using the characters Alexandrine, Marianne, and Héloïse to map the tale of love through the different times and conditions.

The story in the film has been meticulously built up and at the same time has been candidly told by the director of the film, Sciamma, a queer female. Silence and stillness were incorporated in the production's visuals and soundscape as part of the whole feel, thus emotions came naturally focusing on looks, movements, and breaks in speech instead of words. This mode of narrating corresponds to Judith Butler's (1990) notion that gender and lust are actions done and connected rather than fixed identities.

The visual communication of *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* was very important in its authenticity. Sciamma surrounded both women with symmetry and balanced compositions which treated them symbolically as equals. The process of painting turns out to be a metaphor for the politics of seeing—to paint is to see, to recognize, and to keep. In opposition to the voyeuristic inclinations of the male gaze characterized by Laura Mulvey (1975), the manner in which Sciamma is framing the film allows for reciprocity. The spectators are not allowed to consume the intimacy of the women but are rather invited to witness it in a respectable manner. The materialization of men in most of the film still further affirms this freedom, thus establishing a setting in which the feminine selfhood and love between women can emerge without outside intrusion.

Eroticism in Sciamma's movie results from emotional closeness instead of exhibitionism. The lens fixates not on sexual contacts but on the delicate nuances of touch and facial expressions. This moderation is integral to yearning

being seen as a connecting link rather than a case of depriving one of their identity. The last moment—Marianne sitting in an art gallery at Héloïse's distant view—conveys the bittersweet fortitude of affection through recollection and art. In the course of the film, Sciamma makes use of the aesthetic to illustrate the political, revealing that queer cinema, as a means of expressing totality of the experience, still does not lose the particularities.

In the end, *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* becomes a solo trumpet of female gaze's victories, a lonely one among the others. It is the storytelling that enables and not the one that encumbers; it is the character's existence that looks more than just the audience's imaginings. Therefore, the film of Sciamma is still a significant factor in the expansion of queer cinematic expression regardless of the extent of the depiction and how tender, profound, and human the representation of women's love is.

3.2. "Sheer Qorma" (India, 2021)

The film *Sheer Qorma* by Faraz Arif Ansari is a roller coaster of emotions intertwined with a cultural love story, which indeed becomes a reference point in the representation of South Asian LGBTQ community.. The movie's story is centered on a non-binary character, Saira, and a lesbian Muslim woman, Sitara, who have to cope with family rejections, cultural bans on their love, and at the same time, crave for acceptance. The 30-minute long short film is good at counteracting different stereotypes that have usually marked the representation of queer women in India since history.

Sheer Qorma, on the other hand, rather than the older Bollywood movies, which showed same-gender love as humor, disorder, or tragedy, emphasizes emotional truth. The director's method here, however, does not place domestic settings of the movie—dining tables, kitchens, and family rituals—as a symbol of a deliberate reclamation of space. By placing queer love in recognizable, mundane places, Ansari proves that the idea of queerness being an alien in Indian culture is wrong. The film's visual warmth—gentle lighting, soft colors, and leisurely camera work—invites one to feel the affection and the spiritual connection of the characters instead of conflict or show. the character's confrontations but the very tenderness and the sense of belongingness.

To emphasize its place in queer theory and South Asian studies, *Sheer Qorma* is certainly an intersectional film chip of the block—one of the texts that most brilliantly delineate such a concept as elaborated by Kimberly Crenshaw (1989)—using the very notion of intersectionality in its search for explanation and theme. By showing the protagonist Sitara's queerness intertwined

with her Muslim identity and the expectations placed on women from a patriarchal religious structure, the movie places itself in the thick of the debate on the issues surrounding them. Consequently, the film reveals that queer South Asians suffer double marginalization; they are first rendered invisible by the dominant culture, and then they are made pariahs by the returning conservative communities.

The climax of the tale takes place when Sitara's mom at last sees the affection of her girl and puts an end to her rejection by giving her love back to her. This very instance can stand as a metaphor for a radical act of acceptance; it is so especially in a community where the discussion of LGBTQ+ rights and wrongs is still not settled. The mother's acceptance offers a new perspective on the household, which is based on empathy and compassion rather than on exclusion. This concurs with postcolonial queer studies which emphasize the importance of the local narratives and culturally based notions in identity-formation (Gopinath, 2005).

Ansari's authorial perspective as a queer filmmaker characterizes the film's truthfulness. The characters are not seen through the eye of a heterosexual, but rather are portrayed in their lived reality. Sheer Qorma thus aids in the decolonization of queer cinema by showing that representation based on community experiences can be both locally rooted and globally resonant. The film with its soft storytelling and cultural specificity puts South Asian queer love not as an exception but as a part of the global human connection's tapestry.

3.3. "Blue Is the Warmest Color"

In a rather tricky scenario, Abdellatif Kechiche's *Blue Is the Warmest Color* (2013) has been placed in various complex agonies on the broader canvas of queer cinema as a practice: The film has been basked over in praise and accolades, before a rather unruly and critical public consensus—quite possibly due in part to the controversy surrounding the film. The movie presents Adèle, a girl who through a passionate relationship with Emma, a more matured art student, discovers her sexuality. The film seems to be a deep and sensitive depiction of the same-gender love and emotional growth in friendship. But the film, besides being lauded for its acting and emotional impact, was also heavily criticized for its graphic nudity and the dubious power relations of the male director to his female actors.

The heated debates around *Blue Is the Warmest Color* very clearly reflect Laura Mulvey's (1975) theory about the male gaze, which reveals how the mainstream cinema basically turns women into objects for the pleasure of the

opposite sex visually. The director or cameraman Kechiche makes the camera stay for a while on the women's bodies in the course of the long sex scenes, presenting the intimacy through a very loud and spectacular way that has nothing to do with emotional authenticity. Many critics and scholars have said that the movie literally changes the feminine love into a visual act for heterosexual audiences and, in doing so, it deprives the love of its reality and degree of connection. The two actresses, Léa Seydoux and Adèle Exarchopoulos, later on admitted that the whole shooting period was emotionally and physically tiring as they had to undergo the painful experience of the imbalance between the power of the artist and the consent of the actor.

Theoretical sex aspects in the movie completely opposed Butler's (1990) performance notion. The director Kechiche's aesthetics regarded queerness as something that could "show" and "watch" instead of being a real and personally defined identity. The bond between the two characters appears to be artificial and is present merely for the viewership, not the actual conditions of the LGBTQ community. Hence, the film, while introducing lesbian love to the global audience, still continued to be a captive of the masculine beauty norms whose impact was the opposite of that intended—supporting instead of challenging the age-old gender power play.

Still, *Blue Is the Warmest Color* can't be totally ignored. Its victory—Palme d'Or at Cannes Film Festival—streamed a lot of attention to queer stories in the cinema. Nevertheless, its legacy has two sides: it showed at the same time the way and the danger of the representation when there is no author. The movie initiated very much needed debates about gaze, consent and ownership in storytelling, thus allowing films of the type *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* and *Sheer Qorma* to come later, who wanted to reclaim queer narratives from their very midst. In the end, *Blue Is the Warmest Color* is still a paradoxical text—visibility landmark that unveils at the same time the ethical and aesthetic limits of the male gaze.

3.4. Comparative Insights

The three films, when looked at together, depict the transformation of the representation of queer women from a perspective of voyeurism to one of authenticity. *Blue Is the Warmest Color* can be considered an initial effort at introducing the concept of lesbian identity to the public but is still limited by the male gaze. On the other hand, *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* and *Sheer Qorma* prove the impact of queer and female directors taking over the creative control. The two movies convey that authenticity does not only come from the narrative but also from the creative

viewpoint—who narrates the fable and for whom it is narrated.

This evolution is indicative of monumental changes in the culture of both media and society. The audience becoming more selective and varied makes the emotional truth and moral storytelling to be the demands of the time. The majority of the credit for the emergence of LGBTQ+ narratives and the accessibility of the *Sheer Qorma* story to a global audience, who otherwise would not have been able to experience it, goes to the independent film festivals and streaming platforms like Netflix, since it is a minor or local production. Still, challenges exist. Censorship, unequal funding, and tokenism are among the main factors that determine the ways in which queer women are depicted. The presence of representation has increased, but the global film industry still has its share of systemic issues.

In the end, these case studies show that authentic representation arises when film-makers focus on empathy, community, and complexity instead of shock or spectacle. The change of focus from external observing to internal narrating indicates a transition from the margin to the mainstream—not through assimilation, but through artistic and ethical reclamation.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The informative comparison between French, Indian, and European queer film has shown a slow yet substantial change in the portrayal of queer women in movies. One of the main results is the very significant role of authorship and gaze in determining how authentic the representation is. Queer or women directors' films, such as Céline Sciamma's *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* and Faraz Arif Ansari's *Sheer Qorma*, display a very moral and humanistic approach to storytelling. These films promote through their plots the themes of emotional sharing, artistic partnership, and personal identity rather than sensationalism. On the other hand, the film, Abdellatif Kechiche's *Blue Is the Warmest Color*, had great success in terms of visibility but it still remains under the straight male point of view. The matter is not different but the viewpoint is different: when queer narratives are depicted from within the community, they get connected with emotional truth; when depicted from outside, they risk helping to reinforce the hierarchies that they intend to topple.

Another important discovery related to intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. With the help of this term, an answer was found to the question of the relationship between gender and sexuality on one side and race, class, religion, and culture on the other. *Sheer Qorma*

did not present queerness as an isolated Western concept but as a feeling deeply associated with the South Asian family, culture, and religion. The intersectional representation widens the global comprehension of queer identity, making it clear that queerness is different and changes with the cultural background. The film, by placing queer love in domestic and spiritual realms, not only refuses colonial stories that consider queerness to be a foreign concept but also contests patriarchal norms that limit its presence to the fringes.

The third insight concerns the reception of the audience and the dynamics of the industry. Internationally, queer films are coming to be recognized and gradually getting their place in the major festivals and streaming platforms. However, the positive aspect of visibility comes with a negative side. The increasing commodification of "diversity" is likely to turn queer identity into a brand that can be consumable rather than a reality that is lived. Authentic representation, hence, calls for the ethical production practices which will bring about fair labor conditions, inclusive casting, and meaningful community participation behind the camera. Representation that is not authentic cannot be so if it is separated from the experiences of and the voices of those it is going to portray.

The last thing is that the research indicates the present-day queer cinema has changed its tactics from just being seen to becoming agents. Queer women have ceased to be mute icons of revolt or sorrow; they have taken control of the tales told about them. The transition from invisibility to visibility is the major change in the cinematographic politics. The ascendance of the female and queer eyes has transformed the cinema from the site of voyeurism to that of recognition and resistance thus altering the portrayal of love, identity, and desire in international narratives.

V. CONCLUSION

The portrayal of queer women in worldwide films has experienced a deep metamorphosis. Being marginalized or depicted in a tragic way, queer characters now are the main characters in stories that delve into closeness, longing, and identity with richness and compassion. This change not only mirrors the social evolution but is also an indication of the change in film authorship—from outside the observation to the artist's self-expression.

In Butler's Queer Theory, gender and sexuality are portrayed as fluid performances that are constantly influenced by culture and film. On the other hand, Mulvey's Male Gaze concept is still applicable as a reminder of the power dynamics in visual storytelling. These theories point out that real queer representation

needs not only inclusive stories but also the transformation of power relations in terms of creators and the framing of the narratives.

A comparative analysis featuring *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, *Sheer Qorma*, and *Blue Is the Warmest Color* exemplifies that the transition from being marginalized to mainstream is a complicated process and still takes place. Visibility has gotten better, however, authenticity still has to be the main point of future cinema practices. Very much alike other women, queer women are entitled to stories that reflect their diversity—not oversimplified icons of resistance but whole, complex human beings.

Looking ahead, the future of queer cinema lies in intersectional storytelling—one that embraces race, class, culture, and gender identity as interconnected dimensions of experience. As audiences demand greater inclusion, filmmakers have both the opportunity and responsibility to create spaces where representation becomes liberation.

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Acculturation and Cultural Exchange in Perumal Murugan's 'The Last Cloth' and its Movie Adaptation, *Angammal*

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Abstract— The paper explores the concept of acculturation in Perumal Murugan's short story "The Last Cloth" and its movie adaptation, *Angammal*, directed by Vipin Radhakrishnan. The narrative revolves around the complex relationship between a mother and her son, highlighting the cultural tensions that arise from the clash between traditional and modern values. The mother, a village dweller, is forced by her city-bred son to adopt modern attire, specifically wearing a blouse with her saree, which symbolizes the broader theme of acculturation. Through the lens of J.W. Berry's acculturation strategies, the paper analyzes the differing approaches adopted by the mother in the story and the movie. In the short story, the mother exemplifies the "separation" strategy, resisting the change imposed by her son. In contrast, *Angammal*, the mother in the movie, embodies the "integration" strategy, embracing modernity while maintaining her autonomy and cultural identity. The analysis reveals that the conflict between the mother and son stems from their divergent acculturation strategies. While the son seeks to assimilate into modern culture, the mother strives to preserve her traditional identity. The paper highlights the importance of respecting individual choices and cultural autonomy in the process of acculturation. Ultimately, the study demonstrates how the narrative sheds light on the complexities of cultural adaptation and the significance of understanding and acknowledging the perspectives of individuals from different cultural backgrounds. The comparison between the story and the movie adaptation provides valuable insights into the nuances of acculturation and its impact on personal relationships.



Keywords— Acculturation, tradition, modernity, cultural identity, integration.

Perumal Murugan, the renowned Indian Tamil writer, scholar, and literary chronicler, depicts in his stories the life of ordinary people in Tamil Nadu. Exploring themes such as caste, gender, societal norms, and cultural identity, his narratives often focus on the intricacies of human relationships and cultural adaptations. "Murugan weaves narratives that delve into the heart of societal complexities, human emotions, and the timeless struggles of ordinary lives" ("Exploring Perumal"). The tensions between tradition and modernity are best explored in the short story 'Kodithuni', translated as 'The Last Cloth' by Kavitha Muralidharan. Vipin Radhakrishnan, a

popular film director and writer, turned this story into a wonderful Tamil movie titled *Angammal*.

The paper attempts to analyse the differences brought to the character of the mother in the story and its film adaptation, focusing on the acculturation strategies explained by J.W. Berry. In this story, 'The Last Cloth', Perumal Murugan portrays the cultural shock faced by the mother when her younger son forces her to wear a blouse with sari. The writer hasn't given names to the characters. Here, the mother is a humble village dweller who rears cattle and leads a village life. Her breasts are sagging, wrinkled, and exposed. She has not worn a blouse in her

lifetime, but her city-bred son gets irritated at the thought of her mother not wearing a blouse. He forces her to put on a blouse to impress the prospective bride's family. But the notion of wearing a blouse suffocates her like the tumour growing in her breast. Finally, when the blouse is brought in she cannot wear it as the tumour has grown uncontrollably, impeding her from lifting her hands.

Vipin Radhakrishnan has brought in significant changes in the plot but has retained the original pulse of the story. He has given names to characters; the lead one, the mother, is Angammal. "The feisty, free-spirited widow, who flaunts her tattoo, drives around the village on her moped, smokes beedi, is a monster of a mother-in-law to her elder son's wife, and has a soft spot for a widower in her village" (Athira). She had embraced modern ways of living but refused to wear a blouse with sari. Her younger son Pavalam, forces her to wear a blouse, but Angammal resists it. She agreed to wear a blouse temporarily, but fought strongly against the idea of lifetime compliance. According to Naina Rathi, "Angammal takes creative strides away from Murugan's short story and does this liberty Justice" (par. 2).

Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits present the classical definition of acculturation: "acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups" (149). The western notions inflicted upon the village people through the modernisation process are the centre of conflict in the story. The blouse was never part of the costume of the village folk. Modern education and culture that crept into the village through the next generation have made the appearance of the mother without a blouse disgusting to the son. This cultural dilemma can be best understood through J.W. Berry's acculturation strategies.

Berry's acculturation model describes the orientation of immigrants towards the new society on two dimensions relating to the extent to which individuals (i) desire to preserve their ethnic culture and ii) wish to interact with the members of the majority group. As a result, there are four acculturation strategies: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. Berry projects integration as an ideal strategy where people maintain a balance between their original culture and the invading one. Here, the people retain their original culture and tradition, and at the same time value contact with the dominant culture. In assimilation, people do not preserve their original culture and identity, and completely embrace the foreign culture. Separation occurs when people totally reject interaction with the foreign group. Marginalisation is

a complex stage where people reject both the dominant and original culture (Berry 9).

The portrayal of the mother character in the story and film adaptation differs in the acculturation strategies adopted. The blouse emerges as the focal point of conflict between cultures. Naina Rathi comments, "Perhaps because a blouse was never a part of the traditional saree ensemble in the Indian subcontinent. It was western notions that demand body exposure and any possible nudity inappropriate- this adopted into our culture become another means to control and curb a woman's bodily autonomy and identity" (par. 2). The mother, in Murugan's story 'The Last Cloth' unable to bear this compulsion fails terribly, whereas Angammal, the mother in the movie version boldly fights back. One can identify significant differences in the acculturation model followed by these mothers. 'Separation' is the strategy adopted by the mother in the story, whereas integration is the strategy adopted by Angammal.

The mother in the story version remains ignorant of the dominant culture that is invading the village and leads life in a traditional way. She has never felt the need to cover her breasts and can't understand the feelings of his son, who is annoyed at the sight of his mother without a blouse. She continues to lead her life in a normal way. That's why she is shocked when the whole house and the village decide to make her wear a blouse. "The mother was stunned-she was speechless" (Murugan 183). To her the prospect of wearing a blouse was against the beliefs that she carried all these years. Even this minor change was unacceptable to her. "She imagined the blouse piece as a small knife that would cut off all her movements" (Murugan 185). So when the whole house was rejoicing over the change, she was wriggling in pain.

But Vipin Radhakrishnan has depicted the mother differently. One can easily identify the integration model adopted by Angammal. "Angammal is not in favour of tradition or against change. For instance, she is the only woman in the village who rides a motorcycle to move around" (Bengani "What is progress"). Angammal exhibits many of the modern traits like riding a moped, smoking cigarettes, openly addressing the issue of breastfeeding, wearing headphones, and even maintaining personal choices. Her vehement decision to wear the saree without a blouse, even when all the other people insisted, points to her modern outlook. This decision can be viewed as both traditional and modern, suggesting the strategy of integration as the acculturation mode. Naina Rathi comments, "How ironic that a move towards modernity is constantly cited as a reason for Angammal to cover herself? And how surprising, that this progressive act

somehow feels orthodox?"(par. 2). Her attempts at maintaining bodily autonomy are praiseworthy. But her son Pavalam finally succeeds in making her wear a blouse, making everyone believe that she has changed forever. She has agreed to wear the blouse just to impress the bride's family. She is vexed when she feels that people around her expect her to wear the blouse everyday.

J.W Berry discusses individual changes during the process of acculturation as, "The focus is on how individuals who have developed in one cultural context manage to adapt to new contexts that result from migration... the concepts of psychological acculturation and adaption are employed to refer to psychological changes and eventual outcomes that occur as a result of individuals experiencing acculturation"(6). For Pavalam, the whole village has embraced modernisation, except his mother. Elderly women have started wearing blouses, whereas the younger generation has switched over to salwar-kameez. Only her mother remains unchanged. The other progressive acts displayed by her mother remain hidden in his eyes. The whole village exhibited an acculturation model of integration through their dress pattern. But Angammal as an individual varies. She exhibits many other modern trends, except for the blouse. J.W. Berry comments, "While the general changes may be profound in the group, individuals are known to vary greatly in the degree to which they participate in these community changes" (7).

One contradictory instance may be noted in the movie itself. Anandu Suresh points out how the older generation talks about breasts openly, whereas the younger generation remains shy about discussing such topics. "In another scene, we see a group of elderly women arrive at Kalimuthu's house with neem paste to help his daughter-in-law wean her toddler girl. However, when they offer to apply it on her breasts, the younger mother visibly embarrassed, insists on doing it herself-revealing a newer form of narrow-mindedness in the newer generation" (par. 8). Here, the younger generation blindly follows the modern trend without understanding the underlying layers of identity, autonomy, and freedom. "Becoming enslaved by capitalist codes" (par. 8), youngsters like Pavalam put unwanted stress on their mothers. Pavalam and other young people tend to follow the acculturation strategy of assimilation. But they are doing it without much thought and understanding.

Pavalam is so engrossed with the idea of the blouse that he doesn't care much about the feelings of his mother. Nandini Ramnath talk about in her movie review, "Pavalam's embarrassment suggest that migration has increased his distance from his roots- his urbanization has

opened him up in some ways-as is evident from his choice of a life partner- but closed him in other ways" (par. 1). According to J.W Berry the issue of acculturation involves two aspects, "cultural maintenance" and "contact and participation" (9). Cultural maintenance involves the understanding of the importance of preserving and upholding cultural identity and characteristics. Contact and participation pertain to what extent individuals should engage with and participate in other cultural groups versus maintaining primary interaction within their cultural group.

Berry's concepts of culture shedding, culture learning and culture conflict can be best understood through the characters Angammal and Pavalam (20). Angammal has learned and adopted many things from the invading culture without shedding much of her original culture. The conflict arises in the case of the blouse because her son Pavalam has lost everything of his original culture and blindly accepted the new one. The sight of the breasts that once fed him in the past has now become disgusting to him. Pavalam's worries regarding the response of his bride's family also proves wrong. Contrary to his expectations the bride Jasmine finds the photo of Angammal, without wearing a blouse, attractive and beautiful. She respects cultural ethos and considers it quite normal. This clearly showcases the fact that in case of Pavalam, culture shedding occurred without proper culture learning. Anandu Suresh comments, "As the story of Nangeli, the Ezhava woman who protested against the caste-based oppression by cutting off her breasts, continues to resonate in the anti-caste movements symbolizing resistance and trailblazing courage, Murugan's use of the blouse as a central motif adds further depth to the narrative" (par.2). For Pavalam, the education that is supposed to widen one's perspective seems to limit him.

Acculturation is not an easy process. Many factors, like age, gender, education, and personal factors, affect cultural change. Pavalam can easily assimilate the new culture as he is young and educated. But his insistence on bringing a forceful change in the mother's attire cannot be justified. Angammal is entirely different from the mother of Perumal Murugan's original story. She is modern in every respect. Even the decision to stick to her favourite attire is also the result of modern thinking. Unfortunately, her son Pavalam fails to understand that. What Pavalam lacks here is the willingness to understand and acknowledge the identity and personality of people dearer to him. Forceful change will eventually lead to stress. The most shocking factor here is that the force is exerted not by the members of the invading culture but by

the native one. In Murugan's story, the mother is shattered, whereas in *Angammal*, she fights back.

To conclude, the mother-son conflict in Murugan's story and its movie version arises from the difference in the acculturation strategies adopted by them. In the story, a modern son has to settle the issue of clothing with his traditional mother, resulting in a wide gap between them. The mother is so alien to the changing circumstances that she is totally taken aback when forced to wear a blouse. But Angammal is an intricately woven character who has adopted the integration strategy of acculturation, which, according to Berry, is the best one. She has smoothly dived into the new culture, but the unnecessary pressure exerted by her son leads to the conflict. The bold decision to resume her way of clothing clearly showcases the value of personal choices and identity.

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Emotional Study of “Araby” Based on Cognitive Stylistics

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Abstract— This paper analyzes how linguistic features in James Joyce's short story "Araby" affect the expression and appreciation of emotions from the perspective of cognitive stylistics. The article first briefly introduces the theoretical foundations of cognitive stylistics that can be applied to the study of emotions in literature. It then discusses the impact of styles on emotional presentation from the aspects of lexicon, syntax, and phonetics in the original text. Combining three cognitive theories, Conceptual Metaphor, Image Schema, and Foregrounding, it connects the three dimensions of language, cognition, and emotion. The correlation is used to analyze the emotional changes of the characters and reveal the growth and disillusionment of the young boy in the pursuit of love.



Keywords— Cognitive Stylistics; “Araby”; James Joyce; Emotion

I. INTRODUCTION

The origin of stylistics can be traced back to the early 20th century, influenced by modern linguistics and literary criticism. The early stylistic studies mostly focused on formal analysis. With the research enriched, researchers gradually extended their attention to the social and cultural background of language and readers' responses. In recent years, stylistics has interrelated with cognitive linguistics, corpus linguistics and other disciplines added with diversified research methods and perspectives. From linguistic analyses, cognitive science is applied in a systemic context based on theories. Cognitive stylistics inherits and extends cognitive linguistics and stylistics,

concerning readers' cognitive process and features of in-text and outside-text (Bazarbaeva, 2024).

“Araby” is selected from *Dubliners*, a short novels collection written by James Joyce. The collection contains 15 short stories. These stories depict the lives of lower middle class people in Dublin at the beginning of the 20th century, showing their daily lives, moral dilemmas and social realities. At the start of the novel, the narrator depicts his street and childhood experiences with friends, establishing a lively, innocent atmosphere. He mentions a deceased priest and his effects before detailing his infatuation with Mangan's sister, with whom he shares an unrequited, fantasy-filled connection. Upon learning

she cannot attend the "Araby" bazaar, the narrator resolves to go and bring her a gift, though others dismiss his eagerness. After a long wait and a late departure, he arrives at the bazaar, only to find it mundane and disappointing, a far cry from his imagined exotic escape. Overwhelmed by the bazaar's ordinariness and ignored by others, he feels anger and bitterness. In this paper, the novel "Araby" will be analyzed in several aspects through the paradigm of cognitive stylistics for studying emotion in literature.

II. THEORIES OF APPRECIATING EMOTION FROM A COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVE

A range of principles and concepts are included in such domain. The term foregrounding is introduced in English by Mukaiovslj (1964), which is regarded as stylistic deviation in literature. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) have put forward the idea that most of metaphors we use are conceptual. Later, Johnson (1987) expounds image schema relating mind to body. Based on cognitive models, mental space theory (Fauconnier, 1994) and conceptual integration theory (Turner & Fauconnier, 1995) are pinpointed to construct language meanings by cognition universality. Apparently, cognitive stylistics, as an interdisciplinary subject, opens a new window for scholars to perceive deeper meanings of literature.

While intersecting with other disciplines like cognitive science, psychology and neuroscience, it has developed into Computational Stylistics, Emotional Stylistics and so on. Hogan (2021) proposed the term "affective stylistics" due to his advocacy of "affective narratology". It was later renamed "affective-cognitive stylistics" to avoid confusion with "affective stylistics" as advocated by Fish (1970), but according to the advice suggested by Huang (2023), it seems better to be defined as "emotional stylistics". Unlike cognitive stylistics, emotional stylistics uses affective theories and methods to clarify the role of emotions in reading literature, and its theoretical framework is "affective science", which is an

extension of cognitive stylistics. Emotional stylistics emphasizes the importance of emotions and compensates for previous shortcomings. Emotion in literature is complex, varied and includes real and fictional characters, narrative content and action, identifiable and complex emotions, reader evaluations, and emotional intimacy. Emotions are often closely related to the environment in a narrative, and the physical and spiritual meanings are intertwined. As time goes by, the interaction between people and a certain place is no longer merely a simple attachment, but has risen to a more general level of perception of this place (Ariannia, Naseri & Yeganeh, 2024). Within the language, people can interpret the choice of words with emotional colors, different syntactic structures, phonetic rhythm, writing style, etc., while outside the language, it embraces the cultural context, aesthetic thoughts, cognitive experience and so on of the author and the reader. Coupled with these elements, emotional stylistics is able to analyze in-depth how literary works shape emotions through language and stylistic devices, and to explore how these emotions resonate with the reader's personal experience and sociocultural context (Stockwell, 2007).

There are several ways need to be mentioned in emotional stylistics when we study literature. The first is characters' emotion. Through the analysis of the language, behavior and psychological description of the characters, we can have a deeper understanding of the characters' personality, motivation and fate. The same is true in theme by the story's main emotions which may be inferred from ambience. For example, Hemingway's concise style in writing can be found to create some specific emotional ambience through the use of short sentences, repetition and ellipsis. Furthermore, readers will have different emotional reactions when reading literary works, in other words, readers will be affected by the emotions of the works. Therefore, some scholars try to understand readers' emotional resonance and cultural identity in literature.

Amounts of studies can be sought between emotion and cognition. In an empirical research, Miall (2011) suggests that emotions play an important role in subsequent cognitive processes such as inference, recollection of what has been read, and empathy for characters. Thus, there are several different emotion processes evoked when reading literature, including self-reference (e.g., autobiographical memory) and anticipation (e.g., foreshadowing, character development goals). Burke and Coats (2022) launch an appeal that Stylists have important linguistic and analytical skills and tools that help them address contemporary social, emotional, and cognitive issues in children's development through reading and writing, especially in interdisciplinary settings. The following will use "cognitive stylistics" as the theoretical basis and adopt the method of text analysis to examine the emotional connections in "Araby" from the dimensions of vocabulary, syntax, phonetics, conceptual metaphor, image schema and foregrounding.

III. LEXICON, SYNTAX AND PHONETICS

i. Lexicon

Indeed, Van Emde Boas (2022) have shown that the study of mind style focuses on a wide variety of linguistic phenomena, including grammatical structures (e.g., sentence length and complexity, transitive verbs), lexicon (e.g., semantic fields of "key words," over- and under-lexicalization). To illustrate, three times of repetition of "blind" is used in the article:

a. *North Richmond Street, being **blind**, was a quiet street except at the hour when the Christian Brothers' School set the boys free.*

b. *An uninhabited house of two storeys stood at the **blind** end, detached from its neighbours in a square ground.*

c. *The **blind** was pulled down to within an inch of the sash so that I could not be seen.*

The first two uses describe the condition of the street as closed, without openings. This word is not only a physical description but also a spiritual one, implying a sense of hopelessness, closure, and lack of vitality. It foreshadows the protagonist's emotional confusion and an inescapable predicament. The third use in the sentence refers to shutters, but in the context of the boy's feelings for Mangan's sister, it suggests that his love is blind and ignorant, foretelling a failed outcome.

The word "gaze" is also repeated twice in the beginning and in the end:

a. *The other houses of the street, conscious of decent lives within them, **gazed** at one another with brown imperturbable faces.*

b. ***Gazing** up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger.*

The text opens on a quiet street where houses "look at each other" and the camera looks at the empty house of a deceased priest, showing the isolation and loneliness between the house and the outside world. The repetition seems to echo each other, emphasizing the spiritual bonds from which it is impossible to escape and the insurmountable conditions of life. At the same time, this isolation deepens the loneliness experienced by the protagonist throughout the novel.

Thus, Joyce's choice of vocabulary in his writing reflects his writing style and serves the expression of his writing, possessing specific literary effects and meanings, including emotions. The author employs sensory vocabulary, religious vocabulary, exotic vocabulary, and words with negative emotions. When describing the little boy entering the back parlor on a rainy night, listening to the rain outside, yet thankful for not being able to see the distant light, the suppression of sensory friendship here actually reveals his uncontrollable desires, and he whispers his love in the end.

In "Araby," religious vocabulary is frequently used to connect love with religious feelings, expressing the boy's devotion and desire for love. The word "chalice" symbolizes the boy's pure pursuit of love and its sanctification, suggesting that he regards his admiration for Mangan's sister as a kind of religious belief. The symbolic use of this term highlights the boy's innocence and idealism, while also foreshadowing the collapse of this ideal. As for exoticism, "Araby" itself is an exotic name, implying that the bazaar is entirely different from the boy's daily life, full of the unknown and temptation, creating a mysterious and romantic atmosphere. Noteworthy are the negative adjectives in the second paragraph, "musty," "rusty," "damp," "wild" to describe the dead classroom room, dilapidated, full of mold and mess, indicating that this place has long been forgotten, further revealing the moral collapse and spiritual numbness of Irish society at the time.

ii. Syntax

Sentence structure, as an aspect of language, can also reflect language changes, which often affect readers' reading experience and feelings subconsciously.

E.g. *North Richmond Street, being blind, was a quiet street except at the hour when the Christian Brothers' School set the boys free.*

This long sentence details the quiet of the street and the bustle of a particular hour, creating an atmosphere that is both subdued and energetic.

E.g. *She was waiting for us, her figure defined sharply against the light.*

This short sentence is concise and clear, highlighting the image of the character and emphasizing the boy's concern and expectation for Mangan's sister.

Long sentences are used to show delicate inner feelings and descriptions of the environment, while short sentences are used to express sudden emotions or actions. This kind of alternating use enhances the sense of rhythm

and makes the emotional expression more rich.

E.g. *My eyes were often full of tears (I could not tell why) and at times a flood from my heart seemed to pour itself out into my bosom.*

In this sentence, parenthesis and many modifiers are used to describe in detail the complex and inexpressible feelings of the boy.

iii. Phonetics

In "Araby", Joyce skillfully uses alliteration (repetition of consonants at the beginning of a word) and end rhyme (repetition of vowels or consonants at the end of a word) to enhance the rhythm and musicality of the language.

E.g. *Our shouts echoed in the silent street.*

The "s" in "shouts", "silent" and "street" is alliterative and enhances the flow and rhythm of the words. The sound in language can strengthen the description of the characters' emotions and make it easier for readers to resonate. From the phrase, the energy of the children contrasted with the lethargy of the others in Irish street.

E.g. *and my eyes burned with **anguish** and **anger**.*

The alliterative "an" in "anguish" and "anger" not only makes the words more musical, but also indicates the boy's intense and complicated emotion, which also ends the full text.

Besides, in the sentence "Her name was like a summons to all my foolish blood", the harmonious combination of vowels and consonants makes the language sound smooth and natural, and also expresses the boy's infatuation with Mangan's sister. "I imagined that I bore my chalice safely **through** a **throng** of foes". In this line, the alliterative "th" enhances the rhythm of the language and alludes to the hostility and pressure the boy feels at the fair. In the description of the sounds of the market, the narrator can create a noisy atmosphere, so that readers can feel the confusion and loss of the boy in the market.

IV. CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR, IMAGE SCHEMA AND FOREGROUNDING

i. Conceptual Metaphor

In contrast to earlier theories of metaphor and metaphorical meaning, CMT (Conceptual Metaphor Theory) suggested that metaphor is an essential component of human cognition rather than merely a feature of language. In fact, preexisting metaphorical thought

patterns or conceptual metaphors are the source of most metaphorical language (Gibbs, 2011). Conceptual metaphors originate from linguistic metaphors and are understood through cognitive processing. When faced with metaphors in a text, readers can not only grasp the metaphorical meaning of abstract concepts but also activate feelings related to their own experiences and cognition.

Table 1 Conceptual Metaphor in "Araby"

conceptual metaphor	source domain	target domain	linguistic metaphor / example
LOVE IS RELIGION	RELIGION	LOVE	<i>I imagined that I bore my chalice safely through a throng of foes.</i>
LIFE IS JOURNEY	JOURNEY	LIFE	<i>The sight of the streets thronged with buyers and glaring with gas recalled to me the purpose of my journey.</i>
DISAPPOINTMENT IS DARKNESS	DARKNESS	DISAPPOINTMENT	<i>Gazing up into the darkness, I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity.</i>
HOPE IS LIGHT	LIGHT	HOPE	<i>I heard a voice call from one end of the gallery that the light was out.</i>

From the conceptual metaphor LOVE IS RELIGION in the table, the boy's love for Mangan's sister is portrayed as an almost religious devotion. He saw his affection for her as a sacred mission. In this way, it highlights the inner innocence and idealism of the boy, but also implies the fragility and perishable nature of this emotion. After a long wait and anxious anticipation to get to the Araby Market, the boy finally arrives to find that the market is nearly closed and full of commercial atmosphere, far from the romantic scene he had imagined. The metaphor LIFE IS JOURNEY reveals the gap between reality and ideal, emphasizing the uncertainty and disillusionment in life.

From the last two conceptual metaphors DISAPPOINTMENT IS DARKNESS and HOPE IS LIGHT, it can be seen that emotions are relatively complex,

abstract, and invisible. However, they can be connected through the relatively simple, concrete, and visible concepts of light and darkness. This visual metaphor allows readers to perhaps experience the emotions carried in the author's language after careful reading. Faint light symbolizes faint hope, and in the text, it often accompanies the figure of Mangan's sister, indicating that Mangan's sister also carries metaphorical meaning. Multiple depictions of darkness enhance the tragic color of the work, highlighting the boy's inner pain and disillusionment. Darkness is not only physical, but also symbolizes the boy's ignorance of reality and disappointment in the future.

ii. Image Schema

Image schema is a pattern of sensory-motion-emotion experience that appears

repeatedly in the process of body-environment interaction, which has abstract and general characteristics. They are stored in the brain in the form of schematized mental representations and mapped to the rational domain through metaphorical projection, helping humans to construct abstract concepts and carry out thinking activities such as understanding, imagination and reasoning. To a certain extent, image schema are mental patterns that represent

conceptual structures in expressions and are acquired through visual experiences. Their representations in language analysis frequently lack a generalizable framework and are context-dependent (Hedblom, Neuhaus, & Mossakowski, 2024). Image schema, by linking abstract emotion with concrete images, can enhance the intuitiveness of emotion and make it easier for readers to understand and feel the emotion of characters.

Table 2 Image Schema in “Araby”

image schema	example
CONTAINER	<i>An uninhabited house of two storeys stood at the blind end, detached from its neighbours in a square ground.</i>
UP-DOWN	<i>I listened to the fall of the coins.</i>
BLOCKAGE	<i>After an intolerable delay the train moved out of the station slowly.</i>

The CONTAINER schema is reflected in the boy's inner closure and desire for the outside world. The boy's room and North Richmond Street can be seen as containers, symbolizing his restricted living space and inner repression. He was eager to escape this closed environment to find new experiences and emotions. It highlights the contradiction between the boy's inner desire and the constraints of reality.

The UP-DOWN schema describes the position relation of the object in the vertical direction. When the boy is full of hope for Sister Mangan, his emotions are upward, full of longing and expectation. But when he arrives at the Araby Bazaar and discovers the gap between reality and fantasy, his emotions hit rock bottom like a coin dropping. The schema highlights the boy's loss, reflects his change from hope to disappointment, and enhances the tragic color.

In this narrative, the various obstacles encountered by the boy on his way to the bazaar Araby. For example, the boy had to wait for his uncle to come home before he could get the money, and the traffic delayed his journey. These obstacles prevented him from reaching the fair in

time and eventually led to his disappointment. The BLOCKAGE schema enables the readers to relate to the various challenges and difficulties encountered in his own life, thus making it easier to understand the boy's frustration.

iii. Foregrounding

The term foregrounding we mentioned is the equivalent of defamiliarization, which means to be prominent and focalized from background. Leech (2007) figured out two types of foregrounding: qualitative and quantitative foregrounding. The former includes the deviation of lexis, syntax and semantics.

E.g. *The syllables of the word Araby were called to me through the silence in which my soul **luxuriated** and cast an Eastern **enchantment** over me.*

The words "luxuriated" and "enchantment" here, with a strong romantic vibe, highlight the boy's fantasy and longing for the Araby bazaar. The use of these words breaks the banality of everyday language and focuses the reader's attention on the boy's emotional experience.

The latter is embodied by frequency, containing the

repetition of certain prosodies, words, phrases, sentences or even paragraphs. As a case in point, the image "dark" appears repeatedly in the novel, such as "the **dark** muddy lanes" and "The **dark** rainy evening"; The place "Araby" or "bazaar" appears time and again in the text, such as "She asked me was I going to **Araby**." The intentional repetition symbolizes the boy's dreams and fantasies. By using these words frequently, Joyce reinforces the theme of the work and makes the reader more able to understand the boy's inner feelings.

V. CONCLUSION

This article takes cognitive stylistics as its theoretical framework and delves into the expression and construction of emotions in James Joyce's short story "Araby." Through a detailed analysis of stylistic aspects such as lexicon, syntax, and phonetics, as well as cognitive aspects like conceptual metaphors, image schema, and foregrounding at the cognitive level, it reveals how the story shapes the emotional experiences of its characters, and guides the emotional responses of readers through linguistic style and embodied cognition.

The study finds that Joyce skillfully employed various stylistic devices, reflecting the cognitive essence in the text, highlighting the protagonist's complex emotions such as longing, disillusionment, and loss. On the other hand, readers, from a cognitive perspective, can identify and interpret these elements to gain a deeper understanding of the characters' inner worlds and resonate with the thematic emotions of the work. From this view, it can be understood that both language and cognition can serve emotions, and a cognitive perspective helps to better understand the emotional experiences of characters in literature and the emotional experiences of readers. This research can not only enrich the interpretation of "Araby" but also provide a new perspective for the application of cognitive stylistics in literary studies. Future research could further explore these findings through empirical

studies and interdisciplinary approaches.

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Social Determinism and Identity Formation in Sudha Murthy's *Mahashweta*

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Abstract— *Sudha Murthy's Mahashweta intricately explores the tension between individual identity and the socially constructed forces that shape and often suppress it. Moreover, it reveals the strict determinism of Indian patriarchal hierarchies based on class, caste, beauty, and gender via the heroine Anupama's path from social exaltation to ostracism and ultimately self-realization. This paper looks at how Murthy presents social determinism that reveals and constrains the process of identity creation. It explores the woman protagonist's psychological transformation through alienation, empowerment and rejection using Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory of identity development. In addition, it reveals that the author turns into a symbol of defiance against societal destiny. Therefore, the article shows how moral strength and self-awareness exceed deterministic constraints, even when identity is shaped by social circumstances.*



Keywords— *Social determinism; identity, patriarchy, resilience, self-realization*

I. INTRODUCTION

Indian English literature includes many different types of writing and looks at many different topics, such as the difficulties of identity, culture, history, politics, and social justice. The depiction of women's suffering in Indian English literature is a persistent motif that mirrors the stark realities of Indian society. Indian English authors emphasise the challenges women face in asserting their voice and agency within a patriarchal culture. The portrayal of women enduring various forms of oppression, including physical and emotional abuse and discrimination, in Indian English literature exemplifies the resilience of Indian women, who persist in their struggle for rights and the challenge of entrenched patriarchal norms. Indian English authors emphasise how difficult it is for women to express themselves and acquire agency in a patriarchal culture. Indian women's tenacity in fighting for their rights and defying the patriarchal norms that have long held them back is demonstrated by the representation of women in Indian English literature as being subjected to various forms of oppression, such as discrimination and emotional and physical abuse.

Indian women have a long history of being involved in both society and their own households. Patriarchy has shaped and controlled women's lives throughout history and across all cultural boundaries. In their writings, twenty-first-century Indian women authors have openly shared their experiences of emotional, racial, and family exploitation. Motivated by a strong need to establish themselves, the writers have since been able to use their identities as a source of power. In her works, Sudha Murthy expresses a deep concern for Indian women. Moreover, she lays up the hardships that women in contemporary India endure in each of her works. Accordingly, her literature gives voice to societal, domestic, and other real-life events, and she adamantly believes that women's affirmation is the answer to injustice. Thus, she highlights that in order to improve self-esteem, a person must realise their inner potential.

The women characters of Sudha Murthy's work have a positive attitude on life. They respect hard work and diligence. Further, their view on life is quite optimistic and their desire for a situation that drives them towards their passion, self-esteem, and respect is precisely perceived by the female characters. The idea that societal and cultural

factors, rather than an individual's free will, dictate their behaviour and identity is known as social determinism, and it has its roots in sociology and philosophy. By presenting a society in which a woman's social value is based on her marital status and her attractiveness, Murthy's story challenges this mindset. The study also honours human tenacity by implying that selfhood may be rebuilt by bravery and awareness in spite of deterministic forces.

Mahashweta depicts the interaction between societal determinism and human evolution, Sudha Murthy, who is renowned for her clear language and moral realism, adds to this conversation. The protagonist of the tale is Anupama, a bright and attractive young woman whose life takes a terrible turn when she is diagnosed with leukoderma, a skin condition that is stigmatised in Indian culture. In addition, her fall from grace and eventual path to self-discovery perfectly captures the extent to which one's sense of self is influenced by outside societal influences, such as marriage, beauty standards, caste identification, and gender expectations.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: ERIK ERIKSON'S PSYCHOSOCIAL THEORY

The psychosocial theory of Erik Erikson offers a useful framework for comprehending the moral and psychological development of Anupama. According to Erikson, there are eight phases of human development, and each one is marked by a psychological conflict. The stage that is most pertinent to the novel in which a person tries to find harmony between their own identity and what society expects of them. When Anupama's social image crumbles due to illness and prejudice, this struggle becomes apparent. Her former identity as the wife of a prominent physician and a model of beauty is not self-defined; rather, it is socially manufactured. Anupama has an existential crisis after being rejected by society, which compels her to re-establish her identity apart from approval from others. Through effort and education, she moves to subsequent phases of Erikson's paradigm, gaining generativity and integrity, which represent adulthood and inner completeness. Her experience therefore supports Erikson's theory that genuine identity develops via crisis and resolution as opposed to conformity.

Social Determinism in *Mahashweta*

The sociological and philosophical idea of social determinism describes how social and cultural systems, rather than an individual's free will, shape—and often constrain—their behaviour, beliefs, and identity. It implies that outside factors like class, caste, gender, religion, family, education, and social conventions have a significant influence on people's behaviour and life results. In different,

a person's choices, opportunities, and even identity are determined by their social environment. The idea of social determinism is used by authors to examine how the social circumstances around people shape their lives, particularly in realism and social novels. The conflict between destiny and free choice, or society and self, is often portrayed by authors as people fight against or give in to social influences.

Social determinism is portrayed in Murthy's *Mahashweta* as a complex structure that governs women's life via cultural norms and expectations. Patriarchal rules have governed Anupama's life from the start. Particularly, she is a candidate for marriage rather than self-actualization because of her father's financial difficulties and her attractiveness. She is married to the wealthy Anand, who stands for both social acceptance and the brittleness of appearance-based social approbation. The appearance of leukoderma immediately devalues Anupama. Moreover, Anand's desertion and her mother-in-law's brutality highlight the brittleness of social bonds based on outside standards. In keeping with the long-standing correlation between female virtue and physical beauty, society's deterministic views on illness and femininity make her impure.

In *Mahashweta* by Sudha Murthy, social determinism is portrayed as a complex and deeply ingrained system that controls women's lives via a network of gendered expectations, social hierarchies, and cultural standards. In addition, the book reveals how patriarchal ideals that value marriage, looks, and social conformity above uniqueness and inner worth dictate women's identities. Anupama's life is planned from the beginning by the expectations of her family and community, not by her own goals. Predominantly, the notion that a woman's ultimate fate rests on her capacity to maintain social and family status is reinforced by her father, a failing Sanskrit professor, who sees her knowledge and beauty as advantages that may lead to a successful marriage. As a result, Anupama's agency is enmeshed in the patriarchal system that values her more for her potential as a bride than for her intelligence or emotional capacity.

The illusion of social achievement and acceptability is best shown by the marriage to Anand. Rich and well-educated, Anand is the epitome of social approval, and his proposal is seen as a victory of riches and beauty rather than compatibility or love. Sudha Murthy utilises this relationship to show how women's choices and sense of fulfilment are determined by social determinism. Despite her brilliance, Anupama first adopts this socially acceptable definition of femininity, according to which happiness is defined by marital stability and outside acceptance. The

internalisation of deterministic beliefs that place a higher priority on social image than on personal authenticity is evident in her early childhood. But when Anupama has leukoderma, this delusion falls apart completely.

In fact, her physical metamorphosis turns into a moral and social crisis, exposing the true fragility and conditionality of societal acceptability. The illness turns become a symbol of society's intolerance for individuality and flaws. Apart from this, the instantaneous depreciation of Anupama's value highlights the cruelty of a deterministic system that uses a woman's physical attributes to determine her morality and purity. Indeed, Anand's apathy and her mother-in-law's brutality serve as an example of how deeply embedded patriarchal biases function, turning a woman into a social and aesthetic liability as soon as she fails to live up to expectations. Especially, Murthy's story challenges the deterministic mindset that links moral failure and societal contamination to physical defects.

The sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's idea of habitus a system of internalised inclinations and socialised norms that unintentionally mould people's views and actions is reflected in this dehumanisation process. The power of habit is shown by Anupama's first reaction to her illness: she internalises the guilt and humiliation society has placed on her, thinking she is undeserving of love or acceptance. Besides, her retreat into seclusion and quiet is a reflection of the profound psychological conditioning imposed by patriarchal society, not just an emotional response. Additionally, Sudha Murthy illustrates the widespread influence of social determinism across gender, class, and moral domains through Anupama's estrangement. Even males are limited by deterministic factors like social standing and economic uncertainty, as shown by Anupama's father's incapacity to protect her from social censure. Further illustrating how determinism transcends individual bias to group ideology is the institutionalised stigmatisation of sickness, which has its roots in cultural taboos concerning purity and contamination.

Sudha Murthy offers the prospect of change within this deterministic framework. As Anupama progressively realises the unfairness present in her social surroundings, the story starts to change. In addition to this, her relocation to Bangalore represents a psychological and physical break from the deterministic systems that once governed her life. By looking for work and financial autonomy, she starts to break down the internalised hierarchy that had controlled her identity. Similarly, Murthy resists that social determinism is not absolute and that awareness and education may break its cycle.

Sudha Murthy reveals how society influences women through beauty standards, marital status, and moral

judgments. She also illustrates how the heroine breaks free from these constraints. Anupama's change from a socially judged "fallen woman" to an independent individual shows the potential to overcome limited circumstances through knowledge and determination. Thus, the plot becomes a study of both oppression and freedom. It shows that while social conditions shape identity, they do not have to define it permanently. Anupama reinforces the enduring human capacity to rise above the restrictive roles set by society by reclaiming her sense of worth and purpose. The novel powerfully depicts the complex relationship between social circumstances and the development of female identity within the patriarchal systems of Indian society. It explores how outside influences such as family expectations, caste norms, gender roles, and societal biases shape and often limit the protagonist Anupama's identity. It also traces her psychological journey toward self-understanding and strength. The plot highlights how caste and class distinctions affect relationships and self-esteem. Anupama's pain is both physical and social; being ostracized leads to inner conflict and emphasizes the disparity between her true self and the identity that society imposes.

Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory offers a helpful way to analyze Anupama's changing identity in a restrictive environment. At first, Anupama faces confusion and rejection as she tries to align her true self with the identity of a sick and unwanted woman imposed on her by society. As the story unfolds, Anupama begins to assert her individuality and control, moving toward a more solid sense of identity despite societal pressures. Her relationships, particularly those providing emotional support, help her face the challenges of intimacy versus loneliness. This change marks a slow yet important shift away from social determinism through inner strength. The domestic space in the story serves both as a place of confinement and transformation.

Initially, it represents patriarchal control and societal expectations that undermine Anupama's identity. However, as she displays her resilience, the domestic setting shifts into a space for self-discovery and quiet rebellion. The tensions within these spaces highlight the contradictions women face while trying to balance social roles with personal growth. *Mahashweta* captures the conflict between social constraints and the development of personal identity, presenting the protagonist's struggle as representative of the experiences many Indian women face. Viewed through Erikson's theory, Anupama's path from confusion about her role to achieving her identity underscores the potential for psychological growth even within restrictive social structures. This paper sets the stage for examining similar themes in Sudha Murthy's other

novels, showing the nuanced ways that domestic life and societal expectations shape and sometimes support female resilience.

III. IDENTITY CRISIS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ALIENATION

The psychological harm caused by social determinism is shown through Anupama's estrangement after her husband and family reject her. Her exclusion highlights the strict moral code that links physical defects to moral flaws. She experiences what Erikson would call role confusion, as her identities as a woman, wife, and daughter are undermined. In a culture where women's worth relies on others' approval, she questions her own existence and value. Sudha Murthy presents this psychological pain in a clear and relatable way. Anupama's inner thoughts and moments of sadness reflect the identity crisis that arises from patriarchal judgment. However, these experiences also lead to transformation. Her decision to move to Bangalore and look for a teaching job symbolizes her quest for independence. Essentially, her journey from dependence to self-reliance represents a form of rebellion and self-redefinition.

Anupama navigates the typical family environment in the book, which includes many conflicts. Before she falls ill, her life appears to be going well. She has clearly faced alienation within her own family, similar to Shrimati and Mridula. She lacks anyone to share her pain with. Anupama has endured feelings of isolation at both her father's home and her in-laws' house. She has felt alone and disconnected since childhood. Her mother died when she was young, leaving her feeling envious and stigmatized by her sister and stepmother. Most importantly, she lives with a father who is powerless. Her leukoderma prevents her from having a happy life with Anand, and a sense of gloom envelops her. Anupama reflects on her isolated existence, comparing it to a cemetery: "Her own life would be as silent as a graveyard. She wondered where she had gone wrong. Why she has been punished? Was there no escape from this ordeal? It seemed as though even God had turned a deaf ear to her prayers." (65)

Resilience and Self-Realization: Overcoming Determinism

Primarily, Anupama's journey from being a victim to becoming an independent woman marks the moral high point of the book. It is important to note that she chooses to define herself by her own integrity and achievements rather than by society's views. Anupama gains psychological independence through her involvement in school and her connections with supportive figures like Vasanth. In Murthy's story, education becomes a tool for freedom, a

way to overcome the limiting barriers set by class and gender. Moreover, her final release from social constraints is shown by her refusal to reconcile with her repentant husband, Anand, at the end. By refusing to make amends, Anupama regains her moral and emotional autonomy. Thus, Murthy promotes independence, moral strength, and inner peace as paths to developing a true identity, while also criticizing the patriarchal systems that limit women. Furthermore, the plot serves as a powerful example of domestic violence. It thoroughly explores a woman's experiences and the challenges she faces.

Mahashweta adopts a tone closely linked to the feminist movement. On the first page of the novel, we meet the male protagonist, Anand. In the early chapters, he works as a doctor and assists in delivering a baby girl. The experienced nurse in the hospital delivery room holds certain beliefs that apply universally, but they resonate strongly in India: "For a moment Prabhavathi was lost in thought. Even though the female child is stronger than the male child at birth, as adults it is the man who becomes the oppressor, and the woman who suffers." (1)

From a feminist viewpoint, *Mahashweta* reflects the ideas of liberal feminism, which highlights equality, independence, and education as paths to empowerment. Murthy's portrayal of Anupama aligns with the feminist works of writers like Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai, who also depict women's struggle for identity against oppressive societal systems. However, Sudha Murthy distinguishes herself by framing empowerment within moral realism rather than outright rebellion. In *Mahashweta*, social determinism also includes caste and class dynamics. The story subtly critiques how patriarchal beliefs and upper-caste power maintain restrictive norms. Anupama's father, a Sanskrit professor, illustrates how gender and class intersect to shape social destiny. Thus, Murthy shows social determinism as a system of oppression that affects not only women's positions but also the moral and economic frameworks of Indian society.

IV. CONCLUSION

Sudha Murthy offers a powerful look at social determinism and the persistent development of identity despite its challenges. Overall, she questions the deterministic ideas that tie a woman's worth to her looks, social status, or marital success by following Anupama's journey from societal victimization to personal and intellectual awakening. Using Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory highlights that identity is ultimately shaped by inner strength and self-awareness, even under societal pressures. Beyond personal challenges, Anupama's story carries a broader message of resilience and hope: the human spirit

can resist and reshape social destiny. On a global scale, Murthy's narrative advocates for a more compassionate, inclusive, and self-defined understanding of identity, reinforcing literature's role as both a reflection and critique of the societal structure.

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Negotiating Identity and Womanhood: A Feminist Reading of *One and a Half Wife* by Meghna Pant

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Abstract— *In One and a Half Wife*, Meghna Pant writes a powerful story about what it means to be a woman while navigating concepts of identity, displacement, and self-realization through the lenses of patriarchy, migration, and cultural hybridity. In this paper I offer a feminist reading of the novel as I explore how Amara Malhotra, the protagonist, manoeuvres her identity and femininity in the face of clashing social demands and transnational realities. The story follows Amara as she navigates her way back and forth between India and the States, encapsulating the lives of many diasporic women who exist in the liminal space between tradition and modernity. Pant uses Amara's shifting awareness to question how Indian and immigrant women have been shaped by entrenched patriarchal standards, exposing both the price of compliance and the power of self-assertion. Employing feminist theoretical insights from Simone de Beauvoir and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, this paper questions the representation of Amara in her role as an incomplete "half-wife," a metaphor for the disjointed identity of women in a patriarchal system. It carries on to assess how Pant, by the deconstruction of the romanticized details on matrimony, chastity and sacrifice, discloses the cultural and religious patriarchy-enabled subjugation. In the end, Amara's road to self-acceptance and self-reliance is a reclamation of power, redefining what it means to be a woman outside of the expectations of society. Locating *One and a Half Wife* in the feminist/postcolonial discourses, the paper asserts that not only Pant raises the voicing of diasporic Indian woman but also questions the universals on gender, belonging and freedom. It is then that the novel transforms into a tale of rebellion and restoration, in which the notion of identity and womanhood are seen as moving acts of negotiation rather than static markers by which one is defined.



Keywords— *Self-realization, womanhood, patriarchy, feminism, and diaspora*

INTRODUCTION

In this book, Meghna Pant presents a nuanced and sharply critical reflection on gender and identity-formation and what it means to be a woman in contemporary India, as these experiences are mediated through migration, marriage, and ideas of cultural disjunction. This book chronicles the life of Amara Malhotra, born in Shimla who as a child moves to the States with her parents, imbibes Western values and culture, and subsequently comes back to India with her husband after her marriage trajectory had met its natural course. Within this arc, Pant probes the definition of femininity when conservative and progressive identities are at odds: Amara is stuck between familial obligations—submission, virginity, glorifying parental and

societal pride—and her aspirations of agency, self-actualization, and a genuine identity (Pant).

While Pant's narrative presents a woman moving through separation and return, it also engages with the negotiation of female identity against a patriarchal backdrop of compression. That her role as close to "wife" is privileged but circumscribed: marriage becomes battleground of dream and imprisonment: a badge of community often insulated far beyond its local outskirts too frequently outweighing individual ambition. The ugly fallout of her divorce the stigma, the depression, the "loss of honour" exposes how femininity in this setting is shrivelled, controlled, and trapped in the bounds of relational duty and sacrifice (Dutt, D Cunha).

Pant also troubles the tradition versus modernity binary by revealing as both insufficient in meeting the expectations upon Amara. This return to India is not a return to a comfortable equilibrium but to re-negotiation; re-negotiation of what identity she wants to form, what traditions she accepts, what it is that she rejects, though and how she reclaims her agency in a society which expects women to assimilate the contradictions of society. Therefore, through a feminist reading the text *One and a Half Wife* is discovered to be involved with power, voice, and resistance, and thus the text comes to the conclusion that womanhood and identity in general is not static, but in flux (Kumar 72).

Feminist works attempt to create equal opportunities for women's position and recognition in society. Women's empowerment has had a significant impact on current society.

Although women's roles and appreciation have improved over time, misconceptions about feminine identity persist. Women are being recognized for their professional accomplishments, but their household obligations, such as cooking and childrearing, continue to be overlooked. To pursue a career, women often need to juggle domestic and professional responsibilities.

In any event, women are expected to put their needs first while men are seen as the family's main provider. households' obligations. Divorce is frowned upon in Indian civilizations, and those who are divorced must deal with the social and cultural stigmas associated with the idea of "being divorced." The psychological effects of divorce are profoundly depressing. When a person's marriage fails, it can be incredibly challenging for them to get over the negative thoughts and relationship destruction. Even though divorce is a decision made by each spouse with their own agreement, ending a marriage leaves people vulnerable and shattered on many levels—socially, culturally, individually, monetarily, and mentally (Naz 10).

About the Author

Meghna Pant is a contemporary Indian writer whose writings reflect feminism, gender issues, and identity inequality. She was born in Shimla, but spent the majority of her early years in Mumbai and Delhi. She graduated from St. Xavier College in Mumbai with a bachelor's degree in statistics and economics. She was awarded a scholarship to study finance for an MBA at Singapore's Nanyang Business School. She graduated from the University of St. Gallen in Switzerland with a master's degree in international management. She is a well-known journalist and speaker. Meghna decided to pursue a career in business journalism after earning her MBA.

She has shared his ideas in various discourse standings including famous TEDx show, Pune International Literary Festival, Kala Ghoda Literary festival, Jaipur Literature Festival and Young Maker's Conclave, #RiseWithTwitter, Lucknow Literature Carnival, Lito mania, Think Literature, Chandigarh Literati TISS Literature festival, LitFest, Women Writers fest etc. Pant talks liberally on social issues such as rape, domestic violence, body-shaming, miscarriage and surrogacy etc. Pant has worked as business news anchor with various renowned channels including NDTV, Bloomberg-UTV and Times Now. Till now in her career, she has got the chance to meet and interview President Obama, Mukesh Ambani, Sir Richard Branson, Hillary Clinton, Ratan Tata and Shah Rukh Khan, among others. Pant is the sister of famous comedian and artist Sorabh Pant. She currently lives with her husband in Mumbai and blessed with a daughter.

Before Meghna made the decision to confront her abuser, she had long been a victim of domestic abuse. It is partly the cause of her enthusiasm. to speak out against domestic abuse since she had personally experienced the horrific experience of falling victim to it.

Domestic abuse is a severe and cruel social menace, but most of the time women lack the bravery to talk about it because they are afraid of being judged and dishonoured by society. For these individuals, Meghna emerges as an inspiration and a source of hope for escaping their hopeless circumstances. Meghna used her TEDx lecture to raise awareness about domestic abuse by sharing her message, "Stop the Violence, Stop the Silence." aggression.

An Analysis of *One and a Half Wife*

The coming-of-age story of Amara Malhotra, an innocent and submissive Indian girl whose life is governed by her mother's beliefs and morals, is told in *One and a Half Wife* beliefs. The story begins when she is 14 years old. She is her parents' only child. Amara's only option since she was a young child was to appease her mother; "Biji's desire contoured Amara's identity." The needs she had to satisfy before herself—"God's desire," "Biji's (her mother's) desire," and "His desire"—shadowed her own identity. "His" was her future spouse, and he had been in her life since she was a young child, so she never felt alone. Little ones. Every discussion, her toys, her attire, and her manners all featured an imaginary "He." For her unidentified husband, she was expected to become the perfect "ideal woman and wife."

The spectre of another human being was so strong that Amara felt like she had an invisible twin, whose identity had been meshed into hers. She accepted that she was to have no 'I' in her life;

before meeting him, she would be known as 'We', the Malhotra family and after meeting Him she would be known as 'Us', the married couple. (Pant, 9).

Amara was taught that marriage was a lifelong institution for girls, as permanent as death and unchangeable as aging. It was fleeting. Thus, she was unable to comprehend what divorce meant when she learned of her neighbours' daughter Shikha Arora's "failed marriage." Shikha's parents permitted her daughter to remain with them following her divorce, but they were subjected to social marginalization and derisive looks from the community. Nobody asked them to weddings or celebrations, and everyone avoided them. They had a tiny storefront where people stopped to buy groceries, but nobody noticed them when they went for walks in the evening.

Amara's mother forbids her from purchasing anything from Aroras because she was certain that "Shikha's jinn" would have an impact on her daughter. However, Amara occasionally sent flowers outside Didi's home to cheer her up because she felt bad for her Shikha didi. Within two years of getting married, Shikha got divorced. Although she now lived with her parents, her position as a divorcee diminished her social standing. Here, Pant paints a pitiful image of the social repercussions divorced women must deal with. Shikha was a beautiful and smart woman. She was taught to become a doctor after receiving a scholarship to a medical school, but the term "divorcee" marred all of her brilliance. She felt ashamed and humiliated for no fault of her own.

Amara and her mother visit an astrologer to have Amara's destiny predicted as the story progresses. Her mother's expectations are shaped by the astrologer's sardonic statement that she is destined to become "*one and a half wife*," which not only foreshadows the story's main plot but also becomes her top concern and worries that characterize Amara's existence.

In spite of the main character, the plot centres on Amara's mother, "Bijji," whose presence plays a major role in the protagonist's life and who has been portrayed as a symbol of the social principle's deception and prevalent conservative views. Her words and deeds demonstrate the deeply rooted convictions and prevalent social mindset. She forces these values on Amara, forcing her to view the world through inherited customs as opposed to autonomous thought. Amara is forced to repress her own wishes and opinions as a result of her subjectivity being restricted under a strict community framework. The conflict between obedience and the dormant desire for

independence that characterizes Amara's struggle is highlighted by this forced conformity:

The only three desires Amara knew scrambled in front of her eye. They crept up like vines from underneath the floorboards, jumped up from the third leg of the wicker chair and skipped atop the steel trunks. They danced in frenzy, whirring and whirring around her 'It Is God's Desire.' 'It Is Bijji's Desire.' 'It Is His Desire.' (Pant, 20).

In pursuit of her aspirations, Bijji relocates abroad with significant support from her brother Dua Mama. Her goal is to secure a better marriage for her daughter and gain greater respect within society. While everything may seem promising from afar, the reality only unfolds upon closer inspection. The scenario Bijji envisioned in America—filled with happiness and ample opportunities—ultimately exposes the harsh truths of assimilation challenges that immigrants face in a developed country. This leads to despair and confusion for Amara's family, who must navigate the trials of immigrant life, cultural differences, and even rejection from their own relatives.

Among them all, Amara bore the greatest burden, sacrificing her own desires solely to keep her mother content. She encountered challenges at every turn—be it at school, in her Dua Mama's home, or within society as a whole. The most agonizing aspect was her profound isolation, having no one to confide in about her pain. Amara transcends the role of a mere character; she embodies the silent struggles of countless girls who endure difficulties for the sake of their families' happiness and to fulfill societal expectations. Her life is constrained by what the narrative identifies as three ironies—"the curse of beauty," "the curse of money," and "the curse of opportunity"—each highlighting the contradictions of a patriarchal and materialistic society that restricts women's freedom to shape their own futures.

Life constitutes a continuum characterized by an extensive array of educational experiences; at each juncture, it imparts insights that fundamentally alter our worldview and augment the compendium of our lived experiences. In a parallel manner, within the narrative, when she endeavoured to acclimatize to the novel milieu—one that revealed itself to her in unforeseen manners—she came to the realization that the ambition of attaining elevated social standing often diminishes the importance of interpersonal relationships. Rather, it unveils a harsh reality in which relationships are frequently established and esteemed in accordance with an individual's societal standing. This phenomenon is exemplified by her Dua Mama's practice of categorizing guests based on their accomplishments in life, illustrating how societal

validation supersedes authentic human connections. As Amara articulates, “As if doctored by slot machine, the guests fell into sections_ ‘the beyond’ stood at the centre, surrounded by ‘the equals’, while ‘the early’ flitted nervously around both.” (Pant 76).

Another reality that emerged before her (potentially the most significant one) was the behaviour of society under the guise of ensuring a “desirable” life partner for their offspring. Through this lens, a novel and disconcerting conception of marriage was unveiled to her, one that reflected the unvarnished reality underlying social affiliations: “Amara had learnt that in Indian society, everything – prayer, education, family, beauty, chastity and career - represented a rung on the ladder of life, which had to be ascended to attain the highest rung: marriage.” (74).

In this context, marriage was not commemorated as a union founded on companionship or affection but rather upheld as the definitive indicator of social legitimacy and individual achievement.

Amara's life abruptly changed in the middle of an exclusive social circle when Damini, Prashant Roy's wealthy mother, selected her as a suitable spouse for her son, prioritizing traditional values over contemporary perspectives. This choice illustrates the paradox that older generations frequently eclipse modernization with their traditional views. Prashant consented to marry Amara out of a great deal of love and respect for his mother, not out of personal preference but rather to appease her. Like most marriages based on the will of others, Amara's marriage to her husband was unstable. She made every attempt to keep the marriage together, but it was all in vain, leaving her alone. “She entered the room feeling, as always, like an intruder. Maybe this was because she couldn't find the I in their room.” (Pant,103).

There was no meaningful companionship based on love, care, and communication in Amara and Prashant's marriage. She cooked his favourite foods, kept the house just how he wanted it, dressed him, and even thought in accordance with his preferences in an effort to close the emotional gap between them. Essentially, she shaped herself into the “ideal wife” despite her efforts to transform herself into the “ideal wife” she thought he wanted, she was unable to win his affection. This highlights a hard reality about relationships: no matter how much work is put in later, the impression one makes of someone at first sight frequently doesn't change (Yadav 45).

It's particularly interesting that Amara didn't have to put up with controlling or repressive conduct from her in-laws; for example, Damini was kind and supportive to her. However, the disagreement did not cause the marriage to fail. Nevertheless, after six years of continuous conflict,

Amara and Prashant's marriage ended due to neglect, an emotional hole that developed between them—a gradual deterioration of connection rather than an explosive clash. Amara was eventually condemned by her family and the larger community once more.

Ironically, Amara's change began when she was forced to return to India due to her divorce.

Meghna Pant uses a particular quote to show how her protagonist's actions and perspective drastically change from hanging over the fear:

What would happen to her once she was divorced? How would her parents react? What would people say? What box would she tick in forms asking about her marital status? Who would want to marry her again? She was almost thirty; when would she have children? Amara couldn't even envision spending her life alone, leave alone actually do it. (Pant,143).

To the bold declaration Infront of Lalit on Kiara's adoption, “I hope she'll respect me more if she knows that I fought for her and didn't act like a coward. And if things get worse then I'll move to a city where women like me are not singled out.” (Pant,290).

Meghna Pant's novel is in alignment with modernist sensibilities because of the way she depicts her characters' reactions to shifting conditions. She redefines traditional ideas about marriage, divorce, women's empowerment, and even the possibility of love after divorce through this change. Most importantly, via the persona of the narrator, Amara, portrays the picture of the “new woman”—a person who defies social norms, embraces her uniqueness, and demonstrates fortitude in the face of difficulty.

CONCLUSION

In *One and a Half Wife*, Meghna Pant strives to tear down the unjust customs that are imposed on divorced people's identities in Indian society. Divorce is by no means a good or ideal solution to any issue, but occasionally it becomes essential for all concerned. In many parts of India, “being divorced” is still frowned upon, and Indian society are frequently judgmental in these situations. Even though the book depicts the challenging outcomes faced by divorced individuals, it also offers a glimmer of optimism for Indian cultures in transition. The 16-year gap indicates a significant shift in people's tolerance and behaviour toward traditional ideas and cultures.

Amara's experience gives people—especially women—a fresh perspective on how to deal with their issues. The novel serves as a stimulus for overcoming

obstacles because of her journey from inwardness and the obscurity of the actual world to standing alone against all odds for her dignity and self-respect.

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Women and the Great War: A Gendered Reading

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Abstract— Warfare has taken a great to strengthen the man-woman binary. It's time to realize that this gender binary is no more than a myth just like the myths of 'glory of war' or 'patriotic death'. Women not only played the role of a bereaved mother, wife or daughter in this war. A number of them were actively involved in it-be it as a disguised male soldier, a nurse or a worker of munitions factories. They have seen the wounds, the deaths, horror of the war and conveyed it through their writings. Their letters, reports, diaries are based on their real life experience of war. Their poems, novels and stories of war are no less passionate than those of their male counterparts. This present paper aims to bring some light to the willing forgetfulness about the women of WWI because if one has to get an unbiased and clear concept of the war he must pay the right dues to those neglected women folk of First World War.



Keywords— World War, Women, Gendered, Narrative.

Introduction:

There are a few things so much 'gendered' as warfare is. It has been considered to be a 'man's job' from time immemorial. Therefore traditionally women were denied access to the warzone-a completely homo-social periphery. The scenario has changed to a considerable amount during the First World War. The Great War involving almost all the continents of the world had brought this change. It was proved to be not only a watershed for women's social, political and economic rights but also an event to break the age-old binary of gender roles attached to the concepts of warfare.

Women in the battlefield:

Some women, though a handful, were there to experience the war from a first-hand position. For example, Dorothy Lawrence, an English reporter took the disguise of a male and fought the WWI in 1914. She is the only known English women soldier on the frontline during WWI. Maria Bochkareva not only fought herself in WWI but also formed her own battalion of women, namely, 'Women's Battalion of Death'. During her military career, this Russian woman had to undergo the ridicules and sexual harassment by the people of her own regiment, the Imperial Russian Army. Olena Stepaniv of Ukraine was the first woman in the world to receive officer rank in this WWI. Olga Krasilnikov and

Natalie Tychmini both from Russia received the Cross of St. George for their contribution in war front in WWI. There are more names in the line but numerically saying woman playing the roles of combatants at the war front is really 'a few, a few, too few for drums and yells'.

Women in Different Roles:

Actually, the question of direct participation or first-hand experience is a patriarchal conspiracy that aims at ignoring or belittling the role of women played in the warfare. But one must remember that war was not limited in the frontline and trenches. The army hospitals, the munitions factories and several charitable organizations to help and support the soldiers were well-nigh included in the war business. And women took the most important roles to run those institutions. A woman died of mercury poisoning in an explosive factory is no less a war victim than her male counterpart shot in the battlefield.

New Employment for Women:

It is very true that world war provided new employment opportunities for women. The male-workforce being engaged in war the state was in need of labourers and workers in different fields. Thus, they appointed women in dockyards, factories, arsenals, transport industries and many other places though with a lesser wages. A

considerable number of women came out of domestic life and joined the workforce replacing the men in nearly all kinds of routine and automatic works. Gradually, they formed their own unions and strengthen their socio-political movement like suffrage movement.

A relevant question may be raised here whether the Great War really broke the gender binary or reinforce it by exploiting women workforce. Women workers were paid awfully less than the men workers. Women mostly undertook the routine monotonous work which few men could tolerate psychologically. Most of them left the work after marriage and above all they faced the post war backlash against their employment as ex-servicemen returned from the battle and reclaimed their jobs. So, women have to return to their 'rightful' domestic places. Post war nations were no longer in need of them. Beatrice Webb, an English sociologist, economist, reformer and labour historian, was one of the few to argue that the war had not significantly altered the status of women.

Literature of War by Women (Non-Fiction):

If we consider the aspect of 'literature of war', we often see that the narrative of war is considered to be a man's business in terms of authenticity. Most of the war poets (Owen, Brook, Sassoon etc.) had the direct experience of the trench life and thus their narrative have been considered to be more practical and real than the narrative of a nurse who healed others' wound and did not have them in their own body. That is why Vietnam nurse Lynda Van Devanter had to face the struggle to validate her war-memoir *Home before Morning* (1983).

In spite of being largely ignored for ages, women's narratives of war are there and demands proper attention and recognition. Vera Brittain's WWI memoir *Testament of Youth* (1933) shows her moving between the homefront and warfront as a VAD nurse and serves the reality of both the fronts. The letters she exchanged with her fiancé Roland Leighton, a soldier on the warfront, are tinged with what may be called 'real vision of war'.

Not only letters, diaries also served as memoirs of war. Miss Esmee Sartorius, a nurse of Red cross in England writes how they were given 'breads' which were 'black' and 'hard' and beds mostly 'without mattresses' when went to serve in the frontline hospital '...food was getting beautifully less and less, meat very occasional...' or 'life was one continual series of shocks, strange noises made us think we were being shelled, the electric light going out one night made us vividly imagine we were going to be blown up'. (Sartorius in Purdom, 144)

There are diaries of nurse Taffy Evans who worked at several hospitals in England, France and Belgium during

WWI. That also contains the hard core realities about the war.

Literature of War by Women (Fiction):

Apart from non-fictional works like letters or diaries, there are works of fiction by women authors on WWI. Charlotte Mew's poem apostrophizing an empty tomb as the focus of private mourning 'The Cenotaph' was published in the second edition of her collection 'The Farmer's Bride' in 1921. When in 'May 1915' Mew utters, "Let us remember spring will come again/ to thus scorched, blackened wood", it sounds like she is hoping against hope standing amidst the ruins of humanity caused by the WWI. Her other poems like 'To a Child in Death', 'In Nun head Cemetery', 'The Farmer's Bride', 'Absence' etc. are all soaked with the agony of war. Margaret Postgate Cole was another name in the line. Her 'The Falling Leaves', 'The Veteran', 'Afterwards', 'Praematuri' recall war's futile waste of youth and innocence.

The role of women in the warfare being mostly unsung some women poets like Mary Gabrielle Collins had tried their voice to confer some recognition to them. In her poem, 'Women at Munition Making', she says, how "[t]heir hands, their fingers/ Are coarsened in munition factories". 'War girls' by J.C Pope portraits how the Great War left "...no time for love and kisses/ Till the khaki soldier boys come marching back". The girls who 'clips your ticket', 'speeds the lift' or 'drives a heavy van' are all war girls to the poet who as a woman subverts the idea of gender binary. Marian Allen, Madeline Ida Bedford, Sybil Bristowe, May Wedderburn Cannan, Alice Corbin etc are some more names who tried their hands in world war verse.

Besides verse, prose fiction was not an untouched genre by women authors. For instance, *The Return of the Soldier* (1918) by Rebecca West was a novel that examined war from a psychoanalytic point of view and showed its impact on the soldiers. Katherine Mansfield's the world famous short story 'The Fly' certainly has traces of her recollections of the world war I which snatched the life of her own brother.

Conclusion

To overcome the bias of gender binary of war, genuine efforts should be made on part of the researchers. One such researcher, Jean Gallagher, a professor of English in a university in USA wrote a book *World Wars through the Female Gaze* (1998) where she asserts that 'vision has ...played an important role in the development and gendering of cultural discourses about war' (Gallagher, 3) and the role of vision as a gendered activity has deprived women from their right of authenticity. In fine, breaking the

binaries is the first condition to get an accurate and clear picture of the world war. This present paper has only aimed to do that.

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Perseverance, honesty and struggle as characteristic spiritual streak in Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* and Swarup's *The Accidental Apprentice*

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Abstract— Ernest Hemingway and Vikas Swarup can be critically found sharing nothing in common as the former is credited to have tried for transcendental while the latter presents kaleidoscopic facets of life with varied hues and colours. Nonetheless, in terms of characterization something runs as common thread in *The Old Man and the Sea* and *The Accidental Apprentice*. No critic would gainsay the fact that Santiago in the former novella represents, and serves as a metaphorical image, of a species (human) asserting his existential presence and obeying harmony with nature and other species. The perseverant protagonist does not give up to the colossal, human size in contrast to giant marlin is notwithstanding. The old man has been projected against the vast scheme of Nature wherein the novelist showcases man's eternal struggle against indifferent nature apart from his adjustability. The protagonist in another novel does share with Hemingway's old man in terms of true character in the vortex of life while passing through struggles and hardships. Sapna Sinha, though an ordinary proletarian girl, has strong perseverance and honesty to the given circumstances in her character. Through contrived plots Swarup puts the protagonist through odd vicissitudes as she has to pass the seven tests designed by Acharya Vinay. It is her streak of character with honesty, acceptability, perseverance that she emerges triumphant through hard tests; wiser, more refined and enlightened Sapna attains spiritual bit sublimity at the final pages of the novel.



Keywords— character, nature, protagonist, spiritual, struggle, perseverance

If critically taken into pieces, the works of Ernest Hemingway and Vikas Swarup, there would hardly come up something common between two. As a literary artist, philosopher, foreseer and visionary Hemingway holds a coveted place while Swarup is credited being a chronicler of socio-cultural shades of modern Indian life. The former author counts as one of the most representative literary novelists in twentieth century, not only in American world but across the globe. It is well-known fact that someone gets perennial niche in any arena not simply he is one like others in that field, but the one whose contribution in that field is marked with some unique sagacity. Towering figure like Hemingway would not conclude any literary-artistic piece merely by having penned down common shades and hues of life; he rather has taken the readers to the transcendental

heights and to the inner zones of one self with his spiritual touch. *A Farewell to the Arms* (1929) does not flatly falls in the category of documentary literature showing one's point of view and concerns over the horrid facets and consequences of war. Hemingway, in this narrative, does delineates ugly face of First World War I, however, he makes the readers realize the deeper anguish as the protagonist Henry has to undergo.

Similarly, Hemingway's masterpiece *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), which has been taken herein for the research, has established the author as one of the potential voices of his times. The novella is not merely a story of a Cuban old fisherman's struggle but it aims higher as an epical saga of man's perennial struggle. Santiago, the old man, stands as the symbol of man who has been asserting his presence and

existence on earth, his story has attained rather transcendental heights. Hemingway comes up with the truth of human's persistent progression through the hardships and never give-up spirit of the protagonist. The old man does not surrender to the adversity of fiasco of having no catch for long eighty-four days. He epitomizes hard-core optimism because of which perhaps human species has been surviving.

Ontological study of life on earth may reveal that motley of species have succumbed to pain and adversity and thus gone extinct. Charles Darwin in his seminal book *The Origin of Species* (1859) has propounded the idea 'survival of the fittest' which came to be used and quoted very popularly in all branches of knowledge. Robert J. Richards quotes this Darwinian fact of survival supremacy:

In chapter 10 of the *Origin*, for instance, Darwin asserts that "the more recent forms [of creatures] must, on my theory, be higher than the more ancient; for each new species is formed by having had some advantage in the struggle for life over other and preceding forms". This is a universal proposition, not confined to a local population. (Darwin quoted at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2702795/#>)

Human race has been one such dominant and advantageous species in the race of survival, waging strife and consistently progressing ahead-- hostile terrains in the path, challenges and adversities notwithstanding. Metaphorically Santiago stands for that struggle and perseverance on the basis of which human being has survived. Dr Rommana Farooqui's analysis substantiates this point:

Just like Santiago, we all in this life are fighting in many different ways to survive as well as all the other creatures on this earth too. We can see how Santiago has a firm determination and intention to hook the fish and to show to others how he remains undefeated. It simply proved how strong he was, with a mindset of not quitting and not giving up, no matter how tough and challenging it would be. The novella shows Santiago's amazing and unbeatable willpower and mental strength despite his physical exhaustion due to old age. Santiago believed with positive attitude and hoped one can overcome all the hardships and challenges. (Farooqui, 2021: 186)

Santiago's struggle and undefeated spirit exemplify the universal truth that something or someone lacking inner strength does not last long while true character helps one in perseverant struggle in life. The old man here has substantial character that provides him determination in the

adverse circumstances. Marlin and other Sharks are far huger than him apart from hostile weather and the sea, yet Santiago is focused over his profession. In long process of loosening and tightening the line on Marlin he gets injured, fatigued, yet does not give up:

He took his pain and what was left of his strength and his long-gone pride and he put it against the fish's agony and the fish came over onto his side and swam gently on his side, his bill almost touching the planking of the skiff, and started to pass the boat, long, deep, wide, silver and barred with purple and interminable in the water.

The old man dropped the line and put his foot on it and lifted the harpoon as high as he could and drove it down with all his strength, and more strength he had just summoned, into the fish's side just behind the great chest fin that rose high in the air to the attitude of the man's chest. (*The Old Man and the Sea*, 1952: 71-72)

By showcasing such haughty perseverance of the protagonist Hemingway adduces the fact of man's perennial struggle and toughness against all adversities. It is obvious that what distinguishes Santiago from other fishermen is his honesty in character; the old man represents truthfulness to what he is, true to his character. In spite of criticism and mockery from others he does not let his mind be home for qualms about his abilities. Failure cannot shake the moorings of his boat and his true character. One who has duality of thoughts and shaken character is bound to give up, yet Santiago does not. Santiago stands for endurance and unchecked struggle while Marlin and the sharks stand for hardships, obstacles, adversity and challenges in life. Inevitability of pain, suffering and tragic experience serve as the very core of life; earned pleasure is rather meagre in contrast to such inevitable components of life. Thomas Hardy had unearthed this hard fact that- 'Happiness was but the occasional episode in the general drama of pain.' Fatmir Ramadani explores this truth:

The story of Santiago shows not only natural tragic pattern, as the individual human life may do when seen as a whole. It can also stand as a natural parable. In this story, as in the life of man, the battle commences, grows and subsides between one sleep and another. In human experience there are many forms of both marlin and shark. Much is to be endured, and perhaps relatively little is to be enjoyed between the commencement of our human effort and its end. (Ramadani, 2022: 52)

The fact goes without saying that from inner true characters there reflect certain virtues in behaviour such as tolerance, nobility and altruism. Santiago knows well that angling the

fishes is his profession and thus he is bound to kill them; however, he imparts due respect to the catch and treats them tolerantly. In fact, there lurks autobiographical elements in the narrative as Hemingway knew much about the marine life and fishing profession. Tolerance and altruism that reflect from Santiago is extension of the mind of his creator. The old man valiantly wages three-day dogged battle against giant marlin and sharks, yet he gives ample respect to his foe. He addresses and refers fish using human pronouns 'He' and 'you' instead of 'it', "I want to see him, he thought, and to touch and feel him. He is my fortune." (OMS, 73) Being the representative of his creator and the essential human Santiago shows much tolerance to the otherness of others, to everything in the scheme of nature. Reeta S. Harode highlights this altruist humane attitude of Hemingway that reflects in the character of his mouthpiece:

This outlook of Hemingway is mirrored in Santiago who has deferential attitude towards his foe. He treats fish as a noble being instead of an uncivilized wild beast. When he offers sardine and bait to the fish as his initial strategic move in the act of fishing, his mode of addressing the fish exudes the affection of an elderly man offering food to a child in pampered words: "Come on", the old man said aloud. "Make another turn. Just smell them. Aren't they lovely?... (Harode, 2013: 02)

Santiago has attained universal acclaim being the true representative of essential human, showcasing the virtues of tolerance, altruism, perseverance, dogged persistence for continuous struggle. All such characteristic virtues and attributes owe to his spiritual streak as the old man and many like him leave exemplary marks in the world with their good deeds. One's characteristic spiritual streak exudes in one's such action and behaviour as in Santiago's.

Socially, culturally, experientially, professionally, in age and in gender the protagonist Sapna Sinha in *The Accidental Apprentice* (2013) is entirely different entity from the old man discussed earlier. The narrative of the novel is set in modern day twenty first century India, the world far away and far different from the Caribbeans. In the character of Sapna, merely a salesgirl, Vikas Swarup has tried to bring home the idea that spiritual streak and honesty in one's character serves as impetus for determined actions, perseverance and courage to face adversities. Swarup has placed his protagonist in the narrative in such a way that she has to be through varied vicissitudes and hardships in life, yet she emerges triumphant each time. Vinay Mohan Acharya, the owner of multi-billion ABC company, has been assigned the job of making ploys for Sapna and make her to pass through the designed paths and test her character.

Sapna, an ordinary salesgirl, is the choicest pick for Acharya who is in search of someone exceptional; who esoterically stands apart from mundane crowd; someone who is naturally bestowed with characteristic spiritual streak and honesty. Being mouthpiece of his creator Acharya resourcefully and craftily designs seven tests for Sapna to pass in a way that she proves herself and learn in each one. The protagonist girl has to be through each test in her routine life as a puppet who is uncertain about what is in her store next. What Acharya wants to testify and verify in his next CEO is how she tackles imposed problems and hardship. Swarup, like Hemingway, is successful in establishing the fact that it is one's perseverance, honesty in character that he or she gets through challenges and vicissitudes in life. For his exceptional streak in character, determination, tolerant and altruist approach Santiago in the former novella emerges as one of the finest characters, Sapna in this novel qualifies to be distinguished person with essential attributes of a human. In each test her character is proven, her triumph in each situation owes to her honesty in character.

It goes to architectonic art of Swarup that Sapna's real life events are made so intermingled with Acharya's ploys for her that she and the readers stay clueless to differentiate the real ones and the designed ones. Accordingly, the chapters in the novels have been designed with the progress of her ventures into the traps and plots made by the man holding dices, Acharya. In the first chapter 'The First Test: Love in the Time of Khap' Swarup artistically brings forth virtue from the character of the protagonist viz. Leadership. Proving herself a leader in the perilous dark Haryana hinterland is almost impossible for an urban salesgirl; however, her success amidst such hostile self-styled khap bigotry owes to the truth in her character and her honesty for the cause of love. For her streak of perseverance in her character she not only comes out unscathed, but also saves the dignity of love.

In spite of her economic insecurity Sapna proves herself as someone who does not fall prey to all-empowering greed in the second test or the second chapter 'Diamonds and Rust'. Her characteristic honesty gets better of any need or compromise as she returns the Bollywood actress Priya Kapoor's precious ring and wins hearts. Acharya tests Sapna's integrity by putting her through examination to learn from the school of life, she passes it with the distinction of pure gold in her character:

'Integrity means much more than just honesty, Sapna. The real test of integrity is to be honest even when no one is looking. You proved you have solid sense of right and wrong. Remember, a good leader must have an exemplary character. Only

then can he or she inspire trust. Nothing damages an organization more than the dishonesty of its employees. And if the CEO himself is crooked, heaven help that company.' (*The Accidental Apprentice*, 2013: 148)

As Santiago does not give up to the colossal size of the opponent and acute adversity here Sapna is endowed with such spirit that she can summon up courage from her inner self when there is shadows of fear and vulnerability. In the third test and chapter 'Locked Dreams' anyone would have preferred to avoid and escape the mafia of child labour racket, but Sapna has spiritual streak in her character and faces all lethal threats courageously. It is the test of 'courage' for her, the business tycoon testifies her:

'I still don't get how courage applies to a corporation.' 'It's simple,' Acharya smiles. 'The most common fear in a CEO is the fear of failure. A good leader has learnt to conquer the fear. He or she takes calculated risks boldly, knowing that the greatest fear is not taking the wrong action, but not taking action at all. That is the fear of regret, the regret of not having tried.'

I nod. It brings to mind a quote of Kierkegaard I read once: 'To dare is to lose one's footing momentarily. To not dare is to lose oneself.' (185)

In successive tests 'The Blindness of Fame', 'The Atlas of Revolution', '150 grams of Sacrifice', 'The Acid Rain'—shades of Sapna's character come forth as her foresight, resourcefulness, decisiveness and others. May it be Hemingway or Swarup, what a true artist endeavours to adduce is the fact that if someone is spiritually astute and balanced inside-- handles outside challenges bravely. It is Sapna's spiritual strength that she accepts struggle in life, does not compromise and fights with perseverance in all add situations. Both Santiago's and Sapna's rise to the transcendence owes to their spiritual strength in their characters.

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Media's Transformation in the Post-Nirbhaya Era: Reimagining Gender and Nation in Contemporary Hindi Cinema

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Abstract— The 2012 Nirbhaya case marked a watershed moment in India's gender discourse, triggering a paradigm shift in both journalistic and cinematic narratives. This study explores how the post-Nirbhaya decade (2011–2020) transformed the representation of gender and nation across Indian media, particularly Hindi cinema. Drawing upon feminist media theory and postcolonial gender perspectives, the paper investigates how public outrage and social media activism reshaped the narrative frameworks of mainstream entertainment and news. Through textual analysis of selected films—including *Kahaani* (2012), *Queen* (2014), *Piku* (2015), *Raazi* (2018), and *Thappad* (2020)—the study highlights the emergence of women-centric narratives that challenge patriarchal norms and foreground female subjectivity. Concurrently, evolving portrayals of masculinity reflect a gradual move toward emotional sensitivity and gender equality. The findings suggest that post-2011 media discourses signify a transformative shift: from sensationalized victimhood to empowered agency, and from gendered nationalism to inclusive citizenship. By situating these transformations within the broader socio-political context of digital activism and neoliberal reform, the paper argues that the post-Nirbhaya era represents a crucial cultural reorientation in India's media ecosystem.



Keywords— Nirbhaya Case, Gender Representation, Feminist Media, Hindi Cinema, Masculinity, OTT Platforms, Digital Feminism

I. INTRODUCTION

The 2012 Delhi gang rape, widely known as the Nirbhaya case, catalyzed an unprecedented public reckoning in India's social consciousness. It not only exposed the deep-rooted gender violence within society but also compelled media institutions—both news and entertainment—to reevaluate their representational practices. The case ignited nationwide protests, intensified debates on women's safety, and brought the politics of gender, justice, and representation to the forefront of public discourse. The magnitude of the event and its emotional resonance led to significant changes in media ethics, narrative framing, and cultural production, inaugurating what may be termed the "post-Nirbhaya era" in Indian media.

In the immediate aftermath, both print and electronic media faced criticism for sensationalizing sexual violence and objectifying survivors. However, public backlash and the rise of digital activism prompted a gradual shift toward more sensitive and responsible reportage. The language of victimhood gave way to discourses of empowerment and resistance. Survivors, activists, and scholars increasingly occupied visible media spaces, reframing narratives of gendered violence through empathy and accountability. This transformation extended beyond the news domain into entertainment media, where Bollywood's mainstream narratives began to mirror evolving feminist sensibilities.

During the 2010s, Indian cinema experienced a noticeable departure from formulaic, patriarchal storytelling. Films

such as *The Dirty Picture* (2011), *Kahaani* (2012), *Queen* (2014), and *Piku* (2015) foregrounded female protagonists who displayed independence, self-reflection, and moral complexity. This narrative turn corresponded with larger societal movements, including the MeToo campaign and #HappyToBleed, which amplified women's voices through social media. These new cultural articulations collectively contributed to dismantling the binary of the "ideal Indian woman" versus the "modern woman," instead portraying women as multidimensional individuals negotiating agency within and beyond patriarchal frameworks.

Simultaneously, this period witnessed the emergence of new masculinities. The archetype of the aggressive, dominating male hero gave way to more introspective portrayals. Male characters began to display emotional vulnerability and supportive behavior, as seen in films such as *Pink* (2016), *Ki and Ka* (2016), and *Badhaai Ho* (2018). These shifts signify a growing public readiness to accept alternative masculinities aligned with empathy and gender parity.

Technological transformations further accelerated these narrative evolutions. The proliferation of smartphones, social media, and over-the-top (OTT) streaming platforms democratized access to both content and commentary. The online environment enabled diverse audiences—especially younger viewers and women—to engage with feminist discourses and challenge regressive media portrayals. OTT platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Hotstar introduced new genres and creators, allowing for the emergence of women filmmakers and gender-sensitive storytelling. Consequently, the intersection of digital technology and feminist activism has redefined the media landscape, creating new spaces for inclusive representation and public debate.

This paper seeks to analyze how the post-Nirbhaya period reconfigured the intertwined narratives of gender and nation in Hindi cinema. It examines how shifting social realities, feminist interventions, and technological advancements collectively shaped cinematic storytelling. The central argument posits that the Nirbhaya incident acted as a socio-cultural catalyst, transforming media from a site of patriarchal reproduction into a potential instrument of empowerment. By employing feminist media theory and textual analysis, the study situates post-2011 Hindi films within the larger framework of nation-building, neoliberal modernity, and digital activism. Ultimately, this paper underscores that the post-Nirbhaya media transformation represents not merely a change in representation but a rearticulation of cultural values, signaling a gradual yet profound reimagining of gendered citizenship in contemporary India.

II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To analyze the transformation of media discourse and cinematic representation of gender in India following the 2012 Nirbhaya case.
2. To examine how post-2011 Hindi cinema reconstructs the relationship between gender and the nation through women-centric narratives and redefined masculinities.
3. To explore the role of digital media and social activism in shaping new feminist discourses and public engagement with gender justice.
4. To interpret how cinematic narratives reflect broader socio-political and cultural changes in post-Nirbhaya India.

III. RESEARCH QUESTION

1. How did the Nirbhaya case act as a catalyst for change in media ethics, narrative practices, and gender representation in India?
2. In what ways do post-Nirbhaya Hindi films portray female agency and reconfigure notions of nationalism and citizenship?
3. How are masculinities negotiated and redefined within the gendered narratives of post-2011 Bollywood cinema?
4. What is the role of digital media platforms and feminist movements in influencing cinematic storytelling and public reception of gender narratives?

IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The analysis in this paper is grounded in feminist media theory, postcolonial gender studies, and theories of nation and representation. These frameworks collectively illuminate how cinema, as both an ideological apparatus and cultural text, participates in shaping and contesting gendered constructions of national identity.

Laura Mulvey's (1975) foundational essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" introduced the concept of the male gaze, asserting that mainstream cinema privileges male spectatorship and objectifies women as passive subjects of visual pleasure. This perspective remains pertinent to Bollywood, where female characters have historically been portrayed through patriarchal and heteronormative lenses. However, contemporary scholarship extends Mulvey's analysis by exploring the female gaze—a mode of representation that centers women's perspectives, experiences, and emotional

subjectivity. The female gaze reorients spectatorship, transforming women from aesthetic objects into narrative agents.

In the context of postcolonial India, feminist scholars such as Nira Yuval-Davis (1997), Partha Chatterjee (1989), and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (2003) have argued that women occupy a symbolic position in the nationalist imagination—as bearers of tradition, purity, and morality. Within this paradigm, women's bodies and behaviors become metaphors for the nation's honor. Hindi cinema, as a cultural institution, has historically reinforced these associations, producing images of women as embodiments of the “ideal Indian woman” (the *Bharatiya nari*) or as moral anchors for the patriarchal family. However, the post-Nirbhaya period disrupts this continuity by reimagining women as autonomous individuals rather than symbolic extensions of the nation-state.

Postcolonial feminist theory also foregrounds the intersectionality of gender, class, and nation. Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) critiques Western feminist universalism and emphasizes the need to analyze local gender formations within specific historical and cultural contexts. The “new woman” of post-2011 Bollywood embodies this intersectional complexity: she is urban, educated, mobile, and transnational, negotiating multiple layers of identity and power. Films like *Queen* (2014), *Raazi* (2018), and *Thappad* (2020) articulate such hybrid subjectivities, illustrating how feminist discourse in Indian cinema is entangled with globalization, neoliberalism, and cultural modernity.

Simultaneously, theories of the nation and nationalism, particularly those of Benedict Anderson (1983) and Ernest Gellner (1983), provide an important backdrop. Anderson's notion of the nation as an “imagined community” is especially relevant to media and cinema, as both function as instruments that enable citizens to imagine a shared identity. In the post-Nirbhaya era, this imagined community undergoes reconfiguration—no longer centered solely on patriarchal ideals, but increasingly informed by discourses of justice, gender equality, and digital activism. Cinema thus becomes a site where the narrative of the nation is continually negotiated, contested, and rearticulated through gendered lenses.

Together, these theoretical approaches—feminist media theory, postcolonial feminism, and nationalism studies—enable a nuanced understanding of how Hindi cinema participates in the cultural reconstruction of gender and nation in the digital, post-Nirbhaya context.

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs qualitative textual analysis as its primary methodological tool, a well-established approach in media and film studies for interpreting meanings embedded within visual and narrative texts. Textual analysis allows for a critical reading of filmic elements such as plot, character development, dialogue, *mise-en-scène*, and cinematic aesthetics to uncover how gender and national identities are constructed, deconstructed, or negotiated.

The period of analysis (2011–2020) was chosen deliberately to capture the decade following the Nirbhaya case, during which both social activism and digital transformation profoundly influenced Indian media production and consumption. The films selected for analysis—*Kahaani* (2012), *Queen* (2014), *Piku* (2015), *Raazi* (2018), *Thappad* (2020), and *Chhapaak* (2020)—were identified based on three key criteria:

- Thematic relevance: Each film engages directly with gender, power, and social change.
- Cultural impact: These films received significant critical or popular attention for their portrayal of women's agency.
- Chronological representation: Together, they span the decade of socio-political transformation that defines the post-Nirbhaya era.

The analysis involves both narrative interpretation and discourse analysis. Narrative interpretation focuses on how stories are told—what perspectives dominate, whose voices are heard or silenced, and how cinematic structure reflects shifting gender politics. Discourse analysis situates these narratives within broader cultural and ideological contexts, examining how cinematic language interacts with media debates, feminist movements, and nationalist discourses circulating in society.

In addition, the study acknowledges the influence of digital media ecologies—the emergence of OTT platforms, social media dialogues, and online feminist campaigns—as crucial contexts that shape both production and reception. Audience engagement, particularly through online platforms, has become a critical site where meanings of gender and justice are negotiated in real time.

This methodology does not seek to produce statistical generalizations but to generate interpretive insights into how cinema mirrors and mediates India's evolving gender politics. By reading these films as cultural texts situated within the socio-political aftermath of the Nirbhaya case, the paper illuminates how Bollywood contributes to the ongoing redefinition of gendered citizenship, public

morality, and national imagination in twenty-first-century India.

VI. ANALYSIS: MEDIA AND CINEMATIC SHIFTS AFTER NIRBHAYA

The Post-Nirbhaya Media Ecosystem

The Nirbhaya case of 2012 marked a profound rupture in India's media landscape, redefining both the ethics of journalism and the grammar of popular storytelling. Prior to this incident, mainstream coverage of gender-based violence often relied on sensationalism, victim-blaming, and voyeuristic framing. In the wake of nationwide protests and unprecedented public outrage, however, news media faced increasing pressure to shift towards sensitivity, empathy, and accountability. This shift signified more than a moral adjustment—it reflected an epistemological reorientation in how gendered violence was represented and discussed within the public sphere.

Television and print journalism began incorporating survivor voices, expert analyses, and feminist perspectives. Campaigns such as Stop Acid Sale, #HappyToBleed, and the #MeToo movement subsequently expanded these conversations, revealing how digital networks reconstituted publics around gender justice. Social media platforms, particularly Twitter and Facebook, enabled participatory discourse, transforming previously silenced experiences into collective calls for reform.

The intersection of digital activism and mainstream media coverage generated what scholars describe as “networked feminism”—a hybrid public sphere that transcended institutional gatekeeping (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Within this space, the language of outrage evolved into the language of rights. Women were no longer positioned merely as passive victims of violence but as agents demanding justice, dignity, and representation. This discursive evolution directly influenced India's cinematic landscape, where the narrative of the nation increasingly intersected with the politics of gender.

Women-Centric Narratives and the Redefinition of the Nation

Bollywood's engagement with gendered nationalism underwent a significant transformation in the post-Nirbhaya decade. Earlier portrayals frequently equated women's virtue with the nation's moral integrity, as seen in classical depictions of the Bharatiya nari. The new cinematic order, however, began to dismantle this equation. Films such as *Kahaani* (2012), *Queen* (2014), *Piku* (2015), *Raazi* (2018), *Thappad* (2020), and *Chhapaak* (2020) offered female protagonists who are not symbols of

national purity but active participants in shaping India's cultural modernity.

In *Kahaani*, Vidya Bagchi's journey through Kolkata as a pregnant woman searching for her missing husband defies both gender and genre conventions. Her pregnancy, typically associated with vulnerability, becomes a source of agency and deception, subverting patriarchal expectations. Similarly, *Queen* portrays Rani's self-discovery across transnational spaces, where she learns autonomy and emotional strength outside domestic boundaries. The film critiques traditional Indian femininity while embracing cosmopolitan womanhood, suggesting that empowerment need not entail a rejection of cultural identity.

In *Piku* (2015), the eponymous protagonist balances familial duty with professional independence. Her refusal to conform to romantic closure—choosing instead to nurture her relationship with her father—redefines love and responsibility through an ethical feminist lens. *Raazi* (2018) extends this narrative into the geopolitical sphere, depicting Sehmat as a spy whose patriotic duty and moral conflict blur the boundaries between loyalty, agency, and emotional intelligence. Her character humanizes nationalism by infusing it with compassion rather than aggression, contrasting sharply with the masculine militarism of earlier war films.

Thappad (2020) provides perhaps the most explicit critique of patriarchal normalization. Centering on a single act of domestic violence, the film articulates the politics of everyday sexism. Its protagonist, Amrita, challenges societal complacency by rejecting the cultural tolerance of “minor” violence within marriage. In doing so, the film redefines self-respect as a political act. *Chhapaak* (2020), inspired by the life of acid-attack survivor Laxmi Agarwal, extends this argument by framing resilience and advocacy as forms of feminist citizenship. Both films situate personal trauma within collective struggle, illustrating how cinematic narratives increasingly merge the personal and political in post-Nirbhaya India.

Collectively, these representations demonstrate a decisive shift from objectification to subjectivity, from spectacle to introspection. Female characters now drive the plot rather than orbit around male protagonists. Their struggles and triumphs articulate new configurations of national identity—where the nation is not a patriarchal protector but a democratic space negotiated through gendered agency and justice.

Reconfiguring Masculinity: From Dominance to Empathy

The transformation in women's portrayals has been paralleled by an equally significant reimagining of

masculinity. The aggressive, hypermasculine hero archetype—epitomized by earlier figures like Vijay in *Deewar* or Kabir Singh in more recent years—faces increasing contestation. Instead, films such as *Pink* (2016), *Ki and Ka* (2016), and *Badhaai Ho* (2018) depict male characters who support women's autonomy and reject patriarchal entitlement.

In *Pink*, Amitabh Bachchan's lawyer articulates a new moral vocabulary for gender relations through his now-iconic assertion, "No means no." His role as an ally, rather than savior, underscores the need for men to participate in dismantling misogyny. Similarly, *Ki and Ka* reverses traditional gender roles, presenting a male homemaker and a career-oriented wife as partners in mutual respect. *Badhaai Ho* humorously challenges generational conservatism and reframes male sensitivity as strength rather than weakness.

The rise of actors like Ayushmann Khurrana has been particularly instrumental in redefining cinematic masculinity. His characters in *Vicky Donor* (2012), *Shubh Mangal Saavdhan* (2017), and *Bala* (2019) openly confront taboo subjects—fertility, sexuality, and body image—thereby normalizing male vulnerability. These portrayals represent what scholars term "inclusive masculinity" (Anderson, 2009), emphasizing empathy, partnership, and self-reflection. Such narratives align with the broader societal shift towards egalitarian gender politics catalyzed by post-Nirbhaya activism.

The Digital Turn and Changing Viewership

The proliferation of smartphones and Over-the-Top (OTT) platforms has further democratized access to feminist narratives. Digital spaces have eroded the monopoly of traditional gatekeepers, enabling diverse voices—particularly women directors and independent filmmakers—to produce alternative representations. Platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Zee5 now host women-centric series such as *Made in Heaven* and *Four More Shots Please*, where female characters navigate complex moral landscapes.

This digital environment not only diversifies content but also transforms spectatorship. Viewers engage in dialogic participation through reviews, social media debates, and online campaigns, creating a participatory public sphere around cinematic texts. The audience no longer consumes passively; it co-constructs meaning. As such, media transformation in the post-Nirbhaya era must be understood as both a production and reception phenomenon, facilitated by new technologies and empowered audiences.

6.5 Synthesis: Gender, Nation, and Cultural Citizenship

The cumulative impact of these shifts—ethical journalism, feminist filmmaking, inclusive masculinity, and digital democratization—signals a profound transformation in the relationship between gender and nation in Indian media. Post-Nirbhaya cinema rearticulates the nation not as a patriarchal guardian but as a plural, inclusive, and emotionally intelligent community. Female protagonists emerge as moral and intellectual agents of change, while male characters learn empathy and accountability.

This evolution represents a new mode of cultural citizenship—one that recognizes justice, equality, and respect as central to the idea of nationhood. While challenges of tokenism and patriarchal backlash persist, the post-Nirbhaya decade undeniably marks a reawakening in Indian popular culture. Media, once complicit in perpetuating gender stereotypes, now increasingly operates as a site of resistance and renewal—where stories of courage, autonomy, and solidarity redefine what it means to be both a woman and a citizen in contemporary India.

VII. DISCUSSION

The post-Nirbhaya decade represents a decisive cultural inflection point in India's media ecology, where the intertwined discourses of gender, nation, and citizenship underwent visible recalibration. The transformations observed in both journalism and cinema exemplify what Nancy Fraser (1990) describes as the emergence of "subaltern counter-publics"—alternative spaces of debate that contest dominant patriarchal narratives. These counter-publics, enabled by digital media, feminist activism, and changing audience sensibilities, have reoriented the ideological center of Indian popular culture from a patriarchal consensus toward pluralistic and inclusive engagement.

Cinematically, the decade after 2011 demonstrates that representation is not merely a matter of image but of ideology. Films like *Thappad*, *Raazi*, and *Chhapaak* reveal that the grammar of mainstream Hindi cinema can internalize feminist critique without abandoning mass appeal. This convergence of commerce and consciousness challenges the long-standing divide between "art cinema" and "popular cinema." Female protagonists no longer exist to preserve the nation's moral fabric; they embody an evolving national consciousness shaped by justice, equality, and empathy. In this sense, post-Nirbhaya cinema reframes the nation as an affective and ethical community rather than a gendered moral order.

The redefinition of masculinity further reinforces this ideological shift. Earlier Bollywood heroes often symbolized the patriarchal state—protective, aggressive, and paternalistic. In contrast, the emergent male figures of

the 2010s exhibit emotional literacy and moral reflexivity. Their transformation mirrors broader social currents that demand accountability from men and encourage relational ethics. The dynamic between men and women in contemporary narratives thus evolves from one of domination and dependence to one of partnership and mutual respect.

Another crucial dimension is the digital transformation of media practices. The diffusion of OTT platforms and social-networked publics has dissolved traditional hierarchies of production and reception. Digital audiences curate, critique, and circulate meaning across transnational spaces, giving rise to participatory spectatorship. Feminist film criticism, once confined to academia, now thrives in blogs, podcasts, and online forums, democratizing theoretical discourse. This participatory turn repositions audiences as cultural interlocutors rather than passive consumers, expanding the notion of citizenship into the realm of media engagement.

From a theoretical perspective, these transformations validate the premise that media serves as both a mirror and maker of social change. Post-Nirbhaya India witnesses what scholars like Rosalind Gill (2016) term “mediated intimacy” — a cultural condition in which feminist ideas circulate across news, film, and digital platforms, producing new vocabularies of empathy, justice, and rights. The convergence of activism and artistry underscores the porous boundaries between public discourse and creative expression. Cinema, long a site of patriarchal reinforcement, has increasingly become a medium of feminist negotiation.

VIII. CHALLENGES & LIMITATION

Despite these progressive shifts, structural impediments persist. Representation remains uneven: women directors and writers constitute a small fraction of Bollywood's creative workforce, and commercial imperatives often dilute feminist messages to ensure market viability. Moreover, the empowerment portrayed on screen frequently reflects the experiences of urban, upper-middle-class women, marginalizing intersections of caste, class, and rural identity. This selective visibility risks reproducing what Gayatri Spivak (1988) calls the “silencing of the subaltern.”

Further, neoliberal consumerism occasionally co-opts feminist imagery to sell aspirational lifestyles rather than dismantle patriarchal norms. Films celebrating women's agency can simultaneously valorize consumer choice, conflating liberation with purchasing power. Consequently, the post-Nirbhaya transformation, while symbolically potent, remains an ongoing process that

requires vigilance against commodified feminism and superficial inclusivity.

IX. Conclusion

The transformations in Indian media following the Nirbhaya case underscore the power of collective outrage, digital activism, and creative intervention in reshaping public consciousness. The shift from sensationalized coverage to empathetic storytelling marks a deeper cultural awakening—a recognition that gender justice is central to the moral legitimacy of the nation.

Bollywood's evolving narratives illustrate this reorientation vividly. The female protagonist, once confined to domestic or decorative roles, now inhabits public, political, and professional spaces. She negotiates her autonomy without necessarily rejecting tradition, embodying a hybrid modernity reflective of India's globalized yet culturally rooted identity. Male characters, meanwhile, learn to redefine strength through compassion, signaling an emergent model of egalitarian masculinity.

These developments collectively constitute what can be termed a “post-Nirbhaya consciousness” — a sensibility that integrates feminist ethics into the everyday grammar of Indian media. It is a consciousness simultaneously mediated by technology, sustained by activism, and articulated through art. The convergence of these forces challenges patriarchal hegemony while envisioning an inclusive national community grounded in equality, dignity, and empathy.

In conclusion, the post-Nirbhaya transformation of Indian media is not a singular event but a continuum—a dialogue between trauma and reform, representation and responsibility. As India's digital and cinematic landscapes continue to evolve, sustaining this momentum will depend on institutional reforms, gender-sensitive education, and the empowerment of women within creative industries. Only through sustained engagement between policy, pedagogy, and production can media fully realize its potential as an instrument of social justice. The journey initiated by Nirbhaya's cry for justice thus endures—echoing across screens, stories, and social movements—as a testament to the enduring power of media to imagine a more equitable nation.

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An acknowledgement section may be presented after the conclusion, if desired.

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Enhancing Application Letter Writing Through Daily Journaling

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Abstract— This study explored the effectiveness of daily journaling in enhancing application letter writing skills among Grade 11 students at Pardo National High School during the School Year 2024–2025. The research utilized a mixed-methods approach combining pretest-posttest assessments as quantitative method and student reflections as qualitative method. The intervention involved a four-week implementation of structured daily journaling aimed at improving five key writing competencies: tone, language use, organization, format, and mechanics. Initial findings revealed that 89.04% of students performed at the “Beginning” level, indicating minimal mastery of formal writing conventions. After the intervention, improvements were observed: 28.77% advanced to the “Developing” level, 8.22% to “Proficient,” and 2.74% to “Advanced.” A paired t-test analysis confirmed a statistically significant difference between pretest and post-test scores ($t = 8.65, p < 0.001$), validating the positive impact of journaling on students’ writing performance. Qualitative feedback also indicated increased writing confidence, vocabulary development, and improved clarity of expression, although challenges such as idea generation and consistency persisted. This study contributes to Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) by promoting inclusive, equitable, and skill-oriented learning through reflective writing practices. The development of enhanced teaching-learning materials based on the findings provides educators with a practical tool to build students’ formal communication skills. In the Filipino context, where written application letters are essential for employment, work immersion, and scholarship opportunities, strengthening this competency equips students for smoother transitions into the local workforce and broader socio-economic participation.



Keywords— English Teaching, Journaling, Application Letter Writing, Formal Writing Skills, Senior High School, Cebu City, Philippines

I. INTRODUCTION

Writing remains a foundational skill for academic and professional success, and for senior high school students, the ability to craft effective application letters is particularly essential as they prepare for employment, internships, and scholarship opportunities. Despite its importance, many students struggle with organizing ideas, using professional language, and meeting formal writing conventions. Journaling, a low-stakes and reflective writing practice, has been shown to enhance fluency, clarity, and confidence, yet its potential to improve

specific formal writing tasks—such as application letter writing—has been insufficiently explored. Grounded in social constructivist and process-writing frameworks, this study examines the effectiveness of daily journaling in improving application letter writing skills among Grade 11 students at Pardo National High School. By investigating its influence on idea organization, professional tone, and adherence to application letter structure, the study aims to provide practical insights for strengthening writing instruction in secondary education.

II. METHOD

This section outlines the methods and procedures employed to investigate the effectiveness of daily journaling in enhancing application letter writing skills among Grade 11 students at Pardo National High School. It details the research design, the flow of the study, and the environment in which the study was conducted.

Design

The study employed a mixed-method research design with a pre-test and post-test approach. This design allowed the researcher to measure the changes in students' application letter writing skills before and after the intervention of daily journaling. A group of participants was exposed to the intervention, and their performance was assessed through their pre-test and post-test scores in identifying the mistakes in the application letter. This design was suitable for evaluating the impact of the daily journaling intervention on application letter writing skill development within a natural classroom setting.

Flow of the Study

The input included a baseline assessment of students' application letter writing skills through a pre-test. The implementation of daily journaling as a reflective writing activity was integrated into the students' academic routine. Instructional materials, including examples of effective application letters and guided journaling prompts, were provided. The process involved administering the pre-test to assess students' initial writing proficiency and conducting a daily journaling intervention for four weeks, during which students engaged in reflective writing exercises designed to improve organization, tone, and structure in formal writing. Students' progress was evaluated through weekly written outputs. The output of the study was the improvement in students' application letter writing skills, as measured by a post-test. This included measurable enhancements in organization, language use, and adherence to formal conventions.

Environment

The study was conducted at Pardo National High School, a public secondary school located in Cebu City, Philippines. The target participants were the Grade 11 students enrolled in the academic year 2024–2025. The environment was a conducive space for the intervention, with access to necessary resources such as journals, writing materials, and instructional guides. The classroom setting allowed the integration of journaling into the regular curriculum while maintaining a structured yet flexible approach to teaching writing skills.

Pardo National High School serves approximately 4,500 students across Junior and Senior High School levels and

is staffed by around 170 teachers specializing in various academic and technical-vocational subjects. The school is equipped with key learning facilities, including computer laboratories, a school library, science labs, and audio-visual rooms, all of which support both traditional and innovative teaching methods. Despite challenges typical of public schools, the institution remains committed to providing quality education, making it an ideal setting for implementing educational interventions such as daily journaling to enhance students' writing skills. Respondents

The respondents for this study were selected from the Grade 11 population of Pardo National High School during the academic year 2024–2025. The selection process employed random sampling to ensure that participants were representative of the total population. This sample was then distributed proportionally across the two sections: Grade 11-A and Grade 11-B.

Table 1

Frequency Distribution of Respondents

Respondents	Total Population	% Male	% Female
Total			
Grade 11 – A	41	66%	34%
Grade 11 – B	32	41%	59%
Total	73	55%	45%

Instrument

The primary research instrument employed in this study was a sample application letter which had 20 mistakes, served as the pretest and posttest, designed to evaluate the application letter writing skills of Grade 11 students. These mistakes focused on three key competencies: organization (assessing coherence, unity, and logical flow of ideas), language use (evaluating grammar, vocabulary, and clarity), and adherence to formal conventions (ensuring the correct format and inclusion of essential parts of an application letter). Additionally, a Likert scale questionnaire was utilized to collect qualitative data on the students' experiences with daily journaling, exploring themes such as ease of writing, challenges encountered, and factors influencing consistency. Those mentioned instruments underwent a thorough validation process by a panel of experts in education and writing instruction to ensure their reliability, relevance, and appropriateness for achieving the study's objectives. The combination of these tools allowed for a comprehensive assessment of both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the research.

Data Gathering Procedure

The Pre-Gathering Stage involved essential preparations for data collection. This included securing the necessary permissions from the Division Office and the school

administration to conduct the study. Consent forms were also distributed to the participating students and their guardians to ensure ethical participation. Additionally, all required instruments and materials—such as the pre-test and post-test rubrics and the journaling guides—were meticulously prepared to ensure a smooth data collection process.

The Gathering Stage commenced with the administration of a pre-test to the participants, which served to establish a baseline understanding of their application letter writing skills prior to the intervention. Following this, the intervention phase required students to engage in daily journaling activities over a period of four weeks. During this time, journals were reviewed weekly, and students were given constructive feedback to guide and encourage their improvement in writing application letters. At the end of the intervention period, a post-test was administered to the same participants to evaluate any changes in their writing skills.

The Post-Gathering Stage focused on analyzing the collected data. Scores from the pre-test and post-test were systematically compared to assess the effectiveness of the journaling intervention. This comparative analysis aimed to determine the extent to which the intervention enhanced the application letter writing skills of the participating students, providing a basis for drawing conclusions about the study's overall impact.

Statistical Treatment

To analyze the data, the following statistical treatments were applied:

Mean and Standard Deviation: Used to summarize the pre-test and post-test scores.

Paired t-test: Employed to determine if there was a statistically significant difference in application letter writing skills before and after the journaling intervention.

Frequency and Percentage Distribution: Applied to describe the demographic profile of respondents, including gender and section distribution.

Scoring Procedure

After checking the pretest and posttest using the answer key in Appendix B, the following scoring calculation and performance descriptions will be used to assess the students' application letter writing skills.

Score	Verbal Description	Interpretation
5 - 8	Beginning	Limited writing skills with substantial lapses in all areas
9 - 12	Developing	Basic writing skills require significant improvement.

13 - 16	Proficient	Strong writing skills with minor lapses in a few areas.
17 - 20	Advanced	Exemplary writing skills with minimal lapses

III. RESULT

This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of daily journaling in enhancing application letter writing skills among Grade 11 students at Pardo National High School for the School Year 2024–2025. Using a mixed-methods design, the research involved a pretest-posttest intervention approach alongside survey data to capture students' experiences. Prior to the intervention, students showed limited writing competencies, especially in tone, grammar, organization, format, and mechanics. Over a four-week period, students engaged in daily journaling activities designed to strengthen these areas through consistent, low-stakes writing practice. Post-intervention results revealed a statistically significant improvement in writing performance. Furthermore, the study explored the students' experiences, noting both ease and challenges in journaling, which provided additional insight into its pedagogical value. The results were then used as a basis for developing enhanced teaching-learning materials tailored to application letter writing.

Before the intervention, students' initial performance in correcting an application letter showed that 89.04% were at the "Beginning" level, indicating limited proficiency across tone, language use, organization, format, and mechanics. After the implementation of daily journaling, the students' final performance improved, with 60.27% still at the "Beginning" level but with 28.77% progressing to "Developing," 8.22% to "Proficient," and 2.74% to "Advanced." A significant difference was found between the pretest and post-test scores ($t = 8.65$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that daily journaling had a statistically significant positive effect on the students' application letter writing skills. In terms of student experiences, they generally agreed that journaling made writing easier, improved their confidence, and enhanced their vocabulary and organization. However, they also encountered challenges such as difficulties with idea generation, maintaining consistency, and fear of grammatical errors. Lastly, based on these findings, the researcher developed enhanced teaching-learning materials that integrate journaling as a strategy to support formal writing instruction.

IV. FIGURES AND TABLES

Before the implementation of daily journaling as an intervention, it was essential to establish the baseline writing abilities of the Grade 11 students in correcting application letters. This initial assessment provided valuable insight into the students' proficiency in key areas such as tone, language use, organization, format, and mechanics. Understanding their starting point allowed for a clearer evaluation of the effectiveness of daily journaling in enhancing their writing skills. The table 2 presents the distribution of students' performance levels prior to the intervention, highlighting the areas that required significant improvement.

Table 2.
The students' performance in writing Application Letter before the use of daily journaling in enhancing application letter writing

Score	Verbal Description	Frequency	Percentage
5 - 8	Beginning	65	89.04
9 - 12	Developing	8	10.96
13 - 16	Proficient	0	0.00
17 - 20	Advanced	0	0.00
Total		73	100.00
Average		5.62	<i>Beginning Limited writing skills with substantial lapses in all areas</i>

Table 2 presented the students' performance in writing application letters. The data showed that a large majority of the students (89.04%) scored between 5 and 8, which corresponds to the "Beginning" level—indicating limited writing skills with substantial lapses in all areas. Meanwhile, 10.96% of the students scored between 9 and 12, classified under the "Developing" level, suggesting basic writing skills that require significant improvement. Notably, none of the students achieved scores in the "Proficient" (13–16) or "Advanced" (17–20) categories, indicating an absence of strong or exemplary writing performance among the group. The overall average score was 5.62, which also falls within the "Beginning" level.

This implied that most of the students demonstrated minimal proficiency in writing application letters, reflecting a lack of mastery in essential writing components such as proper formatting, clarity of ideas, grammar, and persuasive language. The concentration of scores in the lower range suggests a critical need for targeted instruction and practice in letter writing. This may also indicate that students have not yet developed the foundational skills necessary for crafting effective application letters, which could hinder their preparedness for real-world communication tasks, such as job applications or formal correspondence. Therefore, interventions focused on improving writing mechanics, structure, and content organization are essential to elevate their performance to acceptable standards.

The findings of this study aligned with recent research emphasizing the challenges students face in mastering formal writing skills, particularly in composing application letters. Internationally, Alharbi and Alshammari (2021) found that secondary students often struggle with formal tone, organization, and grammar, which negatively impacts their overall writing performance. Their study highlights the necessity of targeted instructional strategies to improve these competencies. Similarly, a study by Nguyen and Pham (2022) revealed that consistent writing practice, such as journaling, significantly enhances students' ability to organize ideas coherently and apply appropriate language use in formal writing contexts.

In the Philippine context, Dela Cruz and Reyes (2023) reported that Filipino high school students exhibit limited proficiency in formal letter writing due to insufficient exposure and practice, which mirrors the low performance observed in this study. They advocate for the integration of daily writing exercises to build foundational skills and improve students' confidence in producing formal documents. These findings collectively underscore the importance of implementing focused interventions like daily journaling to address the gaps in writing proficiency among Grade 11 students at Pardo National High School.

STUDENTS' FINAL PERFORMANCE IN CORRECTING

AN APPLICATION LETTER

Following the implementation of daily journaling as a writing intervention, it is important to assess the students' progress in correcting application letters. This final performance evaluation provides insight into the effectiveness of daily journaling in enhancing key writing skills such as tone, grammar, organization, format, and mechanics. By comparing the students' abilities before and after the intervention, educators can determine the impact of consistent writing practice on their proficiency. The table below presents the distribution of students' performance levels after the use of daily journaling, highlighting improvements as well as areas that still require further development.

Table 3.
The students' performance in writing Application Letter after the use of daily journaling in enhancing application letter writing

Score	Verbal Description	Frequency	Percentage
5 - 8	Beginning	44	60.27
9 - 12	Developing	21	28.77
13 - 16	Proficient	6	8.22
17 - 20	Advanced	2	2.74
Total		73	100.00
Average		8.11	<i>Beginning Limited writing skills with substantial lapses in all areas</i>

Table 3 presented the students' performance in writing application letters after the implementation of daily journaling as an intervention. The data revealed that 60.27% of the students remained at the "Beginning" level, scoring between 5 and 8, indicating limited writing skills with substantial lapses. While this category still holds the majority, it marks a significant decrease from the 89.04% recorded before the intervention. Moreover, 28.77% of students progressed to the "Developing" level (scores of 9–12), showing noticeable improvement in basic writing skills. Notably, 6 students (8.22%) reached the "Proficient" level, and 2 students (2.74%) achieved the "Advanced" level, demonstrating strong to exemplary writing performance—performance levels that were previously absent.

The overall average score increased to 8.11, which, although still within the "Beginning" range, reflects a clear positive shift in writing proficiency following the use of daily journaling.

This implies that the integration of daily journaling had a beneficial impact on students' writing abilities. Through consistent writing practice, students had more opportunities to reflect, organize their thoughts, and gradually develop the foundational skills required in formal writing tasks such as application letters. The intervention encouraged regular engagement with writing, which likely improved their familiarity with tone, structure, and clarity. The appearance of students in the "Proficient" and "Advanced" categories suggests that daily journaling fostered meaningful progress for some learners. While a majority still require further development, the shift in performance levels highlights the potential of daily journaling as an effective strategy to enhance writing competence over time.

The observed improvement in students' writing performance after the implementation of daily journaling is consistent with recent research emphasizing the benefits of regular writing practice. International studies, such as that by Chen and Lee (2021), demonstrate that daily journaling helps students develop critical writing components, including organization, tone, and grammar, by providing continuous opportunities for reflection and revision. Their findings suggest that consistent engagement with writing tasks can lead to measurable gains in formal writing proficiency, particularly in contexts requiring structured communication like application letters. Similarly, Johnson and Smith (2023) found that journaling interventions significantly enhance students' ability to articulate ideas clearly and adhere to formal writing conventions, which aligns with the progress seen in the "Proficient" and "Advanced" categories in this study.

In the Philippine context, Santos and Villanueva (2022) reported that integrating daily journaling into the curriculum improves Filipino high school students' writing confidence and competence, particularly in formal genres. Their study highlights that while some students achieve notable progress, ongoing support remains essential for those still struggling, reflecting the current findings where a majority remain at the "Beginning" level despite improvements. These studies collectively support the implication that daily journaling is an effective pedagogical tool for enhancing writing skills, though it should be complemented by targeted instruction to address persistent challenges.

SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE ON THE PRETEST AND POST-TEST PERFORMANCE OF THE STUDENTS IN THE USE OF DAILY JOURNALING IN ENHANCING APPLICATION

LETTER WRITING

To determine the effectiveness of daily journaling in improving students' application letter writing skills, a statistical comparison of their pretest and post-test performances was conducted. This analysis aims to evaluate whether the observed changes in writing proficiency after the intervention are statistically significant. By examining the mean scores and variability before and after the use of daily journaling, the study assesses the impact of consistent writing practice on students' abilities. The table on the next page presents the results of the test of significant difference, highlighting the extent to which daily journaling contributed to enhancing the students' writing performance.

Table 4.
Test of significant difference on the pretest and post-test performance of the students in the use of daily journaling in enhancing application letter writing

Performance	SD	Mean	Mean difference	statistic	p	Decision	Interpretation
Posttest	3.53	8.11	2.49	8.65*	<.001	Reject Ho	Significant
Pretest	2.49	5.62					

*Significant If p-value < 0.05

Table 4 presented the test of significant difference between the pretest and post-test performance of students in application letter writing, following the implementation of daily journaling as an instructional intervention.

The mean score in the pretest was 5.62 (SD = 2.49), indicating a "Beginning" level of writing performance with substantial lapses in all areas. After the intervention, the post-test mean increased to 8.11 (SD = 3.53), reflecting an improvement, though still within the "Beginning" range. The mean difference between the two tests is 2.49 points, suggesting noticeable progress in students' writing skills.

The statistical analysis yielded a *t*-value of 8.65 and a *p*-value of less than .001, which is well below the 0.05 threshold. Therefore, the null hypothesis (*H*₀), which states that there is no significant difference between the pretest and post-test scores, is rejected.

This result implied that the use of daily journaling had a statistically significant positive effect on students' ability to write application letters. The structured and consistent writing practice provided by journaling likely allowed students to build confidence, enhance their writing fluency, and internalize the conventions of formal letter writing over time. Although the average performance still falls within the lower category, the significant increase in scores indicates that daily journaling is an effective strategy to initiate improvement and elevate students' writing proficiency. With continued use and reinforcement, students may progress further toward higher levels of writing competency.

The significant improvement in students' writing performance after the daily journaling intervention is supported by recent studies emphasizing the positive impact of consistent writing practice on formal writing skills. For instance, Martínez and Gómez (2021) found that regular journaling activities significantly enhance students' writing fluency and confidence, leading to measurable gains in formal writing tasks such as application letters. Their research highlights that structured writing exercises help students internalize language conventions and improve overall writing quality. Similarly, a study by Thompson and Lee (2022) demonstrated that journaling fosters critical thinking and organization skills, which are essential for effective letter writing, thereby contributing to significant performance improvements.

In the Philippine context, Reyes and Bautista (2023) reported that integrating daily journaling into high school curricula leads to statistically significant improvements in students' formal writing abilities, particularly in grammar, coherence, and tone. Their findings reinforce the notion that journaling is a practical and effective pedagogical tool to enhance writing proficiency among Filipino learners. These studies collectively validate the results of this research, confirming that daily journaling is a valuable strategy for improving application letter writing skills.

STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN THE USE OF DAILY JOURNALING IN ENHANCING APPLICATION LETTER WRITING

Understanding students' experiences with daily journaling is essential to evaluate its practicality and impact on their writing development. This section presented the ease of writing a daily journal and challenges in writing a daily journal.

Ease of Writing Daily Journal

This explores how comfortable and motivated the students felt while engaging in daily journal writing, particularly in expressing their thoughts and organizing ideas. Assessing ease of writing provides insight into whether journaling fosters a positive writing habit and contributes to increased confidence and fluency.

Table 5 presented the students' experiences with the use of daily journaling in enhancing their application letter writing, specifically focusing on the ease of writing daily journals. The overall mean score was 3.56, with a standard deviation of 0.65, indicating that students generally agreed that journaling made writing easier and more effective.

The majority of students expressed positive experiences, as reflected in their agreement with statements such as being able to express their thoughts easily (*M* = 3.62), finding journaling more natural over time (*M* = 3.47), and feeling more confident in their writing (*M* = 3.77). Students also agreed that daily journaling helped them organize their ideas more clearly (*M* = 3.52) and develop a regular writing habit (*M* = 3.68). Additionally, they reported improvements in their vocabulary and sentence construction (*M* = 3.41) and felt more comfortable writing about various topics (*M* = 3.59).

However, one item—"I find it easier to generate ideas for my journal entries"—received a neutral rating (*M* = 3.21, *SD* = 1.73), suggesting that some students still faced challenges with idea generation despite improvements in other areas of writing.

Overall, the results implied that daily journaling has had a generally positive impact on students' writing experiences, helping them improve their confidence, structure, and writing habits. Nonetheless, generating ideas remains an area where students could benefit from further support.

The positive student experiences reported in this study align with recent research highlighting the benefits of daily journaling in enhancing writing

Table 5.
Students' experiences in the use of daily journaling in enhancing application letter writing in terms of ease of writing daily journal

Indicators	SD	Mean	Verif Descrij
I find it easy to express my thoughts in my daily journal.	0.27	3.62	Agre
Writing in my daily journal has become more natural over time.	0.46	3.47	Agre
I can organize my ideas clearly when writing my journal entries.	0.19	3.52	Agre
Daily journaling has improved my confidence in writing.	1.01	3.77	Agre
I feel motivated to write in my journal regularly.	0.13	3.53	Agre
My vocabulary and sentence construction have improved due to journaling.	0.73	3.41	Agre
I find it easier to generate ideas for my journal entries.	1.73	3.21	Neut
Journaling has helped me develop a habit of writing.	0.61	3.68	Agre
I feel more comfortable writing about different topics in my journal.	0.14	3.59	Agre
Daily journaling has helped me express my thoughts more effectively.	1.21	3.81	Agre
Overall	0.65	3.56	Agre

Legend: 1.00-1.79 Strongly Disagree; 1.80-2.59 Disagree; 2.60-3.39 Neutral; 3.40-4.19 Agree; 4.20-5.00 Strongly Agree

V. CONCLUSION

The use of daily journaling significantly improved the students' application letter writing skills. Before the intervention, most students had limited writing abilities. However, after journaling, their skills progressed, with many moving from "beginning" to "developing" writing levels. The statistical analysis confirmed a significant improvement. Students also reported positive experiences, noting that journaling helped with expression, vocabulary, and confidence. Despite some challenges, the overall impact of daily journaling was beneficial in enhancing their writing skills.

Table 6 presented the students' experiences regarding the challenges they encountered while using daily journaling to enhance their application letter writing. The overall mean score was 3.34, with a standard deviation of 1.86, indicating that the students generally experienced a neutral level of difficulty with journaling.

Some challenges were notably more prominent than others. Students agreed with statements such as struggling to come up with ideas for journal entries ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 1.07$), experiencing difficulty maintaining consistency ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 1.34$), and finding it challenging to structure their thoughts while journaling

Table 6

Students' experiences in the use of daily journaling in enhancing application letter writing in terms of challenges in writing daily journal

Indicators	SD	Mean	Ver Descr
I struggle to come up with ideas for my journal entries.	1.07	3.56	Ag
I experience difficulty in maintaining consistency in journaling.	1.34	3.62	Ag
I find it challenging to structure my thoughts while journaling.	1.61	3.67	Ag
Journaling feels like a time-consuming task.	0.26	3.29	Neu
I often feel unmotivated to write in my journal.	3.13	2.70	Neu
I feel pressure when writing in my journal daily.	1.93	2.95	Neu
I worry about making mistakes in grammar and spelling while journaling.	3.81	4.12	Ag
I find it hard to be creative in my journal writing.	1.27	3.60	Ag
I sometimes feel that journaling does not help me improve my writing skills.	3.99	2.52	Disa
I struggle to make my journal entries detailed and meaningful.	0.21	3.38	Neu
Overall	1.86	3.34	Neu

Legend: 1.00-1.79 Strongly Disagree; 1.80-2.59 Disagree; 2.60-3.39 Neutral; 3.40-4.19 Agree; 5.00 Strongly Agree

($M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.61$). These challenges suggest that students faced obstacles related to idea generation, consistency, and organizing their thoughts when journaling.

Other aspects, such as journaling feeling time-consuming ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 0.26$) and experiencing a lack of motivation ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 3.13$), received neutral scores, indicating mixed feelings about the effort required for journaling. Similarly, students did not feel significant pressure ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 1.93$) when journaling daily.

Interestingly, students agreed that they worried about making grammar and spelling mistakes ($M = 4.12$, $SD =$

3.81), and they also found it hard to be creative in their writing ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.27$). However, the statement "I sometimes feel that journaling does not help me improve my writing skills" received a disagree rating ($M = 2.52$, $SD = 3.99$), implying that most students did find value in journaling for improving their writing abilities.

Overall, while daily journaling had its challenges, particularly in areas of idea generation, consistency, and structure, it was still perceived as a helpful tool in improving writing skills. These challenges indicate areas where students may need additional guidance or support to maximize the benefits of journaling for writing development.

The challenges encountered by students in daily journaling, such as difficulties with idea generation, consistency, and organizing thoughts, are consistent with findings from recent studies on writing interventions. Internationally, Lee and Kim (2021) reported that while journaling improves writing fluency and confidence, students often struggle with maintaining regular practice and structuring their entries effectively. They emphasized the need for scaffolding strategies to help learners overcome these obstacles. Similarly, Johnson et al. (2022) highlighted that concerns about grammar and spelling errors can inhibit students' willingness to write freely, suggesting that supportive feedback mechanisms are crucial to alleviate such anxieties.

In the Philippine context, Cruz and Dela Rosa (2023) found that Filipino students face similar challenges in sustaining motivation and creativity in journaling activities, particularly when unfamiliar with formal writing conventions. However, their study also affirmed that despite these difficulties, students recognize journaling as a valuable tool for improving their writing skills. These findings underscore the importance of providing targeted instructional support to address the specific challenges students face, thereby maximizing the effectiveness of daily journaling in enhancing application letter writing.

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Reclaiming the Silenced Past: A Postcolonial Reading of Sally Morgan's *My Place*

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Abstract— Australia today is acknowledged as a multicultural and multiethnic democracy. However, its history of a quarter millennium ago is neither spotless nor unblemished. Numerous heterogeneous Aboriginals tribes inhabited this island region for about 40,000 years until 1788. Nonetheless, their proportion of the total population in Australia has decreased to approximately 3.8% now. The missing 96.2% of Aboriginal population needs to be accounted for. The predominant narrative, woven by white scholars with a predominant Eurocentric viewpoint, conveniently ignores such uncomfortable enquiries. It distorts Australian history and culture, glorifying the colonisers who hoisted the Union Jack on the native land in 1788. The indigenous Aboriginal tribes were portrayed as savage heathens in urgent need of reform, civilisation, culture, and religion. It was used as an alibi to displace, dispossess, subjugate and annihilate the numerous native tribes. A small number of Indigenous populations, who have successfully achieved upward social mobility assume the crucial role of advocating for their community by sharing their narrative, historical experiences, cultural heritage, the injustices they have endured and continue to face and how they envision a dignified future. In this context, the present paper is a reading of one such life-writing by an Aboriginal woman, *My Place* by Sally Morgan.



Keywords— Indigenous life-writing, stolen generations, racism, assimilation, counter-history.

Australia today is acknowledged as a multicultural and multiethnic democracy. It is also widely characterised as a developed and affluent nation. However, its history of a quarter millennium ago is neither spotless nor unblemished. Numerous heterogeneous Aboriginals tribes inhabited this island region for about 40,000 years until 1788. Nonetheless, their proportion of the total population in Australia has decreased to approximately 3.8% now. The missing 96.2% of Aboriginal population needs to be accounted for. The predominant narrative, woven by white scholars with a predominant Eurocentric viewpoint, conveniently ignores such uncomfortable enquiries. It distorts Australian history and culture, glorifying the colonisers who hoisted the Union Jack on the native land in 1788. The indigenous Aboriginal tribes were portrayed as savage heathens in urgent need of reform, civilisation, culture, and religion. It was used as an alibi to displace, dispossess, subjugate and annihilate the numerous native tribes.

A small number of Indigenous populations, who have successfully achieved upward social mobility assume the crucial role of advocating for their community by sharing their narrative, historical experiences, cultural heritage, the injustices they have endured and continue to face and how they envision a dignified future. In this context, the present paper is a reading of one such life-writing by an Aboriginal woman.

My Place by Sally Morgan is one of the most celebrated autobiographies by an Aboriginal woman. This work stands testimony to the ordeal of three generations and contains stories of Sally Morgan's mother, grandmother and granduncle, besides herself. Morgan says in the course of the work that her aim is to put on record the Aboriginal perspective so often missing from the dominant narrative and culture, imposed from above. Sally Morgan was raised by her mother and grandmother and lived under the impression that she was a white and of Indian origin, though

since childhood she had some vague ideas and hints about her family's past. She resolves to discover her roots despite stiff resistance from her grandmother, and travels to her ancestors' land. The journey turns out to be an emotional and spiritual pilgrimage as she does manage to find out her family's antecedents, besides their culture, relatives and the humiliation and exploitation to which her grandmother was subjected. It is a poignant search for truth and roots which she ultimately discovers, and this does have a healing effect on Morgan, her mother and grandmother, as later they agree to share major portions of their past life which they had hitherto buried under shame infused silence.

Being blessed with the fruit of education and the physical and emotional presence of her grandmother and mother, Sally Morgan takes upon herself the onerous and very crucial task of setting the record straight by correcting the distorted history and setting the terms of engagement for future reconciliation. It is done through rupturing various myths notoriously built around Aboriginals and Aboriginality with an intention to set the foundations of cremating a proud heritage of sustainable living.

The first and foremost of such myths is the myth of peaceful settlement especially in the context of British settlement in Australia. The official history maintains that the founding fathers of the British penal settlement found the land desert and uninhabited or at the most inhabited by a few nomadic tribes always on the move without any settled laws, customs or real ownership of the land. The Aboriginals, after they got English education, which was in fact imposed on them, very strongly contest such false myths fabricated by the settlers.

Another associated myth, based on which the colonizers attempted to legitimize their appropriation of foreign land, is the myth of civilizing the barbarous heathens of the third-world nations, a privilege bestowed upon them by none other than Almighty himself. However, in the name of civilizing, the colonizers brutalized, enslaved, subjugated and exploited the natives. The full-blood Aboriginals, especially those who put up retaliation, were exterminated brutally and the children produced from forcefully violated Aboriginal women, the 'half-castes' were snatched away from their mothers and put in state-run homes with the intention of producing 'hands' for farms and servants for white households.

Carmel Bird exposes the real motive of the colonial government behind institutionalizing the native children:

By seizing children of mixed descent, institutionalizing them, teaching them to despise their Aboriginal inheritance and sending them out to work as station hands or domestic servants, authorities

wanted to sever the cultural connection between the children of mixed descent and their aboriginal families and communities and to prepare them for a place in the lower strata of European society. (144)

Sally Morgan, in her autobiography, reveals that her mother, grandmother and her granduncle, all belonged to the stolen generations, stolen under the false promise of education and civilizing, but left brutalized and shattered. As Bourke and Edwards also observe,

These people have been institutionalized, fostered or adopted, loved, hated or ignored. They all share the mental torment of not belonging in the society into which European Australia had decided to put them. Australian society accepted the young Aboriginal children into its institutions but rejected them when they became adults. (102)

Sally Morgan recounts the pain of her grandmother, Nan, who was taken away from her mother on the promise of educating her like white people so that she could become somebody real important. Nan bemoans, "Why did they tell my mother that lie? Why do white people tell so many lies? I got nothin' out of their promise. My mother wouldn't have let me go just to work. She thought I was coming back" (324). From day one, Nan was employed in domestic chores and never sent to school.

The gap between myth and reality was indeed great. Nan was made to work like a machine from dawn to dusk, "The cleaning, the washing, the ironing. There wasn't nothing I didn't do. From when I got up in the morning till when I went to sleep at night, I worked ... they'd throw everything down from the balcony onto the grass. I'd collect it up, take it to the laundry and wash it" (326). If this disclosure was not agonizing enough, we are disgusted to learn that this household was that of Nan's own biological but white father, Alfred Howden Drake-Brockman. He had two white wives and white children of his own, even then, he seduced the two wives of Nan's Aboriginal father. Nan and her brother, Arthur, were progenies of that forced union.

As a result, Nan was a servant in her own father's household and a nurse- maid to her white brothers and sisters. Howden had no sense of guilt or shame or any qualms about what was done to Nan as he never acknowledged her as his child because she was born out of an Aboriginal woman's womb. Violation of Aboriginal girls by the whites was treated lightly by the authorities. Aboriginal girls were considered nothing more than defenseless prey, who could be picked up and mauled any

time. As Germaine Greer in her work, *On Rage*, reports the casual attitude of the whites towards the exploitation of native girls, while narrating a particular incident, "Rape? Who said rape, Ted? Only you. What was probably said was that [the station owner] knew that his white station hands were having sexual relations with some Aboriginal girls. Nothing more. And that happens all the time. You know that... I don't call having a bit of nookie with an Aboriginal girl rape, Ted" (49).

Describing the injustice done to the mixed-bloods, Arthur, Nan's brother, rightly says, "No white man wanted to have black kids runnin' around the place with his name" (156). The same injustice was foisted upon Nan again when she grew up as young girl because her white seducer, Jack Grime, never married her because of her colour, though she bore him a girl child, Glad, whom Nan ultimately brought up alone later. Initially, Glad too was taken away or stolen by the government and shifted to Parkerville Children's Home, an orphanage run by the Church of England sisters.

This bestiality and shameless exploitation of Aboriginal women and girl children at the hands of the white Europeans is contrasted with the sense of respect, care and responsibility with which the Aboriginal young men treated women as Arthur, a young and handsome lad says, "When I was young, I had girls runnin' after me all the time... Trouble is, I was like my old grandfather, tender-hearted. I wouldn't go with any girl, because if I got her into trouble, I'd have to marry her" (203).

Arthur narrates a scene from his early life which forces us to think as to who were in the dire need of getting civilized – the natives or the colonizers. Recounting a particular incident of the treatment of the natives at the hands of the whites, Arthur says, "I remember seein' native people all chained up around the neck and hands, walkin' behind a policeman... I used to think, what have they done to be treated like that. Made me want to cry, just watchin'. Sometimes, we'd hear about white men goin' shooting black fellas for sport, just like we was some kind of animal" (179).

Morgan herself discovers from a public library about the status of indigenes when her grandmother was a young girl. Shocked and numb, she informs her mother,

Well, when Nan was younger, Aborigines were considered sub-normal and not capable of being educated the way whites were. You know the pastoral industry was built on the back of slave labour... I always thought Australia was different to America, Mum, but we had slavery here, too. The people might not have been sold on the blocks like the

American Negroes were, but they were owned, just the same. (149)

Exposing the myth of equality and assimilation, Morgan reveals that she learnt from her grandmother that the whites called her and the other children "bloody mongrels" (141). She forbade Sally Morgan from calling anyone by that name, "It's not right, they got feelings... Promise me you won't ever call them that? When you see a little bloke like that, think of your Nanna" (142).

Another prevalent myth contested and busted is that of the successful assimilation of the Aboriginals in the dominant white culture. The truth being, that the Aboriginals are still on the fringes of Australian society, everyday facing racial bias, discrimination and inequality. As a result, "Feelings of hopelessness, powerlessness and helplessness of life empty of meaning and purpose resulted in widespread apathy among the Aboriginal population. All too often escape into alcoholic oblivion became a panacea for the psychological pain experienced by vast number of Aboriginal people. It remains so for many to this day" (Burden 196).

Sally Morgan in her autobiography says that her grandmother and mother were extremely distrustful of the government all their life because of past experiences of racial bias and having been stolen by the authorities. She says, to run the Aboriginals down, they are referred to as "Boong" (98), as a great deal of social stigma is attached to it. Parents of white children dissuade them from making friends with the Aboriginals. An intelligent girl with good presence of mind, Morgan realizes the reason for her granny always giving royal treatment to the rent man. Nan feared being evicted owing to the whimsical, egoist and biased attitude of the whites towards people like her. She says, "In this world, there's no justice, people like us'd all be dead and gone now if it was up to this country" (105). The white people never expected the Aboriginals to be intelligent at studies. Morgan's university Professors doubted her Aboriginal credentials as she did well in her studies and even won a fellowship.

The birth, death and parentage records of the Aboriginals were never maintained. They were not included in the census up till 1967. Glad, Morgan's mother, a 55-year-old woman, had no knowledge of her father. When Morgan applies for her birth certificate, the column for the name of her mother's father remains blank, "'Just a blank?' Mum muttered slowly. 'Just a blank. That's awful, like nobody owns me'" (150). There is utter confusion about Arthur and Nan's parentage as well. Aunt Judy claims Maltese Sam to be the father of Nan whereas it turns out to be Alfred Howden Drake-Brockman.

Arthur, Sally Morgan's granduncle, rightly says that no matter what a bloke may do for his nation, his contribution, intention, patriotism and dignity are seldom acknowledged, rather always doubted. He refers to many blacks who participated in the war on Australia's behalf, but their lot did not change much after their return because they were Aboriginals. Arthur tries to put things in perspective and says, "You see, the trouble is that colonialism isn't over yet. We still have a White Australia policy against the Aborigines... They say there's been no difference between black and white, we all Australians. That's a lie. I tell you, the black man has nothin', the government been robbin' him blind for years" (209).

Another myth employed to justify the colonizing mission was that of Christianizing the natives, who were described by the colonizers as wandering rogues without any sense of gratitude to the Almighty. These colonizers had no inkling of the deep embedded spirituality which connected the Aboriginals to nature. Carmel Bird, who himself was forcibly taken away from his family, describes the religion-bashing practiced at orphanages, quoting a few lines from Carol's Story. He says,

6.30 a.m. every morning, straight from bed, we had to kneel and say our morning prayers. 7 a.m. we had to go to church for mass. If we didn't we would be punished, like going without a piece of bread for breakfast or get the strap or whipped on our palms. 7.30 a.m. we had to thank god before and after our breakfast. 10 a.m. we had to say another prayer before we had our cups of milk and morning tea break. 11 a.m. we had Catechism taught to us which was part of praying and learning... 12 p.m. again we said our prayers before and after our lunch. 1 p.m. we said another prayer before and after class. 5 p.m. we prayed again before and after our supper. 6 p.m. most times we had to go to church for Benediction or rosary. 7 p.m. we would kneel and say the last prayer of the day, which were our night prayers. (66)

The Commandment in The Bible, 'Thou shalt not Steal' was in fact inverted by the whites themselves and they stole the land, resources, women and children. They did not treat the natives as fellow brothers and sisters, as the scriptures espouse. They did not practice even basic humanity. They forced religion mechanically on little children several times a day including on rare picnics. The

State and the Church never bothered about the credentials of caretakers, managers and doctors sent to the Aboriginal orphanages and reserves. In fact, the harsher they were the better they were considered. Severe punishments and penalties were imposed for trivial faults.

As a result, when Aboriginal children were physically and sexually abused, they could not express what happened to them. Moreover, they had no one to confide in or complain to. In some rare cases, if an Aboriginal child mustered courage enough to reveal the barbarity to the mission-sisters (in some instances they themselves were the perpetrators), they blamed the child himself or herself and segregated, confined and labeled him / her as a bad example for others. These people of God conveniently ignored the horrific sexual exploitation of the Aboriginal children at the hands of the whites, including pastors. On the contrary, the Aboriginal law and Aboriginal people in the pre-contact era did not spare their own for deviations like adultery or even dereliction of duty. Howard Groome recounts the experience of a removed Aboriginal child,

I never told anyone for years and years. And I've had this inside me for years and years and years. I've been sexually abused, harassed, and then finally raped, y'know, and I've never had any one to talk to about it... nobody, no father, no mother, no-one. We had no-one to guide us, I felt so isolated, alienated. And I just had no-one. That's why I hit the booze. None of that family bonding, nurturing – nothing. We had nothing. (175-6)

Sally Morgan says that she always felt uncomfortable in a Church as "it was so formal and lacking in spontaneity" (102) whereas true religion can never crush the natural self and induce artificiality. She recounts her experience as a young girl when a Church minister asked her to stop mixing with his daughter. On being asked the reason, she came the response, "I think you know why" (103). On the other hand, the Aboriginals practiced Godliness in letter and spirit even in the most adverse and trying circumstances. Sally's grandmother Nan's brother Arthur says about his white biological father, "Howden never gave me nothin'. I've only got one good father and he's in heaven. No matter which way the wind's blowin' he's there with you" (203).

Another myth, which the European colonizers proudly proclaimed was about their own superiority – racial, cultural and linguistic. English language was deliberately imposed on the natives to destroy their own language, as language is one of the key assets and means to connect with the culture and heritage of one's ancestors. In contrast to one

English language of the Europeans, the Aboriginals had more than 250 languages with further dialects in the pre-invasion era, which slowly started dying out as the stolen children lost their language. Losing the language also meant they lost their culture and were confused about their identity. Whether these children were in government run 'homes' or in the white families, whom they served, they were told to hate their culture as it was inferior. They were told lies about their parents, that they were alcoholic, illiterate and irresponsible, and so the State had removed them from their families.

Colin Tatz contests the European notion of civilization which is usually employed as a touchstone for the rest of humanity, and says,

Civilization means neither clothes, nor houses, nor industries, nor science, nor culture, nor taste, nor literature, nor art... they stand outside the essential idea of civilization: they belong to it "materially", not "formally" (intrinsically). A primitive people needing no clothes and no houses, eating the things which nature provides for them, without literature or art or industries, would possess a perfect civilization, provided they agreed to live at peace with each other and induce consideration for each other's rights and liberties. (89)

The Aboriginals were spiritual in their outlook who had reverence for nature, for land, and who loved and respected all humanity. They were hard-working people and considerate to the needs of the poor and the unfortunate. The truth was that it was the colonizers who were uncivilized and barbarians for they uprooted and destroyed families, killed recklessly and had the audacity to justify the acts. On the contrary, the Aboriginals did not even remove animals from their mothers, and they reaped the gifts of nature in proportion to their needs. The colonizers, on the other hand, exploited women, men and children, besides plundering, looting and hoarding precious natural wealth. The Aboriginals were more civilized and humane as they lived with extended families unlike the colonizers who lived in nuclear clusters. While the colonizers lived in luxury, they rendered the Aboriginal children malnourished, with only rationed bread, flour, sugar and tea, etc. given to them, whereas in their natural habitat they lived a healthy life.

The Aboriginals had their own unique and rich culture, they were in tune with nature and worshipped their land as sacred; they possessed knowledge of rare-medicinal herbs, had rich spiritual life and were daring and

adventurous. However, with the advent of the colonizers, they were displaced, dispossessed, subjugated, enslaved, butchered, exploited and their movement was restricted. In short, the settlers hoisted the ills of the modern western imperialistic civilization on this pristine land too. These proud, dignified people were reduced to a miserable life. Jenny Burden describes as to what was done to the Aboriginals:

Dispossessed from their land, the dispirited and disoriented remnants of broken tribes were forced into unfamiliar and often alien territory. Many were relocated on missions and reserves where traditional ceremonies and language were forbidden. Some lived as fringe dwellers on the outskirts of European towns... or worked on sheep and cattle stations in order to remain close to their own country. Most Aboriginal people lived in squalid conditions. (195)

Sally Morgan too values the real-life practical education which the Aboriginal lifestyle naturally imparted. From her grandmother she learnt to observe and revere nature and respect all mankind. The education that she was imparted in school she found irrelevant. "Apart from learning different ways to feign illness, there wasn't much to school that year. All my lessons seemed unrelated to life. I often wondered how my teachers could be so interested in the sums I got wrong and so disinterested... whether dad was home from hospital or not" (39).

It were the Aboriginals who were a truly superior race and civilization as they had deep and genuine respect for nature, humanity, women, spirituality, tradition and language. They practised what they preached. Therefore, to call them uncivilized cannot be just naive ignorance but European cultural chauvinism and a deep-rooted conspiracy to destroy and appropriate their land and wealth for expanding the colonial citadel. What they implemented in Australia was the imperialist and capitalist models of exploitation.

Morgan's mother, Glad, was forcefully moved to Parkerville Children's Home at the age of three and she recounts what the whites did to infants like her and how she desperately yearned for the lap of her mother:

If no one came, you put on a brave face and didn't cry.... if one of your friends got visitors, you'd be so jealous... It was hardest for the Aboriginal kids. We didn't have anyone. Some of the kids there had been taken from families that

lived hundreds of miles away... And anyway, Aboriginal people had to get permits to travel. Sometimes they wouldn't give them a permit. They didn't care that they wanted to see their kids. (246)

It shows utter heartlessness, callousness and refusal to acknowledge blacks as humans, on the part of the European colonizers.

The myth of a superior civilization of the whites stands starkly exposed when Sally Morgan narrates the incident when the trainee doctors in a hospital stripped Morgan's granny naked to conduct some tests to gain some extra marks. Nan rightly says that they chose her because she was black and she could bet they didn't do that to white people.

Another prevalent myth circulated by the settlers was that of benign effect of colonization and it stands exposed as the percentage of Aboriginal population was reduced to just 3.8% of the total population of the country. The colonial policies of depriving the Aboriginals of their culture, their land and their family pushed many adult Aboriginals into alcoholism and other forms of self-destruction. Jenny Burden describes the condition of the indigenes: "The once vibrant hunter-gatherer societies were reduced to little more than collections of sick, impoverished and undernourished mendicants forced to eke out an existence on the fringes of European settlement, cut off from their country, their sacred sites and their religion. The essence of their life had been taken from them" (195). The civilizing mission at the most can be termed superficial as what they taught was wearing western/urban clothes, taking daily showers, etc., whereas the Aboriginals were more civilized, religious and spiritual deep inside.

Sally Morgan says that to escape the harsh reality, her mother lived under illusions and deliberately saw the funny sides of things. Her father, a prisoner of war and mentally deranged, sought refuge in alcohol. She says, "Just a frame, that was dad. The heart had gone out of him years ago... I found it hard to comprehend that you could have so many parts missing and still alive" (16). When people like her father woke up at odd hours with a loud shriek, with memories of being captured in dirt with a rifle butt in the mouth, fresh, the nurse tried to calm them down saying it was "Only a dream" (43).

Burden enunciates that for good psychological health, one needs "a firm sense of individual identity and group belonging; a sense of security, purpose, personal involvement, satisfaction and achievement; the knowledge and skills to allow an individual to function effectively in society; the freedom to make choices of benefit to self and

others, as well as a sense of control over important aspects of one's life" (189). Sadly, Billy, Morgan's father, had none of these, so he committed suicide later.

The myths of European cultural superiority and the benign effect of colonization are so engrained in the white psyche that it has been extended beyond humans to inanimate objects like toys too. Morgan's mother, Glad, remembers her white foster sister June's white doll with golden hair and blue eyes and dressed in satin and lace. For Glad, June's mother brought a black doll dressed like a servant with an apron on, resembling Glad's mother. "I stared at this doll for a minute. I was completely stunned. That's me, I thought. I wanted to be a princess, not a servant... 'I don't want a black doll.' Alice just laughed and said to my mother, 'Fancy, her not wanting a black doll'" (257).

Glad says that white children like June had their own separate rooms stuffed with soft toys and dolls whereas in orphanage cupboards dirty, broken dolls were kept, and the little girls were not allowed to take one to bed. In these mission schools, Aboriginal children had to face constant discrimination as Howard Groome reports:

Those children who were allowed to attend their local states schools were usually segregated from other students. They had separate areas for play and in the classroom usually sat together in a black kids section at the back or on the "dark side" of the room. These conditions were still being reported in some Australian schools in the 1970s. In addition to the segregation, they frequently suffered harassment from white peers and discrimination from teachers. (174)

Nan could never openly and proudly acknowledge her Aboriginal descent. She herself was the victim of the brutal racial bias the natives were subjected to. To shield her children from the prejudice, she lied to them that they were Indians. Glad quotes Nan saying, "Terrible things will happen to you if you tell people what you are" (274). Nan also lamented that she was stuck in the middle all her life. "Too black for the whites and too white for the blacks" (328). She recalls that she was helpless and hopeless like other Aboriginals. She could see her daughter, Glad, desperately wanted to be with her, but she could do nothing, "I knew she didn't want to stay there, but what could I do? It wasn't like I had a place of my own. It wasn't like I had any say over my own life" (333). She further says out of her personal experience that money gets the better of people and they forget humanity, "Haa, that's how you get treated by rich

people, real rotten. I think they get greedy, they live for the money" (335).

The natives and their children were used as cheap labor and forced to work like machines without wages from dawn to dusk. Nan says that the big house on Corunna was built by the natives. They all worked together, building this and building that. If it wasn't for the natives, nothing would have got done. They made the station, Drake Brockmans didn't do it on their own. Even then, Aborigines were mercilessly flogged. They had blood everywhere and would scream, "No more, No more. No more, master! He liked you to call him master" (183).

Life Writings such as *My Place* reveal that though once defeated, dispossessed, enslaved, subjugated, oppressed, raped, exploited and humiliated, the Aborigines did not part with humanity, kinship, sharing, spirituality, and hence Godliness. These narratives also provide rare glimpses into the rich and wonderful culture of the Aborigines about which, in the absence of such writing, the world would have known nothing.

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Trend Analysis of Licensure Examination Performance across Selected Programs at Wesleyan University-Philippines (2021–2023)

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Abstract— This paper tracks how 11-degree programs at Wesleyan University-Philippines have fared on licensure tests between 2021 to 2023, based on documentary records. It looked at results for Bachelor of Elementary Education, Bachelor of Secondary Education, BS Accountancy, BS Social Work, BS Electronics Engineering, BS Medical Technology, BS Pharmacy, BS Physical Therapy, BS Radiologic Technology, BS Nursing, and BS Criminology. The analysis found that Elementary Education and Social Work kept performing above the national passing rate, a clear sign that those courses are doing something right. By contrast, Accountancy and Electronics Engineering students fell short more often, so faculty and management will need to step up their support. Medical Technology, Pharmacy, and Secondary Education swung up and down, pointing to gaps in training that call for sharper, piece-by-piece attention. Physical Therapy and Radiologic Technology, however, have taken noticeable leaps forward recently, while Nursing stayed solidly on top. Criminology scores stayed mostly high as well, dropping only once below the national average.



Keywords— Board Exam Performance, College Programs, Licensure Examinations, Trend Analysis, Wesleyan University-Philippines,

I. INTRODUCTION

Licensure board examinations serve as a critical gateway to professional practice, ensuring that individuals entering regulated professions meet a standardized level of competence, knowledge, and ethical responsibility. These examinations uphold public safety and welfare by verifying that candidates possess the necessary qualifications to perform their duties effectively. In fields such as education, engineering, healthcare, and law, licensure is often legally mandated to protect the public's interests and uphold the profession's credibility (Freeman & Hersch, 2018). By establishing a uniform standard for entry into a profession,

board examinations foster trust in professional services and minimize risks associated with underqualified practitioners.

Moreover, licensure examinations contribute to the continuous improvement of higher education institutions by serving as benchmarks for curriculum effectiveness and instructional quality. Educational institutions use the results of these examinations to assess the alignment between their academic programs and the competencies required in professional settings (Wells, 2019). A consistently high passing rate can enhance a university's reputation, attract prospective students, and support accreditation efforts. Conversely, low performance may prompt curriculum revisions, faculty development initiatives, and the

implementation of academic support services. Thus, beyond being a prerequisite for employment, licensure board examinations play a strategic role in shaping educational policy and institutional development.

In the Philippines, watching how well graduates do on board exams has become an important duty for colleges and universities, especially for those the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) has given autonomous status. CHED requires these schools to collect, study, and report the passing rates of their students taking professional licensure tests so that quality and accountability in higher learning can be assured (Commission on Higher Education [CHED], 2019). The results act like a scoreboard, showing not only how strong a particular program is, but also how effective the whole institution remains when licensing in fields such as engineering, nursing, or accounting depend on a national board certificate. In the Philippines, watching how well graduates do on board exams has become an important duty for colleges and universities, especially for those the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) has given autonomous status. CHED requires these schools to collect, study, and report the passing rates of their students taking professional licensure tests so that quality and accountability in higher learning can be assured (Commission on Higher Education [CHED], 2019). The results act like a scoreboard, showing not only how strong a particular program is, but also how effective the whole institution remains when licensing in fields such as engineering, nursing, or accounting depends on a national board certificate.

Following this mandate, the research team carried out an analysis at Wesleyan University-Philippines autonomous university look at the passing rates of its degree programs

on national board exams between 2021 and 2023. The goal is to spot patterns and gaps so that focused support can be crafted, helping graduates either meet or outpace the benchmarks set across the country. Degree courses included in the review are Bachelor of Elementary Education, Bachelor of Secondary Education, Bachelor of Science in Accountancy, Bachelor of Science in Social Work, Bachelor of Science in Electronics Engineering, Bachelor of Science in Medical Technology, Bachelor of Science in Pharmacy, Bachelor of Science in Physical Therapy, Bachelor of Science in Radiologic Technology, and Bachelor of Science in Criminology.

By systematically evaluating licensure performance, Wesleyan University-Philippines seeks to maintain academic excellence, fulfill regulatory expectations, and enhance student preparedness for professional success.

II. METHODOLOGY

This research utilized documentary analysis. Licensure examination results from 2021-2023 of 11 programs of Wesleyan University Philippines were analyzed and explored in this study. The 11 programs were the Bachelor of Elementary Education, Bachelor of Secondary Education, Bachelor of Science in Accountancy, Bachelor of Science in Social Work, Bachelor of Science in Electronics Engineering, Bachelor of Science in Medical Technology, Bachelor of Science in Pharmacy, Bachelor of Science in Physical Therapy, Bachelor of Science in Radiologic Technology, Bachelor of Science in Nursing and Bachelor of Science in Criminology. The research was conducted during the second semester of school year 2024-2025.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. BEEd Examinations Result

Bachelor of Elementary Education					
Date Taken	No. of Takers		Total Number of Examinees	Overall Passing Percentage (First Takers)	National Passing Percentage
	Passed	Failed			
September 2021	6	3	9	66.67%	56.37%
October 2022	29	3	32	90.63%	71.09%
March 2023	9	3	12	75%	71.63%
September 2023	14	4	18	77.78%	74.91%

The table presents the results of the licensure examination for Bachelor of Elementary Education takers from September 2021 to September 2023.

According to the data in the table, October 2022 had the most elementary education examinees (32) compared to any other year, while September 2021 had the fewest takers (9). The first-timers percentages are all higher than the national passing percentages from September 2021 to September 2023. In contrast to the national passing percentage of 71.09%, the highest passing percentage, 90.63%, occurred in October 2022. September 2021 had the lowest passing percentage for first-time takers, at 66.67%, compared to the national passing percentage of 56.37%.

The trend indicates that first-time takers of the Bachelor of Elementary Education licensure examination at Wesleyan University-Philippines consistently outperformed the national passing rates from 2021 to 2023, demonstrating the program's effectiveness in preparing students for the board exams. Notably, the peak performance in October 2022 suggests strong institutional support and academic quality, though fluctuations in examinee numbers and performance also highlight the need for sustained curriculum evaluation and student support initiatives (Professional Regulation Commission [PRC], 2023).

Table 2. BSEd Examinations Result

Bachelor of Secondary Education					
<i>Date Taken</i>	<i>No. of Takers</i>			<i>Overall Passing Percentage (First Takers)</i>	<i>National Passing Percentage</i>
	<i>Passed</i>	<i>Failed</i>	<i>Total Number of Examinees</i>		
<i>March 2022</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	50%	72.01%
<i>June 2022</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>2</i>	100%	74.49%
<i>October 2022</i>	<i>120</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>160</i>	75%	64.24%
<i>May 2023</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>62</i>	70.97%	69.72%
<i>September 2023</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>47</i>	74.47%	75.69%

The table shows the results of the licensure examination for secondary education takers from March 2022 to September 2023.

The data shows that October 2022 had the highest number of secondary education examinees, with 160 participants, while March and June 2022 had the lowest, with only 2 examinees each. Passing percentages were below the national average in March 2022 and September 2023, but exceeded the national average in June and October 2022, as well as in May 2023. Notably, June 2022 achieved the highest passing rate of 100%, compared to the national passing rate of 74.49%. The lowest passing percentage among first-time takers was recorded in May 2023 at 70.97%, which was still slightly above the national average of 69.72%.

The information reveals notable variations in the number of examinees and passing rates over the various exam periods,

with October 2022 registering the largest participation and June 2022 attaining a remarkable 100% passing rate, which is far higher than the national average. The Department of Education (2023) states that although there are times when the performance falls short of the national passing %, overall performance is still competitive, indicating areas that need to be improved in March 2022 and September 2023.

The consistently low passing percentages below national levels indicate that special interventions and increased academic support are critically necessary to enhance student performance in these testing cycles (Herut, Muleta, & Lebeta, 2024). The gap between the number of test-takers and passing rates also indicates possible problems of preparation and allocation of resources that need to be rectified to effect level grounds in educational achievements (Department of Education, 2023).

Table 3. Bachelor of Science in Accountancy Examinations Result

Bachelor of Science in Accountancy					
<i>Date Taken</i>	<i>No. of Takers</i>			<i>Overall Passing Percentage (First Takers)</i>	<i>National Passing Percentage</i>
	<i>Passed</i>	<i>Failed</i>	<i>Total Number of Examinees</i>		
<i>December 2021</i>	0	3	3	0%	16.37%
<i>May 2022</i>	0	13	13	0%	20.25%
<i>October 2022</i>	1	19	20	5%	23.58%
<i>May 2023</i>	11	43	54	20.37%	27.65%
<i>September 2023</i>	6	21	27	22.22%	30.70%

The data in the table exhibit the results of the licensure examination for accountancy takers from December 2021 to September 2023.

The analysis indicates that passing rates for all five examination periods were consistently below national averages, underscoring the urgent need for targeted academic interventions. Notably, May 2023 saw the largest group of examinees with 54 participants, while December 2021 had the smallest cohort with just three takers. Despite the increased participation in May 2023, the highest passing

rate was achieved in September 2023 at only 22.22%, whereas both December 2021 and May 2022 recorded a 0% passing rate, reflecting persistent and significant challenges in examinee performance throughout these sessions.

According to these results, examinees are unable to match or surpass national passing averages with the current academic support measures. To address the ongoing poor performance and enhance the results of upcoming exams, prompt and focused strategic interventions are required (Chen, Chavez, Ong, & Gunderson, 2017).

Table 4. Bachelor of Science in Social Work Examinations Result

Bachelor of Science in Social Work					
<i>Date Taken</i>	<i>No. of Takers</i>			<i>Overall Passing Percentage (First Takers)</i>	<i>National Passing Percentage</i>
	<i>Passed</i>	<i>Failed</i>	<i>Total Number of Examinees</i>		
<i>February 2021</i>	7	10	17	41.18%	58.62%
<i>August 2021</i>	11	6	17	64.71%	57.39%
<i>February 2022</i>	2	1	3	66.67%	64.89%
<i>August 2022</i>	23	8	31	74.19%	74.07%
<i>September 2023</i>	30	8	38	78.95%	68.09%

The table shows the results of the licensure examination for social work takers from February 2021 to September 2023.

The data indicate that September 2023 had the highest number of examinees with 38 participants, while February 2022 recorded the fewest, with only 3 takers. Passing percentages were below the national average only in February 2021, but consistently exceeded national benchmarks in all other examination periods from August

2021 through September 2023. Notably, September 2023 achieved the highest passing rate of 78.95%, surpassing the national passing percentage of 74.07%. Conversely, the lowest passing rate among first-time takers was recorded in August 2021 at 64.71%, which remained above the national average of 57.39%, reflecting overall strong performance across these periods.

These results suggest that, in spite of variations in the number of examinees, the BSSW continuously outperformed the national passing rates for the majority of test periods, demonstrating resilience and successful teaching techniques (Baharudin & Md Sadik, 2016). The

impressive results, especially in September 2023, point to the possible advantages of consistent academic focus and imply that focused interventions and assistance may have helped achieve better results.

Table 5. Bachelor of Science in Electronics Engineering Examination Results

Bachelor of Science in Electronics Engineering					
<i>Date Taken</i>	<i>No. of Takers</i>			<i>Overall Passing Percentage (First Takers)</i>	<i>National Passing Percentage</i>
	<i>Passed</i>	<i>Failed</i>	<i>Total Number of Examinees</i>		
<i>October 2021</i>	3	3	6	50%	46.71%
<i>April 2022</i>	7	9	16	43.57%	45.35%
<i>October 2022</i>	1	19	20	5%	30.33%
<i>April 2023</i>	2	12	14	14.29%	35.13%
<i>October 2023</i>	0	10	10	0%	31.18%

The table shows the results of the licensure examination for electronics engineering takers from October 2021 to October 2023.

The data indicate that October 2022 had the highest number of examinees with 20 participants, while October 2021 recorded the fewest, with only 6 takers. Passing percentages were consistently below the national average from April 2022 through October 2023, except in October 2021, where the passing rate exceeded the national benchmark. The highest passing percentage during this period was 43.57% in April 2022, slightly below the national passing rate of 45.35%. Conversely, the lowest passing rate was recorded

in October 2023 at 0%, significantly underperforming compared to the national passing percentage of 31.18%, highlighting a concerning decline in examinee success over time.

These results point to the necessity of immediate action to address the falling passing rates, particularly in light of the precipitous decline to 0% in October 2023 despite variations in the number of examinees. Reversing this declining trend and raising performance to or above the national average may be possible with the help of targeted support and improved teaching strategies (Chen & Dong, 2024).

Table 6. Bachelor of Science in Medical Technology Examinations Result

Bachelor of Science in Medical Technology					
<i>Date Taken</i>	<i>No. of Takers</i>			<i>Overall Passing Percentage (First Takers)</i>	<i>National Passing Percentage</i>
	<i>Passed</i>	<i>Failed</i>	<i>Total Number of Examinees</i>		
<i>January 2022</i>	5	15	20	25.00%	54.23%
<i>March 2022</i>	3	8	11	27.27%	49.41%
<i>August 2022</i>	3	13	16	18.75%	58.80%
<i>March 2023</i>	25	5	30	83.33%	81.23%
<i>August 2023</i>	17	19	36	47.22%	81.93%

The table presents the results of the licensure examination for medical technology takers from January 2022 to August 2023.

The data reveal that August 2023 had the highest number of examinees with 36 participants, while March 2022 recorded the lowest with only 11 takers. Passing percentages for January, March, and August 2022, as well as August 2023, all fell below the national averages, indicating areas of concern. Conversely, March 2023 stood out with an impressive passing rate of 83.33%, surpassing the national average of 81.23%. Notably, the lowest passing rate among

first-time takers was in August 2022, at just 18.75%, highlighting significant challenges during that period.

According to the results, persistent underperformance over a number of periods suggests the need for more focused interventions and academic assistance, even in the face of variations in the number of examinees. The remarkable passing rate in March 2023 also shows that progress is possible, underscoring the possible advantages of examining and imitating effective teaching strategies from that time frame (Dogani, 2023).

Table 7. Bachelor of Science in Pharmacy Examinations Result

Bachelor of Science in Pharmacy					
Date Taken	No. of Takers		Total Number of Examinees	Overall Passing Percentage (First Takers)	National Passing Percentage
	Passed	Failed			
June 2021	1	3	4	25.00%	72.05%
November 2021	2	1	3	66.67%	56.04%
November 2022	4	2	6	66.67%	74.06%
April 2023	7	2	9	77.78%	74.60%
November 2023	25	12	37	67.57%	82.04%

The table shows the results of the licensure examination for pharmacy takers from June 2021 to November 2023.

The data shows that November 2023 had the highest number of examinees with 37 participants, while November 2021 had the fewest, with only 3 takers. Passing percentages fell below the national average in June 2021, November 2022, and November 2023, indicating areas needing improvement. In contrast, November 2021 and April 2023 exceeded the national passing rates, with April 2023 achieving the highest passing percentage of 77.78%, surpassing the national average of 74.60%. Notably, the

lowest passing rate among first-time takers was recorded in June 2021 at just 25%, highlighting significant challenges during that examination period.

These findings imply that despite variations in examinee numbers, consistent underperformance in certain periods signals a need for targeted academic support and intervention strategies. The success seen in April 2023 suggests that effective practices can lead to improved outcomes and should be analyzed and replicated to enhance overall performance (Rafique, et al., 2021).

Table 8. Bachelor of Science in Physical Therapy Examinations Result

Bachelor of Science in Physical Therapy					
<i>Date Taken</i>	<i>No. of Takers</i>			<i>Overall Passing Percentage (First Takers)</i>	<i>National Passing Percentage</i>
	<i>Passed</i>	<i>Failed</i>	<i>Total Number of Examinees</i>		
December 2021	6	5	11	54.55%	73.33%
June 2022	0	3	3	0.00%	62.19%
December 2022	0	1	1	0.00%	67.19%
June 2023	5	0	5	100.00%	68.65%
December 2023	1	0	1	100%	76.35%

The table shows the results of the licensure examination for Physical Therapist takers from December 2021 to December 2023.

The data reveals that December 2021 had the highest number of examinees with 11 participants, while December 2022 and December 2023 each had the fewest, with only one taker. Passing percentages were below the national average in December 2021, June 2022, and December 2022, indicating areas requiring improvement. However, June 2023 and December 2023 both achieved a perfect passing rate of 100%, significantly surpassing the national average and demonstrating exceptional performance during these

periods. This contrast highlights the potential for success when effective strategies are implemented, emphasizing the need to identify and replicate the factors contributing to these outstanding results.

These findings imply that while earlier examination periods struggled with low passing rates, the perfect scores in June and December 2023 demonstrate that significant improvement is achievable. It is crucial to analyze and replicate the successful strategies from these periods to enhance overall performance consistently (Tariq, et al, 2011).

Table 9. Bachelor of Science in Radiologic Technology Examinations Result

Bachelor of Science in Radiologic Technology					
<i>Date Taken</i>	<i>No. of Takers</i>			<i>Overall Passing Percentage (First Takers)</i>	<i>National Passing Percentage</i>
	<i>Passed</i>	<i>Failed</i>	<i>Total Number of Examinees</i>		
May 2021	2	5	7	28.57%	35.90%
December 2021	1	4	5	20.00%	36.96%
December 2022	7	11	18	38.89%	27.04%
December 2023	15	13	28	53.57%	41.32%

The table presents the results of the licensure examination for X-ray technologist takers from May 2021 to December 2023.

The data indicates that December 2023 had the highest number of examinees, with 28 participants, while December 2021 had the fewest, with only 5 takers. Passing percentages fell below the national average in May 2021 and December 2021, signaling areas for improvement. In contrast,

December 2022 and December 2023 exceeded the national passing rates, with December 2023 achieving the highest passing percentage of 53.57%, significantly surpassing the national average of 41.32%. This upward trend suggests progress in examinee performance, highlighting the effectiveness of recent academic interventions during these periods.

Given the higher passing rates in December 2022 and 2023, these results suggest that intensive academic interventions have improved examinee performance. Maintaining and

improving achievement in upcoming exam periods requires sustained attention to these strategies (Hendrawijaya, 2020).

Table 10. Bachelor of Science in Nursing Examinations Result

Bachelor of Science in Nursing					
Date Taken	No. of Takers		Total Number of Examinees	Overall Passing Percentage (First Takers)	National Passing Percentage
	Passed	Failed			
November 2021	19	5	24	79.17%	78.30%
May 2022	1	0	1	100%	83.23%
November 2022	97	12	109	88.99%	91.67%
May 2023	17	2	19	89.47%	90.60%
November 2023	144	13	157	91.72%	92.13%

The table presents the results of the licensure examination for Nursing from November 2021 to November 2023.

The data shows that November 2023 had the highest number of examinees at 157, whereas May 2022 had only one participant. Passing percentages were below the national average in November 2022, May 2023, and November 2023, but surpassed national benchmarks in both November and May 2022. While May 2022 achieved a perfect 100% passing rate—albeit with just a single examinee—November 2023 stands out for maintaining a high passing rate of 91.72% despite a much larger cohort. This suggests that, although individualized attention can yield excellent results in small groups, effective preparation

and support strategies were also successfully implemented to achieve strong outcomes during periods of high participation.

The data indicate that strong academic assistance and efficient preparation techniques are necessary to sustain high passing rates with a large number of examinees, as observed in November 2023. On the other hand, even though there was only one examinee, the May 2022 flawless passing rate shows the potential value of individualized attention while simultaneously highlighting the difficulty of extrapolating such achievement to bigger cohorts (Spengler, Brunner, Martin & Lüdtkke, 2016).

Table 11. Bachelor of Science in Criminology Examinations Result

Bachelor of Science in Criminology					
Date Taken	No. of Takers		Total Number of Examinees	Overall Passing Percentage (First Takers)	National Passing Percentage
	Passed	Failed			
June 2022	7	9	16	43.75%	42.96%
December 2022	5	14	19	26.32%	45.74%
April 2023	5	5	10	50.00%	42.47%
August 2023	3	2	5	60.00%	45.18%

The table presents the results of the licensure examination for criminologists from June 2022 to August 2023.

The data indicate that December 2022 had the highest number of examinees, with 19 participants, while August 2023 recorded the fewest, with only 5 takers. Notably, the

passing percentage for December 2022 fell below the national average, whereas the passing rates for June 2022, as well as April and August 2023, exceeded the national benchmarks. August 2023 stands out with the highest passing rate of 60%, significantly surpassing the national passing percentage of 45.18%, despite having the smallest group of examinees, suggesting strong performance among this group.

Smaller groups, such as August 2023, may benefit from more targeted instruction and support, which could result in higher success rates, according to the fluctuation in examinee numbers and passing rates. In contrast, despite a larger group, the lower passing % in December 2022 suggests that better preparation techniques are required to sustain high-quality results as participation rises (Ismanova, 2019).

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions are derived based on the findings of the study:

1. The Bachelor of Elementary Education examinees consistently surpassed national passing rates, showing strong program effectiveness.
2. The Bachelor of Secondary Education results varied, with some periods below national averages, indicating a need for improvement.
3. The Bachelor of Science in Accountancy examinees consistently scored below national averages, highlighting the need for urgent academic support.
4. The Bachelor of Science in Social Work examinees mostly outperformed national rates, reflecting effective teaching and preparation.
5. The Bachelor of Science in Electronics Engineering passing rates declined and often fell below national averages, signaling a need for intervention.
6. The Bachelor of Science in Medical Technology results were mostly below national averages, except for one period of improvement, showing the need for continued support.
7. The Bachelor of Science in Pharmacy results were inconsistent, with some periods below national averages, suggesting targeted interventions are needed.
8. The Bachelor of Science in Physical Therapy showed significant improvement in 2023 with perfect passing rates, demonstrating the impact of effective strategies.
9. The Bachelor of Science in Radiologic Technology passing rates improved recently, surpassing national averages and reflecting successful interventions.

10. The Bachelor of Science in Nursing maintained high passing rates, though occasionally below national averages, indicating overall strong performance.
11. The Bachelor of Science in Criminology passing rates were mostly above national averages except for December 2022, suggesting targeted support helps smaller groups succeed.

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The Effectiveness of Student-Teams Achievement Divisions (STAD) on Vocabulary Acquisition among EFL learners

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Abstract— This research examined the effectiveness of Student Teams -Achievement Divisions (STAD) in increasing the vocabulary learning process of the international students taking the Vocabulary Builder course at the Center of English Language Studies in the Lapu-Lapu Cebu International College. It was aimed to measure the learners' performance before and after the adoption of the STAD strategy and to examine their experiences in using the approach during classroom activities. The study method consisted of a one-group experimental model with a qualitative investigation. A vocabulary test was created by the researcher to measure the learning objectives and a focus group discussion provided rich data about the perceptions, attitudes, and the challenges faced by the students in relation to STAD. A one-group experimental design was utilized to test 30 B1-level students from Japan, Taiwan, and Korea who participated in four weeks of STAD-based instruction involving whole-class teaching, team study, individual quizzes, and team recognition. The results showed that STAD implementation positively influenced vocabulary acquisition and encouraged greater participation when compared to traditional instruction design. Students had indicated that group work helped them develop a feeling of cooperation, enhanced confidence, and caused peer-to-peer support, which helped them to understand and remember newly learned lexical matters better. The positive experiences highlighted by the focus-group data were effective teamwork, increased motivation and exchange of perspectives; however, such problems as unequivalent contribution of the group members were observed. The experiment found that STAD is a good approach to use when enhancing learning vocabulary in multicultural EFL, and suggests using it in vocabulary instruction.



Keywords— Cooperative learning, EFL learners, International students, Student Teams–Achievement Divisions (STAD), Vocabulary acquisition

I. INTRODUCTION

The importance of vocabulary acquisition for English as a Foreign PLanguage (EFL) learners is underscored by the increasing demand for English proficiency in a globalized world. As the foundation for the four macro skills—reading, writing, speaking, and listening—vocabulary plays a vital role in academic success and meaningful communication. This importance becomes even more evident as English

functions as the lingua franca for global communication, business, education, and diplomacy (Graddol, 2019; OECD, 2020). Despite this, EFL learners continue to struggle with vocabulary due to limited exposure, low motivation, and excessive reliance on traditional methods like rote memorization and word list drills, which are shown to have low retention (Elhamdi & Hezam, 2020; Webb & Nation, 2017).

Vocabulary is fundamental to both written and spoken communication. Nation (2022) stresses that inadequate vocabulary hampers learners' ability to interpret meaning and express ideas effectively, while Schmitt (2020) notes that vocabulary is more crucial than grammar for real communication. Vocabulary learning supports not only language skills but also the ability to make personal connections through language. However, learners often lack autonomy, motivation, and contextual support in acquiring new words (Teng, 2021). Assigning vocabulary without meaningful or interactive practice tends to be ineffective.

Non-native speakers typically have a vocabulary range of 10,000 to 15,000 words—significantly less than the 20,000 to 30,000 words used by native speakers (Dang & Webb, 2016; Webb & Nation, 2017; Teng, 2021). This gap limits access to academic materials and fluency in communication. Moreover, EFL learners are rarely exposed to real-life English use, which slows acquisition (Elhamdi & Hezam, 2020). Teng & Zhang (2021) also emphasize that ineffective memorization strategies and insufficient contextual input hinder long-term vocabulary learning. Students with restricted vocabulary knowledge tend to underperform in language-related subjects at the tertiary level (Nguyen & Boers, 2019; Webb & Nation, 2017).

Although studies have discussed vocabulary acquisition extensively, many classrooms still use outdated, ineffective approaches. These methods result in poor retention and disengaged students. While the literature advocates contextualized, meaningful instruction, the integration of cooperative learning methods like Student Teams-Achievement Divisions (STAD) into EFL vocabulary teaching is still underexplored. This gap presents an opportunity to evaluate alternative, peer-based strategies that encourage active learning.

This study sought to address this gap by exploring the effectiveness of the STAD model in improving vocabulary learning. At the Center of English Language Studies, Lapulapu-Cebu International College, traditional vocabulary instruction often isolates learners. STAD, developed by Johnson and Johnson (2009), involves grouping students into heterogeneous teams, fostering both teamwork and individual accountability. It encourages positive interdependence and provides equal opportunities for success.

Studies indicate cooperative approaches improve learning. For example, Marashi and Khatami (2017) noted cooperative learning has positive effects on creativity and motivation of EFL learners, which indicated elaboration and peer interaction promote deeper learning and critical thinking. Student Teams-Achievement Divisions (STAD) also supports learner autonomy and intrinsic and extrinsic

motivation as evidenced by Ilyas (2017) and others (Ishtiaq et al., 2017), who observed STAD to increase the mastery of vocabulary through improved motivation.

Thus, this study aimed to determine whether STAD improves students' vocabulary acquisition. It provided empirical support for integrating cooperative learning into vocabulary instruction, aiming to foster communicative competence, engagement, and long-term retention among EFL learners.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Student Teams-Achievement Divisions (STAD)

The study was grounded on the premise that the Student Teams-Achievement Divisions (STAD) is an effective learning mechanism in vocabulary acquisition among international students. This assumption was rooted in three interrelated theoretical constructs as Social Constructivism and Social Interdependence Theory were the main theories supported by Cooperative Learning Theory. Each framework contributes an important understanding of cognitive, social and pedagogical aspects of group-based language learning.

As Vygotsky (1978) proved, individuals learn through interaction with others, and language develops within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Social Interdependence Theory, developed by Johnson and Johnson (2009), states that when positive interdependence exists in a group, cooperation and academic performance increase. Evidence supporting this includes cooperative learning models such as STAD, which, as tested by Slavin (1995), enhance students' achievement by integrating teamwork with individual accountability.

The Student Teams-Achievement Divisions (STAD) method is a cooperative learning program created by Robert E. Slavin and his team at Johns Hopkins University during the late 1970s. Following the cooperative learning theory and social interdependence theory, STAD focuses on group work, individual accountability, and shared opportunities for success. In this approach, students are assigned to small, heterogeneous groups and study in groups, assisting each other in mastering content and grasping main ideas assigned. Following team study sessions, individual quizzes are administered to students and scores are accumulated toward a team score for betterment, but not absolute success. This encourages all students, both talented and less talented, toward team achievement. As pointed out by Slavin (1995), in STAD not only is academic success promoted, but motivation, self-concept, and social skills are enhanced through cooperative learning environments. Through this model, the definition of learning is based on

the premise that learning is most productive when students have a feeling of constructive interdependence—where personal achievement results in group performance. Numerous studies have validated the effectiveness of STAD in various subjects, particularly mathematics and language (Slavin, 1991; Isnaini & Kurniawan, 2020). Recent evidence also confirms its effectiveness in improving language learning outcomes. Suranto and Zalukhu (2025) demonstrated that implementing the STAD cooperative learning model significantly enhanced Indonesian language learning among elementary students, resulting in higher post-test scores and positive learner engagement. These findings further reinforce the theoretical link between social constructivism and cooperative learning in promoting meaningful language acquisition. As a pioneer in school reform based on evidence, Slavin's work has had significant influence in designing cooperative learning strategies so that it is individually responsible and socially interactive among learners as they learn.

Student Teams-Achievement Divisions (STAD) is a cooperative learning approach that supports these constructivist principles through opportunities for active, student-centered learning in small, heterogeneous groups. The structured peer interactions allow students to engage with one another about concepts studied; work on vocabulary and explain it to one another; and collaboratively solve language tasks. Schunk (2020) supports this type of instructional setting by noting that students can learn more by being involved with the content, engaging in hands-on activities or inquiry, and applying it to the real-world, all of which were intrinsic to the STAD framework.

STAD has effectiveness in acquiring vocabulary, as revealed by the actual research. Research conducted by Purnami, Adnyani, and Suarnajaya (2024) in the Balindo Paradiso Training Center has been done stating that the STAD cooperative learning model which was used at this time greatly improved students' mastery of English vocabulary. It attempts several methods, including classroom observation, questionnaire, and written test, the authors found great improvement in students' performance. The passage reads, out of 25%, students who achieved the minimum pass grade of 85 increased to 60% after the implementation of STAD. Based on those results, it also shows that the approach is appealing and effective according to student feedback gained through questioners for good, positive, and collaborative learning. It discloses evidence for theoretical assumptions with social constructivism and cooperative learning, showing that the structure of peer interaction and group accountability, as personified in the frame of STAD, contribute to meaningful learning transfer.

STAD aligns with constructivist principles by promoting active, student-centered learning in small, diverse groups. Within this structure, students engage in meaningful peer interactions where they can discuss concepts, practice vocabulary, and collaboratively solve language tasks.

The implementation of STAD followed five structured steps to support vocabulary acquisition. First, students underwent a vocabulary pretest to assess their baseline proficiency and identify learning gaps. Based on the results, they grouped into heterogeneous teams of 5–6 members to encourage peer support and collaborative learning. Next, the teacher delivered whole-class instruction by introducing new vocabulary using definitions, visuals, and contextual examples appropriate for B1-level learners. Following this, students will engage in team study sessions where they review and reinforce the vocabulary through worksheets, flashcards, games, and other guided activities. During this phase, students quiz one another and discuss word meanings, while the teacher circulates to facilitate and support understanding. After the team practice, students took an individual quiz to assess their learning, promoting both personal responsibility and fair team contribution. Finally, each student's quiz score is compared with their pretest results, and points are awarded to their team based on individual improvement. This process ensures that recognition is based on progress, motivating all students to contribute to team success.

The Concept of Social Constructivism

This collaborative process reflects the core ideas of social constructivism, which highlight how learning happens best through interaction and shared experience. The center of this theory is the Zone Proximal Development (ZPD), the range of tasks that a learner can perform with the help of more knowledgeable others or teachers. Lev Vygotsky's Social Constructivism thesis states that social worlds arise from people's engagements with their culture and society. By means of social negotiating and determining whether personal comprehension is feasible, knowledge develops (Vygotsky, 1978). Essentially, all interactions between two or more people offer the opportunity to learn something new or expand one's knowledge. This is an illustration of the intellectual interchange that takes place when individuals communicate. Constructivist learning theories place a strong emphasis on students actively creating their own knowledge through meaningful interaction and involvement in social environments (Schunk, 2020.) Optimal learning is facilitated by cognitive processes including inquiry, introspection, and integrating new information with existing knowledge as constructivism asserts. The fundamental tenet of constructivism is that education is an active process of creating meaning rather than merely absorbing information,

and that this process is frequently facilitated by cooperation with peers, teachers, and a larger social environment.

Social Constructivism asserts that knowledge is created through language and social interaction; therefore, it is social rather than individual. It believes knowledge is created through social processes and interactions not merely by observing the outside world. So, we find a constructivist orientation to learning that assigns the same value to the experience of learning as it does to the knowledge that is acquired, or the process is just as important as the product.

Learning requires the learner to actively engage in creativity and self-organization. Teachers need to let students ask questions, propose their own theories, and test the theories for possibility. Conflicts between a student's current understanding and experience create tension that requires the student to reflect on their own beliefs before looking to different perspectives. So, instructors should not discourage or avoid conflicts occurring from students' perspectives, instead they should endorse them.

Additionally, social constructivism is concerned with the role culture and context have in comprehending social occurrences and building knowledge from meaning thus (Amineh & Asl, 2015). Social constructivism theory is based on underlying assumptions regarding reality, knowledge, and learning, which are the foundation for comprehending and applying social constructivist ideas into teaching.

Reality is not independently existing and objective but co-constructed and defined by human interaction according to a social constructivist perspective. The world is considered to be co-constructed by the members within a group, meaning that reality has been discovered rather than socially constructed. Knowledge is considered to be a result of social and cultural processes. Humans build meaning in their existence by way of the interactions that they have with other human beings and the world, and thus knowledge ends up being a dynamic and contextualized human creation. Social constructivists argue that actually learning is a social process when learning is taking place. Learning does not occur in the head, or due to passive reception of information. Rather, authentic learning springs from engagement in social, collaborative activities that entail negotiation, interaction, and sharing.

Constructivist educational approaches encourage autonomy, social learning, and higher order thinking. STAD allows students to meet new language numerous times, use it in context, and receive constructive feedback from peers. Thus, from a constructivist perspective, STAD provides a useful structure for learning vocabulary, especially for international students who benefit from

socially engaging and supportive learning contexts (Schunk, 2020).

The efficiency of collaborative learning models such as Student Teams-Achievement Divisions (STAD) in promoting vocabulary acquisition, especially for multilingual and international students, has been confirmed by recent study. Ilyas (2017) conducted an experimental study with junior high school EFL learners and noted that students learned under STAD approaches had far better mastery of vocabulary than under conventional practices. The findings validate organized group activity under conventional practices. The findings validate that organized group activity under cooperative learning assists learners in consolidating the language into meaningful and contextual forms. A study by Ishtiq, Ali, and Salem (2017) also found that adult students learning English as a foreign language who were taught with the STAD method did much better on vocabulary tests ($p=.002$) than those who were not. This suggests that peer collaboration and shared responsibility support deeper cognitive engagement.

More empirical evidence comes from Purnami (2024) who found that teaching with STAD resulted in high vocabulary mastery rate – post-test mean score was 86.3% and 69.5% pre-test. As she explained, “*the cooperative learning model like STAD significantly increased student's vocabulary mastery by encouraging peer-to-peer explanation and team accountability, which created a more interactive and supportive learning environment*” (Purnami, 2024, p.233). Yawiloeng (2021) also found that peer scaffolding of EFL reading activities – clarifying meaning, asking questions, and co-constructing understanding – strongly improved vocabulary understanding and retention in multilingual classrooms. In this context, Ishtiaq, Ali, and Salem (2017) discovered that learning among EFL students was far more effective than under traditional frameworks, highlighting the structured and supportive aspects of its quiz-and-recognition stages.

In terms of vocabulary learning, the use of STAD gives foreign students the opportunity to participate in organized group activities that promote significant language exchanges, meaning clarification, and cooperative vocabulary usage reinforcement. This procedure promotes social integration and linguistic development, both of which are essential in multicultural educational settings.

Overall, Vygotsky (1978) sociocultural theory supported by recent studies (Ilyas, 2017; Ishtiaq et al., 2017; Purnami, 2024) provides a solid theoretical base for using STAD as a cooperative model to enhance vocabulary acquisition among international EFL learners.

The Concept of Social Interdependence

Social Interdependence Theory, which was initially developed by Deutsch (1949) and then refined by Johnson & Johnson in 1989, which argues that the operational structure or organizing principle of the interaction between others (cooperative, competitive or individualistic) plays a large role in group interaction and learning. STAD is a motivational design that creates interdependence among students as they work cooperatively, and team success depends on students' learning gains. This reciprocal structure allows for collaboration and the drive, accountability and support that is necessary, so active vocabulary falls into place. To be incentivized into contributing as well as improving language skills when the group succeeds. According to this interpretation of the theory, the structuring of goal structures in groups determines how members of that group interact and thereby affects learning, motivation and interpersonal relations.

At its core, Social Interdependence Theory is the idea that positive interdependence exists when group members feel such that they can succeed in the task at hand only if the other members succeed too. The negative interdependence, on the other hand, is when individuals believe they can only succeed at the expense of those with whom they compete, and no interdependence in which the outcomes are assumed to be independent of others' efforts (Johnson & Johnson 2009). Interdependence in a positive sense (promotive) leads to students motivating and helping on each other's activities, while interdependence in a negative sense (oppositional) produces competition and no cooperation.

Recent studies have indicated that positive interdependence in collaborative learning is central to success. Ahmadian, Amerian, and Tajabadi (2020) established that EFL learners engaged in group discussion practice learned and memorized more vocabulary and scored better on vocabulary tests than those who participated in non-cooperative activities. Lin (2018) also established that students learning words through collaborative activities scored better on vocabulary tests than cooperative learners. Thus, when we organize group work such as in STAD, students are able to tell, practice and rehearse in context using words—activities proven to enhance vocabulary retention and language acquisition.

A cooperative learning such as STAD is most effective to leverage the power of positive interdependence by combining collective goals, individual accountability and cooperative work to enhance language learning and student motivation (Ahmadian et al., 2020; Lin, 2018). In a language learning environment, structured social interaction is essential as it offers repeated practice and application of words on real communication.

Furthermore, recent studies have also discussed the flexibility of Social Interdependence Theory (SIT) to new learning environments as more recent studies also exist. Kwon and Park (2020) for instance constructed and validated Social Interdependence in Collaborative Learning Scale (SOCS) for measuring Students' Intersubjectivity Level in Collaborative tasks. Their findings substantiate that students with high mutual dependence show increased engagement and academic achievement (Davies et al, 2018 in Hofman et al., 1986) alike. Similarly, Gillies (2016) research finding supports SIT based structured cooperative learning environments for academic and personal growth.

Online and hybrid learning contexts are another example of where SIT has relevance as well. Despite the dissimilarities in communication style and dynamics of the environment and traditional classrooms, digital cooperative tasks correctly designed can trigger a powerful positive interdependence and group cohesiveness (van Leeuwen & Janssen 2019). This adds to the strength of the idea and how well it can be transferred between instruction formats.

Social Interdependence is an enthralling framework for international students learning vocabulary in a second language. Academic, linguistic and cultural obstacles make it hard for many international students to acquire vocabulary. In other words, STAD groups provide the social support of peers, fosters confidence through peer observation and sparks vocabulary contextualized. Vygotsky's perspective of learning through discourse and validation of SIT as interdisciplinary is in line with its notion. To sum up, Social Interdependence Theory postulates a validated theory—empirically based model to facilitate vocabulary learning of STAD cooperative learning at foreign students.

In conclusion, SIT establishes an educated-informed validated empiric model for cooperating STAD cooperative learning among foreign students' vocabulary acquisition. With respect to an interdependent collective, shared responsibility and cooperative interaction in real time, the dominating director of language learning becomes the social dimensions of learning via the social element of learning.

The Concept of Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning by Johnson and Johnson (2009) occurs when students engage in small group learning to complete common academic goals and it is the students' individual, as well as group learnings. Cooperative learning is built on the assumption that positive interdependence exists; in turn, a student's success is dependent on other students' achievements of other members in the same learning group. This method pervades the field of education and in all aspects of instruction and learning. Research has

shown that it boosts academic achievement, retention of facts, higher academic self-esteem and positive attitude in approaching tasks (Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

Intervening at the group level (cooperative learning) of students inadequately ensures the success of cooperative learning. Johnson & Johnson (2009) suggests that there are five necessary components for it to be interconnected. These include positive interdependence, promotive interaction, individual accountability, learning and developing social interpersonal skills. When students understand they are interdependent – which means their success depends on peers' achievement. The specifics are promotive interaction as students facilitate and inspire each other to learn. Everybody needs to be accountable for, therefore, and the group performance will be altered with individual accountability for each student. The development of social skills (like leading, communicating, making decisions and solving conflict) must wait. Teachers need to organize their classrooms according to the principles of effective cooperative learning which result in a small heterogeneous group (preferably 4 or 5 students) and observe participation and mastery of the content. Recent empirical evidence in physical education confirms that effective cooperative learning implementations consistently include these five components and positively impact students' cognitive, social, physical, and affective learning outcomes (Bores-García et al., 2021).

These are all essential components by which the STAD principles of teaching students in small but mixed-ability groups work, making students responsible for their own learning and for group learning, and making them assist each other in learning material, particularly vocabulary in language learning contexts. Positive dependence on STAD makes one's success contribute to group success. In addition, participatory collaborative interaction supports peer instruction and concept clarification between students. Also, the systematic accountabilities and shared reflections in STAD are conditions that Gillies (2016) specifies as necessary for the development of deeper learning and long-term scholarly involvement. The STAD model, then, has not only theoretical support, but scientifically proven to be a successful cooperative learning strategy that fosters cognitive growth and meaningful peer engagement.

Cooperative learning is commonly used because student-centered teaching - collaborative learning offers a means for the student to work together. Out of all different models, STAD strategy is one efficient and feasible model of achieving cooperative learning principles in an actual language classroom. As per Ilyas (2017), STAD strategy worked to learn vocabulary, and the present study had tremendous outcomes to support this on a theoretical basis. This research concluded that students in the experimental

class taught with STAD made significant vocabulary learning progress, from pre-test mean score 52.29 to post-test mean score 71.66; whereas the control group made comparatively small progress from 51.52 to 55.81. The findings determined that positive interdependence was maintained, one's achievement was contingent directly upon others' achievement in the group. It also involves individual responsibility, or each learner is responsible for his/her learning while they are within the group. All these elements encourage active participation, peer assistance, and common knowledge-construction-all the pillars of Social Interdependence Theory and Cooperative Learning Theory. From these paths, students are taught directly from vocabulary through structured group exercises, discussion, and peer assistance.

Rafique, Mansoor, and Bint-e-Mehmood (2021) found that using cooperative learning strategies like STAD really helps intermediate students develop their vocabulary. In their study, students who worked together did better than those in regular classrooms. They noticed that teamwork and individual responsibility were key parts of this success. These findings provide additional evidence to the advantage of STAD for supporting learning environments that are student-centred, where learning is interactive, and it is guided by peers that promote.

Collectively, the ideas from Social Constructivism, Social Interdependence Theory, and Cooperative Learning Theory work together well to explain why the STAD method is effective for teaching vocabulary. They all believe that learning occurs when individuals interact, collaborate, and share responsibilities in a social situation. STAD really puts these ideas into action by encouraging teamwork, personal accountability, and peer learning in small groups made up of diverse students. As stated by Ilyas (2017) and others, including Purnami, Adnyani, and Suarnajaya (2024), as well as Rafique, Mansoor, and Bint-e-Mehmood (2021), STAD effectively boosts vocabulary skills, keeps students engaged, and improves academic performance, particularly in diverse classrooms where students speak different languages and come from various cultures.

Taking these into account, it is evident that STAD (Student Teams-Achievement Divisions) is a solid choice for helping students improve their vocabulary in learning a new language. It is a thoughtfully planned approach to make sure students can really connect with the material, interact with each other, and take charge of their own learning in a supportive environment.

III. METHODOLOGY

The research employed a one-group experimental design to investigate the impact of the Student Teams Achievement

Division (STAD) cooperative learning strategy on vocabulary acquisition among international students. The research focused exclusively on students enrolled in the Vocabulary Builder course at the Center of English Language Students of Lapulapu-Cebu International College. Instead of utilizing a pretest-posttest approach, the study assessed the students' vocabulary acquisition levels before and after the implementation of the STAD method. The objective was to examine whether continuous exposure to STAD contributes to measurable improvements in vocabulary learning. The findings are expected to offer valuable insights for enhancing instructional materials through the implementation of the STAD cooperative

learning strategy in English as a Second Language (ESL) settings.

Research Hypothesis:

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the vocabulary performance of the experimental group before and after using the STAD strategy.

Scoring Procedures

The qualitative interpretation of the respondents' vocabulary acquisition skills and their corresponding scores were based on the following scoring ranges, aligned with the learning goals outlined in the Vocabulary Builder course, as approved by TESDA.

Raw Scores	Categories	Description
0 - 6	Did Not Meet Expectations	Shows very weak vocabulary knowledge. The student struggles to identify correct meanings and interpret words in context, requiring significant support and practice. (24–30 mistakes; 0%–20% accuracy)
7 - 12	Fairly Satisfactory	Demonstrates limited vocabulary knowledge. The student shows partial understanding but frequently misinterprets meanings or struggles to use context clues. (18–23 mistakes; 21%–40% accuracy)
13 - 18	Satisfactory	Shows developing vocabulary skills. The student can identify some correct meanings and use context clues, but inconsistently and with noticeable errors. (12–17 mistakes; 41%–60% accuracy)
19 - 24	Very Satisfactory	Demonstrates solid vocabulary understanding. The student often identifies correct word meanings, distinguishes terms, and uses context effectively, with only occasional errors. (6–11 mistakes; 61%–80% accuracy)
25 - 30	Outstanding	Demonstrates excellent mastery of vocabulary. The student consistently identifies correct meanings, uses context clues effectively, and shows strong comprehension of familiar and unfamiliar terms. (0–5 mistakes; 81%–100% accuracy)

To ensure practicality, validity, and reliability of the main instrument, pilot testing is of utmost importance. Accordingly, a research-made test was pre-tested to 10 students to verify students' difficulties in dealing with the items which ensure completeness and clarity of the instrument. Cronbach Alpha was used as a statistical tool to find out the reliability of the test. The pilot test/dry run responses yielded a Cronbach Alpha value of 0.680. It indicated that the reliability of the test is acceptable.

For the qualitative data gathered through Focus Group Discussions (FGD), Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic

analysis method was applied. This involves familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, identifying patterns or themes, reviewing and defining these themes, and producing a narrative report. This approach helps interpret students' experiences, perspectives, and challenges in vocabulary learning under the implemented strategy.

IV. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Table 1: The vocabulary acquisition level of the EFL learners before using the STAD

Performance Level	Frequency	Percentage
Did not meet Expectations	0	0.00
Fairly Satisfactory	10	33.33
Satisfactory	15	50.00
Very Satisfactory	5	16.67
Outstanding	0	0.00
Total	30	100.00
Average	14.7	Satisfactory

As shown in Table 1, before the intervention, the majority of the EFL learners achieved a Satisfactory level of vocabulary acquisition, with 15 students (50.00%) falling into this category. This was followed by 10 students (33.33%) who demonstrated a Fairly Satisfactory performance, and 5 students (16.67%) who reached a Very Satisfactory level. Notably, none of the students fell into the Did Not Meet Expectations or Outstanding categories.

The computed average score of 14.7, which corresponds to a Satisfactory performance level, suggests that students had a moderate understanding of vocabulary before the intervention but still had significant room for improvement.

The findings indicate that the students' vocabulary acquisition levels prior to the intervention were generally average to below-average for most participants. Since the majority were clustered in the Satisfactory and Fairly Satisfactory categories, it highlights the need for targeted instructional strategies and enhanced teaching materials to support students in developing stronger vocabulary skills.

These baseline results establish a foundation for assessing the effectiveness of subsequent teaching approaches and serve as a reference point for measuring potential improvements in students' vocabulary acquisition.

As there has been consistent research foregrounding the importance and need for effective instructional strategies, teachers are encouraged to adopt approaches that promote active learning and engagement. As for Alqahtani (2015) where the focal point of his study is that without intentional and interactive approaches, EFL learners can often only withhold limited vocabulary which explains why there are a lot of students who remain at the average level or below

average levels. Recent studies have also emphasized the importance of cooperative learning and technology-enhanced strategies. Basri, Busa, and Tahir's (2022) study in Makassar disclosed that cooperative learning groups substantially improved students' vocabulary acquisition, exhibiting the favorable effect of a collaborative environment on language learning. Correspondingly, Nurkhamidah and Rofiah (2020) found that the application of the STAD strategy in the classroom has boosted elementary students' mastery of vocabulary in creating simple sentences, demonstrating the effectiveness of STAD in language performance.

Furthermore, studies have shown that interactive and student-centered strategies are remunerative in multimedia and flipped classrooms. For example, Liu (2022) disclosed that the use of mobile digital flashcards of EFL learners have increased vocabulary mastery compared to students who are exposed to traditional teaching methods. In a study of Hung (2023) it showed that tertiary students who created and used video learning materials in a flipped classroom have attained substantial growth in vocabulary than those who only took teacher-made content. These findings show and suggest that strategies that promote active participation, collaboration, and multimodal engagement such as STAD can traverse the gap that is being observed in performance and would result in stronger vocabulary acquisition development.

Table 2: The vocabulary acquisition level of the EFL learners after using the STAD

Performance Level	Frequency	Percentage
Did not meet Expectations	0	0.00
Fairly Satisfactory	0	0.00
Satisfactory	10	33.33
Very Satisfactory	11	36.67
Outstanding	9	30.00
Total	30	100.00
Average	21.87	Very Satisfactory

As shown in Table 2, after the intervention, there was a notable improvement in the students' vocabulary acquisition levels. The highest proportion of students, 11 participants (36.67%), achieved a Very Satisfactory level, followed closely by 9 students (30.00%) who reached the Outstanding level. Additionally, 10 students (33.33%) remained in the Satisfactory category.

It is significant to note that no students were rated under the Fairly Satisfactory or Did Not Meet Expectations categories, indicating an overall positive shift in vocabulary acquisition performance. The computed average score of 21.87, corresponding to a Very Satisfactory level, demonstrated a substantial improvement compared to the students' performance before the intervention.

The results imply that the students developed a stronger grasp of vocabulary after the intervention, as evidenced by the substantial increase in the number of students achieving Very Satisfactory and Outstanding performance levels. This suggests that instructional approaches and materials designed to actively engage students can contribute significantly to improving their vocabulary acquisition.

Furthermore, these findings highlight the effectiveness of implementing structured and interactive learning strategies in enhancing students' overall language proficiency. The improvements recorded here provide a strong foundation for evaluating and refining future instructional designs aimed at supporting EFL learners in developing essential vocabulary skills.

The results in Table 2 are also in line with the previous studies that have established the positive effects of STAD on the vocabulary development of students. As an example, Tuan (2018) has shown that EFL learners, when taught by the means of STAD, were retaining vocabulary better than the students taught using the traditional teacher-centered

teaching approach. The researchers explained these gains by the fact that organized collaboration with peers and accountability promoted more active involvement of students in new vocabulary.

On the same note, Nurkhamidah and Rofiah (2020) observed that STAD application in the EFL classrooms in Indonesia had a significant impact on vocabulary acquisition among the students. Their findings emphasized that group competition and cooperation influenced students to be more active and this more vocabulary was acquired. These results are similar to the gains in the current research, especially the significant growth in the number of those students who scored on the 'Very Satisfactory' and 'Outstanding' scales.

More recently, Sugandi, Latief and Natsir (2022) discovered that the creation of student study groups based on the use of cooperative learning, e.g., STAD, resulted in the improvement of vocabulary acquisition among students and the development of improved collaboration skills. This implies that interpersonal communication and collective accountability are essential in the enhancement of language performance. Based on this, as Hung (2023) showed, STAD with gamified activities led to motivation as well as vocabulary acquisition supporting the perception that dynamic and interactive group-based interventions also work.

Taken together, these studies prove that STAD is a viable teaching tool in the process of enhancing vocabulary learning in EFL learners. The gains noted in this research, in which no students were left at the 'Fairly Satisfactory' or 'Did Not Meet Expectations' level, again contribute to the argument that the structure of cooperative learning can significantly improve the language proficiencies of the students.

Table 3: The significant difference in the vocabulary acquisition of the EFL learners before and after performing the STAD

Vocabulary Acquisition Level of the EFL learners	SD	Mean	Mean difference	Statistic	p	Decision	Interpretation
Posttest	5.28	21.90	7.17	14.5	<.001	Reject Ho	Significant
Pretest	4.40	14.70					

Effect Size: 2.65

*Significant if $p < 0.05$ **Highly Significant if $p < 0.01$

Table 3 shows that the students' vocabulary acquisition levels significantly improved after the intervention. The posttest mean score of 21.90 was notably higher than the pretest mean score of 14.70, resulting in a mean difference of 7.17. The computed t-statistic of 14.50 with a p-value < .001 indicates that the difference between the pretest and posttest scores is highly significant.

Additionally, the computed effect size of 2.65 suggests a very large practical impact based on Cohen's guidelines, meaning the intervention had a strong and meaningful influence on students' vocabulary acquisition.

The findings provide strong evidence that the intervention substantially enhanced the vocabulary acquisition of the EFL learners. The significant increase in scores demonstrates that incorporating structured, interactive, and collaborative strategies in vocabulary instruction can lead to marked improvements in language proficiency.

Moreover, the large effect size implies that similar instructional approaches could be highly beneficial if applied to other contexts with EFL learners. Educators may consider integrating more active learning strategies into their teaching to foster better vocabulary retention and acquisition.

The difference between pretest and posttest students' performance surfaces strong proof as other studies concluded the effectiveness of STAD strategy on language learning improvement. For example, Tuan (2018) reported that STAD promoted teamwork and accountability for effective retention of new words among EFL learners; thus had a positive effect on vocabulary acquisition. Likewise, Nurkhamidah and Rofiah (2020) found that implementation of STAD proved better in vocabulary mastery than conventional methods, highlighting the

importance of structured group interaction in second language classrooms.

Later research offers additional evidence of significant influence of cooperative learning. Sugandi et al. (2022) demonstrated that establishing study groups through cooperative learning procedures enhanced vocabulary learning achievements in Indonesian EFL students, noting that peer support and working collaboratively increase engagement and retention. In a different setting, Hung (2023) illustrated that cooperative and gamified team-based approaches enhanced both motivation and vocabulary performance, confirming that learner-centered group work can contribute to significant acquisition.

These results overlap with the results of the present study, especially the huge effect (2.65) which suggests a strong practical influence of STAD on vocabulary learning. Both pieces of evidence combined lead to an indication that structured cooperative strategies do not only enhance test performance but also foster a more interesting and supportive learning environment. This demonstrates the possibility of STAD to be implemented more widely in any EFL setting in order to foster a greater vocabulary development and language competence.

Students' Experiences in their use of STAD

The sharing of students' experiences in the use of STAD was conducted face-to-face with eight (8) voluntarily participating students who signed the consent form. The actual interview with respondents provided perceptions from the students and a representative picture on the implementation of STAD in their Vocabulary Builder classes, which might not have been covered by the survey questionnaire alone. The respondents answered the survey questionnaire before they were invited for the interview

and questions were interpreted in their own language for better understanding.

Before the conduct of the sharing, the volunteered students were gathered, and a letter requesting their permission to take part in the interview, along with the mechanics of the inquiry, was read to them. Since they all agreed on the terms presented to them, the students then proceeded to the schedule. The teacher asked the students about their most convenient time for the conduct of the interview. Since all committed to spare their time at 4 to 5 o'clock in the afternoon, the date was already set. The sharing was recorded with permission through a phone recorder.

The main question about the students' experiences during the conduct of the Student Teams-Achievement Divisions (STAD) was first read aloud. The sub-questions supporting the main inquiry revolve on the same element of STAD reflected in the survey questionnaire. The students' answers were categorized into sub-topics revolving around the students' experiences on STAD in their Vocabulary Builder class. The following subtopics are: the advantages and disadvantages of STAD, feeling during the use of STAD, preference of strategy in acquiring vocabulary and the aspects of STAD that helped students understand texts or passages better.

On the whole, STAD was effective in stimulating not only the learning of vocabulary but general text comprehension as it promoted peer scaffolding. Rokmana et al. (2025) also showed that STAD, together with media support, could enhance vocabulary learning and understanding as it allowed students to develop and explain meanings together. Moreover, Khalid and Hammed (2023) discovered that STAD has a substantial positive effect on reading comprehension as students enjoyed mutual views and explanations provided by peers.

V. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the Student Teams-Achievement Divisions (STAD) significantly improved the vocabulary acquisition of EFL learners. Learners' performance increased from moderate to very satisfactory and outstanding levels, supported by a statistically significant difference and a large effect size. The approach also promoted teamwork, collaboration, and responsibility among students, though issues of group dependence emerged. Overall, structured, interactive, and collaborative strategies proved effective in enhancing vocabulary mastery and language proficiency.

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Psychological Determinants Influencing Performance Anxiety in Young Athletes in Haryana: A Comprehensive Study

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Abstract— This study examines the psychological factors influencing performance anxiety among young athletes in Haryana, a state renowned for its robust sporting culture and highly competitive standards. Using secondary data from research journals, sports psychology literature, government reports, and sports federation documents, the study identifies key psychological factors, including self-esteem, motivation, coping strategies, perfectionism, parental pressure, peer comparison, and the coach–athlete relationship, as major contributors to performance-related stress. The socio-cultural context of Haryana further amplifies these pressures, with community expectations, gender norms, and rural–urban differences shaping athletes' mental experiences in distinct ways. Rural athletes often face community-driven pressure and limited psychological support, while urban athletes encounter dual expectations from academics and sports. The findings emphasise the importance of integrating psychological skill training, emotional regulation techniques, and supportive coaching practices into athlete development programs. The study asserts that addressing psychological determinants is crucial for improving long-term sports performance, preventing burnout, and supporting overall athlete well-being in Haryana. It concludes with recommendations for policy reforms, institutional support, and increased access to sports psychologists to foster a more balanced and mentally healthy sports environment.



Keywords— Performance Anxiety, Sports Psychology, Coach-Athlete Relationship, Social Judgement.

I. INTRODUCTION

Performance anxiety has become one of the most discussed psychological challenges faced by young athletes in competitive sports systems. In sports psychology, performance anxiety is generally defined as a stress response—either temporary or trait-based—that occurs when athletes see an imbalance between demands and their coping abilities. The foundational work of Charles D. Spielberger, who distinguished between trait and state anxiety, showed that competitive anxiety arises not only from physical preparation but also from deep psychological patterns influencing how young athletes interpret pressure. Similarly, the multidimensional anxiety theory proposed by Rainer Martens explained that anxiety includes both cognitive components—such as worry, fear

of failure, and negative expectations—and somatic components like physiological arousal, tension, and reduced motor coordination. These theories suggest that the performance of young athletes is heavily influenced by psychological factors that impact their reactions to competitive environments.

In India, especially in Haryana, this topic is particularly relevant due to the region's strong socio-cultural ties to sports. Haryana consistently produces a disproportionate share of national and international athletes despite its relatively small population. Institutions like the Sports Authority of India and the Haryana Sports and Youth Affairs Department promote structured training through academies, residential sports centres, and programs like Khelo India, all of which create a competitive environment

from a young age. While these structures improve access to training, exposure, and physical development, they also increase pressures related to achievement, expectations, and performance outcomes. These pressures are often examined in studies on adolescent sports participation, where the developmental stage of youth—characterised by evolving identity, emotional sensitivity, and cognitive immaturity—makes them particularly vulnerable to performance anxiety (Weinberg & Gould, 2019).

Among the key psychological factors, self-confidence and self-efficacy have been consistently identified as primary predictors of how athletes experience anxiety. Based on the self-efficacy framework introduced by Albert Bandura, athletes who believe they can perform a skill under pressure are less likely to see competitive situations as threatening. In Haryana, where early specialisation and intensive training are common, fluctuations in self-confidence—often linked to selection trials, rankings, and peer comparisons—can significantly boost anxiety responses.

Another important factor is perceived parental and social expectation, which is frequently emphasised in studies on youth sport behaviour in India. Haryana's socio-cultural emphasis on honour, success, and achievement can intensify parental pressure, particularly for boys in high-visibility sports like wrestling, boxing, and athletics. Research shows that excessive expectations, fear of disappointing family, and societal judgment increase cognitive anxiety, especially before high-stakes competitions (Scanlan et al., 2005).

Furthermore, the coach–athlete relationship functions as both a protective factor and a trigger for performance anxiety. The coach-athlete interaction model by Sophia Jowett suggests that supportive communication, empathy, and trust lower anxiety, whereas controlling or authoritarian coaching styles heighten psychological pressure. Haryana's traditional coaching culture, especially in rural akharas and district-level academies, often relies on discipline-driven methods that may unintentionally heighten performance fear among young athletes.

Personality traits—such as perfectionism, neuroticism, and competitive trait anxiety—also play an important role. Perfectionism, while motivating, can also lead to rumination, fear of mistakes, and overthinking, which in turn increase pre-competition anxiety. Many young athletes in Haryana, influenced by role models and high medal expectations, tend to set unrealistic standards, raising their vulnerability to anxiety when facing tough opponents or setbacks.

Finally, coping skills and emotional regulation influence how well young athletes handle anxiety. The lack of

structured mental conditioning programs in many state-level training centres means athletes often depend on untrained coping mechanisms, which can make them more prone to cognitive overload and somatic symptoms of anxiety.

Considering these various psychological factors, understanding performance anxiety among young athletes in Haryana is both a scholarly and practical necessity for sports development.

Definition of Performance Anxiety

- i. According to Weinberg and Gould (2019), Performance anxiety refers to a state of heightened worry, tension, or apprehension experienced before or during a performance situation, where individuals fear that they will be unable to meet internal or external expectations. In sports psychology, performance anxiety is defined as “*anxiety resulting from an athlete's perception of competitive stress, which manifests through cognitive worry, physiological arousal, and behavioural disruptions that impair performance*”.
- ii. According to Patel and Singh (2018), performance anxiety is particularly prevalent among young athletes because they often encounter high expectations from coaches, parents, and peers, making the threat of negative evaluation more intense.

Types of Performance Anxiety in Sports

There are four types of performance anxiety in sports: -

- i. Cognitive Anxiety
- ii. Somatic Anxiety
- iii. Trait Anxiety
- iv. State Anxiety

Cognitive Anxiety

It refers to the mental components of anxiety experienced by athletes. It includes worry, fear of failure, negative expectations, difficulty concentrating, and intrusive thoughts during performance situations. When cognitive anxiety is high, athletes may overthink their actions, doubt their abilities, and misjudge competitive situations. This form of anxiety directly interferes with decision-making, focus, and confidence, making it one of the most influential psychological barriers to optimal performance.

Somatic Anxiety

Somatic anxiety is the physical or physiological aspect of anxiety. It includes symptoms like increased heart rate, muscle tension, sweating, butterflies in the stomach, shakiness, and shortness of breath. Somatic anxiety usually

increases as competition approaches and peaks during the early stages of performance. While moderate physiological arousal can enhance performance, excessive somatic symptoms often interfere with coordination, timing, and motor control, leading to a decline in performance.

Trait Anxiety

Trait anxiety is a stable personality characteristic that reflects an individual's general tendency to perceive situations as threatening. Athletes high in trait anxiety are more likely to respond with worry and arousal even in low-pressure situations. This type of anxiety influences how frequently and intensely an athlete experiences cognitive or somatic symptoms across different competitions. Trait anxiety acts as a predisposing factor, increasing vulnerability to performance anxiety.

State Anxiety

State anxiety is a temporary, situation-specific emotional response that varies with the level of perceived threat in a competition. It has both cognitive and somatic components, and it fluctuates throughout the event, typically increasing before competition and decreasing as athletes settle into their performance. State anxiety is highly sensitive to factors such as opponent strength, crowd presence, coaching feedback, and the importance of the event. Unlike trait anxiety, state anxiety is not constant; it changes according to the environment.

Importance of Psychological Determinants in Sports

Psychological factors play a fundamental role in shaping athletic performance and overall sporting success. While physical fitness, technical skills, and tactical knowledge remain vital aspects of sports, athletes are increasingly recognising that mental strength often determines the difference between winners and competitors. Sports psychology research, beginning with the work of Coleman Griffith, has demonstrated that cognition, emotion, and motivation influence how athletes respond to training and competition.

One of the most crucial psychological factors is motivation, which impacts persistence, training intensity, and long-term commitment. According to Edward Deci's self-determination theory, athletes with intrinsic motivation tend to perform better, learn faster, and cope more effectively with setbacks. Closely related to motivation is self-confidence, which affects how athletes perceive and tackle challenges. The concept of self-efficacy, introduced by Albert Bandura, suggests that athletes who believe in their abilities are more likely to remain calm, take calculated risks, and perform effectively under pressure.

Emotional regulation is another vital psychological component. Athletes regularly face stress, fear of failure, and high expectations. Effective emotional control enables them to stay focused, maintain composure, and prevent performance disruptions during critical moments. Conversely, unmanaged stress or anxiety can adversely affect coordination, decision-making, and reaction time. This is especially true in high-pressure settings where somatic and cognitive anxiety can hinder performance.

Attention and concentration are equally important. The ability to maintain focus despite distractions allows athletes to execute skills with accuracy. Mental skills such as visualisation and goal-setting enhance readiness and consistency. Furthermore, the quality of the coach-athlete relationship, as highlighted in models developed by Sophia Jowett, influences communication, trust, and psychological resilience.

Relevance for Young Athletes in Haryana

Psychological determinants hold significant importance for young athletes in Haryana, a state known for its strong sporting traditions and high representation in national and international competitions. Haryana consistently produces elite performers in wrestling, boxing, athletics, and kabaddi, fostering an environment where competitive expectations are very high (Singh & Hooda, 2020). In this context, mental skills become a crucial factor in performance, particularly for young athletes who are still developing their emotional and cognitive maturity. Many young athletes in Haryana start intensive sports training early, often in residential academies and state-supported sports centres. While this early focus can improve physical skills, it also exposes athletes to psychological pressures such as performance anxiety, fear of failure, and stress from parental and community expectations (Kaur & Sharma, 2021). Research indicates that these pressures can impair concentration, erode self-confidence, and negatively impact overall performance if not effectively managed (Weinberg & Gould, 2019).

Additionally, a large number of Haryana's athletes come from rural backgrounds, where access to sports psychologists, counselling services, and mental health support remains limited (Mehta & Singh, 2022). This lack increases vulnerability to unmanaged stress and emotional issues. Building psychological skills—such as resilience, goal setting, attentional control, and coping strategies—can significantly enhance performance consistency and support long-term athlete development.

As Haryana continues to engage with national programmes like Khelo India and Target Olympic Podium Scheme, the importance of mental readiness becomes even clearer. Psychological preparedness not only helps achieve

competitive success but also promotes the overall well-being of youth athletes in a demanding sporting environment (Raizada, 2020).

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Manoj Goel's (2015) study examined competitive anxiety differences between high- and low-achieving female university football teams in Haryana using the Sports Competition Anxiety Test (SCAT). The sample ($n = 80$) and group-comparison design showed that lower-achieving teams displayed higher competitive anxiety than higher-achieving teams, suggesting that anxiety levels relate inversely to performance outcomes. The study highlights local dynamics (team status, performance expectations) as important determinants of anxiety among young female athletes in Haryana and underscores the value of routine anxiety screening in university and district-level programs.

Wazir Singh's (2014) district-level investigation of school-age cricket players in Bhiwani (Haryana) measured pre-competition anxiety using the SCAT and compared high-performing and low-performing teams (U-19 sample, $n \approx 96$). Results indicated that (a) teams with moderate anxiety tended to perform better than extremely low or very high anxious teams, and (b) high-performing teams often show a more stable/moderate anxiety profile before matches. This study is useful for understanding **optimal anxiety (inverted-U/zone of optimal functioning)** dynamics in Haryana youth sport and suggests that interventions should aim to regulate—not entirely eliminate—pre-competition arousal. The district focus (Bhiwani) provides directly relevant empirical evidence for your Haryana thesis chapter on determinants and performance outcomes.

Objectives of the Study

- To identify key psychological factors affecting performance anxiety.
- To analyse their impact on athletic performance.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is based exclusively on secondary data. The nature of the data is descriptive and analytical, focusing on existing empirical and theoretical work related to performance anxiety, sports psychology, and the socio-cultural context of Haryana. The scope of secondary data encompasses national and international research on young athletes, with a specific emphasis on psychological variables such as self-esteem, motivation, perfectionism, coping strategies, parental pressure, and coach–athlete relationships. Data were collected from peer-reviewed

journals, published reports of sports authorities, government documents, and sports psychology textbooks. Relevant literature was identified using academic databases, institutional repositories, and official federation websites. The collected material was then systematically reviewed, categorised, and thematically analysed to identify key psychological determinants and patterns related to performance anxiety among young athletes. The synthesis of these secondary sources provided a comprehensive conceptual framework and contextual understanding, despite the absence of primary field-based data collection.

Theoretical Models of Performance Anxiety

The understanding of performance anxiety in sport has been shaped by several theoretical models that explain how cognitive and physiological processes interact to affect athletic performance.

i. Multidimensional Anxiety Theory

Multidimensional Anxiety Theory is a sports psychology model developed in the 1980s, which proposes that anxiety is composed of two distinct components: cognitive anxiety and somatic anxiety. According to the theory, **cognitive anxiety** (worry, negative thoughts) has a **negative linear** relationship with performance, meaning performance declines as cognitive anxiety increases. In contrast, **somatic anxiety** (physiological arousal) follows an **inverted-U pattern**, where moderate arousal enhances performance but excessive arousal leads to deterioration. This model, developed based on competitive settings, emphasises that each anxiety component influences performance differently (Gould & Weinberg, 2019).

ii. Catastrophe Theory

Another important framework is the Catastrophe Theory, which expands on the multidimensional model by introducing the concept of a sudden and dramatic performance breakdown. According to this theory, performance depends on the interaction between **cognitive anxiety** and **physiological arousal**. When cognitive anxiety is **low**, arousal follows an inverted-U curve. However, when cognitive anxiety is **high**, increased arousal can push an athlete past a critical threshold, resulting in a **catastrophic drop** in performance. Recovery from this drop requires a substantial reduction in both arousal and anxiety levels, highlighting the nonlinear and fragile nature of performance under pressure (Hardy, 1996).

Psychological Factors Influencing Performance Anxiety of Young Athletes in Haryana

Self-Esteem and Confidence

Self-esteem reflects a person's overall sense of self-worth, while self-confidence refers to belief in one's ability to perform specific tasks. Individuals with low self-esteem often interpret performance situations as threatening, fear negative evaluation, and expect failure, leading to increased anxiety. High confidence, on the other hand, reduces worry and enhances focus. Research shows that self-esteem moderates the relationship between stress and performance anxiety—low self-esteem athletes and students are more prone to anxiety under evaluative pressure.

Motivation (Intrinsic and Extrinsic)

Intrinsic motivation (internal desire for mastery, enjoyment, growth) typically reduces performance anxiety because the person feels internally driven rather than pressured. Extrinsic motivation (rewards, recognition, approval) may increase anxiety when individuals feel controlled or judged by others. Studies show that athletes driven mainly by external rewards show higher competitive anxiety than those motivated intrinsically.

Coping Strategies and Emotional Regulation

The ability to manage emotions before and during performance plays a major role in anxiety levels. Individuals who employ adaptive coping strategies—such as cognitive reappraisal, mindfulness, positive self-talk, or problem-focused planning—experience lower anxiety and improved performance. Maladaptive coping, including avoidance, rumination, and suppression, strongly predicts high performance anxiety.

Parental Expectations and Pressure

Parental pressure—whether through high expectations, criticism, or conditional approval—can heighten performance anxiety in children, adolescents, and young athletes. Over-involved or overly demanding parents increase fear of failure and worry about disappointing the family. Conversely, supportive parenting lowers fear and strengthens confidence.

Coach–Athlete Relationship

The quality of the coach–athlete relationship influences emotional security during training and competition. Autonomy-supportive coaches foster competence and confidence, reducing anxiety. In contrast, controlling or overly critical coaches increase athletes' worries, self-doubt, and fear of punishment or evaluation. Research shows that supportive coaching improves coping and reduces competitive anxiety.

Peer Comparison and Social Judgment

Performance anxiety often increases in social-evaluative contexts where individuals compare themselves with

peers. A fear of being judged, ridiculed, or perceived as inferior heightens stress responses. Adolescents and performers in group environments (sports teams, music ensembles, classrooms) are especially vulnerable to peer-based anxiety.

Personality Traits (e.g., Neuroticism, Perfectionism)

Certain personality traits predispose individuals to greater performance anxiety:

- i. Neuroticism: Linked with emotional instability, worry, and sensitivity to stress. High-neuroticism individuals are more reactive to evaluative threats.
- ii. Perfectionism: Particularly *perfectionistic concerns* (fear of mistakes, self-criticism) predict high anxiety and poor coping.
- iii. Trait Anxiety: Stable tendency to experience anxiety across situations.

Meta-analyses show that maladaptive perfectionism and neuroticism are major predictors of performance anxiety in sports, academics, and arts (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1985; Stoeber & Otto, 2006).

Stress Management Skills

Individuals with weak stress-management abilities (poor relaxation skills, time pressure coping, or lack of breathing control) experience higher physiological arousal, which can trigger or worsen performance anxiety. Training in stress-management techniques—such as breathing exercises, progressive muscle relaxation, and cognitive restructuring—significantly reduces anxiety (Smith, 1980; Weinberg & Gould, 2019).

Goal Orientation (Outcome vs. Task-focused)

Goal orientation strongly influences how performers interpret success and failure:

- i. Outcome-oriented individuals focus on winning, ranking, or outperforming others. This increases anxiety, especially when outcomes feel uncontrollable.
- ii. Task-oriented individuals focus on improvement, mastery, and effort. This reduces anxiety by shifting attention from evaluation to personal growth.

Research consistently shows that task-focused athletes and students experience less performance anxiety and perform more consistently under pressure.

Socio-Cultural Context of Haryana

The socio-cultural environment of Haryana plays a crucial role in shaping the psychological experiences of young

athletes and performers. Factors such as the state's competitive sports culture, entrenched gender norms, and rural–urban distinctions influence how individuals perceive pressure, success, and failure.

Competitive Sports Culture in Haryana

Haryana is widely regarded as one of India's strongest sporting states, known for producing Olympic and international medalists in wrestling, boxing, athletics, kabaddi, and shooting. This long-standing sporting tradition is rooted in rural physical culture, including *akhadas* (wrestling arenas), youth sports competitions, and community-sponsored training camps. Because sports success is associated with prestige, honour, and upward mobility, families often encourage children to pursue athletic training from a young age. The state government's generous policies—cash rewards, government jobs, and infrastructural support—further solidify sports as a viable career option.

However, this strong sports ecosystem also generates intense psychological pressure. Athletes frequently compare themselves with high-performing peers and local role models such as the Phogat sisters, Neeraj Chopra, Bajrang Punia, and Sakshi Malik. The expectation to maintain Haryana's reputation for excellence leads to heightened performance anxiety, particularly among young athletes who fear disappointing their families or losing community respect. Thus, while the sports culture of Haryana is empowering, it simultaneously fosters a high-pressure environment where success becomes closely tied to identity and self-worth.

Gender Norms and Societal Expectations

Haryana has traditionally been a patriarchal society, where gender norms influence participation in sports and public life. While the state has made notable progress in female empowerment—especially due to the visibility of successful women athletes—girls still encounter significant socio-cultural constraints. These include concerns about safety, limited mobility, restrictions on attire, and expectations related to household duties. As a result, girls often feel pressure to justify their involvement in sports, leading to heightened anxiety about meeting performance standards or proving their capability.

On the other hand, boys face pressure rooted in masculinity norms that emphasise strength, stamina, aggression, and winning. Failure is often equated with weakness, making it emotionally difficult for male athletes to express vulnerability or seek psychological help. For both genders, societal expectations shape not just participation but also emotional experience: girls struggle with external scrutiny and restrictive norms, while boys

grapple with internalised ideals of toughness and dominance. These gendered patterns create differentiated yet equally significant psychological stressors for athletes across the state.

Rural vs. Urban Differences in Psychological Pressure

Haryana's rural and urban environments differ substantially in terms of sports culture, opportunities, and psychological demands. In rural areas, sports are deeply embedded in community life, and athletes often train collectively in village arenas. Community pride plays a major role—success brings honour not only to the individual but to the entire village. This collective pride can be motivating but also creates strong pressure to succeed, as failure is socially visible and widely discussed. Rural athletes may also experience limited access to sports psychologists, modern training systems, and professional coaching, which intensifies anxiety about competition.

Urban athletes, by contrast, typically have access to better facilities, a wider range of sports options, and professional support systems. However, they often face performance pressure from multiple fronts—academic expectations, competitive school environments, and parental aspirations for holistic success. Urban settings also involve greater peer comparison due to larger talent pools and exposure to national-level competitions. While rural athletes are more affected by community-driven pressure, urban athletes deal with individualistic pressure linked to self-achievement and future career prospects.

IV. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Interventions to Reduce Performance Anxiety

Reducing performance anxiety among young athletes in Haryana requires a multi-level approach that addresses individual, social, and structural factors. Psychological counselling services should be made accessible in training academies, schools, and sports centres to help athletes understand and manage anxiety triggers. Regular workshops on stress reduction, healthy coping mechanisms, and emotional awareness can help athletes build resilience. Relaxation-based interventions, such as deep breathing, meditation, guided imagery, and progressive muscle relaxation, should be integrated into pre-competition routines. Coaches and parents must be sensitised to avoid punitive or excessively critical behaviour, and instead adopt a supportive, growth-oriented approach that reduces the fear of failure. Creating a non-judgmental team environment in which mistakes are viewed as part of the learning process can significantly reduce performance pressure.

2. Psychological Skill Training Modules

Introducing structured **Psychological Skill Training (PST)** modules is essential for improving mental readiness. PST programs should include components such as self-talk regulation, goal-setting techniques, visualisation, attentional control, and emotional regulation exercises. Training modules may be delivered by certified sports psychologists or trained coaches who understand the unique socio-cultural context of Haryana. Sessions can be conducted weekly and integrated into regular practice schedules. Young athletes should be taught how to develop pre-performance routines, manage internal distractions, and shift from outcome-based to process-based thinking. Over time, these modules help athletes build long-term confidence, increase intrinsic motivation, and enhance overall mental toughness. Regular assessment of athletes' psychological skills can further guide personalised interventions.

3. Policy and Institutional Suggestions

At the systemic level, policy measures are necessary to institutionalise psychological well-being within Haryana's sports ecosystem. Sports institutions—such as state sports departments, academies, and athletic federations—should mandate the presence of trained sports psychologists in all district and state-level training centres. Policies must encourage a balanced athlete development model that prioritises mental health alongside physical training. Government schemes should include funding for mental-skills workshops, coach education programs, and parent-awareness initiatives. Schools and colleges should integrate sports psychology into physical education curricula to normalise discussions around anxiety and stress. Furthermore, talent academies in both rural and urban areas should establish athlete monitoring systems that regularly track psychological indicators, such as stress levels, motivation, and risk of burnout. Ensuring gender-sensitive policies—especially for female athletes—will help address socio-cultural barriers and create safer, more inclusive spaces for performance development.

V. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that performance anxiety among young athletes in Haryana is shaped by a complex interplay of psychological determinants and socio-cultural influences that extend far beyond the playing field. The review of literature highlights that factors such as self-esteem, motivation, coping strategies, perfectionism, parental expectations, and the coach–athlete relationship significantly influence how athletes experience pressure during training and competitions. Haryana's unique sports

culture—characterised by high competitiveness, strong community pride, and the presence of successful role models—creates both motivating and high-pressure environments for young athletes. Gender norms further compound psychological challenges, especially for girls who often navigate restrictive expectations and reduced autonomy. Additionally, rural athletes face community-driven pressure and limited psychological support, while urban athletes encounter performance demands from academics and elite sports pathways. These insights underline the importance of integrating psychological preparedness into sports development programs. For the future of sports performance in Haryana, addressing these determinants is crucial for developing mentally resilient athletes who can sustain long-term excellence without experiencing burnout or anxiety-related setbacks. Ensuring that psychological training receives equal emphasis as physical conditioning will not only enhance competitive outcomes but also promote holistic well-being. Therefore, Haryana's sports ecosystem must adopt a comprehensive approach—encompassing policy support, institutional reforms, and community awareness—to effectively manage performance anxiety and empower young athletes to perform confidently and consistently at higher levels.

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An Epistemological Crisis in the Hilly Elite People Culminating in Persistent Hatred against Madheshis of Nepal

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Abstract— This research article has little to do with the text, emphasizing the discourse on the epistemological crisis [EC] studied in elite class Nepalese society. The epistemological crisis [EC] is a state devoid of logic, reasoning, and evidence. People lack when they create discourse for the manipulation of the circulation of power. This is analytical work based on the power abuse of one group over others through manipulated social discourse. The purpose of this research is to highlight how dominated groups, especially Madheshis, resist such abuse. The method employed uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) exclusively in line with the concepts of Van Dijk, Derrida, and Foucault. The discourse was analyzed to detect and analyze whatever hidden ideologies that might lie behind the use of language in different contexts and situations. The main finding is how Madheshis, a marginalized community in Nepal, are the victims of the false ideologies created by the elite class society through false public discourse against them and how they perceive those discourses and the power exercised upon them. It also highlights how the epistemological crisis [EC] fosters hate culture in the elite class against Madheshis.



Keywords— epistemological crisis, discourse, perception of social discourse, and power exercise

I. INTRODUCTION

An epistemological crisis [EC] can also be called an epistemological fallacy, by which it is generally understood that knowledge one has acquired lacks any solid evidence. Tschaep & Grillo (2022) define it as *a blurring of facts and falsehoods to the degree that blatant and obvious propaganda holds sway over large segments of the population, resulting in truth decay. This phenomenon contributes to a deeply divided society where opposing groups perceive each other with increasing hostility* (p.41). In the definition above, Tschaep & Grill focus on propaganda that kills reality, smears facts, and deviates the masses to such an extent that they create a sort of permanent division in society. It prevails in each society irrespective of the level of their education-more often, the more

advanced a society is, the greater victim they are. It is detrimental in a culturally and socially divided society. Generally, people in politics misuse it. They victimize the mass through power-centric tools, such as the media, which circulate only those messages that the concerned people wish to believe. They sensitize the society, divide it, and rule over it. Mostly applied in politics-elections, campaigning, and policy formulation, it sensitizes when ideological differences divide society as unreachable poles, causing people to lose civic sense.

— In Nepalese society, the hilly elite group, the so-called hilly Brahmin, is the victim of epistemological crisis/ fallacy [EC]. The whole nation has been under their control for more than two centuries. They are accused of misusing money,

muscle, and mandate to maintain their supremacy over other communities. For this, the ruling group in that community makes false propaganda about national unity, sovereignty, and religion, which incapacitates the community members from knowing what is right and what is wrong. For example, almost all national media is under the control of a hilly elite group. When a national issue arises, almost all media circulate the same message. Let me be a bit clearer about how the epistemological crisis [EC] in the hilly elite group has sown the seed of hate culture against the minority community, especially against Madheshis in Nepal. When the minority community raises their voice for any issue, equality for example, all media relate this issue to the breakdown of national unity. This message is disseminated in a way that compels everyone to believe so. Tentatively, the whole hilly elite group tries to collectively believe one thing. When it is about other communities, they have only one voice. They do not incorporate any other voice. Almost every member of that community believes that everything, like language, culture, dress, and others, is superior. Barack Obama, the former president of the US, sensitizes this terminology in relation to the essentiality of a democratic country with people having a higher degree of civic sense. Marietta (2020) quotes Obama's speech on an online page. *If we do not have the capacity to distinguish what is true from what is false, then by definition, the marketplace of ideas does not work. And by definition, our democracy does not work. We are entering into an epistemological crisis [EC].* The idea is plain enough to understand how important it is to be aware of the epistemological crisis [EC] for a harmonious society.

Causes of Epistemological Crisis

Epistemological Crisis [EC] is a long-rooted issue in a society where a game of power play is apparent. Where trivializing the minority and over-prizing the majority are common and where a sense of supremacy overwhelmingly dominates the elite class. This is both a misconception and a misperception developed culturally and socially. It is a state of brainlessness where members of a society acquire their social construct without modifying it. The knowledge-acquiring mechanism itself is guided by self-assumed, self-centered perspectives. They take everything for granted. They develop wrong perceptions about others. They generalize the specialized concepts and specialize the generalized concepts. In the Nepalese context, generally, this happens with elite-class people who think of

themselves as superior to others. Moreover, so-called intellectual snobbery keeps falsifying precepts and justifying itself. They make themselves superior and others inferior. They develop tools to rule over others by creating lots of false myths about others. They capture all mechanisms that control society and the psyche of the masses. They take help from the issue of religion, nationality, and sovereignty, which is interpreted as they wish, thereby keeping themselves in the center of the light. The religious reference often works as the surest weapon to manipulate the mass. The next tool that is often used is the false propaganda of nationalism. They make up false propaganda about nationality- the nascence of exploitation goes unnoticed, culminating in double marginalization of the minority communities throughout society.

An epistemological crisis [EC] occurs when a person or group encounters a fundamental challenge to their way of understanding knowledge, truth, or reality. This crisis can arise when new evidence, experiences, or arguments contradict deeply held beliefs or assumptions, leading to doubt, confusion, and the need to reassess one's understanding of the world (Kuhn, T.S. 1962). Kulm blames deeply held beliefs or assumptions for the cause of an epistemological crisis [EC], and at the same time, he suggests reassessing one's understanding. In the same way, Snyder (2017) seems to have a similar opinion to Kulm. He stresses diverse groups' self-assured opinions as the main cause of the epistemological crisis. He also blames the news and social media for such. According to Arendt (1951/1973), the cause of the epistemological crisis [EC] is the common acceptance of lies by the general public—and worse, the willing adoption of lies as Truth, which is the death knell of a free democratic society. He warns us that in a safe democratic society, there is a prevalent fallacy like such. Further, he puts forth his opinion that an important element in this epistemological crisis [EC] is a diminishing of the possibility for dialogue because this requires at least some shared epistemic principles. He also offers a solution. To address today's epistemic crisis [EC], we must insist that Truth exists and honestly strive to approximate it as best we can—even if our conceptions of Truth are held tentatively, as only current approximations of what omniscience would allow (ibid.)

To be specific, in my view, in the Nepalese context, 'cultural shift' seems to be the main cause of the epistemological crises. By cultural shift, it can be

understood as long-held worldviews challenged by societal developments. The other cause can be contradictory evidence; that is, the new information undermines what someone previously believed to be true. Hence, in this work, I have worked on the following questions:

1. How do the elite class people in Nepal get trapped by the epistemological crisis [EC] at the cost of social harmony?
2. What factors contribute to the perpetual hatred against the Madheshi community in Nepal by the elite-class hilly people? And
3. How do they respond to and react to this issue?

Here, in this context, my point of focus is how an epistemological crisis [EC] plays the role of a fueling tool to inharmonise a society, how an intellectual group gets trapped by it, and how cunning people use it as a ladder for upward mobility. The intent of my research work is to explore the baselessness of misperceptions about the Madheshi community among hilly elite-class people in the hill, culminating in social division. It also tries to shed light on the lack of willpower to come out of it.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

To justify the claim forwarded by this research work, the researcher has taken some evidences of epistemological crisis from different research works that are available physically or online.

Elite vs Mass: A Power Politics

Elite is a selected and small group of citizens and/or organizations that controls a large amount of power (Vergara, 2013). He gives the reference to Daloz in his writing, shedding light on social division as higher and lower strata, where most of these selected groups are constantly searching for differentiation as well as separation from the rest of society. This has been a long phenomenon. Irrespective of geography and civilization, the masses have always been controlled, suppressed, and manipulated by the minority elite. Further, he defines elites as a group possessing a marked degree of qualities of intelligence, character, capacity, or whatever kind. Having different clusters in them, like governing and non-governing, they all subdue the mass this way or that. Mosca (1939) classifies a society as a class that rules and a class that is ruled. The former contains a few numbers of people and possesses all political power and privileges, whereas the latter consists of a large number of people and is subjected to the rule of the former and provides essential instruments for political organization

(p.50). A large group from the masses is created to support the ruling class and the system (ibid.).

The elite class is often more concerned about its supremacy in society. The elite class follows various ways to protect themselves from the threats of non-elites, such as using force, capital punishment, financial ruin, exclusion from public offices, exile, and ostracism. In his other book – *The Mind and Society: A Treasure on General Sociology*, Pareto claims that the ruling class (which is often the elite one) tries to convince the masses that it is their duty to obey the government. They bring different national policies, of which the hidden motif is to justify their role and status and use of visible force (army) and invisible force (political machine) to control them. Further in this regard, Mosca (1939) claims-

The formation of the ruling classes has a close relation with the level of civilization and the type of society. The ruling class, under every condition, tries to reproduce itself, particularly by the domination of political forces like power and wealth, and the ruling class tends to become hereditary. In fact, descendants of ruling class members have a high chance of having the traits necessary to be a ruling class member (pp. 60-61).

The elites use moral and legal principles to reach the top politically. Mosca terms this strategy a political formula, by which he means both the legal and moral bases on which the power of the political class rests. He clarifies this concept, stating that the formula has a unique structure in all societies based on the special beliefs and the strongest sentiments of the current social group or at least upon the beliefs and sentiments of the particular portion of that group that holds political preeminence (pp.71, 72). Pokharel (2019) supports Mosca's conception of elites. He differentiates the elites from the masses as: *the elites are unified, the non-elites are diverged and powerless, the elite's interests are unified due to common backgrounds, and positions and the defining characteristic of power is institutional position.*

Knowledge Capital and Political Representation

Francis Bacon's famous dictum, 'Knowledge is power' encapsulates the essential relationship between information and authority. Knowledge capital has always been the strongest tool for maintaining an existence. Rahman Khan (2012), in his article -*The Sociology of Elites* writes-*Ideas, knowledge, and ideology are seen as central to the maintenance of elite*

power (p.370). He further talks about the ground of the elite class that justifies them to rule the masses. Apart from knowledge capital, he claims four more resources, like politic economic, cultural, social (networks), and knowledge capital, (p. 364).

The ruling class (elites) possesses legal and scientific knowledge and constitutes the class of highest intellectual culture (Mosca, 1961). And this gives an easy way to make a big political representation. Pokharel (2016) supports Mosca's understanding of elites' inborn and acquired traits. Here, Pokharel also highlights how the elite class remains successful in maintaining their political representation in a state.

Knowledge solidifies power; hence, it turns out to be a capital. In the case of the elite class, they are adept at mis/using their knowledge capital to manipulate the masses. In this regard, Rahman Khan gives references of different researchers in his work. He writes: *...Elites use culture both to help constitute their own identities (Beckert 2003) and— through boundary-drawing (Lamont 1994)— to exclude others (p.367); elites use cultural institutions to construct themselves as a class—defined by a particular set of tastes, values, and ways of being (Beisel 1998, DiMaggio 1982).* The same concept is there with Pareto (1968), who claims that elites use force and persuasion as two modes of political rule that help them topple down the masses, and they enjoy enormous privileges in society. Harari (2016), in his book- *Homo Deus: A brief History of Tomorrow*, talks about the coordinating quality of an elite community that keeps them undivided and atop. Khan (2012) further explains how it serves their purposes:

Ties to others serve as resources. Much attention in elite sociology has been paid to ties: how connections facilitate information transfers and help either to coordinate action or to produce consistent modes of action because of shared understanding produced through common experiences, (pp.368-369).

Elites' knowledge capital is reflected in the state's policies they formulate to maintain dominance over the masses. Elite dominance, however, does not come automatically; it is not simply 'built-in' to the state. Rather, elites must continuously mobilize in order to exercise the power needed to enact the policies that best suit their interests. (Domhoff, 1990). Further, Domhoff (2006), in his other book, *Who Rules America? Power and Politics and Social Change*, argues that elites organize four different power networks in

order to influence state policy-making, namely (a) the special-interest process, (b) the policy- planning process, (c) the candidate-selection process, and (d) the opinion-shaping process. Though Domhoff's explanation is mainly centered on how the corporate circle has captured the US, his philosophy seems applicable elsewhere.

Gramsci (1971) puts different ideas about the elite class's knowledge capital and their political representation in a state. He illuminates that cultural knowledge over force works best for the elite class. Their cultural knowledge helps them subdue the masses and compel them to adopt the values of the dominant. For him, hegemony is a process whereby the many are ruled by the few through consent insofar as their interests and values are aligned with bourgeois values. In line with Gramsci, Sartori (1969) writes that elites use ideology to manipulate the masses into particular political mobilizations. Ideology is the key tool of elites for doing mass politics.

This piece of writing is exclusively an interpretation of discourse often created against the Madheshi community, the most marginalized one in Nepal. While doing so, some approaches, such as, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Deconstruction, and New Historicism have been duly acknowledged. Moreover, the focus is on how social discourse created by the elite class of Nepali society against Madheshis manifests in their class's epistemological crisis [EC] and how they exercise power over the marginalized communities.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted using discourse analysis, an interpreting approach using some literary theories, like CDA, Deconstruction, and New historicism. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) focuses on the concept that the application of language is not just a medium of communication, but instead, it is a study that attempts to analyze language as social behavior to determine how power may be transferred via language used in political or social speeches (Bustan & Alakrash, 2020). The data were collected from newspapers, social media, articles, books, and some different online portals. All that data has been critically analyzed applying the critical theories, and their applicability has been evaluated in the Nepalese context.

Analysis and Interpretation

The Elite, the Others, and the Value Determined by the Elite

Change is natural. Society changes. People change. The environment changes. Attitude changes. Mentality changes. There is nothing that doesn't change. But, in the Nepalese context, the elite class (especially the hilly Brahmin) seem to remain unchanged towards Madheshi communities. Despite having about a half dozen political movements for equality, freedom, and social inclusion, Madheshis have always been excluded from the mainstream of the nation. The hilly Brahmins have always stood against Madheshis and have always tried to *other* them. Dr. Sangita Kaushal Mishra was bypassed for promotion by Dr Bikash Devkota as the Health Secretary. Dr Devkota belongs to the hilly elite class in Nepal (The Republica, 2025). This is one case out of many. Even the nation's statute, that the statute is dictated by them.

Foucault (1977) says that power is not possessed by individuals or institutions but is a relation between subjects, constantly being exercised and resisted. Foucault also emphasizes the close relationship between power and knowledge, arguing that knowledge is always produced in relation to power and can be used as a tool of domination. Parmanand Jha, the first Vice President of Nepal, was sworn in twice because he didn't use their language and their traditional dress while taking the oath. They have developed the value that their language is the nation's language, but the nation's language is not theirs; their culture is the nation's culture, and the nation's culture is not theirs. The masses do not seem to raise questions about the existing situation.

Dominance

A famous quote by Oscar Wilde – “The man who can dominate a London dinner table can dominate the world”- is widely and often uttered in public discourse. The very scenario replicates in the Nepalese context. Kathmandu, the capital city, has not been able to be the city for all, but rather only the hilly elite class people. Generally, the scholars from the elite class elsewhere in Nepal, who preach about equality and democracy, happen to forget humanity, equality, and democracy. When we talk about mainstream politics, the scenario is even worse. When the government makes a political appointment, it ignores the mandatory inclusive spirit. In 2025, 31 out of 34 ambassadors have been appointed from a single community, though their actual representational share is about 11% only. Even the big scholars, when they create a forum or form a professional organization,

seem to misuse their power. Hardly any organization operated by the elite class exists that has inclusive representation. Van Dijk (1993) says that dominance is a kind of social exploitation of power, lawfully legal or ethically unlawful employment of authority over others in a particular interest, which frequently results in social inequality.

Further, he says that those who possess a greater degree of power and authority may readily impose unlawful effects on others who are placed in a lower position of power and influence by discourse (Van Dijk, 2006). In line with Dijk, McGregor (2003) writes that social dominance and power are regularly organized and institutionalized to facilitate greater significant control and regular mechanisms of power transmission.

The manifestation of dominance can be experienced in many ways. Everywhere, it is the power that gives birth to the sense of dominance. Those who hold power exercise it through dominance.

Verbal Power Exercise and Mass Hatred

In 2016, a noted politician from a hilly elite group gave a controversial tweet about the complexion of Madheshi communities without any feeling of regret, even after being accused of fueling racism and hate culture in the country. However, he deleted his post subsequently. (The Himalayan, 2016, September 7). Evidence is huge when a highly intellectual public figure from the elite class is seen to be exercising power and developing a sense of mass hatred in society. The textbook of Grade 7 for a Public school, written by a professor, assigns vocabulary-related tasks asking to match the words with opposite meanings. The word ‘pahaadiya’ (hilly people in this context) is thought to be the opposite of ‘Madheshis’ (people from Madhesh, especially of Madheshi origin) (Nepali, 2074, p. 31). Though the portion was deleted in the new edition, it poses a million-dollar question to the elite class society.

The language is full of deep-rooted meanings and preconceptions, and the deconstruction method should be applied to understand the language and meaning. The deconstruction indeed aims to reveal the concealed and other implicit meanings, not to show the meaninglessness of the text by separating it (Balkin, 2015). It is desirable to search reality to understand the meaning of the text. According to Yegen, C., & Abukan, M. (2014), the emphasis of deconstruction is on the plurality of meaning. ‘Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely’ stated Acton (1907). Whatever the above-stated statement might mean, one interpretation is

the essentiality of the checks- and-balances theory in a society. When political power is assumed by a particular group (this happens generally to an elite class), or let's say, when the elite class grabs political power through any means, they activate the conspiracy theory (Obama, 2020) to subdue the others as 'outsiders' and to maintain their single hegemony in a society or in a state. They smear the brains of their own groups in such a way that their own members fall prey to the epistemological crisis [EC]. They are incapacitated of distinguishing what is right from what is wrong. They feel privileged to make false propaganda about others.

Elite's Construct Imposed on Madheshi

More often, Madheshis, along with other marginalized communities, are expected, asked and forced to accept the construct of the Elite class. The 'OTHER' voice for equal share in the mainstream of the nation becomes a threat to THEIR lion's share.

OTHER voices are misinterpreted and disseminated by dissecting the intent into separate entities. Everything is twisted and related back to the threat of national unity. In 1990 A.D., when Gajendra Narayan Singh, the chairman of the then Nepal Sadbhavana Party, raised his voice for 10,000 Madheshis' entrance to the Nepal Army, it was rumored that he was trying to bring about a civil war. Two reasons were put forth: (1) *Why does Nepal need 10000 more army when it has already about 30,000?* (2) *The second one is how can a country feed such a large number.* Even now, 30 years later, when Madheshi politicians and social activists raise the same voice, the same two questions arise. However, the reality is that the volume of the army has increased to about 90,000, with only nominal representation of Madheshis.

A widely recited Nepali dictum-*Tero khuta, khuta, Mero Khuta charan, Tero boli, boli, Mero boli, bachan* (*your leg is leg, mine a foot, your voice is merely a sound, but mine is a preaching, translated into English*)- is often expected to be applied to the Madheshi community. When the elite class commits mistakes while speaking something other than Nepali, it is like 'to err is human, to forgive divine'. But when other community members commit the same while speaking Nepali, their bite is trolled and made viral. Generally, people's representatives in the parliament are the biggest victims in this regard.

The elite class's culture of taking Madheshis' day-to-day words derogatorily is witnessed to be an issue of social class. For example, *Daju* and *Bhaiya* are interlingually synonymous words, but mean

differently when used by the elite class. Yadav (2023) writes:

People being positioned as ' Bhaiya' means one becomes an object of legitimate interest who can be scolded, discriminated against, or even punished like a second-class citizen or an outsider, a Bihari or an Indian. On the other hand, being positioned as 'Daju' takes a positive connotation worthy of respect and fair treatment (p.305).

If reality and truth become indiscernible from falsehoods not only in the unobservable but in the observable, we are confronted with an epistemological crisis [EC] not unlike a person who is ill with schizophrenia, but on a mass scale. This has potentially profound effects on human relationships and on how society functions as a whole (Varbelow & Yaworsky, 2023). Yegen & Abukan (2014) write that the Darridian theory studies how the terms are put in binary poles, attaching values to one and detaching the value from others, with one privileged to be considered more true, more valuable, more important, or more universal than its opposite.

Falsifying History by the Elite

Yadavas (a community from a sect of Madheshis) were the first to formalize a nation, yet were treated as others, the hilly Brahmin never appearing in nation formation, yet appearing as the A+ Nepali. Different historical references, along with the history book written by Babu Ram Acharya, the greatest historian who himself belongs to the elite class, accept that the Brahmin entered Nepal in the 12th century after the Muslim invasion of India. Madheshis, especially the Gopal dynasty and Mahispal dynasty, forefathers of present-time Yadavas, established a nation and ruled for many years in the Dwapara Yuga (the third stage of world history, according to Hindu scripture) around five thousand years ago. Sita (a Goddess in Hindu culture), Janak (father of Sita), and Gautam Buddha (God of Buddhists) were all from the Madhesh geography. They are national luminaries while their descendants are treated as second-class citizens.

Derogatory Terms Gaining Status: A Reversing Scenario

Power can be 'transmitted' and confined to a certain communal sphere or range, mainly in regard to politics, the media, the rule of law, education, or commercial businesses, leading to more distinct 'institutions' of power and privileged groups that

govern those institutions (Sikka, 2012). When the oppressed group has access to political power in a society, they try to restore their social prestige through 'addressing terminologies'. For example, when 'Madheshis were addressed as 'Madheshis' in the past, they felt humiliated. The same term has gained social status now. The same is applicable to 'Dalit', the people of the lowest social strata, and others too. This happened after the 2007 Madhesh Movement. Before the movement, they often tried to hide their identity as Madheshi or Dalit with Non-Madheshi or Non-Dalit, but now they proudly claim to belong to their respective communities. When studied, there can be the issue of opportunity, power, or something like such. At the end of 2024, the CAN (Cricket Association of Nepal) conducted the NPL (Nepal Premier League), hilly people teased Madheshis at the stadium because they thought the Janakpur Bolts, the so-called Madhesh representation, was about to lose the match. The game, taking a U-turn, when the Janakpur Bolts won the final match, they (Madheshi supporters) shouted- 'Yo jeet kasko, Dhoti ko' (the victory is of Dhoti, Madheshi). Dhoti, a special cultural code of Madheshis was a humiliating term for Madheshis in the past. But now, they sing a song - 'Dhoti kurta pagri hamar pahichan chhai', meaning 'dhoti-kurta', a traditional dress that is our identity.

The political power has given them cultural awareness, too. So the suppressed group has been very much aware of the way they are addressed or referred to in different social dimensions. The issue is related to the sense of perception and the psychology of the addressees, too. A case can be an issue to be discussed. A widely played Maithili song- 'Chamara ke khataba me chhappar chhupar paniya, taahi me nahaae sundar babhane ho Ram', has a reference to 'chamaar', a community of the lowest social strata in the Hindu caste hierarchy system, and 'babhanaa', the highest in the hierarchy. Both of them are addressed with a humiliating tone, yet the Brahmin community takes it for granted, but not the Dalit. In another case, a cultural song often sung during the marriage ceremony of the Madheshi (Maithili) community - 'aklel babhanaa, baklel babhanaa, ek rati dahi laa karaiyakhekhana', Babhanaa (Brahmin of Madheshi community) does not take it otherwise, even when they are humiliated in the song.

Language is subjective; meaning is context-dependent. The real meaning of the text is unknown (Derrida, 1967). Crabtree (2021) writes about the implicit attitude of the social groups who perceive and evaluate the texts based on the social identities of

speakers.

IV. CONCLUSION

Power is meant to dominate. Power is often controlled by the elite class, who always try to maintain their supremacy. They do not need justification. Their actions themselves are their justification. In Nepalese society, the hilly Brahmins (the elite) are the ruling class people who have been exercising their power against Madheshis, a marginalized community, for more than two decades. They seem to be the victims of the epistemological crisis [EC]. They are adept at creating false social discourse and propagating it. Through their false propagation, they sensitize society, divide it, and rule over it. When they create propaganda, when they create a social discourse against Madheshis, they lack solid evidence about their ideologies, yet they claim to be true. It is the epistemological crisis [EC] that has caused a perpetual division in Nepalese society.

The hate culture that the elite class has adopted against Madheshis is often seen to be a hindrance to social harmony. The scenario is- Nepali societies are constitutionally united but separated by heart. They have been imposing their construct upon others. The social discourse is created in such a way that they themselves are made to be privileged while others are 'othered'.

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Theorizing the Rural: Space, Identity, and Modernity in contemporary India

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Abstract— Mahatma Gandhi, after returning from South Africa, said that “if the villages perish, India will perish too. It will be no more India. Her own mission in the world will get lost”. This research paper examines how the construction of rural space, identity, and modernity in contemporary India transforms both sociological theory and rural policy. The objective is to critically analyse how traditional village studies and evolving rural realities intersect with modern development discourses. How these dynamics influence the configuration of rural identities and spaces. The study employs a qualitative methodology, focusing on critical textual analysis of foundational and contemporary village studies, policy documents, and ethnographic accounts. The research framework draws on multi-sited and political ethnographies to move beyond single-village analysis. It's specific focus on tracking interactions between villages and state institutions such as panchayats, local administrations, and development agencies. This approach aims to illuminate how narratives of the "village" are created. This also challenged, and redefined in present-day India, anchoring the analysis on the dynamic relationship between rural representation and development. Findings show that earlier studies treated villages as static, separate units, whereas recent work views them as fluid, socially constructed places. Here, identity, modernity, and development are always in negotiation. Insights from the sociology of space, postcolonial studies, and development theory reveal that the village is shaped by both state policies and changes such as migration, globalization, and new social aspirations. The study concludes that viewing villages through these new lenses is vital for understanding rural change and shaping better development policies.



Keywords— India, Village, Issues, Social structure, Change.

I. INTRODUCTION

The notion of the Indian village as central to Indian society mostly came from colonial ways of studying and describing it (Cohn, 1997). In colonial times, the village was seen as more than just a local administrative unit. It became important in debates about theory and history. Thinkers such as Henry Sumner Maine, Karl Marx, and B. H. Baden-Powell saw the Indian village as a key to understanding Indian society, not just as a tool for colonial rule.

By the nineteenth century, the Indian village had come to embody multiple meanings: it was seen as an ancient and primary core of Indian civilization, a self-governing political and administrative unit, and an economically self-

sufficient community. It was characterized by subsistence agriculture, low-level technology, simple crafts and services, and by a sense of social and physical immobility deeply tied to the land (Breman, 1997). These features gave the idea of the Indian village a specific ideological shape rooted in colonial thought.

Interestingly, these colonial constructions later influenced Indian nationalist thinking as well. In the search for a distinct national identity, the village began to be celebrated as the repository of India's cultural and civilizational values. Even after the British shifted their focus from the village to caste as the main analytical category for understanding Indian society, the notion of the “self-

sufficient village republic” continued to dominate nationalist imagination. Once the village became symbolic of the nation itself, it was repeatedly idealized and romanticized. Nationalist discourse portrayed the village as the true heart of India—an emblem of its “golden past,” representing equality, simple democracy, and harmonious social life (Dumont, 1970).

Ideologically, the image of the Indian village—with all its idealized virtues—served as a contrast to the much-criticized system of caste, which was seen as rigid and hierarchical. For Indian nationalists, this romantic vision of the village became a powerful symbol that offered confidence in India’s ancient civilizational unity and continuity. In this way, the village played an important ideological role in shaping nationalist thought and identity.

Alongside this nationalist fascination, new theoretical and methodological directions in anthropology led which later became known as the “village studies” tradition in Indian sociology and social anthropology. Inspired partly by the community studies carried out in the United States during the 1930s and 1940s, Indian scholars began to focus intensely on rural life. The village was viewed as a natural point of convergence where both caste relations and peasant life could be examined together. It offered a convenient setting to understand how social hierarchy and economic practices interacted in everyday life.

Although many of these studies were more concerned with analyzing caste than with understanding the lives of peasants themselves (Heesterman, 1985). The wave of village sketches and monographs that followed became a hallmark of Indian sociology and anthropology for several decades.

After Independence, the village was reimagined as a model for national reconstruction. It was examined for planned social transformation Prof. Dube (1964) called it “directed cultural change.” The post-colonial state boosted rural development programs, and tried to place the village at the center of its modernization agenda. Sociologists and anthropologists also continued to view the village as the best site for studying India’s peasant society and culture (Redfield, 1955).

However, the same qualities that had once made the village a symbol of moral virtue its stability, simplicity, and self-sufficiency now looked as a sign of stagnation and backwardness. Policymakers believed that change had to be introduced from outside through state-led initiatives. Thus, the discourse of rural development represented a new phase that combined its earlier colonial, nationalist, and anthropological constructions. In this sense, as Breman (1997) suggests, the “village developmentalised” is a

continuation of the “village colonised,” the “village nationalised,” and the “village anthropologised.”

II. THE CHANGING RELEVANCE OF THE VILLAGE IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA

The central position that the village once held in early Indian sociology and social anthropology now appears increasingly unsettled in light of contemporary scholarship. Many recent scholars argue that the village has lost much of its sociological and cultural significance. As Gupta (2004: 11) notes, “the village is no longer a site where futures can be planned.” He further observes that “the village is shrinking as a sociological reality, though it still exists as space” (Ibid: 9). According to Gupta, the village today holds little sway over India’s national culture or political discourse. Both India’s national culture or political discourse have become overwhelmingly urban in orientation. Despite the fact that more than half of the population of India still reside in villages, rural life leaves only a faint imprint on the nation’s cultural imagination (Ibid: 20).

This shift is reflected even in the realm of popular culture. By the 1990s, mainstream cinema, once deeply rooted in romanticized depictions of village life, largely abandoned such portrayals. Films inclined to favor urban themes and aspirations. They were mirroring a broader disillusionment with the village as a moral or cultural ideal.

Jonathan Parry’s (2004) ethnographic work among long-distance migrant workers at the Bhilai Steel Plant offers further evidence of this transformation. His research highlights how industrial modernity fosters a worldview that positions the village as a place of darkness—a mere “waiting room” to be escaped. For these workers, Bhilai represents progress, opportunity, and modern life, while the village stands for everything they wish to leave behind. Though it may still evoke fleeting nostalgia for imagined rural virtues such as purity, honesty, and simplicity, the village has come to symbolize social and moral backwardness.

Importantly, Parry (2004) suggests that the village is not merely the spatial opposite of Bhilai but rather its moral and ideological counterpoint. The village is not rejected in the dearth of modern infrastructure like electricity or roads, but for its perceived cultural deficiencies its conservatism, illiteracy, and supposed lack of civility. In this sense, both Gupta and Parry reveal how, in the contemporary Indian imagination, the village has lost its former symbolic prestige and is now viewed as peripheral to the narratives of modernity and national progress.

III. REIMAGINING THE VILLAGE: BETWEEN DECLINE AND RENEWAL

From a varied theoretical and ideological standpoint, Nandy (2001) also throw light to the diminishing presence of the village within India's creative and intellectual imagination in recent decades. According to Nandy, this decline represents not merely a social transformation but a symbolic shift in India's self-perception. The rejection of the village signifies the ascendancy of the colonial city. New self-image of India is associated with ideas of progress, history, and modernity while the village becomes the obsolete part of that identity. As he observes, the city emerges as "the new self, identified with history, progress, becoming" (Ibid: 13). In this formulation, the village no longer exists as an autonomous reality but functions as a conceptual counterpoint to the city a romantic or nostalgic construct, often imagined from an urban perspective. In effect, the village has turned into a dystopian space, symbolizing stagnation and obsolescence. It survives largely as a demographic category or statistical reference rather than as a vibrant social world. Like Gupta and Parry, Nandy too suggests that the vitality of the Indian village no longer animates the region's dominant visions of the future.

However, not all scholars share this sense of decline. Some continue to affirm the analytical and empirical value of village studies. Economist Barbara Harriss-White (2004: xxii), for instance, insists that "village studies are far too important to our understanding of economy and society to have atrophied in the way they seem to have done over the last decade." Similarly, in their edited volume *Village Matters*, Mines and Yazgi (2010: 3) lament that "villages are desperately lost objects in the anthropology of India." They argue that since the time of Louis Dumont, dominant theoretical trends emphasizing globalization, deterritorialization, and cultural flows have made it almost taboo to write about villages as meaningful social units, even though the majority of India's population continues to maintain strong connections to them—either as sites of daily life or as integral nodes in broader social and cultural networks.

While Mines and Yazgi advocate for a renewed engagement with village studies, they also recognize that the contemporary village can no longer be treated as a closed, self-contained entity. Villages today are not simply geographic settlements defined by population size or administrative boundaries, but complex social formations shaped by mobility, exchange, and translocal interactions. Their plea, therefore, is not for a return to the static village of the past, but for a reimagining of the village as a dynamic and interconnected site within a rapidly changing social landscape. The authors urge researchers to move beyond the

purely factual or empirical focus typical of traditional village studies. They remind us to critically examine the theoretical assumptions that shape how the Indian village has historically been understood (Niranjana 1991: 373). These underlying assumptions often remain unspoken yet deeply influence sociological inquiry. As Niranjana points out, the village should not be viewed merely as an object of study but as a construct shaped through sociological discourse. It represents a discursive space where political and administrative strategies intersect and where diverse socio-cultural meanings of Indian society are negotiated.

Most sociological studies on villages have followed the norms of scientific empiricism, assuming the village as a given social reality rather than questioning its conceptual formation (Niranjana 1991: 377). Even scholars who focus on broader rural processes often treat the village as an objective and stable category, overlooking its discursive nature. Consequently, the village has been seen as a valid analytic unit with an empirical basis, rarely examined as something requiring explanation in itself. The dominant view within sociology has been to analyse rural social change, taking the village as the primary site where such transformations occur.

Although there is no single definition of the village due to its multiple dimensions, the concept generally includes ecological, occupational, and socio-cultural aspects. Ecologically, it describes a small, geographically bounded, and relatively isolated settlement. Occupationally, it comprises people whose livelihoods depend mainly on agriculture and related activities. Socio-culturally, the village is often portrayed as traditional, conservative, slow to change, and shaped by fatalistic values—an image long perpetuated in sociology textbooks.

In today's India, however, where rural life is often viewed with disillusionment, retaining an analytical framework centred on the village presents serious intellectual challenges. The village, once imagined as the symbol of the nation, is now frequently depicted as a site of despair, stagnation, and violence—a space evoked only in moments of crisis, such as farmer suicides or khap panchayat controversies. It appears as the opposite of development and modernity, seen as a barrier to industrial progress. Yet, as Merton (1968: 162–71) observed, shifts in empirical realities and new data necessarily provoke conceptual renewal. Therefore, continuing village studies without recognising the profound changes in the social and conceptual landscape of rural India would be misguided. The following discussion identifies one of the main forces redefining the Indian village and its associated meanings of rurality.

IV. THE STATE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSE, AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF VILLAGE IDENTITY IN INDIA

The contemporary debate around rural development presents the village in a new light. Rural development discourse tends to promote a dominant or hegemonic understanding of what a village means. It reshapes its meaning in both social and intellectual imagination. Whether or not development programs meet their intended goals. They still transform the language and ideas through which the village is described. In this discourse, the village becomes a marker of social difference often used to signify the extent or absence of development. It operates as a category of classification, situating the village in relation to the larger national project of development and modernization.

In this process, rural development discourse not only impacts how policymakers and scholars view the village but also influences how villagers themselves perceive it. The growing power of the state causes the gradual erosion of the village's older moral and social autonomy. As access to state resources and services increasingly depends on officially defined categories, the village starts to see itself through the lens of state bureaucracy. Consequently, the state's image of the village becomes the dominant frame that shapes understanding and policy. In modern times, the village is often transformed into what may be termed a "governmentalized locality."

Every rural development program implicitly carries a concept of the village within it. When such programs are designed and implemented, the state draws on selective, standardized images of rural life. These generalizations tend to collapse regional and cultural distinctions into a single, generic "village." Through this process, the village becomes a unified social category central to the state's development project. This merger between state-led development and the idea of the village has not received sufficient attention from Indian sociologists and anthropologists, who have traditionally focused on issues like community structure, political autonomy, and self-sufficiency. While the substance of these debates remains important, what has often been overlooked is the deep connection between development policies and the sociological representation of the village.

Although rural development has long been understood as a state-guided mechanism for social change, its conceptual effect has rarely been examined. In practice, scholars have usually treated the study of villages and the study of rural development as separate domains. Few have considered how the process of rural development itself constructs a

specific, hegemonic image of the Indian village. Our argument emphasizes that state-driven development programs actively reproduce a particular version of "village India," framing how both outsiders and villagers themselves come to understand it.

In this context, the term village extends beyond its physical or demographic meaning. Within development discourse, the village is portrayed as the opposite of progress—defined by its supposed lack of development. This framing casts the village as inherently backward and in need of intervention. As a result, the expansion of development programs has reshaped popular and academic perceptions of what a village is. The very phrase "rural development" implies that the village has fallen short of an ideal standard that must be achieved. Over time, this association has transformed the notion of the village from a geographic space into a symbolic representation of a certain kind of people the rural poor or the underdeveloped.

Through these interventions, the state's presence becomes deeply embedded in the village landscape. Government agencies, officials, and programs spread across rural India, giving rise to an imagined, uniform "village India" a collective subject awaiting development. The shared condition of underdevelopment becomes the defining feature of village identity. Consequently, the relationship between the village and the state is increasingly expressed through the language of development. This incorporation of rural life into the state's developmental framework redefines villagers as citizens and transforms their everyday identity (Weber 1979; Ferguson 1990).

Moreover, this discourse produces a temporal hierarchy. Villages are seen as remnants of the past, while urban spaces and "developed" areas represent the future. As Gupta (2004: 7) notes, even though rural India has changed in many ways, conceptually the village continues to be imagined as belonging to the past. This mirrors the way the concept of "the native" functions in anthropology (Fabian 1983). The identity of the villager thus fuses with that of the place, representing a certain set of values and a distinct temporal location.

Although rural development seeks to modernize villages, it simultaneously reinforces their difference from developed spaces. In the developmental bureaucracy, development is viewed as the solution, while the village becomes the problem. This paradox is central to the logic of rural development: villages are both the targets and the margins of development efforts (Pigg 1992).

Still, the relationship between the state and the village is not entirely one-directional. While the state seeks to remake the village, the village also influences and reshapes the state (Breman 1997). Recent scholarship shows that rural

communities reinterpret and re-appropriate development policies within their own local contexts (Pigg 1992; Woost 1993; Tsing 1999; Moore 2000). Even so, the dominant narrative of rural development remains framed by the state's worldview.

Over the decades, the discourse of development has shaped how people imagine their social identities and differences. Political narratives such as the "Bharat versus India" debate (Joshi 1985, 1988) further intensify this divide, assigning contrasting identities to rural and urban populations. The concept of development thus becomes not only an economic or administrative idea but also a political tool for defining belonging, marginality, and entitlement. Villages increasingly articulate their position in national history through this developmental lens.

Historically, the growth of Indian sociology has been closely tied to the state's developmental agenda (Singh 1986). The prominence of village studies emerged largely because sociologists sought to contribute to national planning and modernization. Yet, these studies often overlooked how development itself shaped the village as a conceptual and lived category. The act of labelling a place a "village" is political—it defines who qualifies for state attention, resources, and representation. Understanding the village, therefore, requires examining not just rural life as a factual entity but also the ideological and political processes that produce it.

Ultimately, the idea of the village functions as a strategic representation within policy and public discourse. It serves as a field where identity, power, and resource claims are negotiated. Villagers themselves often adopt state-defined categories to assert rights and access opportunities. The term "rural," while appearing descriptive, is part of a broader discursive and political process through which individuals engage with the modern state (Harriss 2004: 147).

V. CONCLUSION

Village studies once held a prominent place in Indian sociology and anthropology, especially during the mid-20th century. However, in recent years, the tradition has seen a significant decline. This is partly because many later scholars treated village studies in a routine and formulaic way, paying excessive attention to documenting the daily social organization and behaviors of villagers rather than critically examining the concept of the village itself. The conventional approach often viewed the village as merely a convenient site for fieldwork, focusing more on issues like caste, occupations, kinship, and religious practices without reflecting deeply on the theoretical underpinnings of the "village" as a construct.

Such a narrow perspective neglected the importance of representations and ideals in shaping social realities. As Béteille (2003: 60-61) points out, societies engage with social life not only through concrete practices but also by aspiring towards certain ideals. This realization has led scholars to reconsider the methodological foundations of village studies. Most previous work saw the village as a fixed socio-spatial unit, existing primarily in contrast to the city and defined along demographic, ecological, or occupational lines. This missed out on examining how the village is also historically constructed and ideologically used.

Recent scholarship suggests that the village should not be treated as a static, bounded entity; instead, villages are best understood as dynamic social spaces shaped by factors such as gender, ecology, migration, state power, changing rural employment, and globalization. Analyzing villages in this way allows researchers to integrate topics such as diasporic ambitions, consumption cultures, and transformations in rural identity. As Jodhka (2012) notes, while most Indians remain strongly connected to villages, it is no longer necessary to treat them as isolated empirical realities. This evolving perspective encourages multi-sited ethnography—following the movements and interactions of villagers beyond just one location, rather than focusing on lifelong fieldwork within a single village.

Looking ahead, a renewed agenda for village studies may consider several possible directions. Investigating villages as sites shaped by colonial knowledge and power . It is revealing how the category "village" has been constructed through administrative and intellectual projects. Further, exploring the ways Indian nationalists appropriated and idealized villages. It is using them to symbolize traditional values or indigenous forms of democracy and socialism. This work Re-examining the link between villages and peasant societies in the light of changing agrarian conditions and the rise of non-farm employment in rural areas. I-Ithave been tried unpack contemporary thoughts of villages. It have seen them as repositories of tradition, spirituality, and environmental wisdom, especially in the work of NGOs and alternative movements (Nandy 2001).

Ultimately, village studies must reflect the changing political and cultural realities of villages in India, including new ways in which villages are represented and imagined. This includes considering how rural development and national discourses shape the idea of the village, and recognizing the emergence of 'authentic' village-like spaces even within urban centers like metropolitan India (Tarlo 1996).

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Money Anxiety and Character Traits in John Steinbeck's *The Pearl*

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Abstract— *The American writer John Steinbeck is known for his realistic and imaginative writings which projects the societal condition and individual's psyche in combination of humour and sympathy. The works of John Steinbeck reflects the life of common people, their struggles, sufferings and emotional disputes. Rather than projecting fantasy and bombastic life style the works of John Steinbeck reflects poverty, slums, inequality, violence, trails of survival and the American dream. This paper aims at exploring the anxiety prevailed in human beings before and after attaining wealth with reference to the character Kino from The Pearl. The character changes and instability of human nature are also further aimed to be explored in this paper.*



Keywords— *Psyche, Instability, Dispute, Wealth, Suffering*

John Steinbeck's novella *The Pearl* published in 1947 efficiently carries out the theme of American dream and apart from stating the positive state and progress of life; John Steinbeck has projected out the anxiety and negative characteristic traits that can develop in human beings when there is an unexpected entry of money in one's life.

Money anxiety commonly known as financial anxiety is a common condition or experience faced by every individual in regard of money management. The fears and stress related to financial handling is also categorized under the term money anxiety. Conditions like low income, high cost of living, past experience of poverty and the trauma faced by low income can be categorized under money anxiety.

Emily Swaim's article "Money Anxiety is Common, but You Don't Have to Handle it Alone" states money anxiety as "When money and financial concerns cause ongoing stress in your life, you could eventually begin to experience some feelings of anxiety as a result. This anxiety can, in turn, have a negative impact on your quality of life." (Swaim).

The novella *The Pearl* runs through the plotline of a pearl diver named Kino who takes a turn in his life after

the attainment of an unexpected fortune which carries an impact on his life. The protagonist Kino faces money anxiety after the attainment of the unexpected fortune which affects his mental health, breakup from all relationships and suspicion on all around him.

The story of the novella *The Pearl* opens in Kino's house where Kino is shown as a respectable family man who lives with his wife Juana and his infant son Coyotito. Kino's attachment with his family is highly evident when he thinks of the traditional 'Song of Family'. He wanted to be the protector of the family and the beginning of the novel justifies his thoughts. The story takes a twist when the infant son of Kino, Coyotito was stuck by a poisonous scorpion. Through the shift from 'Song of Family' to 'Song of Evil' John Steinbeck foretells the evil that Kino's family is going to move with.

The medical attention to Coyotito was refused by the doctor inspite of their family's insufficient finance providence. This makes Kino to dive into the sea in search of the 'Song of Pearl Undersea'. As that of Kino's Kino receives pearl from the undersea which he thinks the most precious and expensive thing all over the world. With this belief Kino returns home and states Juana that he has

received 'The Pearl of the World'. The thought of attaining the most expensive thing in the world made Kino to look at the world around him suspicious. As a result of this suspicion he looked at his friends and relatives in the sight of enmity.

Kino's look of suspicion is with the reason of safeguarding the pearl he got from the sea. This restricts him to believe the words of pearl dealers and refuses the money offered by them i.e. thousand pesos and fifteen thousand pesos. Though the money offered by the first dealer seems not to be reasonable, the second dealer's bid of money is highly a reasonable one. It is to be remembered that Kino had gone into sea dive only to get some money in order to fulfil the financial expense of the infant child's medical treatment when stung by a scorpion.

Kino experiences money anxiety where after experiencing lots of financial strains and oppressions in the name of 'poor' and now he tries to gain as much as possible wealth to lead him in a highly comfortable way and so he is called as a rich man.

The concept 'American Dream' originated in the United States of America with an idea that irrespective of the status of living in the society every human can achieve better status through determination and hard work. The American dream brought a positive hope in the minds of people that it is possible to attain a better place and survive in the society irrespective of the distinctions in terms of caste, creed or religion.

After getting the pearl Kino's reaction to oppression he faced as a poor man, the life he led with poverty and starvation comes in his mind. The well-known American Dream with the dream of freedom, equal opportunity, upward growth and success comes into the mind of Kino. He remembers his desires as an American and wanted to fulfil it and come out of his oppressed life. The desires that Kino wants to fulfil were: (i) He wanted Kino and Juana to get married in church with traditional wedding customs (ii) He dreams of his son Coyotito dressed in a yachting cap and sailor suit from the United States (iii) Kino imagines of buying a new rifle, which can break all the troubles he faced in his life (iv) He thinks of his son Coyotito going to school and learning to read and write.

In the pearl he saw how they were dressed—Juana in a shawl stiff with newness and a new skirt, and from under the long skirt Kino could see that she wore shoes. It was in the pearl—the picture glowing there. He himself was dressed in new white clothes, and he carried a new hat—not of straw but of fine black felt—and he too wore shoes—not sandals but shoes that laced. But

Coyotito—he was the one—he wore a blue sailor suit from the United States and a little yachting cap such as Kino had seen once when a pleasure-boat put into the estuary. All of these things Kino saw in the lucent pearl, and he said: "We will have new clothes." (26)

Kino's dreams not only express his expectations but reflect the condition of United States and the trials and tribulations of the natives who try to come up in their life out of the poverty and starvation they face with. The words "My son will go to school," (27), reminds William Wordsworth's poem "My Heart Leaps Up" which states "The Child is father of the man/And I could wish my days to be" (Lines 7-8). Steinbeck has projected the dream of middle class and lower middle class Americans who wanted their children to pursue education and their intense belief on education.

Yufi Wang in his article "Exploring the Realization of the American Dream Taking the Pursuit of Happiness as Examples" states American Dream as:

The realization of the American dream is the pursuit of a better life. The premise of the realization of the American dream is that everyone has an opportunity. They are equally judged by people, when they are taking a job interview, when they are applying for the university. They are not subjected to their financial situation and family background. If an opportunity is not equal, how can people believe that the American dream is real? (35)

The entry of the thought of gaining the unexpected fortune and being the richest man in their town made him to have a strained relationship with everyone around, he even tries to harm his wife in sake of the possession of pearl. Though Kino's brother Juan comments the pearl as: "It is the pearl," said Juan Tomas. "There is a devil in this pearl. You should have sold it and passed on the devil. Perhaps you can still sell it and buy peace for yourself" (69), Kino ignores the advice proceeds with the possession of pearl and falls in danger. Kino often suspects that along with the neighbours even his wife and brother would take the pearl from him if he had left the pearl out of him. The excess anxiety and the stress laid upon him make him to lose his sleep and to forget the humanity he had in him. "Here is your pearl. I found it in the path. Can you hear me now? Here is your pearl. Can you understand? You have killed a man. We must go away. They will come for us, can you understand? We must be gone before the daylight comes." "I was attacked," Kino said uneasily. "I struck to save my life" (65). The anxiety on the money and the pearl goes to

the peak when Kino was ready to harm his wife and kill a man.

The excessive thought of gaining money even brought out negative character traits in Kino. The negative characters in human like selfishness, pride, aggression and greed is found to be in the front forth of Kino replacing love and humanity he had in his earlier life. Olaf Simonse responses about financial stress as:

Financial stress can be regarded as an adaptive response to financial scarcity, it is often accompanied by negative socio-emotional states: it relates positively to loneliness and social exclusion and negatively to self-worth. Financial stress may also go together with impeded cognitive functioning. It is negatively related to attention, self-control, self-monitoring, planning, and taking initiative. (14)

The desire on social attention and the lack of self-control made Kino to lose his temper. This made him to sacrifice a lot of things from his life. Due to the negative characteristic traits and the turn of American dream into greed made him to forget all the responsibilities and the relations he had in his life. This made him to lose the house he resided, he remained a mere observer when the house he resided was put into fire, rather than taking the responsibility to protect his family after this incident he tried to protect the pearl in his hand again which made him to witness the murder of his own infant child Coyotito. Though Kino realizes his mistake and gets an opportunity to live his life back he was completely filled with guilt and despair and this emotional damage would continue till the end of his life. John Steinbeck has even given a hidden message to the readers that it is essential to dream to have a better life but the dream should not be overlooked by selfishness and loss of identity.

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From Postmemory to Prosthetic Memory: The Narrative Battle Over the Malabar Rebellion

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Abstract— *This paper interprets the dynamic collective memory of a historical event (Malabar Rebellion, 1921) in the light of the oral narratives that I collected during my research fieldwork in the region after a century of its occurrence. I argue that the orature of the Malabar Rebellion is undergoing gradual mnemonic changes in both individual and collective levels through a continuous process which mediates and remediates the memory of the subjects within the research population. The medium includes cultural formations like songs and stories prevalent within the Mappila community of Malabar, everyday conversations and interactions comprising the communicative memory of the subjects, formal and informal conferences conducted with the aim of commemorating the rebellion, print and electronic media which re-present the event and generate multiple narratives from time to time, and institutional actions by governmental agencies. Cultural identity and socio-political utility of the present dominated the narrative of the participants rather than the emotional connection with their ancestors' past. Marianne Hirsch's notion of postmemory is used as the starting point to analyse the construction of narratives from transmitted memory. David Herman's theorisation of cognitive narratology acts as the methodological tool for the study.*



Keywords— *Malabar Rebellion, narrativisation, oral stories, postmemory, prosthetic memory.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I have tried to interpret the dynamic collective memory of the Malabar Rebellion, foregrounding specific patterns in the light of the oral narratives that I collected during my research fieldwork in the region. The rebellion, which took place in 1921, was a six month long armed revolt led by Muslim tenants against the British and local Hindu landlords in the South Malabar region of the then Madras Presidency. The multi-layered event, with its complex socio-cultural intricacy, continues to generate polarized discourses even after a century. Shades of anticolonialism, class struggle, and religious fanaticism are ascribed to the event by different factions in varying degree. The orature of the Malabar Rebellion is undergoing gradual mnemonic changes in both individual and collective levels through a continuous process which mediates and remediates the memory of the subjects within the research population. The medium includes cultural formations like songs and stories prevalent within the Mappila community

of Malabar, everyday conversations and interactions comprising the communicative memory of the subjects, formal and informal conferences conducted with the aim of commemorating the rebellion, print and electronic media which re-present the event and generate multiple narratives from time to time, and institutional actions by governmental agencies which add to the dominant narrative of the event. Through this process of active mediation, the natural postmemory of the people whose ancestors were affected by the rebellion, develops into multiple prosthetic memories based on their social background. A meta-awareness of their own memory was evident in the narratives of most participants.

II. DEPICTION OF THE REBELLION

In the aftermath of the rebellion, both colonial and nationalist narratives viewed it with abjection as something that should not have taken place. The initial support given by the Indian National Congress was withdrawn when the

movement took a violent turn and the rebellion was condemned. It was only after several decades that the rebellion gained some positive recognition, through revisionist accounts that followed a Marxist narrative.

2.1. Dominant historiography

The dominant historiography of the rebellion has its roots in the reports and accounts produced by British colonial administrators. *A History of the Malabar Rebellion, 1921* by R. H. Hitchcock (1925/1983), the then Superintendent of Police of South Malabar, is the prominent narrative account which elucidated the circumstances of the rebellion to the world. It designated religious fanaticism of the illiterate Mappilas of South Malabar as the primary cause of the rebellion. *The Mappila Rebellion 1921-1922* by G. R. F. Tottenham (1922) and *The Moplah Rebellion, 1921* by C. Gopalan Nair (1923) are the other two works in this category that reflect the colonial attitude towards the rebellion and label it as a socio-political unrest caused by fanatic rebels and the leaders of Indian Nationalist Movement. Nationalist narratives on the rebellion tried to blame the British administration for creating the conditions that exacerbated the rebellion. Even while doing so, they echoed the colonial judgement in foregrounding the fanaticism and ignorance of the Mappilas as the causal factors of the rebellion rather than their anti-colonial or anti-feudal sentiments. Congress leader K. Madhavan Nair's (1971) historical work titled *Malabar Kalapam* [Malabar Rebellion] is a widely quoted text in this category.

2.2. Revisionist accounts

Communist theorist E. M. S. Namboodiripad's (1952) economic interpretation of the rebellion, as depicted in his work *The National Question in Kerala*, considers it as essentially "anti-imperialist" and "anti-feudal" (120). Resonating with Namboodiripad's argument, Robert Hardgrave (1977) categorically termed the rebellion as a peasant revolt citing agrarian discontent as its primary cause (97,98). Historian K. N. Panikkar (1989) highlighted the need to look beyond the dichotomy between economic and religious factors with regard to the cause of the rebellion. According to him, "it was in the interplay of these two factors and not just in any one or both of them that the uprisings were rooted" (Panikkar 1989:193). M. Gangadhar Menon in his 1971 essay "Mappila Outbreaks of 19th Century Malabar" views the rebellion as a natural culmination of the series of Mappila outbreaks from 1836 onwards which according to him had both economic and religious undertones (490). Though antagonism towards the

landlords and the British administration was the dominant emotion of the rebellion, it can only be critically examined if we take into account its inherent heterogeneous nature. Rather than framing a historical narrative of the Malabar Rebellion, my objective is to locate it within the framework of postmemory and cultural practices of representation. Semi-structured interviews conducted from January to April 2024 in and around the sites of the rebellion provide the primary data for this paper.

III. THE COMMEMORATIVE SURGE

The centenary of the rebellion has led to an increased production of multiple and contradictory narratives of the event through various media. Commemorative assemblies and publications carried out in this regard act as discursive practices of representation which modify the collective memory of the event. For instance, Malappuram Block Panchayat conducted a programme titled "1921 Malabar Independence Movement: Documentary Presentation and History Seminar" on January 16, 2024. The title itself declares that the rebellion is nothing but a part of the Indian Independence Movement. Academics, orators, and politicians who took part in the programme highlighted the valour and selfless fight displayed by the rebels in 1921. A short description of the rebellion was played as a voice-over repeatedly during the course of the programme. The narrative of this description was carefully scripted to engender a secular outlook of the rebellion among the listeners. While describing the leadership of the rebellion, along with the two prominent Mappila leaders, namely, Variyankunnath Kunjahammad Haji and Ali Musliyar, two Hindu leaders of the Khilafat Movement, namely, M. P. Narayana Menon and M. Brahmadattan Namboodiripad were mentioned as if to balance out the participation from the two religions concerned.¹ The second example is a lecture regarding the nature of the rebellion published on an online platform called Sangam Talks. This narrativization outrightly labels the rebellion as "the Moplah genocide of Hindus" and stands in total contradiction with the previous discourse mentioned. The speaker commences the talk by enumerating the atrocities inflicted upon the Hindu community by the rebels: "Savage rape, dishonours, slaughter and slavery of Hindu women, slaying Hindus alive, wholesale slaughter of men, women, children, and infants, forcibly converting Hindus en masse or killing those who refuse to convert, throwing half dead people into wells and leaving them there to suffer and die" (Sangam

¹ In 1919, widespread Khilafat Movement gatherings took place in Kerala with the active support of Indian National Congress (INC). It had provided the political and ideological support for the Mappila community to rise against the propertied classes and

the British during the initial phase before the rebellion took its violent turn.

Talks, 2019). The term “Hindu” is repeated three times in a single sentence with the aim of reiterating the speaker’s claim that the community was brutally victimized during the rebellion. This is the premise upon which the whole narrative of the lecture is built upon.

IV. POSTMEMORY OF THE REBELLION

Postmemory encompasses the mediated knowledge assimilated by the present generation about their past and their relationship with it. Marianne Hirsch (1997), who theorized this concept, states that “postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation” (22). Since there is no direct experience involved, postmemory narratives are constructed with imaginative investment, according to the socio-cultural framework of the present. When new discourses of the rebellion are presented to the cultural consciousness of different communities, it modifies the existing orature on the event by altering the memory stories that people remember and narrate. The tension which currently exists related to the positioning of the Malabar Rebellion has its roots in the need of different groups to advance their ideology by constructing their version of the event. Here, the postmemory of the rebellion becomes a malleable raw material for the communities to mould a new sense of affiliation to the past event based on the needs of the present.

4.1. Memory reconsolidation

Postmemory of the Malabar Rebellion is a knowledge corpus brimming with multiple narratives that are not completely exclusive from each other. The presence of a mnemonic battle where different groups argue on how the event should be remembered was evident in the oral stories narrated by the participants. While answering my question regarding the nature of the rebellion, Muhammad Ashraf, a middle-aged businessman from Kondotty claimed that “history is the creation of the present”. When probed further, he recollected that he heard this statement at a protest gathering that had been conducted a year ago against the central government’s move to remove the names of Mappila rebels from the Dictionary of Martyrs of India’s Freedom Struggle. Ashraf used to think about the rebellion as a peasant uprising that took place because of the economic oppression suffered by farmers. Discourses like television debates and public talks have significantly changed his perception of the rebellion: “I recently realized that the Malabar Rebellion was a significant part of the national freedom struggle. Islam teaches its followers to fight for their motherland. It was ultimately a fight against

the imperialistic forces. Sangh Parivar will not accept this reality. They are trying to alter historical facts for their political gains” (M. Ashraf, personal communication, January 21, 2024). Cultural identity and socio-political utility of the present dominated the narrative of the participants rather than the emotional connection with their ancestors’ past. This pattern became increasingly evident as we move down the generations. The very nature of postmemory, where individuals identify empathetically with their ancestors’ experience in the past through intergenerational transmission, gets challenged here. It should not be confused with the natural changes that happen to memory over time. This shift is far more drastic and extrinsically motivated than the natural modification of transmitted memory that happens via imaginative reconstruction of the past.

4.2. Shift to prosthetic memory

Through continuous mediation and remediation, the postmemory of the rebellion is gradually evolving into and attaining characteristics of what Alison Landsberg calls prosthetic memory. “Prosthetic memories are neither purely individual nor entirely collective but emerge at the interface of individual and collective experience. They are privately felt public memories that develop after an encounter with a mass cultural representation of the past” (Landsberg 2004:19). Here, individuals who have not lived through a past event will develop a deeply felt but artificially constructed memory of the same as if they have experienced it themselves. Prosthetic memory’s significance lies in its ability to guide the political consciousness and subjectivity of an individual. Different political parties and cultural groups aggressively propagate their narrative of the event and actively participate in this synthetic construction of memory. Religious and other socio-cultural factors surrounding the individuals will influence their reception of the mass media narrative and the subsequent moulding of their prosthetic memory. For example, if two individuals with contradictory postmemory of the Malabar Rebellion attends a commemoration gathering with its own narrative agenda, they will automatically develop two distinctive prosthetic memories aligning with their own existing postmemory.

4.3. Narrative battle

Distortion in the collective memory of the rebellion happening through “instrumentalization” and “narrativization” becomes relevant in this context (Schudson 1995:351, 355). Public conferences, social media discussions, books, and television debates on the Malabar Rebellion act as the major platforms through which political parties instrumentalize memory to meet their present strategic goals. Distortion by selective

rearrangement of facts or by favouring their own version of the event can be seen in such discourses. On August 19, 2021, Ram Madhav, a prominent national leader of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), labelled the rebellion as a manifestation of Talibani mindset while inaugurating a year-long program remembering the victims. Senior leader of Indian National Congress, K. Muraleedharan, negated this argument, stating that the rebellion was part of the Indian Freedom Movement and that the BJP is trying to execute their communal agenda by implementing the divide-and-rule policy of the British ("BJP, Congress spar over Malabar Rebellion," 2021). While the former tried to foreground the violent nature of the rebellion, the latter dismissed the accusation by underscoring its political significance.

4.4. Mnemonic tradition

Shared memories of a thought community are formulated and collectively remembered by its members in order to project their social identity. How an individual perceives a past event (either experienced by himself or imbibed through second-hand narratives) depends on the need and interest of the cultural group to which he belongs. Eviatar Zerubavel (1997) uses the term "mnemonic tradition" to indicate the selection procedure adopted by communities to modify and thereby control what is remembered by its members (87). Along with the inclusion and exclusion of memories, this tradition also guides how an included memory should be remembered. "Being social presupposes the ability to experience events that happened to groups and communities long before we even joined them as if they were somehow part of our own past" (Zerubavel 1997:91).

4.5. Exclusive communications

During my interaction with an elderly research participant named Unni Namboothiri, he showed me a magazine and asked me to go through it. It was the April 2021 volume of a quarterly magazine called *Swasthi*, published by Yogakshema Sabha, a community organisation of Namboothiri Brahmins of Kerala origin. The volume had a special section where the present generation readers can share the traumatic experience suffered by their ancestors during the Malabar Rebellion. Namboothiri was the primary propertied class or *jenmi* caste which suffered maximum losses during the rebellion. After making me read a few memoirs from the magazine, he asked me whether I believe the rebellion was actually a part of the Indian Freedom Movement: "If it was freedom struggle, why would they target and attack Hindu households? People are talking about the atrocities faced by their relatives in this book. Do you think they are lying?" (U. Namboothiri, personal communication, January 18, 2024). As seen in the case of this magazine, mnemonic traditions sustain and grow

through exclusive communications circulated within different communities. This transmission of narrative from person to person or generation to generation not only communicates the "facts" associated with the event, but also its explanation which narrativises the content.

V. PATTERNS IN ORAL NARRATIVES

David Herman (2007) identifies five conceptual tools, namely, positioning, embodiment, distributed nature of mind, emotionology, and qualia for interpreting an oral narrative which according to him is inherently situated within "a specific discourse context or occasion for telling" (314). Positioning of the self and others in a particular way will help the narrator to coherently structure the storyline. As cited previously in this paper, the research participant Muhammad Ashraf criticizes right wing politics by saying "they are trying to alter historical facts for their political gains". The participant categorically distances himself from a group of people whom he thinks are ideologically different from him. This self-positioning and othering reveal the vantage point adopted by the narrator. Individual narratives make more sense when assessed in relation with other narratives and thereby arriving at the underlying patterns. Viewing mind as a distributed entity spread across individuals, places, and time elevates the individual act of cognition into a collaborative process. Memory of an individual strengthens when it gets validated by the memory of other members of his social group. This happens because the mind is "grounded in participants' relations with one another and their surrounding social and material environment" (Herman 2007:320). Shaheela Amjad, a research participant, recollected the discussion she had with her relatives at a marriage function:

We were talking about the latest movies released in Malayalam. During the discussion, my uncle started criticising film director Ashiq Abu for backing off from the announced biopic of Variyankunnath [Kunjahammad Haji]. He was saying that all the controversies surrounding the film was purposefully created by certain political groups to create communal tension. All of us know that Variyankunnath is a hero and I don't understand why some people have issues with him.

(A. Shaheela, personal communication, January 10, 2024)

Shaheela's idea of the rebellion is heavily influenced by the beliefs of her friends and family. Communicative memory of the subjects comprising of day-to-day conversations and

interactions had played a crucial role in modifying the orature on the rebellion.

5.1. Stock responses

Patterns identified from the responses point to the collective understanding of the rebellion cultivated and perpetuated among the members belonging to the same cultural groups. During the interview, I could record several stock responses from the research participants who shared similar outlook towards the rebellion. A significant number of participants who opposed the communal angle of the rebellion and supported the intent of the rebels had responded in similar fashion when questioned about the atrocities faced by the Hindus. They would negate the argument that only Hindus were attacked by pointing out that a Mappila policeman named Chekkutty Sahib was publicly beheaded by rebel leader Variyankunnath Kunjahammad Haji for having worked with the British. They go on to argue that irrespective of the religion, people who sided with the British were considered criminals and punished by the rebels. Similarly the participants who highlighted the fanatic nature of the Mappila rebels and sympathised with the sufferings of the Hindu victims would often quote lines from the Malayalam poet Kumaran Asan's poem based on the rebellion titled "*Duravastha*" ["The Plight"]. The most quoted line is: "*Krooramahammadar chinthunna haindavachorayaal*" ["With the Hindu blood spilled by cruel Mohammedans"] (Asan, 1978:line 7). They try to seek legitimacy for their claims from reputable sources. Even while narrating their own mediated memory of the rebellion, the participants tend to self-validate their arguments by quoting other people or media reports.

5.2. Mediation across generations

Mediation of memory across the generations have had significant impact on the ways participants from different age groups remember and identify with the rebellion. Elderly research participants, especially those above seventy years of age, have a nuanced understanding of the rebellion in general. Their postmemory narratives display an organic emotional connection with the past event. When asked about the dominant memory of the Malabar Rebellion, an elderly participant recited a folk song that his aunt used to sing when he was a child. The song narrated the military brutality endured by the Mappila rebels: "pregnant women were attacked with spears; the spears were adorned with their unborn infants" (A. Thangal, personal communication, January 8, 2024). They have spent their formative years listening to the first-hand oral narratives of the people who were alive when the rebellion took place. Though it was a fight against oppression, majority of them view the rebellion as a conglomerate of different events which have their own individual

characteristics. C. P. Muhammad Moulavi, who is seventy-seven years old, recognizes the significance of the rebellion and considers it as a part of the freedom struggle. At the same time, he agrees that "since there was no central leadership throughout the course of the rebellion, many people with malicious intent took advantage of the chaotic situation to attain their selfish needs" (C. Moulavi, personal communication, January 13, 2024). He is also the grandson of Ali Musliyar, one of the prominent leaders of the rebellion. Most of the research participants from the younger generations tend to approach the rebellion on an emotional level. Their attitude towards the rebellion is primarily moulded by the conflicting narratives propagated by different socio-political groups through online media. Prosthetic memory based narratives tend to display emotions recently constructed out of sensationalized representation of the rebellion. K. S. Mithun, a twenty-eight-year-old research participant from the Hindu community, animatedly declared to me during the interview that he will not forget the sufferings endured by his forefathers during the rebellion. He went on to question the logic behind labelling the rebels as freedom fighters: "how can the rebels be considered as freedom fighters when many among them mercilessly murdered innocent people including women and children" (K. Mithun, personal communication, January 30, 2024). When enquired about the source of his information, he replied with a smile that everything is now available on the internet. Discursive psychology defines emotionology as the collective understanding of a cultural group in employing and interpreting emotions. Socio-political factors which extrinsically cultivate collective emotions become relevant in this context.

VI. CONCLUSION

The faction which perceives the rebellion as an uprising against colonial and feudal oppression will consider the people who died for the cause of rebellion as martyrs. But for those who view the event as a communal genocide, the innocent victims of violence are the real martyrs. Here, the remembrance of the event itself becomes a discursive practice of representation. When people consume and represent such narrativised representations again and again, their memory of the rebellion becomes prosthetically defined by their respective socio-political limits. In this way, orature on the Malabar Rebellion continues to undergo mediation through narrative reconstruction of the past events.

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Decolonising Futures: Afrofuturism and Indigenous Futurisms in Contemporary Latin American and Caribbean Literature

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Abstract— *Latin American and Caribbean literatures have increasingly turned to speculative genres to confront crises of ecology, race, and identity. Moving beyond the hegemony of magical realism, writers across the region employ Afrofuturism and Indigenous Futurisms to reimagine futures historically denied to marginalized communities. This article situates these currents within the broader speculative turn in the Americas, tracing how Afro-Caribbean and Indigenous epistemologies reshape science fiction, fantasy, and dystopian forms. Through close readings of works such as Rita Indiana's *La mucama de Omicunlé* and Edmundo Paz Soldán's *Iris*, alongside anthologies like *Prietopunk*, the study demonstrates how Afro-diasporic spirituality and Indigenous cosmovisions function as speculative technologies, disrupting colonial temporalities and projecting decolonial imaginaries. Afrofuturist texts foreground diasporic hybridity, queerness, and oceanic memory, while Indigenous Futurisms emphasize cyclical time, ecological survival, and sovereignty. Their convergence signals a hemispheric movement where speculative fiction operates as resistance literature, rehearsing cultural survival against extractivism and ecological collapse. By reading these strands together, the article argues that speculative fiction in the Americas is a central site of decolonial thought and world-making.*



Keywords— *Afrofuturism, Indigenous Futurisms, Latin American speculative fiction, Decolonial imaginaries, Hybrid temporalities, Caribbean literature*

I. INTRODUCTION

Latin American and Caribbean literatures have long been laboratories for imagining alternative realities, where myth, politics, and cultural memory intersect in complex ways. For much of the twentieth century, the region's most visible literary export was magical realism, epitomized by Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad* (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*, 1967). That style, with its layering of everyday life and the fantastic, helped articulate histories of colonial trauma and social upheaval to international

audiences. Yet in recent decades, writers from across the Americas have turned from the backward glance of myth-infused realism toward the forward-looking experimentation of speculative fiction. Science fiction, fantasy, and other “futurist” modes are increasingly used to probe ecological disaster, authoritarian legacies, and the persistence of racial and gender inequities. As Pilar Marrero (2023) notes, “writers who once turned to magical realism to understand their societies are increasingly turning to science fiction and fantasy” (para. 5). This “speculative

turn” signals not a rejection of regional traditions but their reinvention to confront the uncertainties of the present and the looming crises of the future.

Scholars of Latin American cultural studies have begun to chart this transformation. Rachel Haywood Ferreira (2007) demonstrated that science fiction has roots in the region extending back to the nineteenth century, even if it was long overlooked by critics. More recently, Tobin (2018) has argued that Latin American science fiction studies have entered “a new era,” with growing recognition of the genre’s capacity to reframe debates about modernization, identity, and global interdependence. Within this landscape, two particularly vital and underexplored currents have emerged: Afrofuturism and Indigenous Futurisms. These bodies of work adapt speculative tropes—time travel, cybernetic bodies, ecological apocalypse, interplanetary migration—to the histories and epistemologies of African-descendant and Indigenous communities in the Americas. In so doing, they contest the colonial logics that once cast Black and Indigenous peoples as “without future,” positioning them instead as protagonists of tomorrow.

Afrofuturism, long studied in U.S. and African diasporic contexts, has recently been recognized in Caribbean and Latin American literatures as a distinct cultural current. Maguire (2024) argues for a “specifically Caribbean Afrofuturism” that reworks diasporic memory and syncretic religious traditions into speculative forms. Rita Indiana’s novel *La mucama de Omicunlé* (*Tentacle*, 2015), for example, deploys Santería rituals, queer temporalities, and ecological catastrophe to dramatize the entanglements of Afro-Caribbean spirituality, gender, and environmental crisis (Deckard & Oloff, 2020; Perkins, 2021). Meanwhile, anthologies such as *Prietopunk* (2022) testify to the consolidation of Afrofuturism as a genre in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean (González Fernández, 2023). These works mobilize speculative aesthetics to reclaim technology, futurity, and narrative agency for Afro-descendant communities historically excluded from dominant models of progress.

In parallel, Indigenous Futurisms have taken root across Latin America, particularly in Andean and Amazonian contexts. Prado (2023) identifies a burgeoning “neoindigenist” science fiction that draws upon ancestral myths and spiritual cosmologies while engaging with contemporary issues such as extractivism, urban migration, and climate change. Liliana Colanzi (2023) highlights the figure of the *aparapita* in Bolivian cyberpunk, a symbol of indigenous labor reimagined through biomechanical enhancements, embodying the hybridity of tradition and high technology. Cortés Correa (2023) further theorizes how indigenous speculative stories collapse temporal

boundaries, producing “tiempos mixtos” (mixed times) that disrupt linear colonial narratives. Collectively, these texts enact what López-Pellisa (2023) describes as a posthumanist indigenismo, one that projects Indigenous presence and knowledge into the future as acts of survival and resistance.

The significance of these Afrofuturist and Indigenous futurist literatures lies not only in their aesthetic innovation but also in their political charge. They challenge the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000) by refusing futures defined solely by Western modernity, instead imagining pluriversal horizons shaped by Afro-diasporic spirituality, Indigenous ecological wisdom, and hybrid cultural practices. As Josephs (2013) demonstrated in her reading of Erna Brodber’s *The Rainmaker’s Mistake*, such speculative forms can destabilize historical fixities and reconfigure Caribbean memory. In both Afro and Indigenous strands, speculative fiction functions as a decolonial imaginary—what Merla-Watson (2017) calls *altermundos*, “alternative worlds” crafted from the margins to unsettle and rework dominant narratives of time, identity, and technology.

This article argues that reading Afrofuturism and Indigenous Futurisms together, as comparative decolonial projects, enriches our understanding of contemporary Latin American and Caribbean literature. While Afrofuturist works tend to foreground diasporic movement, syncretism, and oceanic memory, Indigenous Futurisms emphasize rootedness, ecological continuity, and cyclical temporality. Yet both converge in their insistence on marginalized communities as central actors in the future of the Americas. By placing these literatures in dialogue, this study seeks to illuminate how speculative genres not only reflect the crises of the present but also imagine the conditions of survival, justice, and renewal.

Finally, this focus aligns directly with the mission of *Review: Literature and Arts of the Americas*, which has consistently foregrounded emergent cultural currents—whether magical realism in the 1970s, pan-Caribbean arts in the 2000s, or eco-literature in recent years. By analyzing Afro and Indigenous futurisms together, this article extends that tradition, spotlighting the region’s writers as they seize the tools of science fiction and fantasy to articulate decolonial futures. In so doing, it demonstrates how Latin American and Caribbean literature continues to serve as a crucible of imaginative resistance and cultural innovation.

From Magical Realism to Speculative Modernities

Latin American and Caribbean literatures have long been marked by formal experimentation and hybrid narrative modes that resist the neat classifications of Euro-American literary traditions. The global success of magical realism in the mid-twentieth century crystallized this reputation.

Writers such as Gabriel García Márquez, Alejo Carpentier, and Isabel Allende crafted works that blended myth, history, and the everyday, making visible the supernatural as part of ordinary life. For decades, magical realism dominated how global audiences understood the region's cultural production. Yet as critics such as Rachel Haywood Ferreira (2007) remind us, other speculative forms—particularly science fiction—were already present in Latin America from the nineteenth century, though they remained marginalized within national canons. Ferreira's genealogy of early Latin American science fiction shows that long before the "boom" of magical realism, writers were using futuristic and scientific motifs to grapple with modernization, nation-building, and imperial contact. This overlooked history underscores that the speculative has always been integral to the region's literature, even if critics often relegated it to the periphery.

By the end of the twentieth century, however, the dominance of magical realism began to wane, and writers turned increasingly toward dystopian and science-fictional registers to confront new social realities. Ursula Heise, in an interview with Marrero (2023), emphasizes that Latin American speculative fiction differs from its Anglo-American counterparts by prioritizing social context over technological innovation. In this tradition, futuristic São Paulo in Ignácio de Loyola Brandão's *Não verás país nenhum* (*And Still the Earth*, 1981) serves not as a playground for gadgets but as an allegory of ecological collapse under dictatorship. Similarly, Edmundo Paz Soldán's *Iris* (2014) depicts a dystopian mining colony, reflecting the entanglement of neoliberal extractivism with indigenous dispossession. These texts highlight how the speculative genre in Latin America is not escapist but diagnostic: it holds up a mirror to the structural inequalities and environmental crises that shape everyday life. As Marrero (2023) observes, contemporary authors are "turning to science fiction and fantasy to explain the world around them" (para. 5), suggesting a shift from mythic pasts to speculative futures as the preferred idiom of social critique.

The emergence of critical discourse around Latin American science fiction reflects this transformation. Tobin (2018) argues that the field of Latin American science fiction studies is entering "a new era," characterized by sustained scholarly attention, anthologies, and conferences dedicated to the genre. Collections such as *Cosmos Latinos* (2003) and *Altermundos* (Merla-Watson & Olguín, 2017) have provided platforms for voices historically absent from dominant literary narratives, particularly Afro-descendant, Indigenous, and Latinx writers. This scholarly infrastructure has created the conditions for recognizing Afrofuturism and Indigenous Futurisms not as peripheral

curiosities but as central currents within Latin American speculative production. The consolidation of these fields suggests that Latin American literature is no longer tethered to magical realism as its global signature, but instead participates in a dynamic and diverse speculative tradition.

A critical feature of this shift is the way speculative fiction engages with the material crises of the region. Climate change, urban inequality, migration, and authoritarian resurgence provide the raw material for dystopian imaginaries. Deckard and Oloff (2020) argue that Rita Indiana's *La mucama de Omicunlé* should be read as part of the "New Oceanic Weird," a mode of speculative fiction that links ecological devastation of the sea to histories of slavery and colonial violence. In this sense, Indiana's work exemplifies how speculative fiction has absorbed the region's ecological and racial crises into its narrative fabric. Similarly, Josephs (2013) reads Erna Brodber's *The Rainmaker's Mistake* as a Caribbean Afrofuturist text that destabilizes the linearity of colonial time, showing how the speculative allows for new imaginings of post-emancipation futures. Both cases illustrate how the speculative turn functions as a means of confronting the unfinished business of colonialism through futuristic idioms.

Another reason for the prominence of speculative forms lies in the broader cultural climate of the twenty-first century. As Jorge Carrión, cited in Marrero (2023), observes, "the region is finding in its literature the futures that politicians are incapable of imagining" (para. 10). This statement captures the stakes of the speculative turn: literature is not merely reflecting reality but actively compensating for political paralysis and institutional failures. In societies where environmental degradation, corruption, and inequality appear entrenched, speculative fiction becomes a space to imagine alternatives—often dystopian, but sometimes utopian in their decolonial orientation. Such imaginaries reassert literature's role as a laboratory of possibility when political systems fail to deliver.

The speculative turn is also deeply tied to questions of identity and belonging in the Americas. As Maguire (2024) argues, Caribbean Afrofuturism incorporates diasporic memory and religious traditions to imagine futures rooted in Black Atlantic experience. For Indigenous writers, speculative fiction provides a vehicle for asserting continuity of culture and knowledge in the face of narratives that consign Indigenous peoples to the past (Prado, 2023). These literary strategies reflect what López-Pellisa (2023) terms "posthumanist indigenismo," where Indigenous and Afro-descendant epistemologies enter into dialogue with speculative tropes to produce alternative visions of modernity. In both Afro and Indigenous strands, speculative

fiction offers not only critique but also affirmation: it insists that marginalized communities will shape the future, rather than be erased by it.

This background demonstrates that the speculative turn in Latin American and Caribbean literature is not a rupture but a reorientation. It builds upon long histories of speculative writing in the region, from nineteenth-century scientific romances to twentieth-century dystopias, while adapting to contemporary crises of ecology, governance, and identity. In this context, Afrofuturism and Indigenous Futurisms stand out as distinct but interrelated expressions of the decolonial imagination. They mobilize speculative genres not only to expose the violence of the present but also to envision survivance and transformation. Understanding their emergence requires situating them within this broader trajectory: a literary field moving beyond the hegemony of magical realism toward speculative modernities that reimagine the Americas' past, present, and future.

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The emergence of Afrofuturism and Indigenous Futurisms in Latin American and Caribbean literatures can be fully understood only by situating these practices within broader theoretical currents of speculative cultural production. Afrofuturism, first theorized in African American contexts, describes the use of science fiction, fantasy, and other speculative forms to reimagine Black identity, history, and future possibilities. While Mark Dery coined the term in the 1990s, subsequent critics and practitioners have expanded its scope. Reynaldo Anderson (2016) situates Afrofuturism 2.0 as part of a Black speculative arts movement that integrates digital culture, performance, and literature into a global project of cultural redefinition. Afrofuturism thus becomes less a bounded genre than a methodology of reclaiming futurity for African-descendant communities historically excluded from dominant narratives of modernity. In the Caribbean, as Maguire (2024) argues, Afrofuturism takes on specific resonances: histories of slavery, syncretic religious practices, and the oceanic imaginary infuse speculative works with distinct textures. What emerges is a "Caribbean Afrofuturism" that reconfigures diasporic memory and spiritual epistemologies into visions of tomorrow.

Latin American contexts complicate the picture further through the articulation of Latinofuturism, or Latinx Futurism, which intersects with but is not reducible to Afrofuturism. Millán (2019) defines Latinofuturism as a speculative current that draws on Chicanafuturism and other Latinx aesthetic practices to project alternative futures. This builds upon Catherine Ramírez's (2004) theorization of Chicanafuturism, in which artists retool science-fiction

tropes to interrogate borderlands identities, technological exclusion, and cultural hybridity. Merla-Watson (2017) extends these insights by describing Latin@futurism as a stitching together of heterogeneous materials—ancestral myth, digital media, and popular culture—to create *altermundos*, alternative worlds that resist dominant narratives of linear progress. Within the Latin American context, these approaches underscore the flexibility of speculative genres: they are not merely about imagining space travel or futuristic technologies, but about reconfiguring cultural belonging, racial hierarchies, and histories of displacement.

Indigenous Futurisms add yet another dimension, one that emphasizes continuity and survivance rather than rupture. Grace Dillon's (2012) *Walking the Clouds* established the term to describe speculative works by Indigenous authors in North America, highlighting how they project traditional knowledges and cosmologies into the future. In Latin America, critics such as Prado (2023) have adapted the concept to describe *ciencia ficción neoindigenista*, a new form of indigenist science fiction that blends ancestral mythologies with speculative narratives. Prado notes that this subgenre reclaims narrative space for Indigenous characters and epistemologies, offering counterpoints to narratives that cast Indigenous peoples as relics of the past. Alemany (2023) suggests that these works move beyond neoindigenismo toward a postindigenismo, marked by hybrid forms and posthumanist engagements that complicate essentialist notions of indigeneity. Bianchi (2023) expands this framework by examining how indigenous speculative fiction engages with posthumanism, presenting Indigenous bodies as sites of technological and cultural fusion rather than as untouched by modernity.

Temporal frameworks are central to these imaginaries. Cortés Correa (2023) highlights how indigenous speculative stories frequently collapse linear time through what she terms *tiempos mixtos*, mixed times that juxtapose ancestral and futuristic horizons. This temporal hybridity is not merely stylistic; it destabilizes the colonial imposition of linear progress, asserting instead cyclical and relational models of temporality grounded in Indigenous cosmovisions. In a similar vein, Afrofuturist texts often reconfigure temporality by drawing on African diasporic spiritual practices, where ancestral presence disrupts Western chronologies. Caruso (2023), in her reading of Rita Indiana's *Tentacle*, demonstrates how Santería rituals enable characters to traverse time, inserting Afro-Caribbean spirituality directly into speculative futures. Such temporal disruptions reflect what López-Pellisa (2023) calls posthumanist indigenismo, in which non-Western epistemologies reshape not only narrative content but also the very structure of speculative imagination.

The convergence of Afrofuturism, Latinofuturism, and Indigenous Futurisms in Latin America and the Caribbean foregrounds hybridity as a method. As Merla-Watson (2017) suggests, Latin@futurism thrives on assemblage, bringing together disparate materials and genres to unsettle narratives of mastery. This hybridity is evident in Caribbean Afrofuturist works that merge cyberpunk aesthetics with orisha cosmologies (Maguire, 2024; González Fernández, 2023), and in Andean cyberpunk narratives where indigenous bodies are reimagined through biomechanical prosthetics (Colanzi, 2023). Rather than treating tradition and technology as oppositional, these literatures insist on their co-presence, dramatizing how marginalized communities negotiate modernity on their own terms. Such hybrid forms challenge the binaries of primitive versus advanced or past versus future, binaries that underpinned colonial discourses of progress.

Taken together, these conceptual frameworks demonstrate that speculative fiction in the Americas is not a peripheral experiment but a central decolonial strategy. Afrofuturism reclaims technological and temporal agency for Afro-descendant communities, Latinofuturism situates diasporic and borderlands experiences within futuristic imaginaries, and Indigenous Futurisms insist on the persistence of Indigenous knowledge in shaping humanity's future. Each of these strands responds to specific historical traumas—slavery, displacement, colonization—but their convergence signals a broader cultural project: to imagine futures in which the peoples most excluded by colonial modernity are not only present but central. This comparative framework will guide the analyses that follow, illuminating how Latin American and Caribbean speculative literatures mobilize futurity as a tool of resistance, survivance, and cultural renewal.

Analysis I – Afrodiasporic Futures

Afrofuturism in Latin American and Caribbean contexts emerges as both a continuation of global Black speculative traditions and a distinct articulation shaped by the histories of slavery, colonialism, and diaspora in the Americas. While the concept developed largely in North American cultural criticism, its resonance in the Caribbean and Latin America demonstrates the adaptability of Afrofuturist aesthetics to diverse sociopolitical environments. Caribbean Afrofuturism, as Emily Maguire (2024) emphasizes, is not simply an extension of U.S. Afrofuturism but a unique current where Afro-Caribbean spiritual practices, diasporic memory, and the legacy of the Middle Passage configure speculative futures. This literature insists that Afro-descendant communities, often marginalized in national narratives, are central actors in imagining the future. By foregrounding Afro-Caribbean epistemologies in

speculative contexts, these works dismantle colonial binaries that associated technology and progress with whiteness while relegating Blackness to the past.

Rita Indiana's novel *La mucama de Omicunlé* (*Tentacle*, 2015) exemplifies this tendency. Set in a near-future Dominican Republic devastated by ecological collapse, the novel follows a transgender protagonist navigating time travel enabled through Santería rituals. As María Cristina Caruso (2023) argues, Indiana's integration of Afro-Caribbean religion into a speculative framework constitutes a "futurismo caribeño" that challenges Eurocentric visions of science fiction. The orishas, divine figures from Yoruba religion carried into the Caribbean through the slave trade, function in the novel as technologies of temporal and ecological repair. This use of ritual as speculative machinery unsettles the Western assumption that futurity is a secular, technological domain. Instead, Afro-diasporic spirituality becomes the very medium of accessing and reshaping time. In this sense, *Tentacle* not only critiques environmental degradation but also asserts Afro-Caribbean culture as indispensable to imagining survival in a collapsing world.

Critics have illuminated how Indiana's novel refigures ecological crisis through the lens of race, gender, and history. Sharae Deckard and Kerstin Oloff (2020) describe the work as part of the "New Oceanic Weird," in which marine ecosystems devastated by pollution and overfishing become sites for confronting the legacies of slavery and extractive capitalism. They argue that Indiana's novel links contemporary ecological devastation with the historical violence of the transatlantic slave trade, drawing connections between the exploitation of the sea and the commodification of Black bodies. This reading positions *Tentacle* as both a climate novel and a post-slavery narrative, demonstrating how Afro-Caribbean Afrofuturism fuses ecological and racial critique. The novel also destabilizes heteronormative frameworks by centering a transgender protagonist, whose gender transitions parallel temporal transitions, a point developed further by Perkins (2021), who interprets the text through a lens of queer materiality. The speculative technologies of the novel, then, are not neutral; they embody intersections of race, sexuality, and ecology, all framed through Afro-diasporic cultural resources.

The queer dimensions of Indiana's Afrofuturism deepen its decolonial charge. Humphrey (2022) argues that Indiana's narrative produces "fluid temporalities" that queer linear histories of nationhood and progress. By reimagining bodies, time, and place through Afro-Caribbean rituals and queer subjectivities, *Tentacle* subverts the logics of colonial temporality that equated modernity with heteropatriarchal

and racial hierarchies. Acevedo-Reyes (2025) similarly interprets the novel through a “cui ecological” framework, highlighting how its portrayal of toxic ecologies and non-normative genders exposes Dominican cultural constructs of race, sexuality, and environment. Taken together, these readings demonstrate how Afro-Caribbean Afrofuturism in *Tentacle* envisions liberation as multidimensional: ecological, racial, and sexual. This aligns with Maguire’s (2024) claim that Caribbean Afrofuturism is distinguished by its ability to integrate multiple axes of marginalization into its speculative imaginaries.

If *Tentacle* represents an individual novel’s radical intervention, the anthology *Prietopunk: Antología de afrofuturismo caribeño* (2022) signals the consolidation of Caribbean Afrofuturism as a recognized literary current. González Fernández (2023) analyzes two of its stories to demonstrate how Afro-Caribbean authors deploy speculative tropes to center Black identities in futuristic contexts. In these works, orishas are not merely cultural remnants but active participants in cybernetic and post-apocalyptic futures. Maguire (2024) notes that the anthology reveals a specifically Caribbean mode of Afrofuturism that insists on the persistence of African diasporic cultures in technologically saturated environments. The title itself—*Prietopunk*—signals a blending of Afro-Caribbean identity (*prieto*, colloquial Spanish for Blackness) with cyberpunk’s high-tech, low-life aesthetic. These stories refuse the erasure of Afro-Caribbean presence in futuristic imaginaries, ensuring that the “weight of Afro-diasporic histories” remains central to how the Caribbean envisions tomorrow.

Beyond the Dominican Republic and Spanish Caribbean, Afrofuturism has resonated in broader Latin American and Caribbean contexts. Brazilian cultural production has developed its own Afrofuturist idioms. Parisi (2023), in her analysis of *Negrum3* by Diego Paulino, highlights how Black queer embodiment and cosmic imagery reconfigure spatial politics in Brazilian Afrofuturism. Here, Afrofuturism intersects with queer futurity to imagine new forms of belonging beyond racialized and heteronormative boundaries. While Paulino’s work is audiovisual rather than literary, its critical reception underscores how Afrofuturist aesthetics in Latin America often cut across media, blending literature, film, and performance in a shared speculative vocabulary. These examples also demonstrate how Afrofuturism is not monolithic but adapts to local histories of race and colonialism, from the Caribbean’s plantation past to Brazil’s legacies of slavery and racial democracy.

In the Anglophone Caribbean, Erna Brodber’s *The Rainmaker’s Mistake* (2007) has been read by Josephs (2013) as an Afrofuturist narrative that destabilizes the

linearity of post-emancipation history. Brodber reimagines slavery’s aftermath through speculative devices, offering new modes of historical memory. Josephs argues that Caribbean Afrofuturism here performs a radical temporal revision, creating futures in which enslaved peoples’ descendants assert narrative control. This aligns with the broader Afrofuturist project of rewriting the past to reclaim the future. Brodber’s work underscores how Afrofuturist strategies resonate across linguistic traditions in the Caribbean, confirming that the speculative has become a transnational Afro-diasporic mode of critique and survival.

Taken together, these examples demonstrate that Afrofuturism in the Latin American and Caribbean context is not derivative of North American traditions but a distinct set of practices that reconfigure futurity through Afro-diasporic epistemologies. Whether through Indiana’s fusion of Santería with climate fiction, the *Prietopunk* anthology’s assertion of Afro-Caribbean presence in cybernetic worlds, Paulino’s audiovisual explorations of queer Black futurities in Brazil, or Brodber’s speculative revision of Caribbean history, these works collectively insist on Afro-descendant centrality in the Americas’ futures. Critics such as Maguire (2024) and González Fernández (2023) emphasize that this Caribbean Afrofuturism is distinguished by its insistence on hybridity—melding spirituality with technology, ancestral memory with speculative imagination. This hybridity itself is a decolonial strategy, refusing the colonial dichotomy of tradition and modernity, and asserting instead that Afro-diasporic knowledge systems are indispensable to the future.

Afrofuturism in the region also consistently links futurity to survival in the face of ecological, racial, and sexual precarity. As Deckard and Oloff (2020) note, the ecological devastation in *Tentacle* mirrors historical and ongoing racial exploitation. As Humphrey (2022) and Acevedo-Reyes (2025) show, queer ecologies in Indiana’s work destabilize both gender and environmental binaries. And as Josephs (2013) illustrates, Caribbean Afrofuturism reimagines historical trauma as a foundation for speculative liberation. These analyses converge on the argument that Afro-Caribbean futurisms are not escapist fantasies but deeply engaged cultural critiques, mobilizing speculative aesthetics to reconfigure narratives of power, survival, and identity.

In sum, Afrofuturism in Latin American and Caribbean literatures constitutes a powerful decolonial imaginary. By blending spirituality, technology, and memory, it reclaims futurity for Afro-descendant peoples. It contests the colonial logics that confined Blackness to the past and excluded it from visions of progress. Instead, it imagines futures where Afro-Caribbean and Afro-Latin cultures are not only present

but central, shaping the survival of societies facing ecological and political collapse. This current, distinct yet in dialogue with global Afrofuturism, prepares the ground for comparative analysis with Indigenous Futurisms, where similar strategies of hybridity and resistance emerge from different historical experiences. Both converge in their insistence that the peoples most marginalized by colonial modernity are precisely those who must shape the futures of the Americas.

Analysis II – Indigenous Futurisms

If Afrofuturism reconfigures Caribbean and Latin American futures through diasporic memory and Afro-spiritual epistemologies, Indigenous Futurisms confront colonial modernity by projecting Indigenous knowledge, cosmologies, and subjectivities into speculative worlds. Across the Andes, the Amazon, and Mesoamerica, writers are reimagining indigeneity not as a vestige of the past but as a dynamic presence shaping possible futures. This move constitutes a direct challenge to the colonial narrative of disappearance that has long consigned Indigenous peoples to historical prologues of the nation-state. Instead, speculative fiction insists on Indigenous continuity and sovereignty in the face of extractivism, ecological crisis, and cultural erasure. As Prado (2023) emphasizes, the emergence of *ciencia ficción neoindigenista* marks a turning point: science fiction is no longer peripheral but is becoming a mode through which Indigenous and mestizo authors reclaim narrative agency, expand genre boundaries, and articulate resistance to new forms of colonialism.

The Andean region has become a particularly fertile ground for Indigenous Futurisms. Edmundo Paz Soldán's *Iris* (2014) is emblematic of this trend, weaving together dystopian mining landscapes, authoritarian control, and fragments of Andean mythology. Martínez-Arias (2023) argues that such works transform Western science-fiction tropes by embedding them within local cultural contexts. The novel's depiction of extractive economies resonates with the lived realities of Andean communities, where mining corporations displace Indigenous populations and devastate ecosystems. The speculative setting is not an escapist fantasy but an allegory of contemporary socio-environmental violence. Montoya Juárez (2023) similarly highlights how Paz Soldán hybridizes indigenismo with science fiction, crafting narratives that critique the enduring coloniality of resource exploitation. In these dystopias, Indigenous bodies and lands remain central to global capitalism, yet speculative tropes allow writers to invert the narrative, imagining scenarios where Indigenous epistemologies resist or outlast extractivist violence.

Miguel Esquirol's *El cementerio de elefantes* (2008), analyzed by Colanzi (2023), further illustrates this

hybridity. The novella reimagines the *aparapita*—a marginalized Indigenous porter figure in La Paz markets—as a biomechanically enhanced worker in a near-future cyberpunk economy. Colanzi interprets this as an example of “Andean cyberpunk,” where the Indigenous body becomes a site of negotiation between tradition and high technology. Far from erasing indigeneity, the speculative lens highlights how Indigenous figures adapt to, resist, and haunt national narratives of modernization. The *aparapita* embodies what Colanzi calls overlapping temporalities: past, present, and future intersect in the figure's hybrid existence. This undermines colonial binaries that cast indigeneity as incompatible with technological modernity. Instead, Indigenous Futurisms insist that technology and ancestral knowledge can coexist, generating forms of resilience rooted in cultural continuity.

Temporal disruption is a defining feature of Indigenous Futurisms. Cortés Correa (2023) introduces the concept of *tiempos mixtos* to describe how Indigenous speculative narratives collapse linear time, intertwining ancestral pasts with futuristic horizons. Stories by Giovanna Rivero and Alicia Fenieux exemplify this approach, producing what Cortés calls “migrant subjectivities” that traverse both spatial and temporal boundaries. This manipulation of time aligns with Indigenous cosmovisions in which cyclical and relational temporalities contrast with the linear progress of colonial modernity. By bending time, Indigenous Futurisms unsettle the narrative of inevitable assimilation or disappearance, offering instead visions where Indigenous presence shapes the *longue durée* of the Americas' futures. These temporal experiments resonate with Afrofuturism's reconfiguration of diasporic time but remain grounded in Indigenous philosophies of renewal and return.

The ecological dimension of Indigenous Futurisms is equally central. Works like Alison Spedding's *De cuando en cuando Saturnina* (2017) imagine Indigenous women protagonists who time-travel to address ecological collapse, dramatizing the role of ancestral cosmologies in environmental resilience (Prado, 2023). In such narratives, Pachamama, Andean deities, or Amazonian spirits are not relics but active agents in shaping futures. Palacios (2023) underscores how Andean speculative stories addressing Peru's internal armed conflict mobilize apocalyptic motifs to reframe trauma and resilience. These texts situate ecological and political violence within longer Indigenous frameworks of survival, suggesting that futures depend on revaluing traditional ecological knowledge. In this sense, Indigenous Futurisms converge with global climate fiction, yet they reorient the genre by grounding environmental crisis in colonial histories of dispossession and by foregrounding Indigenous stewardship as central to planetary survival.

The evolution of Indigenous Futurisms can also be traced through conceptual debates over neoindigenismo and postindigenismo. Alemany (2023) observes that Indigenous-centered science fiction today departs from earlier indigenista literature, which often depicted Indigenous peoples through paternalistic or nationalist frameworks. Instead, neoindigenist and postindigenist works foreground Indigenous voices, often authored by Indigenous or mestizo writers themselves, and embrace hybrid or posthumanist aesthetics. Bianchi (2023) elaborates this shift by showing how speculative narratives stage Indigenous bodies as sites of technological and cultural fusion. Such posthumanist indigenismo challenges both primitivist stereotypes and assimilationist ideologies, articulating futures where Indigenous subjectivities thrive through hybridity. These critical perspectives confirm that Indigenous Futurisms are not nostalgic or essentialist but forward-looking, open-ended, and experimental.

While much of the scholarship centers on the Andes, Indigenous Futurisms extend across the hemisphere. Gama and Garcia (2020) discuss “Amazofuturism” in Brazilian science fiction, where Indigenous cosmologies of the Amazon intersect with speculative tropes to resist narratives of deforestation and cultural erasure. These stories imagine futures in which Indigenous communities deploy advanced technologies alongside ancestral practices to defend their lands from extractive forces. In Mesoamerica, speculative works like Franz Galich’s *Tikal Futura* draw on Mayan imagery to critique urban modernity and neoliberal corruption. Though less systematically studied, these texts demonstrate the breadth of Indigenous Futurisms across linguistic and cultural borders, reinforcing that this is a hemispheric phenomenon with local inflections.

The political stakes of Indigenous Futurisms lie in their ability to transform imaginaries of sovereignty and survival. By depicting Indigenous characters as scientists, hackers, or time travelers, these works claim space for Indigenous agency in realms often monopolized by Western narratives of progress. As López-Pellisa (2023) argues, this constitutes a form of posthumanist indigenismo, where Indigenous cosmologies reshape not only cultural representation but also the ontological terms of futurity. By refusing linear progress, Indigenous Futurisms articulate a pluriversal future in which multiple epistemologies coexist. They insist that Indigenous knowledge is not antiquated but urgently relevant to confronting planetary crises. This decolonial orientation converges with Afrofuturism’s insistence on Black futurity, even as it emerges from different historical experiences. Both currents deploy speculative genres to overturn colonial erasures and to imagine worlds in which the peoples most marginalized by modernity determine the shape of the future.

In sum, Indigenous Futurisms in Latin American literature mark a critical intervention in speculative genres. Through allegories of extractivism, temporal disruptions, ecological imagination, and posthumanist hybridity, they project Indigenous presence into futures from which colonial narratives sought to exclude them. By situating ancestral cosmologies within futuristic settings, they challenge the temporal and ontological hierarchies of colonial modernity. Like their Afrofuturist counterparts, they are decolonial imaginaries that insist on survival, transformation, and agency. In their convergence with Afrofuturism, Indigenous Futurisms broaden the horizons of speculative literature in the Americas, ensuring that the future is not the property of the colonizer but a terrain of creative and political reclamation.

III. DISCUSSION – HYBRIDITY, RESISTANCE, AND DECOLONIAL IMAGINARIES

The analyses of Afrofuturist and Indigenous futurist literatures reveal distinct genealogies but also striking convergences. Both traditions emerge from the Americas’ histories of colonialism, racial violence, and cultural marginalization, and both use speculative genres as vehicles for imagining alternatives to those histories. Their common ground lies in their insistence on reconfiguring futurity, a domain historically monopolized by colonial modernity, through epistemologies and practices that colonial discourse dismissed as primitive, folkloric, or vanishing. In bringing these strands together, it becomes clear that hybridity, resistance, and the construction of decolonial imaginaries are the threads that tie them into a broader hemispheric movement of speculative innovation.

Hybridity stands as the defining aesthetic and political mode of both Afrofuturist and Indigenous futurist works. In Afro-Caribbean contexts, hybridity manifests through the blending of African diasporic spirituality with speculative technologies. Rita Indiana’s *La mucama de Omicunlé*, with its reliance on Santería rituals as a form of time travel, exemplifies how spiritual practices are reframed as speculative technologies (Caruso, 2023). Similarly, the *Prietopunk* anthology merges cyberpunk’s aesthetics of high-tech urban decay with orisha cosmologies, producing stories where Afro-Caribbean deities shape digital and futuristic landscapes (González Fernández, 2023; Maguire, 2024). In Indigenous Futurisms, hybridity often involves the insertion of Indigenous figures into technologically saturated settings. Colanzi (2023) shows how the *aparapita* in Miguel Esquirol’s novella becomes a biomechanical subject, at once indigenous and cybernetic. Such representations resist the binary of tradition versus modernity, demonstrating that Indigenous and Afro-

descendant knowledge systems can coexist with and even transform technological futures. Merla-Watson (2017) has described Latin@futurism as a practice of assemblage, stitching together seemingly incompatible elements to create *altermundos*, or alternative worlds. This principle is visible across Afro and Indigenous works, where hybridity becomes not only a narrative device but a political stance against colonial mastery.

The logic of resistance is equally central. Both Afrofuturism and Indigenous Futurisms deploy speculative fiction as protest literature, rehearsing survival strategies and subverting dominant narratives. Deckard and Oloff (2020) interpret Indiana's *Tentacle* as a response to ecological devastation that links marine crisis with the violence of slavery, reframing environmental catastrophe as inseparable from racial exploitation. Similarly, Josephs (2013) shows how Erna Brodber's *The Rainmaker's Mistake* rewrites the historical trauma of slavery through speculative means, offering descendants new agency over their past and future. On the Indigenous side, works such as Paz Soldán's *Iris* and Spedding's *De cuando en cuando Saturnina* dramatize extractivism as dystopian futures, critiquing the neo-colonial exploitation of land and labor (Martínez-Arias, 2023; Prado, 2023). In both cases, speculative narratives serve as symbolic acts of resistance, rewriting colonial encounters as science-fictional battles over resources, bodies, and memory. They reveal how marginalized communities use literature to stage insurgencies that might not be possible in political or material domains.

At the heart of these resistant imaginaries is a reconfiguration of time. Cortés Correa (2023) emphasizes how Indigenous Futurisms create *tiempos mixtos*, collapsing ancestral and futuristic horizons into narratives that refuse linear colonial temporality. This temporal hybridity aligns with Afrofuturist strategies where the past—the Middle Passage, slavery, ancestral presence—erupts into speculative futures. Humphrey (2022) notes how Indiana's fluid temporalities queer not only bodies but also histories, disrupting the heteronormative and racialized linearity of progress. Both traditions thereby destabilize colonial time, which positioned Afro-descendant and Indigenous peoples as “behind” modernity. Instead, they insist that marginalized communities generate alternative chronologies in which past traumas and ancestral wisdom are not erased but actively shape the future.

These literatures also share an ecological orientation, though expressed differently. Afrofuturist works like *Tentacle* dramatize climate catastrophe through oceanic imaginaries, linking environmental degradation with histories of slavery and queer ecologies (Deckard & Oloff, 2020; Acevedo-Reyes, 2025). Indigenous Futurisms

foreground land as both character and cosmology, situating ecological collapse within the logic of extractivism and colonial dispossession (Montoya, 2023; Palacios, 2023). In both cases, the environment is not a neutral backdrop but a contested site of survival and resistance. By projecting ecological crises into speculative futures, these works insist that Afro-descendant and Indigenous epistemologies—whether Afro-Caribbean rituals or Andean cosmovisions—offer models of resilience absent from technocratic discourses of climate adaptation. These narratives thus expand speculative fiction beyond Western techno-utopias to include ecological justice and cultural survival as conditions of futurity.

Despite these convergences, the traditions maintain distinct emphases. Afrofuturism is often diasporic, oceanic, and creolized. It dramatizes fragmentation and recombination, reflecting histories of forced migration and cultural syncretism. Stories like those in *Prietopunk* or Indiana's novel emphasize mobility, hybridity, and the haunting weight of diasporic histories (Maguire, 2024). Indigenous Futurisms, by contrast, frequently emphasize rootedness, continuity, and sovereignty. The Andean cyberpunk of Esquirol or the temporal disruptions of Rivero and Fenieux emphasize persistence in place and the cyclical endurance of Indigenous cosmologies (Colanzi, 2023; Cortés Correa, 2023). Yet these differences do not preclude dialogue. Instead, they reveal the richness of decolonial imaginaries across the Americas, showing how different historical experiences—diaspora versus dispossession, oceanic rupture versus land-based continuity—produce complementary visions of liberation.

The construction of decolonial imaginaries is the ultimate point of convergence. López-Pellisa (2023) frames Indigenous Futurisms as posthumanist indigenismo, where speculative aesthetics destabilize human/nonhuman binaries and reinsert Indigenous knowledge into the core of futurity. Maguire (2024) similarly frames Caribbean Afrofuturism as a project that insists on the centrality of Afro-descendant epistemologies in rethinking modernity. Together, these critical perspectives highlight that Afro and Indigenous speculative literatures are not marginal subgenres but central to the hemispheric project of decolonization. They imagine futures where technologies are not stripped of cultural context but embedded in ritual, myth, and memory. They refuse the colonial exclusion of Afro and Indigenous peoples from narratives of progress, positioning them instead as architects of the Americas' futures.

This convergence has implications beyond literature. By dramatizing resistance through speculative forms, these works intersect with broader cultural and political

movements: environmental justice campaigns, Afro-descendant rights activism, Indigenous sovereignty struggles. As Carrión, cited in Marrero (2023), notes, Latin American literature is imagining futures that politicians cannot. These speculative imaginaries thus fill a political void, offering visions of justice, survival, and renewal where institutions fail. They remind readers that the future is not neutral but contested terrain, and that Afro-descendant and Indigenous epistemologies are indispensable to its construction.

In bringing Afrofuturism and Indigenous Futurisms into dialogue, it becomes clear that speculative fiction in the Americas is not simply entertainment or genre experiment. It is a decolonial practice, one that asserts cultural survival, critiques colonial structures, and envisions alternatives to systemic violence. Hybridity, resistance, and decolonial imaginaries are not abstract themes but lived strategies encoded in narrative form. Together, these literatures announce that the future of the Americas will be plural, ecological, and deeply marked by the knowledge and resilience of those communities long excluded from dominant visions of progress.

IV. CONCLUSION

The exploration of Afrofuturism and Indigenous Futurisms in contemporary Latin American and Caribbean literatures demonstrates that speculative fiction has become one of the region's most vital decolonial practices. What began as a shift away from magical realism toward speculative genres has evolved into a powerful mode of cultural resistance and renewal. Writers across the Caribbean, the Andes, Brazil, and Mesoamerica have harnessed science fiction, fantasy, and futuristic motifs not as escapist entertainment but as instruments for rewriting history, critiquing extractivism, and imagining plural futures. By positioning Afro-descendant and Indigenous communities as central actors in speculative worlds, these literatures reclaim futurity from the colonial imagination and reassert it as a terrain of survival, justice, and creativity.

Afrofuturist works in the Caribbean and Latin America foreground hybridity, spirituality, and diaspora as resources for imagining tomorrow. Novels like Rita Indiana's *La mucama de Omicunlé* exemplify how Afro-Caribbean religious practices can be reframed as speculative technologies, challenging Eurocentric associations of futurity with secular technoscience. Anthologies such as *Prietopunk* consolidate these innovations, embedding Afro-Caribbean presence in cybernetic landscapes and refusing erasure from narratives of progress. These texts insist that the histories of slavery, displacement, and racialization do not relegate Afro-descendant peoples to the past; instead,

they become the foundation upon which alternative futures are built. In parallel, Indigenous Futurisms reposition Indigenous epistemologies as indispensable to the future of the Americas. Andean and Amazonian speculative works confront extractivism, collapse linear time, and dramatize Indigenous survivance through characters who embody both ancestral wisdom and technological adaptation. Concepts such as *neoindigenismo* and *postindigenismo* illuminate how Indigenous futurist texts move beyond earlier literary paternalism, presenting Indigenous voices as architects of futures where sovereignty and ecological stewardship are paramount.

The comparative discussion of these strands highlights their shared commitment to hybridity, resistance, and decolonial imaginaries. Both Afrofuturist and Indigenous futurist works destabilize colonial temporalities, whether through Afro-diasporic disruptions of linear history or Indigenous *tiempos mixtos* that collapse ancestral and futuristic horizons. Both critique ecological devastation as inseparable from colonial and capitalist violence, proposing instead ecological futures rooted in Afro-diasporic ritual or Indigenous cosmovision. And both articulate resistance not only through allegory but also through the act of narrative itself, creating imaginative rehearsals of liberation. Their differences—diaspora versus rootedness, oceanic fluidity versus land-based continuity—are not contradictions but complementary perspectives that together expand the horizons of decolonial thought in the Americas.

By situating these literatures within the mission of *Review: Literature and Arts of the Americas*, this study underscores their relevance to the journal's history of foregrounding emergent cultural currents. Just as earlier issues brought magical realism, pan-Caribbean arts, and eco-literature to critical attention, the present moment demands engagement with Afrofuturism and Indigenous Futurisms as defining currents of twenty-first-century Latin American and Caribbean letters. These works exemplify how literature in the Americas continues to act as a laboratory of imagination, producing futures that politicians and institutions have failed to envision. They demonstrate that speculative fiction is not peripheral but central to ongoing struggles for cultural survival and decolonial transformation.

The objectives of this study have been to chart the emergence of Afro and Indigenous futurisms in Latin American and Caribbean literature, to analyze their narrative strategies, and to bring them into comparative dialogue. In doing so, it has argued that speculative fiction is not merely reflective but actively world-making: it constructs alternative temporalities, identities, and ecologies that resist colonial logics. The conclusion is clear:

the future of the Americas, as imagined through these literatures, is not singular but pluriversal, shaped by the creativity and resilience of the very communities once denied a future. This recognition not only enriches literary scholarship but also affirms the power of cultural production to envision justice and renewal in a fractured world.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT ON THE USE OF GENERATIVE AI TOOLS

In the preparation of this manuscript, I have used OpenAI's **GPT-5** (version GPT-5.0) as a language model to assist with language refinement, grammatical accuracy, and stylistic consistency. The AI tool was not used for idea generation, content creation, or analysis but solely for enhancing the clarity and readability of the text. All intellectual contributions, critical insights, arguments, and research findings presented in this manuscript are entirely my own. The use of GPT-5.0 has been carefully reviewed to ensure academic integrity and adherence to scholarly standards.

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Constructed Spaces: Domination and Liberation in the Film *Orlando*

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Abstract— This essay examines Sally Potter’s 1992 film *Orlando* to explore how power dynamics like gender, hierarchy and ownership are constructed and represented through space presented in the film. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space*, it argues that space in the film is not a neutral backdrop but functions as a powerful agent that shapes, constrains, and liberates an individual. By tracing Orlando’s transformation from man to woman, this essay analyzes how gender fluidity redefines spatial relations and reveals the gendered and artificially constructed nature of both private and public spaces. Through close readings of scenes involving clothing, domestic interiors, and natural landscapes, the discussion highlights the ways in which space reflects and enforces patriarchal, national, and class hierarchies. The essay also investigates moments of resistance, particularly Orlando’s rejection of ownership and return to nature, as acts of liberation from space. Ultimately, this essay argues that *Orlando* exposes the mechanisms through which space functions as both a social product and a site of emancipation, offering a critical reflection on how identity, power, and belonging are deeply involved with space.



Keywords— Gender, Space, Nation, Nature, Sally Potter, *Orlando* (1992)

I. INTRODUCTION

Sally Potter’s 1992 film *Orlando*, loosely based on Virginia Woolf’s novel *Orlando: A Biography*, explores the fluidity of gender and identity by following the protagonist’s mysterious transformation from man to woman over centuries. At the heart of the film lies the notion that gender is not a fixed, binary characteristic but

rather a social construct. As Craft-Fairchild (2001) observes in her analysis of the film, although Potter insists that her film is about an “essential self” that transcends gender, the film nonetheless reveals how “gender ideology unavoidably permeates the celluloid” (p. 23). The film thus spontaneously draws attention to the interplay between individual identity and broader societal forces.

In the film, gender fluidity is seldom explicitly discussed but is often implied through spatial dynamics. Space is often presented very differently before and after Orlando turns into a woman and thus can be said to be gendered. This raises an intriguing question: If gender is fluid and if space is gendered, is space also fluid? Can the transformation of gender cause a corresponding shift in the way space is perceived, experienced, and constructed? This essay thus aims to explore these questions by examining how space functions in *Orlando*, with a particular focus on the shifting spatial dynamics as Orlando transitions into a woman. More than its relation to gender, this analysis will also examine how other power dynamics function in constructing space and how space itself has become a powerful medium in expressing ideologies.

II. DRESSING AND THE PRODUCTION OF GENDERED SPACE

In *Orlando*, there are many deliberately constructed parallel scenes that mirror each other across Orlando's gender transformation, creating a direct comparison between Orlando's experiences as a man and as a woman. A particularly straightforward example occurs when Orlando, as a man, declares to Sasha, "You are mine ... because I adore you" (Potter, 1992, 24:35-23:41); this is later echoed by Archduke Harry with the exact same lines when proposing to Orlando as a woman (Potter, 1992, 1:05:45-1:05:52). The intentionally mirrored scenes underscore the shift in power relations: what once functioned as Orlando's declaration of desire is now turned back on her, transforming her from the expresser of affection into the object of another's desire.

While such direct parallels are powerful in delivery, the film more frequently articulates the impact of the change of gender through less overt contrasts. These subtler contrasts emerge particularly in the way space is experienced by Orlando before and after the

transformation. As Orlando transitions, the spaces they inhabits (though often physically unchanged) and the ways those spaces structure movement, visibility, and autonomy are deeply shaped by the sudden change of gender. As Orlando shifts from man to woman, the spatial terms under which she exists also shift.

To further illustrate the shifts before and after the transformation, it is necessary to begin with the most immediate visual marker of Orlando's changed gender: clothing. With the protagonist's face remaining unchanged and the physiological characteristics of the body covered, dressing becomes the crucial marker of gender.

Henri Lefebvre, in his seminal work *The Production of Space*, proposes that space is not a passive background but a social construct (1991). Beyond physical space and the planned space of architects and planners, he identifies a third, crucial dimension: "representational space." This is the space of lived experience, "alive" with symbolism, imagination, and cultural codes: it is the space that "the imagination seeks to change and appropriate" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 39). It is precisely within this theoretical framework that Almila (2021), in discussing fashion studies, proposes the idea that dress is not only a situated practice but a spatial one, shaped by powerful ideologies and, in turn, creating its own spaces and realities. Clothing, in this light, already functions as a representational space, as it embodies certain symbolism that carries more than its practical use of covering the body (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 33).

This is evident in *Orlando*, where, whether Orlando appears as a man or a woman, the act of being dressed by others always occurs immediately after their introduction. Before the act of clothing, the essence of men and women is reduced to their biological characteristics; it is through dressing that they fit into specific gender roles. Notably, Tilda Swinton is not the only one in the film who plays a cross-dressing role as the male Orlando; Queen Elizabeth I is played by the actor Quentin Crisp. Yet there

is nothing to doubt about their gender in the film: once the body is enveloped in the appropriate garments—be it a wig, gown, or corset—it is read according to the visual codes that clothing produces.



Fig.1: *Orlando being dressed after becoming a woman*

Note: From *Orlando* (Potter, 1992, 56:45).

In both dressing scenes right after the introduction, Orlando occupies the central position, but the balance of power shifts noticeably. After becoming a woman, Orlando's agency diminishes; she is transformed into an adorned and restrained object rather than the subject being served, just like the ornaments in the dressing room (see Figure 1). This transition from subject to object is further illuminated through the visual clue of mirrors. As Craft-Fairchild (2001) notes, echoing John Berger, the function of the mirror (the one she holds and the one behind her) is "to make the woman connive in treating herself as, first and foremost, a sight" (Berger, 1972, p. 51; as cited in Craft-Fairchild, 2001, p. 38).

More than its relatively abstract spatial function, the hoop skirt serves as a tangible visualization of Orlando's increasing limitations in physical space after turning to a woman. The skirt's size and constriction not only symbolize societal constraints but also physically restrict movement. As a larger physical presence occupies more space, the usable space around it narrows proportionally. This becomes strikingly apparent when Orlando, now wearing the dress, struggles to navigate a hallway. She is forced to sidestep as the corridor's width is effectively reduced by the expansive skirt (see Figure 2). As Craft-Fairchild (2001) also notes, the hoop petticoat

takes its historical model to an "absurd extreme," and Orlando's "ungainliness in manipulating it gives the lie to notions of inherent female grace" (p. 43). The larger the skirt, the more her movement and, by extension, her agency (to move), is confined within the given space.



Fig.2: *Orlando struggling through the hall*

Note: From *Orlando* (Potter, 1992, 57:32).

An additional layer to this scene is the way Orlando, dressed in the white gown, also mirrors the function of the furniture covered in white cloth. Both the gown and the furniture become ornamental, confined within the same patriarchal space. In this context, Orlando, like the furniture, is reduced to a mere object, a symbol or attribution within the space. This highlights how women, in this patriarchal setting, are constrained not only by physical limitations, like the hoop skirt, but also by the spatial roles they are expected to occupy, roles that strip them of their autonomy.

While the physical constraints imposed on the female Orlando are stark as above, the film is also careful enough to show that the patriarchal order also disciplines men through spatial means. As a man, Orlando is subjected to a different, yet equally symbolic, spatial limitation: the wig. Functioning as a technology of social discipline, the wig imposes a rigid, respectable identity upon him, symbolizing the weight of his born aristocratic identity and its requisite authority. It operates as a sign of power and status yet a portable, oppressive space at the same time. This is exactly why Orlando seizes a moment of liberation by the campfire in the East (see Figure 3). The lack of surveillance on a foreign land allow him to

remove the wig, embracing a fleeting moment of reclaiming an authentic, essential self (as suggested by Potter) beyond the constrictive spatial norms of English society.



Fig.3: Orlando taking off his wig near the campfire

Note: From Orlando (Potter, 1992, 45:46).



Fig.4: The literary gathering

Note: From Orlando (Potter, 1992, 58:48).

Another function of the wig in this film can be seen at the literary gathering, where the gathering of more people offers additional insight into spatial and societal hierarchies. In this scene, Mr. Pope occupies the most commanding position, both visually and socially. Though not physically situated at the center of the room, his position on the sofa, combined with the way others lean towards him as the focal point, marks him as the center of attention (see Figure 4). A very interesting detail is that Mr. Pope is the only person not wearing a wig, a distinction that symbolizes his elevated status. Unlike others who rely on the wig as an artificial attribution of power or authority, Mr. Pope's position allows him to transcend these restrictive societal symbols. This contrast emphasizes a hierarchy where higher status grants freedom from certain societal norms and allows for greater autonomy within the

space. Mr. Pope's unadorned presence highlights how social privilege enables individuals to move through or inhabit the very same space with fewer constraints. This reinforces the idea that spatial freedom is in fact deeply intertwined with power and societal positioning, aligning again with Lefebvre's assertion that "(social) space is a (social) product" (1991, p. 26).

This spectrum of control finds its most concrete expression in the artifacts that physically mediate the body's relationship to space: the wig and the hoop skirt. Both function as impositions that shrink the individual's authentic self. However, a critical distinction must be drawn between them. The restrictions symbolized by the wig, while significant, are primarily social and can be contextually shed. In contrast, the constraints of the hoop skirt are inescapably physical and pervasive, systematically enforcing a more profound limitation of autonomy.. This spatial disempowerment of women in *Orlando* of course extends far beyond this physical confinement of heavy dressing, to a fundamental loss of personal autonomy, most starkly exemplified by the erosion of privacy. It is only after Orlando turns into a woman that her property becomes filled with others: she almost immediately loses the privacy that he (and the audience) once took for granted. The film highlights this through a deliberate contrast on the same garden path of her estate: where the man Orlando once walked in solitary reflection, the woman Orlando is forced into the company of others (Potter, 1992, 1:03:40). More than the overt contrasts, there are also numerous scenes in which the physical setting or material carrier of space (primarily the house) remains unchanged, yet the presence of servants, particularly maids, highlights how privacy is deprived (Potter, 57:10-57:20). The film then deliberately underlines this by having the squire explicitly advise Orlando not to attend the literary gathering without company, stating, "But you could not possibly venture there alone (Potter, 58:01-58:06)." Whereas the man

Orlando is free to travel all the way to the East without forced company, the woman Orlando is cautioned against attending a simple literary gathering near her own place. This enforced companionship and the systematic deprivation of privacy reflect broader societal constructs that limit women's agency and reinforce their dependency on others. As a matter of fact, from the moment of her transformation, Orlando is never granted a moment of true solitude—until she steps into the labyrinth.

III. CONSTRUCTED SPACES AND THE LIBERATION OF NATURE

Right before Orlando enters the labyrinth, the squires of the royalty come to announce to her the possible reclamation of her property. One of them states to Orlando, “One, you are legally dead and therefore cannot hold any property whatsoever; two, you are now female,” to which another squire immediately adds, “Which amounts to much the same thing.” (Potter, 1992, 1:04:32-1:04:45). Upon hearing that Orlando has to reside her property because of the transformation, the Archduke, who had previously been Orlando's subordinate while Orlando was a man, immediately proposes to her. Orlando is surprised by the sudden proposal and asks him why, to which the Archduke answers, “Because I am England, and you are mine” (Potter, 1992, 1:05:42-1:05:46). When Orlando refuses, the Archduke then remarks that she, after rejecting his “kind” offer “will die a spinster, dispossessed and alone” (Potter, 1992, 1:06:20-1:06:25). Very much disturbed by this offensive remark and probably the many accumulated prior ones encountered before, Orlando rushes into the labyrinth, dragging her Rococo dress through the narrow turns of the maze, moving very difficultly through the narrow space (see Figure 5). Then after a sharp turn, her dress suddenly transforms into a smaller, black one, strikingly reminiscent of the one worn by 19th century suffragettes (see Figure 6). Her movement, though still not entirely unencumbered, becomes freer.



Fig 5: Orlando struggling through the maze with the Rococo dress

Note: From Orlando (Potter, 1992, 1:07:00).



Fig 6: Orlando finding greater mobility in a smaller black dress

Note: From Orlando (Potter, 1992, 1:07:03).

This scene powerfully frames space as a metonymy for time. The labyrinth, a space of confinement and transformation, gives way to a new era as the film transitions to the 1850s, a period marked by the rising force of the suffragette movement. Orlando's own expanding agency is mirrored spatially: the cumbersome Rococo dress is replaced by a smaller, darker one, facilitating freer movement. This sartorial and spatial liberation culminates in her flight into a misty field, where she casts herself onto the grass and proclaims, “Nature, nature, I'm your bride, take me” (Potter, 1992, 1:07:40-1:07:45). Given the proximity in time to the earlier dialogue with the Archduke, this moment clearly echoes the Archduke's words: “I am England, and you are mine.” This stark comparison raises an intriguing question: what does it mean for Orlando to reject England and instead wed herself to nature?

To fully grasp this symbolic refusal, it is instructive to recall an earlier scene (Potter, 38:45-38:50), where William III and Mary II send Orlando to the East, ostensibly to impart horticulture. This scene is pivotal, for horticulture serves as a conceptual bridge between the nature and nation, or nature and human construction. Horticulture epitomizes the desire to shape and dominate natural space, aligning it with the human-constructed spaces of nationhood. The contrast between the ordered, cultivated gardens (representing the nation) and the untamed wilderness (representing nature) exemplifies the tension between the human-imposed order of space and the organic spontaneity of natural space. This tension is indicated by Orlando's departure from the garden, her passage through the labyrinth, and her eventual immersion in the wild. As Lefebvre (1991) notes, "As sources and as resource, nature obsesses us, as do childhood and spontaneity, via the filter of memory" (p. 30). Nature, however, is constantly under threat: "Everything conspires to harm it" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 31). While Lefebvre seems to have lost confidence in the future of natural space, adding that it is "now seen as merely the raw material" (1991, p. 31), Potter offers a contrasting view, suggesting that nature can still serve as a space of liberation and renewal. In this context, Orlando's moving from structured spaces of power (social occasions in England, gardens and the labyrinth) to the raw, unbounded wild symbolizes a rejection of human-made spatial constraints and a return to a more liberated existence. It is also noteworthy that the film poster, which features Orlando in the labyrinth, captures a moment where the narrow passage contrasts Orlando's constricted form in a giant dress, evoking a sense of spatial compression (see Figure 7). This is an image of spatial compression that, in hindsight, foreshadows her imminent rebirth, both spatially and socially.



Fig 7: Orlando standing in the maze

Note: From Orlando (Potter, 1992, 1:06:35)



Fig 8: Orlando stepping into the mist

Note: From Orlando (Potter, 1992, 1:07:26)

The nation attempts to control and redefine nature through spaces like gardens, while Orlando and nature itself constantly resists. This interplay raises questions about the limits of human control and the potential of nature as a space for liberation. This is further highlighted by the scenes in the film where Orlando, immersed in true nature (whether under a tree or in the mist) is often depicted alone in the wild, free from societal constraint.

Despite those suggested resistance, horticulture and its products still serve as concrete examples of nation's desire to assert control over nature; they reflect the extent to which England, historically, sought to fracture and impose its own order on nature. This logic aligns with the ecofeminist critique of dualism, which identifies hierarchical oppositions (such as culture versus nature, civilization versus barbarism, man versus woman) as the ideological root of systemic oppression. Within this framework, horticulture emerges as a material expression of the nature-culture dichotomy, one that deliberately privileges culture while framing nature as a domain to be

dominated and conquered. This same dualistic worldview manifests spatially in other scenes, particularly one that dramatizes the tension between civilization and so-called “barbarism.” Here, Orlando and other English nobles dance formally upon a carpet laid across the ice, while Sasha, the Russian girl that Orlando fascinates, skates freely with her father beyond its edges (see Figure 9). The carpet functions as a literal and symbolic boundary, reinforcing the English claim to cultural superiority. As one of Orlando’s companions condescendingly notes, the Russians are viewed as lacking both material wealth and “civilization.” Yet, while the carpet demarcates a space of distinction, it also confines its users, physically limiting their movement to its prescribed area. In contrast, Sasha’s unrestricted skating outside its margins represents a mode of being unbounded by national or social impositions, a fluidity that subtly subverts the very hierarchy the English seek to enforce.

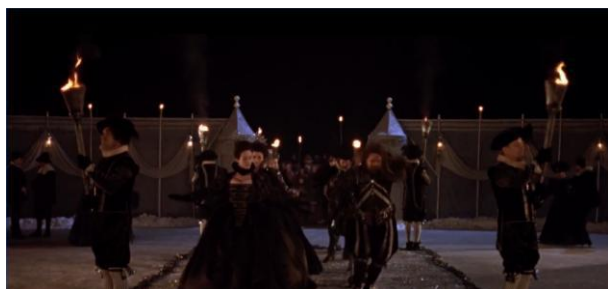


Fig 9: *English noblemen dancing on the carpet*

Note: From *Orlando* (Potter, 1992, 17:44)

This juxtaposition reveals a central thesis of the film: spatial possession is inherently linked to the curtailment of liberty. This idea extends beyond the carpet, underpinning the film’s critique of ownership in all its forms.

IV. PROPERTY AND OWNERSHIP

The film’s spatial critique then eventually extends to question a more fundamental relationship, one that between ownership and belonging: does owning the property make the space created by it “mine”?

At the very beginning of the film, Orlando’s father claims he would offer everything he owns to please Queen Elizabeth I, to which the Queen replies, “What you call yours is mine already (Potter, 1992, 7:22-7:27).” This exchange encapsulates the power dynamics surrounding ownership. Orlando’s father may legally own the property where the dinner is hosted, but under the Queen’s reign (which represents the overarching power of the nation), his ownership is always subject to the whims of higher authority. In this context, the space created by the property is not truly private but only temporarily so, existing at the mercy of higher powers. Later, when the Queen grants Orlando the property, she adds, “For you and for your heirs Orlando, the house... do not fade, do not wither, do not grow old” (Potter, 10:28-10:51). While Orlando literally fulfills the stipulation of not aging through all these years, the grant carries implicit social and gendered conditions: the beneficiary must remain the male Orlando and produce a male heir to ensure continuity. Orlando’s transformation into a woman fundamentally violates these terms. As the royal squires later affirm, being female is tantamount to being “legally dead,” and without a male heir, her claim to the property is voided. This reveals the fragility of ownership, demonstrating how it is contingent upon conforming to rigid patriarchal and social norms, thereby reinforcing Orlando’s entrapment within a system that ultimately disowns her.

Moreover, after witnessing Orlando’s lack of privacy in the house as a woman, one can easily see that possessing the house does not equal true ownership of the space inside. Even before the formal notice brought by the squires, Orlando already is a mere temporal holder of the house, with its true ownership passing either to a husband or a son, who could also easily lose the ownership to higher command.

Therefore, owning the container of space does not equal true belonging or privacy within that space. That, to some extent, explains why it is only after relinquishing her

claim to the property, that Orlando, for the first time as a woman, exhibits a sense of belonging. In a powerful reversal, she stands alone yet assured before the vast expanse of her forfeited estate (see Figure 10). No longer defined by legal possession, she exists as an autonomous subject, liberated from the patriarchal boundaries that once confined her. This moment visually inverts the traditional logic of ownership: dispossessed, she nonetheless appears for the first time not as a transient occupant, but as the unequivocal subject of her own space.



Fig.10: *Orlando* standing in front of her forfeited property

Note: From *Orlando* (Potter, 1992, 1:19:30)

This theme of liberation through dispossession is also echoed in the philosophy of Shelmerdine, the American with whom Orlando, as a woman, falls in love. Significantly, he has a very similar face with Sasha, the Russian girl who Orlando falls in love with as a man. Both Sasha and Shelmerdine, as Russian and American outsiders respectively, occupy a marginal status in the English worldview, yet this very position grants them a unique mobility. Shelmerdine describes the joy of travel as being “like a free spirit unfettered by position or possession” (Potter, 1992, 1:10:45-1:10:50), articulating his life philosophy unburdened by the very attachments that define English society. Paradoxically, their lack of property becomes the source of their agency, liberating them from the constraints of socially sanctioned spaces.

The narrative thus offers a definitive answer to its central question: owning a property does not make the space it contains truly “mine.” Instead, through the characters Orlando loves, both embodiments of a freedom

untethered to property or status, the film argues that it is the relinquishment of ownership that opens the way to a more expansive existence. Orlando’s enduring quest, unchanged by gender, is for this very liberty. Orlando’s emancipation from the restrictions of constructed space is further emphasized by her decision to give birth to a daughter, not a male heir, declaring her will to live as a free human being rather than as a prescribed role within a rigid hierarchy. Ultimately, it is only by renouncing material possession and the human-made spaces that enclose it that she achieves true liberation, transcending societal confines to find a final, unbound belonging in the embrace of an essential self.

V. CONCLUSION

In *Orlando*, space is not merely a backdrop or a static setting but an active signifier in the formation and repression of identity, especially in relation to gender and nationhood. The film masterfully illustrates how spaces, whether physical, social, or metaphorical, serve as tools for both constraining and liberating the characters. As Lefebvre (1991) suggests, “(social) space is a (social) product”, and these constructed spaces operate as “means of production and of control” (p. 26). The spaces Orlando occupies throughout the film, from the rigid confines of her aristocratic estate to the expansive, untamed wilds of nature, are not neutral; they are laden with social, political, and gendered meanings that both define and restrict her agency.

The analysis has traced a clear trajectory in Orlando’s spatial existence. Beginning with the gendered production of the body through dressing that constrict and define, the film shows how Orlando’s agency diminishes as she navigates the world as a woman. The labyrinth serves as a pivotal, transformative space, a tight corridor of patriarchal confinement that ultimately leads to an expansion of both time and possibility. This movement out of the labyrinth and into the wild encapsulates the film’s

central spatial argument: the rigid, ordered spaces of nationhood, epitomized by the aristocratic estate and the cultivated garden, give way to the unbound, organic space of nature as the true site of personal and political freedom.

Ultimately, Orlando posits that true belonging is not achieved through ownership, but through release. The legal possession of property is exposed as a fragile and conditional privilege, one that reinforces patriarchal and national hierarchies rather than securing autonomy. Orlando's liberation is only realized when she renounces these material claims, transcending the socially constructed spaces of gender, nation, and property. In the end, the film proposes a radical redefinition of belonging, not as a right granted by deed or title, but as a state of being found in the boundless, natural space of the self, free from all imposed confines.

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Fractured Traditions and the Tragedy of Colonial Encounter in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

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Abstract— Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is a profound narrative of cultural conflict, tragic heroism, and the collapse of indigenous structures under colonial intrusion. By re-centering African perspectives, Achebe challenges colonial stereotypes and articulates the complexity of Igbo society prior to European conquest. Okonkwo, the novel's central figure, embodies both the strengths and contradictions of a traditional world destabilized by external forces and internal tensions. His downfall mirrors the fragmentation of Umuofia as European missionaries and administrators impose new religious, judicial, and political systems. Through close textual analysis, this study examines major themes such as masculinity, tradition, spirituality, community, and the violent intersections of cultures. Ultimately, this paper argues that *Things Fall Apart* functions not merely as a postcolonial response but also as a tragic narrative illustrating the universal consequences of cultural misunderstanding and rigid adherence to inflexible ideologies.

Keywords— Achebe, Igbo society, colonialism, masculinity, cultural conflict.



Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* stands as a foundational text of African literature, challenging Eurocentric depictions of Africa by presenting an internally rich portrayal of Igbo life. Written partly as a response to works like Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Achebe's novel restores African voice, agency, and dignity. Achebe states his intention clearly: "I would be quite satisfied if my novels... did no more than teach my readers that their past—with all its imperfections—was not one long night of savagery" (Achebe, Morning Yet on Creation Day, 45).

The novel's opening establishes the hero, Okonkwo, whose fame "rested on solid personal achievements" (3). Through his story, Achebe presents a society grounded in communal norms, oral traditions, rituals and social hierarchies. Yet the arrival of British missionaries and colonial rule initiates a slow destruction of this world, leading to the metaphorical and literal falling apart of the title. Achebe offers detailed portrayals of precolonial Igbo life its systems of justice, spirituality, agriculture, gender roles, and communal leadership. The narrator emphasizes cultural coherence: "Umuofia was feared by all its

neighbours. It was powerful in war and in magic" (9) social order is maintained through elders, titled men, and ancestral traditions.

Igbo cosmology is rooted in harmony between the living and the spiritual world. The Oracle, the egwugwu, and traditional festivals mark the society's rhythm. Far from primitive chaos, Achebe depicts a world governed by laws, however severe. When Ikemefuna must be sacrificed, the Oracle's decree is obeyed despite emotional cost: "That boy calls you father. Do not bear a hand in his death" (57). The tragedy lies in Okonkwo's refusal to follow this advice, revealing the tension between cultural obligation and personal insecurity. Okonkwo exemplifies the classical tragic figure whose greatest strength determination becomes his downfall. His obsession with strength stems from rejecting his father Unoka, described as "a failure" (5). To avoid resembling him, Okonkwo embraces hyper-masculinity and violent authority.

Okonkwo ruled his household with a heavy hand. His wives, especially the youngest, lived in perpetual fear of his fiery temper. His flaw is not strength itself but the inability

to adapt. While the Igbo world allows for flexibility and communal discussion, Okonkwo insists on rigid interpretations of tradition. His participation in Ikemefuna's killing, driven by fear of appearing weak, marks the beginning of his moral deterioration. Achebe reinforces the tragedy: "He heard Ikemefuna cry, 'My father, they have killed me!' as he ran towards him" (61). Here Okonkwo's misguided pursuit of honour deepens his internal disintegration.

Igbo spirituality plays a central role in shaping identity and communal values. Achebe emphasizes continuity between the living, the ancestors, and the deities. The egwugwu trial demonstrates a sophisticated judicial system rooted in spiritual authority: "The egwugwu appeared... swirling smoke and powdered chalk" (85). Ritual practices and their misinterpretation by Europeans become points of conflict. Missionaries label Igbo gods 'false' and traditions 'evil', failing to understand their cultural meaning. Achebe portrays this cultural misunderstanding as a major catalyst for division.

The arrival of missionaries marks a turning point. Mr. Brown adopts a conciliatory approach, engaging with local leaders and learning about Igbo beliefs: "He trod softly... and won the people's hearts" (178). Yet his replacement, Reverend Smith, embodies rigid intolerance, symbolizing the shift toward coercive colonial rule. Conversion fractures the community. Nwoye's attraction to Christianity stems from emotional trauma: "He was converted because the new religion answered his needs" (147). His alienation from Okonkwo signifies generational rupture and foreshadows the collapse of Umuofia's unity. Colonial courts and the District Commissioner further undermine Igbo authority: "The six men were handcuffed and led into the guardroom" (94). Humiliation becomes a tool of domination.

The novel's climax reflects escalating tensions between the colonizers and the Igbo community. When the egwugwu burn the church, conflict becomes unavoidable. Achebe frames the destruction not as barbarism but as resistance against cultural erasure. Okonkwo, now isolated, embodies desperation: "He mourned for the clan, which he saw breaking up and falling apart" (183). His worldview anchored in tradition and warrior ethos cannot coexist with a system that criminalizes his values. The final confrontation occurs when Okonkwo kills a colonial messenger: "In a flash Okonkwo drew his machete. The messenger's head lay beside the body" (204). Instead of rallying behind him, the clan recoils, revealing irreversible change.

The novel's ending is dark and ironic. The District Commissioner is a pompous little man who thinks that he understands indigenous African cultures. Achebe uses the

commissioner, who seems a character straight out of *Heart of Darkness*, to demonstrate the inaccuracy of accounts of Africa such as Joseph Conrad's. The commissioner's misinterpretations and the degree to which they are based upon his own shortcomings are evident. He comments, for example, on the villagers' 'love of superfluous words', attempting to ridicule their beautiful and expressive language. His rumination that Okonkwo's story could make for a good paragraph illustrates his shallowness.

Whereas Achebe has written an entire book about Okonkwo, he suggests that a European account of Okonkwo would likely portray him as a grunting, cultureless savage who inexplicably and senselessly kills a messenger. Achebe also highlights one of the reasons that early ethnographic reports were often offensively inaccurate: when Obierika asks the commissioner to help him with Okonkwo's body, the narrator tells us that "the resolute administrator in [the commissioner] gave way to the student of primitive customs." The same people who control the natives relay the accepted accounts of colonized cultures—in a manner, of course, that best suits the colonizer's interest.

Okonkwo's suicide violates the very traditions he fought to preserve. Achebe writes: "It is an abomination for a man to take his own life (107)". The act symbolizes both personal defeat and cultural collapse. His body hanging from a tree becomes the final image of a society unable to reconcile old and new realities. Achebe rejects the District Commissioner's detached description of African lives, underscoring the tragedy of colonial misrepresentation: "One could almost write a whole chapter on him" (209). This ironic ending reasserts Achebe's narrative purpose restoring African history through African voices.

Masculinity serves as both a cultural principle and a personal obsession for Okonkwo. Strength, control, and aggression define his identity, yet Achebe shows that Igbo values incorporate flexibility and wisdom. Themes explored include: Masculinity vs. Femininity Okonkwo labels sympathy and negotiation as 'feminine', causing repeated conflict. Community vs. Individualism Igbo society emphasizes collective decision-making, whereas Okonkwo acts impulsively and alone. Tradition vs. Change Achebe demonstrates that societies unable to adapt face fragmentation. Colonialism and Violence, The clash between indigenous and foreign ideologies results in cultural disruption, not merely political conquest

Achebe's work plays a crucial role in postcolonial discourse by rewriting Africa's literary representation. *Things Fall Apart* challenges colonial narratives that portrayed Africans as primitive or voiceless. Achebe achieves this by: Centering African epistemologies, Showcasing linguistic hybridity (Igbo proverbs, oral

traditions) Depicting complex social institutions, Revealing colonialism's, psychological and cultural consequences

The fall of Umuofia reflects a broader historical process of cultural dismantling under European imperialism. Yet Achebe's portrayal is not romanticized; he acknowledges internal contradictions, gender inequalities, and ritual severity.

Things Fall Apart remains one of the most influential African novels because it blends cultural representation with universal tragic form. Achebe reconstructs a precolonial world with dignity while illustrating its vulnerability to both internal rigidity and external domination. Okonkwo's tragic downfall mirrors the disintegration of Igbo society, demonstrating how cultural misunderstanding, uncompromising traditionalism, and colonial aggression combine to produce irreversible loss. Achebe's narrative legacy endures as a reminder that history must be reclaimed through authentic storytelling, and that cultures 'fall apart not only through violence but through an absence of dialogue and mutual understanding.

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Understanding Characterization: The Young Adult Character in the Prose Fiction of Selected Ugandan Female Authors.

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Abstract— This article explores the details of characterisation, particularly that of the young adult character in the prose fiction of selected Ugandan female authors, through a thorough reading of Barbara Kimenye, Mary Karooro Okurut and Glaydah Namukasa's novels and short stories. This study positions the texts within the broader literary analytical realm of the fundamental analytical framework of characterisation. Drawing from the archetypal critical theory and young adult studies, the work locates young adult protagonists as they navigate life's complexities, expectations, and their own personal perceptions about family, peers at school, teachers, and other people in their lives. Different characters are studied from their different settings accorded to them by the different writers; the schools, street environments, and later a university setting, all of which offer adolescents spaces to discover who they are. They rebel, they bond, they conflict, and they grow even as they negotiate their spaces in a world that is dominated by adults. The study highlights the physique of characters, their actions, their reactions and narrative voice, which reflect their agency and their search for identity. This analysis of characterisation of the young adult in female-authored prose fictional works stresses the role of Ugandan literature in increasing worldwide understanding of the young adult character in prose fiction.



Keywords— Characters and Characterisation, the young adult character, Archetypal Criticism.

Characterisation is a sum of choices and decisions that a writer makes to describe and portray the physical appearance, actions, thoughts, reactions, responses, speech and the general personalities of the people or things (that are made to execute human undertakings) in the fictional world; a world that authors create. It is the analysis of people who live and act in the fictional world created by the author, a world that, sometimes, resembles the real one. The fictional world is a world with people that evoke feelings in readers and that makes the readers identify with characters at times, a world that makes readers judge or rationalise about characters.

According to E.M. Forster (Forster "Aspects of the Novel 1927" 54-56). Characters are "actors in the story [who] pretend to be human beings". They are creations by the

author who is human and who uses "word-masses" to assign them identities (i.e. Name, attitudes, physical appearance, sex, actions and reactions, speech, etc.). The creation by the author is a result of her/his utilisation of actual raw materials, which Forster refers to as "evidence" plus or minus the author's imagination, that which the reader finds in a novel. "Evidence" refers to actual, identifiable human beings in the real world that the author uses to help her/him create characters. Characters that are "Human beings with two sides, appropriate to history and fiction". This means that a character is a person in the story who has human characteristics that are modified and are sometimes embellished or understated by the author for purposes of making her/him fit in a specified role.

The calling of characters ‘people’ based on the assumed intimate affinity that the novelist shares with actual human beings may be appropriate if the novelist writes about human beings of the same disposition as her/himself. The practice where adult novelists create, say, young adult characters (YACs), connotes the view that the YACs created are constructed according to the novelist’s assumed knowledge of the psychology of the young adult; an assumption that is questionable and may end up misrepresenting the character.

Apart from the two sides mentioned above of fiction and reality, the characters, according to Merico (2014), go through four stages of life, namely **childhood, young adulthood, adulthood, and old age**. Stages which, according to Riley (1976), have specific attributes and expected behaviour according to specific social contexts. In Uganda, for instance, when one considers the aspect of responsibility, a young adult is not expected to have any family responsibility, such as caring for other people or being answerable for her/his actions. S/he is expected to stay in school for a specified time, where s/he is dependent on parents or guardians. They are expected to lead a carefree life, giving adults a hard time because of their assumed unruly and untameable conduct. Young adults do not have either economic independence or any other form of independence (emotional and mental). Their autonomy is reduced or controlled by their caregivers. A young adult, because of her/his increased level of adolescence and limited level of maturity, is not relied on as a role model. These assumptions about young adults influence authors during the process of characterisation in their creative works.

Most authors aim to make their characters life-like. They make them behave like normal human beings, they make them think and reason, feel and react, and communicate with fellow characters and readers. They use characters to perform particular roles since the fictional world, like the real one, has conflicts and arguments, emotions and feelings, attitudes and processes which the characters have to face and resolve. The characters are born, they eat, they sleep; they love, they fall sick, and they die.

Authors base their characterisation on actual life situations, which Forster (*Aspects of the Novel*) refers to as “Evidence”. This means, as already pointed out, those actions and modes of behaviour which are similar to those of real human beings and can be easily related to. Authors can choose to depict characters accurately, exaggerate them, minimise them or portray them as unique or even extraordinary. They know the lives which their characters will lead since they create them, and by using their

authority as creators, they determine their fate. I refer to this power by the authors as **authorial autonomy**.

Characterisation helps readers relate to events in the texts. It provides credible moments and presents situations that readers can easily relate to. Readers are also helped to identify with characters when their actions and motivations are exposed. This exposure of the characters and the almost real representation make the stories worth reading and compelling. Imagine a country without citizens or a home without family members. Characters form the population of the places in fiction; in homes, schools, institutions and other places that make the texts real. Through characterisation, readers are enabled to understand the feelings, personalities and complexities of the characters. Characterisation also enhances the vividness of the lives of the characters, plus their credibility. The information that is provided by the writer, together with the readers’ imagination and interpretation, sums up who the character is. Characters are understood in many ways.

Physical Description

Authors can do direct characterisation by describing the physique, demeanour and general character outlook. When they do this, they create mental pictures in the readers’ minds. The physical description of the character helps to introduce characters and also makes an impression on the reader. In *Beauty Queen* by Kimenyi, for example, the readers are at first given a general impression of Adela as a very beautiful young girl. Later on, her physical appearance is described even further to reveal the magnitude of her beauty;

Ujeni stared at her younger sister as if seeing her for the first time, trying to detect that special quality that Joe Banda insisted was there. And what did she see? She saw a young girl, tall for her age, with slender, tapering limbs and a graceful length of neck. The delicate facial structure (p. 45) ... a gloriously perfect creature in a gown of velvet splendour made her catch her breath (p. 74) ...the slenderness of her waist [made her exclaim] You are something special! (p 84).

The above description of Adela justifies her winning position in the contests and leaves a picture of a lovely young girl in the reader’s mind, a girl with a special quality that her ‘manufacturers’ are ready to exploit to the full.

Mary Karooro Okurut also uses physical descriptions of her characters to directly characterise Hero (the protagonist in *Child of a Delegate*. When she goes to Nile University, the students size her up, award her marks

based on her physical appearance and eventually give her a nickname, 'Poverty'. According to them;

[Hero's] head looks like that of the king of ants, and the few hairs that are there look like those on the buttocks of a baboon... [the face is] murram...[the eyes] look like those of a wild cat... [the nose] is too big, covering three-quarters of the face. Looks like it sucks in all the oxygen around, and we shall be left with nothing! We shall suffocate when she is around... [The kisser] looks as if it knows its job to perfection... [The neck] is almost non-existent. Looks squashed...the breasts look succulent... the stomach is flat and good. [The buttocks are] an absolute scandal. Looks like starved reeds. They even have potholes...There is something of the peasant in her. She has a peasant and local look. I think it's the boobs. Oversized boobs give a woman a peasant look. (Okurut, 1997, pp. 27-29).

The above description of Hero leaves a pitiful picture of a wide-faced, ugly-looking girl with a short, thick neck, thin legs, small buttocks and big breasts. The description must be exaggerated by the students to make Hero feel small, but apart from being funny and revealing the cruel taunts of rich students, it brings out the prejudice that students from high-placed families have of the not-so-privileged lot. Apart from physical appearance, characters are also revealed through the actions they perform in the stories.

Action

There is a common adage that "actions speak louder than words". The actions of characters in fiction reveal, among other things, character traits. The actions also help in character analysis. They enrich the readers' understanding of the characters and the plot. In Kimenyi's Moses series, the character of Moses, the protagonist, is revealed mainly through his actions. In the first novel in the series, *Moses Moses* character as a no-nonsense person, a boy ready to defend himself and conquer the world, is revealed through his actions when he puts King Kong, the most feared and revered boy in Mukibi's Educational Institute for the Sons of African Gentlemen, down:

Several boys had stayed in the room, expecting to see some fun, and now they began to laugh. King Kong, because he was not getting the best of it with me, turned his attention to the trembling Four Eyes... "I will get you later," King Kong whispered threateningly, as we sat down at our desks again...I was making up my bed. In the end, I was ready to close King Kong's mouth with a good old thump. However, instead of fighting him, I retaliated with this:

"Old King Kong had a terrible pong
a terrible pong had he.

He smelled so high,
that folks passing by
thought he wasn't sanitary..."

Of course, that did it. He was at me before I finished the last word of my cool little rhyme. We were both scuffling on the floor of the narrow passage between the beds... (pp. 14-15).

The quotation shows that apart from being a newcomer, Moses is ready to save himself from bullying and cannot be intimidated.

Another example of action as a way of revealing character traits is when, in *Voice of a Dream* (Namukasa, 2006), Nanfuka is confronted with village rumours about the possibility of her never going back to school and becoming a house girl. She responds to her sister Kizza:

God, anger isn't easy to control. 'I didn't ask you to tell me anything.' Kizza shouts, 'Hey, that's how God has paid you, despising us because you study in the city. Now go back and study in the city and become a nurse!'

Nanfuka lunges at Kizza, slapping her face twice.

'Shame upon you.' Kizza draws back. 'No wonder you are going to be a house girl.'

Nanfuka pounces on her, and they fall to the ground.

'Let me hit sense into this dense head,' she says, bashing Kizza's head with her fists. Kizza grabs Nanfuka's hand and bites the index finger. Nanfuka jumps up screaming, Cannibal!'

'House girl!' Kizza struggles to get up.

Nanfuka presses her finger. She shouldn't have acted like that, but Kizza provoked her beyond control. She reaches for her carrying pad, struggles to lift the bundle of firewood onto her head, and then walks away.

'House girl!'

Nanfuka hurries on, silent. (p. 42).

The actions above reveal the magnitude of Nanfuka's suffering and her explosiveness when fighting for her dream. Her final silence proves that she, as the caretaker, is ready to swallow her pride and keep silent to pacify the situation. Her silence here is a loud kind of silence, an action that connotes a great effort to control rage. In the

quotation above, we see Nanfuka portrayed as a frustrated young girl being mocked by not only envious villagers but even her siblings. Her hot temper gets the better of her, and she fights with her sister, but then her sense of responsibility and awareness that she is now the 'adult caretaker' restrains her from further provocations and placates her foul mood.

Characterisation by Character Reaction

Other than action or together with action, the reaction is another way that authors use to reveal the traits of the people in the story. Reactions are multi-dimensional. Characters may react physically, they may react emotionally or psychologically to different events and situations. When a character's reaction takes place after an expression or an action, it enhances the insight of the reader into the story's context. Most characters react according to human expectations, for instance, they get angry when abused and happy when praised. However, when characters react contrary to human expectations, readers are either shocked or surprised at their uniqueness. Credibility in novels is achieved when an action incites a reaction. The absence of reaction after an action makes readers wonder and if the trend continues, the story becomes unbelievable. Character reaction gives the reader a sense of direction and guides her/him into understanding the character better, and when the reaction is responded to by another character, the reader can get meaning out of it.

Characters react to events and situations through their dialogue or what they keep silent about, or through their actions or what they refrain from doing; what they feel and what they think. What is said by a character can be carefully thought out and said to influence or convince other characters, or it can be forced out of the character by other characters that have power over them or involuntarily come out due to an emotional outburst. Examples of character reactions that give revelation to character traits are such as that of Nanfuka (the protagonist in *Voice of a Dream* (2006), when her auntie Naka brings home a suitor to marry her off to take control of her father's property:

'You...are...welcome,' Nanfuka says.

'So this is my Nanfuka,' the visitor says, his voice hoarse.

'And these are my siblings, sir,' Nanfuka says. If this huge man is going to marry her, then he should know she has brothers and sisters. She glances at Aunt Naka's face: it has already transformed, eyes narrowed, lips bunched and nose flaring. The venom in her eyes is even more pronounced now that she is angry... Tears well up in Nanfuka's eyes. It's disheartening to see her

siblings hustled out, unwanted. Is this an illusion or reality?

...'As you already know, sir, this is your bride-to-be.' Aunt Naka smiles, then turns to Nanfuka. 'This is your husband-to-be.'

Silence falls. In a moment, it's cut through by Kato's scream from outside.

'I hate such noises! The visitor complains.' 'Nanfuka I don't need such interruptions.'

...'It's not that!' Nanfuka says. I have a right to decide. I am not getting married!' She turns to go out.

Aunt Naka hurries to snatch Nanfuka's hand. Nanfuka fights her way out of the grip. She stands still, fighting back Aunt Naka's venomous stare with a scowl.

'Let me teach you manners, you daft girl.' Aunt Naka brandishes her hand to slap Nanfuka, but Nanfuka ducks away... (pp. 61-62).

The dramatic encounter above is a revelation of not only Nanfuka's character but also that of Aunt Naka. Nanfuka's response to the suitor's possessive statement by introducing her siblings has underlying spite. Her reaction is that of 'take it or leave it' where 'it' means Nanfuka with all her responsibilities. Her frustration and love for her siblings is read in the tears that well up in her eyes. The silence that falls when the suitor is introduced as Nanfuka's husband-to-be is a silence that is pregnant with tension, rage and suspense; reactions from Aunt Naka, Nanfuka and the suitor respectively. The drama that ensues thereafter demonstrates the conflict between Nanfuka and her Aunt Naka and it helps to demonstrate Nanfuka's assertive nature and her resolve not to succumb to her aunt's dictates. Aunt Naka on the other hand is shown to be dictatorial and insensitive to her nieces' and nephews' feelings. She takes advantage of her being an adult to suppress the young ones.

Characterisation by Character Thoughts

Other than physical appearance, actions and reactions, a revelation of a character's thoughts is another way that a reader can understand a character. The revelation of character thoughts is mainly done through protagonists, although some authors reveal thoughts of other characters, especially when narration is participatory. In some stories, though, character thoughts are not revealed at all. The disclosure of characters' inner thoughts enhances the readers' deeper understanding of the characters.

In *Moses* (Kimenye, 1968), the first book in the *Moses* series, for instance, the revelation of Moses' thoughts gives the reader insight into the character of Moses, the protagonist, by laying a foundation of his life and the setting from which he is operating. His feelings, his history, and his perceptions about himself and his guardians are all laid bare for the reader to be able to understand his behaviour. All comes out clearly when the author exposes his thoughts thus:

From there, I started thinking about my past. I know that at the age of fifteen, you are not supposed to have one, and yet I seemed to have very little else: I had no money of my own, no parents, no brothers or sisters. Yes, it was quite true to say that a past was all I could claim to have in the world. And what a past! Honestly, I couldn't help being impressed when I looked back on all the things I had done in only fifteen years of life. What other boy, I wondered, could boast of having been expelled from six different Uganda schools? ...It was not likely that another school would accept me. In a way, I was glad because it meant that I would be free to take a job. In my judgment, I was perfectly capable of doing something exciting and interesting. Say, for instance, piloting a jet aircraft. And I was only too willing to be Africa's first man in space because heights have never worried me. I was climbing trees before I was five years old (pp. 1-2).

The reference above brings out Moses as a teenager who is not only unruly and transgressive but one who is also proud of his behaviour. His misguided pride exposes his naivety and myopic imagination that he can be a pilot without qualifications. His narrow-mindedness and desire for freedom also come out and emphasise the ingenuousness that is associated with his age. When later his thoughts about his guardians are revealed, the reader is accorded ground to analyse the age/ parent/child conflict:

As things were, even a reformatory would be better than staying much longer in my uncle's house. I was tired of always being shouted at and regarded as a criminal or, even worse, continually being told how grateful I should be... Can you blame me, then, if I spent the rest of the evening trying to strategise how I could escape from them forever? When I was free, I would earn my living so that I would be completely independent (p. 5).

The great desire for independence and freedom from "[feeling] like a prisoner in solitary confinement... [Feeling] like a condemned man..." (pp. 5-6), free from

the guardians' dictates, is once again exposed through Moses' thoughts.

Characterisation through Dialogue/ Speech:

Apart from character thoughts, character traits can also be revealed through characters' dialogue. What a person says, what s/he is silent about and how s/h says what s/he says, shows what kind of person s/he is. [Semino and Culpeper \(253\)](#), quoting Mead (1990) point out the link between people and fictional characters thus: "we recognise, understand and appreciate fictional characters insofar as their appearances, action, and speech reflect or refer to those of persons in real life". Just like the personalities of real human beings can be deciphered from their speech, so can characters be interpreted from what they say and how they say it. A good example is in Namukasa's short story "The Pact" (pp. 145-154);

"Tino," she called my name and hesitated, staring at me as if what she wanted to say was written in my eyes. "I saw Daudi talking to your sister last week. I knew they were up to something bad. That's why I gave you that letter instead of giving it to Daudi. I have heard bad things about Daudi."

Before we talk of Daudi, I have something to say to you."

She remained silent.

I did something very bad, Rachel. I am here to ask for your forgiveness."

The bewildered look on her face disappeared, and instead, her eyes narrowed in confusion.

Direct and Indirect Characterisation:

On the one hand, direct characterisation is a method of characterisation where the author gives readers information about characters. The information is mainly given through the narrator, the characters themselves or other characters talking about or describing a character. For this kind of characterisation, the authors explicitly bring out the character traits of particular characters, sometimes through the narrator's description, for instance, the description of Nanfuka in *Voice of a Dream*.

"Tonight the clever, hot-tempered Nanfuka would be his" (Namukasa, 2006, p. 2). Later, Sendi, reminiscing about Nanfuka, elaborates the description thus: "Everywhere he looks seems to be painted with Nanfuka's picture. Nanfuka, fuming; eyes narrowing, lips tightening, nose flaring. Nanfuka, smiling: eyes sparkling,

dimples forming. His sense of smell is haunted by the cocoa butter perfume Nanfuka applied that 'incomplete night'. It's a fragrance that beats the scent of roses in the flower garden at home (ibid., pp.17-18).

The descriptions are a clear description of who Nanfuka is: a clever, hot-tempered girl who has attracted the attention of Sendi.

On the other hand, indirect characterisation is another way of interpreting characters. Here, the readers infer from other things that the authors use to give their characters life. Authors mainly use actions, reactions, thoughts and speech, and the readers make intelligent conclusions by deducing from what the characters do, say, think or how they react to situations and events in the stories. One good example is in *Voice of a Dream*, which reveals Sendi's desire to be a better person when he realises he is in love with Nanfuka:

Inside the class, three of his crew members are hovering over something. Their panic, as he enters, tells him it is the nude picture magazine Moses brought in the morning. 'See you tomorrow, guys,'...Sendi hurries out, studiously ignoring the voice. [At home], he grabs the nude picture magazines from the drawer. 'Where should I hide these damn magazines?'...He collects his dirty jeans and folds them one by one into a pile. He yanks off the blanket, makes his bed and slumps back...He is no longer a cowboy. The cowboy 'Ettiene is a corpse that only Nanfuka can resurrect... [When the father asks], 'Ma said you left the boarding section. Why? ...We don't own the school, Sendi. I am just one of the school proprietors. You can't just walk in and out.' [He shockingly answers], 'I understand Pa' ...I'll go back to the boarding section next term.' (pp. 20-23)

All the actions, speech and reactions displayed by Sendi above expose a change of behaviour and a development of his character. He no longer wants to participate in pornography; he is more studious and wants to be on his father's good side. He is disgusted with his disorganised life and is ready to abandon his weird cowboy behaviour. This behaviour and attitude change is revealed indirectly through his actions and reactions.

Types of Characters

Just like people in the real world are different, so are characters in the fictitious world. There are flat and round characters, there are static and dynamic as well as stock characters, heroes and anti-heroes, not to mention major, minor, protagonists, antagonists, foils and symbolic characters.

CONCLUSION

Conclusively, we can say that characterisation is a useful method of understanding a story because it offers readers a similarity to the real world. It exposes character traits, is a source of entertainment, and helps authors develop characters. Characterisation helps in author effectiveness as far as developing their plots is concerned, not to mention augmenting readers' understanding of characters, their roles and consequently the author's concerns. When characters surprise or shock us, their complex nature is revealed. Characterisation also helps in uncovering authors' stylistic choices and the degree of their literary excellence, their investment in their stories and their devotion to their creations. Through character psychological and physical descriptions, character thoughts, dialogue, actions and reactions, readers can understand them and relate with them and to real life. It is through characterisation that readers can, as Atticus Finch states, "...understand [the characters by] considering things from their point of view [and]...until [they] (the readers) climb into [their] skin[s] and walk around in [them]", can they understand the characters. The intimacy between the reader and the character in a work of fiction is born out of characterisation and out of the reader's great desire to understand the 'people' that move and act in the story. Characterisation is therefore not only a stylistic device but also a plot developer and a theme revealer.

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A Reflection on Cultural Dislocation in Jamuna Bini's *When an Adivasi Sings*

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Abstract— The present paper will try to understand the social, cultural, philosophical and political stand of Adivasis. How do they lead their life? How does intrusion affect their culture? How their culture should be addressed? The paper will adhere to the MLA 7th edition and will also follow 8th and 9th edition. Jamuna Bini, born in a Nyishi Adivasi family in Arunachal, North East India, is well acclaimed poet and literary figure. Her popular work, *When an Adivasi Sings*, is a collection of thirty-seven poems. Most of her poems delve deep into the tapestry of Adivasi faith, culture, and values. In her poems she knits her lived experiences amidst forest and mountain. Through her poems, she draws the attention of readers towards the challenges of protecting forest, water, land, Adivasi language, culture, identity, habitat, and existence. Adivasis are offered development and modern amenities at the cost of losing water, forest, land, mountain, culture, language, and identity.

Keywords— Cultural dislocation, development, urbanization, deceptive policies, aesthetic beauty, morality.



I. INTRODUCTION

I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me...When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves or figments of their imagination, indeed everything and anything except me... That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of the construction of their inner eyes, those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality (Elison 03).

According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, culture stands for the customs, beliefs, art, way of life, and social organization of a particular country or group. Cultural conflict shows or represents the differences between two communities or people.

The term 'cultural conflict' is the main anchor to measure the objective of this paper. The term 'Adivasi' refers to the self-claimed identity of the people who are known as 'Tribals,' or 'Scheduled Tribes' in the *Constitution of India*. They are indigenous people and spread across our country. The term also denotes that they are the original or first inhabitants of the nation. Jamuna

Bini's collection of poems, *When an Adivasi Sings* depicts the intrusion on their culture, language, inhabitant, forest, land, and mountain. The collection also helps to understand the rich Adivasi culture and their conflict with growing modernization, development projects, and globalization. The present Adivasi generation is facing cultural dislocation, flawed policies of government to extract natural resources, blind and uncontrolled mining and exploitation of natural resources, migration to cities, and urbanization.

II. ANALYSIS

Adivasis are struggling to pass their culture to the next generation or to retain it in its original form. Basic features of Adivasi life are collectiveness, co-existence, symbiotic relationship with nature, denial of anthropocentric values of life, sense of equality among all creations in the cosmos, reverence forest, nature and mountain, friendly relationship between man and woman, etc. but the blow of modernity and globalization is uprooting and dismantling everything. In the very first poem, "Those Days of Leisure," the poet is nostalgic and recalls her childhood days eating "Muku-Mabla," (Bini 37) chasing goats, and cropping ragi paddy.

She used to enjoy leisure lying, catching butterfly while her parents were entangled in the humdrum of daily life. In the evening all used to sit together beside the fireplace, and each member used to narrate the incidents of the day. They used to go to bed early and wake up early. Now the poetess is grown up and states that “furnaces have broken,” (Bini 41), people do not stay together anymore. They have migrated to different cities in search of livelihood. Their houses are made of concrete. People do not sit together, do not share stories, sleep late and wake up late, and remain busy on social media. Urbanization brought the misery of loneliness, frustration, fake virtual friends and hollow life. Explaining the present situation of Adivasis in the age of scientific revolution, she writes:

We remain engaged in
T.V. mobile phones
And laptop
Now,
MMS, Facebook,
And WhatsApp
Get us connected. (Bini 42)

Industrialization and economic liberalization have been used as by the governments as tools to displace Adivasis from their land by usurping their fields fraudulently. “An Interesting Story” deals with farmers and their precious happy days until they transferred their farmland to capitalists to open companies. They were allured by a handsome amount of money, and when their money was spent, they “visited the office of the company” and “scuffle with the employees of the company” (Bini 45). They had lost the battle and ground both. They were at their wit's end and have turned from owners to “Hooliganism” (Bini 45).

A corporate company
entered this village
It offered an enticement
of compensation
in exchange of
Land acquisition. (Bini 44)

Language is maker of one's identity and a tool for acquiring hegemony. Mrs. Campbell Praed's nineteenth-century Australian novel, *Policy and Passion* sums up, “Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of 'truth', 'order', and 'reality' becomes established” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 07)

Robert J. C. Young in his *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* notes, “The colonial language becomes culturally more powerful, devaluing the native language as it is brought into its domain, domesticated and accommodated!” (140). The third poem, “When an Adivasi

Sings,” points out the capitalist and urban people stereotype which categorises Adivasi language as limited, semi developed, coarse and full of flaws. The poet voices the importance of regional languages/dialects and culture. The dominant class blames that Adivasi languages lack “sophistry,” “logic,” “coarse,” “illogical sentence construction, shallow, semi-developed and only lullabies can be sing” (Bini 47). However, the poet, with her acute vision, advocates and convinces the readers that the Adivasi language is a matter of pride, celebration, and confidence. It is most natural, musical, and affable. Adivasi language is the song of the river, tree, birds, sun/moon, mountain, rain, and every corner of nature. Moreover, the people need to change their aesthetic behaviour and perspective towards Adivasis and their language and culture.

The poem “In A Waiting for the Return” deals with ideological clash and the sufferings of innocent people. According to Marxist analysis, culture becomes an arena through which the dominant class seeks to propagate the ideas that are conducive to its own growth and prosperity following the logic of class antagonism; this necessarily requires the exploitation of another culture thus becomes an expression of dominant ideology or “false consciousness” (Chakraborty 39). Wangpan's mother is terribly old and desperately needs her family members around her. However, she asks Wangpan to go away to city from village so that he may not either be taken away by the “people of the forest” to join their gang, or become a target of Indian Army's bullets. Undoubtedly, she loves her son and has a great wish to meet him, but she does not want to put her son's life in danger. That's why she wants her son to stay away and consoles herself from his memory:

No! No!
Ask him,
Of the two,
The People of the Forest
And
Indian Army,
Whose Bullets
Does he like
The taste of? (Bini 52)

The poem “Relationship with Soil” deals with the innocence of Adivasis and the deceptive policies of the capitalists. She states that the Adivasis of Arunachal sell their land for their greed, need, and laziness and later they are forced to live a pitiable life. The money they receive is spent; the job they get do not procure enough for their survival. Their dream of a better future and pride is crushed and ultimately, they surrender to the circumstances and to the system. They have broken their relationship from their soil, hence uprooted and cursed to bear the agony of separation and humiliation:

A big dam
 Would be constructed here
 After demolishing this village...
 The handsome amount of money
 Received as compensation
 Was spent by them
 Long ago.
 And
 The salary
 Of the peon
 Is insufficient
 To satisfy
 Hungry stomach
 Of the family members. (Bini 62-63)

"A Fairy Tale" discusses cultural dislocation and exploitation of Adivasis. Capitalists as well as the government both are responsible for the exploitation and pitiable plight of both men and women. These agencies show day dreams to the Adivasi girls through their "pomp-show" (Bini 58). The innocent girls are trapped in their glittery promises and migrate to the cities for employment/dream fulfilment. Moreover, these fairies are mentally as well as physically tortured and harassed by the "main-stream" demons (Bini 58). They are physically molested and exploited. The chimera of good life, employment, and fashionable life is drained out. Disappointed they either return to their native land or become slave of conditions. Those who return heartbroken and exploited lack courage and tell their experiences "in bits and pieces" (Bini 59). Explaining deception which the Adivasi girls meet, Jamuna Bini writes:

Showing
 Dreams
 Of employment
 These demons
 Imprison
 Those fairies
 In the fake golden cage...
 When a fairy Molested
 And physically exploited,
 Return home,
 She shared
 Some experiences
 In bits and pieces
 With her sister fairy... (Bini, 58-59)

Robert J. C. Young opines that "Indigenous culture is being opened up for appropriation by the conquering culture" (141). Similarly, Adivasis are forced to adopt the path of their cultural and linguistic appropriation. Bini notes that influence of acculturation has damaged cultural pride in Adivasi youths and they do not feel pride in speaking their dialect. Arunachal Pradesh is not untouched of it.

Arunachali youth speak English and Hindi and give more respect to them. They do not like the stories of their warriors and deities. Moreover, they like cartoon serials of "Doremon, Pokemon" (Bini 66). They do not eat local food like "Hiku-Huyup, Honyor" instead, they prefer "Pizza and Noodles" (Bini 66). Hence, the "consumerist culture" is snatching away their language, music, habitat, food, stories, and way of living, thinking and controlling their behaviour (Bini 67).

The dominant culture has declared itself as mainstream which tries to maintain its dominance upon the subaltern through hegemony. It writes history, makes policies, and controls the narrative. It controls the process of creating knowledge through multiple strata of society. In postcolonial India, multiple voices and narrations have found a place in literature, history, and other documents. Accordingly, a shift in the concept of power and the parading of social strata has been witnessed. The best example of the mainstream-colonial narrative and subaltern is uprising of 1857. English historian and colonial narrators John Kaye and G. B. Mallison have called it "Sepoy War" and "Indian Mutiny," while Indian historians, authors, and poets have called it the "war of independence." Talapatra Observes, "While mainstream historiography highlights the major events led by elitist-political ideologies, subaltern studies unearth local events headed by the masses" (45).

Jamuna Bini, in her poem "The So-Called," depicts pain and disappointment of Adivasis being ignored from mainstream history and literature. Ania Loomba, in her celebrated book *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* observes "Various tribal peoples, historically repressed by the upper castes and already relegated to the margins of Hindu society, were also regarded by the British authorities as less sophisticated, more warlike, childlike, and gullible" (86). Bini observes that in narration of history, story, and literature, people are cognizant about "Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev," but nobody mentions "Matmur Jamoh and Moji Riba" (Bini 68). She states that Adivasis know cow is a sacred animal of the mainstream, but mainstream does not know about "Mithun" (Bini 69). Adivasis give due importance to the mainstream warriors, culture, rituals, food, faith and literature but Adivasi warriors, patriots, culture, tradition, fashion, faith, food, and literature do not get enough space and attention in mainstream literature, narration, and history.

Since inception, humans have opted for an anthropocentric attitude toward nature. Instead of considering themselves a part of nature, a companion, they see it as 'other' just for exploitation to satisfy their unruly desires. Exploitation of nature by the civilized main-stream has been ravishing, irreparable and cause of immense

calamities in the world. Aldo Leopold in his book, *A Sand County Almanac* (1949) states, "Humans are required to show respect and consideration for the fellow members of the extended community rather than compete with it" (Qtd. Rangarajan 51). "Memory of the Village" and "Scene" describe the ravaging and conquering attitude of men who are exploiting nature and polluting the environment. In "Memory of the Village" Yama goes to the city with her aunt. Her eyes search for trees but fail to find them; she looks for the blue sky and finds it smoky. She searches for the river, and her aunt responds, "Here the rivers have become a dumping ground" (Bini 74). She goes to the crowded market, and on returning, she feels an etching in her nose. She "cleans her nose, and her finger turns black" (Bini 75). Her aunt tells:

Air is polluted here;
Next time,
Wear a mask necessarily
When you go out. (Bini 75)

Yama misses fresh air, green trees, her dialect, and river. She has become a victim of globalization, urbanization, capitalism, power, and powerlessness. She is enslaved by the urban ecosystem, either to survive or get destroyed. Her father is helpless and suggests:

Staying with your uncle and aunt
Study with complete attention;
Get some job
And
Help your brothers and sisters also.

(Bini 77)

Whenever Jamuna Bini finds green trees, mountain and birds, she is reminded of human greed, cruelty, emotionlessness and his indifference towards nature. Humans build tall buildings, showrooms, hotels, offices, apartments, malls, markets, and play grounds by chopping off thousands and thousands of trees. The poem "Scene" describes Bini's trauma as she imagines trees to be green waving corpse, where "Tall buildings have been constructed" (Bini 82). She longs for the existence of mountain, forest and birds. She weeps for the natural beauty that is wiped out. Hotels are built on them. The trees, pasture fields, mountains, and flowing rivers have become a matter of the past:

One day
Sitting
In the dining hall
of a luxurious hotel
I was eating
But something stuck in my throat
That here below
There happened to be
A river. (Bini 83)

Robert J. C. Young, in his *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* observes, "They made war and called it peace" (37). Young's comment is relational to government statutes which prefer capitalism, urbanization, and modernity that dominate, restructure, and impose a materialistic culture and authority on the Adivasis. Bini is very disappointed and observes that the Adivasis are helpless and hopeless in the present situation. Their population is dwindling; how can they have a bright future? Urbanization and capitalism are looking to exploit their resources; land is being occupied to build big dams, hotels, and factories. They are uprooted simultaneously from their root under multiple external intrusion and circumstances.

In "Mother", the poet is concerned about regionalism, corrupt leaders, terrorism and urges the natives to unite, stand and fight to safeguard the mother country. In "Modern Education", Bini advocates for the stories of Adivasi ancestors, its humour, mourning, happiness of birth, lamentation of death, victory and wars. However, she expresses her disappointment that the Adivasi youth is unable to see or feel pride in it. They call "primitive faith" "hypocrisy" and move towards modern education and "give logic for logic sake" (Bini 101). The poem "They and We" shows the perspective of outsiders and of natives. The outsiders call the natives insolent, rigid, ignorant, afraid of change, uneducated, nomads, hunters, and savage. They outsiders want to change the Adivasis for the sake of development, modern education, to clean their dirty villages, to save them from cannibalistic animals, for their benefit. However, Bini observes that the Adivasis do not want all this on the cost of their culture, land, forest and mountain. Therefore, she appeals the intruders to leave the Adivasis on their own.

In "Being a Woman" she observes that Adivasi culture gives freedom to women. But women lack it in the so called developed and modern society and inclusive society. They are repressed and if any woman makes any comment on God or religion, it is taken as a "blunder," a "slap" on the cheek of religion (Bini 113). They are awarded public shaming like calling "witch," chaining her "with shackles, cruelly crushing her to death, or throwing her into the fire (Bini 113).

III. CONCLUSION

The collection also comprises poems those deal with love, laughter, memory, democracy, sky, emotion, fear, machine, rain, and waves. However, these poems do not romanticize but visualise the concern, and pang of the poet for depleting culture, wiping out forest, mountain, land, and pasture. Jamuna Bini is well aware about the root and uprooting, culture and cultural dislocation, their ease and unease. She is also well informed about their greed and

innocence. She does not fail to observe the ideologies and cunningness that is being imposed upon them in the name of modernity, urbanization, development, religion, employment and cultural superiority. She also observes that the Adivasi youth is losing pride in their root, language, culture, faith, food, music and belief. They are easily influenced by majority culture, language, music, song, food and fashion. The diction is simple and realistic. The tone of the poetry is nostalgic, sarcastic and appealing. Commenting upon the poems, Padmashree Yeshe Dorjee writes, "The poems are simple in tone but very deep and impressive in effect. The most burning issue which Adivasis are facing is separation from their cultural roots" (Bini 13).

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Navigating the Labyrinth of Reality: A Postmodern, Psychoanalytic, and Structuralist Analysis of Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore*

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Abstract— Haruki Murakami's "*Kafka on the Shore*" remains an exceptional illustration of postmodern writing, where divided stories and obscured real factors challenge customary narrating. Through characters like Kafka, Oshima, and Nakata, Murakami investigates the intricacies of personality, ease, and the exchange between cultural standards and individual encounters. This story's intricacy, improved by components of structuralism and deconstruction, welcomes readers to connect effectively, embrace vagueness, and question the limitations of the real world and creative mind, making "*Kafka on the Shore*" a dazzling excursion through the complex embroidery of the human life.



Keywords— Postmodern Writing, Intricacies of Identity, Structuralism, Deconstruction, Questioning Reality

"If you only read the books that everyone else is reading, you can only think what everyone else is thinking."
(Murakami, Norwegian Wood)

Haruki Murakami remains quite possibly one of writing's best authors, eminent for his wonderful investigation of topics like enchanted authenticity, deception, and the significant existential inquiries that life presents. His scholarly manifestations, exemplified by the spellbinding '*Kafka on the Shore*,' unpredictably mesh these topics into stories that challenge shows and dazzle reader's brains. Right from the beginning, his writing was characterized by images and events that even the author found challenging to decipher, yet they seemed to emerge from the inner recesses of his memory. His literary works are profoundly imaginative and rich with intricate symbolism. Through the deft use of human nuances, he crafts characters that resonate deeply, fostering reliability and immersing readers completely.

Haruki Murakami's literary prowess is profoundly influenced by the interplay of elements such as Magical Realism and Surrealism, Deep Symbolism, Introspection and Identity, as well as character depth and reliability. His

skill in meticulously crafting atmospheres, vividly evident in works like "*1Q84*" (Murakami, 1Q84), enriches his narratives. By employing narrative ambiguity, Murakami uniquely engages readers, blending accessible prose with profound themes and intricate symbolism. His stories beckon readers to delve into the human experience, question norms, and navigate life's intricate tapestry.

"*Kafka on the Shore*," published in 2002, takes readers on a hypnotizing venture through complex layers of the real world, dream, and human brain science. Set against the scenery of Japan, the story interlaces topics of personality, memory, and the cryptic idea of presence. With a capable mix of mysterious authenticity, imagery, and thoughtfulness, Murakami welcomes readers to explore the confounded scenes of his characters' lives, testing their insights and making a permanent imprint on them.

Kafka Tamura is a resolute fifteen-year-old protagonist who takes a daring leap into the unknown, leaving behind his identity and the weight of a disquieting prophecy his father has bestowed upon him. Haunted by his father's words, he seeks solace by distancing himself from his past, embarking on a journey to unravel the enigma within

himself and the turmoil that engulfs our human existence. Driven by the need to fathom the secrets behind his mother's departure alongside his sister, Kafka's odyssey becomes a quest for self-discovery and answers, revealing a remarkable resilience that thrives amidst the chaos of his coming-of-age.

Identity Construction and Isolation

Kafka's decision of the name "Kafka" is critical according to a psychoanalytic point of view. The name "Kafka" represents crows, which has double implications in Japanese culture. On one hand, they are viewed as nuisances causing tumult, while then again, they address help from above through the three-legged crow legend. This decision can be deciphered as Kafka relating to the idea of being an untouchable or a pariah. He could consider himself to be a wanderer crow, detached from the general public he lives in, and feeling unimportant or undesirable because of his mom's surrender. This segregation is built up by his inclination for wellness and exercise, which he utilizes as a method for making an individual, separated space, and laying out a feeling of control.: After a series of adventures, Kafka chooses to return to society, enrolling in a school in Tokyo. His decision to embrace the "brand new world" suggested by Crow is ironic, signifying his successful redefinition of his emotions and his creation of a fresh identity.

"The name 'Kafka' is derived from Czech which means 'crows'." (Murakami, p. 330)

Unlike the stereotypical mischievous rebellion of adolescent characters, Kafka's defiance involves effectively suppressing the influence of a parental figure. Paradoxically, his attempts to escape his father's curse become entwined with the curse itself, showing that he can't fully break free from it, regardless of his efforts.

Unresolved Oedipal Complex:

Kafka's journey to get away from his dad's Oedipal prescience and find his mom can be connected to Freud's idea of the Oedipal complex. The prescience predicts that he will kill his dad and have sexual relations with his mom and sister, addressing oblivious longings and clashes. Kafka's stressed relationship with his dad, Koichi Tamura, could come from unsettled Oedipal sensations of competition and hatred. The decision to move away from his dad and society overall could be a sign of his inner turmoil to freely state his character and wants.

He decides to run away from his home to elude his father's prophecy which tells him that he will murder his father and violate his mother and adopted sister.

Mother-Son Dynamics and Subconscious Desires

Kafka's profound yearning for adoration and warmth from his mom and sister demonstrates his unsettled cravings for maternal support and ladylike friendship. His deserting by his mom and sister might have prompted insecurities and an oblivious quest for maternal figures, like Miss Saeki. The experience with Miss Saeki's phantom and his acknowledgment of his Oedipal wants in dreams should have been visible as his psyche endeavors to wrestle with these longings in a representative manner.

In contrast to typical adult messages in YA literature that deemphasize sex, Kafka's father introduces him to the concept through a negative lens. Kafka's attraction to Miss Saeki stems from his unfulfilled desire for maternal love due to early abandonment. This desire manifests as an attempt to reattach his lost childhood, creating a unique perspective on the role of sex in adolescence.

Father-Centered Conflicts and the "Crow"

Kafka's boundary, known as the "crow," fills in as a defensive system to protect himself from the aggravation of dismissal. This crow should have been visible as a portrayal of his dad, an image of the power figure he wants to limit any association with to declare his personality. The dad-focused clashes trigger Kafka's journey for character, as he attempts to break liberated from the requirements of his dad's prediction and assumptions.

He builds a protective emotional barrier called the 'crow' to shield himself from the pain of rejection.

Oshima's Unique Identity

Oshima, the intelligent librarian, defies societal norms through his gender presentation and sexual orientation. He identifies as biologically female but lives and dresses as a male. His preference for males as gay individuals, along with his hemophilia, shapes his identity and limits his engagement in risk-taking activities. Oshima's self-awareness and acceptance of his unique bisexual body showcase his strength and independence in navigating societal expectations.

"My body is truly female, yet my mind's completely male... Truly I live as a man. So I guess your idea of being a 'prototype' may be correct. And who knows if I'm a notorious sexist. But I'm not a lesbian, even though I dress this way. My sexual preference is for men. In other words, I'm a female but I'm gay...So, what am I discriminating against?" (Murakami, 2006, p. 236).

Miss Saeki's Haunting Past

Miss Saeki, a melancholic middle-aged woman, is haunted by her past, specifically the loss of her lover during the Student Protests of the 1960s. Her presence is multi-layered, existing as both a wandering living soul and an Ikiryo, a concept from Japanese folklore. Miss Saeki's

psychological state can be psychoanalytically examined, revealing unresolved conflicts and her attempt to reconnect with her past experiences. Her engagement with Kafka and her deceased lover reflects her complex emotional landscape.

Miss Saeki's way of behaving, where she relives her past by engaging with Kafka and her departed lover, can be analyzed psychoanalytically as a manifestation of unresolved psychological conflicts and her effort to relive her past experiences.

Nakata's Otherness and Regression

Nakata's unique psychology stems from his traumatic past, particularly his loss of identity during the Rice Bowl Slope incident. The abuse he endured led him to adopt a defensive mechanism of emptying himself, resulting in a new, simple identity devoid of language and complex thought. His ability to communicate with cats and perform supernatural feats highlights his divergence from societal norms. Nakata's otherness is more intricate and potentially dangerous, reflecting his journey from trauma-induced regression to his current state of peculiar abilities.

Before the Rice Bowl Slope incident, Nakata had been an intelligent child but there were signs of him suffering abuse and violence at home. After receiving an extreme beating from his group teacher, when he discovered her blood-soaked pads, Nakata adopted the defense mechanism of emptying himself and letting himself go to the other extreme, losing all his memories, renouncing his old identity, and assuming a new primitive one; an identity devoid of language and basic understanding of things.

In "Kafka on the Shore," Haruki Murakami masterfully crafts characters who exist on the peripheries of societal norms. Oshima's gender and sexual identity, Miss Saeki's haunting past and dual existence, and Nakata's regression into otherness showcase a range of psychological constructs that delve into the intricacies of human nature and societal belonging.

Navigating Kafka's Blurred Realities in a Postmodern World

Fragmented Narratives and Reality: The postmodern approach in "Kafka on the Shore" deliberately disrupts the narrative flow, creating a fragmented and non-linear structure that blurs the boundaries between reality and imagination. This technique challenges the traditional concept of a coherent and linear narrative, reflecting the postmodern skepticism towards objective reality.

"It's like I'm split in two. One of me is fine, perfectly fine, and the other is like a shadow that's always with me." (Murakami, 2005, p. 9)

Metafiction and Storytelling: The novel incorporates metafictional elements that draw attention to its status as a work of fiction. Kafka's interactions with fictional characters and his exploration of books within the narrative disrupt the illusion of a seamless narrative world. This metafictional play encourages readers to question the distinction between reality and fiction, a characteristic feature of postmodern literature.

"Nakata stared at his hands. So if you weren't here, this wouldn't be a scene in a novel. Kafka would just be a fifteen-year-old kid. Nakata would be a man in his seventies. Sakura would be alive. People wouldn't be talking with cats." (Murakami, 2005, p. 24)

Intertextual Collage

Haruki Murakami employs intertextuality by referencing Western authors and cultural touchstones. These references serve as building blocks for the narrative's meaning, blurring the boundaries between high and low culture, and inviting readers to engage in a playful exploration of various texts and cultural contexts.

"Sometimes fate is like a small sandstorm that keeps changing directions. You change direction but the sandstorm chases you. You turn again, but the storm adjusts. Over and over you play this out, like some ominous dance with death just before dawn." (Murakami, 2005, p. 2)

Fluid Identities in Shifting Settings

The settings of the library and the forest symbolize fluidity and transformation in identity construction. The library represents the accumulation of experiences and knowledge that contribute to Kafka's evolving sense of self. At the same time, the forest embodies the liminal space where boundaries between reality and the subconscious blur. This postmodern approach challenges the fixed nature of identity and reality.

"I can't remember who I was back then. It's strange. Even though it was only a short time ago, my memory is already growing dim. Kafka, you must really be special." (Murakami, 2005, p. 112)

Cultural and Artistic Influences

Music and literature are central to Kafka's identity development. The incorporation of music and literature as shaping forces for his character aligns with postmodern sensibilities that emphasize the multiplicity of influences that contribute to individual identities.

"I think my whole life might be like that. A kind of long, dark corridor with no exit signs." (Murakami, 2005, p. 177)

Narrative Play and Unresolved Mysteries

Murakami's supernatural realism blurs the lines between the rational and the magical. This postmodern element adds layers of complexity to the narrative by presenting mysteries and unresolved questions that resist easy explanations. The narrative's openness to ambiguity mirrors the postmodern focus on embracing uncertainty.

"Sometimes fate is like a small sandstorm that keeps changing directions." (Murakami, 2005, p. 2)

Subverting Norms through Characterization

The novel's diverse characters challenge societal norms and stereotypes, reflecting postmodern values of embracing the 'other' and celebrating individual differences. Murakami's portrayal of characters with unique sexual orientations, mental abilities, and physical traits defies traditional categorizations and enriches the exploration of identity.

"My body is truly female, but my mind's completely male." (Murakami, 2005, p. 236)

Global Context and Identity

The novel's global appeal is a manifestation of postmodern literature's tendency to transcend cultural and geographical boundaries. Murakami's exploration of identity resonates with readers worldwide, as characters grapple with universal questions of selfhood amidst unique historical and cultural contexts.

"The world's so vast, and yet so small." (Murakami, 2005, p. 17)

Narrative Complexity and Accessibility

Murakami's narrative style, marked by simplicity on the surface and intricate themes underneath, reflects postmodern storytelling. The tension between accessible narratives and complex themes allows for multiple interpretations and encourages readers to actively engage with the text, echoing postmodernism's emphasis on reader participation.

"In everybody's life there's a point of no return. And in a very few cases, a point where you can't go forward anymore. And when we reach that point, all we can do is quietly accept the fact." (Murakami, 2005, p. 283)

The multiplicity of Meanings

Like many postmodern works, *"Kafka on the Shore"* invites diverse interpretations and readings. The novel's openness to multiple meanings aligns with postmodern philosophy, which celebrates the plurality of perspectives and the inherent subjectivity of human experiences.

"But who can say what's best? That's why you need to grab whatever chance you have of happiness where you find it,

and not worry about other people too much." (Murakami, 2005, p. 78)

Structuralist Interpretation of Kafka's Rebellion and Language:

Kafka's attempt to escape his father's prophecy by running away to Shikoku is a fascinating reflection of the structuralist perspective. According to his plan, by distancing himself from his father's physical presence, Kafka believes he can break free from the curse and avoid fulfilling the prophecy of killing his father and being with his mother and sister. However, the irony lies in the fact that Kafka's rebellion inadvertently follows the very pattern outlined in the prophecy. In this context, Kafka's rebellion against the prophecy becomes a manifestation of the inherent system created by his father's language.

"It's like I'm split in two. One of me is fine, perfectly fine, and the other is like a shadow that's always with me." (Murakami, 2005, p. 9)

This structuralist interpretation unveils the power of language and its role in shaping one's reality. Even in the absence of a physical parent, the presence of a repressive surrogate persists, embodied in the form of the parent's language. This notion aligns with structuralism's emphasis on the influence of signifiers and signifieds, where language constructs and constrains the way we perceive the world.

Deconstruction of Traditional Categories

Murakami's narrative strategy in *"Kafka on the Shore"* resonates with deconstructionist tendencies inherent in structuralism. The characters in the novel, fitting into traditional categories, are situated in non-deterministic states. Oshima's gender identity, Nakata's unique abilities, and Miss Saeki's intertwining of time and identity exemplify this deconstruction.

"My body is truly female, but my mind's completely male." (Murakami, 2005, p. 236)

This deconstructive approach dismantles rigid categories, exposing the fluidity of identity and challenging the binary norms upheld by society. The tension between these constructed categories and the characters' intricate experiences highlights the transformative nature of identity, a central theme in structuralism.

Interplay Between Norms and Experiences

Structuralism's lens offers insights into how societal norms interact with individual experiences to shape narratives. The characters, often marginalized by societal standards due to their sexual orientations, mental abilities, and gender fluidity, engage in a perpetual negotiation between these norms and their landscapes.

"In everybody's life there's a point of no return. And in a very few cases, a point where you can't go forward anymore." (Murakami, 2005, p. 283)

Kafka's journey to Shikoku, his encounters with characters like Oshima and Nakata, and his eventual realization reflect the interplay between societal structures and personal experiences. This narrative tension propels characters to explore uncharted territories of their identities, redefining themselves beyond established categories.

The novel's deconstructionist tendencies and exploration of the fluidity of identity resonate with the tenets of structuralism, offering readers a unique perspective on the transformative narratives that emerge from the interaction between individuals and their environment.

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Literary Reflections of Womanhood in Colonial and Postcolonial Indian English Fiction

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Abstract— Tradition is not a force that modifies itself spontaneously; rather, tradition undergoes transformation only when members of society themselves enact deliberate change. The conceptualization of women within Indian society has evolved over decades—and often in abrupt, profound ways—marked by a succession of shifts that mirror changing historical, cultural, and ideological currents. The representation of “woman” has appeared in myriad forms, each reflecting different expectations, prescriptions, and aspirations imposed or cultivated within the social milieu. In literary domains, especially within the pages of early Indian English novels, one observes close examinations of these varying social identities—artfully revealing, through narrative and characterization, the altering masks worn by women in response to their time and context. This inquiry is an attempt to carefully identify and analyze those sites of change and continuity, as presented by pioneering novelists of the period. In composing this study, the objective is to gather and scrutinize the fragmented and diverse images of women, as they emerge from the multiple social layers and strata of Indian life—a reconstruction drawn from the nuanced tapestry that literature affords. It is essential to clarify that the analytical approach pursued does not advocate a position on either side of the feminist/anti-feminist divide. Instead, what is sought here is an exposition of the paradox inherent in women’s representations: both as fixed cultural symbols and as evolving agents within a dynamic society. The novels selected for examination comprise the works of both male and female authors, reinforcing the principle that the first duty of a writer is not to any specific ideological stance but to the honest chronicling and interpretation of society’s realities. By upholding this standard, the present study positions the writer as a true guardian of the social fabric—one whose role is to record, interrogate, and preserve the truths and contradictions of communal existence.



Keywords— Tradition, Transformation, Womanhood, Indian society, Indian English novels, Patriarchy, Gandhism, Social reform, Dowry system, Female agency, Education, Modernity, Female subjugation, Cultural identity, Literary representation

From the Middle Ages extending down to the dawn of the twentieth century, the intricate fabric of Indian family life, encompassed within a multifaceted social milieu and complex cultural traditions, compelled women to live encapsulated within protective yet repressive boundaries erected by moralists and custodians of societal order. The profound influence of Manu’s teachings was particularly impactful during this long epoch, shaping not only social

attitudes but also practical conditions for women. The halcyon days of the Harappan civilization and the early Vedic period, noted as golden eras for women, gradually receded into the past. Up until the closing century, a woman’s position within the family remained unequivocally subordinate, a state of affairs that significantly informed the genesis and thematic concerns of early Indian English novels. These novels reflect the

ongoing realities of female subjugation and limited agency, set against the backdrop of a society deeply imprinted by traditional prescriptions and patriarchal values derived, in large part, from authoritative texts like the Manusmriti. The novels thus emerge not only as literary artifacts but as sociocultural documents that illuminate the conditions and constraints defining womanhood during this historical juncture.

The emergence of Gandhism and the enactment of the Sharda Act unquestionably precipitated a profound and transformative shift in the lives of Indian women. The ideological and practical reforms advocated by Mahatma Gandhi, combined with legislative measures such as the Sharda Act, served to challenge and dismantle several oppressive social practices that had long constrained women's freedoms and status within society. The relentless efforts of earlier social reformers, including Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Jotiba Phule, Dhondo Keshav Karve, and Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, were instrumental in abolishing pernicious customs such as sati, widow tonsure, and child marriage. These monumental social changes were not confined to the legal sphere alone; they found vibrant expression and representation within the literatures composed in various Indian languages. Writers increasingly sought to present authentic and unvarnished portrayals of women's realities—revealing the complexities, struggles, and aspirations of womanhood amidst a rapidly changing socio-political landscape. The convergence of Gandhian philosophy and reformist zeal thus influenced both societal attitudes and literary depictions, underscoring the central role of literature as a mirror reflecting the evolving status of women in Indian society.

In English novels as well, the emergence of realistic portrayals of women became increasingly noticeable. The pioneers of the Indo-English novel, such as M. R. Anand, R. K. Narayan, and Raja Rao, undertook explorations into the underlying reasons that shaped the traditional societal attitudes towards women. The influence of these long-standing traditional forces is profoundly evident in the manner in which the birth of a girl child is perceived within the Indian family context. This perspective, however, saw some modulation during the later Vedic period. From the times of the Atharva Veda (VI-2-3), which states, "The birth of a girl, grant it elsewhere, here grant a boy," through the medieval ages and persisting into contemporary times, the birth of a daughter has often been received with resignation, if not outright sorrow. Early Indian English novels mirror this social reality by illustrating how daughters are frequently unwelcome within their families, and they delve into the cultural and economic reasons sustaining this traditional viewpoint. One prominent factor is the dowry system, a practice notorious for impoverishing parents

owing to the financial burdens it imposes. In R. K. Narayan's novel, *The Financial Expert*, the character Margayya candidly reveals to his borrowers the economic strain incurred by his family in raising daughters, thereby reflecting the societal anxieties surrounding the birth of girls and the weight of entrenched traditions

...Three daughters were born to my father.

Five cartloads of paddy came to us every half year, from the fields.

We just heaped them upon the floor of the hall,

we had five halls in our house, but where has it all gone? To the three daughters!'

'But it is not said that a man who begets a son is blessed in three lives, because he gives away the greatest treasure on the earth?' said some one.

'And how much more blessed is he that gives away three daughters? He is blessed no doubt, but he also becomes a bankrupt,' Margayya said. ¹

This contextual conversation exposes the greyish realities of its times. The problem of dowry and the traditional view about the girl's birth is expressed.

The protagonist, Rukmini, in *Nectar in a Sieve* closes her eyes in sorrow upon learning that she has given birth to a baby girl. Her husband desired sons who could assist him with the arduous work in the fields. This concern deeply troubles her, as she grapples with the societal preference for male offspring, especially the expectation that a first child should be a son. The prevailing negative attitude toward the birth of a girl child stems partly from the harsh realities of the dowry system, a burden Rukmini herself has suffered under, and partly from the traditional belief that sons serve as the pillars of support in old age. This perspective is further reinforced by religious doctrines that ascribe to sons the unique role of safeguarding ancestral spirits through ritual oblations. Raja Rao's protagonist, Ramaswamy, and his stepbrother, Vamana, perform such rites on the ghats of the Ganga River in the novel *The Serpent and the Rope*. Even progressive writers like Mulk Raj Anand echo this sentiment, as in his work *Morning Face*, where there is no depiction of joy at the birth of a girl. Likewise, R. K. Narayan's *Swami and Friends* reflects this traditional viewpoint. However, contemporary society has improved somewhat compared to previous generations. Yet, it remains a matter of concern that a child not welcomed at birth faces daunting challenges in later life. If mothers themselves greet the birth of any child, girl or boy, with

sorrow or reluctance, then such a society is bound to remain conservative, backward, and deprived of progress.

Another perspective on this traditional viewpoint must be considered. The joy associated with the birth of a son holds significant importance from the woman's standpoint as well, for it is the mother of the son who experiences immense pride during his marriage. Yet, the infusion of Western cultural values did indeed foster a shift in attitudes toward daughters, particularly in the post-independence era. This evolving perspective is vividly illustrated in the novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya. In *He Who Rides a Tiger* (1954), Kalo, the blacksmith, initially wished for a son to assist him in the smithy, but his deep love for his wife, who died in childbirth, transfers to his daughter, whom he educates and cherishes. His rebellion against societal indifference toward her remarkable academic achievements marks a critical narrative moment. In *So Many Hungers*, the character Rahul, soon to become a father, desires a daughter, though his mother and wife maintain traditional preferences for a son. Bhattacharya's works often reveal that the tide of change impacts men more noticeably, whereas ingrained views persist longer among women. As Tara Ali Baig insightfully remarks in *India's Woman Power*, traditional women have long upheld and enforced male primacy within society, beginning from birth, training girls from infancy to serve others dutifully:

“ Arch traditionalists that women are, it is they who have successfully and brutally established man's ascendancy over women in society. And it starts right from birth. ...girls were trained from babyhood to serve others and do manual work...”³

A small segment of society was able to resist the pervasive traditional views surrounding childbirth. For instance, Venu Chitale, in his novel *In Transit*, presents his heroine Mai—a princess by birth and a member of a progressive family—who desires to have a daughter after already bearing sons. Mai's wish symbolizes a departure from conventional preferences and reflects the evolving attitudes within certain privileged and enlightened circles that began to challenge entrenched societal norms.

Mulk Raj Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya, and Kamala Markandaya have, without doubt, vividly portrayed in their early novels the myriad sufferings that girls were subjected to under various circumstances such as famine, orthodoxy, and conservatism. Anand's literary motivation was rooted in social realism and a fervent passion for progressivism—an intellectual and artistic force that had swept through Europe in the 1930s and inspired the works of playwrights like Henrik Ibsen, George Bernard Shaw, and John Galsworthy. In his most acclaimed novel, *Untouchable*, Anand's

primary focus is the harrowing plight of the protagonist Bakha, a young boy oppressed by an orthodox and caste-ridden society. However, Anand's narrative also offers significant insights into the lives of girls within this social framework. Anand's ambition was to delve deeper into the lives of the marginalized, even more profoundly than contemporaries such as Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay and Premchand. Both Bakha and his sister Sohini are depicted as honest, diligent, and graceful individuals. While Bakha occupies the central role, Sohini is presented through an external viewpoint yet emerges as a compelling and lifelike character. Anand does not shy away from illustrating the harsh realities faced by girls, as exemplified by the incident where Sohini is molested by a priest while sweeping the temple courtyard, laying bare the suffering endured by young girls in a deeply unjust society.

In his novel *Two Leaves and a Bud*, Anand presents another poignant image of a girl through the character Leila. She compromises with the harsh conditions imposed upon her. The python that coils ominously around Leila as she ventures out to collect firewood symbolizes the impending lustful harassment by the white overseer, Reggie Hunt. Bereft of maternal protection, Leila stands “dumb like Time held spell-bound by the fear of Death.” Though merely a girl, she undertakes the labor typically assigned to an adult woman, and does so without complaint, enduring her plight silently. It is only through their labor that daughters are regarded as blessings by their parents—blessings akin to the rivers that are sacredly worshipped by Indians. As Anand notes, “The Aryan Hindus have loyally worshipped four things—Vedas, fair complexion, the rivers, and the cattle.” While Anand's female characters occasionally find moments of joy, the adult world remains largely hostile to them. For instance, Sheila in *Coolie* can only play freely with Munoo when her mother is absent. Maya in *The Village* exhibits a bolder spirit, even joining boys at play. Yet, she is abruptly reined in by a shrill and stern voice that admonishes her for lacking modesty. This reflects the pervasive societal pressures placed upon girls to behave in accordance with conservative gender norms:

Maya ni Maya, eater of your husband, may you wither away. Have you no shame that you go sitting among men? You must learn to be ashamed and modest.”⁷

In Bhabani Bhattacharya's *He Who Rides a Tiger*, the character Lekha embodies the image of a suffering girl. Despite being motherless, she is full of joy and vitality. However, her exuberance and laughter are not without caution; she is sternly warned by an elderly woman relative not to laugh too freely, reflecting the societal constraints

imposed on young girls' expressions of happiness and freedom. This warning serves as a metaphor for the suppression of female joy and autonomy, underscoring the severe limitations placed on girls' behavior within traditional patriarchal norms.

“ Laughing, a maiden uncovers a part of her That should be hidden! A maiden is safe Only in gravity's cloak.” 8

In Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*, Ira is depicted as a sweet, obedient, and industrious daughter of Rukmani and Nathan, a poor rural couple. Despite her dedication, Ira faces abandonment by her husband due to her inability to bear children. When famine strikes, her care and concern swiftly shift toward her younger brother, who becomes the center of her attention as maternal instincts awaken in her. For the sake of her brother, she starves herself, placing his wellbeing above her own. Ultimately, she crosses the strict boundaries of moral conduct by selling her body to the tannery workers, an act of silent sacrifice that manifests the extreme lengths to which a girl might go to support and protect her family. Ira's actions also represent a form of rebellion, as she disobeys her mother's counsel and navigates a morally fraught path, driven by necessity and love. This portrayal underscores not only the hardships faced by daughters in impoverished and traditional settings but also highlights their resilience, strength, and selflessness in the face of overwhelming adversity.

Early novels by Anand, Bhattacharya, and Markandaya predominantly depict the suffering of girls arising from poverty and the restrictive nature of family dynamics. These authors tend to focus on rural and urban settings where traditional social constraints severely limit the freedom and agency of young girls. However, their coverage is somewhat limited geographically and culturally. Notably, they do not explore the experiences of girls from tribal communities, which remain largely unrepresented in their works. There is a conspicuous absence of narratives similar to *Yashoda*, a Marathi novel by Pendse, or *Chemmeen* by T. S. Pillai—works that vividly portray the lives of girls from tribal backgrounds and coastal fishing communities. These narratives provide a different perspective, highlighting the unique hardships faced by girls in marginalized and underrepresented social groups. Such works extend the scope of Indo-Anglian fiction, enriching the understanding of varied socio-cultural realities faced by girls across different regions and social strata, yet they remain relatively absent in the early Indo-Anglian literary canon.

The pervasive theme of obedience to elders, which girls were expected to uphold, suffuses the Indo-Anglian novel. The depiction of highly westernized girls who mimic

Western lifestyles and are preoccupied with physical love was often subjected to ridicule. In stark contrast, traditional values of obedience and faithfulness were portrayed as the very essence of Indian girls and girlhood. This thematic distinction underscores a fundamental difference between Indo-Anglian and Anglo-Indian fiction. While Anglo-Indian novels typically presented the "sexy" or passionate female archetype as a dark-skinned woman, Indo-Anglian novels reserved such "bitchy" or morally loose types for Western or thoroughly westernized women. Among Indo-Anglian writers, Manohar Malgonkar's novels feature a host of such Westernized vignettes, illustrating the clash between tradition and modernity. Furthermore, Anita Desai's *Voices in the City* depicts ultra-modern girls in Calcutta who emulate Western manners and attitudes, thereby highlighting the societal tensions around changing female identity and cultural influence in urban India.

The advent of new education exerted a profound influence on Indian society, particularly among the middle class. It became a catalyst for significant change, initiating ripples—and at times whirlpools—across the social fabric. For young girls, education introduced an expanded vision of life and unlocked new vistas full of promise. Yet, despite these openings, tradition maintained a stronghold, exercising vigilance against any ideas or aspirations in girls that deviated from accepted norms—often condemning such thoughts as nearly sinful. Western ideas, in particular, were viewed with suspicion, regarded as pernicious by elders and, perhaps, also by many contemporary writers. As a result, while many literary works of the period portrayed girls as educated and somewhat enlightened, they ultimately depict these young women conforming to the wishes and expectations of their elders, underscoring the continuing dominance of traditional authority in shaping female destinies.

As literature serves as a mirror reflecting societal transformations, it also chronicles the evolving social changes taking place within society. With the gradual spread of education among girls and the increasing age of marriage, novels began to portray young women confronting the challenges of reconciling tradition with modernity. Some girls, influenced by their reading of English novels, developed notions of romantic love and, naturally, longed for such affection within their Indian environments. The figure of the young, educated girl increasingly became a central subject of study and focus in Indo-Anglian novels. This emerging change is discernible even in the later works of the founding figures of Indo-Anglian literature. For instance, in Anand's fictional universe, Sohini and Leila are depicted as modest and compliant, yet characters like Maya and Gauri display a nascent vitality, despite lacking formal education. Bhabani

Bhattacharya's *Music for Mohini* centers on the character Mohini, who embodies the transitional tensions experienced by a young Indian woman navigating the demands of education and the pull of traditional life. The difficulty Mohini faces in reconciling these opposing cultural trends is poignantly illustrated. Her father's statement that "there's to be a cultural synthesis of a horoscope and a microscope" attempts to express the necessary integration of tradition and modernity. Nevertheless, Mohini's experience in married life reveals that "old ties of girlhood slackening is a painful process." She yearns for love but discovers that achieving it requires enduring suffering, sacrifice, and compromise—ultimately needing to create harmony from discordant elements.

Apart from formal education, Gandhian ideals exerted a substantial influence over the cultural and social milieu. Tradition, as reflected in both life and literature, was portrayed as embodying the Hindu ethos, whereas modernity was largely equated with Western manners and morals, which were sweeping through the minds of the young with considerable force. Young girls, captivated by the allure of movies and Western culture, were sometimes carried away to the extent of compromising their virginity. For example, in Khushwant Singh's *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, Beena is shielded from such dangers by the vigilance of her mother. The influence of Western culture was particularly potent in upper-class urban societies, where girls were often swept along before they could develop a mature understanding of these conflicting forces. The resulting conflict was complex in nature, encompassing both emotional and intellectual dimensions, as these girls were not only physically mature but also educated, with many being surrounded by similarly educated individuals. This created a multifaceted struggle between adherence to tradition and the temptations and freedoms offered by modernity.

Last but not least, this limited study of the position of women in early Indian English novels reveals that the period before independence and immediately after was a pivotal and transitional moment for both society and women in particular. The early works of writers such as Mulk Raj Anand and R. K. Narayan are predominantly framed from the male perspective. Female characters in their novels are largely portrayed as subordinate figures, rarely explored in depth, and are often presented primarily as objects of pity and suffering. Although later works by these authors do introduce moments of joy in the lives of female characters, the dominant impression remains one of constraint and endurance. Raja Rao's viewpoint is similarly traditional and philosophical, emphasizing cultural continuity.

Bhattacharya's early novels also depict the sufferings of girls, portraying them as bound by tradition and societal expectations. Female novelists, however, contributed nuanced and intimate portrayals of girls within their narratives. Their works offered perspectives and details—particularly about isolated or conservative communities such as Brahmin and purdah-clad families—that male writers could not easily access or convey. This contribution enriched the early Indian English novel by introducing the feminine point of view, thereby broadening the literary landscape and deepening the exploration of the female experience in society.

The educated middle-class girl found herself ensnared in the dynamic and often conflicting interplay of traditional and modern values. This tension and transition rendered her a central, emblematic figure in early Indian English novels. Authors frequently positioned such young women at the heart of their narratives to explore the complexities of balancing inherited cultural expectations with the influences of education and emerging modernity. Consequently, the educated middle-class girl became a staple character—a symbol of evolving identity and societal transformation within these literary works.

The study of women's portrayal in early Indian English novels reveals a profound narrative of transition and tension between tradition and modernity. These texts, richly informed by socio-cultural realities and historical contexts, exhibit both the perpetuation of patriarchal norms and the subtle emergence of female agency. Writers like Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao, and Bhabani Bhattacharya provide nuanced insights into the complex lives of Indian women—showing their sufferings, struggles against orthodoxy, and moments of resilience. Female characters in these novels often exist at the crossroads of old values and new aspirations, grappling with cultural expectations around obedience, education, love, and sacrifice.

The middle-class educated girl, in particular, emerged as a powerful literary figure representing this conflict, embodying both the promise and the contradictions of social change. While tradition remained deeply embedded, pressures of modern education and Western influence introduced new vistas and dilemmas. Moreover, women writers enriched the literary landscape by bringing forth intimate portrayals of girls' lives in secluded social spaces, inaccessible to male authors.

Thus, early Indian English novels serve as both mirrors and architects of social consciousness, charting the evolving identities of women and reflecting the broader currents of reform, resistance, and redefining womanhood in a changing India. This trajectory in literature underscores not only historical oppression but also the relentless spirit of

transformation and the ongoing quest for equity and recognition in Indian society.

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A Comparison of English-Chinese Subtitle Translation in the Film *MULAN* (2020)

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Abstract— With the increasing openness of international cultural exchange, film has gained significant attention as a key medium for cross-cultural communication. High-quality subtitle translation is essential to help target audiences better understand foreign films. This thesis first introduces the fundamental aspects of subtitle translation, including its definition, classification, features, and constraints. It then presents Skopos theory, outlining its main principles and criteria, and discusses its applicability to subtitle translation. Using the film *Mulan*(2020) as a case study, the study analyzes the translation of stylistically marked language elements—such as culture-specific terms, allusions, idioms, and humor—from the perspective of Skopos theory. The findings reveal that, due to spatiotemporal limitations, subtitles do not always fully convey the original meaning, though such losses may be compensated by other filmic elements like visuals, sound, and actors' expressions. The study also finds that while the Skopos-oriented approach prioritizes the translation purpose, the strategies employed do not always optimally transfer the original content.



Keywords— Film Translation, Skopos Theory, Subtitle Translation, Translation Strategies, *Mulan*

I. INTRODUCTION

With the development of globalization, international cultural exchange has become increasingly open. More and more foreign movies and TV shows are attracting people's attention. These movies make people's life colorful and provide an opportunity to learn about foreign cultures. Today, film as an important cultural exchange media is getting more and more attention from researchers. To let more people understand these foreign movies, we have to pay more attention to the application of subtitle translation. The study of film subtitles not only improves the quality of the translation but also helps the audiences to understand the meaning of movies. By analyzing subtitle translation in this thesis, cultural exchange and knowledge of culture-specific differences will be shown.

Although the number of Chinese who can speak and understand English is increasing, there are still many people who cannot understand foreign languages very

well. Thus, subtitle translation is an effective way to solve this problem. Subtitle translation offers more people the opportunity to understand foreign movies and know about foreign cultures. It seems that subtitle translation is an indispensable part of movies.

According to Yucheng et al. (2019: 13), “subtitle is a kind of text, which is added to the video, and it explains the meaning of movies under the need of videos”. It usually appears at the bottom of the screen to help audiences better understand the movie and TV program. As Shaochang (2001: 61) says, “thinking about its importance in our daily life, we should attach more importance to subtitle and do more research on this area”.

This article applies Skopos Theory to the case study of subtitle translation of *Mulan* (2020), an American action film with Chinese elements as the theme. The film, set in ancient China, tells the story of a woman who takes her father's place in the army. There is a lot of scenery,

costumes, and culture-specific food in this movie, which are all Chinese elements. The article applies Skopos theory of Vermeer (2001) to the case study of subtitle translation.

This article will briefly introduce the content of subtitle translation and Skopos theory. Cases of different kinds of application of Skopos theory in subtitle translation will be analysed. Domesticating method, foreignizing method, and omission method applied to various elements of style will be discussed. In particular, humour, idiom, and allusion translation will be in the focus.

To achieve this aim, we have set the following goals:

- 1) to present the Skopos theory and subtitle translation;
- 2) to distinguish between different types of translation strategies when translating subtitles;
- 3) to compare the original subtitles with the translated subtitles to determine the translation strategies in subtitle translation;
- 4) to evaluate the overall retention degree of the translation of the source language into the target language in the film subtitles.

The material in the analysis part is taken from the original (Chinese) subtitles of the film *Mulan* (2020) and the original (Chinese and English) subtitles of the film *Mulan* (2020). Translation software called "youdao" was used to extract Chinese subtitles from the Chinese version of the film. After the extraction is complete, the subtitles are compared with the original English version to determine their accuracy.

These examples were identified and collected according to the classification method proposed by Lin et al (2018) and analyzed according to the types of translation strategies proposed by Vermeer (2001) and Zhang (2016). 122 cases of domestication strategy, 23 cases of foreignization strategy, 13 cases of omission strategy, 4 cases of humorous translation strategy, 21 cases of idioms and allusions translation strategy, and 17 cases of concentration strategy in the subtitles of the movie were identified. The collected cases include language use at the word, phrase, and sentence levels. Comparative and case analysis methods are applied. That is to say, this is a comparative analysis of subtitles in films and their translations.

The article is divided into 5 parts. The introductory and theoretical sections are based on the views of the following authors: Cheng (2007), and Li (2001), as well as on Sheng (2019), Cai (2000), Subtitle translation strategies of Li (2001). The fourth part of this paper introduces the research methods and data, and analyzes the specific cases of subtitle translation, and gives examples. In the last

chapter, conclusions and suggestions for further research are presented.

II. MAIN ASPECTS OF SUBTITLE TRANSLATION

This part briefly presents the definition and classification of subtitle translation and the features of subtitle translation. The theoretical background is based on the ideas of Henrik (1993), Shuttleworth (1997), Cowie (2004), Cai (2000), and other authors.

2.1 Definition and classification of subtitles

"In western countries, especially in Europe, the study of subtitle translation started early, and it has become a mature theoretical system" (Henrik 1993: 266). According to Shuttleworth et al (1997), the history of studying subtitle translation could backdate from the end of the 1950s to the early 1960s. In the recent two decades, European scholars have been leading the study of subtitle translation mainly focusing on the subtitle practical level, psychological level, and descriptive study level: "The study of subtitle in western countries is deepened and focused" (Shuttleworth et al. 1997: 62).

However, in China, subtitle translation research started later than that in western countries. Cai (2000) claims that it began in 1949. The research level of film translation theory in China is relatively low. Over the past decade, a large number of foreign films and television works have been introduced to China, and then subtitle translation research has been rapidly developing. In the 1980s, Nida's translation theory came into China and his three principles of translation brought a great influence. Especially important are the notions of "the five features of film language: auditory, visual, instantaneous, popular and annotationless" (Cai 2000: 57).

The theory and strategy of film translation still need further study. First of all, "subtitle is a kind of text, which is added to the videos, and it explains the meaning of movies under the need of videos" (Qian 2001: 62). They usually appear at the bottom of the screen to help the audience better understand the whole movie and TV program.

Many scholars have different opinions on subtitle translation. For example, Henrik maintains that subtitle is a kind of multimedia translation that can be written, attached, and synchronous (Henrik 1993: 264). Henrik defines subtitle translation as a special type of language transfer: a written, condensed translation of a predominantly oral original (Henrik 1993: 261-270). Routledge regards that subtitle as the interpretation of

language symbols with other languages (Routledge 2004:24).

According to Qian (2001: 60), “subtitle translation can be defined as the process of providing synchronized captions for film and television dialogue”. It uses another language to express the film. Also, Qian (2001: 65-67) points out that “subtitling is the process of providing synchronized text for a television and movie dialogue, and it is a kind of term, the main method of language conversion”. Dialogue subtitles for the film and television work generally appear at the bottom of the screen, and drama subtitles may display on both sides of the stage, or above (Vermeer 2001:43). The purpose of subtitles is to help people who cannot hear or who cannot understand the film very well.

In addition, as Li (2001) states, according to the showing stages, subtitles can be divided into three types: opening credits, ending subtitles, and main subtitles. Opening credits appear at the beginning of titles which include the name of the film, director team and the main performers. Ending subtitles appear at the end of a film, including billing, producer, sponsor, and other production information (Li 2001: 38-40). From the linguistic perspective, Yao (2014: 147) distinguishes the main subtitles into two types: intra-lingual subtitles and inter-lingual subtitles. The intra-lingual subtitles are defined as displaying the sound language, which is the language of the same country, but the sound language may appear in the form of dialect (Yao 2014: 147). That is, through the subtitles, Shanghai Province Dialect and Cantonese display show the standard Chinese characters. Maybe people in other provinces can not understand these dialects, but they can read Chinese characters. “The intra-lingual subtitles do not change language, they directly change sounds into words” (Yao 2014: 148). According to Zhang (2009: 87), the inter-lingual subtitles are defined as sounds and subtitles language devote to different languages, which means that people translate English into Chinese or translate Chinese into English. In this way, people of two countries can understand each other well.

2.2 Features and constraints of subtitle translation

Subtitle translation is unique and the language of film is different from other written language. The subtitle translation usually appears at the bottom of the screen with the original sound. Subtitle translation always provides a large amount of information about the content of the film to the audience by the form of text.

In China, Qian (2001: 64) “put forward five features of subtitle translation. They are listening, comprehensiveness, instantaneous, popularity and no note”. In general, according to Zhang (2016), the subtitle translation has the following characteristics:

(1) Comprehensiveness: subtitles are not isolated and appear with sounds and pictures or other visuals, thus the audience can listen and watch the movie at the same time (Zhang 2016: 107). The movies cannot accurately express information if there are only subtitles, but no sounds and pictures. At the same time, the audience would not understand the movies if only sounds and pictures appear, but without subtitles. “In movies, sounds and pictures are important, and the subtitle is only a factor that plays a supporting role” (Zhang 2016: 107). The feature of comprehensiveness can provide subtitle translation with some convenience, which means subtitle translation can be omitted when the film’s information can be expressed well by sounds and pictures (Yao 2014:147).

(2) Instantaneousness: Subtitles are seen very briefly, so the audience has to be quick in reading them (Zhang 2016:107). The readers can not go back to the read subtitles once again as it would be with other genres of the written text. In order not to affect the audience's appreciation of the following plots, the immediacy makes the audience do not have much time to think about the content of subtitles.

(3) Popularity: as the audience might have different levels of cultural knowledge, subtitle translation should include popular rather than culturally loaded language and the translator needs to use the most concise text to convey the meaning of the original text to target audience with different language background (Zhang 2016: 107). Because of the limits of time and space, only the popular language can let the audience understand the information of the film in a short time.

(4) Synchronism: Subtitles should be synchronized with the picture and sound. During the conversion of spoken and written language, subtitle translation can increase or decrease appropriately to keep with original text completely (Zhang 2016:107).

(5) No note: “If target readers have questions when they watch movies, the translator needs to add some notes to these questions” (Zhang 2016:107). However, according to Zhang (2016:107) “subtitles are limited by time and space, and in order to achieve the synchronism, the translator cannot add these notes to subtitle translations”.

What’s more, Henrik (1993: 261-274) considers that “subtitle translation is restricted by formal constraints and media-defined constraints, and subtitles as a special kind of text also have two constraints: formal constraints and textual constraints”. Formal constraint means that space and time limit of the subtitle translation is caused by the screen size and the audience’s reading speed, so formal constraints can be further divided into space and time constraints.

In addition to its own characteristics, textual constraints come from subtitle translation to the film language, which means that subtitle language should be close to colloquial language in film and television works. Henrik (1993: 261-274) states that there are only two lines and thirty-five words in subtitles. Shuttleworth et al. (2004: 58) further put forward “some textual constraints of subtitle translation: picture, dialogue, music, spoken language, and phonetics”.

Finally, Vermeer’s (2001: 68) ideas can be used to summarize the overall discussion. According to the author, subtitle translation is influenced by context. This context means subtitle translation is influenced by various subjective factors including the purpose of language users, jobs, hobbies, status, mood, and state. Subtitle translation is restricted by objective factors such as environment, time, place, and others factors (Vermeer 2001: 68). Therefore, the translator should fully consider these factors in order to fully express the information transmitted through the film. Further on, we will present one of the perspectives in Translation Studies that might be useful in considering subtitle translation.

III. AN OVERVIEW OF THE SKOPOS THEORY

This part will make a brief introduction to Skopos theory, including the main content, development, three principles, and two main methods of Skopos theory. The author also explains the possibility and necessity of the application of Skopos theory in subtitle translation.

3.1 Development of the Skopos theory

Skopos theory was developed by German translation theorist Hans Vermeer. The word “Skopos” is from Greek, which means “aim” or “purpose”. Skopos theory focuses on the selection of various objectives in the process of translation. “Skopos theory can make up for the deficiency of traditional translation theories” (Vermeer 2001: 87).

Most scholars consider that translation is a kind of purposeful activity. “Skopos theory focuses on translation as an activity with a purpose or aim” (Vermeer 2001: 92). From the target-oriented perspective, Skopos theory is a study of the deconstructive translation and it focuses on the target text’s function and practicability. Skopos theory thinks that translation is a purposeful communicative activity between humans. In Vermeer’s Skopos theory, it has been stated that “people cannot solve all the problems in the translation only by linguistics, and the reader is one of the most important factors determining the purpose of the translation” (Vermeer 2001: 29). They have their own cultural backgrounds. Each translation is directed to a certain audience, so Skopos theory is a course that is

produced for a certain purpose or some target audience with the context of the target language.

Skopos theory, introduced into translation theory in the 1980s by Hans Vermeer was further developed by Nord, one of its most important second-generation scholars in the 1990s (Zhang 2009:43). Vermeer (2001: 127) stated that “translating means to produce a text in a target setting for a target purpose and target addressees in target circumstances”. There are four phases in the development of Skopos theory.

The first phase proposed by Katharina Reiss is “the functional category of translation criticism”(in Xu 2011: 52-53). She developed the translation criticism model which is based on the relationship between the source text and target text. In her opinion, the ideal translation would be one “in which the aim in the target language is equivalence regarded as the conceptual content, linguistic form and communicative function of a source language”(in Xu 2011:52-53). However, she found in some situation equivalence is impossible because of the translation brief which we will talk about it next. Reiss also explains an exception from the equivalence. She stated that comprehensive-communicative translation is an ideal way of translation, which means the content of the concept, language forms, and communicative functions equivalent to the original text and functional characteristics of translation should be given priority in practice (Xu 2011: 52-53).

In the second phase, the theory is put forward by Vermeer who has stated that “translation is a behavior and it is based on the original purpose and the results” (2001: 43). In this stage, Vermeer (2001:65) also agrees that “translation must follow a set of rules, and Skopos Rule is in the first place which means translation depends on the purpose of translation”. The ultimate purpose of subtitle translation is to help people to understand the main content of the film rather than stimulating the audience’s desire to watch. Besides, according to Wang (2017: 247), the translation must follow the “coherence rule” which means the translation must be internally coherent; and the “fidelity rule” which means the translation should be coherent with the original text.

The third phase is the theory of translation action that is proposed by Henrik in 1993. This theory is based on Action Theory, and Henrik further developed the theory of functional translation. It was designed to cover all forms of intercultural transfer. Henrik (1993: 261) considers that “translation is defined as a complex action designed to achieve a particular purpose”. This theory takes translation as driven by “purpose, the interaction between people and

people in the translation result-oriented" (Henrik 1993: 270).

In the fourth phase, Nord (2001:120) defined the function plus loyalty principle. She proposed two interdependent deficiencies of the Skopos rule. First, it is impossible for the translation purpose to satisfy all readers because of the differences in expected value. The second is concerning the author and the translator. Considering these deficiencies, Nord puts forward the "Loyalty Principle" of Skopos theory: "the responsibility of translators affects their partners in translation interaction" (Nord 2001:142). Nord (2001: 143) maintains that "during translation the internal and external factors needed to be considered in the analysis of the text". Nord (2001:185-186) has stated that "people have different views on a good translation due to their different cultural backgrounds. Some hope to see the faithful reproduction of the original form, while others like the translation style to reveal the key points of the original source". If the translator can not achieve the cultural requirements of the recipient of the target text faithful reproduction, Nord (2001: 185) has said that "the translator has a moral responsibility to the recipient, must explain to them what they have done and the reasons for doing so". That's one aspect of loyalty. Although there is the principle of fidelity in the translation criterion, the principle of fidelity is subordinate to the principle of purpose. If the communicative purpose of the target text required by the Law of Purpose is contrary to the intention of the author of the source text, we should consider that the other aspect of the Law of Loyalty is to require the translator to be loyal to the author of the source text. The translator should respect the author of the original text and coordinate the purpose of the translation with the author's intention. Therefore, the Law of Loyalty is concerned with the social relationship between the translator and other participants in the translation process. (Zhong et al. 1999:49)

From the phases presented above, traditional translation theories take the original text as the starting point and the target text as the endpoint, so the yardstick to measure the quality of the target text is usually the original text (Liu 2005:426).

To continue with, Skopos theory creatively puts forward a series of translation principles and methods, which liberates translators from the bondage of translating text source text into the target language, and forms a theoretical system of translation standards with objective rules as the leading role (Liu 2005 351).

To sum up, Skopos theory turned their attention from the translation with the original equivalent to focus on the translator itself, pay attention to the translator in the different translation strategies to choose between the

power of that translation is in human purpose, thus turning to the translation activities other related factors research, broaden the field of translation study, formed the diversity, the situation of translation studies from multiple perspectives. On the basis of translation theory and intercultural communication theory, Skopos theory explores a new way for translation research. Although it has some shortcomings, it has broadened the scope of translation studies and made important contributions to the development of translation studies.

3.2 Principles of the Skopos theory

Vermeer believes that translation studies cannot rely solely on linguistics for two main reasons: first, translation is not only or even not primarily a language process; Second, linguistics has not really raised questions about translation difficulties. (Vermeer 2001:29) Therefore, he put forward the "Skopos Theory" of translation on the basis of the action theory.

The central idea of Skopos Theory of Translation is that every action has a purpose. The translator chooses the most appropriate way to achieve the expected goal by referring to the actual environment. Since translation is also a kind of action, the translator will try to consider all possible relevant factors under the guidance of the translation purpose, so as to decide the most appropriate way of action. Based on this description of the actual situation, a normative basic rule can be drawn: "the purpose of translation determines the strategy for achieving the expected goal", that is to say, the translation should play the expected function for the intended audience (Vermeer 2001:12-15). According to Skopos Theory, the rules followed by all translations are the principle of Skopos, the principle of loyalty, and the principle of coherence. On the premise of abiding by these rules, translators will adopt domestication and foreignization strategies in most subtitle translations. Therefore, the following sections will detail these three principles and two main translation strategies.

3.2.1 Skopos rule

As Sheng et al. (2019) claim, "the Skopos theory defines that Skopos rule is the first rule that all translation activities need to obey". "According to the readers' expectation, translation can use different methods in context and culture" (Sheng et al. 2019). The translators propose that the method is decided by the results, and the purpose of translation determines the whole translation process. However, there are many aims of translation activities, and according to Sheng et al. (2019), these aims are divided into three parts:

(1) the communicative purpose of translation such while enlightening the reader;

(2) using some special means to achieve the purpose of translation that means translators usually use the grammatical structure to explain the corresponded translation methods;

(3) basic purposes of translators such as making a living. "Skopos" means the communicative purpose of the translation. Therefore, the translator needs to find its purpose out in context. Then, they should decide what kind of translation methods can be used, such as using literal translation, literal translation, or using both of them.

3.2.2 Coherence rule

As stated by Wang (2017: 247), the coherence rule defines that translation must obey the intra-textual coherence and it must be read and accepted by readers, which means the translation must have a real meaning in a context that the audience could understand. Similarly, Vermeer (2001:273) states that "there is an 'inter-textual coherence' between the target language and source language". That discovers the relationship between the translated text and original text. In order to reproduce the original information, the translated text should be tied with the original text. The translator understands the article and the purpose of the target language, both of them make the inter-textual coherence of translation. The following constituents are important:

- (1) The translator wants to express the original text of the original information;
- (2) How to interpret the information depended on the translator;
- (3) How the translator for the purpose of the language encodes information (Vermeer 2001:266)

Generally speaking, the target text must be translated in such a method, which is coherent for the target readers, by their different cultural background and knowledge.

3.2.3 Loyalty rule

This principle is put forward by Nord who found there are two constraints in the Skopos theory: first, it is impossible for the translation purpose to satisfy all readers because of the expected value differences. Second, this rule is concerning the author and the translator. Zhang (2016: 107) argues that thinking of these deficiencies, Nord proposed the loyalty rule to solve the problem of cultural differences and the relationship among the participants in translation. Zhang (2016: 107) states that "translators have the responsibility to explain everything in the original text to target text receiver". In other words, she thinks the loyalty rule asks translators to be loyal to the original author. The loyalty rule is mainly concerned with the relationship between the translator and the original author.

In general, the Skopos theory is constituted of three principles. The coherence and the loyalty rule must observe the Skopos rule because it is the first important principle, and during the translation, translators should take the Skopos rule and loyalty rule as a guide.

3.2.4 Domesticating method

According to Nord (2001:121), the domesticating method makes the original language localized and this method uses some expressions which are conformed to target language readers' habits. It is defined as: "in order to make target language culture accepted by audiences, translators need to use the appropriate expression" (Nord 2001: 121). Finally, the meaning of words can be found in the corresponding culture. The translator needs to translate the original language into the local language if the original author wants to make a directed communion with the target audience, which demands the translator should respect the characteristics of the target language. The language which conforms to the target language can be used in translation text. "The advantage of domesticating method is eliminated differences among foreign language and culture" (Nord 2001:142).

3.2.5 Foreignizing method
According to Xu (2011: 52), Venuti's translation purpose is to improve the status of the translation and translators while communicating a cultural and linguistic differences of source-language text, as well as weakening the hegemonic status of the culture in English-speaking countries. To make these aims come true, Venuti further proposed foreignization: one is choosing a foreign text excluded by domestic literary then using a marginal discourse to translate it. There are four features of foreignizing method:

- (1) The translations do not fully follow the standard of the target language.
- (2) The translations can use some difficult text in due time.
- (3) Some archaism of the original language can be intentionally reserved by translators
- (4) Translators provide an unprecedented reading experience for target readers (Xu 2011:53)

The foreignizing method can be reflected by the expression of the original language, and it enriches the translation and lets people know about alien culture better through the translation. The foreignizing method keeps the character of the original language and culture, it can bring people to the area of alien culture and let them see the difference between languages and cultures.

3.3 The possibility of the application of the Skopos theory in subtitle translation

Skopos theory can be very helpful for translators. Translation strategies are determined by translation

purpose, so before using the Skopos theory, translators should judge the purpose of film translation and choose the right method applying to the subtitle translation.

There is a possibility and necessity of the application of Skopos theory in subtitle translation: the Skopos theory in translation is derived from behavioral theory and subtitle translation is also a kind of purposeful activity (Wang et al. 2018: 78-79). Different kinds of movies have different translation purposes. Movies can be divided into many types, like historical movies, romantic movies, documentaries, science fiction, disaster movies, mystery, and horror (Wang et al. 2018: 78-79). All kinds of movies have many differences in language, plot, and intention. For example, the purpose of historical movies is to inherit true history, and disaster movies expect people can protect the environment. These are the purposes of movies; the original author hopes the audience can get inspiration from movies. Usually, film and television works transmit information by various channels. In order to achieve different purposes of different movies, the Skopos theory provides a possibility for the application in subtitle translation.

As Wang et al., point out, "A good movie depends on a good subtitle translation and a good subtitle translation must concern the needs of an audience" (Wang et al. 2018: 78-79). The needs and expectations of the audience are an important part of subtitle translation purpose, and the application of Skopos theory in subtitle translation can make these purposes come true. Another important reason is the characteristics of subtitle translation. Because of the limits of time and space in subtitle translation, a translator needs to abridge some original information during the translation. It is impossible to completely eliminate the reading barriers of cultural difference, but people can do is to try their best to keep the closest effect as the original text (Wang et al. 2018: 78-79). Therefore, it is necessary to apply Skopos theory in subtitle translation. In a conclusion, the Skopos theory can be used in subtitle translation to achieve the closest effect as the source text or original text. The Skopos theory proposed by Vermeer had important influence on the theory and study of translation. The Skopos theory puts the readers' requirement as a priority and it plays a vital role in cross-cultural communication (Yao 2014:147). According to the theory, translators should consider the receptors' purpose. Besides, the success of subtitle translation depends on whether the receptors, under the help of translation, have the ability to understand well and appreciate the movies. It shows that the application of Skopos theory in subtitle translation is possible and necessary. The purposes of subtitle translation conform to the basic criteria of Skopos theory.

IV. A COMPARISON OF ENGLISH-CHINESE SUBTITLE TRANSLATION IN MULAN (2020)

This part takes the American action movie *Mulan* (2020) as an example to study the application of Skopos Theory in subtitle translation. The first part of this chapter will give a brief introduction to the film, revealing the characteristics of the film, which was originally shot in a Chinese environment but was made in English and then subtitled into Chinese. Next, specific examples of subtitles in films and their translations will be analyzed. Admittedly, some films are dubbed, and some films use subtitles only as a form of conveying meaning to their target audience. However, adapted or translated subtitles may not convey the meaning of the original text, so this is especially important when it comes to which subtitle translation strategy is used. Therefore, it is necessary to distinguish between how a translator deals with such a challenging translation problem and its impact on the original text and its meaning. Therefore, this paper will focus on the analysis of subtitle translation in films.

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze the cases of subtitle translation strategies by comparing the source text (English) and target text (Chinese) and to distinguish their particularities and differences in subtitle translation strategies. Niki Caro's *Mulan* (2020) was chosen for analysis. Film selection is based on several criteria: considering several options and studying several film scripts to determine the one most suitable for study; Personal connection and interest in the film itself, as well as high praise from the audience. The film, directed by Niki Caro and written by Chris Bender, was released in 2020.

In order to find and compare the translation of subtitles better, we took screenshots of the cases used in this paper and all the relevant cases that did not appear in this paper (see Appendices). To ensure accuracy, a translation software called "youdao" to translate the original English film into Chinese, to distinguish whether the original film subtitles were accurate or not.

By comparing English subtitles with Chinese subtitles, we obtain practical examples of subtitle translation based on Skopos theory and divide them into several translation strategies. They are the translation method of domesticatio, the translation method of foreignizatio, the translation method of omission, the method of humorous translatio, the translation method of idioms and allusions, and the translation method of concentration.

Table 1. Subtitle translation strategies

Subtitle translation strategies	Number
the translation method of domestication	122
the translation method of foreignization	23
the translation method of omission	13
the method of humorous translation	4
the translation method of idioms and allusions	21
the translation method of concentration	17
Total translation strategies in Mulan(2020)	200

As can be seen from the above table, we found a total of 200 cases of subtitle translation strategies. It should be pointed out that our classification of all the identified sentences is based on the method of subtitle translation strategies discussed by Vermmer (2001) and Li (2014). In view of the cases of subtitle translation in films, this paper puts forward six main translation strategies: domestication (122 cases), foreignization (23 cases), omission (13 cases), humor translation (4cases), idiom and allusion (21 cases), and centralized translation (17 cases). It is worth noting that in the analysis of subtitle cases, we find that context is particularly important in judging a particular case. In many cases (as can be seen in the appendix), individual examples of subtitle translation are not always seen as being comprehensible to the audience and, therefore, more context is needed to determine the meaning of subtitles in the film. In addition, these translation strategies are analyzed and studied based on Vermmer (2001) and Li (2014). At the same time, the following chapters will focus on the translation strategies in film subtitles.

4.1 Introduction of *Mulan*

Mulan (2020) is an American action film, which uses Chinese Kung Fu as the theme. In this movie, there are many things full of Chinese elements, like the makeup, buildings, costumes, and even the food. We can find out from the table below.

Table 2 Chinese elements of life in *Mulan* (2020)

Cultural specific categories	Number
Clothing	2
Food	3
Makeup	1
Buildings	3

The movie of *Mulan* (2020) contains a lot of Chinese cultural connotations. This movie shows people some Chinese cultures like Chinese philosophy and Chinese Kung Fu. As a consequence in order to let the Chinese

audience understand Chinese culture in American eyes, during translation, the translator should be cautious and try their best to keep those sentences that contain Chinese connotation culture. On the other hand, as the film, an American production, inevitably it has the elements of American culture, not typical for the Chinese setting as, for example, American humor. To sum up, the translation of culture in movies is closely related to the translation strategies used.

4.2 Adaptation of the Skopos theory to subtitle interpreting

Before translating the subtitle, translators should deeply understand the content of the film, catch the theme of the movie, learn the characters of film personage's language; they also should know which message can be expressed by the subtitle and which do not be needed.

The Skopos theory applies to the subtitle translation, the first thing translator should do is to make sure the purpose of translation, the ultimate aim of subtitle translation is to let audiences eliminate the barriers between language and culture understand the film under the help of subtitle (Guo 2002: 23). Besides, according to Li (2001: 38-40), "translator also should know about the director's creating style and aims, the purpose of film distributor and film importer, at the meantime, they should know the target audience's cultural level even the expectation of audience". The second is that the translator decides translation strategies and methods according to the purpose of the original author, and these various translation strategies should be flexibly adapted in a perfect translation.

The main principle of translation activities is the principle of purpose, translation subtitles should be carried out in the context and culture of the target language, the use of translation methods should meet the expectations of the audience. So Huang et al. (2018: 155) point out that translators should take the main principle of perspective of Skopos theory as guidance: take the Skopos rule as the first rule, keep the purpose of translation in the translator's mind; obey the coherence rule, keep the translation text consistent with the original text; follow the loyalty rule, the translation must be loyal to the original information, a translator should not distort the information. "According to the limit of time and space, the translator should use a simple and coherent translation transferring the original language and culture to audiences" (Yao 2014: 158). In that way, audiences can better appreciate foreign films then achieve the purpose of cross-cultural communication.

The Skopos theory requires the translator to consider every audience's cultural level. Different audiences have different cultural backgrounds and the translation must be acceptable for most of the normal audience. If the word

used in translation is uncommon, most of the common audience will have difficulties in understanding. In translation, the three principles of Skopos theory can be played a normative role. In a word, it is necessary to apply the Skopos theory in the subtitle translation of *Mulan* (2020).

Moreover, the main purpose of subtitle translation is to transmit effective messages to the target audiences under the limits of time and space. The translation process of Skopos theory is from top to bottom: first, the translator grasps the general situation of translation. The translator must consider the influence of various factors in translation, such as the preferences of the audiences, the purpose of the translated text. Then, the translator analyses these purposes of achieving translation activities. On this basis, the processing method of words and phrases determines the final translation strategy.

Chinese culture is different from American culture. The English subtitle in *Mulan* cannot completely describe the connotation of Chinese culture. Wang et al. (2018: 78-79) point out that “in order to achieve the communicative purpose of this movie and help Chinese audience understand it, a translator needs to use the domesticating and foreignizing method”. The domesticating and foreignizing methods are two different kinds of theories. They are both in the unity of opposites with each other, and absolute domestication and foreignization do not exist.

According to the different needs of text, a translator needs to decide which kinds of original culture should be kept and how to keep it; which kinds of original culture have to make adjustments to adapt to the target culture (Wang 2017: 247). The following chapters from 4.3 to 4.8 will concretely summarize and analyze several subtitle translation strategies based on Skopos Theory. It also illustrates the problems in translation.

4.3 The translation method of domestication in *MuLan* (2020)

To begin with, it is necessary to enumerate the intuitive domestication data:

Table 3 Data of domestication

Strategy	Instances	Percentage
Translation by domestication	122/200	61%

Use the domesticating method in translation. Take the target language culture as the basis, use acceptable expressions which target language culture can be accepted as much as possible. The representative figure of domestication translation, who once said, “language as a part of the culture and the corresponding culture of each language can be directly or indirectly reflected by any text,

finally the meaning of texts only can be found in the corresponding culture” Vermeer (2001: 56). That means translators should respect the characteristics of the target language and use the language which can be accepted by the audience. Here are some examples:

(1) Original text: A young shoot, all green.

Translated text: 小时候，她像麦苗儿一样青涩稚嫩。

Back translation from Chinese to English: When she was a child, she was as green as a wheat seedling.

The phrase appears in the introduction of the film to introduce Mulan. If we had not adopted the naturalization method, the phrase would have been translated as “嫩芽，全绿” The translation of this phrase into English means all green shoots. Without planning, the Chinese audience will not understand the meaning of this statement.

(2) Original text: Unaware of the blade.

Translated text: 不知道镰刀的锋利。

Back translation from Chinese to English: Do not know the sharpness of the sickle.

This sentence also adopts the domestication translation method. The Chinese subtitle translates “blade” into “sickle”. This naturalization method accords with the traditional thinking of the Chinese people. Because the Chinese subtitle above the sentence says, “小时候，她像麦苗儿一样青涩稚嫩。” Back translation from Chinese to English is “When she was a child, she was as green as a wheat seedling.” In China, people usually associate wheat seedling with the sickle.

(3) Original text: Her **chi**; Bori **Khan**.

Translated text: 她的元气；布利可汗。

Back translation from Chinese to English: Her **energy**; Bori **Khan**.

In this movie, the domesticating method can be reflected in some translation names and positions. For instance, “Chi” and “Khan” are appeared many times in this movie apart from the example above. These two English words are rooted in the Chinese pronunciation “qì” and “Kè hán”. First of all, “Chi” plays a very important role in Chinese kung fu. In Chinese kung fu, the strength of all movements comes from the strength of the “Chi” in the body of the person who makes the movements. In addition, the Khan is the name given to the chief of the minority people in ancient China. In ancient times, the leader of an ethnic minority was the equivalent of an emperor in the eyes of the Han ethnic. So directly translates into as “气 (energy)”

and “可汗(emperor)” are easy to understand by using the translation of domestication.

(4) Original text: That includes every guard...

Translated text: 把人从四方城门。。。

Back translation from Chinese to English: From the four gates...

This happened when the prime minister was ordered by a witch to let all the soldiers leave the gates of the palace guarding the palace. The translation strategy of domestication is used to defuse the cultural differences between the East and the West. Because in traditional Chinese architecture, there are only four gates to excavate out of every wall. They are the East Gate, the West Gate, the South Gate, and the North Gate. If according to translating "every guard" into "每个(every gate)". It doesn't coincide with traditional Chinese architecture, and it doesn't make the Chinese audience understand why so many gates are cut into the walls that protect the imperial palace.

Through the above cases, we can analyze that domestication translation usually contains the following characteristics. First, the translator consciously adopts a natural and fluent style of the target language. Second, translators usually add explanatory words when translating the original language into the target language. Third, in the process of translating the subtitles from the original language into the target language, the regional and historical color of the original language is removed. Finally, through these cases, we can analyze that in the process of language conversion, we should adjust the ideas and features between the translation and the original. Due to cultural differences, sometimes the literal translation of the original text may make the audience of the target language confused and even misunderstood. At this time, it is necessary to borrow the same or similar meaning in Chinese, and have their own distinctive cultural expression to domesticate the original text (Cheng 2007:43)

To sum up, the domestication translation method is often used to deal with some English idioms, allusions, image words, and other expressions with strong cultural color. As a result, domestication can make the translated text concise and lively, which is easy for the readers to understand and accept.

4.4 The translation method of foreignization in *Mulan* (2020)

The data collected showed that alienation was used in 23 out of the 200 cases. The use of a translation strategy mainly leads to the audience's understanding of the character:

Table 4 Data of foreignization

Strategy	Instances	Percentage
Translation by foreignization	23/200	12%

Use foreignizing method. The translator expresses the original text as far as possible. They should create an environment to let audiences have direct communication with the author. Get as close as possible to the original language in translation, just like Shuttleworth et al. (2004: 231) said, "the foreignizing method is accepted so that the differences between language and culture in the foreign text then lead audiences into a foreign context". To illustrate the use of foreignizing:

(5) Original text: I will squash it.

Translated text: 我来捏死它。

Back translation from Chinese to English: I'm going to pinch it.

This happened when Mulan said that her sister had a spider on her head, and then Mulan told her sister that she could help her take the spider away. The word "squash" in this sentence, directly according to the American thinking of the word "捏死(crush)". The foreignized translation not only makes the language more lively and vivid but also reflects the thinking of the American people.

(6) Original text: I'm starving.

Translated text: 我饿死了。

Back translation from Chinese to English: I'm starving.

This is Mulan on the way to see the matchmaker, her sister said a sentence. This sentence also adopts the foreignization translation method. This sentence reflects the differences between Chinese and American languages and cultures. Because there is no subject in a typical sentence in China. According to Chinese thinking, this sentence should be translated as "饿了(hungry)".

(7) Original text: It is his son.

Translated text: 是他儿子。

Back translation from Chinese to English: It's his son.

This sentence happened when the emperor asked the minister who was disturbing the border, and the minister answered what the emperor had said. In this sentence, the "is" is translated out by the translator. Obviously, this sentence adopts the foreignizing translation method. Because the essential element is the predicate in sentences' structure of English. If this sentence is translated by the domestication method, the strategy would have removed the "is" and translated it as "他儿子(his son.)".

(8) Original text: What a killer!

Translated text: 你可真厉害。

Back translation from Chinese to English: You're really good.

This is what the other soldiers said to Mulan after she accidentally showed off her powerful Chi (energy) during another fight with Honghui. From the above example and the movie, we can see that there are many slang words used in the American language. It is worth mentioning that American slang is characterized by hilarity and humor. In addition, American slang can also relieve awkward situations. As in the example above, if the translator follows "Back translation from Chinese" to English (You're really good.), the sentence will lose the characteristics of American slang. However, the foreignized translation is not only in line with the characteristics of American slang, but also suitable for the language environment when speaking at that time.

After sorting out the above cases, it can be concluded that the foreignization translation method mainly has the following characteristics. First, the translator does not fully follow the target language and discourse norms. Second, when appropriate, the translator can choose a sentence that is not smooth and difficult to understand. Finally, it is worth mentioning that we can make a comparative analysis of the sentences that use domestication translation and the sentences that use foreignization translation. Sentences translated by foreignization are more attractive to the audience. Because the sentences translated by foreignization retain the characteristics of the original language, they are more fresh to the audience.

To sum up, after the analysis of these cases of foreignized subtitles, the foreignized translation method is intended to break through the conventions of the target language and retain the exotic flavor of the original text.

4.5 The translation method of omission in *Mulan* (2020)

In the analysis of cases with omission, we found that ellipsis techniques were used in 13 out of 200 cases. Also note that most of the examples include specific cultural domains (architecture, food, etc.). First of all, it is necessary to introduce the translation strategy of omission:

Table 5 Data of omission

Strategy	Instances	Percentage
Translation by omission	13/200	7%

According to the limit of time and space, a translator should adjust subtitle translation. Firstly, a translator can use some succinct language. In the original text, there is some useless information that can be deleted which has

unimportance and no influence on the film to audiences' understanding. Now there are some examples:

(8) Original text: It is because I'm trying to protect Mulan that I say this.

Translated text: 我这样说, 也是为了保护木兰。

Back translation from Chinese to English: I also say this to protect Mulan.

The sentence, if not omitted, would have been translated into Chinese as "这是因为, 我这样说, 我是为了尽力保护木兰". Although we can't understand the sentence, we can compare it with the Chinese in the subtitles of the original film above. The Chinese subtitles did not translate "It is because". If translated "It is because", it does not conform to the speaking habits of Chinese people. Chinese people do not usually add "这是因为...(It is because)" before giving reasons. In other words, the Chinese will drop the word "because" and goes right after the word "because." Also, this sentence is much longer than an omitted subtitle. Such lengthy subtitles not only make the audience watch too much in time but also take up large screen space.

(9) Original text: I ask you, what man will want to marry a girl who flits around rooftops.

Translated text: 我就问你, 哪个男人敢娶她这样的姑娘。

Back translation from Chinese to English: I'll ask you what man would dare marry a girl like her.

When Mulan was a little girl, she went to the roof to catch chickens. At night when the two were resting in the bedroom, Mulan's mother said to her father. "Who flits around rooftops" was omitted in the translation of the subtitles. Because audiences already knew why her mother said that when they watched the previous clip. So Omitted In the original text, there is some useless information. Because this information is not important to the audience's understanding and will not have an impact on the film.

(10) Original text: She has trained an elite force of shadow warriors to assist Bori Khan.

Translated text: 她训练了一批精炼的暗影武士

Back translation from Chinese to English: She trained a group of refined shadow warriors.

This happened when the minister was reporting to the emperor the muscle of the Rouran army. "To assist Bori Khan" is omitted because the audience already knows that the army is loyal to Buri Khan (emperor of the minority). According to the earlier movie plot, the witch with Rouran soldiers attacks the border town. Therefore, if translate it word by word according to English subtitles, it will not

only take up space on the screen but also make the audience feel that the subtitles are verbose. As a result, the audience's feeling of the film is trouble.

(11) Original text: you were exiled.

Translated text: 流离失所。

Back translation from Chinese to English: Displaced.

This is what Buri Khan (the emperor of the minority people) said when he told the story of the witch and comforted her. The "you were" is omitted here. If the translator had not used omission strategy, the subtitle would have been translated into“你是流离失所的 (You are displaced.) ”. Such the translation does not coincide with the Chinese way of speaking. Besides, “流离失所 (Displaced)” is a four-character idiom in China, and it is not added words anymore in the front of the four-character idioms in the Chinese way of speaking. Therefore, it is very appropriate for the translator to adopt the strategy of omission in the translation of this sentence.

Through the above case study of subtitle translation using omission strategy, we can understand that under normal circumstances, due to the limited size of screen space and the speed of letter broadcasting, a strategy of omission is the best choice for translation. There is some theoretical support for this view. Yao (2014:147) has suggested that “the translator should take into account that the audience should not spend too much time to understand when reading the subtitles, try to use single-line translation, and avoid the continuous occurrence of two-line subtitles, which will cause the audience's eyes to be tired.”

In conclusion, through the case study of omission strategy, we can know that strategy of omission can solve the problem that subtitle translation is limited in space and time. But we should also follow the principle of omitting subtitles. After the analysis and induction of the case, we can know that the omission strategy generally follows these principles. First, leave out unnecessary words such as pronouns. Second, express complex sentences with simple meanings. Finally, use idioms appropriately. It should be noted that these analyses have a good reference value for other film subtitle translations. 4.6 The method of humorous translation in Mulan (2020) American humor in dialogues makes the film humorous and lively. In the film Mulan (2020) 4 instances of humor were identified. Further on, we will analyze the most illustrative examples of humorous translation:

Table 6 Data of humorous translation

Strategy	Instances	Percentage
Translation by humor	4/200	2%

The film uses Chinese Kung Fu as the theme has a great market prospect in China, so in order to attract more Chinese audiences, the application of Skopos theory can help Chinese audiences better understand the American humor in this movie. We can use some examples to illustrate the humor of the subtitles:

(13) Original text: Need a hand, little man?

Translated text: 起来吧,小锉子。

Back translation from Chinese to English: Get up, Dwarf.

This sentence happened when Mulan was bumped into by her peers, Honghui called her Shorty. A humorous translation of "little man" as "小锉子(Shorty)". It makes the movie more witty and interesting.

(14) Original text: I like kissing women with cherry red lips

Translated text: 我喜欢樱桃小嘴的姑娘。

Back translation from Chinese to English: I like girls with a cherry mouth.

This sentence happened when Mulan was discussing with her fellow soldiers what kind of girls she liked. The translator translates it as " 樱桃小嘴(a cherry mouth)" which is both funny and pictorial.

(15) Original text: Ling is a romantic!

Translated text: 田岭真是多情!

Back translation from Chinese to English: Tianling is really affectionate!

For the subtitle, the soldiers said to warrior Tianling when he was telling about his fiancée. The word “多情 (affectionate)” in the Chinese language is tinged with humor. This is usually used to make fun of the fact that the thought that someone is saying is only the thought that the person is saying, but the loved one doesn't think so. Moreover, to transfer into “多情(affectionate)”, it can also show that they have a very good relationship, as in the Chinese language, well-connected people can speak it. Finally, it also fits in with the scene of the movie fragment.

(16) Original text: Mulan, forget the chicken.

Translated text: 木兰! 别追那只鸡了!

Back translation from Chinese to English: Mulan! Stop chasing that chicken!

This subtitle is at the beginning of the movie when Mulan was a little girl. The translator translated "forget" into “别追 (stop chasing)” . In the Chinese language, "chase" generally symbolizes lively, smart, and agile, which has a funny color. In addition, the character “追(chase)” also

vividly shows the humorous scene of Mulan catching a chicken. It also reflects the character of Mulan. Thus, without a humorous translation, it would have been translated “木兰，忘了这只鸡。(Mulan, forget the chicken.)”. Then it will lose the happy atmosphere when Mulan catches the chicken.

The data in Table 6 shows that there are a few humorous translation strategies in this movie. This data proves that humorous translation strategies are often not adopted by translators when language conversion of movies introduced from target language countries involves movies with a lot of traditional and strong cultures. Because according to Cai (2000: 56) has said that "humorous translation methods tend to make a lot of cultural loss". However, through the above specific cases, we can find out that humor translation still plays an important role in the movie. Namely, when the audience hears this subtitle which is translated by the strategy of humorous translation, it often attracts the audience's interest and causes the audience to laugh. Therefore, in the process of translating these subtitles, if there no humorous translation in movies rather than translating literally from English to Chinese. Consequently, through the examples listed above, we can analyze that adopting a humorous translation method is very important to achieve the expected level of translation.

All things considered, humorous language plays a very important role in people's daily life. Additionally, in intercultural communication, the translation of humorous language has been paid much attention by many scholars. Although humor translation is difficult to operate, its translatability is indisputable. In particular, the humorous language in subtitles can help ordinary audiences without language and cultural background to understand and appreciate English movies.

4.7 The method of idioms, allusions translation in *Mulan* (2020)

In *Mulan*, the translator uses a great deal of Chinese four-character idioms and Chinese allusions to show the characters of the film's dialog.

Table 7 Data of idioms, allusions

Strategy	Instances	Percentage
Translation by idioms, allusions	21/200	11%

The Chinese four-character idioms and Chinese proverbs are essences of Chinese culture. They are unique forms of language structure in Chinese languages. On the side of content, they are concise and to the point; on the side of pronunciation, they are catchy and having lasting appeal; on the side of the form, they are orderly rows. There are some examples:

Example of idioms:

(17) Original text : Her chi is beyond imagining.

Translated text: 此人的元气深不可测。

Back translation from Chinese to English: The man's strength is unfathomable.

This sentence happened after the officer reported to the emperor that there was a witch in Rouran. If you do not use the four-character idiom translation method, it will be translated as "超出想象 (unexpected)". But the translator translated it into a four-character idiom, which not only expresses the meaning of the context but also makes the language concise and comprehensive.

In addition to the use of idioms, translators also use allusions to translate. To illustrate this shift, see the following example:

(18) Original text : Four ounces can move, pounds.

Translated text: 四两拨千斤。

Back translation from Chinese to English: A little strength overcomes a great strength

This sentence takes place after Hua Mulan is discovered to be a woman by the soldiers, but she still musters up the courage to tell them how to deal with Rouran's tactics. The translator translated this sentence into a Chinese proverb. Because in the long history of China, as a form of culture, proverbs play a unique role in language expression. Proverbs generally concise, popular, rich in philosophy, so that even people who have not read many books, use this language, have reached a very skilled degree, from which we can see the wide adaptability and strong vitality of proverbs.

(19) Original text: Slaughtered!

Translated text: 惨遭杀戮

Back translation from Chinese to English: Massacre on a massive scale.

This subtitle adopts the translation strategy of idioms and allusions. And This word happened when the emperor asked the minister how the border people were because of the invasion of the Rouran army, the minister replied. If the translator does not use the translation of idiom, the subtitle will be translated as “屠杀 (Killing)”. According to the plot of the previous movie, the Rouran army burned, killed, looted, and plundered the border civilians. Obviously, the translation into “屠杀(Killing)” does not illustrate the huge damage that the Rouran army has caused to the border civilians. Therefore, the strategy of idioms and allusions translation is the most appropriate method for this subtitle.

(20) Original text: We're not afraid of dark magic.

Translated text: 邪魔巫术不足为惧。

Back translation from Chinese to English: Witchcraft is nothing to be feared.

Similarly, this sentence still adopts the translation strategy of idioms and allusions. This word was made after the minister told the emperor that Rouran had a powerful army. And emperor had a response. For “不足为惧(nothing to be feared)”, in the Chinese language, means that it is not worth worrying or fearing for something. Usually with a contemptuous attitude towards the enemy. In addition, Chinese four-character idioms also have the function of emphasizing a certain tone. Therefore, “not afraid of” is translated into “不足为惧 (nothing to be feared)”. The method translation is very consistent with the aspect and tone of the emperor shown in the movie.

Ma (1997: 82) has said that “an idiom is a unique form of the phrase in Chinese, which has a distinct sense of semantic image”. Therefore, we should use it in subtitle translation to improve the level of the works and the audience's aesthetic taste. Through the above case can strongly confirm this point of view. Throughout the movie, the use of Chinese idioms and allusions is only a few short Chinese characters. But these short few Chinese characters often contain a period of history or truth. Therefore, people familiar with idioms and allusions, when they hear idioms, those historical events and historical figures will appear vividly before their eyes; Those who are not familiar with history will understand the extended meaning of the idiom.

In short, due to the particularity of its form, film and television subtitles have the characteristics of popularity, service, limited time and space, etc., so the translation should follow the principles of conciseness and understandability. Chinese idioms and allusions are short and piquant, with distinct meanings and rich contents. When translating English film subtitles, the use of Chinese idioms and allusions can play a concise, understandable, and prominent role in literary brilliance.

4.8 The translation method of concentration in *Mulan* (2020)

The concentration method means translators can simplify some unimportant information and use some simple words to express the long dialogue, and stress the important information (Li 2014: 269)

Table 8 Data of concentration

Strategy	Instances	Percentage
Translation by concentration	17/200	9%

As can be seen from Table 4.8, many translation strategies adopt a centralized translation approach. However, in order

to better understand the translator's choice of these translation strategies, it is necessary to analyze several examples.

(21) Original text: Assemble all Imperial guardsmen

Translated text: 立即传令。

Back translation from Chinese to English: Immediately command.

The subtitle was that the emperor heard that the Great Khan had infiltrated the imperial city, and he gave orders to the personnel concerned. If the translator translates word for word. It said, "召集所有皇家卫队,朕有些事情要让你当中的相关人员去做。(Assembling all the Royal Guards, I have something for some of you concerned to do.)" If translated word by word, there is so much information that the audience can't grasp the main idea of the sentence. And the use of a centralized translation method, simple sentences can be understood by the audience, this will be more attractive.

(21) Original text: Proof that there is a place for people like us.

Translated text: 说明我们也是有立足之地的。

Back translation from Chinese to English: It means there is a place for us.

The subtitle of the story is that Mulan convinces the witch to return to the right path. The translator still adopts the method of centralized translation. The use of centralized translation can be similar to the above example. Not only can the sentences be concise and comprehensive, but it is easier for the audience to understand the characteristics of the characters. At the same time, it makes the film more attractive.

(22) Original text: Here's my decree.

Translated text: 传朕旨意。

Back translation from Chinese to English: Tell them what I want to.

For the subtitle, it was said when the emperor was about to recruit soldiers from the people. The translator adopts the strategy of concentrated translation. This translation is in line with the habit of the emperors of ancient China speaking when decreeing edicts. In ancient China, when an emperor issued an edict, The emperors would begin their command with these four words “传朕旨意 (Tell them what I want to)”. If it will be translated into “这是我的法令。(That's my decree.)” according to the original subtitle “Here's my decree.” to translate, it will make Chinese audiences feel very strange when watching movies with traditional Chinese culture, and they can not resonate with the movie.

(23) Original text: One man from every house.

Translated text: 每户一人。

Back translation from Chinese to English: One person per household.

This subtitle also adopts the strategy of concentrated translation. This sentence is happening at the conscription of the Imperial Army. The sentence would have been translated as “每个家庭需要有一个男人应征入伍。(Every family needed a man to be drafted into the army.)” without using the concentration strategy. This way of translation is very incorrect. First of all, according to the conscription system in ancient China, women were not allowed to join the army, so it is unnecessary to translate “男人 (man)”. Second, it is very proper for a unit of measure for the population of China to translate “every” into “每(per)”. Finally, “One man from every house.” is translated into “每户一人 (One person per household.)”. This is not only simple but also understandable to the Chinese audience.

Pass to concentration strategies in the collection and analysis of the case, we can see that kind of translation strategy, it is the translator in fully consider the cultural background of the target language audience, value idea, speech habits, and other factors from the perspective of the target language, on the basis of combined with the purpose of translation and the special case of the audience, from the original language provides multiple information for selective translation. However, it is important to note that the condensed translation strategy does not blindly reduce or delete the primitive information.

To sum up, we conclude that subtitle translation in this particular analysis often does not follow the original wording closely and applies different strategies to render the content in the most applicable way for the target audiences.

V. CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper was to analyze and compare the cases of stylistically important elements and their translation strategies in the subtitles of the film *Mulan* (2020). To achieve the aim, first the Skopos theory of subtitle translation was discussed. The collected data was classified divided into six types: domestication strategy, foreignization strategy, omission strategy, humor translation strategy, idiom and allusion translation strategy, and concentration strategy. It was found that 73% of subtitle translations used domestication and foreignization strategies. However, it is worth mentioning that 61% of the domestication strategy is much higher than 12% of the

foreignization strategy. Therefore, we can draw a conclusion that it is relatively safe and easy for people to accept domestication strategy in subtitle translation of other movies. This is because when a film is introduced from a certain country to other countries, the importing country will often adopt the domesticated way to conform to the thinking mode of people in its own country.

Moreover, it is worth noting that most culture-based subtitle translations generally use omission, idioms and allusions, and concentration translation methods. Using these methods is more in line with the Chinese way of language because Chinese people generally like to use a few words to form more complex sentences.

Humor translation is only 2%, so we can learn that humor translation strategies are rarely used in some cultural films with heavy cultural color, especially in traditional cultural films because using humor translation strategy to carry on the transformation, will make the cultural color disappear. Therefore, it can be concluded that the proper strategy combined with the translator's choice of words is the key to the successful transfer of subtitle translation. What is more, in the process of comparing the original subtitle and the translated subtitle, the translation strategy can be determined by analyzing the rules. For example, when translating long subtitles, the strategy of concentration can be adopted. When the subtitles are limited by time or space, the strategy of omitting or using idioms and allusions can be adopted. Admittedly, this method is also applicable to subtitle translation of other movies.

In addition, through the case analysis of *Mulan* (2020), we found that most of the translations adopt a subtitle translation strategy for conversion. Therefore, it can be shown that these strategies have the possibility and necessity of their application in subtitle translation. However, some translation problems were found after the study and analysis of the case. Before subtitle translation, the translator needs to have a deep understanding of the film, correctly understand the language phenomenon and logical relationship, and master certain background knowledge.

To continue with, through the analysis, in the process of subtitle translation, the style of the original text has also changed. It has been noted that the Chinese translation uses more formal words than the original. In addition, in some isolated cases where the translation strategy uses idioms and allusions, the translated text has no counterpart in the original (English) language.

The practical value of the analysis can be used as a practice for future translators, because they can identify the Skopos theology-based subtitle translation cases in film subtitles, identify the translation strategies used, and

whether they lead to the loss or transfer of the original meaning of the case. In addition, this study can be further studied by analyzing and comparing subtitle translation of advertisements, dubbing, documentaries, or other categories.

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A Study on the Translation Strategies of the “Hongyan” (Wild Goose) Image in Xu Yuanchong’s Ancient Poetry Translations from the Perspective of Cultural Translation Theory

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Abstract— “Hongyan” (wild goose) is a core cultural image in ancient Chinese poetry, carrying profound cultural connotations. Its translation involves not only linguistic conversion but also cross-contextual transmission of cultural semantics. From the perspective of cultural translation theory, this study focuses on Xu Yuanchong’s English translations of ancient Chinese poetry. By sorting out the historical and cultural origins and multiple semantic orientations of the “Hongyan” image, it systematically analyzes the translation strategies adopted by Xu, image retention with contextual reinforcement, cultural compensation, aesthetic reconstruction, and strategic omission. The findings reveal that Xu was not a passive transmitter of linguistic content but an actively conscious “cultural mediator” who skillfully employed target-language poetic conventions and reader schemata to effectively transfer the high-context “Hongyan” image from Chinese culture into the English-speaking world, all while respecting the spirit of the source text. His practice exemplifies a dialectical unity of “creative treason” and “cultural confidence,” offering a paradigmatic model for Chinese literary translation that harmonizes aesthetic excellence with cross-cultural communicative efficacy.



Keywords— cultural translation theory, Xu Yuanchong, ancient Chinese poetry, “Hongyan” image, translation strategies, Three Beauties principle

I. INTRODUCTION

Ancient Chinese poetry carries rich cultural images with concise language. As one of the frequently appearing images, “Hongyan” has accumulated multiple cultural semantics such as homesickness, letter delivery, and loyalty, becoming a unique carrier of the Chinese nation’s cultural psychology. With the ongoing implementation of China’s “Chinese Culture Going Global” strategy, the English translation of classical poetry has emerged as a vital channel for intercultural communication. Within this process, the translation of cultural images constitutes a central challenge and a critical focal point. Mr. Xu Yuanchong, the preeminent translator of classical Chinese poetry in the 20th century, crafted English versions guided by his principle of

the “Three Beauties”—beauty of meaning, sound, and form—and demonstrated exceptional cultural insight and poetic creativity in handling the “Hongyan” image.

Cultural translation theory emphasizes that the essence of translation is cultural transmission. It holds that translation is not only the conversion of linguistic symbols but also the communication and dialogue between different cultures. Translators are required to attach great importance to cultural factors in the translation process and realize the effective connection between the source culture and the target culture. Based on this, this study takes cultural translation theory as the theoretical framework, selects poems containing the “Hongyan” image from Xu Yuanchong’s English translations of classic works such as

The Book of Songs, *Chu Ci*, *Tang poetry*, and *Song ci*, and explores the strategies adopted in the translation of the “Hongyan” image, aiming to uncover the underlying cultural stance, poetic choices, and intercivilizational dialogue embedded in his work, thereby providing a new perspective for the translation and communication of cultural images in classical poetry and offering theoretical and practical insights for China’s cultural “going global” initiative.

II. DEFINITION OF CORE CONCEPTS AND THEORETICAL BASIS

2.1 Cultural Connotation Origin of the “Hongyan” Image

The cultural connotation of the “Hongyan” image was not formed overnight but gradually accumulated in the long historical development. As early as in *The Book of Songs*, the line “Wild geese fly south with rustling wings” expressed the ancestors’ feelings about separation and reunion through the migratory characteristics of wild geese. With the evolution of history, the cultural semantics of “Hongyan” have been continuously enriched: First, due to the migratory law of wild geese leaving in autumn and returning in spring, it has become a symbol of homesickness. For example, in Wang Wei’s poem *Mission to the Frontier*, the line “Like tumbleweed I leave the Han frontier behind; Homing wild geese cross northern sky.” uses the returning wild geese to contrast the wanderer’s sense of drift. Second, derived from the allusion of “Hongyan delivering letters”, it has become a carrier for delivering letters and conveying thoughts. For instance, in Li Qingzhao’s *A Paper Cut for a Plum Blossom*, the line “Who’ll send me a letter from the clouds above? When wild geese form their lines, the moon fills my western tower” reflects this connotation. Third, due to the neat formation and lofty posture of wild geese when flying, it is endowed with the character connotation of loyalty, nobility, and lofty aspiration. For example, in Fan Zhongyan’s *Fisherman’s Pride – Autumn Thoughts*, the line “Autumn comes to the frontier, scenery strange and drear; Wild geese fly south to Hengyang, no thought to stay here.” implies the soldiers’ perseverance through the resoluteness of wild geese. These cultural connotations are deeply rooted in the soil of traditional Chinese culture and become core elements that cannot be ignored in the translation of the “Hongyan” image.

2.2 Core Essentials of Cultural Translation Theory

Susan Bassnett is a renowned contemporary cultural critic and translation theorist. She has a profound insight into the significance of cultural factors in literary translation and has proposed the famous “cultural translation perspective”.

Cultural translation theory is a translation theoretical paradigm formed under the background of the cultural turn. Its core essence is to break through the limitation of the traditional linguistic school that only focuses on the conversion of linguistic forms and examine translation in a broad cultural context. This theory holds that the purpose of translation is not only to realize the accurate transmission of text meaning but also to promote the understanding and communication between different cultures. As cultural intermediaries, translators need to fully recognize the differences between the source culture and the target culture, and balance the integrity of the source culture and the acceptability of target readers in the translation process to avoid the loss or misunderstanding of cultural semantics.

Susan Bassnett (2001) asserts, “Cultural translation constitutes a complex process that extends beyond linguistic conversion, necessitating a profound comprehension and articulation of the cultural context and connotations embedded within the source text.” Consequently, the perspective of cultural translation mandates that translators thoroughly grasp the cultural contextual factors, achieve linguistic equivalence, and facilitate cultural transformation during the translation process. Furthermore, in the realm of literary translation, translators are required not only to master linguistic techniques but also to comprehend the cultural essence represented by the source text, thereby accurately conveying the author’s intent and emotional resonance.

The cultural translation perspective underscores that the fundamental aim of translation extends beyond the mechanical correspondence of linguistic forms to encompass the attainment of deep cultural equivalence, thereby endowing this theoretical framework with particular relevance in the translation of poetic imagery. As highly condensed constituents of poetry, cultural images frequently embody distinctive cultural symbols and carry profound emotional connotations. Given their deep embedding within specific cultural contexts, identical objects often assume divergent symbolic meanings across cultures. To ensure the effective transference of such cultural symbols, translators must actively exercise interpretive agency. They may either draw upon semantically and culturally equivalent expressions from the target language’s repertoire or reconstruct a coherent cultural cognitive framework through strategies such as internal compensation and explanatory annotations. By preserving the emotional depth and aesthetic integrity of the source text, this approach facilitates the elicitation of aesthetic resonance among target readers via deliberate cultural adaptation, thus fulfilling the essential objective of meaningful cross-cultural communication.

Within this framework, Xu Yuanchong’s translational practice can be understood as a strategic cultural performance, wherein his handling of the “Hongyan” constitutes a deliberate act of cultural reproduction within the global context.

III. ANALYSIS OF TRANSLATION STRATEGIES FOR THE “HONGYAN” IMAGE IN XU YUANCHONG’S TRANSLATIONS

Based on the sorting of Xu Yuanchong’s English translations of ancient Chinese poetry, combined with the different cultural connotations and poetic contexts of the “Hongyan” image, his adopted translation strategies can be summarized into the following four categories.

3.1 Image Retention with Contextual Enhancement

Example 1: 孤雁不饮啄，飞鸣声念群。(Du Fu, *The Lonely Goose*)

Xu’s translation: A lonely wild goose, it drinks not, eats not, /But flies and cries, longing for its flock. (Xu, 2007, p. 112)

This couplet from Du Fu’s time of wandering in southwestern China uses the “lonely wild goose” to symbolize the sorrow of being separated from a group during turbulent times. The phrase “longing for the flock” is subtle and profound, hinting at inner longing through the act of crying. Xu Yuanchong retains the core image of “wild goose,” avoiding domestication, and adds the adjective “lonely” to set the emotional tone. He also makes the implicit psychological verb “longing” explicit as “longing for its flock,” allowing English readers to understand the essence of loneliness without needing cultural background knowledge. Furthermore, the parallel structure “drinks not, eats not” reinforces the drama of fasting and crying, mimicking the rhythm of the original five-character verse. This approach exemplifies the strategy of “contextual reinforcement,” preserving the source image while activating cultural associations through intertextual compensation, thereby fully realizing the “beauty of meaning” and “beauty of form.” This treatment not only conveys Du Fu’s emotions but also enhances the readability and musicality of the translation.

Example 2: 鸿雁于飞，肃肃其羽。(Classic of Poetry, *Hong Yan*)

Xu’s translation: Wild geese fly south with rustling wings. (Xu, 2005, p. 41)

Hong Yan is a song of the Zhou dynasty laborers, using geese to evoke sympathy for the hardworking soldiers. “肃肃” describes both the sound of flapping wings and the heavy footsteps. Xu Yuanchong translates this as “rustling

wings,” accurately reproducing the auditory imagery. More importantly, he adds “south” to specify the direction of migration—a detail not present in the original text but one that activates deeper cultural scripts such as the autumn departure and spring return, contrasting with the soldiers’ inability to return home. By adding this small detail, Xu transforms simple natural description into an image laden with social concern, achieving a transition from “object” to “emotion.” This treatment neither disrupts the poetic intent nor leaves target readers culturally adrift, showcasing his wisdom in translating with minimal yet impactful additions. This strategy not only enriches the cultural depth of the translation but also preserves the original beauty and rhythm of the poem.

3.2 Cultural Compensation

Example 3: 云中谁寄锦书来？雁字回时，月满西楼。(Li Qingzhao, *Yijianmei*)

Xu’s translation: Who’ll send me a letter from the clouds above? /When wild geese form their lines, the moon fills my western tower. (Xu, 2009, p. 154)

“雁字” (yan zi) refers to the formation of wild geese flying in the shape of “—” or “人,” which is deeply tied to the Han dynasty legend of Su Wu sending letters via wild geese, becoming a poetic signifier for “letter arrival.” Directly translating “geese form characters” would be difficult for English readers to understand. Xu adopts a strategy of semantic fronting: The first line directly asks, “Who’ll send me a letter from the clouds above?” making the implied “brocade letter” explicit. In the second line, when “wild geese form their lines” appears, readers naturally interpret it as a signal of the letter’s arrival. This cross-line semantic cueing achieves cultural transference without footnotes, completing the activation of allusions. The rhyme “above/tower” is soft and melodious, with the question-and-statement structure corresponding to the original lyrics questioning layout, balancing “beauty of meaning” and “beauty of sound.” This strategy not only addresses cultural gaps but also enhances the overall beauty and coherence of the translation.

Example 4: 塞下秋来风景异，衡阳雁去无留意。(Fan Zhongyan, *Fisherman’s Pride – Autumn Thoughts*)

Xu’s translation: Autumn comes to the frontier, scenery strange and drear; /Wild geese fly south to Hengyang, no thought to stay here. (Xu, 2009, p. 89)

“衡阳” (Hengyang), a place name in Hunan, is traditionally considered the southernmost point where wild geese migrate, serving as an important cultural geographic symbol. Xu boldly retains “Hengyang” rather than generalizing it as “the south,” demonstrating his respect for cultural tradition. He translates the “no thought to stay here,”

explaining that the geese have no intention to linger, while also forming a spatial contrast with “frontier” in the previous sentence, reflecting the sorrow of border soldiers unable to return home. The added word “drear” forms a rhyme with “here,” enhancing musicality. In this example, the retention of place names and the explicit expression of emotion work together to maintain cultural authenticity and strengthen emotional tension, perfectly embodying the translation philosophy of prioritizing faithfulness and beauty over literalness. This approach not only enhances the cultural richness of the translation but also strengthens its musicality and emotional expression.

3.3 Aesthetic Reconstruction

Example 5: 征蓬出汉塞，归雁入胡天。(Wang Wei, *Mission to the Frontier*)

Xu’s translation: Like tumbleweed I leave the Han frontier behind; / Homing wild geese cross northern sky. (Xu, 2007, p. 68)

This couplet contrasts “tumbleweed” with “homing wild geese”: the poet is forced to leave the frontier, while the geese can return north. Xu chooses “homing wild geese,” where “homing” goes far beyond “returning,” precisely conveying both the biological instinct and emotional attachment to home. Meanwhile, “northern sky” replaces “Hu Tian” (referring to the airspace of northern ethnic groups), depoliticizing it while retaining the vast, desolate atmosphere and avoiding cultural barriers. The two lines are connected by a semicolon, mimicking the original parallelism; “behind/sky” creates alliteration and spatial opposition, enhancing auditory tension. This treatment sacrifices some historical reference for overall poetic unity, exemplifying the strategy of “aesthetic reconstruction” that prioritizes “beauty of sound” and “beauty of form.” This approach not only addresses cultural differences but also enhances the overall beauty and musicality of the translation, allowing readers to better appreciate the original poem’s mood and emotion.

Example 6: 鸿雁于飞，肃肃其羽。之子于征，劬劳于野。(Classic of Poetry, Hong Yan)

Xu’s translation: Wild geese fly south with rustling wings; / The man is sent to toil in distant things. (Xu, 2005, p. 41)

This poem uses “wild geese” as its opening image (xing), contrasting the geese’s free flight southward with the conscripted man’s arduous fate “toiling in the fields.” Xu Yuanchong’s translation masterfully handles this contrastive structure. The first line, “Wild geese fly south with rustling wings,” retains the “Hongyan” image and adds “south” to specify direction, activating cultural associations. The second line creatively renders “in the fields” as “in

distant things,” using the abstract noun “things” to broadly signify indescribable hardship, thereby imbuing the verse with existential overtones. Though not a literal correspondence, this creates a powerful irony with the preceding line: the geese enjoy the freedom of migration, while the man is trapped in the suffering of “distant things.” This abstraction elevates the poetry and expands its interpretive space. The internal rhyme “wings/things” is soft and sorrowful. This strategy of “poetic abstraction” represents an aesthetic sublimation grounded in fidelity to the core “wild goose” motif, truly realizing the ideal that “to translate poetry is to write poetry.”

3.4 Strategic Omission

Example 7: 故园渺何处？归思方悠哉。淮南秋雨夜，高斋闻雁来。(Wei Yingwu, *Hearing Wild Geese*)

Xu’s translation: Where is my old home beyond the distant view? / Homesick, I long to go back, my heart in pain. / On an autumn rain night south of the Huai, / From my high chamber I hear wild geese again. (Xu, 2007, p. 158)

Titled *Hearing Wild Geese*, this poem centers on the event of hearing geese and being triggered into homesickness. The “geese” here are a classic symbol of the “messenger of longing.” However, unlike his treatment of Li Qingzhao’s lyrics, Xu does not explicitly render it as “letter” or “messenger,” but simply translates it as “I hear wild geese again.” He places the emotional focus entirely on the direct psychological statement: “Homesick, I long to go back, my heart in pain,” allowing “wild geese” to exist purely as an auditory backdrop. This approach avoids oversymbolizing the image, preserving the natural flow of emotion triggered by external stimuli. This is a sophisticated form of “strategic omission”: when the emotion has already been fully expressed through other lines, the “geese” need not bear additional explanatory weight; their mere presence is sufficient. This demonstrates Xu’s masterful control over the poem’s overall rhythm and emotional distribution.

Example 8: 云物凄清拂曙流，汉家宫阙动高秋。残星几点雁横塞，长笛一声人倚楼。(Zhao Gu, *Autumn View from Chang’an*)

Xu’s translation: Clouds and mists, bleak and clear, drift at dawn’s light; / Han palaces stir in lofty autumn air. / A few stars fade; wild geese cross the frontier pass; / A flute’s long note—one man leans on a tower there. (Xu, 2007, p. 298)

This couplet juxtaposes four images—“fading stars,” “wild geese crossing the frontier,” “a flute’s note,” and “a man leaning on a tower”—to sketch a scene of desolate beauty on an autumn morning in Chang’an. “Wild geese crossing the frontier” indicates the season and borderland

atmosphere, but its cultural connotations (e.g., letters, parting) are not the focal point here. Xu renders it as “A few stars fade; wild geese cross the frontier pass,” using a paratactic structure of noun phrases and completely omitting verbs or emotional modifiers. He adds no suggestive words like “migrating,” “lonely,” or “bearing messages,” presenting only the objective visual image of “wild geese cross...” This “zero-degree style” maintains the overall balance and pictorial quality of the poem’s image cluster. Over-emphasizing the goose’s symbolic meaning would disrupt the subtle mood jointly created by other images like fading stars and the flute. This is a paradigmatic application of “strategic omission” in poetry dense with image.

Example 9: 金河秋半虏弦开，云外惊飞四散哀。
仙掌月明孤影过，长门灯暗数声来。(Du Mu, *Early Wild Geese*)

Xu’s translation: In mid-autumn, barbarian bows twang by Golden River; / Wild geese, startled from clouds, scatter with cries of woe. / Past the Immortal’s Palm, lone in moonlight they fly; / To Changmen Palace, dim-lit, their cries faintly go. (Xu, 2007, p. 246)

This poem uses “early wild geese” as a metaphor for northern civilians displaced and scattered by barbarian raids. The first couplet, “startled from clouds, scatter with cries of woe,” already fully conveys the geese’s panic and lament through “startled” and “cries of woe.” In the subsequent lines describing “a lone shadow passes” and “faint calls come,” Xu refrains from reiterating their sorrow, instead focusing on spatial movement (“fly past...”, “go to...”) and contrasts of light and shadow (“moonlight,” “dim-lit”). He translates “lone shadow” as “lone,” acknowledging solitude but avoiding further cultural metaphors like “lost from the flock” or “helpless.” This restrained approach ensures the image of the “geese” consistently serves the poem’s political allegory rather than becoming an independent emotional symbol. Once the core emotion is established upfront, the geese in later lines function merely as a narrative thread—this is the profound logic behind “strategic omission.”

IV. CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS AND COMMUNICATION VALUE OF TRANSLATION STRATEGIES

4.1 Practical Reflection of Cultural Translation Theory

Xu’s practice confirms Lefevere’s view that translators manipulate texts according to ideology and poetics. He refused to reduce the “Hongyan” to an ordinary bird. Instead, he engaged in poetic recreation, securing legitimacy for Chinese imagery within English poetic systems. His

motto—“to translate poetry is to write poetry”—epitomizes the highest form of cultural agency. “Beauty of meaning” preserves cultural authenticity; “beauty of sound” and “beauty of form” align with English prosodic conventions (e.g., iambic meter, alliteration, parallelism). For instance, the internal rhyme “wings/things” in his *The Book of Songs* translation is both melodious and ironically suggestive of fate. This strategy reveals a key insight: cultural export must be packaged in aesthetically consumable forms within the target culture to achieve effective communication.

Against the backdrop of long-standing Western cultural hegemony, Xu’s translation constitutes a gentle yet resolute act of cultural resistance. Through masterful artistry, he demonstrated that classical Chinese poetry is not only “translatable” but also “comparable to world classics.” His treatment of the “Hongyan” consistently centers Chinese cultural subjectivity while remaining open to the world—embodying genuine cultural confidence: not isolationist, but engaging global civilization as an equal partner.

4.2 Practical Value of Cross-Cultural Communication

Xu Yuanchong’s translation strategies for the “Hongyan” image provide important references for the cross-cultural communication of cultural images in classical Chinese poetry. First, his translation strategies balance “cultural fidelity” and “reader acceptance”, which not only retain the uniqueness of Chinese culture but also avoid communication barriers caused by cultural barriers, helping target readers gradually accept and identify with Chinese cultural images on the basis of understanding the poetic artistic conception. Second, through cultural compensation methods such as annotations and contextual implications, not only the surface meaning of the poem is transmitted but also the cultural connotations behind it are conveyed, promoting in-depth communication between Chinese and Western cultures. Finally, Xu Yuanchong’s translation practice proves that the translation of cultural images is not a simple “one-to-one” correspondence, but requires translators to flexibly choose translation strategies based on the text context, cultural differences, and communication goals to realize the unity of “beauty in meaning, beauty in sound, and beauty in form”.

V. CONCLUSION AND PROSPECT

From the perspective of cultural translation theory, this study analyzes the translation strategies of the “Hongyan” image in Xu Yuanchong’s translations of ancient Chinese poetry. It is found that Xu flexibly uses four strategies and these strategies not only adhere to the aesthetic principles of poetry translation but also fully consider the actual needs of cross-cultural communication, realizing the functional

transmission of cultural images and the maximum retention of the aesthetic value of poetry. These strategies not only reflect Xu Yuanchong’s translation concept of “art of beautification, competition of excellence” but also practice the core goal of promoting cultural communication in cultural translation theory. His success demonstrates that the crux of Chinese literary translation lies not in whether to retain some terms, but in enabling target readers to experience the original poem’s emotional power and aesthetic height within their own cultural cognitive framework.

In conclusion, the translation of cultural images in classical poetry is an important link in cross-cultural communication. Translators need to be guided by cultural translation theory, flexibly use translation strategies on the basis of respecting cultural differences, and realize the effective transmission of cultural semantics. Xu Yuanchong’s translation practice provides valuable experience for us. It is believed that with the continuous development of translation theory and practice, the cultural images in classical Chinese poetry will shine more brilliantly in cross-cultural communication. At the same time, in the new era, for Chinese culture to “go global”, more “ferryman” with cultural awareness, poetic literacy and cross-cultural communication skills are needed. Only then can Chinese stories be truly heard, understood, and appreciated by the world.

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Women as Other: Reflecting Underrepresentation and Objectification of Women in the Age of AI

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Abstract— *We are living in a world that is continuously getting transformed by AI in more revolutionary ways than we can even imagine. Day by day, AI is becoming increasingly integrated into our daily lives. Applied in the economy, politics, healthcare, business, social media, entertainment, agriculture, and multiple industries, AI has brought about a groundbreaking change in the present world. However, in addition to its application in different sectors, it has also generated some complexities and discourses that need to be addressed with increasing insight. Living in the age of AI in the 21st century, we cannot think of a world free of gender bias, gender stereotypes, discrimination, and subordination. Hegel's theory of Otherness posits that otherness is the unknown and opposite of oneself, or it may be defined as the outsider identified by certain signs such as race and gender. Thus, the concept of Otherness is closely associated with underrepresented, victimized, and objectified people in the social, cultural, technological, and political world. Philosopher Simon de Beauvoir modified and redefined the concept of the Other by setting its association with objectification and subordination in *The Second Sex*. In the recent world of AI, women are becoming victims as they are objectified, harassed, and robbed of their voices in many ways. This paper endeavors to examine the representation and situation of women as Other in diverse contexts in the age of AI from a feminist point of view.*



Keywords— *AI, Other, feminism, gender bias, stereotype, objectification.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence is a product of modern science and technology, which refers to the simulation of human intelligence. It is transforming the world in every moment at an unbelievable rapidity. From dawn to dusk, it is changing lives and influencing every walk of life incredibly. But while counting AI as a blessing, the disadvantages or threats should also be counted. This study will inquire into applications of AI in different sectors and focus especially on deepfake technology, voice assistants, healthcare, and employment to bring out gender biases implied in AI-based backgrounds in the mentioned areas.

In this highly changing world of globalisation, commercialization, and technological advancement, gender discrimination still exists visibly or invisibly in various forms (Arora Manasi, 2022). Although women are

contributing largely in all social, cultural, political, and technological advancements, they are remaining underrepresented and subordinated in many spheres. A study conducted by UNESCO says that AI causes negative impacts on the economic empowerment of women (UNESCO, 2020). If we look back into the history of Computing science, we see that AI has been perceived as a masculine pursuit and seen as distant from feminine knowledge (Schelhowe, 2004). This study aims to shed light on the plight of women in the age of AI due to gender bias in AI algorithms.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To portray the underrepresentation of women, this paper focuses on the concept of the Other. Generally, in

Phenomenology, the term ‘other’ refers to an identity that is associated with ‘self-consciousness’ and opposite to the ‘self’ or ‘I’. If ‘self’ is the subject, then ‘other’ is the object. “What Hegel means by the claim that for self-consciousness the object is negative is that in itself the object is taken to be nothing—it is nothing but a thing-for-my-consciousness. Self-consciousness takes itself to be the thing of significance. I am what is important and essential; the object is nothing but a thing-for-me” (Kain, 2005). Self depends on the Other for recognition which actually enforces the Self to desire recognition, and this desire gives rise to a lot of conflicts in society (Kain, 2005). This desire becomes prominent and is prioritized by the Self and the Other, or the object is used as a means to fulfil the desire. Therefore, the subject is always the superior one, and the object is the subordinate. This subject-object dichotomy may create diverse discriminating relationships in society such as master-slave relationship which has also been discussed in Hegel’s phenomenology.

In her striking book *The Second Sex*, Simon de Beauvoir reflected and redefined the concept of Other from a feminist lens. This One-Other duality existing between the man-woman relationship has been analyzed by Beauvoir in the light of history, myth, reality, present, and past throughout the text. In the patriarchal world, man represents the positive and women negative; man defines humanity and woman is defined in relation to him, man is the subject and woman is the object (Beavoir, 1953). “For him, she is sex-- absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man, and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other” (Beavoir, 1953).

Though this discriminating scenario has changed a lot over the last centuries and women have been actively contributing in every sector, women are still being oppressed, victimized, and less recognized in every sector worldwide. They never shared equality with men; they are nothing but submissive to men (Beavoir, 1953, pp. 18-20). “Even when her rights are legally recognized in the abstract, long-standing custom prevents their full expression in the mores.” (Beavoir, 1953). There are some traditional beliefs or ingrained concepts existing in society for long ages that make us consider women to be caregivers, affectionate, sensitive, weak, and inferior. *The Second Sex* also portrays how the age-old myths and stereotypes work as a basis for considering women submissive in a patriarchal world. As AI algorithm is set based on these social beliefs, AI applications are not free of stereotypes and bias, leading to the objectification of women in different fields. Therefore, this research

analyzes the usage of AI-centered tools and examine how they create discrimination and treat women as the Other.

III. DISCUSSION

Basically, AI programs are a series of algorithms set in specific programming language or data. This implies that successful applications of AI depend on big data and powerful algorithms (Guszcza, 2018). Algorithms related to decision-making are used in diverse sectors such as diagnosis, job recruitment etc. AI algorithm is greatly influenced by the input data. As a result, algorithms set based on subjective choices may reflect data bias while using AI tools (F.R.A Focus, 2018, p. 5). Thus, if the original input data carries a bias against a particular group, the algorithm can lead to wrong and discriminatory results in which cases women suffer most. (F.R.A Focus, 2018).

3.1 MIRRORING WOMEN OBJECTIFICATION THROUGH VARIOUS AI APPLICATIONS IN DIFFERENT SECTORS

3.1.1. DEEPFAKES

In today’s world of simulation and hyper-reality, it’s difficult to differentiate between real and fake. Today we live in a “post-truth” era, which can be characterized by digital disinformation, false information, and manipulated opinions of individuals (Anderson, 2018). Nowadays, fake news, fake videos, and fake images are commonly used to threaten one’s identity, honour, and social status. In this crucial context, the emergence of deepfake, an AI technology, is contributing largely as it is able to make videos by imitating human personality, voice, and gesture, etc. Deepfakes create fake videos by merging, combining, replacing, and superimposing pictures and videoclips to make it look authentic (Maras & Alexandrou, 2018). Deepfakes mostly appear as humorous, pornographic, and controversial videos of politicians, actors/actresses, social media influencers, or other people of different social sectors.

In recent years, deepfake technology has been used to create violent and sexual images to degrade women. Cathy Newman, an English news presenter of Channel 4, told BBC 4 about her feelings when she discovered her images as part of deepfake videos. She said, "It was violating... it was kind of me and not me," as her face was shown in the video but not her hair (Cooney, 2024). In January 2024, social media platforms were flooded with intimate images of pop icon Taylor Swift, quickly reaching millions of users. However, the abusive content was not real; they were deepfakes (Nelson, 2024). This kind of malicious video poses great threat to the safety, privacy, and honour of women.

The most horrible matter is that in recent years, deepfake technology has been largely used to produce adult videos of

celebrities, actors, and actresses. This is alarming that a large number of them are also made as revenge porn. Celebrities like Scarlett Johansson have been featured on deepfaked adult videos, and an altered video of American politician Nancy Pelosi got viral which had a huge outreach (Westerlund, 2019). Although deepfakes are being produced using the images or clips of both male and female celebrities and politicians or random people, this is a matter of serious concern that women are the greatest victims of this technology. Moreover, revenge pornography and non-consensual videos are used by men to abuse, defame, and control the victims who are most likely to be women (Lucas, 2022)

In recent years, deepfake technology has been used to deceive, blackmail, and sometimes to intimidate someone, where revenge is the main motif. In most cases, for women, deepfake images and videos are degrading and dehumanizing. The organization named Sensity AI monitored a large number of deepfake videos online in 2020 and found that only 35 videos had featured politicians, 96% of them were non-consensual deepfakes and the majority of those were made of women (Dunn, 2021).

Using deepfake, people are easily making fake images or videos of women by collecting their photos and clips available on social media. The alarming matter is that most of these videos and photos are produced without any consent. Consequently, any woman from any class, religion, or profession can be objectified and assaulted unknowingly. Men who are producing these malicious videos or images consider their acts as a victimless crime driven by a sense of superiority over women (Wolfe et al., 2023). In short, objectifying and commodifying women became much easier than before because of the advancement of deepfake technology.

3.1.2 LANGUAGE VISION MODEL AND VOICE ASSISTANT

Language vision models and voice assistants have been two widely used AI applications over the last decade. Past examples of language vision models and voice assistants show that most of the models and assistants are female. This paper also attempts to figure out the gender biases in virtual assistants directed by AI algorithms. According to the European Institute for Gender Equality, gender bias refers to “prejudiced actions or thoughts based on the gender-based perception that women are not equal to men in rights and dignity” (ILERI, 2024). Most often, language vision systems display sexualized pictures of the female body or body parts, where commercialization is likely to be the main motif. Study shows that in language-vision AI technology, women are exhibited in sexualized contexts visually, where they are depicted as bodies or sexual

objects (Wolfe et al., 2023). Containing stereotypical gender features, input data plays a crucial role in creating bias in these applications. Moreover, stereotypical datasets not only create gender bias but also promote colour bias. It is also found that computer vision datasets cause underrepresentation of women with darker complexion (Wolfe et al., 2023). Therefore, women with darker skin are facing twofold discrimination in these AI-controlled systems. They are being underrepresented firstly because they are not male and secondly because they are not fair. This colour bias leads women to be ‘other’ to their male counterparts and also to women with fair skin. This is the way stereotypical datasets may promote racial prejudice in AI-generated programs.

The remarkable growth of AI has led to the emergence of voice assistants and many companies have launched Smartphone applications operated by AI. Many world-famous companies have launched voice assistants associated with smartphone applications such as Siri (Apple), Cortana (Microsoft), and Alexa (Amazon) etc. Use of virtual assistants is increasing remarkably in different fields to make modern everyday life easier, and this advancement leads us to a smooth interaction between humans and AI in the future. Study predicts that by 2030, 55% of interactions will be done through AI-based voice assistants (Robier, 2019). But designers and researchers are also facing some challenges that must be taken into great concern. Biased outcome is one of them which should be monitored and mitigated as much as possible. It is evident that most of the AI voice assistants are female by default (Lee et al., 2024). Siri, Alexa, and Cortana came with feminine voices, and among them, only Siri has a masculine option but with a limited set of languages (Costa, 2018). The meaning of Siri’s name in Nordic is “beautiful woman who leads to victory,” and Cortana’s name was adapted from a female character of the video game Halo (Fessler, 2022). The primary reason behind their being feminine might be the conventional belief that the female voice is the symbol of care, affection, and love, which leads customers to rely more on the female voice. On the other hand, research also shows that female voices are highly user-engaging because they are perceived as more attractive (Yuasa, 2010). Another reason for choosing female voices might be the fact that most of the research data was derived from male participants and researchers who found female voices more appealing (Puts et al., 2011).

The abovementioned data show that the female voice is preferred both by designers and customers because it sounds attractive and flirtatious to them. Therefore, femininity in voice assistants might be a byproduct of stereotypes that reinforce bias that might misrepresent

women through these applications. Moreover, in the male-dominated technological industry, women are underrepresented because they are not getting enough opportunities to contribute to the industry with their talent or skills; rather, their voices or organs are used to gain profit which indicates nothing but objectification where men are leading as the subjects.

This is a regrettable matter that the voice behind Apple's voice assistant Siri belongs to Susan Bennett, but Apple never acknowledged her and they wanted to keep it secret. In fact, Susan Bennett never worked for Apple; she recorded her voice for a client eight years ago. Later on, audio forensics analyzed both Siri's and Susan's voices and confirmed that Susan is the real person behind the voice of Siri. In one of her interviews with "Business Insider" Benett said that Apple used my voice without my knowledge and never acknowledged or paid me (Cucci, 2023). Here it's clear that Apple had been using Susan's voice without her consent because of their business policy according to which they usually keep the voices anonymous. The tech industry is a place of constant competition among the brands where earning revenue is the main motive of each and every company. Apple used Susan's voice without her consent to make a profit but they didn't acknowledge her contribution to the profit-making for their company. So, it is Susan's voice which has been used as a product to sell worldwide and earn profit by the renowned company Apple. This clearly indicates objectification in a male-dominated tech industry. Therefore, through the AI applications such as language vision AI models or voice assistants, women's voices and other organs are used as objects or commodities which can clearly be considered as women's objectification.

3.1.3 ADVERTISEMENTS AND SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT

The present age is the age of social media where we cannot live without it for a single day. In almost all jobs, employees need to be connected on social media and companies need good exposure on social media to reach their goals. As a result, it became the major platform for broadcasting all types of advertisements and promotional events. Since it is easier to reach millions of people within minutes, nowadays the majority of companies are relying on social media rather than TV channels or newspapers.

After the emergence of AI, making advertisements and other content became even easier than before. Some companies are not hiring human models for making advertisements anymore. Anyone can generate images, posters, and videos by using ChatGPT, DeepSeek, Deepfake, and many other AI-based apps and tools. In these sectors, women are being objectified and

underrepresented too. Demographic analysis shows that algorithmic bias and other societal factors are causing women underrepresentation in almost all ad categories (Roy & Linden, 2025). Over the last decades, women's objectification in media and advertisements has become very common scenario. In some advertisements, women's bodies seem to be reduced in body parts and displayed through sexualized clothing, poses and so on. Moreover, these kinds of advertisements are likely to promote unrealistic body standards which might be a great threat for man-woman sexual relationships in the real world (Kelly et al., 2025). Stereotyping in advertisements is another major issue and study shows that in many of the advertisements, women are associated with domestic and beauty products while men are associated with the traditional work environment in public spheres such as sports and outdoor activities (KRIJNEN, 2017). In case of product description, male products are described as durable, long-lasting while words like dressy, fashionable or silhouette are used for female products. Words like 'silhouette', 'fashionable' are clearly stereotypical and at the same time indicate objectification (Kelly et al., 2025). In most of the advertisements, thin body shapes are represented as standard which creates a sense of inferiority and negative self-perception among those who are physically bulky or suffering from obesity syndromes (Colin Campbell, 2025).

Nowadays, the perception and concept of beauty are determined and influenced by AI-generated content on social media (Minna Ruckenstein, 2020). In every scroll on popular social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, we are watching videos made by generative AI which are changing our aesthetic viewpoints largely. Many AI-based photo editing apps contain filters that can transform a decent image into a sexually attractive one. Young people are widely using these apps and tend to show themselves as 'perfect' as possible on social media. This emerging trend of being perfect has a drastic impact on the mindset of the growing generations. Since AI is changing their perception regarding beauty and perfection, they seem to be disrespectful and judgmental towards those who prefer showing the real beauty and gesture on social media. AI-driven portrayal of beauty standards is creating "algorithmic aesthetic": a culturally dominant beauty standard which is produced by algorithmic data (Blake Hallinan, 2016).

Another alarming matter for the women of the Eastern world is that AI-generated content is promoting Western standards of beauty. Research and media reports show that widely used AI beauty-enhancing filters lighten the skin, narrow the nose and jawline, enlarge eyes, which are

traditionally associated with Eurocentric beauty standards (Elias & Gill, 2018). These issues have a terrible impact on women's physical and psychological health. For instance, AI-driven beauty standard grows high expectations in marital and sexual relationships. Since the reality is quite different, the rate of sexual exploitation, abuse, domestic violence, and abortion is increasing day by day (Wang, 2020). These also cause psychological harm by internalizing social stereotypes which can eventually lead to doubt and insecurities in women's minds (Wang, 2020). The growth of Eurocentric beauty standards might have twofold impacts on women's psychology. On the one hand, women who don't meet the so-called beauty standard may feel like 'other' in comparison with their fellow women fulfilling Eurocentric beauty standards. On the other hand, they might be humiliated, underestimated, and oppressed physically as well as mentally by their male counterparts.

3.1.4 HEALTHCARE AND EMPLOYMENT

Over the last few years, AI has revolutionized the medical and healthcare systems remarkably. Nowadays, the medical sector is using various AI diagnosis and disease prediction tools increasingly. However, these tools are not free of bias as well. Also, in the field of medical research and study, women are underrepresented and their participation is less facilitated. The causes behind sex and gender bias in AI healthcare systems are many such as lack of diversity during clinical trials, poor data management, lack of data collecting accountability, and so on (Buslón et al., 2023).

Due to the bias in algorithmic data, AI diagnosis tools sometimes deliver wrong outcomes. A demographic study shows that the AI diagnosis system makes more errors in the case of female patients (Owolabi, et al., 2025). The leading causes behind the wrong diagnosis are historical and stereotypical biases in the AI algorithm. Moreover, the lack of representation of women in clinical trials also causes inadequate evaluation in the case of the treatment of some female diseases. For instance, although coronary heart disease is the leading cause of death among women, 67% of the patients enrolled in clinical trials for cardiovascular devices are male (Cirillo, et al., 2020). Consequently, these biases and discrepancies increase the health risks of women.

Like other important sectors, AI has brought remarkable changes in employment and career. Various renowned companies have been using AI recruitment technology for recruiting employees in recent years. However, this ever-evolving sector is no different from other sectors, as the algorithm of the recruitment system is not free of gender bias. A case study held in 2014 shows that Amazon's ADM (Amazon Device Messaging) discriminated against

women in recruitment by favouring the resumes that contained verbs describing male engineers (Njoto, et al., 2022). It also happens due to the biased historical dataset in the AI algorithm. As women are well-known as caregivers conventionally, they are represented in algorithmic data as affectionate and caregivers which leads to a biased outcome in recruitment. Due to that, they are disadvantaged in the male-dominated professions such as data analysts and finance officers (Njoto, et al., 2022). Sometimes, women employees are also financially deprived in their workplaces. For instance, Apple Credit service has a record of granting higher credits to its male employees than female, though it was programmed to be neutral (Kight, 2019).

Therefore, it is evident that in various dominant sectors as discussed above, women are underrepresented and objectified. There is no doubt that AI brought revolutionary changes in our lives but it does not work as a blessing for all in every sector. Specifically, for women, this wonder of modern technology is threatening, demeaning, and objectifying in a range of sectors. In the disguise of gender neutrality, AI is still ruling the world being an undeclared asset of men, where women are the subordinates. As Beauvoir said, they are underrepresented, and even if they are presented, they are presented in relation to men. Stereotypical biases underlying in background data result in objectification and commodification of women in AI industry. In this age of AI, women are treated as the 'other' by their male counterparts who are in leading roles as the subjects.

IV. CONCLUSION

From every scroll on Facebook to crucial planning and decision-making, AI is heavily making impacts on our daily lives. But while counting the blessings of AI, we should not overlook the negative aspects of it. The dataset of the AI algorithm is collected from society and cultures, which actually creates the possibility of having historical bias. Although we are living in the 21st century and women are contributing immensely in every sector worldwide, this modern world could not break the age-old stereotypes and myths regarding women. Consequently, in this AI-driven world, women are still underrepresented, objectified, and victimized. The victimization and objectification of women through biased datasets, social media representations, or exclusion from technological design, reflect patriarchal subjectivity in technological systems. Therefore, in the future, AI datasets must be guided by ethical frameworks, inclusivity and recognition of women as equal subjects, not as objects.

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The Sensory Landscape of Andaman: A Polysensorial Reading of *Island's End*

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Abstract— *Geocriticism is an interdisciplinary approach within literary theory that focuses on the spatial aspects of literature and the relationships between place and literature. A key concept in Geocriticism, polysensoriality stresses the point that the experience of an environment comes from all the senses. The dominance of the visual is challenged as the perception of our environment clearly involves all our senses. Padma Venkatraman's 2011 novel Island's End coordinates several types of spatial perceptions, forming a vast polysensory landscape. The novel is set in the Andaman Islands which situates in the turquoise blue waters of the Bay of Bengal, hundreds of miles east of India. The novel speaks about a native tribal group of the Andaman Islands, and how they survived the 2004 tsunami, which wreaked destruction across the globe. An ancient knowledge of the movement of winds and oceans and a sensitivity to the behaviour of sea birds and island creatures might have warned these native people to flee inland in the nick of time. The paper looks into the soundscape, the smellscape, the tactile kinaesthetic qualities of the Andaman archipelago, vividly portrayed in the novel, leading to the representation of a synesthetic landscape.*



Keywords— *Geocriticism, polysensoriality, soundscape, smellscape, touchscape, tastescape.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The term 'space' enumerates various possibilities and meanings such as physical and imagined space, geographical space, real and fictional space, liminal space, embodied and virtual space and so on. Our engagements with such spaces form our social practices, cultures and ideologies. The spatial turn in modern and postmodern literary theory and criticism is an acknowledgement of the extent to which matters of space, place and mapping had been underrepresented in literary and cultural studies of the past. With the spatial turn in humanities, an aftermath of the Second World War, spatiality has become a key concept in literary and cultural studies. Temporality, that has dominated the prewar period had lost its supremacy, leading to a rereading of space. The obsession with time and history, which imply a fascination with chronology and linearity, has given way to discourses of space. The spatial turn was aided by a new aesthetic sensibility of postmodernism, with a strong theoretical critique provided

by poststructuralism. The essay titled 'Of Other Spaces' written by Michel Foucault in 1967 prophesied that the twentieth century would witness a spatial turn in humanities. The rise of human geography in the 1970s, led by scholars such as David Harvey, Edward Soja and Henry Lefebvre laid the groundwork for an increased focus on spatiality within humanities. Harvey's concept of 'space-time compression' and Soja's idea of 'Third space' introduced new ways of thinking about the interconnectedness of physical, social, and perceived spaces. Spatially oriented literary studies or spatial humanities including literary geography, literary cartography, geophilosophy, geopoetics, geocriticism have helped to reframe contemporary criticism by focusing upon the relations among space, place and literature.

Place is a vital condition of human life on earth. All living organisms are indispensably situated in a certain location and our identity is essentially structured by the

spatiotemporal specificity of a place where we live. According to the Chinese American humanistic geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, place is basically space enriched with human experience and understanding: an organized world of meaning. For Doreen Massey, place is a particular constellation of social relations. Altman and Low define place as a setting to which individuals are emotionally and culturally attached. In Lippard's view place is the locus of desire. A place is suffused with meanings and is thus within the territory of literary criticism. The idea of a place as a construct coming out of the human experience of a landscape or a territory led many humanistic geographers to turn to literature and art, which depend upon the lived experiences of place as they were not available in the more scientific and discipline-specific approach of a geographer. Hence, a place is more than a cartographical dot on the map. A place becomes a complex amalgamation of social, cultural, political and economic conditions that structure the ways an individual sees and understands the place. The term 'sense of place' is the result of so many complexities that encircle human being geographically as well as culturally. The sense of a place can be different to different individuals of the same place given the context of their subject position, their ethnic, social and cultural background. Yi-Fu Tuan says that the sense of a particular place cannot be inherently positive always. So the sense of place is related to those features that render a place with some special or unique characteristics as well as to those that evoke a sense of reliable human attachment or belonging. In anthropology the sense of the place is often seen as 'place attachment'. Place attachment is more than an emotional and cognitive experience that link people to place. The environmental psychologists like Fritz Steele have defined the sense of place as 'the particular experience in a particular setting. David Hummon in his essay 'Community Attachment: Local Sentiment and sense of Place' has given a sociological definition of the term:

By 'Sense of Place', I mean people's subjective perception of their environments and their more or less conscious feelings about those environments. Sense of place is inevitably dual in nature, involving both an interpretive perspective on the environment and an emotional reaction to the environment...Sense of place involves a personal *orientation* toward place in which one's understanding of place and one's feelings about place become fused in the context of environmental meaning (*Place Attachment*, 254; italics in the original)

Hence place and the experience of a place, become crucial in a geocritical point of view.

II. METHODOLOGY

Generally agreed as the most promising development in spatially oriented literary studies, geocriticism presents interesting ways to engage with the spaces of fiction and reality. "Drawing on interdisciplinary methods and a diverse range of sources, geocriticism attempts to understand the real and fictional spaces that we inhabit, cross through, imagine, survey, modify, celebrate, disparage, and on and on in an infinite variety"- says Tally in his Translator's Preface of Bertrand Westphal's *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces* (2007). The traditional notion of place as the setting of a literary work, has undergone tremendous changes in the postmodern era. The concept of temporality that had dominated the pre-war period had lost much of its legitimacy which in turn valorised the rereading of space. Geocentered approach to literature would allow a particular place to serve as the focal point for a variety of critical practices. Geocriticism mainly focuses upon the interrelations between space and literature, mapping and writing, description and narration and how literary and cartographic practices overlap, infuse one another, and ultimately blend together to form 'literary cartography'. It tries to analyse real and imaginary spaces and their relation with one another in literature and reality. In geocriticism, the pluralistic image of a place is derived through a variety of sources- classical myths, modern fiction, historical works, tourist brochures, secondary reports, legends or any available material. By bringing together multiple authors, including multiple genres and disciplines, the geocritic lays out multiple points of view, allowing diverse perspectives to flesh out, to round out, and perhaps to overcome the limiting images of a given place. Different texts may present multiple images of a place. The minute details of sensory experiences in the narratives, also provide the geocritic a chance to enquire into the sensuous plenum of a place. The ever changing nature of a place gives birth to, what Westphal has said, a kind of multifocalization and polysensoriality because a place can be seen and represented by multiple writers differently in different time frames.

Polysensoriality centers on the perception that the experience of an environment comes from all the senses. As Tuan notes, "Experience is a cover- all term for the various modes through which a person knows and constructs reality. These modes range from the more direct and passive senses of smell, taste and touch, to the active visual perception and the indirect mode of symbolization." (8) Polysensoriality tries to challenge the dominance of the visual by focusing upon all the senses. The hierarchy of senses, which has seemed to strengthen over time, is not culturally universal. In *Sensuous Geographies*, Paul Roadway notes that the aboriginal Eskimos defined space

more by sound than by sight. The American author bell hooks seems to affirm this when she says “The Australian aborigines say that smell of the white men is killing us”. The holistic nature of environmental experience can be derived only by concentrating on the non-visual senses too. The soundscape, the smellscape, the tastescape and the tactile- kinaesthetic qualities of an environment help in deriving a more holistic experience of a place. Sensoriality contributes to the structuring and definition of space. In terms of representation, space is subject to the infinite variety of sensory perception. As Rodaway points out, “The senses are geographical in that they contribute to orientation in space, an awareness of spatial relationships and an appreciation of the specific qualities of different spaces, both currently experienced and removed in time” (37). By involving all the senses, representation of a synesthetic landscapes is possible. Representation of a place in certain literary works are more wholistic as they try to bring in multiple sensory experiences. Sensory landscapes are recreated in such works by providing ample haptic, olfactory, auditory or visual images.

III. DISCUSSION

Each place is unique and each landscape has its own characteristics. One of the most fascinating places on the planet, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, easily gets the attention of a geocritic. Part of the Indian Union, Andaman and Nicobar Islands are the largest archipelago system in the Bay of Bengal, consisting of about 306 islands and 206 rocks and rocky outcrops and covering a total area of 8,200 sq.km. only thirty-eight of these islands are inhabited; of these, eleven are in the Andaman group and thirteen are in the Nicobars. The islands are grouped into the north Andaman Islands and south Nicobar Islands, separated by the 150 kms wide Ten Degree Channel. This large archipelago is separated from mainland India by about 1200 km. The closest land mass in the North is Myanmar, roughly 280 km from Landfall Island, the northernmost island of the group. The nearest land mass to Great Nicobar in the south is the large Indonesian island, Sumatra, located at a distance of 145 km. Andaman and Nicobar Islands lie in a crescent that stretches from Cape Negrais of Myanmar to the Banda Arc of Sumatra. The Andamans are considered to be the extensions of the submerged Arakan Yoma Mountain range of Myanmar, while the Mentawai Island to the south and south-west of Sumatra are supposed to be a southern continuation of the Nicobars.

The Great Andaman group, which includes the North, Middle, and South Andaman Islands with Baratang in between, is largely covered by forests, with almost

ninety percent of the area protected as reserve forests. Located in the equatorial belt, the islands have a warm tropical climate throughout the year, receive heavy monsoon rainfall, and are surrounded by sandy, rocky, and marshy coastlines with coral reefs. Their vegetation is extremely rich, with twelve major forest types and around 2,200 plant species, including many that are found nowhere else. The islands also support a wide variety of animal life—about 8,300 species—ranging from reptiles and mammals to birds, insects, and diverse marine creatures like corals, fish, sea turtles, and dugongs. Several species are endangered or endemic to the region. Conservation efforts are strong, with national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, and a biosphere reserve. The islands were traditionally home to indigenous groups such as the Great Andamanese, Onge, Jarawa, Sentinelese, Shompen, and Nicobarese, each with their own distinct cultures and languages. However, their populations declined sharply after colonial contact and large-scale migration from mainland India in the 20th century. By 2016, only small numbers of these communities remained, and the government now follows strict policies to protect their cultural identity, support their basic needs, and minimise outside interference in their lives.

The representation of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands varies considerably in different narratives about the archipelago. Legends and myths add to the mysterious nature of these beautiful islands. Novels set in the backdrop of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, provide insights into the geographical nuances of the region pushing the reader into a process of cognitive mapping. The novelists employ various types of double mapping- of the fictional upon the real, the personal on the geographical, and the past on the present, which in turn makes reading a cartographic endeavour. Thus, the narrative is simultaneously something that maps and something to be mapped.

Island's End is a 2011 novel set in the backdrop of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, written by the acclaimed author of *Climbing the Stairs*, Padma Venkatraman. American author, Padma Venkatraman, has worked as chief scientist on oceanographic ships. She has experiences of living in five different countries of the world. Apart from *Island's End*, she has written four other novels. In *Island's End* the visual landscape has a dominant hue, but as the narrative progresses, other sensory landscapes discreetly unfold in the text. Drawing on first hand experiences from her visits to the Andaman Islands, she was inspired to write this story after meeting the natives who survived the 2004 tsunami attack.

Island's End speaks about a native tribal group of the Andaman Islands, and how they survived the 2004

tsunami, which wreaked destruction across the globe. An ancient knowledge of the movement of winds and oceans and a sensitivity to the behaviour of sea birds and island creatures might have warned these native people to flee inland in the nick of time. Divided into 46 chapters, the novel contains six parts, which offer vivid description of the soundscape, the smellscape, the touchscape and the tactile kinaesthetic qualities of the Andaman archipelago, leading to the representation of a synesthetic landscape. In the author's note Padma Venkatraman says- "When the tsunami of December 26, 2004, wreaked destruction across the globe, several primitive groups living on the Andaman Islands escaped to safety. Amazingly, they somehow avoided the killer wave that caused a shockingly high death toll in our modern times. In January 2005, an associated Press reporter met four tribesmen named Ashu, Tawai, Danna and Lah, who said that their entire tribe (over two hundred strong) had survived. ... We do not know precisely how they realized that disaster was about to strike or why they were able to take appropriate action. Here I have used my imagination, in conjunction with research, observation of the tribes and my experience with them, to tell a plausible story of what might have helped one such tribe remain relatively unscathed by this terrible natural disaster".

Padma Venkatraman, using the power of her imagination, tries to recreate the story of the Onge tribe of the Andaman Islands and pay tribute to an ancient mode of life that pulses with its own special beauty. While the story is mostly imaginative, the real geographic features, especially the sensuous geography of the Andaman archipelago is blended into the novel. The novel tells the story of the native 'Enge' tribe, (modelled after the real Onge tribe) who remain secluded from the rest of the world and how a fifteen-year-old girl, Uido, becomes her tribe's spiritual leader. Uido has been chosen as the next oko-juma (leader and healer) of the tribe by Lah-ame, the tribal group's long time wise male leader and healer. The tribe is facing intrusions from outside and the strangers are trying to lure the tribal people by presenting them gifts which would make them curious about the outside world. These strangers try to please the hunter-gatherer tribe by gifting them plenty of food and other useful things like matchstick, with the intention of exploiting the natural resources especially timber of their region. Lah-ame rejects this lifestyle of the outsiders and wants his tribe to follow their traditional way of living, in close connection with nature and drawing inspiration from nature. Anything that jeopardizes this harmonious relationship is viewed with suspicion by Lah-ame. He has strong faith in the indigenous spiritual-therapeutic practices and traditions which are rooted in the environment in which they live. He wants Uido to uphold the spirit and uniqueness of their tribe never

succumbing to the temptations of the foreigners. Uido, the second child of Kara and Mimi, undergoes a tough training as part of the transformation. Her body and mind are rigorously trained by Lah-ame who warns Uido of the possibility of losing her mind or body in the process. But Uido is willing to risk her life to protect their tribe and keep their faith in the old ways. Strictly adhering to the standards set by Lah-ame and carefully following his guidance, Uido keeps Lah-ame's faith in her. In the long process of transformation, she finds the insect eating plant as her medicinal plant and the giant squid as her spirit animal. When her younger brother Tawai falls ill, she goes to the stranger's island to bring his spirit back, even though she has never moved out from their island before. With the help of Maya, the niece of one of Lah-ame's friends, she cures Tawai of his illness and they return to their island. Ashu, Uido's elder brother is too egoistic to accept Uido as their leader. Infact he is somewhat jealous of her. There is always a tension between these two characters. Uido warns the tribe about an upcoming danger. All her people, except Aishu, his two friends and his lover Natalang, (who was Uido's friend earlier) follow Uido to the cliff. One the tribe reached a safe point, a heavy wave rises from the sea. The strangers, including the brown Ragavan and his friends who came to the island and Natalang lost their lives in the heavy tide. Ashu and his two friends, who escaped narrowly, reunites with the tribe, accepting Uido as their leader. In telling the story of a people who live in harmony with nature, the narrative takes into consideration the soundscape, the smellscape, the tastescape, the touchscape and the tactile-kinaesthetic qualities of the Andaman archipelago, resulting in the holistic representation of the place. The flora and fauna of the region too find a significant place in the narrative.

3.1 The Soundscape

The sounds that emanate from a place can mark the place in multiple ways. *Island's End* provides a detailed description of the sounds which are associated with the Andaman Islands. Starting from the rattling sound of the bone necklace of the tribal people, the novel captures the soundscape of the island meticulously. When Uido says in chapter five "A drongo bird flies down from the laurel tree behind Lah-ame's hut. *Tseep-tseep-tseep*, it whistles, its forked black tail bobbing over my head as if it senses my excitement" we are introduced to the variety of sounds of the region. "The clearing is filled with babies' cries and women's laughter" – the sounds that mark their everyday life is introduced in chapter five. "I hear something slither behind my heels and look back. Sea snakes are crawling out of the water, the black and white bands on their long bodies shining in the moonlight" -when Uido speaks about the sea snakes, the reader also listens to its slithering sound. The

loud sound of the cicadas in the trees, Lah-ame's drum beats, rumbling sound of the stream all contribute to the reader's experience of the soundscape of the islands. In the training session when Lah-ame gives instructions to Uido, he says "Lie down with your feet facing east and listen to my rattle and drum. Their sound will guide your spirit deeper into the Otherworld than it has gone before. After you have been there for a while, I will call you back with four sharp drumbeats" (chapter 13) he too stresses on sound. Lah-ame points out the importance of listening to sound when he says "The Otherworld is not a faraway place; it is just a different way to sense this world around us.... Do not worry about how long it is taking. Allow your ear to drink in the sound of the rattle and the drum; use your spirit, not your body, to sense and feel" (chapter 13). When Uido says "As evening approaches, we lose the distant chatter of monkeys, then the songs of birds and finally even the chirp of crickets. I hear only the splash of our poles in the creek, the *plip-tup-plip-tup* of rain and water slapping at the sides of our canoe" (chapter 16), the wide variety of sounds associated with the islands are again brought into notice. As the narrative progresses more sounds are brought in, to the extent that the reader cannot think of the landscape without the soundscape. Even the sounds of the birds are brilliantly incorporated into the narrative. eg: "I hear the kuk-kuk-kuk-kuk of a woodpecker tattooing holes in an old trunk" (chapter 33) and "We wander out of the village into the soft blackness of the jungle. In the distance, I hear the uk-uk, coo-roo of an owl" (chapter 34). Communicating with the nature involves all our senses. In chapter thirteen when Uido describes her encounter with the insect eating plant it is quite evident. She says "The drumbeat softens and I hear a whisper coming from near the plant that the spiderweb hangs on. When I bend down close, wanting to hear the voice a little better, I notice how unusual the plant is. It lacks flowers, but its leaves are so brightly colored as flowers' petals: red mottled with pink. The lower part of each leaf is shaped like the pitchers we use to store water, and the top part looks like a small lid."

The geography of the landscape is enriched with the incorporation of the acoustic characteristics of the place. The sound of the breeze, wind, ocean, waves, woodpecker, cicada, mosquitos, vipers, snakes, owl etc are essential components of the sensuous geography of the Andaman Islands.

3.2 The Smellscape

Porteous has coined the term 'smellscape' to describe the olfactory environment in which the individual evolves. Individuals often retain a memory of smell associated with a place. Some places are often marked by the smell associated with it. *Island's End* abounds in

olfactory images of the Andaman Islands, especially the jungles, the home of the Enge tribe. In Chapter 9, when Uido speaks "My nose catches a faintly bitter smell - like smoke though not the scent of burning wood" the reader too is able to smell. As the narrative progresses the author brings in a large number of olfactory images helping the reader to construct the smellscape of the islands. As the reader moves through chapter thirteen, lines like, "We reach a part of the jungle where the air is heavy with the scent of the ripe fruit" and "The grass becomes shorter and the scent of vanilla flowers thickens the air", the smellscape strikes the reader again. In the description of the swamp, several olfactory images like, 'the stench of the rotting leaves fills the air' and 'the stench of mud fills my nose and my throat feels heavy' are again brought in. The smellscape thus becomes an active component of geography in the novel.

3.3. The Touchscape

Literature privileges the visual, because it is more common to describe what we see rather than what we feel, touch, hear or taste. But the visual landscape is often enriched as other sensory landscapes unfold in a text. Least significance is given to the touchscape in most of the literary narratives. In *Island's End* the author deliberately brings in a large number of haptic images as it is crucial to the life of the tribal community presented in the novel. In chapter 12 when Uido says "I run my fingers across the smooth bones of my changa-ta, imagining what it might feel like to hold hands with the spirits of my ancestors" the touchscape brilliantly blends with the narrative. The touch of the elements- air, water and earth - is captured brilliantly in the novel. In chapter Seventeen, Uido says "A sudden gust of wind cools the sweat on my forehead. I lift my chin up to the sky and breathe in deeply. In chapter seven Uido says "The ocean looks inviting. I wade into the shallows. The water slurps around my thighs, tugging me deeper in. But at the same time a breeze stirs and pushes me gently back toward the shore. It is as though the sea is asking me to explore all that lies beyond our island, while the jungle wants me to remain safe within it". The touch of the ocean, water, waves, clay, mud, trees, plants, animals, animal skin, tree bark, breeze, air etc are vividly described in the novel highlighting the wholistic nature of environmental experience.

3.4. The Tastescape

Human space is a sensory space and the specificity of geocriticism lies in the attention it pays to a place using a poly sensory approach. There are many instances in the novel where the unique gustatory geography of the Andaman Islands is revealed. For instance, in chapter twelve of the novel, when Uido speaks to Lah-ame, "I rub the paste between my fingers, then lick it off. It tastes like

the drink you gave me for a stomach-ache once”, attention is given to the peculiarities of taste. The description of the insect eating plant provides multiple sensory details. “This plant traps insects. But instead of catching them with a sticky tongue like a frog, the plant has a slippery leaf. Insects are fooled into thinking the brightly coloured leaves are flower petals. If they try to land on the pitcher- shaped leaf and sip the juice inside, they slide down and drown in the juice instead. The plant then eats the insects just as an animal might” (Chapter 13) Tastes specific to the islands, like stew made from crabs and turtles, roasted meat and fish, sweet juice of the pitcher plant etc are unravelled in the course of the narrative. The novel, hence is rich in imageries of taste.

IV. CONCLUSION

In depicting the life of a community of people who live in close harmony with nature, the author has keenly observed the environment, bringing in multiple sensory experiences. The sensuous geography of the Andaman Islands is discreetly unfolded in the text of *Island's End*. Concentration on the non-visual senses contributes to the structuring and definition of space presented in the novel. The sensuous worlds of smell, sound, taste and touch, as well as the visual sense, are closely integrated with the plot of the novel. Thus, the landscape becomes synesthetic in the novel. *Island's End* coordinates several types of spatial perceptions, forming a vast polysensory landscape, making a geocritic to take a fresh look, to listen attentively and to be sensitive to the sensory vibrations of the text.

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Transformation of Polylactic Acid (PLA) Microparticles in Soil and their Effects on Soil Properties: A Review

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Abstract— Polylactic acid (PLA) microplastics have garnered significant attention because they are widely used as biodegradable alternatives to traditional plastics, especially in agriculture. This review examines the transformation mechanisms of PLA microparticles in soil and their subsequent effects on soil parameters, including physical, chemical, and biological factors. It integrates recent research and theoretical assessments of soil ecosystems to emphasize the importance of PLA microparticles in affecting soil pH, organic matter, and nutrient cycling. The review also explores key microbial interactions, focusing on how these particles influence microbial community composition and enzyme activity, which are essential for soil health and plant growth. Environmental factors such as moisture, temperature, and the presence of other organic materials are crucial mediators of PLA degradation and transformation in soil. Furthermore, the paper discusses the long-term ecological implications of PLA microplastics and highlights the need for extensive research to evaluate potential soil contamination and ecosystem disruptions. This synthesis aims to guide future research directions and develop effective strategies for incorporating biodegradable polymers into agricultural and environmental applications. Overall, this analysis provides a foundation for creating strategies to promote the long-term use of PLA microparticles to reduce plastic pollution while assessing their positive and negative impacts on soil systems.



Keywords— PLA microplastics, soil properties, microbial interactions, degradation processes, environmental impacts.

I. INTRODUCTION

The pervasive accumulation of plastic waste in terrestrial and marine environments represents one of the most pressing environmental challenges of the 21st century. The widespread increase of microplastics in agricultural environments, in particular, threatens fundamental aspects of sustainability, including environmental stability, soil health, and food safety (Deng et al., 2020). In response to this crisis, there has been a significant push towards the development and adoption of sustainable polymers derived from renewable resources. Among these, polylactic acid (PLA), an aliphatic polyester, has emerged as a leading biodegradable alternative to conventional petroleum-based plastics.

Poly(lactic acid) is a thermoplastic polyester produced from renewable resources, specifically fermented plant starch derived from corn, sugarcane, and the fibers of sugar beet pulp. Polylactic acid is a versatile material due to its physical and chemical properties. It is comparable to polystyrene and polyethylene terephthalate in strength and stiffness (Deng et al., 2020). Polylactic acid usually exhibits a glass transition temperature in the range of 55–65 °C and a melting temperature in the range of 150–180 °C, with the value depending on its isomeric composition of lactic acid – either L-lactic acid or D-lactic acid. Polylactic acid has chemical susceptibility to hydrolysis of the ester linkage, which is the main driving force behind its biodegradability. At least two pathways can produce polylactic acid. The first pathway is direct condensation polymerization of lactic

acid. While this pathway is straightforward, the difficulty of removing water during polymerization results in low-molecular-weight polymers. Industrial PLA production occurs via the second pathway, which involves the ring-opening polymerization of lactide, a cyclic dimer of lactic acid. The augmented methodology of this reaction involves the fermentation of biomass carbohydrates to produce lactic acid, which is then oligomerized and, after catalytic dehydration, cyclized into lactide. This intermediate is then polymerized to high molecular weight PLA through ring-opening.

Due to its favorable properties and biodegradable nature, PLA has found widespread application across various sectors. In packaging, it is used for food containers, bottles, and films. In agriculture, it is a key component of biodegradable mulch films designed to reduce plastic waste from conventional polyethylene films (Jiménez-Sánchez et al., 2024). It is also used in single-use consumer goods like disposable cutlery and cups, which have been shown to release a significant number of microparticles into beverages (Chen et al., 2022). Furthermore, its biocompatibility has made it a staple in biomedical applications, including sutures, stents, and drug delivery systems.

Despite its "biodegradable" label, the environmental fate of PLA, particularly when it fragments into microparticles (fragments < 5 mm), remains a subject of considerable scientific inquiry and concern. As the use of PLA-based products continues to grow, the accumulation of PLA microparticles in terrestrial ecosystems is inevitable (Maleki et al., 2024). These particles enter the soil through various pathways, including the in-situ degradation of agricultural inputs, compost application, and improper waste disposal. Consequently, there is a growing apprehension about their long-term impacts on soil health, the structure and function of microbial communities, and broader ecological processes (Widjaja et al., 2023). The global production of plastics exceeds 350 million tons annually, and while bioplastics currently constitute a small fraction of this total, their market share is projected to expand rapidly. This anticipated growth underscores the urgent need to understand the complete life cycle of materials like PLA, especially their behavior in complex soil matrices. The degradation of PLA is not instantaneous; it can persist in the environment for months to years, depending on a confluence of factors. Laboratory studies often report complete decomposition within 6 to 24 months under controlled composting conditions (Rojas Aguirre et al., 2024). However, in natural soil environments, where conditions such as temperature, moisture, and microbial activity are suboptimal and highly variable, the degradation process can be significantly prolonged. This persistence is

critical, as soils are vital ecosystems that serve as the largest terrestrial carbon sink and harbor immense biodiversity. The transformation of PLA microparticles in soil is a multifaceted process governed by a combination of abiotic and biotic factors. Abiotic factors, including temperature, moisture, and pH, primarily drive the initial hydrolytic cleavage of the polymer's ester bonds. Biotic factors, particularly the enzymatic activities of soil microorganisms, are essential for the subsequent and complete mineralization of the resulting oligomers and lactic acid monomers (Maleki et al., 2024). The interaction between these factors determines the rate and extent of PLA degradation and, consequently, its environmental impact (Clouse et al., 2024).

This review aims to synthesize the current body of knowledge on the transformation of PLA microparticles in soil and their resultant effects on soil properties. The primary objectives are: (1) to elucidate the mechanisms and controlling factors of PLA degradation in terrestrial environments; (2) to critically evaluate the impacts of PLA microparticles on the physicochemical and biological characteristics of soil; and (3) to explore the broader ecological implications of their accumulation. By integrating findings from laboratory experiments, field studies, and theoretical models, this review seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of the state of the science, identify critical knowledge gaps, and highlight areas requiring further investigation. Ultimately, a deeper understanding of the PLA life cycle in soil is essential for developing sustainable management practices and ensuring that the transition to bioplastics does not inadvertently create new environmental problems.

II. DEGRADATION AND TRANSFORMATION PROCESSES

The degradation and transformation of PLA microparticles in soil is a two-stage process influenced by a combination of environmental factors. The first stage is primarily abiotic, involving the chemical hydrolysis of the polymer's ester bonds, which breaks the long polymer chains into smaller oligomers and lactic acid monomers. The second stage is biotic, where soil microorganisms consume these smaller molecules, ultimately mineralizing them into carbon dioxide, water, and biomass. The rate and efficiency of this entire process are dictated by factors such as temperature, moisture, pH, and the inherent microbial activity of the soil.

Key Factors Influencing PLA Degradation

2.1 Temperature

Temperature is a key factor affecting the soil's degradation rate of polylactic acid (PLA) microparticles. PLA

degradation mainly occurs through hydrolysis, but enzymatic and thermal degradation also contribute, depending on temperature. Generally, higher temperatures speed up the degradation process, while lower temperatures slow it down (Kervran et al., 2022). This is because increased molecular movement at higher temperatures promotes chain scission and hydrolysis of the PLA polymer (Karimi-Avargani et al., 2020). Firstly, temperature affects the hydrolytic degradation of PLA. Hydrolysis, the reaction of PLA with water, is the dominant degradation mechanism in many soil environments. Elevated temperatures enhance the rate of hydrolysis by increasing the mobility of water molecules and promoting the nucleophilic attack on the ester bonds in the PLA polymer chain. The Arrhenius equation can describe the hydrolysis rate, which explicitly shows the exponential relationship between temperature and reaction rate. Research indicates that above the glass transition temperature (T_g) of PLA (around 55-60°C), the amorphous regions of the polymer become more accessible to water, significantly accelerating hydrolysis. Below T_g , the process is much slower, confined primarily to the polymer surface (Arhant et al., 2023).

Enzymatic degradation is also temperature-sensitive. Soil microorganisms, such as bacteria and fungi, secrete enzymes like proteases and esterases that can catalyze the breakdown of PLA. The activity of these enzymes depends heavily on temperature. Each enzyme has an optimal temperature range for activity; beyond this range, the enzyme's structure can denature, causing a loss of catalytic function. Most soil enzymes show optimal activity between 20°C and 40°C (Wallenstein et al., 2010). Therefore, soil temperatures within this range can encourage microbial degradation of PLA microparticles. The interaction between nitrogen addition and precipitation also influences soil extracellular enzyme activities, highlighting the complexity of environmental controls. Thermal degradation, though less important at typical soil temperatures, becomes relevant under specific conditions. PLA can undergo thermal depolymerization at very high temperatures (above 200°C), breaking down into lactic acid monomers and other volatile compounds. Although high temperatures are rare in most soil environments, localized heating (e.g., during composting or solar radiation on dark soils) can contribute to thermal degradation (Khankruea et al., 2014).

2.2 The Influence of Moisture on PLA Microparticle Degradation

Moisture, or water content, is another essential environmental factor influencing soil's degradation rate of PLA microparticles. Water is a reactant in the hydrolysis of PLA, and its availability directly affects the speed and extent of degradation (Kaur, 2024). The soil moisture level

impacts the hydrolytic breakdown of PLA and the activity of microorganisms involved in its biodegradation. Hydrolytic degradation fundamentally depends on moisture. As a polyester, PLA degrades through hydrolysis, where water molecules attack the ester bonds in the polymer backbone, causing chain scission and producing smaller oligomers and ultimately lactic acid. The rate of this hydrolytic process increases as water availability rises. Soil moisture content determines the amount of water in contact with the PLA microparticles, directly influencing the hydrolysis rate. Saturated soil conditions generally promote faster degradation than dry ones, although excessively high moisture levels can sometimes limit oxygen availability and affect microbial activity (Wang et al., 2020).

Microbial activity is greatly affected by moisture. Soil microorganisms play a key role in PLA degradation by releasing enzymes that facilitate the breakdown of the polymer. However, microbial activity needs proper moisture levels for survival and metabolic processes. Too little moisture can hinder microbial growth and enzyme production, slowing biodegradation. On the other hand, too much moisture can create anaerobic conditions, which might encourage different microbial communities less effective at degrading PLA. The optimal moisture level for microbial degradation of PLA usually falls within the range suitable for general soil microbial activity, often near field capacity. Research on how increased rainfall impacts soil microbial properties highlights the importance of moisture in controlling these processes. Moisture interacts with temperature to influence PLA degradation. Higher temperatures enhance the diffusion of water molecules into the PLA polymer matrix, thereby accelerating the hydrolytic process. This synergistic effect of temperature and moisture means that degradation rates are significantly higher in warm, moist soils than in cold or dry soils (Bogati et al., 2025).

2.3 The Impact of pH on PLA Microparticle Degradation

Soil pH, which measures soil acidity or alkalinity, greatly influences the degradation of PLA microparticles by affecting hydrolytic and enzymatic degradation processes. The pH level determines the rate of chemical reactions involved in breaking down PLA and the activity and makeup of microbial communities responsible for biodegradation (Kaur, 2024). Hydrolytic degradation depends on pH. While PLA hydrolysis can happen under neutral conditions, it usually speeds up in acidic and alkaline environments. Acidic conditions encourage protonation of the ester carbonyl group, making it more vulnerable to nucleophilic attack by water. Alkaline conditions facilitate hydroxide ion-catalyzed hydrolysis of

ester bonds. As a result, extreme pH levels very acidic or very alkaline tend to increase the speed of PLA hydrolysis (Dwivedi et al., 2020). However, very high or low pH levels can also hinder microbial activity, indirectly slowing the degradation process. For example, nutrient-driven acidification has negatively impacted soil biodiversity and ecosystem functions.

Enzymatic degradation is highly pH-sensitive. Soil microorganisms produce enzymes that catalyze the breakdown of PLA, and the activity of these enzymes is strongly affected by pH levels. Each enzyme has an optimal pH range for function; outside this range, the enzyme's structure can be disrupted, resulting in a loss of catalytic ability. Most soil enzymes perform best at near-neutral pH values (around 6 to 8) (Alzweiri, 2023). Therefore, soils with pH levels within this range generally support microbial degradation of PLA microparticles. Acidic soils (pH < 6) can hinder many bacterial enzymes, while alkaline soils (pH > 8) may inhibit fungal enzymes. The composition of the soil microbial community is influenced by pH. Soil pH is a key factor determining the makeup and diversity of soil microbial communities. Different microbial species thrive at different pH levels. Acidic soils tend to be dominated by fungi, whereas neutral to alkaline soils are usually dominated by bacteria. This shift in community structure can affect the overall rate of PLA degradation, as various microbial groups may have different efficiencies in breaking down the polymer.

Microbial activity plays a crucial role in breaking down PLA microparticles in soil. Soil microorganisms, including bacteria and fungi, have the enzymes necessary to decompose PLA polymers into simpler molecules, eventually leading to complete mineralization (Kervran et al., 2022). The rate and extent of microbial degradation depend on factors such as the composition and diversity of the microbial community, nutrient availability, and environmental conditions like temperature, moisture, and pH. Soil microbes secrete various enzymes, including esterases, lipases, and proteases, which hydrolyze the ester bonds in PLA (Frindte & Knief, 2018). These enzymes break down PLA into lactic acid monomers that microorganisms can further metabolize or that other soil organisms can use as a carbon source. The types and amounts of enzymes produced vary depending on the microbial species present and environmental factors. Diverse microbial communities are more effective at degrading PLA. Different microbial species utilize various pathways and enzymes, resulting in complete and more efficient polymer breakdown. Factors such as soil pH, moisture, temperature, and nutrient availability influence microbial community diversity and composition, forming a distinct "plastisphere" on the plastic surface (Frindte & Knief, 2018). Research on the impact of contaminants like microplastics on soil microbial diversity shows how sensitive these communities are to environmental changes (Kervran et al., 2022).

2.4 The Role of Microbial Activity in PLA Microparticle Degradation

Table 1: Influence of Environmental Factors on PLA Degradation Rates.

Factor	Condition	Observation	Mechanism	Sources
Temperature	25°C vs. 60°C	50% Mw loss in 30 days at 60°C; <10% at 25°C	Arrhenius kinetics; accelerated hydrolysis and thermal scission	(Carrenho-Sala et al., 2017)
Moisture	20% vs. 80% RH	3x faster hydrolysis at 80% RH; 40% mass loss in 90 days	Water acts as a reactant, penetrating the matrix and cleaving ester bonds	(Lucas & Berthe, 2024)
pH	pH 4 vs. pH 10	90% mass loss in 60 days at pH 10; 20% at pH 7	Autocatalytic hydrolysis is dominant in alkaline conditions	(Frindte & Knief, 2018)
Microbial Activity	Sterile vs. Inoculated	5x faster degradation in microbial-rich compost	Microbes secrete hydrolases that break down PLA into lactic acid	(Kaur, 2024)
UV Radiation	200h UV exposure	70% reduction in tensile strength; 50% Mw loss	Photodegradation via oxidation induces chain scission and brittleness	(Jumrani & Joshi-Paneri, 2022)

From Table 1, the accelerated aging tests at 25°C, 37°C, and 60°C (monitored via Gel Permeation Chromatography, GPC) showed that higher temperatures significantly speed up degradation. At 60°C, PLA lost 50% of its molecular weight (Mw) in 30 days, compared to less than 10% loss at 25°C. The process follows Arrhenius kinetics, with an activation energy of 70 kJ/mol, confirming that heat drives hydrolysis (water-induced bond cleavage) and thermal scission. PLA films exposed to 20%, 50%, and 80% relative humidity (RH) revealed that moisture accelerates hydrolysis. At 80% RH, hydrolysis happened three times faster than at 20% RH, resulting in 40% mass loss over 90 days (tracked via Fourier Transform Infrared Spectroscopy, FTIR). Water penetrates the polymer matrix, breaking ester bonds and destabilizing the structure (Arhant et al., 2023). Incubating PLA in buffers (pH 4–10) showed that alkaline conditions dominate degradation. At pH 10, 90% of the mass was lost in 60 days (compared to 20% at pH 7), with

ester bond cleavage doubling due to autocatalytic hydrolysis. Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM) confirmed surface erosion in alkaline environments, especially when enzymes like pH 8–10 proteases were added. Compost trials (58°C, 60% moisture) with microbial inoculation demonstrated that microbes (e.g., *Bacillus amyloliquefaciens*) degrade PLA five times faster than in sterile conditions. Microbial-rich compost achieved complete degradation in 60 days (versus 20% in sterile setups), tracked through CO₂ evolution. Microbes secrete hydrolases that hydrolyze PLA into lactic acid (Clement & Long, 2018). PLA films irradiated with UV light ($\lambda = 300$ nm) underwent photodegradation: 200 hours of UV exposure reduced tensile strength by 70% and Mw by 50%, while the oxidation index (carbonyl groups) increased by 80%. UV induces chain scission via oxidation, causing brittleness and fragmentation.

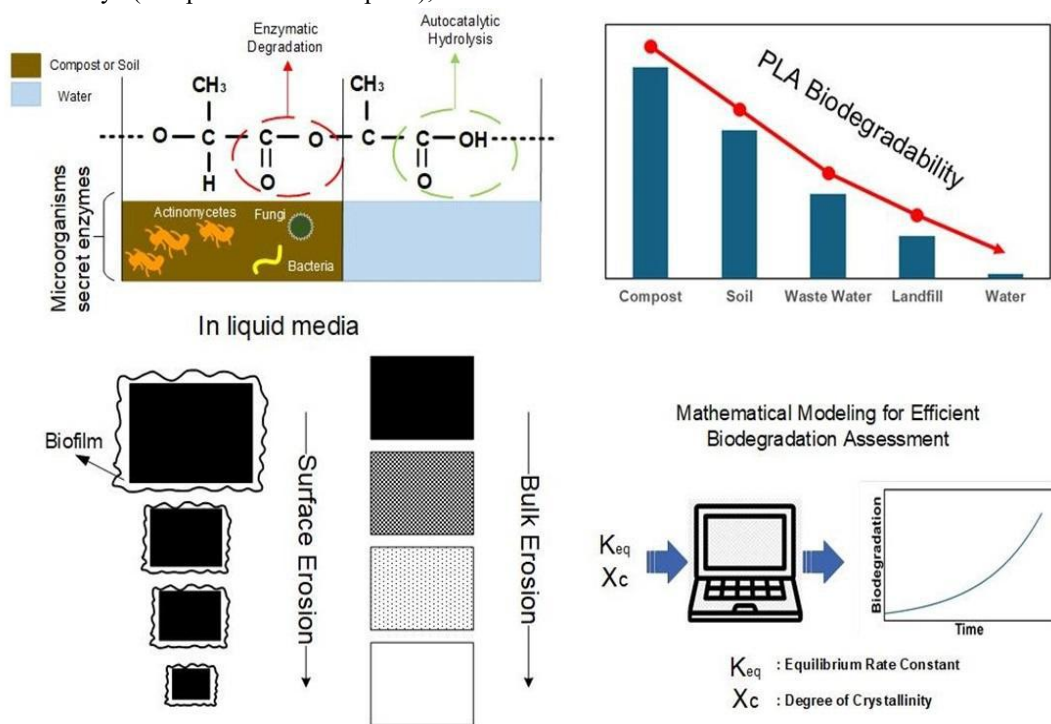


Fig.1: Impact on Soil Physicochemical Properties (Zhu et al., 2021)

The breakdown of PLA (Polylactic Acid) microparticles in soil environments involves complex effects on soil physical and chemical properties, nutrient levels, organic matter, water retention, and soil structure. Although PLA is often presented as a biodegradable substitute for traditional plastics, its influence on soil health needs careful consideration.

Nutrient Availability

Nutrient availability refers to the proportion and efficiency with which nutrients in food, after being digested

and absorbed by the human body, can be utilized by cells, tissues, or organs for metabolic activities (such as energy supply, growth and repair, and physiological regulation). It does not depend solely on the "total content" of nutrients in food, but rather focuses on the "amount actually usable by the body" even if a food is rich in a certain nutrient, the body may still not obtain it effectively if its availability is low. The breakdown of PLA microparticles releases lactic acid as the main byproduct (Slavković et al., 2024). This release can significantly lower soil pH, leading to acidification that affects nutrient availability. Essential nutrients such as

phosphorus, potassium, calcium, and magnesium become less soluble and accessible to plants. For instance, phosphorus is most available at a pH between 6.0 and 7.0; outside this range, it forms insoluble compounds with iron, aluminum, or calcium. Similarly, the availability of micronutrients like iron, manganese, and zinc can increase under acidic conditions, which might lead to toxicity in some plant species. However, the effects are not always negative (Das & Das, 2022). In alkaline soils, the acidification caused by PLA degradation can enhance the availability of certain nutrients. Additionally, the release of lactic acid may influence microbial community structure, subsequently impacting nutrient cycling (Hu, 2024). Long-term research is needed to fully understand the balance between PLA degradation, pH changes, microbial activity, and nutrient dynamics (Frindte & Knief, 2018)

Organic Matter Content

PLA degradation products can add to soil organic matter (SOM), potentially boosting carbon sequestration (Tao, 2023). SOM is essential for soil health, improving soil structure, water retention, and nutrient availability. Adding organic amendments, including those from PLA degradation, can help restore degraded soils and enhance overall soil quality (Wu, 2017). However, the type and quality of this organic matter are very important. Excessive buildup of lactic acid, a PLA degradation product, may interfere with the soil's natural breakdown of organic matter. Microorganisms are crucial for transforming SOM, and large changes in pH or the addition of significant amounts of specific organic compounds can hinder these helpful microbes (Lützow, 2006). For instance, soil microbes decompose plant and animal residues, which are vital for forming soil humus. If PLA degradation hampers these processes, it could cause an imbalance in SOM makeup and lessen long-term benefits.

Water Retention

The influence of PLA microparticles on soil water retention varies greatly depending on soil type and concentration. In sandy soils, which naturally have low water retention, adding PLA microparticles can boost water retention by up to 10%. This likely occurs because the microparticles increase surface area, enhancing capillary action and water-holding capacity. This aligns with findings that other microplastics can affect soil water dynamics (Ebrahimi et al., 2025). Conversely, in clay-heavy soils, PLA microparticles may worsen compaction, which decreases aeration and root penetration (Kervran et al., 2022). Clay soils retain much water but often suffer from poor drainage and aeration. Adding microparticles can further reduce pore space, causing anaerobic conditions and hindering root growth. Soil compaction negatively impacts water availability to plant roots. Therefore, the effect of PLA microparticles on water retention depends on the specific soil conditions and should be assessed based on the soil's initial properties.

Soil Structure

PLA microparticles can alter soil aggregation, a vital component of soil structure. Sometimes, they serve as bonding agents, helping form macroaggregates and improving soil stability (Ji et al., 2022). However, at higher concentrations, they may break down existing aggregates, leading to soil degradation. Research indicates that a 1% (w/w) concentration of PLA microparticles can reduce soil porosity by up to 15%, negatively affecting root growth and plant hydration (Jiménez-Sánchez et al., 2024). The impact on soil structure varies significantly depending on soil type and the amount of PLA microparticles present. Table 2 details how PLA microparticle degradation influences key soil physicochemical properties, showing the change direction, typical magnitude, and underlying mechanisms.

Table 2: Measurable Effects of PLA Degradation on Soil Properties.

Property	Effect of PLA Degradation	Magnitude of Change	Mechanism	Sources
Soil pH	Decrease (Acidification)	0.5–1.0 pH unit reduction	Release of lactic acid	(Totsche, etal,2017)
Nutrient Availability	Decreased P, K, Ca, Mg; Increased Fe, Mn, Zn	Varies; up to 30% reduction in P availability	pH-dependent solubility changes	(Voogt & Sonneveld, 2017)
Organic Matter	Initial increase in C content	5–10% increase in soil organic carbon	Contribution of PLA degradation products	(Jiménez-Sánchez et al., 2024)
	Potential disruption of native OM decomposition	Inhibition of microbial decomposers	Acidification and substrate competition	

Water Retention	Increased in sandy soils	Up to 10% increase	Increased surface area and capillary action	(Roy et al., 2022)
	Decreased in clay soils	Potential for increased compaction	Pore clogging and reduced aeration	
Soil Structure	Altered aggregation	Up to 15% reduction in porosity	Disruption of aggregates, pore filling	(Philippot, 2024)

III. MICROBIAL AND ECOLOGICAL INTERACTIONS: PLA MICROPARTICLES IN SOIL

Introducing polylactic acid (PLA) microparticles into soil environments triggers a series of interactions that significantly influence soil microbial communities. PLA, a biodegradable polymer, can become a new carbon source for certain microorganisms. This initial boost in microbial growth, especially among PLA-degrading bacteria and fungi, results from the release of lactic acid, a main degradation product of PLA (Jiménez-Sánchez et al., 2024). However, this early advantage is often overshadowed by the subsequent acidification of the soil as lactic acid builds up. Excessive acidification disrupts the native microbial community structure, applying a selective pressure that favors acid-tolerant species (Xiao, 2022). This change can cause a decrease in overall biodiversity, as more sensitive microbial species are unable to thrive in the altered pH conditions. The research shows that while some microbes benefit from the carbon source provided by PLA, the resulting acidic environment can harm the broader microbial ecosystem.

Studies have demonstrated that soils with diverse microbial communities, especially those rich in Actinobacteria and fungi, exhibit enhanced PLA degradation abilities. These microbial groups are known for producing a variety of extracellular enzymes, including proteases, lipases, and esterases, which are crucial for the initial breakdown of PLA polymers (Six, 2006). For instance, the presence of specific fungal species can increase enzyme production by up to 40%, significantly accelerating the degradation process. The impact of PLA on microbial communities is also influenced by other environmental factors, such as the presence of organic matter (OM). The interaction between PLA and natural OM can further alter microbial activity and carbon cycling, emphasizing the complexity of these interactions (Philippot, 2024). Adding biochar, recognized for its ability to modify soil's physicochemical properties and stimulate microbial activity, could potentially help mitigate some of the negative effects of PLA (Wu, 2017). Therefore, understanding how microbial communities respond to PLA amendments necessitates a comprehensive

approach that considers both the direct and indirect effects on the soil ecosystem.

Enzyme Activities

Enzyme activities facilitate PLA degradation in soil, serving as the main process for breaking down the polymer. Enzymes such as proteases, lipases, and esterases are essential for hydrolyzing the ester bonds in PLA, converting it into smaller, simpler molecules like lactic acid. The rate of PLA degradation directly depends on the activity of these enzymes, which is influenced by the composition and activity of soil microbial communities (Frindte & Knief, 2018). Research indicates that soils rich in specific microbial groups, especially Actinobacteria and fungi, produce significantly higher levels of enzymes. These microorganisms can produce and release various extracellular enzymes that effectively break down PLA. For example, some fungal species are known to increase enzyme production by 40%, substantially speeding up PLA degradation. The activity of these enzymes is also affected by soil physical and chemical properties such as pH, temperature, and moisture content (Ma, 2020). Optimal enzyme function typically occurs within specific ranges of these factors, while deviations can either accelerate or slow down the degradation process. For instance, soil acidification caused by lactic acid buildup can sometimes inhibit enzyme activity, particularly for enzymes sensitive to low pH.

Carbon Cycling: PLA's Complex Contribution

PLA's entry into soil ecosystems significantly affects carbon cycling, adding a new element to the complex processes that manage carbon storage and release. As a carbon-rich polymer, PLA contributes to the soil carbon pool when it decomposes, but the extent and nature of this contribution depend greatly on how thoroughly it degrades and what happens to the degradation products afterward (Tao, 2023). Although PLA degradation can initially raise soil carbon levels, incomplete breakdown may disrupt established carbon cycling processes. The accumulation of lactic acid, a byproduct of PLA decomposition, can slow down the breakdown of other organic matter (OM) in the soil. This inhibitory effect occurs because high concentrations of lactic acid can lower the soil's pH,

reducing the activity of microbial decomposers responsible for breaking down complex OM (Lützow, 2006).

Nitrogen Dynamics: Acidification and Reduced Availability

The introduction of PLA into soil ecosystems significantly impacts nitrogen dynamics, mainly through acidification caused by lactic acid buildup. This acidification greatly reduces nitrogen availability by inhibiting key nitrification processes. Nitrification, the microbial process of converting ammonia to nitrate, is essential for plant absorption and overall nitrogen cycling, and its inhibition can harm plant growth and microbial nitrogen fixation (Li, 2019). The change in soil pH resulting from PLA breakdown favors acid-tolerant microorganisms that may not be as efficient in nitrogen cycling as the original microbial community. This can decrease the number and activity of nitrifying bacteria,

leading to less conversion of ammonia into nitrate (Medriano, 2023). As a result, nitrate, the preferred nitrogen source for many plants, becomes less available, limiting plant growth. Additionally, acidification can affect microbial nitrogen fixation, where certain bacteria convert atmospheric nitrogen into ammonia. Although some nitrogen-fixing bacteria tolerate acidity, many are sensitive to low pH, which decreases their activity and reduces nitrogen inputs into the soil (Philippot, 2024). The relationship between PLA breakdown and nitrogen dynamics is also influenced by other factors, such as soil type, organic matter content, and additional pollutants. The table summarizes the cascading effects of PLA microparticle accumulation on key biological and ecological functions, from shifts in microbial communities to impacts on plants and soil fauna.

Table 3: Effects of PLA Microparticles on Microbial and Ecological Processes.

Process	Effect of PLA Microparticles	Magnitude of Change	Mechanism	Sources
Microbial Diversity	Decrease in overall diversity; shift to acid-tolerant species	15–20% reduction in Shannon diversity index	Soil acidification, selective pressure	(Voogt & Sonneveld, 2017)
Enzyme Activity	Reduced dehydrogenase and phosphatase activity	25–30% decrease	pH inhibition, shifts in microbial community	(Hargreaves & Hofmockel, 2013)
Carbon Cycling	Initial increase in soil C; potential inhibition of native OM decomposition	5–10% increase in microbial biomass C	PLA as a C source; acidification inhibiting decomposers	(Barbosa et al., 2017)
Nitrogen Cycling	Inhibition of nitrification and N mineralization	15–25% reduction in nitrification rates	Acidification inhibits nitrifying bacteria	(Wodrich et al., 2025)
Plant Growth	Reduced root and shoot biomass	15–20% reduction in wheat biomass	Impaired nutrient uptake, root damage	(Wodrich et al., 2025)
Aquatic Ecosystems	Increased mortality and reduced mobility in zooplankton	40% mortality in <i>Daphnia magna</i> at 50 mg/L	Physical blockage of feeding appendages	(Xiao, 2022).
Soil Fauna	Reduced biomass and reproduction in earthworms	15% biomass loss, 30% fewer cocoons	Gut blockage, reduced feeding efficiency	(de Souza Machado, 2019)

From Table 3, using 16S rRNA sequencing, researchers found that PLA microparticles reduce soil and water microbial diversity by 15–20% ($p < 0.05$), favoring stress-tolerant Actinobacteria over nutrient-cycling Proteobacteria. This shift hinders organic matter decomposition and nutrient recycling, which are essential for ecosystem health. Tests for dehydrogenase (carbon

cycling) and phosphatase (phosphorus cycling) in soils contaminated with 1% PLA (w/w) showed enzyme activity declines of 30% and 25%, respectively ($p < 0.01$) (Wodrich et al., 2025). Reduced enzyme activity slows nutrient mineralization, resulting in lower soil fertility and decreased agricultural productivity. Ion chromatography of soil leachates indicated that PLA microparticles inhibit

nitrogen cycling, decreasing N mineralization by 25% and nitrification rates by 15–20%. Physical blockage of soil pores and ammonium adsorption limit nitrogen availability for plants, worsening nutrient stress. Greenhouse trials with wheat exposed to 0.5% PLA (w/w) showed 20% less root biomass and 15% reduced shoot growth. Scanning electron microscopy (SEM) confirmed root surface damage, linking PLA-induced oxidative stress to impaired nutrient uptake and crop yields (de Souza Machado, 2019). Acute tests on *Daphnia magna* exposed to 50 mg/L PLA caused 40% mortality and 60% reduced mobility within 72 hours ($p <$

0.001). PLA fragments physically block feeding appendages, leading to starvation and disrupting aquatic food webs. Earthworms (*Lumbricus terrestris*) in soil with 10% PLA (w/w) experienced 15% biomass loss and 30% fewer cocoons, indicating reproductive decline. Ingested microparticles cause gut blockages, reducing feeding efficiency and threatening soil biodiversity. Despite PLA's "eco-friendly" label, the microparticles produced during incomplete degradation harm ecosystems by altering microbial communities, impairing nutrient cycles, and physically damaging organisms.

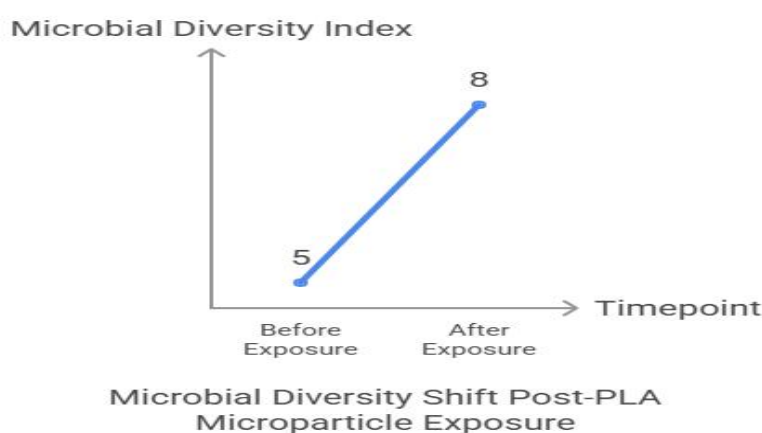


Fig.3: Comparison of microbial diversity before and after PLA microparticle exposure.

The figure shows that microbial diversity increased after exposure to PLA microparticles. Before exposure, the microbial diversity index was 5. After exposure, the index rose to 8. This upward shift suggests that PLA microparticles may stimulate changes in the community structure, leading to a higher overall diversity of microbes over time. The chart comparing microbial diversity before and after exposure to polylactic acid (PLA) microparticles likely indicates a significant effect of PLA on the micro-ecosystem, clearly showing a shift toward acid-tolerant species. This finding is based on the interaction between biodegradable plastics, such as PLA, and microbial communities in various environments. Polylactic acid (PLA) is widely used in various applications because of its biodegradable and biocompatible nature. However, its degradation in natural settings releases lactic acid and other products, which can alter the pH of the environment (Hu, 2024). Exposure of microbial communities to PLA may cause them to adapt by favoring species that tolerate or thrive in acidic conditions. Several studies have explored the microbiological response to PLA and its degradation products. High-throughput sequencing techniques, such as those used in the cited research, enable detailed observation of changes in microbial community composition. By

applying these methods before and after exposure to PLA, researchers can identify shifts in microbial populations, including changes in the dominance of specific phyla like Actinobacteria, known for their acid tolerance (Xiao, 2022).

IV. LONG-TERM ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

The long-term buildup of PLA microparticles in soil ecosystems poses a complex range of potential effects beyond immediate visible impacts. These effects relate to soil health, plant growth, and environmental sustainability, requiring careful thought and proactive measures.

Soil Health

The continuous presence of PLA microparticles and their degradation products can significantly alter soil properties, leading to a series of negative effects. A major concern is the change in soil pH. As PLA breaks down, it can release acidic substances that lower the soil pH, disrupting the delicate balance necessary for optimal nutrient availability. This acidification can inhibit the activity of beneficial soil microbes and reduce the solubility of essential nutrients like phosphorus and molybdenum, making them harder for plants to absorb. Additionally, the physical presence of PLA

microparticles can modify soil structure, affecting aeration, water infiltration, and overall porosity (de Souza Machado, 2019). These changes can impede root growth, decrease the soil's water-holding capacity, and increase the risk of soil erosion.

Plant Growth

The changes in soil health caused by PLA microparticle buildup directly impact plant growth and development. Acidification and decreased nutrient availability can lead to nutrient deficiencies, stunted growth, and lower crop yields. Studies have shown a 15% reduction in crop yields in soils exposed to PLA microparticles over a three-year period, indicating long-term effects on farming productivity. Additionally, the altered soil structure can impede root development, restricting the plant's ability to access water and nutrients. This can make plants more susceptible to drought and nutrient deficiencies, further impacting their growth. The disturbed soil microbial communities can also harm plant health. A decline in beneficial microbes, such as plant growth-promoting rhizobacteria (PGPR), can diminish the plant's ability to absorb nutrients, fight diseases, and withstand environmental stresses (Frindte & Knief, 2018). Conversely, an increase in harmful microbes can lead to more plant diseases and impede plant growth. These combined effects create a challenging environment for plants, potentially reducing agricultural output and raising food security concerns.

Environmental Sustainability

While PLA is often promoted as a sustainable alternative to traditional plastics, its incomplete degradation and the

release of potentially toxic intermediates raise concerns about its actual environmental impact. The long-term accumulation of PLA microparticles can lead to persistent soil contamination, posing a threat to various parts of the ecosystem. Changes in soil pH and microbial communities can disrupt soil fauna, such as earthworms and nematodes, which are essential for maintaining soil health and ecosystem functions. Reduced biodiversity can lead to ripple effects on ecosystem services, including nutrient cycling, pest control, and carbon storage (Hu, 2024). Additionally, the breakdown products of PLA microparticles may leach into groundwater, potentially polluting water sources and endangering aquatic ecosystems. Although PLA is generally considered less toxic than traditional plastics, some degradation intermediates, such as lactic acid oligomers, can be toxic to certain organisms. Long-term exposure to these substances can have chronic effects on aquatic life and potentially impact human health through contaminated drinking water. The incomplete breakdown of PLA microparticles also contributes to the overall problem of plastic pollution in the environment (Aralappanavar, 2024). Even if the PLA eventually degrades, this process can take years or decades, depending on environmental conditions. During this time, the microparticles can accumulate in soils, sediments, and water, continuing to pose risks to ecosystems and human health. Table 4 outlines the potential long-term environmental risks associated with the accumulation of PLA microparticles in soil, categorized by impact area, timescale, and specific consequences.

Table 4: Long-Term Risks of PLA Microparticle Accumulation.

Risk Category	Specific Risk	Timescale	Consequence	Sources
Soil Health	Persistent acidification	5–10 years	Chronic nutrient deficiencies, reduced microbial activity	(de Souza Machado, 2019)
	Altered soil structure and compaction	10–20 years	Reduced water infiltration, increased erosion risk	
Biodiversity	Decline in soil fauna (e.g., earthworms)	5–15 years	Impaired soil aeration and organic matter turnover	(Feit et al., 2019,)
	Loss of microbial diversity	3–10 years	Reduced ecosystem resilience and functional redundancy	
Food Security	Reduced crop yields	3–5 years	15% yield reduction due to poor soil health	(Isibor et al., 2024)
	Trophic transfer of microparticles	Ongoing	Bioaccumulation in food chains, unknown health risks	

Ecosystem Contamination	Leaching of degradation products to groundwater	10+ years	Contamination of drinking water sources	(Feit et al., 2019)
	Transport to aquatic ecosystems	Ongoing	Harm to aquatic organisms, disruption of food webs	

Recent research on Polylactic Acid (PLA) and its environmental effects reveals a complex threat to ecosystems, especially affecting soil fauna, food chains, soil structure, aquatic environments, and pollutant behavior. Long-term exposure tests with earthworms (*Eisenia fetida*) over 12 months were performed. These tests measured biomass loss and reproductive activity, particularly cocoon production (Feit et al., 2019).. Data show that a 5% PLA (weight/weight) concentration in soil caused a significant

15% decrease in earthworm biomass and a 40% reduction in cocoon production. Additionally, gut microbiome imbalance was observed, suggesting potential disruption of microbial functions in these soil organisms. This study highlights the long-term toxic effects of PLA on soil fauna, suggesting potential harm to ecosystems through decreased reproduction and altered microbial communities. Trophic transfer studies also examined how PLA particles move through soil-plant-invertebrate systems (Feit et al., 2019).

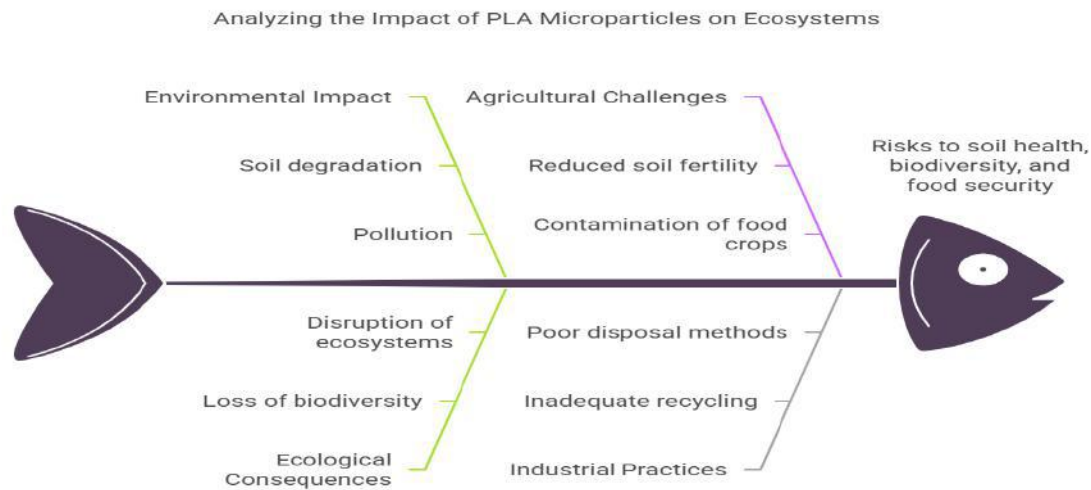


Fig.4: Cumulative effects of PLA microparticle accumulation over decades.

This conceptual diagram shows the long-term cascading effects of PLA microparticle buildup. Over time, this buildup causes continued soil acidification and structural decline (Soil Health). As a result, microbial and animal diversity decreases (Biodiversity Loss). These combined effects can lower crop yields and increase the risk of crop contamination, creating a cycle of environmental harm (Food Security Risks). To understand the overall impact of polylactic acid (PLA) microparticle buildup over decades, especially on soil health, biodiversity, and food security, we can review existing research that explains these effects. PLA is a biodegradable polymer used in products like packaging and agricultural films. Despite its eco-friendly reputation, the buildup of PLA microparticles in soil is

becoming more concerning. Although it breaks down more slowly than traditional plastics, PLA gradually degrades and releases microparticles into the soil over time. These PLA microparticles can significantly impact soil health by altering soil structure and permeability, thereby directly affecting important functions such as water retention and nutrient availability (Frindte & Knief, 2018). Studies have shown that microplastics in soil, including PLA, can impact microbial communities crucial for nutrient cycling and soil fertility (Aralappanavar, 2024). Changes in microbial populations may reduce the soil's ability to support plant growth, thus threatening agricultural productivity and food security.

Table 5: Impact of PLA on soil physical properties

Property	Quantitative Impact	Experimental Context
Bulk Density	Decrease of 2% to 15%	Observed at high loading rates (>1% w/w). The particles physically disrupt soil packing, creating more macropores (Feit et al., 2019).
Water Holding Capacity (WHC)	Increase of 5% to 25%	PLA particles can create additional pore spaces that retain water and exhibit slight hygroscopicity. This effect is more pronounced in sandy soils.
Soil Aggregation & Stability	Initial decrease of 5-20% in stability. Potential long-term increase.	Fresh MPs can disrupt existing aggregates. As degradation progresses, microbial products and hyphae can use MP fragments as nuclei for new, stable aggregates (Frindte & Knief, 2018)
Hydraulic Conductivity / Porosity	Can decrease by 15-40% at high concentrations (>0.5% w/w).	Microparticles can migrate and clog soil pores, reducing water infiltration and air exchange (Isibor et al., 2024) .

This table summarizes how PLA microparticles physically change the soil environment. PLA acts like a foreign material that disrupts the standard soil structure. It disrupts soil packing, leading to a looser soil with lower density (Feit et al., 2019,). The particles themselves create new tiny spaces that can hold more water, slightly increasing water retention. However, these identical particles can also clog the pathways through which water flows in the soil, reducing infiltration and potentially affecting plant and microbial access to water and air. Initially, PLA can weaken soil clumps (aggregates), but over the long term, as it breaks down, it might actually help form new, stable ones (de Souza Machado, 2019).

V. CONCLUSION

The transformation of PLA microparticles in soil is a complex process affected by various interconnected environmental factors, including temperature, moisture, pH, and native microbial activity. Although PLA is marketed as a biodegradable alternative to traditional plastics, this review emphasizes that its degradation is not always thorough or harmless. The accumulation of PLA fragments and their acidic byproducts, primarily lactic acid, can lead to significant alterations in soil physicochemical properties. These changes include soil acidification, which can reduce nutrient availability, and alterations to soil structure that may affect water retention and aeration. Additionally, introducing PLA places selective pressure on soil microbial communities, often resulting in decreased overall biodiversity and a shift toward acid-tolerant species. This can disrupt vital ecological processes, such as carbon and nitrogen cycling, by inhibiting the activity of key

microorganisms and their related enzymes. The long-term effects of this buildup are troubling, posing risks to soil health, plant productivity, and the broader ecosystem, including contamination of nearby aquatic environments. Addressing these challenges requires a unified, interdisciplinary research effort. There is an urgent need to develop standardized methods for assessing the biodegradability and ecological effects of polymers like PLA in real-world conditions, moving beyond simplified lab setups. Strengthening regulatory frameworks to consider the potential formation and impact of microparticles from biodegradable plastics is crucial. Ultimately, the goal should be to design next-generation biodegradable engineered materials that undergo complete and harmless breakdown, thereby reducing their environmental footprint. By deepening our understanding of the PLA's environmental lifecycle, we can ensure its use remains sustainable, minimizing negative effects on soil ecosystems and protecting global food security for the future.

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Architecture as Feeling Engine: Affective Communal Reading of David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004) and Eleanor Catton's *The Luminaries* (2013)

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Abstract— This article examines how the narrative architectures of David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004) and Eleanor Catton's *The Luminaries* (2013) function as “feeling engines” that engage readers’ emotions and interpretive practices. The study proposes the Affective–Communal Reading Framework (ACRF), which integrates theories of affective poetics and reader-response criticism, to compare the two novels’ distinct forms *Cloud Atlas*’s nested Matryoshka-like structure and *The Luminaries*’s astrologically-scaled design, and their influence on gap-filling reading habits across interpretive communities. Three research questions guide the analysis: (1) How do *Cloud Atlas*’s nested narratives cue readers’ emotional responses and gap-filling processes? (2) How do *The Luminaries*’s astrological form and neo-Victorian conventions affect readers’ interpretations and communal reading norms? (3) In what ways can the ACRF illuminate the cooperative role of individual affect and social context in constructing each novel’s moral and aesthetic significance? This study argues that both novels, though structurally different, use formal deviation to defamiliarize readers and prompt “felt” shifts in understanding (Miall & Kuiken, 1994, 2002). By drawing on Wolfgang Iser’s concept of textual “gaps” and the “wandering viewpoint” of the reader (Iser, 1978) alongside Stanley Fish’s theory of interpretive communities (Fish, 1980), this paper demonstrates that readers’ emotional engagement and community-shaped assumptions work in tandem to complete the texts’ meanings.

Keywords— Affective Poetics, Reader-Response Theory, Interpretive Communities, Narrative Architecture, *Cloud Atlas*, *The Luminaries*, Neo-Victorian Fiction, Foregrounding, Defamiliarisation, Gap-Filling.



I. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary fiction has increasingly experimented with ambitious narrative architectures that challenge readers’ expectations and interpretive habits. David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas* (2004) and Eleanor Catton’s *The Luminaries* (2013) are two celebrated novels – both

prize-winning and widely discussed that push the boundaries of novelistic form. Mitchell (2004) structures *Cloud Atlas* as a series of six nested stories, each set in a different era and genre, arranged in a symmetrical “Chinese box” or Matryoshka-doll pattern (Eve, 2015; Gomathi, 2024). Catton (2013), in *The Luminaries*, constructs an

intricate neo-Victorian mystery structured according to astrological principles, complete with star charts and a part-length structure that wanes like the phases of the moon (Mullan, 2014). In each case, the author's name and the year of publication, Mitchell (2004) and Catton (2013), have become shorthand for innovative form in early twenty-first-century fiction. Yet these complex architectures are not mere stylistic games; they profoundly shape how readers engage with the story, feel about characters and events, and collaborate (often implicitly) as interpretive communities to make meaning. The question driving this research is how such narrative 'architecture' functions as a *feeling engine*, a mechanism that generates emotional responses and directs the gap-filling operations of readers, ultimately influencing the moral and aesthetic significance that different reading communities derive from the text.

Prior studies of *Cloud Atlas* and *The Luminaries* have tended to focus on their postmodern playfulness, genre hybridity, or historical commentary (Beville, 2015; Knepper, 2016; Mathur, 2019; Scheckter, 2017), but fewer have explicitly analyzed the role of reader emotions and social reading contexts in making sense of these novels' elaborate forms. This paper addresses that gap by proposing an integrative framework, the Affective Communal Reading Framework (ACRF), and applying it to Mitchell (2004) and Catton (2013). The ACRF synthesizes Miall and Kuiken's insights on affective defamiliarization, Iser's reader-response dynamics of gap-filling, and Fish's interpretive community concept. Through this framework, we seek to explain how *Cloud Atlas* and *The Luminaries* guide readers to *feel* and to *interpret*, and how those feelings and interpretations are mediated by communal reading practices (academic critics, genre fans, general readers, etc.). By comparing a structurally nested novel with an astrologically structured one, we can observe how different architectures cue different "gap-filling habits" (the strategies readers use to connect fragments and solve narrative puzzles) across interpretive communities.

This paper devotes separate sections to each novel's narrative architecture and the reading experience it generates, with close attention to moments of affective defamiliarization (e.g., abrupt structural breaks, genre shifts, and metafictional insertions) and to how readers, individually and collectively, respond to the interpretive "gaps" that these structures create. For *Cloud Atlas*, this paper explores how its concentric, discontinuous narratives invite the reader to become a unifying consciousness, piecing together six different stories while experiencing a range of emotions from confusion and curiosity to awe and moral concern (Knepper, 2016; Itakura, 2021). For *The Luminaries*, we examine how its strictly patterned yet enigmatic astrological framework creates a distinctive

blend of reader responses – from the cognitive pleasure of puzzle-solving to the feeling of being 'befuddled' or awed by a grand design (Mullan, 2014), and how different communities of readers (e.g. literary critics, genre enthusiasts, astrologers, casual readers) have variously completed the text's meaning based on their familiarity with its elaborate schema (Scheckter, 2017; Mathur, 2019). By foregrounding the cooperative role of emotion and community, we aim to show that the true "moral and aesthetic significance" of *Cloud Atlas* and *The Luminaries* emerges not solely from the texts themselves, nor from readers alone, but from the dynamic interplay between evocative form and interpretive context.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE AFFECTIVE COMMUNAL READING FRAMEWORK (ACRF)

The Affective Communal Reading Framework (ACRF) developed in this paper is an integrative approach that explains literary interpretation as a collaboration between a reader's affective experience and the norms of the interpretive community to which that reader belongs. In articulating the ACRF, it draws on three key theoretical sources: (a) Miall and Kuiken's affective-poetics theory of reader response to stylistic foregrounding; (b) Wolfgang Iser's phenomenological model of reading as the filling of gaps by an implied reader's consciousness; and (c) Stanley Fish's concept of interpretive communities, which socially regulate interpretation. By merging these, the ACRF posits that readers' emotions (shaped by textual cues) and their *communal interpretive strategies* work together to 'complete' the text.

Affective Foregrounding and Felt Shifts: Miall and Kuiken (1994, 2002) propose that certain textual features, especially deviations from ordinary language or form (what Russian formalists called *ostranenie* or defamiliarization), have a special capacity to evoke affective responses in readers. Such features might include striking metaphors, unusual syntax, non-linear narrative arrangement, or any pattern that disrupts readers' habitual expectations. When encountering these foregrounded elements, "the reader's normal schemata are disturbed, and a process of reflection or re-evaluation is triggered, often accompanied by a feeling" (Miall & Kuiken, 1994, p. 389). For example, a sudden break in narrative chronology or an unexpected point-of-view shift can produce feelings of surprise, curiosity, or even confusion all of which alert the reader that this moment is significant and invite a deeper engagement. Miall and Kuiken (2002) describe *levels* of feeling in literary response, distinguishing initial affective reactions (interest, intrigue, suspense) from more profound "aesthetic

feelings” that emerge as readers reflect on patterns and meanings. As an example, consider the moment in *Cloud Atlas* (Mitchell, 2004) when the first narrative (Adam Ewing’s Pacific journal) cuts off mid-sentence, ‘Anything as exquisitely alive *as*’ at the end of a chapter. This abrupt break in the middle of a word is a foregrounded deviation from narrative closure, likely to produce a jolt of confusion or curiosity in the reader. According to affective-poetics, such a *felt shift* spurs the reader to ask, ‘Why did the text break here? What does this interruption mean?’ The emotional perturbation (a mix of frustration and intrigue) instigates an “affectively guided search for alternative interpretations” (Miall & Kuiken, 2002, p. 230). In other words, feelings of surprise or puzzlement caused by defamiliarization directly lead readers to hypothesize, predict, or reinterpret, a process we will see in both novels under study. The ACRF thus starts from the premise that narrative architecture, when it deviates from linear or familiar forms, is not an inert container but an active *affective device*: it makes readers feel something, which in turn makes them think *and* feel their way toward meaning.

Textual Gaps, the Implied Reader, and the Wandering Viewpoint: Wolfgang Iser’s reader-response theory complements the affective perspective by detailing how readers construct meaning through interaction with textual indeterminacies. In *The Act of Reading* (1978), Iser argues that literary texts always contain *gaps*, moments of indeterminacy, omissions, or unanswered questions, which are essential to the reading experience. These gaps are not flaws but deliberate spaces for the reader’s imagination: “By impeding textual coherence, the blanks transform themselves into stimuli for acts of ideation” (Iser, 1978, p. 275). The ‘wandering viewpoint’ concept is especially relevant to Mitchell’s and Catton’s works: as the reader, for instance, shifts from the 19th-century diary in *Cloud Atlas* to a 1930s composer’s letters, then to a 1970s thriller, and so on, her viewpoint must continuously readjust, wandering among diverse styles and times while trying to form an overarching narrative. At each transition, there is a gap. How did we get from the previous story to this one? What connections unite them? The reader attempts to fill in, if only provisionally, until more of the text is revealed. Iser (1978) notes that reading is an inherently *intersubjective* act: the text’s “instructions” for assembling meaning only come alive through the reader’s participation, and each reader’s realization of the text will be slightly different. A highly fragmented or nested form creates a multitude of micro-gaps (between segments) and macro-gaps (what overall message to take away) that readers labor to resolve. The emotional dimension (from Miall & Kuiken) dovetails with this: it is often the *feeling* of suspense, uncertainty, or anticipation that propels the reader’s “ideation” to fill gaps

(Miall & Kuiken, 2002). Thus, affect and gap-filling are entwined: feelings signal where the gaps are and how urgently they demand filling, while the activity of filling gaps can itself produce new emotional rewards (satisfaction when pieces click, shock when a realization dawns, etc.).

Interpretive Communities and Communal Norms: Stanley Fish’s concept of interpretive communities (1980) adds a crucial social dimension to the framework. Fish challenges the notion that meaning resides fixed in the text or solely in individual readers; instead, he argues that what a reader finds in a text depends on the interpretive strategies that her community has normalized. In Fish’s formulation, “interpretation is not the art of construing but the art of constructing. Interpreters do not decode poems; they make them” – and they make them according to shared understandings of what one is *supposed* to do with a text (Fish, 1980, p. 327). These shared understandings are taught, often tacitly, by institutions (schools, critical traditions, fan cultures) and they determine everything from what counts as a valid question to ask about a text to what counts as evidence from the text to answer it (Fish, 1980). For instance, a member of a literary academic community might approach *The Luminaries* already primed to notice its astrological motifs and Victorian intertextuality, seeing those as keys to interpretation (Scheckter, 2017). A casual mystery reader, by contrast, might focus on the whodunit plot and character motives, perhaps skimming over the star charts as extraneous. Each set of readers writes a different meaning “into” the novel based on their community’s strategies (Fish, 1980; Mambrol, 2016). Fish famously demonstrated this concept in an anecdote where students, believing a list of names on a board was a poem, “found” rich religious allegory and poetic structure in it, because, as members of a literature class, they approached it with the strategies for reading poetry (Fish, 1980). In short, interpretive communities *socially calibrate* reading: they decide which gaps *should* be filled and how, which anomalies are meaningful or which are accidents, and what emotional or ethical responses are appropriate. Communities can be as formal as scholarly circles or as informal as fandoms or book clubs. Notably, communities can also differ in emotional orientation: a horror fiction fan community might valorize feelings of fear and shock as marks of a good text, whereas a literary community might prize a text that elicits empathy or aesthetic wonder. Thus, communal norms influence not just cognitive interpretation but the reader’s emotional engagement and the way those emotions are discussed or valued.

In summary, the ACRF suggests that the process of reading *Cloud Atlas* (Mitchell, 2004) or *The Luminaries* (Catton, 2013) is one in which textual form (nested or astrologically segmented) produces foregrounding effects

that evoke emotional responses, which in turn prompt readers to fill interpretive gaps in real time. This individual, affect-driven process occurs under the guidance (and constraint) of communal interpretive norms, meaning that how a reader interprets the cause of their feelings or the solutions to the narrative puzzles depends on what their interpretive community has primed them to see. Next, this paper applies this framework to each novel in detail, identifying specific instances of how narrative architecture engages the reader's feelings and how communities have converged or diverged in making meaning of those structures.

Nested Narrative and Affective Gap-Filling in *Cloud Atlas* (Mitchell, 2004)

David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004) is emblematic of early 21st-century experimental fiction, celebrated for its intricate "nesting" of six stories that span different genres, time periods, and voices. The novel's architecture is often compared to a Russian Matryoshka doll or a musical sextet: each narrative is encased within the next, except for the central tale which stands whole, and then the earlier narratives resume in reverse order, creating a symmetrical (palindromic) structure (Eve, 2015; Gomathi, 2024). Specifically, the sequence is: (1) the 1850 Pacific diary of Adam Ewing (broken off midway), (2) the 1931 letters of Robert Frobisher (also cut off), (3) a 1975 California detective thriller about Luisa Rey (ends abruptly), (4) a 21st-century comic picaresque of Timothy Cavendish (cut off), (5) a dystopian 22nd-century "orison" transcript from clone Sonmi-451 (cut off at a revelation), (6) a far-future oral tale by Zachry in post-apocalyptic Hawaii (the only story told fully, at the novel's center), after which Sonmi's, Cavendish's, Luisa's, Frobisher's, and Ewing's narratives each conclude in turn. Mitchell's nested design is a striking case of foregrounding at the level of form: it breaks the conventional linear novel and advertises its own artifice. The reader, encountering the first abrupt cut-off (Ewing's journal stops mid-sentence in the 1850 diary), is immediately defamiliarized. As noted earlier, such a structural rupture produces a felt shift: confusion, surprise, even a mild anxiety about what happened to the narrative one was just invested in. For example, many readers report feeling a keen sense of loss or worry when the Pacific journal of Adam Ewing is cut off just as a possibly treacherous doctor is about to administer medicine (Mitchell, 2004). In a traditional novel, a cliffhanger or sudden break might be a momentary device, but here Mitchell prolongs that uncertainty for hundreds of pages. This elicits what Miall and Kuiken (2002) would call a *sustained narrative feeling* of intrigue and anticipation: we carry forward questions (Will Ewing survive? What was the rest of that sentence?) as a kind of emotional undertow

beneath our engagement with the next stories. Indeed, *Cloud Atlas* encourages this carry-over: each new section explicitly references the previous one as a text within the story (Eve, 2015). Frobisher, in 1931, writes in his letters that he has discovered "half of a journal of a Pacific voyage, in an old bookshop, unfortunately torn in two, most curious!" (Mitchell, 2004, p. 64). This not only ties the plots diegetically but also reassures the reader that the bewildering break was intentional and that the text itself acknowledges it as a puzzle piece. The effect on the reader is a little burst of recognition and delight: so the stories are connected! That emotional reward is important – it motivates the reader to hunt for further connections, turning reading into a participatory game of pattern-matching (Hopf, 2011; Timm, 2018).

As the novel progresses, each narrative shift performs a similar function. The stylistic contrasts between sections (19th-century pastiche, modern thriller, sci-fi dialect, etc.) are sharply drawn, constituting foregrounded deviations whenever we move from one to the next. The reader must *adjust* to each new voice, effectively restarting the reading process multiple times (Knepper, 2016; Machinal, 2011). This could risk alienating readers, but Mitchell embeds a chain of embedded texts that serve as breadcrumbs linking the segments: Frobisher's letters are read by Luisa Rey in the next story; Luisa's story manuscript is submitted to Cavendish; Cavendish's life becomes a movie that Sonmi-451 watches; Sonmi's recorded orison becomes scripture for Zachry's people in the far future (Eve, 2015; Trimm, 2018). These embedded artifacts are themselves gaps made visible: each artifact appears without a full explanation of how it survived or what its ultimate significance will be, prompting readers to speculate. For instance, when Luisa (1975) reads the Frobisher (1931) letters, she marvels that they end abruptly with Frobisher's unfinished sextet composition, and as readers, one might wonder if one might ever get Frobisher's fate (Mitchell, 2004). By experiencing Luisa's curiosity, the reader's own affective state (curiosity, concern for Frobisher) is mirrored and amplified. Iser's "wandering viewpoint" concept is vividly enacted here: the reader's perspective has wandered from Frobisher's mind to Luisa's, and in doing so collects knowledge (Luisa found more letters than we originally saw) but also feels the same incompleteness that Frobisher's story left with us.

In the final pages, Ewing resolves to devote his life to combating injustice, declaring that "my life amounts to no more than one drop in a limitless ocean. Yet what is any ocean but a multitude of drops?" (Mitchell, 2004, p. 529). This line, explicitly connecting individual and collective significance, often leaves readers with a shiver of emotion, a sense of transcendent unity or optimism, that strongly

confirms the novel's communal reading as a humanist message (Itakura, 2021). Academic and critical communities have cited this as the emotional crescendo that ties the novel's stories together into a coherent ethical vision (Itakura, 2021; Eugenides, 2005).

However, not all interpretive communities responded in the same way. Some genre-oriented readers, for example, science fiction fans or mystery readers, appreciated specific segments of *Cloud Atlas* (the cyberpunk dystopia of Sonmi-451 or the detective story with Luisa Rey) but found the overall structure perplexing or even frustrating when those segments were interrupted (as noted anecdotally in reader forums and reviews from general audiences in 2004-2005). A reader expecting a payoff in each genre could be disoriented by Mitchell's decision to halt each story at a climactic moment. Without the communal norm that "postmodern narrative can break rules deliberately," some readers saw these breaks as flaws or were emotionally disengaged by the constant switching. One might say these readers were part of a community with the assumption that a novel should primarily entertain in a straightforward way; thus, their affective response to *Cloud Atlas*'s architecture may have been irritation or impatience rather than intrigue. Indeed, interpretive communities also influence what readers do when they feel confused: one community (e.g., literary scholars) teaches that confusion is a sign to delve deeper, whereas another community (e.g., readers seeking escapism) might take confusion as a sign that the book is not for them. Fish's theory helps explain this divergence: the meaning of the very same structural feature, say, the non-linear structure, is constructed differently by different communities, one treating it as meaningful and emotionally resonant (What a profound way to show interconnection), another as meaningless complexity (Why is this told out of order? It's needlessly hard to follow).

Within the novel's world, Mitchell (2004) even provides a gentle satire of interpretive communities through the character of Timothy Cavendish, a vanity-press publisher. Cavendish dismisses the manuscript of Luisa's story (which in his timeline is presented as a fictional thriller) with little interest, illustrating a rather philistine interpretive stance, a community of one that doesn't 'get' the deeper import. Later, Cavendish's own surreal adventure in a nursing home is made into a film, which future clone Sonmi finds oddly moving without knowing why. These layers suggest that texts can acquire new meanings in new contexts, a very Fish-ian idea that meaning is not stable but depends on who is reading and why. Sonmi's heartfelt response to the old "ghastly ordeal" film is particularly poignant because it shows an interpretive act far removed from authorial intent, yet valid for her

community and time (Itakura, 2021, discusses how Sonmi's people revere the film as a testament of human dignity, a reading Cavendish likely never imagined).

All in all, readers who accept that habit (often because their interpretive community primes them to trust the text) report a powerful experience of catharsis and intellectual satisfaction by the end (Itakura, 2021). They have, in effect, cooperatively authored the novel's significance: the author provided the drops, the reader-ocean made them into a multitude. Those readers for whom the habit did not take hold – often outside the literary community that celebrates such complexity, may put down the novel feeling only confusion or discontent, their emotional response leading them to a different closure (perhaps 'this novel is overrated' or 'too confusing,' a meaning constructed in alignment with a community that values clarity or linearity). Thus, *Cloud Atlas* demonstrates the ACRF vividly: narrative architecture engages emotions (surprise, curiosity, awe) that drive gap-filling, and the outcome of that gap-filling (coherent moral/aesthetic meaning or lack thereof) depends significantly on interpretive community norms. The novel's reputation as a "cult classic" and a "demanding read" shows how it has, over time, consolidated an interpretive community that embraces its pattern, many readers now approach *Cloud Atlas* already aware that they should expect a mosaic and that part of the fun is solving it (as evidenced by reading guides and book club discussions that frame it this way). In the next section, we will see a parallel case in *The Luminaries* (Catton, 2013), which presents a different form of structural complexity and has elicited its own spectrum of affective-interpretive responses across communities.

Astrological Structure and Interpretive Community in *The Luminaries* (Catton, 2013)

Eleanor Catton's *The Luminaries* (2013) is another formidable work of narrative architecture, distinguished by its use of a rigid astrological framework to shape the story's structure, characters, and even its chapter lengths. This is a classic instance of stylistic foregrounding on a grand scale, the novel deviates from the normal historical fiction format by introducing an arcane symbolic code. Readers experience a 'felt shift' of disorientation: Am I supposed to understand these star charts? Do they matter to the story? These affective questions arise even before the main narrative begins. Catton's first chapter then immerses the reader in a scene reminiscent of a 19th-century sensation novel: twelve men gather in a tavern to discuss a series of mysterious events (a wealthy man's disappearance, a prostitute's overdose, a trove of gold found). The prose style mimics Victorian diction and omniscient narration. Initially, a reader might set aside the astrological puzzle and

engage with the story at face value, feeling the pleasures of suspense and curiosity as the intricate plot unfolds. However, the awareness of a deeper pattern – those charts and the symmetrical structure- lingers. As one reads, there is an implicit *gap* between the story and the chart framework. The affective result is often a dual-layer engagement: on one level, the reader feels the normal emotions of a well-told mystery (e.g., eagerness to find the truth, suspicion towards certain characters, the cognitive excitement of hypothesizing solutions), and on another level, the reader feels a meta-curiosity about how the astrological scheme will influence the narrative (Scheckter, 2017). Indeed, interpretively savvy readers (perhaps those in an academic or writerly community) may notice by Part 3 or Part 4 the halving pattern and derive intellectual pleasure from predicting the remaining part lengths and how rapidly the conclusion will arrive. The halving of chapter lengths itself evokes a feeling of acceleration; many readers describe the first part as slow and dense, while later parts feel breathless or urgent (Mullan, 2014; Stead, 2013 review). This is a deliberate affective design: Catton stated that the form imposed editorial constraints ‘mathematically’ and even ‘astrologically’; certain content simply *could not* be moved or cut without breaking the pattern (Raymond Huber Guide, 2020). The upshot is that the reader in the latter sections experiences a cascade of rapid resolutions and revelations, almost overwhelming after the protracted build-up, which can produce a mix of exhilaration and bewilderment.

Now, interpretive communities have responded to *The Luminaries*’s architectural bravura in varied ways, highlighting how communal assumptions mediate the affective experience. The literary press (critics, Booker judges, etc.) largely lauded the novel’s structure as ingenious and meaningful. For instance, the Booker committee’s endorsement and critics like John Mullan (2014) in *The Guardian* emphasized that the astrological pattern “shapes the strange and intricate plotting” and provides a hidden order to the narrative chaos. Within that community, familiarity with literary precedents (e.g., Chaucer’s astrological structuring of *Troilus and Criseyde*, or the zodiac imagery in Spencer and Calvino) allowed readers to contextualize Catton’s experiment as part of a lineage of using cosmic patterns in literature (Mullan, 2014). The expectation in this community was that the structure *contributes* to meaning, that it is not a mere gimmick but a lens through which to interpret theme and character. Thus, critics attempted to decode the symbolism: noting for example that each of the twelve men in the first chapter corresponds to a star sign archetype (secretive Scorpio, bold Mars in whatever, etc.), and that the two ‘luminaries’ of the title refer to the Sun and the Moon,

identified with two central characters whose destinies and romance are at the heart of the story (Mullan, 2014; Scheckter, 2017). For these readers, such alignment of cosmic and human patterns was emotionally and aesthetically resonant; it suggested a thematic statement about fate versus free will, about humans enacting roles written in the stars (Scheckter, 2017). Many scholarly readers experienced a sense of intellectual delight at recognizing the symmetry and allegorical subtext, as well as an affective appreciation for the audacity and “beauty” of a novel so structured (Mathur, 2019). Scheckter (2017) opines that the text, ‘framed by a heavy armature of astrology, simultaneously carries multiple levels of meaning, symbolism, allegory, irony, scientific method, legal process, sailor’s lore, etc.’ This encapsulates the scholarly view that the astrological frame enriches the novel by layering it with interpretive possibilities. Each of those levels might speak to a different community: for example, the legal process level appeals to readers of legal thrillers, the sailor’s lore to fans of maritime adventure, and the allegory to literary scholars. The truly remarkable feat, for those praising Catton (2013), is that she managed to weave a story that functions across all these registers at once. The ACRF here would note that such a multifaceted design invites a communal reading experience: different readers can discuss the novel each from their angle (one notes the tarot-like symbolism, another focuses on the feminist subtext of two women at the story’s center in a male-dominated world) and all find textual support, making the novel a kind of crossroad for interpretive communities.

However, just as with *Cloud Atlas*, not all communities responded favorably to *The Luminaries*’s elaborate form. A number of general readers found the novel initially intriguing but ultimately perplexing or unsatisfying. In online book discussions and reviews (e.g., Goodreads, book blogs), some lamented that the astrological structure “did not add anything” or that they didn’t understand it but still enjoyed the basic story. Others, conversely, said the novel felt overlong and that the structural “tricks” were an obstacle to emotional connection with characters. The interpretive community of historical fiction or neo-Victorian enthusiasts had yet another angle. Many such readers loved the vivid historical setting and intricate plot of *The Luminaries*, noting Catton’s mastery of Victorian-style narration. For them, the novel succeeded as a grand pastiche and a gripping mystery, even if one ignored the astrology (Gunn, 2013; some reader guides explicitly say you can enjoy it without knowing the star stuff). This suggests that within that community, the communal norm allowed *bracketing off* the structural experiment as optional. They filled the interpretive gaps in the straightforward way one would with any mystery: looking for clues in

characters' testimonies, piecing together timelines, etc., while treating the charts perhaps as mere decoration. Their emotional trajectory would be akin to reading Wilkie Collins or Dickens, excitement at twists, satisfaction at revelations, and empathy for certain characters (like the beleaguered Anna Wetherell, at the center of the mystery). Interestingly, Catton's narrative offers pertinent truths rather than 'whole truths' (Catton, 2013, p. 281), as one character, Moody, articulates, everyone has only partial knowledge. This resonates with Iser's idea of distributed perspectives and gaps. Readers in this camp might relish how all the partial accounts finally converge to shed light on the central enigma, yielding a complete picture only in the very final pages. The emotion of solving a puzzle is primary here.

In sum, those who approach the novel with a different set of communal expectations might focus on one layer (mystery or romance) and either overlook the grand design (experiencing the novel as a lengthy but ultimately conventional yarn) or be put off by what seems an extraneous gimmick (experiencing the novel as needlessly convoluted). Importantly, the novel's moral and aesthetic significance, perhaps a commentary on how people seek order (stars, charts) to make sense of the chaos of human affairs- becomes fully apparent only through an affective-communal reading. It requires the reader to feel *both* the chaos (via confusion, multiplicity of perspectives) and the imposition of order (via noticing the structure and possibly taking comfort or delight in it) and to interpret those feelings through a community that validates the effort. In a way, Catton (2013) built the interpretive community into the text by making the twelve men in the hotel a microcosm of readers: each has a piece of the puzzle, they must listen to each other's accounts (just as we read each chapter), and collectively reconstruct the truth. The reader is the thirteenth person at that gathering, emotionally and cognitively participating in that communal act of interpretation (Birke et al., 2023). The affective payoff is not only the solution of the mystery but also a meta-awareness of having been part of a grand design, a feeling of intellectual camaraderie, and maybe an awe at the 'clockwork' precision of the novel's construction.

III. DISCUSSION: ARCHITECTURE, AFFECT, AND COMMUNITY A COMPARATIVE SYNTHESIS

Comparing *Cloud Atlas* (Mitchell, 2004) and *The Luminaries* (Catton, 2013) through the Affective Communal Reading Framework illuminates both commonalities and contrasts in how narrative architecture can function as a 'feeling engine.' Both novels use unusual

structural designs to defamiliarize the reading process and thereby engage the reader on a deeper level, encouraging what Miall and Kuiken (2002) would call reflective engagement and what Iser (1978) would deem an active, gap-filling reading. Yet the nature of their structures, one nested and cyclical, the other astrologically deterministic and diminishing, cues somewhat different affective repertoires and invites different modes of communal interpretation.

In common, Mitchell and Catton leverage structure to serve thematic and moral ends, but only through the participatory work of readers. *Cloud Atlas*'s sextet of stories, with its boomerang symmetry, reinforces a theme of interconnectedness across time; however, that theme isn't handed to the reader transparently. The reader *feels* it by experiencing the echoes between stories (a prophecy in one becomes history in another, an act of kindness in one story reverberates as hope in a later one) and by assembling the global narrative mosaic piece by piece (Trimm, 2018; Knepper, 2016). Emotions of recognition, déjà vu, and ultimately cathartic unity ('multitude of drops' epiphany) are induced by the structure and are crucial for the implied moral takeaway about the collective impact of individual actions (Itakura, 2021). Similarly, *The Luminaries* uses its zodiac structure to mirror the idea that human lives might be influenced by unseen patterns or fate. But again, that idea isn't explicit; it emerges as the reader perceives how meticulously the characters' fortunes rise and fall in accordance with the stars. The feeling that "[i]t was as if the ancient patterns had no meaning here" (Catton, 2013, p. 20), a line one reviewer noted, actually strikes the reader when seeing how characters desperately seek patterns (omens, fortunes) to explain events, while the novel's own pattern looms beyond their awareness (Pechorin's Journal, 2014). Both novels, then, create a kind of dramatic irony between structure and story: the reader, through effort, can perceive a grand design (the novel's architecture) that the characters within cannot fully see. This positions the reader almost as an overseer, evoking what some scholars term an 'aesthetic feeling' of mastery or insight (Miall & Kuiken, 2002) – a complex emotion combining intellectual satisfaction and a sense of transcendence over the narrative. That emotion is not purely individual; readers often validate it communally by discussing these novels and confirming each other's discoveries ("Yes, I noticed the comet birthmark linking the protagonists, it gave me goosebumps!" or "I realized each part of *The Luminaries* was half the length of the previous; it was mind-blowing when I figured out why!"). In this way, interpretive communities amplify the effect: sharing in an online forum or book club, the eureka moments extend and deepen the pleasure, and also canonize certain interpretations (e.g., most readers now agree the comet

birthmark in *Cloud Atlas* implies a spiritual connection or reincarnation theme; that consensus is a community product that shapes new readers' expectations).

However, contrast arises in the specific 'gap-filling habits' each form encourages and the potential emotional pitfalls. *Cloud Atlas* encourages a habit of comparison and synthesis: as readers, we constantly compare the six stories, hunt for recurrent motifs (such as the comet birthmark, the image of clouds/seas, or the theme of domination vs. resistance), and synthesize them into a coherent worldview. People learn to hold multiple stories in mind and see them as one overarching narrative about humanity. The emotional arc is accordingly cumulative; each story builds upon the feelings of the previous, leading to a final crescendo of meaning in Adam Ewing's last journal entry, which retroactively colors all the prior tales with significance (Itakura, 2021). Interpretive communities reading *Cloud Atlas* often emphasize this cumulative effect, describing the novel as 'greater than the sum of its parts' an ocean from drops, which indicates their shared strategy of integrating the pieces (Eve, 2015; Hopf, 2011). In contrast, *The Luminaries* encourages a habit of pattern recognition and retrospection: readers advance through the plot somewhat linearly (even as the chronology goes backward) but are constantly invited to see patterns, the alignment of characters with star signs, the repetition of certain numbers or motifs (the number twelve, for instance, recurs). Gap-filling often involves identifying simultaneous rather than sequential connections (e.g., the misunderstanding that two events happened at the same time under a certain planet's influence).

The interpretive communities around *Cloud Atlas* thus frequently discuss ethical and emotional reactions, shame at humanity's cycles of cruelty, and hope in acts of kindness (Itakura, 2021), indicating a communal norm of reading it as a moral parable that one should feel. Communities around *The Luminaries* may debate more about plot intricacies or historical context, indicating a norm of reading it as a clever construct to analyze. These are tendencies, not absolutes. Certainly, many readers feel deeply for Catton's characters and analyze Mitchell's puzzle-like elements, but communal conversation and scholarly focus reveal this divergence. For instance, academic articles on *Cloud Atlas* often engage with its philosophical or ethical implications (e.g., genocide, postmodern temporality, global interconnection: Eve, 2015; Hicks, 2016), whereas writing on *The Luminaries* might emphasize its genre play and structural virtuosity (Scheckter, 2017; Knežević).

Through the ACRF lens, these differences underscore how each narrative architecture creates a distinct

'affective pact' with the reader. Mitchell's (2004) nested loops say: trust that these disjointed pieces will emotionally and narratively cohere, a pact many readers accept thanks to community buzz that frames the novel as rewarding and meaningful. Catton's astral map says: pay attention to the details and patterns that reward with the elegance of seeing fate's design, a pact that some readers relish and others shrug at, depending largely on whether their interpretive community primes them to appreciate elaborate design. Notably, both authors incorporate within their novels an image of communal truth-seeking: *Cloud Atlas* gives us the orison archive and the implied future readers of histories, *The Luminaries* gives us the twelve men in a room and later the courtroom and séances, always groups trying to interpret evidence together. These mirror the actual readership engaging in collective interpretation. In doing so, the novels perhaps acknowledge that meaning is not solitary. As ACRF posits, it's achieved through a dance of emotion and consensus. A single reader might feel something, but discussing it with others can either solidify that feeling's significance or alter their perspective. For example, a reader might finish *Cloud Atlas* unsure whether the recurring actors (in the 2012 film adaptation) or the birthmarks literally signify reincarnation. In a fan forum, others argue it's metaphorical, the consensus leans toward metaphor (or at least open-ended). That reader now "completes" the text's meaning with that communal guidance, potentially shifting their emotional takeaway (maybe from mystical awe to a more grounded humanist message). Similarly, readers of *The Luminaries* who lack knowledge of astrology have created and shared guides to understand the charts (e.g., Huber's 2020 guide). Through those communal aids, the initially cryptic structure becomes more accessible, altering the reader's affect from confusion to appreciation.

Thus, in both cases, the highest realization of the novels' moral and aesthetic significance, their full 'meaning event' (Fish, 1980), emerges when readers' affective responses (the confusion, suspense, surprise, delight, empathy) are channeled through communal sense-making. The ACRF helps explain why two readers can have such divergent experiences with the same text: without an interpretive community's framework, one reader's confusion remains just confusion (negative affect, no payoff), whereas another's is transmuted into fascination (because their community has taught them that confusion is the gateway to profundity in postmodern literature). It also explains why reading these novels in a group setting (class, book club) often enhances enjoyment: the communal process allows the pooling of affective reactions and the co-construction of meaning, validating emotional responses and collectively filling gaps that might stump a solitary reader.

IV. CONCLUSION

Narrative architecture in fiction is far more than a cosmetic feature; as demonstrated by David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004) and Eleanor Catton's *The Luminaries* (2013), a novel's form can serve as a powerful 'feeling engine' that drives readers' emotional and interpretive engagement. Through a comparative analysis using the Affective Communal Reading Framework, we have shown that the nested doll structure of *Cloud Atlas* and the astrologically-scaled structure of *The Luminaries* both function to defamiliarize readers' habitual reading processes and trigger active gap-filling, but they do so in distinct ways and with distinct effects on interpretive communities.

Mitchell (2004) employs a radical nesting of stories that at first disrupts the reader's sense of coherence, provoking feelings of confusion and curiosity that propel the reader to search for connections. As the reader progresses, these connections emerge through affective highlights, motifs, echoed narratives, and a mounting emotional resonance that encourage the reader to weave the disparate tales into a holistic vision of interdependence and moral progression. Catton (2013), in *The Luminaries*, presents a different yet parallel case. Her astrologically structured narrative defamiliarizes linear storytelling by imposing a cosmic order onto human affairs, thereby generating an initial sense of puzzle and wonder. Readers are tasked with filling gaps in a mystery plot while simultaneously deciphering an underlying astrological code. Those who accept the challenge, often with the aid of communal discourse such as readers' guides or online discussions, find that the novel delivers both the satisfactions of a Victorian mystery and the additional reward of a grand design revealed. Emotions of suspense, surprise, and intellectual thrill accompany the reading process, and in the end, a sense of elegant closure emerges as the seemingly chaotic threads of fate are shown to have been orchestrated by the novel's structural 'stars.' Interpretive communities (literary critics, neo-Victorian scholars, and enthusiastic readers) have debated and largely appreciated the astrological architecture as a meaning-making machine: it amplifies themes of determinism, chance, and the human yearning to find order in coincidence (Scheckter, 2017; Mullan, 2014). At the same time, the split reception, some finding the structure enriching, others alienating, underscores the role of community norms in shaping the reading experience. The ACRF analysis of *The Luminaries* highlights that when readers approach the novel with the communal understanding that its unusual form is intentional and significant, they are more likely to engage

emotionally with its patterns and complete its intended meaning: a commentary on how narrative (like astrology) can impose meaning on the flux of reality, and how we collaborate in interpreting our world's mysteries. Readers from communities less versed in metafictional or structural play may miss or dismiss that layer, resulting in less emotional and interpretive payoff. The novel's full aesthetic significance, as a simultaneously earnest and tongue-in-cheek exploration of whether lives are predestined or self-authored, emerges most clearly in the space of communal reading, where diverse pieces of the puzzle (each reader's insight or feeling) are shared to form a more complete picture.

In bringing these two case studies together, we find strong support for the central proposition of the Affective Communal Reading Framework: that readers' emotions and communal norms cooperatively complete a text's moral and aesthetic significance. Neither *Cloud Atlas* nor *The Luminaries* yields all its treasures to a reader approaching in isolation or purely analytically. It is through the reader's affective investment – the sense of wonder at Mitchell's interlocking destinies, the curiosity and eventual satisfaction at Catton's clockwork plotting – that the impetus to interpret deeply is born. And it is through the frameworks provided by interpretive communities, the shared recognition that these novels are doing something extraordinary, and how to talk about it, that individual interpretations coalesce into recognized meanings. In other words, feeling without interpretation remains inchoate (awe without understanding), while interpretation without feeling may miss the point (analysis without empathy). It is the fusion of the two, in a social context, that allows these works to resonate as greatly as they do.

In conclusion, *Cloud Atlas* and *The Luminaries* show two paths by which narrative architecture can shape reader response: one *nested and iterative*, fostering a gradual emotional synthesis across disparate stories, and one *schematized and encyclopedic*, inviting a cognitive-emotional decoding of an elaborate design. Both achieve their fullest impact through the ACRF's dual channels of affect and community. As readers, when we allow a novel's form to surprise and move us, and when we engage with fellow readers in interpreting those surprises and feelings, the study partake in what Iser (1978) called the 'dynamic happening' of literary meaning. These two novels keep reminding us that a text's significance is not just on the page; it blooms in the interplay between the stirring of our hearts and the meeting of our minds.

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Breaking the Barrier: Reinterpreting Dalit Autobiographical Narratives from Postcolonial Perspective

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Abstract—Dalit autobiographical literature has emerged as a powerful genre for contesting the hegemonic narratives of caste, class, and identity in postcolonial India. This paper re-interprets key Dalit autobiographies through a postcolonial lens, exploring how these narratives confront the lingering effects of colonialism and Brahmanical patriarchy. While postcolonial theory has largely focused on colonial subjugation, this study extends its boundaries to analyze the internal colonization of Dalits within the Indian socio-political framework. Texts such as Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan*, Bama's *Karukku*, and Sharan Kumar Limbale's *The Outcaste* (Akkarmashi) are examined as testaments of resistance, reclaiming agency, dignity, and cultural voice. These texts not only narrate individual trauma but also function as collective chronicles of social injustice, disrupting sanitized narratives of Indian nationalism. The article underscores the need to integrate Dalit perspectives into postcolonial discourse, emphasizing intersectionality and the politics of representation.



Keywords— Dalit autobiography, postcolonialism, resistance, identity, subaltern, marginality

I. INTRODUCTION

We will build the organization of workers, dalits, landless, poor peasants through all city factories, in all villages. We will hit back against all injustice perpetrated on Dalits. We will well and truly destroy the caste and varna system that thrives on the people's misery, which exploits the people, and liberate the dalits (*Dalit Panthers Manifesto* 1973 xi)

Prakash Louis in his book *Political Sociology of Dalit Assertion* says that the deeply rooted inequality had not only existed in the traditional Indian social structure but it was also formalized and institutionalized through the caste system based on which, the lower castes, including the Dalits, were exploited, oppressed, marginalized and considered "impure" (42-43). Literature has always been considered as a crucial avenue to raise the consciousness of the marginalized section of the society. One such example is the Dalit literature which echoes the age-old existence of despair and oppression inflicted on the Dalit who are the stigmatized section of the society. Therefore,

the focus of the Dalit literature has been the liberation of the Dalits and abolition of the caste system. The Dalits who remain ostracized from the mainstream society because of being classified as untouchable, belong to the lowest ladder of the social hegemony in India representing the Indian version of the subalterns. The word subaltern was first used by the Italian Marxist socialist Antonio Gramsci who in his work *Prison Notebooks*, published in 1971, declares that the subalterns were the subjected untouchables of the society on whom the dominant power exerted its hegemonic influence for centuries (145). Edward Said, a renowned scholar and cultural critic in his book *Orientalism* (1978) conceptually talks about the impacts of colonialism and imperialism addressing the oppressed subalterns by the white-men resulting in the domination of the other (25). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak an Indian scholar, feminist critic and literary theorist also argues in her famous essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* on the notion of subaltern, and the vast restriction, subjugation and prohibition which they countered in the society. Dalit literature too emerged as a protest literature

to delineate all the inhuman humiliations, to reveal the caste prejudices prevalent in the society, to inculcate a new cultural and social consciousness and to establish a separate identity of their own. The young Dalit writers Namdeo Dhasal, Arjun Dangle, and J. V. Pawar, and the pioneer of Dalit literature, Baburao Bagul, who formed 'Dalit Panthers' in 1972 admitted that the scattered utterances of their discontent needed a more militant ventilation. In their manifesto they attempted to exhibit their literary mission, and establish their social identity and political concerns. In the years following the explosive debut of the Dalit Panthers, autobiography became the most effective expression of Dalit empowerment.

In the tapestry of Indian literary tradition, Dalit autobiographical literature has emerged as a potent form of resistance and reclamation. In the canon of Indian literature, the voice of the Dalit has historically been marginalized, silenced, or misrepresented. Dominant caste narratives have long controlled the modes of literary production, historiography, and cultural representation, systematically excluding Dalit experiences and perspectives. However, the rise of Dalit autobiographical narratives from the late twentieth century onwards has redefined this literary landscape. These narratives are not merely personal recollections; they serve as powerful instruments of socio-political resistance. This essay explores the transformative journey from imposed silence to vocal resistance within Dalit autobiographical writing, reinterpreting these texts as acts of reclaiming agency, memory, and identity.

In a postcolonial nation where freedom from colonial rule did not equate to social emancipation for all, Dalit narratives have worked as counter-discourses to dominant histories. Postcolonialism, as a theoretical framework, interrogates colonial domination and its afterlives, yet it often neglects the structural inequalities—like caste—that persist within the so-called "postcolonial" state. Dalit autobiographies, when re-read through postcolonial perspectives, illuminate the internal colonization perpetrated through caste hierarchies and Brahmanical ideologies, thereby challenging the completeness of Indian independence. This paper reinterprets select Dalit autobiographies—namely *Joothan* by Omprakash Valmiki, *Karukku* by Bama, and *The Outcaste (Akkarmashi)* by Sharan Kumar Limbale—as sites of postcolonial contestation. These narratives do not merely recount the personal sufferings of Dalits but unveil the systemic and inherited violence embedded in the Indian social fabric. In doing so, they critique the exclusionary nature of nationalist and literary canons and reconstruct a history from the margins.

II. POSTCOLONIALISM AND THE DALIT EXPERIENCE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To understand Dalit autobiographies as acts of resistance, it is crucial to frame them within theories of subalternity, voice, and self-representation. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's question "Can the Subaltern Speak?" becomes relevant here, as it foregrounds the historical silencing of marginalized voices. Dalit autobiographies challenge this silence by articulating lived experiences that were previously invisible or suppressed. These narratives do not merely insert Dalit voices into existing literary structures; rather, they often dismantle and reconstruct those very structures, creating new literary forms and languages of dissent. The act of writing itself is a radical one for Dalit authors. As Sharmila Rege notes in *Writing Caste/Writing Gender*, Dalit autobiographies function as testimonios—texts that bear witness to systemic violence and oppression, while simultaneously asserting the author's dignity and humanity (Rege 12). The testimonial form aligns with global traditions of resistance literature, including African-American slave narratives and Latin American testimonio, situating Dalit literature within a broader transnational framework of subaltern resistance.

Postcolonial theory primarily critiques European imperialism, its cultural ramifications, and its continuation in the neocolonial world. Thinkers such as Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Homi K. Bhabha have foregrounded the significance of hybridity, mimicry, and subalternity. However, their frameworks, often centered on race and colonial binaries, inadequately address the specificity of caste as a socio-historical construct in South Asia. Spivak's question, "Can the subaltern speak?" is particularly relevant when applied to Dalit subjectivities. In the Indian context, Dalits represent the subaltern par excellence, having been denied voice, history, and representation for centuries (Spivak 66). Dalit autobiographies, however, constitute a direct response to this silencing. These texts speak with urgency and authenticity, asserting the right to narrate one's history and identity. Gopal Guru argues that Dalit narratives must not be subsumed under elite academic discourse but must be understood as epistemologies in their own right (Guru 36). Therefore, a postcolonial reading of Dalit texts must move beyond abstract theorizing and engage with the embodied realities of caste, oppression, and survival.

Breaking the Silence: The Rise of Dalit Autobiographies

Before the emergence of Dalit autobiographical narratives, mainstream Indian literature—especially in regional languages—largely failed to represent Dalit

experiences with authenticity. When Dalits were depicted, it was often through the lens of pity, caricature, or tokenism. The dominant-caste writers controlled both the means of production and the literary themes, which left little room for authentic Dalit self-representation. The absence of Dalit voices was not simply a matter of omission but a deliberate act of epistemic violence. This erasure maintained the social order by denying Dalits the right to narrate their own lives. In this sense, silence functioned as both a symptom and a tool of oppression. The publication of autobiographies like Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* (1997), Baburao Bagul's *When I Hid My Caste*, and Sharan Kumar Limbale's *Akkarmashi* (The Outcaste, 2003) marked a turning point. These texts did not just share personal stories; they became declarations of resistance against caste-based oppression.

In *Joothan*, Valmiki recounts the indignity of being denied education and basic human dignity because of his caste. The title itself—referring to the leftover scraps given to Dalits—becomes a metaphor for the social status imposed on Dalits in Indian society. His writing dismantles the sanitized narratives of a casteless, inclusive India, exposing the brutal realities of caste discrimination. Sharan Kumar Limbale's *Akkarmashi* similarly recounts his experience as an "illegitimate" child born of an upper-caste father and a lower-caste mother, symbolizing the complex intersections of caste, class, and gender. The text challenges the dominant narratives of identity and belonging, offering a fragmented, polyphonic self that resists easy categorization.

Narrative Strategies as Resistance

Dalit autobiographies differ significantly in form and style from traditional Indian autobiographies. The conventional autobiography, often written by elite men, focuses on personal achievement and individualism. In contrast, Dalit autobiographies are collective in nature, rooted in the community's struggle and suffering. Many Dalit autobiographers consciously reject literary embellishments and aestheticism. Their language is raw, direct, and unflinching, often drawing from oral traditions, folk idioms, and regional dialects. This stylistic choice is political—it resists the aesthetic standards imposed by upper-caste literati and reclaims the legitimacy of Dalit linguistic expression. For example, Bama's *Karukku* (1992), one of the first Dalit autobiographies by a Tamil Christian woman, uses a conversational tone and colloquial Tamil to narrate her journey from a convent to activism. Her use of the word "karukku," which refers to the serrated edges of palm leaves and metaphorically to a wounded yet resilient identity, embodies both suffering and strength.

Dalit women's autobiographies add a crucial layer to this narrative of resistance. They confront not only caste but also gender and patriarchy, both within and outside the Dalit community. Texts such as Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life* and Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* articulate what Rege calls the "double burden" of being Dalit and female. In *The Prisons We Broke*, Kamble offers a rare glimpse into the lives of Dalit women in rural Maharashtra, highlighting both systemic oppression and internalized patriarchy. Her narration is unapologetic, often confrontational, and deeply rooted in collective memory. By documenting rituals, folk practices, and everyday violence, she reclaims Dalit women's histories from oblivion. Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life* interlaces personal memories with socio-political commentary, weaving a narrative that is as much about personal transformation as it is about community evolution. Her writing resists the binaries of private/public and personal/political, asserting that the two are inextricably linked in the lives of Dalit women.

Joothan by Omprakash Valmiki: The Politics of Purity and Pollution

Valmiki's *Joothan* is a searing autobiographical account of growing up in a Dalit family in Uttar Pradesh. The title itself—"joothan," meaning leftover food—encapsulates the dehumanizing conditions under which Dalits were expected to survive. The text critiques the Hindu caste order which, despite India's political independence, continued to enslave Dalits socially and spiritually. Valmiki's experiences at school, where he was made to sit separately and clean the premises, mirror colonial structures of othering and subjugation. He writes, "I had to sit away from the others in the class, on the floor. The mat on which the rest of the class sat was out of bounds for me" (Valmiki 5). This exclusion parallels the racial segregation of colonial rule, indicating that caste functions as an internal colonizer. Furthermore, the memoir debunks the myth of post-independence progress. Valmiki's struggle to access education and employment reflects the state's failure to dismantle Brahmanical structures. Postcolonial theorists have often celebrated the hybrid identities emerging from colonial encounters; Valmiki's narrative, however, foregrounds purity-pollution dichotomies that remain deeply entrenched and non-negotiable in casteist India.

Karukku by Bama: Gender, Caste, and Religious Hypocrisy

Bama's *Karukku* is an intersectional text that examines caste from the dual lens of gender and religion. A Dalit Christian woman from Tamil Nadu, Bama recounts her awakening to caste discrimination both within

her village and inside the Christian Church. Her disillusionment with religious institutions, which perpetuated rather than eradicated caste, forms a central critique of postcolonial India's moral duplicity. The autobiography challenges the glorified image of Christianity as an egalitarian faith introduced by colonial missionaries. Bama reveals that Dalits, even after conversion, remain segregated within churches and schools. "Even in our church, we were given a separate place to sit," she writes (Bama 18). This reveals how colonial legacies of religious conversion failed to translate into social liberation. Postcolonial discourse often valorizes hybridity as a form of resistance; however, Bama's experience exposes hybridity as a trap for Dalits who convert but remain subjugated. Her narrative deconstructs the myth of "emancipatory modernity" promised by both colonialism and postcolonial nationalism. As a woman, Bama also critiques the patriarchal norms within Dalit communities themselves, making *Karukku* a radical text that interrogates both external and internal systems of oppression.

***The Outcaste (Akkarmashi)* by Sharan Kumar Limbale: Reclaiming Dalit Aesthetics**

Limbale's *The Outcaste* is a compelling narrative of identity fragmentation. Born from an inter-caste relationship between a Dalit woman and a dominant caste landlord, Limbale's life is marked by illegitimacy and rejection. The term "akkarmashi," meaning outcaste, symbolizes the liminal and subordinate position of Dalits within the nation-state. Limbale's text is not only a personal narrative but also a political manifesto. He asserts, "My writing is not literature. It is a weapon. It is the history of my community" (Limbale 4). This declaration marks a departure from aestheticized literature towards a functional, activist literature. In postcolonial studies, this aligns with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's call for a decolonized and people-oriented literature. Limbale also critiques the tokenism of caste representation in upper-caste literary circles. The very act of writing, for him, becomes an act of reclamation—of both voice and visibility. His concept of "Dalit aesthetics" challenges Brahmanical canons that marginalize the experiences of the oppressed. By giving literary form to pain and humiliation, Limbale extends the boundaries of postcolonial literature to include the interior landscapes of caste trauma.

Towards a Postcolonial Dalit Discourse

These autobiographies reveal that the project of Indian nationalism and the postcolonial state has failed to deliver justice to its most marginalized citizens. Dalit autobiographies expose the paradox of a postcolonial

nation that remains caste-colonized. They reframe the meaning of freedom—not as political sovereignty from foreign rule, but as social liberation from internal hierarchies. While scholars like Partha Chatterjee have critiqued the limits of Western liberalism in postcolonial contexts, Dalit writers go further by critiquing the Indian state itself as a Brahmanical institution. These texts demand a re-writing of history, a re-imagining of nationhood, and a decolonization of literature itself. A re-reading of Dalit autobiographical literature from a postcolonial perspective thus necessitates a methodological shift—toward intersectionality, toward subaltern agency, and toward literary activism. These narratives are not mere testimonials; they are insurgent texts that reclaim the right to self-definition, challenging both colonial and casteist regimes.

Autobiography as Collective Testimony

While these narratives are autobiographical, they are rarely individualistic. They serve as collective testimonies that speak for a larger community silenced by centuries of oppression. The "I" in these texts often morphs into a "we," underscoring the communal nature of Dalit suffering and resilience. This collective dimension is particularly evident in the use of communal rituals, oral traditions, and shared experiences of violence and resistance. By rooting personal experience within collective memory, Dalit autobiographies break the boundaries of genre, becoming ethnographies, political manifestos, and social commentaries all at once.

III. CONCLUSION

Dalit autobiographical narratives have resonated beyond the Indian context, finding parallels in African-American slave narratives, Indigenous life writing, and other forms of subaltern expression. Works like Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life* or Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* echo similar themes of dehumanization, resistance, and self-fashioning. The journey from silence to resistance in Dalit autobiographical narratives marks a profound shift in the politics of representation, memory, and identity. These texts do not merely fill a void in Indian literature; they redefine the contours of literary discourse itself. By asserting their right to speak, remember, and narrate, Dalit writers transform the very act of writing into a tool of liberation. Their stories demand to be read not as exceptions or isolated instances, but as urgent calls to dismantle caste hierarchies and reconstruct a more equitable society. In reclaiming their voice, Dalit autobiographers compel the reader to confront uncomfortable truths and to imagine a world where

dignity, justice, and equality are not privileges but rights. Dalit autobiographical literature is an indispensable archive of resistance and assertion in postcolonial India. Texts like *Joothan*, *Karukku*, and *The Outcaste* not only document personal trauma but also confront the systemic violence of caste, complicating the dominant narratives of postcolonial liberation. Through the lens of postcolonialism, these works re-inscribe history from the vantage point of the oppressed and demand recognition within the national imaginary. A postcolonial re-reading of Dalit autobiographies compels scholars and readers alike to confront the unfinished business of decolonization—wherein freedom must be both external and internal, political and social, national and individual. In this way, Dalit autobiographical literature does not simply supplement postcolonial studies; it transforms it.

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Designing ELT Syllabi for Industry-Ready Professionals

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Abstract— In an era of rapid technological disruption, global competition, and evolving workplace expectations, higher education institutions must revise and redesign curricula to produce industry-ready graduates. This paper argues that up skilling, workplace immersion, and a growth mindset are fundamental to bridging the academia–industry gap. The empirical study is based on a questionnaire administered to corporate heads, senior managers, and industry professionals. The findings reveal that digital communication etiquette, technical writing proficiency, persuasive presentation skills, active listening, workplace responsiveness, crisis communication, and conflict resolution abilities are among the most demanded competencies. The study proposes a collaborative model involving curriculum co-design, simulation labs, real-world documentation, industry mentorship, and experiential learning. It highlights existing challenges such as limited resources, inconsistent industry engagement, and slow curriculum revisions. The recommendations include structured collaboration frameworks, periodic industry mentoring followed by student’s assessment and feedback, increased funding, exposure of industrial practices for faculty. The paper concludes that integrating authentic workplace communication tasks into ELT syllabi can significantly enhance employability, industry readiness, and professional behaviour among learners.



Keywords— Industry-ready professionals, ELT curriculum, up skilling, curriculum co-design, simulation labs, employability skills, workplace communication.

I. INTRODUCTION

India’s ascent as a global technological and economic force underscores the urgent need for a robust academia–industry partnership. To develop a skilled and industry-ready workforce, higher education institutions must integrate authentic workplace communication practices into English Language Teaching (ELT). Traditional English instruction—limited to grammar, literary texts, or isolated communication exercises—fails to address real-world expectations.

Recent research supports this shift.

- Tushar (2023) emphasizes that 21st-century employability relies on communication, teamwork, critical thinking, and digital literacy, advocating for industry-integrated curricula.
- A 2025 systematic review on communication in ESP and vocational education confirms that digital tasks—virtual meetings, e-portfolios, and

workplace simulations—enhance workplace readiness.

- Studies published in MDPI (2025) and World Journal of English Language (2025) highlights that continuous professional development (CPD), authentic materials, and industry input significantly improve ESP/ELT outcomes.
- Conceptual papers from 2023 (Granthaalayah, ShodhKosh) also emphasize aligning English curricula with employer expectations, short internships, and industry mentors.

Although engineering and management students possess strong technical abilities, their inability to express ideas concisely and persuasively often becomes a barrier during presentations, interviews, and corporate discussions. As organizations increasingly prioritize communication proficiency, academic institutions must adapt their ELT syllabi to reflect real workplace practices.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent scholarship in ELT, ESP, and workplace communication highlights several recurring themes:

2.1 Employability and Workplace Communication

Studies consistently affirm that communication is the most valued employability skill (Tushar, 2023). Employers expect graduates to demonstrate clarity, conciseness, presentation skills, and digital etiquette.

2.2 Industry-Aligned ELT Materials

Research by Erkir (2024/2025) indicates that Business English courses aligned with authentic corporate materials—emails, reports, meeting minutes—significantly improve employability.

2.3 Digital and New-Media Competence

Vocational studies (2025) highlight that new-media-enabled tasks—simulated meetings, recorded presentations, e-portfolios—enhance confidence, linguistic accuracy, and professional readiness.

2.4 Teacher Professional Development

MDPI (2025) emphasizes that CPD programs co-designed with industry mentors equip teachers to deliver workplace communication more effectively.

2.5 Academia–Industry Collaboration

Studies recommend curriculum co-design, periodic industry feedback, and exposure to real workplace documentation (audit reports, SOPs, incident logs) to strengthen ELT programs.

Collectively, research suggests that industry-integrated ELT curricula produce more confident, job-ready, and professionally competent graduates.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a descriptive research design using a structured questionnaire administered to:

- Corporate heads
- HR managers
- Senior engineers
- Project managers
- Industry trainers

A total of 110 responses were collected from various sectors including manufacturing, IT/ITES, public sector undertakings, and private business houses. Quantitative and qualitative feedback was analyzed to identify key communication competencies expected from fresh graduates.

IV. FINDINGS

The analysis highlights several critical competencies demanded by employers:

4.1 Key Communication Skills Required

- Digital communication etiquette
- Technical writing proficiency (reports, SOPs, MOMs)
- Presentation and persuasion abilities
- Listening skills and responsiveness
- Crisis communication and conflict resolution
- Professional email writing
- Workplace interaction etiquette

4.2 Preferred ELT Interventions

Employers strongly endorsed:

- Boot camps facilitated by industry professionals
- Simulation-based activities (virtual meetings, on boarding tasks)
- Proper drafting and editing of official documents (MoUs, emails, logs)
- Effective and persuasive presentations
- Exposure to real incidents, troubleshooting reports, and communication failures
- Strong ethico-moral behavior and professional skills

4.3 Importance of Authentic Documentation

Employers noted syllabi incorporating:

- Project overview, timely completion and assessments are integral.
- Professional behaviour and discipline must be taught under soft skills like :adherence to guidelines, precision, responsiveness, these are vital traits for which employees look in fresh recruits.
- Hands on reports like Failure analysis, feasibility, audit and Troubleshooting reports, must be well practiced.
- Preparing Maintenance SOPs, industry manuals for better understanding of the modus operandi of the company.
- Incident logs and understanding Quality control standards should be a must component.
- On sight exposure and interaction with officials greatly enhance students' understanding of corporate communication.

V. DISCUSSION

Technological advancements—AI, IoT, automation, data analytics—are transforming workplace expectations. Employers expect graduates who can adapt quickly, communicate effectively, and act professionally. Without up skilling, students are at a risk of being unaware about industrial ethics and standard practices and their textual knowledge become obsolete soon after entering the job market.

5.1 Communication as a Professional Necessity

A single ambiguous instruction in a maintenance manual or safety protocol can lead to operational failures. Therefore, communication accuracy is not merely a linguistic requirement but a safety and performance imperative.

5.2 Simulation-Based Learning for ELT

Simulation labs can integrate:

- Virtual corporate meetings
- Remote collaboration platforms
- Technical report drafting
- Client complaint handling
- Cross-cultural negotiation
- Budgeting presentations
- Crisis communication drills
- Fire and safety and contingency service briefings.

These activities refine workplace behavior, analytical thinking, and interpersonal skills.

5.3 Industrial Data as Course Material

Using real industrial data enables students to:

- Understand workplace expectations
- Learn technical vocabulary naturally
- Develop clarity and accuracy
- Interpret and draft official documents
- Strengthen decision-making and analytical reasoning

5.4 Behavioural and Soft Skills through Industry Interaction

Soft skills such as punctuality, etiquette, empathy, adaptability, and teamwork cannot be learned from textbooks. They develop through repeated interaction with industry mentors during:

- Guest lectures
- Internships

- Mentorship programs
- Workshops
- Live projects

VI. INCORPORATING INDUSTRY INSIGHTS INTO ELT SYLLABI

To systematically integrate real-world insights, the paper proposes establishing a Communication Skills Advisory Board to executing an effective industry–academia partnership along with a structured mechanism that aligns curriculum, training, and real-world expectations. The entire model can be divided into five stages: planning, partnership, integration, execution, and evaluation.

1. Strategic Planning and Need Identification

- Conduct a joint needs assessment between industry and the academic institution.
- Identify skill gaps, emerging technologies, behavioral expectations, and workplace competencies required in the sector.
- Align program outcomes with industry requirements such as technical skills, communication, teamwork, and problem-solving.

2. Building Strong Partnerships

- Form formal MoUs with companies that are committed to talent development.
- Create an Industry Advisory Board with professionals, HR leaders, and domain experts.
- Assign faculty coordinators and industry mentors for seamless communication.
- The board may comprise of : Engineers and managers, Supervisors and technicians, Academicians and entrepreneurs, Legal and defence professionals, CEOs, HR trainers, and industry leaders, Freelancers and retired professionals.

3. Curriculum Integration and Co-Design

- Co-develop modules with industry (technical modules, communication skills, digital tools, project management, and workplace behaviour).
- Embed industry certifications, job-oriented courses, and domain-specific workshops.
- Align teaching outcomes with real industry cases, standards, and documentation formats.
- Introduce blended learning: classroom + practical labs + online modules.

4. Hands-On Exposure and Real-World Learning

- Provide live projects, internships, industrial visits, and problem-based challenges.
- Conduct master classes, guest lectures, technical demonstrations, and tools-based training by industry experts.
- Organize mentorship programs where professionals guide students on projects, communication, attitude, and professionalism.
- Establish on-campus labs or Centres of Excellence with industry partners for continuous skill training.

5. Faculty Development and Capacity Building

- Train faculty through industry immersion programs, company visits, and technology workshops.
- Encourage joint research, consultancy, publications, and innovation challenges.
- Align faculty's teaching content with updated industry standards.

6. Continuous Evaluation and Feedback

- Collect feedback from industry mentors on student performance, communication, discipline, teamwork, and technical understanding.
- Regularly revise curriculum based on market trends, new technologies, and employer expectations.
- Use assessment tools such as presentations, industry-reviewed assignments, case studies, and workplace simulation tasks.

7. Outcome Mapping and Placement Integration

- Track whether students demonstrate improved employability skills.
- Map outcomes to placement data, employer satisfaction scores, and internship-to-job conversion rates. Celebrate success stories, publish impact reports, and strengthen partnerships

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Strengthening Academia–Industry Collaboration

- Establish MoUs for curriculum co-design
- Conduct quarterly industry review meetings
- Organize periodic guest lectures
- Review ELT syllabi every semester

- Recommend outcome-based learning
- Suggest AI-driven language tools
- Facilitate internships focusing on communication
- Integrate simulations and role plays

7.2 Enhancing ELT Pedagogy

- Use authentic corporate documents
- Introduce industry-aligned assessments
- Provide case studies, MOUs and Minutes of meetings, resolutions, sustainability, vigilance awareness quizzes and pledges, corporate templates and other official communication drafts etc as a reference resource or material.

7.3 Faculty Exposure and Training

- Industry immersion programs
- Workshops on technical communication
- Joint research with corporate mentors

VIII. CONCLUSION

Employers today view fresher as enthusiastic learners who must possess essential professional skills such as clear communication, teamwork, discipline, problem-solving ability, learning agility, digital literacy, and a positive attitude. While they do not expect deep experience, they do look for fresher who can express ideas confidently, adapt quickly to new environments, work collaboratively across diverse teams, and demonstrate strong work ethics and responsibility. These skills can be nurtured through structured communication training, industry-linked projects, behavioural workshops, digital-skills enhancement, and continuous mentoring. Corporate leaders and industry mentors play a crucial role in this process by providing real-world insights, guiding students through practical problem-solving, offering feedback on workplace behaviour, and exposing them to current industry expectations. Their involvement bridges the gap between academic learning and professional readiness, helping fresher evolve into competent, confident, and industry-aware professionals. The increasing demand for workplace-ready professionals places greater responsibility on academic institutions to redesign ELT curricula that reflect authentic industry practices. The shift from theoretical language teaching to experiential, simulation-driven, and industry-informed communication training is essential. By institutionalizing advisory boards, internships, real-world documentation, and corporate simulations, institutions can produce graduates who are:

- Technically proficient

- Linguistically agile
- Behaviourally mature
- Professionally confident

Such graduates are better equipped to thrive in fast-paced, technology-driven workplaces and contribute meaningfully to organizational growth. ELT classrooms—once peripheral to engineering and management education—can become dynamic laboratories where future professionals are nurtured, refined, and prepared for real-world success.

Industry-academia programs are executed through a coordinated framework that includes need identification, partnership building, joint curriculum design, hands-on learning, continuous mentoring, faculty development, and outcome evaluation. Corporate mentors play a vital role by sharing real-time insights, guiding students through live projects, nurturing professional skills, and ensuring that graduates are workplace-ready. Hough all the above discussed pointer can be well assimilate in syllabi, but limitation to such liberal thought is companies may not be willing to share their technical drafts, reports or manuals with academicians due to confidentiality protocols of not sharing companies SOPs and modus-operandi in an open forum, and herein lies the scope of future research, that Govt. organizations or PSUs with Govt. Stake are liable to facilitate academics under CSR projects. So even that small sharing of official documents or technical drafts along with the face to face interaction with industry professional or workshops can be of immense help for budding engineers and Managers to adopt professional ways and behavior of doing things.

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Geography as Gendered Space: An Analysis of Female Perspectives in *The Country of the Pointed Firs*

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Abstract— Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* redefines literary realism through a distinctly female perspective, transforming the geographical space of Dunnet Landing into a vessel for women's experiences and memories. Through the lens of an unnamed female narrator, Jewett challenges the male-dominated realist tradition by intertwining landscape with female consciousness, intimacy, and community. The novel emphasizes women's resilience and wisdom, particularly through characters like Almira Todd, who embody a deep connection to nature and serve as emotional and cultural pillars of their rural society. Male characters are marginalized, further highlighting women's central roles in sustaining community life. Jewett blends detailed realism with poetic romanticism, exploring themes of memory, solitude, and human connection. Her narrative strategy expands the boundaries of realism by prioritizing inner emotional landscapes and the symbiotic relationship between people and place, offering a profound critique of gender and narrative authority while affirming the enduring power of female-centered storytelling.



Keywords— Sarah Orne Jewett; *The Country of the Pointed Firs*; geography; gender

Sarah Orne Jewett was a significant writer in late 19th-century American literature, renowned for her detailed observations of rural New England life, particularly through the lens of women's perspectives. Her works often explore themes of identity, place, and community, with *The Country of the Pointed Firs and Other Stories* being one of her most representative works.

One of the central themes of this novel is the transformation of Dunnet Landing's geographical space into a vessel for female experience and memory through the use of a female first-person narrative. Through the

perspective of the female narrator, Jewett imbues the town's landscape with a unique sense of intimacy and belonging. This is not only a profound expression of female experience but also a challenge to the male-dominated literary realism tradition of the late 19th century. Through this narrative strategy, Jewett tightly links the geographical landscape of Dunnet Landing with the emotional and cultural experiences of women, providing a powerful critique of gender and narrative authority, and breaking away from the male-dominated literary tradition.

The narrator's dual identity as both an outsider and a

temporary member of the community reflects Jewett's own dual life as a Boston intellectual and a carrier of Maine nostalgia. The narrator's integration into Dunnet Landing is always mediated through the women of the community. "Later, there was only one fault to find with this choice of a summer lodging-place, and that was its complete lack of seclusion" (Jewett 5). Among them, Mrs. Todd's wisdom and narrative become the key for the narrator to understand the land. The series of interpersonal relationships the narrator develops within the community revolves around Mrs. Todd. Through Mrs. Todd, the narrator becomes integrated into the community, but she is also in search of her own space (the schoolhouse) of solitude. In this way, she exists both outside and within the community, gaining a perspective that is at once distanced yet intimate.

As the narrative progresses, the descriptions of the landscape gradually merge with the female characters, creating a seamless connection between environment and identity (Folsom 70). Initially, the geographical descriptions are restrained, but they gradually take on the narrative rhythm of the female characters. This shift in style reinforces Jewett's central argument: geographical descriptions are never neutral; they are always shaped by the narrator's gender perspective. In the novel, the depiction of the landscape is intricately connected to gendered perspectives (Hild 117). For instance, when the narrator describes the coastal town of Dunnet Landing, the rocky shore, dark forests, and houses nestled against the cliffs are anthropomorphized as "securely wedged and tree-nailed," while the high windows are likened to "knowing eyes that watched the harbor." This personification not only gives the environment a female-like gaze and sense of guardianship but also suggests the intimate connection between female characters, like Mrs. Todd, and nature---her herb garden is described as "the scent of sweetbriar, lemon balm, mint, and wormwood came in with the sea breeze," as if nature itself were expressing its healing power through her hands.

Furthermore, the depiction of Green Island through the eyes of Mrs. Todd's mother, an elderly yet resilient woman,

also ties the female experience to the natural world. "A long time before we landed at Green Island we could see the small white house, standing high like a beacon, where Mrs. Todd was born and where her mother lived, on a green slope above the water, with dark spruce woods still higher" (Jewett 30). This portrayal of women intertwined with home and nature highlights the central role of women as a bridge between nature and culture.

On Joanna's secluded Shell-heap Island, the desolate rocks, sparse vegetation, and solitary waves mirror her inner world, evoking a deep resonance with the narrator. "There was the world, and here was she with eternity well begun. In the life of each of us, I said to myself, there is a place remote and islanded, and given to endless regret or secret happiness; we are each the uncompanioned hermit and recluse of an hour or a day; we understand our fellows of the cell to whatever age of history they may belong" (Jewett 71). Joanna's choice---to live away from society and alone with nature---is imbued with a tragic sense of the sublime, "There was something medieval in the behavior of poor Joanna Todd under a disappointment of the heart. (Jewett 60)" Other female characters, like Mrs. Todd, further emphasize their understanding and sympathy for Joanna, strengthening the unique female recognition of nature and solitude.

This blending of home and nature is especially evident in the scenes of female community gatherings. In the famous "Bowden Family Union" chapter, Jewett places the social activities of a group of women in the expansive natural environment of the island. "The sky, the sea, have watched poor humanity at its rites so long; we were no more a New England family celebrating its own existence and simple progress" (Jewett 87). This description not only naturalizes human social activities but also implies that the female community itself is an organic part of this landscape. Through careful spatial arrangement, Jewett allows the reader to see that these women's memories, wisdom, and emotions are deeply rooted in the land, like the wild grass growing on the island. These descriptions indicate that the

landscape in the novel is not merely a backdrop but an extension of women's lives, emotions, and power. Nature is imbued with feminine spirituality, and the female characters use nature to define and connect with themselves.

Jewett's exceptional character development is beyond dispute. In fact, the most remarkable aspect of her works lies in her emotionally rich and profound depictions of women living in poverty. She once told Willa Cather that her mind was filled with the image of those lovely old houses and elderly women (Cary 203), and whenever these two things crossed her mind, she knew another story would emerge. Many of the female characters she portrays are older women. This is not only because these older women inherit and maintain past values but also because, in regions like Maine, most young people, especially men, have left the countryside. It should be noted that when the rapid development of capitalist industrial economies caused young people, especially men, to leave their hometowns and flock to the cities, it was women who stayed behind to shoulder the burdens of life, facing poverty, decay, and hardship. As American feminist critic Jane Tompkins pointed out, escape is the one lifestyle that female literature does not recommend to its readers (175). In contrast to the classic works of 19th-century male writers, where protagonists often rebel by escaping from civilized society, Jewett's work focuses on a group of women who persist in living in rural towns that have already lost their economic vitality (Jin 87). Jewett portrays women as the pillars of life. The female characters she creates actually embody certain qualities typically associated with men. However, Jewett emphasizes the superiority of female qualities, highlighting women's irreplaceable role in both the family and society. The themes of Jewett's works are not marriage and childbirth, nor are they the struggles of young women fighting for personal liberation. What she strives to portray are women who survive with resilience in adversity, demonstrating endurance. At the same time, she excels at depicting women's delicate emotions and rich spiritual worlds, which gives her works immense artistic power.

In the portrayal of women in this novel, the characters who have passed their prime years radiate a vitality that rivals youth, and Almira Todd is a captivating example of this. A woman who embodies independence, sharp intelligence, and wisdom, she earns her living by collecting herbs, tending her garden, and renting out rooms. Not only is she an indispensable figure in the village, but her warm friendliness and witty remarks also win her the affection of everyone (Chen 95). She often collaborates with the village doctor to provide medical care for the locals. As the story unfolds, readers gradually realize that this seemingly ordinary widow is far from destitute. Her resilient will, profound intellect, and skillful hands have long held her destiny firmly in her grasp. What is especially noteworthy is that the admirable qualities she possesses resonate deeply with the laws of nature. Jewett cleverly portrays her as a personification of Mother Earth, perfectly embodying the expansive heart and all-encompassing wisdom of the earth's mother. It is this connection with nature that allows her to become the "wise woman" in the eyes of the villagers, holding a revered position within the community. However, this strong exterior conceals a delicate and profound emotional world. One evening, while gathering herbs, she opens up to the guest writer residing with her and shares the painful memory of her youth---having been forced to marry a man she respected but did not love. Though her husband treated her with great care, and they once sat side by side on the rocks gazing at the sea, a sudden storm took him away forever. Mrs. Todd buried this deep sorrow in her heart, only allowing herself to release the storm of emotions when she faces the raging sea alone. The narrator poetically describes the scene: in the twilight, her tall figure stands as though a solitary Antigone in a Greek tragedy, her unwavering vitality shining through, yet her posture also conveys timeless sorrow. This combination of strength and tenderness makes her one of the most moving female characters in Jewett's work.

In contrast to the brilliance and larger number of female characters, the male characters are largely

marginalized. Through this approach, Sarah Orne Jewett not only challenges traditional gender roles but also demonstrates how women in that era gained power and existence through self-awareness and solidarity (Goheen 155). In *Dunnet Landing*, men's lives are primarily focused on the outside world, whether it's going out to sea for fishing or heading to the city, while women delve into the core of the local society, assuming the responsibility of maintaining community life and emotional bonds. Although male characters are not entirely absent from the story, their roles and influence are often diminished, even excluded from the central plot.

There are three main male characters. The first is Captain Littlepage, who is deeply immersed in the past and unable to extricate himself from it. The old man has lost touch with the present world. What is past is gone, and the future exists only in imagination. He can only live through fantasies, relying on memories of past glory to pass the time. He may wish to replicate the male glory of his time at sea, but unfortunately, in *Dunnet Landing*, that male-dominated era has long passed.

The second is Mrs. Todd's brother, William. Though he is one of the few men in the story, he exhibits distinctly "feminine" traits. At over 60, he is easily embarrassed and shy, with limited contact with the outside world, much like an unmarried woman from ancient times. From the narrator's description, we sense that, compared to his mother and sister, he does not have the traditional male privilege and masculinity that male characters typically possess in male-oriented novels; instead, he is gentler and calmer.

The third is an old fisherman named Elijah Tilley. In him, almost all male traits are abandoned. He watches over a wife who will never return, just as his wife once waited for him to return from sea in her youth. He seems to be living in place of his wife. He keeps his modest home as tidy as it was when his wife was alive, as a way to express his sorrow. He washes, mends, and does the things his wife once did, silently passing the time. For him, only the kind

of home environment his wife would have wished for holds meaning, so he refuses help from others, fearing it would disrupt the order of the home his wife established (Jin 88).

The perspective of the female narrator, as an incarnation of the author, and her characterizations serve Jewett's thematic expression well, and through this perspective, Jewett expands the boundaries of realism traditionally dominated by male authors. This unique artistic practice by Jewett essentially constructs a more inclusive aesthetic of realism. While male writers were focused on depicting urban changes or commercial competition in the wake of industrialization, Jewett turned her gaze toward the rural female communities marginalized by mainstream narratives. When traditional realism was obsessed with representing the objective reality of the external world, she shifted her focus to explore the subtle resonance between inner emotions and the external environment. This creative direction is not a departure from realism but a deepening and expansion of its meaning---in Jewett's view, the life stories exchanged by elderly women as they sit mending, or the daily scenes of an elderly woman living by the sea conversing with the tides, are equally essential components of reality.

As seen in the seemingly casual but carefully arranged details in the novel: the shadow of the drying fishing nets cast in the sunlight, which intertwines with the wrinkles on the faces of the elderly women, creates a marvelous intertextuality; the cries of seagulls blend with the laughter of the women, blurring the boundary between natural sounds and human language. These descriptions transcend mere environmental depiction, creating an artistic realm where subject and object merge, where nature and humanity are in harmony.

Jewett's innovation lies further in her creative fusion of the realist tradition with the spiritual pursuit of romanticism. In this novel, reality is not only found in tangible, sensory objects but also flows in the fleeting moments of connection between the characters and nature, which are difficult to articulate. When the narrator describes

Mrs. Todd listening to the waves, the detailed realism and near-mystical experiential description merge seamlessly. This writing strategy breaks the boundary between realism and transcendentalism, suggesting that the deepest reality often resides in the intersection between rational cognition and intuitive understanding. Through the female perspective's acute sensitivity, Jewett captures those subtle tremors that traditional realist writers often overlook--- memories embedded in objects, emotions reflected in landscapes, and the silent testimony of time etched on the human body. This expanded concept of realism has had a profound influence on the development of later literature. Jewett proved that realism need not be confined to a faithful recording of social appearances; it can delve into the complex interactions between human consciousness and the material world. In her writing, reality is no longer a passive object of observation but an active process of experience; it is not a static picture but a flowing perception. This understanding allows this novel---though it describes the seemingly simple lives of a remote fishing village and its humble characters---to touch upon universal human themes: memory and forgetting, loneliness and connection, passing time and eternity (Mehlman 400). When modern readers walk along the coast of Dunnet Landing with the narrator, they not only witness the real landscape of late 19th-century New England but also feel an emotional resonance that transcends time and space. This is Jewett's most valuable contribution to realist literature: she liberated the genre from a single, objective imitation of the world and imbued it with the depth and breadth of expressing the landscapes of the soul.

The Country of the Pointed Firs redefines the boundaries of realism with its unique female narrative perspective and delicate geographical descriptions. Through the observations and integration of the unnamed narrator, Jewett transforms the geographical space of Dunnet Landing into a vessel for female experience and memory, intertwining the natural landscape with the emotions of the characters. This breaks the traditional male-

centered narrative model of realism. The female characters in the novel, particularly Almira Todd, not only exhibit resilience and wisdom but also, through their symbiotic relationship with nature, become the core of the community's spirit and knowledge. At the same time, the marginalization of male characters further highlights the dominant role women play in maintaining rural society. Finally, the narrator's departure from Dunnet Landing may be Jewett's hope for the transcendence of the limitations of female narrative. Jewett combines the realist tradition of detailed description with the poetic expression of romanticism, imbuing everyday life with transcendent meaning, thereby expanding the depth and breadth of realism. Her work not only records the true appearance of late 19th-century rural New England but also, through the sharp perception of the female perspective, reveals universal human themes---memory, loneliness, and connection. This innovative interpretation of realism provides important insights for later literary developments, proving that reality is not only found in the outward appearances of the objective world but also in the deep interactions between characters and their environment.

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Innovative Research on the Cultivation of Compound Employment-Oriented Business English Talent under the Outcome-Based Education Framework

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Abstract—In response to China's strategic demand for cultivating interdisciplinary and application-oriented talents, the "New Liberal Arts" initiative is accelerating the transformation of traditional disciplines. However, a misalignment persists between university training and industry competency requirements, as conventional curricula often fail to meet the labor market's demand for interdisciplinary professionals. Taking Business English—an emblematic interdisciplinary major—as the research subject, this study adopts the Outcome-Based Education (OBE) framework and focuses on competence setting under an employment-oriented perspective. It employs a dual-path approach through questionnaire surveys and Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) method to identify students' capability gaps and enterprises' priority requirements for professional competencies. The findings reveal that while Business English majors value practice and internship opportunities, they tend to neglect soft skills such as risk management, resulting in a significant mismatch with industry expectations. This research aims to optimize the competence structure for Business English majors, providing empirical evidence for curriculum reform and university-industry collaborative training, thereby contributing to the improvement of educational quality and innovative talent cultivation models.



Keywords— Indigenous languages, multimedia instruction, intercultural education, teacher qualifications, working conditions

I. INTRODUCTION

Globalization and digitalization have driven the increasing specialization and integration of job competencies. However, the phenomenon of "competency mismatch," particularly the "education-employment mismatch," has become a prominent challenge, hindering the effective alignment of higher education talent cultivation with labor market demands (Shtaltovna et al., 2021; Daka et al., 2023). As the talent supply side, universities must proactively respond to market needs by focusing on enhancing graduates' employability and job fit. Outcome-Based Education (OBE) offers a systematic approach for higher education institutions to address this issue. The OBE framework centers on "outcome setting—backward design—continuous improvement,"

emphasizing the need for dynamic adjustment of competency outcomes (Spady, 1994). In this study, "outcome setting" refers to the systematic definition of graduate competencies with an emphasis on scientifically responding to industry orientation.

Business English, as a typical interdisciplinary major, integrates language skills with business literacy requirements. Although OBE frameworks have been preliminarily introduced in the curriculum design and reform of Business English programs, the foundational stage of competency setting remains underexplored, and a clear competency indicator system to support precise talent cultivation objectives has yet to be established. Currently, how to construct a scientific and reasonable competency setting model that combines industry job requirements with

student development needs is a critical issue requiring further investigation in Business English education. Guided by OBE, this study integrates industry orientation and student perspectives to explore the logic of competency structure formulation for interdisciplinary talents, aiming to provide theoretical support and empirical references for optimizing talent cultivation models and advancing educational practice reform.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The deepening trends of globalization and digital transformation have heightened the demand for high-level international business professionals. However, the persistent difficulty in employment among Business English graduates reflects, to a considerable extent, a capability gap between graduates and job requirements. Existing studies suggest that this misalignment is associated with outdated curriculum structures, an overemphasis on theoretical instruction at the expense of practical training, and students' passive learning engagement (Avsheniuk & Seminikhyna, 2020; Xie, 2022). Under the broader strategy of "New Humanities," interdisciplinary integration and competency-based orientations have become critical directions for reform in humanities disciplines, prompting systematic innovations in the capability structure and training pathways of Business English programmes.

With regard to competency structures, the profile of interdisciplinary Business English professionals has gradually become clearer. The National Standard for Undergraduate Teaching Quality of Business English Majors in China defines business English competence as encompassing solid English proficiency and professional knowledge, while highlighting the core capabilities of business language application, business knowledge and practice, and cross-cultural business communication (Guo, 2021). Through expert interviews, Tong and Gao (2022) established a competency framework encompassing linguistic proficiency, intercultural awareness, trade-related skills, digital literacy, and a set of socio-interactional, cognitive, and career management capabilities. Jiang and Qu (2024) further proposed a "four-dimensional integrated model," categorizing competencies into business–language ability, intercultural competence, thinking and learning skills, and business workplace awareness. These frameworks demonstrate increasing alignment between the conceptualization of Business English competencies and real-world work scenarios, thereby enabling a more accurate response to contemporary business needs.

Talent development pathways have also become more established, with key strategies such as interdisciplinary integration, dual-qualified faculty development, and

university–industry collaboration receiving wide emphasis. However, despite the breadth of existing studies, research specifically targeting competency structures oriented toward labor-market demands remains limited. Detailed analyses of questions such as "What competencies should interdisciplinary Business English graduates possess in specific occupational settings?" and "Which competencies should be prioritized in talent cultivation?" are still insufficient.

Against this backdrop, the introduction of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) offers theoretical breakthroughs to address the challenge of "outcome formulation." Its core lies in articulating explicit learning outcomes to drive the backward design of teaching objectives, curriculum structures, and assessment mechanisms (Spady, 1994). According to the NBKR Institute of Science & Technology (2022), the promotion of OBE in regions such as the European Union and Malaysia aims primarily to enhance graduates' employability and adaptability—an objective that corresponds directly to resolving the misalignment between competencies and employment needs observed among Business English undergraduates in China.

The foundational principles of OBE—including outcome orientation, competency-based progression, continuous improvement, and student-centeredness—are broadly applicable and have been widely adopted across applied disciplines such as business and management. For instance, Wang et al. (2024), in their analysis of OBE-based practices in International Trade courses, argued that clearly defined learning outcomes help optimize curricular structure and reinforce the alignment between course objectives and students' competencies. Liu and Li (2022) integrated OBE with the PAD model, demonstrating its effectiveness in enhancing interactivity and outcome orientation in economics and management courses. Yang (2024) combined OBE with PDCA and compared Business English students' performance before and after its implementation across listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation abilities. Although the potential of OBE in humanities instruction is increasingly recognized, practice has also exposed several challenges. Rhodes (2010) contends that rapid knowledge evolution has rendered the meaning of learning outcomes increasingly complex, making generic or vague outcome descriptions inadequate for bridging higher education with labor-market expectations. Echoing this perspective, Lyu et al. (2023) emphasized that, despite OBE's student-centered logic and emphasis on competency standards and continuous feedback, the key challenge for humanities disciplines remains how to align learning outcomes precisely with job-specific requirements.

In summary, although OBE has gained considerable traction in applied humanities programmes, existing studies remain largely focused on teaching optimization and assessment innovations. The foundational stage of “outcome formulation,” which anchors the entire educational system, is often handled in overly general terms and lacks competency frameworks informed by concrete job requirements and systematic industry feedback. Moreover, most outcome formulations continue to privilege the perspectives of faculty and employers, while the perceptions and developmental experiences of students—the primary agents of competency formation—remain insufficiently represented.

Therefore, this study focuses on the outcome formulation stage within the OBE framework, integrating feedback from industry practitioners and incorporating students’ perceptions of their competency development. By examining the discrepancies between students’ self-perceived abilities and industry expectations, the study seeks to construct a competency indicator system for interdisciplinary Business English talents that aligns with real-world labor-market conditions while accounting for student developmental experiences. This effort aims to provide theoretical support and practical pathways for advancing OBE implementation in applied humanities programmes.

Accordingly, the present study addresses the following research questions:

- (1) What specific competencies do enterprises expect from interdisciplinary Business English professionals?
- (2) How do enterprises prioritize these competencies during recruitment?
- (3) What major challenges and competency gaps do current Business English students encounter in enhancing their employability?

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study targets two key groups—students and industry practitioners—and is structured around two guiding mechanisms: problem orientation and social demand orientation. A mixed-methods approach is employed, with quantitative methods playing a primary role and qualitative methods serving as a supplement. Quantitatively, structured questionnaires are used to examine students’ perceptions of competencies and their curriculum expectations, while the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) is applied to elicit enterprises’ prioritization of competency indicators. Qualitatively, content analysis is incorporated to refine and further substantiate the competency framework for interdisciplinary Business English talents.

A. Construction of the Competency Framework for Interdisciplinary Business English Talents

The competency framework for interdisciplinary Business English talents forms the foundation of this study and serves as the core basis for designing subsequent questionnaires for both the student and enterprise samples. Drawing upon an extensive review of prior literature, relevant policy documents, and existing scholarly findings, consensus has been established regarding several core competencies—namely linguistic foundation, domain-specific knowledge, and business practice skills—which provides direction for the construction of the framework.

To further align the framework with employment-oriented needs, this study additionally collected 184 authentic recruitment postings from a diverse range of employers, including 50 state-owned enterprises, 94 private companies, 20 international organizations, and 20 nongovernmental organizations. All recruitment samples were categorized according to three dimensions: organizational type, job requirements, and job responsibilities. Using the data-mining tool “JiSouKe,” the research team extracted keywords and conducted frequency analysis, generating word clouds for both job responsibilities and qualification requirements. High-frequency verbs and core competency-related keywords were then identified, forming the basis for determining the primary- and secondary-level competencies required for Business English professionals.

B. Problem Orientation — Student-Side Investigation

Data on the student side were collected through a structured questionnaire encompassing five dimensions: basic information, professional cognition, course evaluation, perceptions of professional competencies, and training needs. The questionnaire was designed to systematically capture students’ understanding, evaluation, and expectations regarding their academic learning and self-development, thereby identifying the practical challenges and competency gaps they encounter. The basic information section records students’ status, intended employment destinations, and preferred industries, providing contextual variables for subsequent analysis. The professional cognition section focuses on students’ awareness of the core competencies required in the Business English major.

The course evaluation section adopts a five-point Likert scale to gather students’ assessments of both the importance and their satisfaction regarding the current curriculum. The course items draw from the undergraduate Business English training scheme while also incorporating emerging intelligent-technology-related courses introduced under the

New Humanities framework, thereby enhancing the questionnaire's forward-looking nature. In the competency cognition section, the logic-branching function of the Wenjuanxing platform is utilized to display competency options tailored to the industry preferences selected by students in the basic information section, thus increasing the specificity and relevance of the survey. The training needs section employs open-ended questions to solicit students' suggestions for the programme, providing direct insights for curriculum refinement.

Three analytic approaches were adopted to comprehensively portray the characteristics of the sample and to reveal curriculum–competency alignment as well as student needs. Descriptive statistics were applied to the basic information, professional cognition, and competency cognition sections. The course evaluation module employed the IPA (Importance–Performance Analysis) model to compare the perceived importance and satisfaction levels of curriculum components. Using SPSS 27.0, an IPA quadrant matrix was constructed to identify “Concentrate Here,” “Keep Up the Good Work,” “Low Priority,” and “Possible Overkill” areas. Originally developed in the marketing field, the IPA model has since been widely adapted in educational research (Sever, 2015). Finally, students' training needs were summarized through word-frequency analysis using the Wenjuanxing platform.

C. Demand Orientation — Industry-Side Investigation

To determine the prioritization of competencies for interdisciplinary Business English talents from the perspective of enterprises, this study adopts the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) to construct a competency indicator system. Originally proposed by Saaty (2008), AHP is well suited for addressing complex decision-making problems involving multiple evaluative criteria, as it enables subjective judgments to be quantified into numerical weights. For the multi-dimensional and inherently difficult-to-quantify competencies required in Business English, AHP provides an effective means of

clarifying the relative importance of each competency component, thereby offering evidence-based guidance for curriculum reform in higher education.

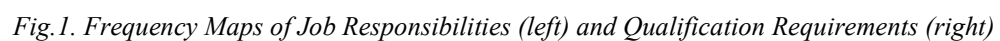
Following the standard AHP procedure, this study establishes a three-tier hierarchical structure—comprising the goal, criteria, and alternatives—based on the previously constructed competency framework for interdisciplinary Business English talents. This structure forms the foundation for constructing pairwise comparison matrices, calculating weights, and conducting consistency checks. While AHP does not require a large sample size (Doloi, 2008), increasing the number of participants may introduce greater discrepancies in judgments and reduce matrix consistency due to cognitive variation among experts (Baig et.al., 2022). Considering this, a purposive sampling strategy was employed to invite five industry experts with substantial professional experience to participate in the rating and decision-making process.

IV. FINDINGS

This section analyzes data collected from both the student and industry samples to address the questions raised in the literature review concerning enterprise competency demands, competency prioritization, and the challenges faced by students. A comparative analysis is conducted to highlight similarities and divergences between the two groups.

A. Competency Framework for Interdisciplinary Business English Talents

Building on a systematic review of relevant domestic and international literature, this study further collected and analyzed 184 recruitment postings. Through keyword extraction and semantic categorization of job responsibilities and qualification requirements (see Figure 1), the study identifies the practical competency demands of the labor market for Business English positions.



employers place considerable emphasis on communication abilities, relevant experience, and team cooperation.

Table 1. Competency framework for interdisciplinary business english talents

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Ability	business settings.
	Able to detect potential risks and propose appropriate response strategies.

B. Problem Orientation

A total of 167 questionnaires were distributed, and 161 valid responses were collected, yielding an effective

response rate of 96.4%. All respondents were current students or graduates of the Business English major. Their basic demographic information is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Basic Information of Business English students

Student Statistics	Categories	Numbers	Percentage
Grade	Freshman	11	6.83%
	Sophomore	72	44.72%
	Junior	48	29.81%
	Senior	20	12.42%
	Professional	10	6.21%
Graduation Plan	Pursue a graduate degree	76	50.33%
	Obtain engagement	61	40.4%
	Study abroad	11	7.28%
	Uncertain	3	1.99%
The career desired to engage in	Civil servant	52	34.44%
	Foreign trade	97	64.24%
	Cross-border e-commerce	65	43.05%
	Overseas assignments in domestic enterprises	60	39.74%
	Education institutions	62	41.06%
	Finance / consulting industry	28	18.54%
	Uncertain	7	4.64%

In terms of grade distribution, sophomores and juniors constitute the largest proportion of respondents, indicating that most participants had already completed the core courses of the major. Regarding post-graduation plans, a substantial share of students expressed the intention to enter the workforce directly, underscoring the importance of cultivating employment-oriented competencies that align with job requirements. Concerning career interests (multiple-choice), students primarily favored foreign trade, cross-border e-commerce, educational institutions, and state-owned enterprises with overseas placements. Careers in the civil service and the financial sector also showed notable appeal. These patterns suggest that students generally prefer industries closely related to their field of study, while their overall career orientations remain diverse.

(a). Professional Cognition

Figure 2 illustrates students' perceptions of core professional competencies. Business operations competence received the highest importance rating, followed by integrated English skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Market analysis ability and project management competence were rated at a moderate level, whereas risk management ability and industry-specific knowledge scored comparatively lower. These results indicate that respondents generally regard linguistic proficiency and business operations competence as their primary strengths, while placing insufficient emphasis on risk management and industry-related knowledge.

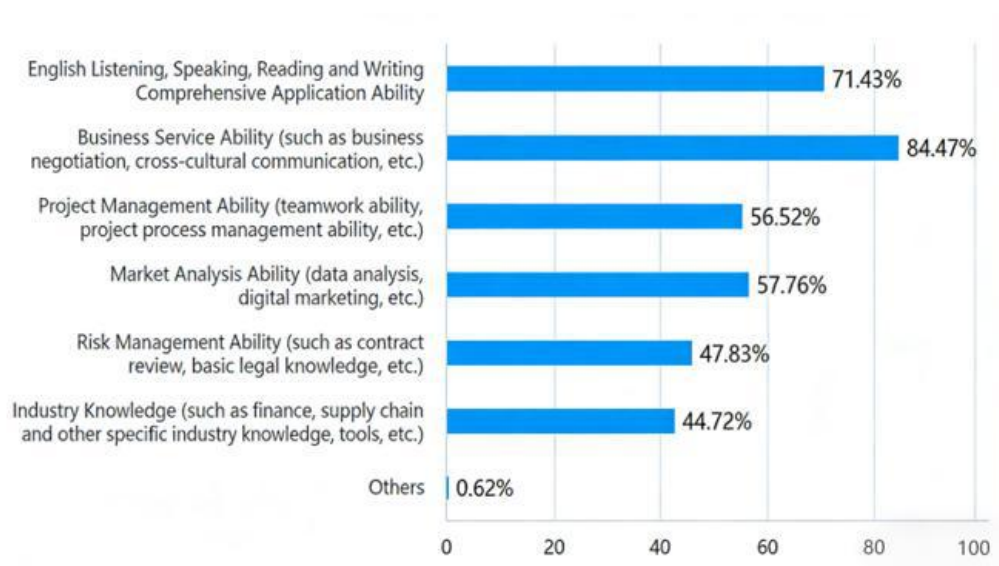


Fig.2. Students' Perceptions of Competencies in the Business English Major

(b). Course and Practice Evaluation

In the course evaluation section, a self-developed scale was employed to assess students' perceived importance and satisfaction across six curriculum modules. To ensure the reliability and validity of the instrument, SPSS 27.0 was used to conduct statistical tests. The results show a KMO value of 0.881 and a significant Bartlett's test of sphericity ($p < 0.001$), indicating that the data were suitable for factor analysis. The overall reliability of the scale, as reflected by Cronbach's alpha, was 0.903. The satisfaction and importance subscales demonstrated alpha coefficients of 0.924 and 0.891 respectively, evidencing strong internal consistency and sound structural validity.

Based on adequate reliability and validity, the IPA (Importance–Performance Analysis) model was applied to further analyze student responses. Using SPSS 27.0, the mean values for importance and satisfaction were calculated for each curriculum module and plotted in a two-dimensional matrix, with importance on the x-axis and satisfaction on the y-axis. This approach allowed the six curriculum modules to be categorized into four quadrants (see Figure 3), providing a visual representation of curriculum–competency alignment.

Strength Area: Industry Extension (5) and Digital Skills (6) demonstrated simultaneously high importance and high satisfaction, suggesting strong alignment with industry trends and learner expectations.

Maintenance Area: Business Knowledge (2) showed high satisfaction but comparatively lower importance, placing it in the maintenance quadrant.

Opportunity Area: Language Foundation (1) and Intercultural Communication (3) scored relatively low on both importance and satisfaction. Notably, although intercultural communication competence received a high importance rating (84.47%) in the “Professional Cognition” dimension, its corresponding course was rated low in both perceived importance and satisfaction. This discrepancy implies that students recognize the occupational value of intercultural competence but perceive a gap between the course content and actual professional needs, or doubt the course's effectiveness in cultivating relevant abilities. This highlights the necessity of strengthening the linkage between course design and competency outcomes to enhance students' perceived value of learning.

: Business Practice (4) showed high importance but low satisfaction, indicating a critical need to enhance practical content and instructional design.

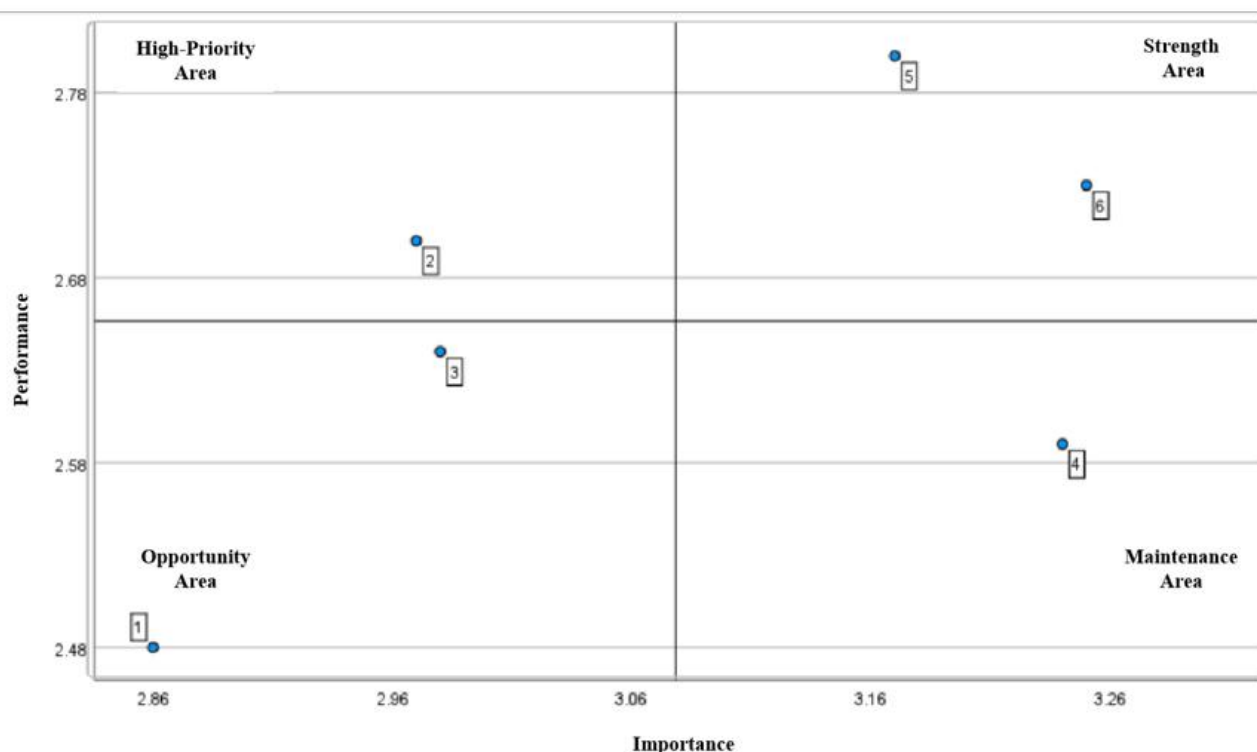


Fig. 3. Importance–Satisfaction Analysis of Business English Curriculum Modules

(c). Identification of Competency Gaps

Table 3 presents the core competency gaps of Business English students across different target positions.

Table 3. Self-Assessed Competency Gaps of Students

Job Type	Competency Gap	Percentage Mentioned
Foreign Trade / International Trade	Practical knowledge of foreign trade processes	47.42%
Internet / Cross-border E-commerce	Data analysis and market trend judgment ability	56.92%
Overseas Assignments (State-owned Enterprises, Public Institutions)	Weakness in logical structure of English business reports	36.67%
Diplomatic Civil Servants	International policy interpretation ability	50.00%
Financial Industry	Deficiency in data visualization skills	39.29%

Overall, students' perceived competency gaps extend beyond domain-specific operational skills to broader cross-contextual abilities, including knowledge transfer, information processing, and the use of communication or productivity tools. Deficiencies in practical operation and application are the most pronounced, indicating persistent obstacles in translating classroom knowledge into

actionable skills. These findings suggest that curriculum enhancement should strategically target the dimensions in which students demonstrate weaker competencies, with particular emphasis on strengthening practice-oriented components within the instructional process.

(d). Support Needs for Talent Development



Fig.4. Frequency Map of Students’ Training Needs in the Business English Major

In the responses to the open-ended question, students expressed a strong demand for increased opportunities for business-oriented practical experience (see Figure 4). Enhancing the practical components of the curriculum—particularly those related to authentic business practice—has thus emerged as a central expectation from the student perspective.

C. Social Demand Orientation

This part of the study aims to clarify the prioritization of competencies for interdisciplinary Business English talents from the perspective of actual industry needs. By applying the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP), the study provides empirical support for curriculum enhancement and the cultivation of interdisciplinary capabilities.

(a). Weighting System of Competency Indicators for Interdisciplinary Business English Talents

The hierarchical competency structure—constructed based on literature analysis and recruitment-text analysis—was finalized after expert evaluation and

subsequently developed into the competency indicator system used in this study (see Table 4). The system was designed specifically for this research.

Table 4 presents the competency structure required for cultivating interdisciplinary abilities in Business English, organized into three levels: the goal level, the primary indicators (criteria level), and the secondary indicators (alternatives level). The goal level represents the overarching objective of the competency system—namely, to enable students, through coursework and practical training, to acquire interdisciplinary Business English competencies that meet the diverse demands of the modern workplace. The primary indicators encompass six major dimensions of competency: language proficiency, business operations skills, project management ability, market analysis ability, risk and compliance ability, and industry application ability. Each primary indicator is further elaborated into specific secondary indicators to clarify the competency requirements and facilitate instructional design and assessment.

Table 4. Competency Indicator System for Interdisciplinary Business English Talents

Goal	First-level indicators	Second-level indicators
Cultivation of Compound Employment-Oriented Business English Talent	English Proficiency A	A1: Able to demonstrate solid integrated English skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing.
		A2: Able to understand and apply Business English terminology.
		A3: Able to obtain certification through recognized language examinations (e.g., IELTS, BEC).
	Business Operations Competence B	B1: Able to perform tasks related to international trade operations. B2:Able to negotiate and communicate effectively in intercultural business

	contexts.
	B3: Able to collaborate efficiently within diverse and cross-functional teams.
	C1: Able to coordinate resources and facilitate the achievement of project objectives.
Project Execution Ability C	C2: Able to plan project timelines and milestones and manage execution processes.
	C3: Able to address unexpected issues and communicate across teams during project implementation.
Market Analysis Ability D	D1: Able to analyze market data and identify trends and customer needs.
	D2: Able to identify potential clients and establish business relationships.
	D3: Able to conduct digital marketing effectively.
Industry Application Ability E	E1: Able to demonstrate foundational knowledge of the industry and keep abreast of ongoing developments.
	E2: Able to use industry-specific software, systems, and tools proficiently.
Risk and Compliance Ability F	F1: Able to identify key contract elements and understand legal and compliance requirements in business settings.
	F2: Able to detect potential risks and propose appropriate response strategies.

Based on the self-developed indicator system, pairwise comparison questionnaires were designed and distributed online to five experts. Table 5 presents the experts' professional fields, years of experience, and professional

roles, which serve to confirm the appropriateness and credibility of their qualifications for providing the AHP judgments.

Table 5. Expert Selection

No.	Industry Experience	Years of Service	Role
1	Construction Engineering	5	Business Specialist, Beijing Construction Road & Bridge
2	Construction Engineering	8	Technician, Beijing Construction Road & Bridge
3	Finance, Internet, Automotive Manufacturing	12	Senior Software Engineer, Great Wall Motors Technology Co., Ltd., Shanghai
4	International Advertising, Language Education	10+	Founder, Orchidvalley
5	Technology Promotion; Management Consulting; Strategic Planning; Information Consulting	10+	Shanghai Outao Testing Technology Service Co., Ltd.

Using Saaty’s 1–9 scale method, the experts conducted pairwise comparisons within each hierarchical level to form a judgment matrix $A=[a_{ij}]$, where a_{ij} denotes the relative

importance of indicator i over indicator j . The judgment matrix A is an n -order positive reciprocal matrix that satisfies:

$$A=\begin{bmatrix}1&a_{12}&\cdots&a_{1n}\\\frac{1}{a_{12}}&1&\cdots&a_{2n}\\\vdots&\vdots&\ddots&\vdots\\\frac{1}{a_{1n}}&\frac{1}{a_{2n}}&\cdots&1\end{bmatrix}$$

Subsequently, each column of the judgment matrix is normalized as follows:

$$a_{ij}'=\frac{a_{ij}}{\sum_{i=1}^na_{ij}}$$

Then, the average value of elements in each row of the normalized matrix is calculated to obtain the weight vector w_i of each indicator in this hierarchy:

$$w_i=\frac{1}{n}\sum_{j=1}^na_{ij}'$$

To ensure the logical consistency of experts' judgments, the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) requires a

Table 6: Random Consistency Index (RI) Table

n阶	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
RI	0.00	0.00	0.52	0.89	1.12	1.26	1.36	1.41	1.46

Consistency is deemed acceptable if $CR<0.1$

Following the aforementioned steps, pairwise comparisons and consistency tests are conducted for indicators at the criterion level and alternative level sequentially, with weights calculated hierarchically. Finally, the comprehensive weight of each secondary competency item is derived by multiplying the local weight of each indicator with the global weight of the upper hierarchy

After completing the weight calculation and consistency

Table 7: Business English Talent Competency Weights

First-level Indicators	First-level Weights	Second-level Indicators	Second-level Weights	Comprehensive Weights
A	0.1411	A1	0.5424	0.0765
		A2	0.2874	0.0406
		A3	0.1702	0.0240
B	0.2156	B1	0.4388	0.0946
		B2	0.3607	0.0778
		B3	0.2005	0.0432
C	0.1975	C1	0.2508	0.0495
		C2	0.2882	0.0569
		C3	0.4610	0.0910
D	0.1616	D1	0.3319	0.0536
		D2	0.3720	0.0601

consistency test for the judgment matrix. First, compute the maximum eigenvalue $\lambda_{\max}$ of the judgment matrix, then calculate the Consistency Index (CI):

$$\lambda_{\max}=\frac{\sum(Aw)_i}{nw_i}$$

A denotes the judgment matrix, w denotes the weight vector, n denotes the order of the matrix, and $\lambda_{\max}$ denotes the maximum eigenvalue of the judgment matrix.

$$CI=\frac{\lambda_{\max}-n}{n-1}$$

Next, compare CI with the Random Consistency Index (RI) (refer to Table 6) to calculate the Consistency Ratio (CR):

$$CR=\frac{CI}{RI}$$

test, the CR value of primary indicators is 0.018, and the CR values of secondary indicators are 0.030, 0.010, and 0.029, respectively—all less than 0.1. This indicates that the consistency among different indicators falls within an acceptable range. Additionally, some 2nd-order matrices inherently exhibit consistency due to their order of 2. Based on the passed consistency test, the final competency ranking with weights is obtained (see Table 7).

		D3	0.2961	0.0478
E	0.1130	E1	0.6456	0.0730
		E2	0.3544	0.0400
		F1	0.6083	0.1042
F	0.1713	F2	0.3917	0.0671

Based on the weights of First-level indicators, the competency ranking for interdisciplinary Business English talents is as follows: B. Business Operation Competence, C. Project Execution Ability, F. Risk & Compliance Ability, D. Market Analysis Ability, A. English Proficiency, and E. Industry Application Ability. This indicates that enterprises prioritize practical business operation capabilities, with high attention also paid to project execution and risk management. They tend to select practical talents with implementation and risk control competencies. The relatively low weights of English language proficiency and industry application capability suggest that linguistic foundations and tool proficiency serve as auxiliary rather than core competitive advantages.

Among the 16 secondary competency indicators, enterprises highly rate F1. Contract Recognition & Compliance, C3. Emergency Problem-Solving, B1. International Trade Practices, B2. Cross-Cultural Communication, A1. English Listening, Speaking, Reading & Writing, and E1. Familiarity with Industry Knowledge & Trends. Additionally, enterprises expect Business English talents to possess D1. Ability to Analyze Market Data and Identify Trends & Demands, as well as F1. Ability to Detect Potential Risks and Propose Response Strategies. Some seemingly popular competencies, such as E2. Industry Tool Application and A3. Language Certification, have relatively low weights, reflecting that practical skills and general adaptability are valued more than formal certifications.

D. Comparison of Results from Student and Industry Perspectives

Combining the questionnaire data analysis from the student side and the AHP evaluation results from the enterprise side, this study summarizes the following key conclusions from three dimensions: the structure of curriculum supply and demand, deviations in competency cognition, and the alignment between university training objectives and industry needs:

(a). Mismatch Between Students' Curriculum Needs and Current Supply

Business practice-oriented courses are generally regarded as highly important by students, but the existing

curriculum content fails to fully meet their demands—especially the limited investment in practical sessions, which makes it difficult to effectively improve students' practical operational capabilities. Students also attach great importance to cross-cultural communication competence; however, their ratings of the importance and satisfaction of relevant courses are relatively low, indicating a mismatch between curriculum supply and student expectations. This reflects a disconnect between teaching content and the requirements of professional competencies.

(b). Cognitive Deviation in Competencies Between Students and Industry

Risk awareness and compliance capability are identified as core competitive advantages from the enterprise perspective. In contrast, students' attention to these competencies is significantly insufficient. This cognitive gap regarding soft skills urgently needs to be addressed through curriculum optimization and targeted guidance.

(c). Misalignment Between University Training Objectives and Enterprise Needs.

Enterprises emphasize practical operation, flexible adaptability, and compliance awareness, while current university curricula still focus heavily on linguistic foundations and theoretical business knowledge. As a result, students struggle to adapt to work requirements and environments when entering the workplace, highlighting the imperative for educational reform.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the OBE (Outcome-Based Education) concept, this study focuses on the goal-setting of interdisciplinary Business English talent cultivation, identifies the current competency shortcomings of students, and designs a competency indicator system aligned with industry needs. The research reveals three key findings: a contradiction between students' curriculum needs and the current supply, a deviation between students' cognition of competencies and the actual industry demands, and a misalignment between the competency requirements of enterprise positions and university talent training objectives. These findings provide insights for Business English talent

development.

Universities may refer to the competency weights valued by enterprises in curriculum system design, highlight the competency dimensions highly emphasized by enterprises, and appropriately adjust curriculum content and proportions to strengthen the systematic training of core competencies. In addition, greater attention should be paid to students' needs and shortcomings. To this end, practical teaching should be enhanced—through designing project-oriented modules, job simulation exercises, and internship-embedded programs—to help students improve their ability to apply competencies in real-world scenarios. The dynamic feedback mechanism also needs further improvement: by establishing a regular communication platform between universities and employers, the integration of curriculum content, assessment standards, and industry needs can be achieved, forming a feedback-driven curriculum update system. Meanwhile, the development of interdisciplinary integrated courses should not be overlooked. Universities and students should leverage digital tools to break professional barriers, thereby enhancing competency transferability and adaptability across multiple industry contexts.

The research results validate Peltonen and Hu's (2025) assertion regarding the critical role of soft skills in Business English education. Furthermore, combined with Hu and AlSaqqaf's (2025) systematic review of Business English teaching research in China, this study points out that current research pays insufficient attention to employment-oriented competency structures, providing a valuable supplement to the field. The competency framework constructed in this paper not only responds to the practical needs of curriculum reform in applied liberal arts programs but also offers directions for future outcome setting and dynamic optimization. Although the sample size is limited and practical verification remains pending, this study holds certain reference value for educational supply-side reform and the optimization of talent training programs.

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Migration, Music, and Memory in Diasporic Adivasi Narratives

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Abstract— Migration has always been central to the socio-cultural formation of Adivasi communities across India, but the scale, pressure, and compulsions of contemporary mobility have reconfigured Adivasi identity in unprecedented ways. This article examines the interconnectedness of migration, music, and memory in diasporic Adivasi narratives, with a special emphasis on the role of oral traditions particularly songs, chants, and ritual performances in shaping and preserving collective identity. Drawing on ethnographic scholarship, cultural anthropology, musicology, and emerging Adivasi writings in English, the study argues that music operates as a sonic archive that sustains ecological memory, emotional continuity, and cultural belonging among displaced tribal populations. Songs such as karma geet, jhumur, and sohara, transmitted through communal performances, not only retain fragments of ancestral landscapes but also recount the histories of forced migration, labour exploitation, and displacement. Diasporic narratives reveal how Adivasi migrants actively reconstitute cultural memory through song, enabling them to negotiate identity in unfamiliar geographies. Through textual analysis, theoretical framing, and case studies from Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Assam, and industrial migration corridors, the article demonstrates that music is not merely an expressive art but a political, mnemonic, and epistemic practice. It becomes a space of resistance, survival, and self-articulation that challenges dominant narratives of tribal erasure and documents the lived realities of displacement. Ultimately, the article argues that Adivasi musical traditions provide a powerful framework for understanding the emotional architecture of migration and the imaginative reconstruction of home.



Keywords— Adivasi Diaspora, Migration, Oral Traditions, Folk Music, Cultural Identity, Tribal Literature

I. INTRODUCTION

Migration seasonal, circular, or long-term has historically been embedded in the socio-economic rhythms of Adivasi life in India. Yet, in modern times, migration has transformed from a cyclical livelihood strategy into a structure of displacement, often forced by land alienation, deforestation, industrial mining, and agrarian crises. As scholars such as Virginius Xaxa argue, “the history of tribal communities in India is inseparable from the history of their displacement” (Xaxa 42). Migration, therefore, is not simply a movement of bodies across space; it is a movement

of memory, culture, stories, and rituals. Among these cultural forms, music emerges as one of the most resilient repositories of Adivasi identity.

For many Adivasi groups including the Oraon, Munda, Ho, Santhal, Gond, and Kharia communities’ music is inseparable from social life. It is not produced for performance alone but embedded in rituals, agricultural cycles, labour, festivals, and communal work. Anthropologist Felix Padel notes that Adivasi music “sustains collective identity by encoding ecological memory and ethical relationships with the natural world”

(Padel 118). Songs become mnemonic devices that store landscapes, kinship structures, mythic origins, and genealogies of struggle.

This article explores how diasporic Adivasi narratives literary, oral, ethnographic, and autobiographical represent this triad of migration, music, and memory. It argues that Adivasi communities transform musical practices into portable homelands, enabling them to survive estrangement within industrial sites, urban settlements, tea gardens, brick kilns, and construction centres. Using cultural memory studies, postcolonial indigenous theory, and ethnomusicology, the article analyses how Adivasi music becomes a living archive of displacement, ecological belonging, and identity negotiation.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the relationship between migration and cultural transformation among Adivasi communities
2. To examine the relationship between migration and cultural transformation among Adivasi communities
3. To investigate how diasporic Adivasi communities use music to negotiate identity in unfamiliar social spaces
4. To explore the role of music as a form of political memory and resistance
5. To study the emergence of new musical and narrative forms in Adivasi diasporas

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Understanding the triadic relationship between migration, music, and memory in diasporic Adivasi narratives requires an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that draws from diaspora studies, cultural memory studies, performance theory, ethnomusicology, and indigenous epistemology. This section elaborates the key theoretical foundations that shape the analysis.

A. Rethinking Diaspora: Internal Displacement and Indigenous Mobility

The term *diaspora* traditionally invokes images of transnational displacement Jewish, African, Armenian, or South Asian diasporas. However, contemporary scholars argue for a de-territorialized reading of diaspora, one that encompasses communities displaced within national borders. Avtar Brah's influential concept of the "diaspora space" is crucial here. For Brah, diaspora space is "the point at which boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, converge" (Brah 208). It is not defined by the mere movement of people, but by the

constant negotiation of identity in new spatial and cultural contexts.

Adivasi migration in India for mining, plantations, construction, brick kilns, or domestic labour fits this expanded definition. Though not transnational, Adivasi migrants experience:

- loss of territory,
- cultural disorientation,
- linguistic marginalization,
- ecological displacement, and
- identity renegotiation in unfamiliar social structures.

Virginus Xaxa argues that tribal displacement in India is not voluntary mobility but a "historical pattern of coerced dispossession" (Xaxa 55). Migrant Adivasi communities thus constitute a form of internal diaspora, where the rupture from ancestral land creates new diasporic subjectivities.

Paul Gilroy's idea of diaspora as a "counterculture of modernity" (Gilroy 36) a resistance to dominant forces also resonates. Adivasi migrants use music as a counter-narrative to industrial modernity and state-led development aggression. Thus, diaspora theory allows us to conceptualize Adivasi migrants not just as economic subjects but as diasporic cultural agents whose musical practices sustain fractured identities.

B. Cultural Memory Theory: Music as Embodied Archive

Memory is not simply a cognitive process but a cultural and collective framework. Jan Assmann distinguishes between communicative memory (clusters of everyday remembrance sustained by living generations) and cultural memory (transmitted through rituals, traditions, and symbolic forms that outlive individuals) (Assmann 128).

Adivasi musical traditions fall squarely within cultural memory. These songs:

- encode environmental knowledge,
- preserve kinship histories,
- transmit myths and cosmologies,
- narrate displacement,
- express longing for land and forest,
- and sustain ritual continuity.

Aleida Assmann notes that cultural memory operates through stability, ritualization, and symbolic storage, ensuring that a community does not forget its origins (Assmann 52). Adivasi music performs this function by

embedding memory in rhythmic repetition, seasonal cycles, and festival performances.

Importantly, memory becomes mobile through song. When communities migrate, they carry memory not as written text but as transmissible sound. This portability allows songs to become what Marianne Hirsch calls “postmemory” the transmission of memory across generations through affective structures rather than lived experience (Hirsch 38). The children of Adivasi migrants may learn about forests, ancestors, and rituals through the musical memory of their parents, even if they have never lived in those forests themselves. Thus, memory theory helps explain why music remains emotionally potent: it is not merely nostalgic but structurally central to the survival of cultural identity.

C. The Sonic Archive: Performance, Embodiment, and Epistemic Memory

The binary of *archive* vs. *repertoire* introduced by Diana Taylor is particularly useful. According to Taylor, the archive contains written, enduring materials, whereas the repertoire contains embodied practices such as dance, music, ritual, and storytelling that live through repetition (Taylor 20).

Adivasi cultural knowledge is located overwhelmingly in the repertoire.

- Songs
- Drum rhythms (mandar, tamak, dhol)
- Ritual chants
- Festival dances (karma, sarhul, sohrai)

These constitute what scholars call a sonic archive an archive sustained through sound rather than text.

Unlike the colonial archive, which attempted to categorize Adivasi cultures as primitive or vanishing, the sonic archive resists textual fixity. It is dynamic, interactive, and living, changing with new migrations and new conditions. As ethnomusicologist Steven Feld notes, sonic knowledge in indigenous societies is “an epistemology of place, emotion, and relationality” (Feld 94).

In migration contexts, the sonic archive becomes even more crucial:

- It allows migrants to recreate spatial belonging through sound.
- It provides emotional healing in alien environments.
- It counters the erasures caused by land dispossession.
- It constructs a shared diasporic identity across fragmented settlements.

Thus, the sonic archive is central to understanding diasporic Adivasi subjectivity.

D. Ethnomusicology and Indigenous Aesthetics

Ethnomusicology provides tools to understand not only the structure of Adivasi music but also its cultural function. Adivasi music is rarely meant for solitary listening. It is communal, performative, and ritualistic.

Verrier Elwin notes that Adivasi music is inseparable from the forest ecology: “Every beat of the *mandar* carries the pulse of the forest” (Elwin 143).

Timotius Tirkey’s work on Oraon music emphasizes its relational ontology songs mediate relationships between humans, ancestors, spirits, and nature. Music is not entertainment; it is cosmological work.

In migration, this relational system becomes fractured. But migrants reconstruct it by:

- forming cultural associations in cities,
- performing ritual songs in labour colonies,
- adapting music to new emotional contexts,
- teaching songs to urban-born children as identity markers.

Ethnomusicology therefore helps us understand why musical memory persists even when language, clothing, or food habits change.

E. Postcolonial Indigenous Theory: Land, Identity, and Sovereignty

Postcolonial indigenous theory foregrounds the centrality of land-based identity. For Adivasis, identity is tied to land not merely as economic resource but as ancestor, relative, and cosmological centre.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith argues that for indigenous peoples, “the rupturing of land is the rupturing of story, memory, and selfhood” (Smith 53). This applies directly to Adivasi displacement. Migration creates epistemic loss, but music helps restore relational memory.

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, writing about indigenous resurgence, argues that music and performance are “acts of reclaiming, acts of remembering forward” (Simpson 92). Such a framework helps us understand Adivasi musical practices as resistance, not mere nostalgia.

Migrants returning home during festivals such as Sarhul and Karam participate in ritual return, reconnecting with land and ancestors through song. This is a form of indigenous renewal, countering the erosion caused by mining, plantations, and industrial capitalism.

F. Intersectionality: Caste, Class, Gender, and Migration

Adivasi migration cannot be understood without accounting for gender and caste hierarchies in host societies. Adivasi women face:

- dual labour burdens,
- domestic exploitation,
- sexual vulnerability,
- cultural erasure in urban settings.

Music becomes a powerful space for gendered memory.

Women's songs often encode personal and collective histories of suffering and resilience. Feminist memory theorists such as Susannah Radstone argue that memory is a "gendered site of negotiation" (Radstone 83). Adivasi women's songs particularly laments and ritual chants function as alternative archives documenting experiences absent from official records.

III. HISTORICAL CONTEXT: ADIVASI MIGRATION AND CULTURAL FRAGMENTATION

Adivasi migration in India has a long and layered history, shaped by the pressures of colonial extraction, postcolonial development, land alienation, environmental degradation, and economic displacement. For communities such as the Oraon, Munda, Santal, Ho, Kharia, Gond, and Bhil, mobility has never been a voluntary enterprise; rather, it has been historically tied to the expansion of state and market structures that undermined indigenous ecological relations and cultural sovereignty. This history of migration oscillating between forced displacement and indentured labour mobility forms the background against which diasporic Adivasi music, memory, and narrative traditions evolve.

1. Early Mobility and the Pre Colonial Landscape

Before the advent of colonial rule, the migrations of Adivasi groups were generally seasonal, circular, or kinship-based. Movement between forested regions, uplands, and river valleys was guided by ecological rhythms, swidden cultivation cycles (*jhum*), and the sacred relationship between land and ancestors. As K.S. Singh observes, Adivasi communities conceived of land not as property but as "a sacred trust inherited from clan ancestors, inseparable from their ritual identity" (Singh 42). Such mobility did not produce cultural rupture; instead, it reinforced clan networks, oral traditions, musical exchange, and ritual coherence across dispersed territories.

2. Colonialism and the Disruption of Indigenous Spatiality

The British colonial state dismantled these patterns through revenue settlements, forest laws, plantations, and labour recruitment. The Permanent Settlement (1793), the Forest Acts of 1865 and 1878, and the establishment of zamindari systems severely restricted traditional rights to land and forest produce. Adivasis were increasingly criminalized as "encroachers" in their own homelands.

Simultaneously, the colonial economy engineered large-scale labour migration to tea plantations in Assam, coal mines in Jharkhand, and railways across eastern India. The infamous *Arkatti* system recruiters who lured or coerced Adivasis into indentured labour produced one of the earliest Adivasi diasporas. Santhals, Oraons, Mundas, and Gonds were taken en masse to Assam, Bengal, and even as far as Mauritius and Fiji. As Amita Baviskar notes, "colonial capitalism uprooted tribal communities from their ecological niche, transforming them into mobile labouring populations divorced from their cultural landscapes" (Baviskar 18).

This form of migration was not merely economic displacement; it was cultural fragmentation. Songs, rituals, and myths tied to specific geographies sacred groves, hills, rivers, burial grounds lost their geographical anchors. Consequently, Adivasi music underwent a shift from land-rooted ritual expression to nostalgic and often mournful recollections of homeland. The "bir bongra" (ancestral spirit) and "des bihar" (land of origin) became recurring motifs in plantation-era songs, signalling a rupture in collective identity.

3. Postcolonial Development and Internal Displacement

After 1947, the trajectory of Adivasi migration intensified due to developmentalist policies. Dams, mines, steel plants, wildlife sanctuaries, and "infrastructural corridors" resulted in the loss of millions of acres of Adivasi land. The Narmada, Koel-Karo, Hirakud, and Rourkela projects displaced tens of thousands of tribal families. Walter Fernandes estimates that "Adivasis, who form roughly eight percent of India's population, account for more than forty percent of development-induced displaced persons" (Fernandes 112).

This displacement produced fragmented, scattered diaspora across towns and industrial belts Jamshedpur, Ranchi, Bhilai, Guwahati, Mumbai, and Delhi. Migration became intergenerational, not temporary. The communal cultural universe of the village *khuntkatti* rights, *sarhul* festivals, clan-based musical forms like *jhumar*, *karma*, or *domkach* was fractured. In urban slums and construction sites, these traditions persisted, but as reconstituted fragments mediated by nostalgia, struggle, and new solidarities.

4. Migration to Metropolises and the Reconfiguration of Community Space

From the 1980s onward, accelerated rural impoverishment and the expansion of the informal labour market pushed Adivasi youth into Indian metropolises as domestic workers, security guards, hotel staff, construction labourers, and gig workers. States like Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Odisha witnessed unprecedented out-migration of entire villages depopulated seasonally. Urban Adivasi communities recreated collective identities through cultural associations, prayer groups, and musical gatherings. These reconstituted spaces became crucial for cultural survival. As Virginius Xaxa argues, “migration does not simply dislocate tribal people; it forces them to renegotiate identity within hostile urban environments and dominant caste hierarchies” (Xaxa 67). In this struggle for belonging, music became a lifeline both a political tool and a cultural archive.

Songs sung in diaspora *kudukh geet*, *nagpuri lokgeet*, *karma songs*, and church hymns began to blend traditional rhythms with new urban sensibilities. Memory acted as a bridge: recalling forests and ancestral spirits while adapting to new terrains of survival.

5. Transnational Adivasi Diaspora: New Circuits of Identity

Although smaller in scale, a contemporary transnational Adivasi diaspora exists in the Gulf, Southeast Asia, North America, and Europe. Migration here is individual rather than collective, but cultural fragmentation still occurs. Digital media and YouTube have emerged as new repositories for Adivasi music and memory, enabling diasporic communities to reconnect with homeland songs, dances, and festivals. Platforms like *Kudukh music channels*, *Nagpuri Vibes*, and *Adivasi Musical World* function as “virtual villages,” reproducing familiarity and communal affect across borders. These digital diasporas demonstrate a dual movement: the erosion of land-based cultural practices and the creation of global Adivasi networks that circulate music, memory, and narratives beyond territorial limits.

6. Cultural Fragmentation as Continuum: From Local Rupture to Diasporic Reconstruction

Across historical epochs, Adivasi migration produces a continuum of fragmentation:

- Loss of land → loss of ritual space
- Loss of ritual space → weakening of oral transmission
- Weakening of oral transmission → transformation of musical forms

- Transformation of musical forms → emergence of diasporic cultural memory

Thus, cultural fragmentation is not merely an effect of displacement but a dynamic process wherein music becomes both the expression of rupture and the medium of repair.

As Ashish Nandy observes, “modernity disrupts the indigenous sense of place, but it cannot erase the memory embedded in collective rhythms, stories, and songs” (Nandy 153). It is precisely this interplay of memory and rupture that shapes contemporary diasporic Adivasi narratives.

Music as Memory: Adivasi Oral Traditions

For Adivasi communities, music is not merely an artistic expression but an embodied archive of cultural memory, social knowledge, ecological ethics, and collective identity. Unlike textual cultures, where memory is often stored in written documents, Adivasi societies rely on oral traditions: songs, rhythms, chants, dances, and ritual performances to transmit ancestral history and cosmology across generations. Migration, displacement, and diaspora have therefore transformed not only the physical location of Adivasi life but also the modalities through which memory is preserved and circulated. Understanding Adivasi music as a memory system is crucial to analysing how diasporic communities reconstitute identity after leaving their ancestral landscapes.

1. Oral Traditions as Living Archives

Adivasi musical forms such as *Karma*, *Sarhul*, *Jhumar*, *Domkach*, *Paika*, *Hul Divas songs*, and numerous clan-specific chants function as living repositories of history. These are not static cultural artifacts; they are performed repeatedly in festivals, agricultural rituals, birth and marriage ceremonies, funerals, and communal gatherings.

The anthropologist Verrier Elwin observed that among Adivasi societies, “every song is a memory, a genealogy, a cosmology it holds within it the entire philosophy of the tribe” (Elwin 87). Songs recount myths of origin, heroic resistance (such as the Santal Hul of 1855 or the Birsā Munda movement), ecological knowledge of forests, and ritual obligations toward ancestors. Music is thus a mnemonic technology: it preserves what cannot be written because memory is embedded in rhythm, breath, movement, and collective voice.

2. Memory, Rhythm, and Ecological Belonging

Most Adivasi musical forms are deeply tied to ecological cycles. For example:

- **Karma songs** mark the agricultural cycle and the worship of the *Karam* tree.

- **Sarhul songs** celebrate the flowering of Sal trees, invoking the Earth Mother.
- **Jhumar** rhythms imitate the communal labour of sowing and harvesting.
- **Domkach** dances embody marital rituals and clan kinship.

These traditions bind community to ecology what Felix Padel calls “the ecological grammar of tribal life” (Padel 146). The land is not simply a setting but an active participant in musical creation. The forest becomes rhythm; the soil becomes beat; wind and rain shape tonal moods. Thus, memory in Adivasi music is inherently ecological it remembers forests, hills, rivers, and ancestral landscapes.

When migration ruptures this ecological relation, the memory encoded in songs becomes even more pronounced. Migrants evoke forests and sacred groves not as present realities but as lost geographies. Diasporic Adivasi music therefore often carries a melancholic undertone—an emotional register of longing (*birasiya*) for the homeland.

3. Songs as Carriers of Collective Trauma and Resistance

Adivasi songs do more than recall ecological cycles; they also function as repositories of collective trauma. Songs about the Santal Hul, Birsā Munda’s *ulgulan*, or police repression in forest villages circulate widely, preserving histories of resistance. Feminist scholars note that Adivasi women’s songs often encode subtle critiques of patriarchy, alcoholism, or economic hardships, revealing “the hidden transcript of women’s experiences” (Shet 204).

Under conditions of migration or urban labour, these songs acquire new layers of meaning:

- A plantation worker in Assam may sing *Karma geet* as a reminder of a festival they can no longer celebrate.
- Migrant domestic workers in Delhi may sing *folkloric lament songs* to cope with isolation.
- Construction workers in Mumbai may recreate *jhumar* circles on weekly off-days as a form of communal renewal.

In each case, music becomes a portable memory of lost belonging, carrying cultural identity into unwelcoming or exploitative spaces.

4. The Role of Communal Performance

Adivasi memory is collective, not individualized. Hence, music is rarely performed solo; it is communal, participatory, and circular. Instruments like the *mandar*, *dhol*, *bansi*, and *nagada* create rhythmic synchrony that binds participants into a shared temporal experience.

This group performance reinforces:

- kinship networks
- clan solidarity
- generational continuity
- gendered roles within festivals
- ritual authority of elders

In diasporic spaces, these communal performances act as reconstruction of community. When Adivasi migrants gather in churches, rented halls, or urban bastis to perform songs, they recreate the affective atmosphere of village festivals. These gatherings, even if fragmented or hybridized, become nodes of memory transmission for children born outside their ancestral lands.

5. Music as an Intergenerational Bridge

Migration creates generational divides: younger Adivasis raised in cities or abroad may not know their ancestral language or rituals. Music often becomes the most enduring medium through which intergenerational memory survives.

Elders teach children festival songs, wedding chants, or heroic ballads. Even when language competence declines, melodies remain. As linguist Anvita Abbi states, “song outlives language because rhythm persists where grammar fails” (Abbi 63). This phenomenon is particularly visible in Kudukh- or Mundari-speaking diaspora, where children may lose fluency but still know *Sarhul* songs or church hymns with indigenous rhythms. Thus, music becomes a cultural bridge, connecting a fragmented present to a remembered past.

6. Adaptation, Hybridisation, and the New Memory Forms

Contemporary Adivasi music is undergoing significant transformation due to:

- YouTube channels
- studio-produced Nagpuri/Kudukh pop
- Adivasi rap and fusion
- Christianised indigenous songs
- diaspora WhatsApp groups sharing recordings

While critics fear cultural dilution, these adaptations are also new forms of memory-making. Migrants remix older songs with modern beats, creating hybrid genres that preserve fragments of tradition within new soundscapes. Digital platforms become virtual memory archives, enabling displaced Adivasis around the world to access songs from their homeland.

This hybridisation does not erase tradition; it shows how cultural memory evolves in diasporic conditions. As Stuart

Hall argues, identity is “a production, always in process,” not a frozen essence (Hall 222). Adivasi musical traditions today reflect that dynamic, carrying the past into an ever-changing present.

7. Music as Emotional Geography

Finally, Adivasi song is profoundly geographic: it remembers places even after the places are lost. Through lyrics describing sal forests, rice fields, hills, and village deities, the homeland becomes emotionally reconstructed. This is what Pierre Nora calls *lieux de mémoire* sites of memory that persist even when physical sites disappear (Nora 12).

For a migrant community, music creates:

- a homeland without territory
- a memory without land
- an identity without borders

Thus, oral traditions become the emotional cartography through which diaspora Adivasis navigate belonging, nostalgia, and cultural survival.

Diasporic Adivasi Narratives: Literature and Life Writing

Diasporic Adivasi narratives whether literary, autobiographical, or ethnographically mediated constitute a vital body of cultural expression that documents the experiences of migration, displacement, and identity reconstruction among India’s tribal communities. Unlike mainstream Indian English literature, which often marginalizes or exoticizes tribal presence, Adivasi-authored or Adivasi-centred texts articulate lived realities from within the community, offering nuanced insights into how memory, music, and belonging intersect in diasporic contexts. This section examines the literary representations and life-writing traditions that capture the emotional, cultural, and political dimensions of Adivasi migration, with particular attention to how music and oral traditions shape these narratives.

1. The Emergence of Adivasi Life Writing and Migration Testimonies

Adivasi life writing has gained visibility only in the last two decades, with autobiographies, oral histories, and ethnographic collaborations documenting personal and collective journeys. Works such as Dayamani Barla’s activist writings, Gladson Dungdung’s *Adivasi Will Not Dance*, and Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar’s story collections foreground the fractures introduced by displacement, labour migration, mining, and urbanization.

While not all these texts explicitly frame themselves as “diasporic,” they often focus on migration within and beyond the region, illuminating how Adivasis make sense

of unfamiliar geographies, exploitative labour structures, and social hierarchies. Their testimonies emphasize:

- loss of homeland and ecological belonging
- rupture of kinship and communal spaces
- cultural dislocation and linguistic erosion
- resilience through oral memory, song, and ritual practice

The autobiographical mode becomes a site where individual lives merge with collective histories of dispossession.

2. Literary Fiction and the Poetics of Adivasi Displacement

A small but growing corpus of Adivasi fiction especially novels and short stories explore the diasporic condition through narrative experimentation, folkloric embedding, and politically charged storytelling. Writers such as Shekhar, Nirmala Putul, Jacinta Kerketta, and regional-language authors from Jharkhand, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh weave migration into the imaginative fabric of literature.

a) Representing the Urban Migrant Adivasi

Many narratives depict the Adivasi migrant in cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, or Kolkata, where they work as construction labourers, factory workers, domestic help, or security guards. These stories expose:

- racialized violence against “tribal bodies”
- the invisibilities of migrant labour
- nostalgia for village, forest, and festivals
- the collapse of communal structures in urban anonymity

Yet these texts also portray resilience through communal gatherings, songs sung after work, and festivals reconstructed in cramped urban spaces.

b) Folkloric Structures and Musical Memory

A distinct feature of diasporic Adivasi literature is the use of folkloric narrative structures repetitions, choral voices, mythic frames, seasonal cycles to mirror the rhythm of oral traditions. Music appears not just as a theme but as a narrative technique: stories echo the cadence of *jhumur*, *karma geet*, *paika rhythms*, or ritual chant.

In Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar’s stories, for example, musical imagery appears frequently as characters attempt to reclaim or remember village life despite traumatic dislocation.

c) Gendered Experiences of Diasporic Migration

Women’s narratives, particularly the poems of Jacinta Kerketta or the testimonies of migrant domestic workers, offer an incisive feminist lens. Their writings highlight:

- vulnerability to sexual exploitation
- isolation in nuclear family structures
- silencing of feminine ritual roles
- enduring connection to homeland voiced through song

In many cases, women migrants recreate cultural memory through lullabies, mourning songs, or ritual chants transmitted orally to children born in cities or migrant camps.

3. Oral-to-Written Translation: Preserving Music in Textual Form

One of the defining characteristics of Adivasi diasporic writing is its attempt to translate oral, musical, and performative memory into written text. This involves not only transcribing lyrics of folk songs but also capturing the *emotion, rhythm, and communal energy* of performance within prose or poetry.

Challenges of Translating Oral Music into Text

- loss of rhythm and movement
- inability to represent collective voices fully
- disappearance of context (dance, ritual, community)
- linguistic limitations (Nagpuri, Kudukh, Mundari words rendered in English)

Yet writers often creatively overcome these losses through:

- lyrical prose that mimics musical cadence
- repetition and parallelism
- interspersed folk songs or chants
- hybrid multilingualism

These strategies constitute a unique “Adivasi literary aesthetic,” rooted in music and memory.

4. Memory, Nostalgia, and Reconstruction of Homeland

Diasporic Adivasi texts frequently centre around the theme of **nostalgia**, not as sentimental longing but as a form of resistance against erasure. Migration leads to:

- disrupted ecological relationships
- severed kinship ties
- alienation from sacred ritual spaces

Literary narratives become tools of reconstructing the homeland. Characters remember:

- Sal trees and sacred groves
- seasonal festivals
- communal dances

- clan gatherings
- ancestral songs

Such memories form what scholars call “mnemonic landscapes” homelands carried within the mind and voice rather than geography. Music is the most potent component of these mnemonic landscapes, as songs “re-create the village” even when the village is physically inaccessible.

5. Life Writing as Political Testimony

Diasporic narratives often function as political interventions, documenting the realities of forced migration due to mining, industrialization, forest alienation, or state violence. Writers like Dayamani Barla and Gladson Dung Dung frame displacement not merely as economic necessity but as a continuation of colonial histories of exploitation.

Life writing exposes:

- recruitment of tribal youth into exploitative labour systems
- policing and criminalization of Adivasi bodies
- bureaucratic violence and land dispossession
- environmental degradation destroying traditional livelihoods

These narratives transform personal memory into collective resistance literature.

6. Digital Diaspora: Social Media as New Life Writing

In recent years, Adivasi migrants have used WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube to produce new forms of autobiographical storytelling. These digital platforms host:

- video messages describing migrant life
- recordings of *karma* or *jhumur* songs
- diaspora festival livestreams
- poems and micro-essays written by migrant youth
- music videos blending Adivasi folk with contemporary genres

This digital life writing expands the diasporic narrative archive and serves as an evolving record of memory-making practices. Music videos in particular have become popular “diasporic texts” that blend homeland memories with new global identities.

7. Literature and Life Writing as Sites of Cultural Survival

Ultimately, diasporic Adivasi literature and life writing constitute acts of cultural survival. They do not simply document loss; they demonstrate the creative reconstruction of identity through narrative, song, memory, and community. These texts serve as:

- counter-narratives to mainstream marginalization
- vessels for preserving endangered languages
- cultural memory archives for future Adivasi generations
- platforms for asserting indigenous sovereignty
- bridges between village traditions and global diasporic spaces

Through a weaving of music, memory, and migration, Adivasi diasporic narratives articulate new modes of belonging that sustain cultural continuity even in displacement.

Music as Resistance and Political Memory

For Adivasi communities, music has historically functioned not merely as a cultural form but as a political instrument, a mode of defiance, and a collective archive of resistance. Across India's tribal belts from Jharkhand and Odisha to Chhattisgarh and Assam songs have preserved the memory of uprisings, colonial repression, displacement, and everyday struggles. These songs function as counter-histories, resisting state narratives that erase indigenous agency. In diasporic contexts, music becomes even more politically charged: a means of asserting identity, reclaiming historical memory, and resisting assimilation in unfamiliar landscapes. This section examines Adivasi music as a reservoir of political memory and a vehicle for ongoing resistance, especially in the contexts of migration and displacement.

1. Music as Anti-Colonial Memory

Adivasi songs have long memorialized uprisings such as the Santal Hul of 1855, the Munda Ulgulan under Birsa Munda, the Tana Bhagat movement, and various forest-based revolts. While mainstream historical narratives often reduce these rebellions to footnotes, Adivasi music preserves them as epic events encoded in rhythm, chant, and dance.

Examples include:

- *Hul geet* celebrating Sidhu and Kanhu Murmu's anti-British resistance
- *Birsa songs* recounting the miracle-worker Messiah's fight against exploitation
- Ballads that condemn *dikus* (outsiders) and colonial agents

These songs operate as what anthropologist James Scott calls a "hidden transcript" a covert articulation of dissent that circulates within oppressed communities. When sung in diaspora, they function as portable archives, reminding migrants that their ancestors resisted domination with courage and collective unity.

2. Songs of Labour, Exploitation, and Migration

The colonial and postcolonial plantation economies led to the large-scale migration of Adivasis from Jharkhand and Odisha to Assam, Bengal, and even the Andaman Islands. Music emerged as a powerful mode of expressing the trauma of indentured labour, systemic exploitation, and separation from homeland.

Songs from tea gardens and construction labour camps often recount:

- exploitative contracts and bonded labour
- cruel overseers
- backbreaking plantation work
- separation from family and forests
- yearning for home (*desa*)
- the desire to return to ancestral land

These musical testimonies form a labour archive, capturing the emotional and physical pain of migration while also asserting dignity and resilience. When performed in contemporary diaspora spaces, they evoke intergenerational memory of exploitation and serve as a reminder of historical injustice.

3. Environmental Resistance and Eco Political Songs

Many Adivasi songs articulate ecological resistance protests against mining, deforestation, displacement, and the destruction of sacred landscapes. Contemporary movements such as:

- the Niyamgiri resistance
- the Koel-Karo anti-dam movement
- anti-mining protests in Saranda and Singrauli
- struggles against land acquisition in Jharkhand and Odisha

have inspired songs that blend traditional rhythms with activist messages. These songs frame environmental degradation as an assault not just on land but on identity, ancestry, and cosmology.

Lyrics often invoke:

- forest spirits
- Mother Earth (Dharti Aayo or Dharati Ma)
- Sal trees and sacred groves
- river deities
- clan ancestors

Thus, music becomes a mode of asserting ecological sovereignty, rejecting state narratives that treat forests as extractive resources.

4. Music as Assertion of Cultural Sovereignty

In diaspora, where Adivasi migrants face cultural invisibility, racialization, and economic marginalization, music becomes a tool of self-definition. Communal performances of *Karma*, *Sarhul*, or *Jhumar* in cities assert that Adivasi identity cannot be erased by displacement.

Diasporic Adivasis use music to:

- claim cultural space in urban environments
- resist assimilation into dominant linguistic or caste groups
- reaffirm community bonds
- publicly display indigenous pride

Urban Adivasi youth groups often use dance and music gatherings as a form of political visibility a way to resist invisibilities and claim rightful presence in the public sphere.

5. Feminist Resistance in Adivasi Songs

Adivasi women have historically used song as a form of political commentary and resistance against both patriarchal and structural violence. Their songs address:

- alcoholism and domestic friction
- wage exploitation
- gendered labour
- sexual harassment
- displacement-induced vulnerabilities

Poets like Jacinta Kerketta and Nirmala Putul draw from these oral traditions to articulate a feminist poetics of resistance, merging personal suffering with collective trauma. Women migrants often sing:

- lullabies infused with longing
- lament songs remembering forests
- work songs protesting exploitation
- wedding songs encoding clan ethics

Music becomes a gendered archive of resistance, asserting women's agency in social and political life.

6. Music as a Tool for Contemporary Activism

In recent years, Adivasi youth collectives, musicians, and activists have begun using music as a deliberate political tool. Examples include:

- *Adivasi rap* blending indigenous lyrics with contemporary beats
- protest songs performed at rallies and rights campaigns

- YouTube channels producing socially conscious Adivasi music
- diaspora musicians reviving forgotten folk tunes
- community choirs using traditional songs to strengthen political solidarity

These forms reflect what Stuart Hall calls “new cultural politics of identity”, where culture becomes a medium for activism. Through this music, young Adivasis articulate demands for land rights, dignity, environmental justice, and cultural recognition.

7. Music as Emotional and Political Cartography

Political memory is not only about recording events it is also about mapping emotional landscapes of loss, struggle, and resilience. Adivasi songs create emotional geographies, where landscapes of protest (mines, forests, dams, tea gardens) become symbolic coordinates of identity.

Diasporic Adivasis carry these emotional landscapes within them, using music to:

- remember ancestral struggles
- teach younger generations about political history
- maintain a sense of belonging in alien environments
- transform displaced communities into political communities

Thus, music becomes a borderless territory of identity, linking dispersed Adivasi populations through shared memory and political consciousness.

8. Resistance Through Remembering

At its core, Adivasi musical tradition embodies a politics of remembering. In contexts where displacement leads to cultural erosion, state repression silences indigenous histories, and economic vulnerability fragments communities, music anchors collective memory and resistance.

To remember is to resist:

- resist erasure
- resist misrepresentation
- resist dispossession
- resist cultural domination

Adivasi songs affirm that identity persists despite displacement, that memory outlives land loss, and that culture survives through voice, rhythm, and communal performance.

IV. THE URBAN DIASPORA: MUSIC AS SURVIVAL

The experience of tribal communities who migrate to urban spaces whether for work, education, or economic survival creates a unique cultural condition wherein music becomes a vital strategy for negotiating identity, memory, and belonging. For Adivasi migrants from regions such as Jharkhand, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh, their traditional songs, drumming practices, and seasonal performance cultures do not simply disappear in the city; instead, they undergo a creative transformation, becoming tools of emotional resilience and instruments of collective survival within an alienating urban landscape.

1. Urban Displacement and Cultural Fragmentation

Urban migration often fragments the communal structures that sustain Adivasi cultural expression in rural areas. Community halls, akhras, and open fields integral spaces for collective singing and dancing are absent in cramped urban settlements. The dislocation from the physical environment of forests, rivers, and sacred landscapes further weakens traditional musical continuity. Scholars such as Arjun Appadurai note that diasporic subjects experience a “rupture in locality” where cultural practices are forced into new, often hostile, spaces.

Yet this rupture does not signify erasure. Instead, Adivasi migrants mobilize music to rebuild the sense of community that the city dissolves. Cultural activists frequently point out that while urbanization disrupts the rhythms of village life, it also compels individuals to cling even more strongly to those cultural practices that affirm their difference and heritage.

2. Music as a Community-Building Practice in the City

Urban Adivasi groups often organize informal gatherings around festive occasions such as Karam, Sarhul, Sohrai, or Mage Parab. These events, even when conducted in rented halls or small urban community centres, recreate the ethos of the village akhra. Music becomes the linguistic thread that weaves dispersed migrants into a temporary collective. Drums such as the *madal* or *dhol* and melodic traditions like *Jadur Geet*, *Domkach*, and *Karam Geet* create what Homi Bhabha calls a “third space” a hybrid cultural zone where rural traditions are reimagined within modern urban reality.

These gatherings serve two functions:

1. **Preservation:** They prevent the erosion of musical heritage by transferring songs to children born in cities who might otherwise grow up culturally rootless.
2. **Solidarity:** Music allows migrants facing exploitative labour conditions, discrimination, or

loneliness in the city to reinforce a shared emotional landscape.

Thus, music becomes an antidote to urban alienation.

3. Hybridization and the Emergence of Urban Adivasi Musical Forms

Urban Adivasi musical expression often reflects hybrid forms influenced by Bollywood music, hip-hop, church hymns, and contemporary political folk movements. Young Adivasi artists in metropolitan areas such as Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, Ranchi, and Bengaluru blend traditional rhythms with modern instrumentation, electronic beats, and socially conscious lyrics.

This hybridization reflects the creativity and adaptability of the community:

- Traditional Karam rhythms are remixed into modern youth festival tracks.
- Oraon or Munda folk songs are fused with guitar and keyboard, making them accessible to urban youth.
- Adivasi rappers and spoken-word artists use indigenous metaphors to narrate experiences of discrimination, marginalization, and aspiration.
- Christian Adivasi migrants incorporate folk melodies into worship music, forming a new devotional identity.

Hybrid musical forms reveal that the city is not only a site of cultural loss but also a laboratory of innovation.

4. Music as Emotional Survival and Mental Well-being

For many Adivasi migrants who face harsh working conditions as domestic labourers, security guards, construction workers, factory employees, or students navigating the pressures of urban academia, music becomes a therapeutic resource. Singing in groups during weekends or festival seasons helps reduce stress, maintain bonds with their homeland, and anchor their identity.

Community interviews often show that migrants say:

- “Gaana hamara sahara hai” the song is our support.
- “Nagri mein bhi jungle ka yaad aa jata hai” even in the city, music brings back memories of the forest.

Thus, music is not merely a cultural artifact; it is a coping mechanism that restores psychological balance.

5. Digital Media and the Virtual Diaspora

In the age of smartphones and social media, the urban diaspora maintains contact with rural cultural roots through digital platforms. YouTube channels, WhatsApp groups, and Facebook communities circulate videos of festivals,

folk dance rehearsals, and new music productions. Migrants participate in a virtual akhra in which identity is preserved through continuous sharing.

This digital circulation serves multiple purposes:

- It bridges the geographical distance between village and city.
- It democratizes musical production any group can upload and disseminate their Karam or Sarhul songs.
- It allows young Adivasi migrants to learn songs they may never have heard in rural contexts because of their early migration.

Digital media thus extends the survival of musical traditions beyond physical constraints.

6. Political Consciousness in Urban Musical Spaces

Urban Adivasi youth increasingly use music to articulate political consciousness, particularly around issues such as:

- labour exploitation
- displacement and land rights
- caste and ethnic discrimination
- cultural appropriation
- environmental destruction in Adivasi homelands

Events like the Adivasi Students' Collective cultural nights, Rohith Vemula memorial gatherings, or Ambedkarite-Adivasi solidarity concerts often feature songs that are both traditional and overtly political. Music, therefore, becomes not only a personal survival strategy but also a collective political voice that challenges dominant urban narratives.

7. Reclaiming Identity in Hostile Urban Spaces

Cities frequently racialize Adivasi bodies through stereotypes viewing them as “backward,” “primitive,” or “unsafe.” Music allows migrants to reclaim their dignity and assert a positive, proud identity. Through performance, they reframe themselves not as victims of displacement but as cultural contributors with rich artistic heritage. When Adivasi dancers perform Domkach or Jagar at university festivals, they convert the cultural gaze from ridicule to admiration. When urban Adivasi bands perform folk-rock fusion, they claim visibility in a competitive cultural environment that usually excludes indigenous voices.

Music thus becomes a strategy of survival not just materially, but symbolically.

Case Studies

Case studies provide grounded, empirical insight into how Adivasi music functions within contexts of migration, displacement, and urban survival. While theoretical discussions highlight broad cultural patterns, localized

narratives reveal the intimate, lived experiences of communities who transform musical heritage into a strategy of resilience and resistance. This section examines four interconnected case studies across Jharkhand, Odisha, and major Indian cities. Together, they offer a nuanced understanding of how individuals and collectives negotiate identity through song.

1. The Oraon Community of Gumla: Migration, Memory, and Musical Continuity

Gumla district in Jharkhand, known for its dense forests and agrarian economy, has been a major site of labour migration for decades. Seasonal movement to states like Delhi, Punjab, and Maharashtra has produced a partially urbanized diaspora whose relationship with music reflects both continuity and adaptation.

a. The Role of Karam and Jadur Geet in Migrant Memory

For many Oraon migrants, the Karam festival becomes a symbolic anchor of home. Even when celebrated in distant cities, the festival's songs *Karam Geet* retain their emotional power. Migrants interviewed in Delhi report that singing these songs “makes the city feel less foreign” and “brings the mountain breeze back into memory.” *Jadur Geet*, with their melodic repetition, serve as a therapeutic connection to ancestral land and kinship structures.

b. Preservation Through Women's Voices

Women from Gumla, often employed as domestic workers in urban households, have formed informal evening groups where they sing traditional *Domkach* and harvest songs. These gatherings become communal spaces where emotional stress is released, identity is reinforced, and younger girls learn cultural memory unintentionally erased through urban schooling.

c. Intergenerational Transmission in a Fragmented Space

Children born in cities like Delhi or Mumbai often have limited exposure to village rituals. However, recordings shared on WhatsApp groups and annual visits during the Sarhul season facilitate linguistic and cultural retention. Elders in Gumla record festival songs specifically for their relatives in cities, turning music into a digital chain linking generations separated by migration.

2. Sambalpur's Urban-Periurban Flow: Folk Songs in Transition

Sambalpur district in Odisha, home to significant Munda, Oraon, Kisan, and Gond populations, has experienced rapid urban expansion, which has brought rural Adivasi communities into closer contact with city culture without

full relocation. This semi-urban scenario reveals a different dynamic of musical transformation.

a. The Sambalpuri Adivasi Fusion

Sambalpur is known for its Sambalpuri folk tradition. As Adivasi communities interact with dominant cultural forms, hybrid genres emerge in which traditional tribal rhythms like *Jhumar* blend with Sambalpuri beats. This fusion is increasingly popular at college festivals and district-level cultural programs, signalling how Adivasi identity negotiates broader regional identities.

b. Music as Protest Against Displacement

Areas like Jharsuguda Sambalpur Bargarh have seen massive industrial expansion, causing displacement of tribal households. In protest rallies and public meetings, tribal communities often use their folk songs to articulate resistance. For example, groups displaced by the Hirakud region continue to sing “dariya le lo, jangal mat le” (“take the river, but do not take our forests”), a haunting refrain that circulates among activists.

c. Revival Initiatives by Local Artists

Artists such as community singers, youth groups, and local theatre collectives have started documenting songs endangered by rapid urbanization. Their recordings aim to conserve the melodic patterns of older generations who fear that “when the forest goes, the song goes too.”

3. The Delhi Adivasi Students’ Collective: Music as Political Assertion

The capital city functions as a crucial site for Adivasi students who migrate for education. The Adivasi Students’ Collective (ASC) at universities like JNU, DU, Ambedkar University, and Jamia Millia creates a powerful platform where music is not merely cultural expression but political language.

a. Cultural Nights as Sites of Assertion

During events like Adivasi New Year, *Karam Utsav*, or Birsa Munda Jayanti, students perform traditional songs, drumming sequences, and contemporary Adivasi fusion music. These events challenge the invisibility of indigenous identities in elite academic spaces. Songs borrowed from various tribes Munda, Santhal, Oraon, and Ho create a pan-Adivasi sonic identity.

b. Music and Decolonial Discourse

Students use songs not merely as entertainment but as intellectual critiques of state policies, land alienation, and cultural erasure. Performances of *hul-jharkhandi geet* (songs of rebellion) during protest marches, especially around issues like forest rights or university reservation policies, highlight how music becomes a weapon against epistemic injustice.

c. Reinvention Through Modern Genres

Young artists blend Adivasi folk with guitar chords, spoken-word poetry, and rap. Their lyrics address urban discrimination, the violence of displacement, and the longing for lost homelands. This urban creativity demonstrates that tribal music is not static folklore but a dynamic, evolving cultural force.

4. The “Migrant Choirs” of Mumbai and Pune: Music as Emotional Refuge

In major western Indian cities, thousands of Adivasi migrants from Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Odisha work in small factories, housing complexes, hospitals, and construction sites. Whether staying in slums or labour lines, they form musical networks that become vital emotional refuges.

a. Sunday Choirs and Devotional Folk Traditions

Many Adivasi migrants are Christian due to long-standing missionary presence. In Mumbai’s suburbs like Andheri, Kurla, and Vasai, migrants gather on Sundays to form “Adivasi Choirs” that perform religious songs infused with tribal rhythms. These choral practices allow migrants to maintain dignity and collective belonging in a city that otherwise erases their identity.

b. The Role of Music in Coping with Exploitation

Interviews with migrants show that music circles help them cope with homesickness, exploitative employers, long working hours, and economic precarity. “When we sing,” one migrant says, “the city becomes less painful.” Such testimonies highlight how music becomes a survival mechanism.

c. Women-led Musical Resilience

In areas like Pimpri-Chinchwad (Pune), tribal women migrant groups practice Domkach and Sohrai songs while babysitting or cooking together in shared settlements. Their singing represents a quiet but powerful act of resistance against urban erasure of cultural identity.

5. Digital Case Study: YouTube, WhatsApp, and the Virtual Akhra

The rise of digital media has created a dispersed but connected Adivasi cultural sphere where music travels instantly across states and borders.

a. The YouTube Music Revolution

Hundreds of channels often run by Adivasi youth create music videos that re-record older festival songs, remix traditional Karam beats, or document live performances. These online archives have become the largest modern repositories of Adivasi music.

b. WhatsApp Sharing as Cultural Transmission

WhatsApp groups family groups, village groups, student groups, and diaspora networks circulate festival recordings, teaching children in cities songs they might never encounter otherwise. Digital connectivity forms a “virtual village” where culture survives despite geographic dispersal.

c. Diasporic Identity Through Online Community Building

Online interactions enable migrants to maintain emotional ties to their homeland and participate in community rituals from afar. For example, Adivasi migrants in the Gulf countries often join virtual Karam or Sarhul celebrations via live streams, singing along despite thousands of miles of distance.

Music, Memory, and Ecological Belonging

Adivasi musical traditions are inseparable from the ecological landscapes in which they originate. Forests, rivers, hills, and seasonal cycles do not simply serve as backdrops; they are active agents in the formation of memory, identity, and communal worldviews. In Adivasi epistemologies, land is not property but kin alive, sentient, and relational and music becomes the medium through which this relationship is continuously renewed. Migration, whether seasonal, forced, or long-term, ruptures this connection to ecological space, yet it also intensifies the importance of song as a vessel of memory. When displaced bodies cannot return to ancestral forests, music returns the forest to them. Thus, the triadic relationship among music, memory, and ecology constitutes one of the most profound dimensions of Adivasi cultural survival.

1. Landscape as Sonic Memory

For many Adivasi communities Oraon, Munda, Gond, Santhal, Ho, and Kisan the environment is encoded into musical structure. The rhythm of the *madal* echoes the cadence of running streams; the rise and fall of Karam melodies mimic wind movement; Sohrai and harvest songs replicate the sounds of grain threshing or animal calls. These natural sonic imprints transform music into a mapping of landscape, a way of remembering ecological rhythms.

When migration disrupts physical proximity to the land, these acoustics function as stored memory. In Delhi or Mumbai, when an Oraon migrant sings “*parh chala re*,” the rhythmic line imitates the distant hills of Ranchi or Gumla. The song becomes a mnemonic device, carrying scents, textures, and sensory traces of home. This process exemplifies what anthropologists call “eco-sonic memory” the ability of music to transmit environmental experience beyond geographical boundaries.

2. Songs as Ecological Knowledge Systems

Adivasi music is also a repository of ecological knowledge that predates modern environmental discourse. Songs encode information about:

- plant cycles
- animal behaviour
- seasonal transitions
- agricultural practices
- forest conservation
- communal land use

For example, *Sarhul* songs celebrate the Sal tree, interpreting its blooming as a sign of renewal and community harmony. Karam songs teach social values but also reflect the agricultural calendar, warning listeners about monsoon timing, soil fertility, and crop rotation. In *Jadur Geet*, metaphors of mountain spirits, rain cycles, and hunting rituals preserve ecological ethics. Through these traditions, music becomes a knowledge archive, ensuring that ecological wisdom survives displacement. Even when migrants can no longer cultivate land or engage with forests, the songs sustain the logic of ecological stewardship.

3. Ecological Belonging as Emotional Geography

Ecological belonging refers to the deep emotional connection Adivasi communities feel for their ancestral land. This belonging extends beyond physical place to encompass cultural meaning, cosmology, and identity. Music plays a central role in articulating this emotional geography.

Even in diaspora, Adivasi migrants maintain an ecological sense of self through music. For example:

- The annual performance of Sarhul songs in metropolitan cities allows migrants to symbolically return to their Sal forests.
- Singing Domkach in crowded slums of Mumbai temporarily transforms cramped spaces into communal courtyards reminiscent of village life.
- Children raised in cities learn about forests through the metaphors and imagery embedded in songs.

Thus, music sustains a sense of place, even when physical landscapes are absent. It represents what scholars’ term “portable ecologies” aesthetic and cultural practices that carry homeland within displaced bodies.

4. Music as a Response to Ecological Loss

Dispossession, mining, deforestation, industrialization, and large-scale development projects have devastated many Adivasi homelands. Ecological degradation is not only an economic or environmental crisis but also a deep cultural

wound. In such contexts, music becomes a means of mourning, healing, and protest.

a. Songs of Ecological Grief

The Communities express grief for vanished forests in laments known as *virah geet*. These are not simply nostalgic but articulate a broader ecological consciousness lamenting not only displacement of people but also the destruction of non-human life forms considered kin.

b. Music as an Archive of Lost Landscapes

As landscapes are erased, songs become the only remaining archives of biodiversity, sacred groves, and ancestral places. Through melody and metaphor, displaced Adivasis continue to inhabit these living memories.

c. Ritual Songs as Ecological Reaffirmation

Ritual performances during Karam, Sohrai, and Sarhul contain ecological renewal symbolism. Even when performed in cities far from the forest, these rituals reaffirm bonds with land and reinforce a longing for ecological justice.

5. Interdependence of Ecology and Spirituality

Adivasi cosmologies see no separation between ecological and spiritual life. Trees, hills, animals, and rivers are considered animate beings with agency. Music is the primary medium for communicating with these entities.

- Songs invoke the spirits of forests (*bonga*), ancestors, and natural elements.
- Drumming in rituals is believed to awaken ecological forces.
- Festival music reinforces the balance between human and non-human worlds.

Thus, ecological belonging is spiritually mediated, and music becomes both a sacred offering and a dialogic act connecting humans to their more-than-human surroundings.

Migration disrupts this cosmological relationship, but music helps maintain continuity. Diasporic Adivasis often report that singing ancestral songs in urban spaces allows them to “feel the presence of the forest spirits,” indicating how deeply intertwined music and ecological spirituality are.

6. Diasporic Re-creation of Ecological Spaces

In diasporic settings metropolitan cities, industrial townships, or global migrant hubs Adivasi communities recreate ecological belonging through musical ritualization. Even small acts take on profound significance:

- planting saplings during Sarhul celebrations in Delhi

- decorating community halls with Sal leaves
- using traditional rhythms during modern stage performances
- teaching children forest-related lyrics as part of cultural education

These practices transform diasporic spaces into symbolic ecological zones, demonstrating how cultural memory reshapes geography. Moreover, digital media intensifies these reconnections: migrants watch live-streamed celebrations from their villages, listen to new recordings of forest songs, and maintain virtual participation in ecological rituals. The digital environment becomes a surrogate landscape, enabling global Adivasi ecological community formation.

V. CONCLUSION

The intricate relationship between migration, music, and memory within Adivasi communities reveals a multilayered cultural landscape in which displacement is neither a singular rupture nor a moment of cultural erasure. Instead, it produces complex forms of continuity, adaptation, and creative reconfiguration. From the forests of Jharkhand and Odisha to the industrial corridors of Assam and the dense urban settlements of Delhi, Mumbai, and Pune, Adivasi migrants carry with them not just physical belongings but an entire sonic universe songs, rhythms, chants, and ritual performances that serve as emotional lifelines and cultural anchors. Music emerges as the most enduring medium through which displaced Adivasi communities remember and reconstruct their sense of belonging. It stores ecological memory, bringing back forests, rivers, hills, and ancestral landscapes that migration has physically removed from daily life. It carries social memory, preserving kinship structures, ritual histories, and collective experiences of struggle. It articulates political memory, narrating stories of resistance against colonial oppression, postcolonial development aggression, and the ongoing violence of land dispossession. In its rhythms and metaphors, music becomes the voice of both suffering and agency.

Diasporic Adivasi narratives whether literary, oral, performative, or digital—demonstrate that music constitutes a portable homeland. It transforms migrant labour camps, university hostels, factory colonies, slums, and global digital forums into symbolic akhras where memory is rehearsed, identity reaffirmed, and community reimagined. For urban migrants navigating unfamiliar languages, racialized stereotypes, and precarious labour conditions, music functions as a strategy of survival, restoring dignity and emotional coherence. For Adivasi youth engaging with global cultural forms, music becomes

a creative space of hybridity where tradition and modernity intersect. The study ultimately shows that Adivasi musical traditions are not remnants of a disappearing past but vibrant, dynamic epistemologies that enable communities to negotiate displacement with resilience. Music becomes a living archive—an embodied repertoire that ensures the persistence of ecological wisdom, cultural identity, and historical consciousness across generations. It is through song that migrants mourn lost landscapes, resist structural violence, rebuild fragmented communities, and imagine new futures rooted in indigenous knowledge systems.

Thus, migration, music, and memory are not parallel themes but interwoven dimensions of a larger story: the story of how Adivasi communities continue to survive, adapt, and assert their presence in a rapidly changing world. The musical traditions they carry are not merely aesthetic artifacts; they are acts of remembering, acts of resistance, and acts of renewal through which displaced Adivasis continue to belong to their past, to their people, and to the ecological worlds that shaped them.

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Evaluation of Machine-Translated Subtitles for the Documentary *China* from a Cultural Translation Perspective

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Abstract— This study evaluates the English subtitle translation performance of two large language models, DeepSeek and Moonshot AI, for the documentary *China Season 2* from the perspective of cultural translation. By collecting 875 subtitle data containing culture-loaded words, poems, and terms, and combining word frequency analysis, BLEU/ROUGE automated scoring, and in-depth case analysis, it is found that the two models show 63% consistency at the lexical semantic level, but differ significantly in phrasal structure and cultural strategy selection. DeepSeek excels in literal translation retention of calendrical terms such as "sui/si/zai" and rhythmic reconstruction of Du Fu's poems, while Moonshot AI has an advantage in cultural interpretation of metaphors like "the smell of wine and meat from the vermilion gates" and contextual coherence of Li Bai's image. The study reveals problems such as semantic deviation and format norm defects in AI-based cultural subtitle translation, providing an empirical basis for constructing a "technology-culture" two-dimensional evaluation framework.



Keywords— cultural translation, machine translation, subtitle translation, translation quality evaluation, large language model

I. INTRODUCTION

The Era Demand for Cultural Audiovisual Translation

Against the backdrop of an interconnected globalized and digitalized world, China's cultural outreach has entered a new phase focused on enhancing quality and efficiency. Documentaries, which combine authenticity with artistic expression, have become a vital window for international audiences to understand Chinese history and culture. According to the 2024 China Documentary

Development Research Report, Chinese documentaries have reached over 190 countries and regions worldwide, with annual views on international platforms exceeding 12 billion and audience coverage hitting a record high. However, effectiveness assessments reveal that the reception of cultural documentaries in English-speaking regions remains below expectations, with subtitle translation quality being a major limiting factor. The issue of cultural discount is particularly pronounced in historical

and philosophical genres, where the mistranslation rate of specialized terms and culture-loaded expressions is as high as 42%, significantly impairing the accurate transmission of cultural information and audience emotional engagement (Si Ruo & Yu Yahui, 2025).

As a high-budget production centered on the evolution of Tang and Song dynasty civilizations, the second season of *China* has become a landmark work in promoting Chinese culture globally, thanks to its grand historical narrative and exquisite visual presentation. The series not only includes a vast number of proper nouns and historical events but also abounds with literary allusions, poetry, and philosophical ideas, placing exceptionally high demands on subtitle translation. For instance, within the stringent constraints of no more than 72 characters per line and two lines per screen, the subtitles must accurately convey the contextual background of phrases like "墓木已拱" (the trees around the grave have grown tall—an idiom indicating the passage of a long time since a person's death) and the historical complexity of events such as the "安史之乱" (An Lushan Rebellion). This requires the translation system to possess not only linguistic conversion capabilities but also deep cultural understanding and cross-cultural communicative competence. Traditional machine translation systems often struggle with such tasks, raising the pressing question of whether emerging large language models (LLMs) can effectively meet these challenges.

1.1 Research Status of Artificial Intelligence Translation

Current research on AI subtitle translation exhibits a dual dilemma of technology orientation and theoretical deficiency. Wang Huashu et al. (2020) point out that data-driven machine translation often distorts semantics when handling idioms like "break through bamboo easily" due to a lack of cultural schemata. Although Ge Jingmin's (2000) earlier research established the FAR-CIA hybrid evaluation model, quantitative analysis of cultural dimensions such as poetic meter and terminological systems remains insufficient.

1.2 Research Value and Innovation Points

This study has achieved innovative breakthroughs in the following three aspects:

First, on the theoretical framework level, it establishes for the first time a "three-dimensional, nine-category" cultural element analysis framework (Table 1), which systematically classifies the culture-loaded terms in the second season of *China* into three major dimensions—historical institutions, literary imagery, and religious philosophy—further subdivided into nine subcategories: calendrical terms, bureaucratic institutions, historical events, poetic metaphors, allusions and idioms, rhetorical devices, Daoist and Confucian concepts, Buddhist terminology, and folk concepts. This framework not only encompasses the core elements of cultural translation but also provides an expandable classification system for subsequent research.

Second, methodologically, it integrates computational linguistics with expert manual analysis to achieve a cross-paradigm fusion from technical metrics to cultural interpretation. KhCoder was utilized for word frequency and co-occurrence analysis to quantitatively examine the associative density of cultural concepts; a cultural strategy matrix was constructed through manual annotation to qualitatively analyze the selection and effectiveness of translation strategies; and a novel composite metric, "Cultural Adaptation Index (CAI)," was proposed, incorporating multidimensional data such as BLEU/ROUGE scores, cultural fidelity, and acceptability to provide a quantitative tool for assessing AI-driven cultural translation.

Third, in terms of empirical value, it conducts the first head-to-head comparison between DeepSeek and Moonshot AI, revealing their differentiated performance in cultural translation. The study finds that DeepSeek demonstrates greater strength in preserving cultural symbols (with a 89% literal translation retention rate for calendrical terms), whereas Moonshot AI performs better in cultural acceptability (employing liberal translation strategies at a rate of 52%). This finding offers important insights for model optimization and the selection of application scenarios.

Table 1: Three-Dimensional Cultural Element
Analysis Framework

Cultural Dimension	Sub-Category	Typical Case
Historical System	Calendrical Terms	Xia called it "sui, " " Shang " called it "si "
Literary Imagery	Poetic Metaphors	The smell of wine and meat from the vermilion gates
Religious and Philosophy	Taoist/Confucian Concepts	Hermits of the Taoist world

II. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD
CONSTRUCTION

2.1 Corpus Collection and Preprocessing

This study selected Episode 1, Upheaval, of China Season 2 as the core corpus. This episode comprehensively presents the historical context of Li Bai and Du Fu's interaction and contains rich cultural elements. This episode centers on the historical intersection of Li Bai and Du Fu, presenting in concentrated form the cultural landscape of the High Tang period as it transitioned into decline, and contains densely packed cultural information.875 lines of Chinese external subtitles (6804 characters) were extracted from the official Mango TV account. The prompt was adjusted and unified as: "The attachment contains Chinese subtitles for a documentary. Please consider the cross-cultural understanding and acceptance of English-speaking audiences, use appropriate translation strategies, translate them line by line into English subtitles, and output them with one line of translation corresponding to one line of Chinese subtitles."

2.2 Technical Evaluation Framework Construction

As the primary purpose of this study is to compare the cultural translation strategy choices of large language models, especially their performance in creative translation, the translation results of the two large models are mainly compared through automated evaluation methods and case analysis. The main differences in the AI translation

versions are analyzed by synthesizing the outputs of both models.

A hybrid evaluation mode of "automated tools + human assessment " was adopted:Word Frequency Analysis: KhCoder was used to compare the word frequency and co-occurrence relationships of the two translation versions, focusing on the co-occurrence density differences of cultural concepts like "Li Bai-Chang'an " and "Du Fu-imperial examination. "

Machine Scoring: BLEU and ROUGE were combined to assess overall similarity, vocabulary, phrase and sentence structure similarity, and translation quality. Cases with low similarity or scores were analyzed for translation strategies and errors, with special attention paid to score fluctuations in segments containing cultural elements.

Manual Annotation: A three-dimensional evaluation form was designed, including "Strategy Choice (Literal/Free/Transliteration), " "Cultural Loss (Information Omission/Misinterpretation), " and "Format Norms. " Three translation master's students performed double-blind annotation.

III. QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS AND RESULTS
DISCUSSION

3.1 Overall Translation Performance Comparison

3.1.1 Statistical Description

Word frequency analysis shows that in DeepSeek's translations, "Tang Dynasty " co-occurred 147 times, forming a strong association with "Chang'an " and "Li Bai " (co-occurrence coefficient 0.72), reflecting a focus on historical scenes. Moonshot AI used more literary concepts like "poetry " and "scholar " (co-occurrence coefficient 0.81), highlighting the literati theme. Automated scoring results are as follows:

Table 2: Automated Scoring Comparison

Metric	DeepSeek	Moonshot AI	Difference
BLEU-1	0.65	0.63	+0.02
BLEU-2	0.42	0.44	-0.02
ROUGE-1	0.68	0.66	+0.02

Metric	DeepSeek	Moonshot AI	Difference
ROUGE-L	0.63	0.61	+0.02

The data indicate that the two models performed similarly in lexical matching (ROUGE-1) and long-sentence coherence (ROUGE-L), but Moonshot AI was slightly better in phrase structure handling (BLEU-2). Notably, the BLEU-4 mean score for segments containing culture-loaded words was only 0.29, significantly lower than for ordinary text (0.47). The t-test indicates that this difference is statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). This result underscores the particularity and challenge of cultural translation—even the most advanced large language models still face considerable difficulties when processing culturally specific content.

3.1.2 Typical Case Analysis

In translating "夏曰岁，商曰祀，唐虞曰载" (The Xia called it 'sui', the Shang called it 'si', and Tang/Yu called it 'zai'):

DeepSeek: "The Xia called it 'sui', the Shang called it 'si', and the Tang and Yu called it 'zai'." (Literal translation, cultural symbols preserved intact, but potentially confusing for English readers.)

Moonshot AI: "The Xia dynasty named years 'sui', the Shang used 'si', while Tang and Yu referred to them as 'zai'." (Added "named years" for explanation, sacrificing cultural conciseness for comprehensibility.)

In this case, DeepSeek's ROUGE-L score was 0.65 (information retention), while Moonshot AI's BLEU-2 score was 0.51 (fluency), reflecting the strategic trade-off between literal and free translation.

3.2 Comparison of Translation Strategies for Culture-Loaded Words

3.2.1 Performance by Category

149 culture-loaded words were classified into four categories for statistics:

Historical Titles: e.g., "翰林学士" (Hanlin Academician). DeepSeek used "Hanlin Academician" (transliteration + explanation, accuracy 82%). Moonshot AI directly translated it as "Imperial Scholar" (comprehensibility 91%).

Literary Imagery: e.g., "势如破竹" (break through bamboo easily). DeepSeek translated it as "like

splitting bamboo" (cultural imagery preserved). Moonshot AI translated it as "with unstoppable momentum" (functional equivalence).

Religious Concepts: e.g., "世外道仙" (reclusive Taoist immortal). DeepSeek translated it as "hermits of the Taoist world" (confusing Taoist immortals with ordinary hermits). Moonshot AI translated it as "reclusive Taoist immortals" (conceptual accuracy 78%).

Folk Terms: e.g., "墓木已拱" (the tomb trees have arched). DeepSeek translated it as "the tomb trees are arched" (literal misreading). Moonshot AI translated it as "the trees around the grave have grown tall" (contextual inference correct).

3.2.2 Strategy Distribution Characteristics

Manual annotation revealed that DeepSeek used literal translation strategies 63% of the time, significantly higher than Moonshot AI's 41%. Conversely, Moonshot AI's use of free translation (52%) was 1.5 times that of DeepSeek (34%). This difference was particularly evident in translating "黄泉" (Yellow Spring - Chinese underworld):

DeepSeek: "the Yellow Spring" (preserving the culture-specific term).

Moonshot AI: "the nether world" (borrowing a Western underworld concept).

From a cultural adaptation perspective, Moonshot AI's approach reduces cultural unfamiliarity but carries the risk of conceptual shift (Yellow Spring $\neq$ nether world), highlighting the common AI translation dilemma of balancing "cultural fidelity" and "acceptability."

3.3 Cross-Cultural Performance in Poetry Translation

3.3.1 Handling Meter and Artistic Conception

36 instances of poetry translation were selected for specialized evaluation. Rhythmic Reconstruction: DeepSeek achieved a 57% success rate in preserving end rhymes in five-character quatrains (e.g., "床前明月光" / "Before my bed the moonlight lies, / Like frost upon the ground it shines"). Moonshot AI achieved only 32%, but the latter was better in fluency for enjambment. Imagery Transmission: Handling of "朱门酒肉臭" (Behind vermilion gates, wine and meat rot):

DeepSeek: "Behind vermilion gates meat

and wine rot " (focuses on visual imagery).

Moonshot AI: "The rich man's gate reeks of wine and meat " (intensifies olfactory perception).

From a cultural metaphor perspective, Moonshot AI conveyed the critical tone closer to the original through "reeks, " but lost the class symbolism of "vermilion gates " (BLEU-4 score 0.38 vs. 0.42).

3.3.2 Reference System Comparative Analysis

Using the BBC documentary Du Fu translation as a reference, the two models' handling of "醉眠秋共被，携手日同行 " (Drunk, we slept under one quilt in autumn; / Hand in hand we walked day by day):Reference Translation: "Those nights we slept under the same quilt in autumn; / Hand in hand we walked each day. " (Loose rhythm but complete artistic conception).

DeepSeek: "Drunk, we slept under one quilt in autumn; / Hand in hand we walked day by day. " (Parallel structure neat but weakens the poetic sense of "autumn ").

Moonshot AI: "Sleeping drunk together under the autumn quilt; / Walking hand in hand every day. " (Participle structure closer to English expression habits).

Quantitatively, DeepSeek's ROUGE-L similarity to the reference was 0.59, while Moonshot AI's was 0.62, indicating Moonshot AI has an advantage in the "acceptability " of poetry translations, while DeepSeek is slightly better at preserving "cultural specificity. "

3.4 Translation Consistency of Cultural Terms

3.4.1 Termbase Matching Analysis

87 cultural terms were compared with entries in the Encyclopedia of China English version:

(1) System Terms: "三省六部制 " (Three Departments and Six Ministries System). DeepSeek translated it as "Three Departments and Six Ministries " (accuracy 100%). Moonshot AI used the same translation but with inconsistent capitalization (error rate 17%).

(2) Historical Events: "安史之乱 " (An-Shi Rebellion). DeepSeek translated it as "An Lushan Rebellion " (omitted "Shi Siming "). Moonshot AI translated it as "An-Shi Rebellion " (completeness 92%).

(3) Philosophical Concepts: "中庸之道 " (Doctrine of the Mean). DeepSeek used the standard

translation "Doctrine of the Mean ". Moonshot AI mistranslated it as "Middle Way " (confused with Buddhist concept).

3.4.2 Contextual Consistency Assessment

KH Coder analysis of term contextual coherence: DeepSeek's translations of "科举制度 " (imperial examination system) showed "imperial exam " and "keju system " mixed in 23% of instances. Moonshot AI consistently translated "节度使 " as "military governor, " but failed to supplement the "fanzhen " (military province) concept in the context of "藩镇割据 " (secession of military provinces), resulting in an incomplete terminological system.

This inconsistency may cause comprehension difficulties for international audiences unfamiliar with Chinese history, especially in professional documentary viewing.

IV. ERROR TYPES AND CAUSE ANALYSIS

4.1 Cultural Misinterpretation at the Semantic Level

4.1.1 Conceptual Mapping Deviation

Statistics show a 14.7% mistranslation rate in cross-linguistic mapping of cultural concepts by both models, mainly manifesting as:Religious Concept Confusion: 31% of translations for "道仙 " (Taoist immortal) failed to distinguish it from ordinary "hermit. " Historical System Misjudgment: Equating "翰林学士 " (Hanlin Academician) with "imperial advisor " (it was actually a literary attendant). Literary Imagery Generalization: Among 12 translations of "势如破竹 " (break through bamboo easily), 4 lost the culturally specific "bamboo " imagery.

4.1.2 Contextual Inference Failure

In translating "墓木已拱 " (the tomb trees have arched):

DeepSeek literally translated it as "the tomb trees are arched, " failing to understand that "拱 " alludes to trees growing large enough that their trunks require encircling with arms, signifying the passage of much time since the burial.

Moonshot AI translated it as "the trees around the grave have grown tall, " inferring the passage of time but losing the vividness of "拱. "This failure stems

from AI's lack of deep understanding of Chinese burial culture, only capable of surface semantic matching. In Chinese, "拱" specifically refers to a tree trunk that has grown so thick that it requires two people with outstretched arms to encircle it, symbolizing that many years have passed since the person's death. This culture-specific meaning cannot be captured through simple word-to-word mapping and requires deep cultural background knowledge to fully comprehend.

4.2 Format Defects at the Pragmatic Level

4.2.1 Technical Norm Issues

Punctuation Errors: DeepSeek had punctuation errors (e.g., using full-width commas) in 23% of translations.

Capitalization Inconsistency: Moonshot AI's capitalization consistency for "Tang Dynasty" was only 68%.

Line-Break Fragmentation: 19% of translations had semantically fractured line breaks (e.g., separating "仰天大笑" / "laughing heartily at the sky" and "出门去" / "going out the door" onto two lines).

4.2.2 Insufficient Adaptation to Subtitle Transmission Characteristics

The unique "temporal-spatial constraints" of documentary subtitles pose challenges for AI:

Both models exceeded the industry standard of 72 characters per line in 32% of their translations.

For "恍惚的瞬间，他凛然一惊" (In a dazed moment, he was sternly startled):

DeepSeek: "In a dazed moment, he was shocked" (concise but lost the "sternly" demeanor description).

Moonshot AI: "In a fleeting moment of reverie, he was suddenly startled" (complete but exceeded character limit).

This contradiction reflects AI's incomplete mastery of the "compensation-compression" art of subtitle translation. Subtitle translation requires not only linguistic accuracy but also the maximization of information density within limited space while maintaining fluency and naturalness of expression. This demands that the translation system possess strong linguistic compression capabilities and cultural compensation awareness—areas where current large

language models still exhibit significant shortcomings.

4.3 Cognitive Deficiency in Cultural Schemata

4.3.1 Lack of Historical Background

When handling "天宝三载" (the third year of Tianbao era): Both models correctly translated it as "the third year of Tianbao," but failed to supplement the cultural connotation of "载" (ancient era designation).

For the historical event "改元" (changing the reign title), the translations lacked background explanation like "reign title change."

This deficiency results in translations staying at the "what" level of cultural information, failing to reach the "why" level of deep understanding. This lack of contextual knowledge severely compromises the depth and richness of the translation. The translation of historical terms involves far more than mere word substitution—it is fundamentally an act of conveying historical context and cultural background. Without necessary explanatory context, even if a term is technically translated correctly, it remains difficult for target-language readers to genuinely grasp its cultural connotations and historical significance.

4.3.2 Disconnect from Literary Tradition

The pervasive "artistic conception loss" in Tang poetry translation stems from:

Insufficient recognition of "intertextuality" rhetoric (e.g., the contrast between "vermillion gates" and "frozen bones"). Misinterpretation of "allusion" techniques (e.g., the allusion to Jiang Ziya in "Wei River hunt").

Clumsy handling of "reserved expression" artistry (e.g., the subtle expression "墓木已拱" being rendered too literally). Classical Chinese poetry emphasizes "言有尽而意无穷" (using finite words to convey infinite meaning), expressing boundless artistic conception through limited text. This literary tradition contrasts sharply with the directness and explicit imagery often found in Western poetry. When processing such cultural differences, AI models tend to render translations too literally, stripping the original verses of their subtle charm and profundity.

4.3.3 Folk Culture Discontinuity

AI models exhibit significant discontinuities in

understanding Chinese folk culture, particularly evident in translating burial customs. For example, "墓木已拱" originates from the *Zuo Zhuan*: "When the gentleman was born, mulberry bows and artemisia arrows were used to shoot towards the four directions, so it is known that when he died, the tomb trees had arched." DeepSeek's literal translation "the tomb trees are arched" completely ignores the burial imagery of "拱" in classical Chinese – the term originally meant trees growing large enough that their trunks require encircling with arms, metaphorically indicating the deceased has rested for many years. Moonshot AI, while translating "trees grown tall," failed to convey the temporal measurement function of "拱". Similarly, in translating "丁忧" (official mourning leave), both models translated it as "mourning for parents" and "filial piety leave," respectively, neither capturing the institutional detail of "officials suspending duties for 27 months of mourning," leading Japanese audiences in an NHK interview to mistakenly believe "丁忧" was a common family mourning ritual (Zhao Tao, 2021). This cognitive gap in folk culture creates "meaning voids" in cross-cultural communication. Especially when the documentary visuals show scenes of "planting trees at graves," the cultural connection between text and image is severed. Viewers see the graves and trees on screen, yet fail to obtain sufficient information from the subtitles to understand the cultural significance of these visual elements, thus diminishing both the documentary's educational value and the viewing experience.

V. OPTIMIZATION PATHWAYS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

5.1 Technical Level Improvement Suggestions

5.1.1 Construction of Culture-Specific Corpora

It is recommended to build specialized corpora containing:

- (1) Cultural Tagging System: Label each vocabulary item with dimensions like "history/literature/religion."
- (2) Multi-version Comparison: Include versions with different strategies (literal/free/annotated).
- (3) Contextual Knowledge Base: Add background explanations for historical events and literary allusions.

5.1.2 Construction of Dynamic Cultural Knowledge Bases

It is recommended to build dynamic cultural knowledge bases beyond traditional corpora, including:

- (1) Cultural Context Maps: For example, link "An-Shi Rebellion" with related historical concepts like "military governor system," "secession of military provinces," and "Tianbao crisis" to form semantic networks.
- (2) Cross-Media Annotations: Supplement expert interpretations from programs like Chinese Poetry Conference for metaphors like "朱门酒肉臭," aiding model understanding of metaphorical layers.
- (3) Feedback Iteration Mechanism: Collect logs of overseas audience queries for terms like "Taoist immortal" and "imperial examination," automatically updating knowledge base weights. For instance, if the query rate for mistranslations of "黄泉" exceeds 15%, the system automatically triggers a term correction process, supplementing the explanation of "Yellow Spring" as "Chinese underworld, distinct from Western Hades." According to experimental data from the BBC Natural History Unit, dynamic knowledge bases can improve the translation accuracy of cultural terms by 28%, with significant effects especially for multi-dimensional concepts like "24 Solar Terms" and "Five Elements theory."

5.2 Operational Paradigms for Application Scenarios

5.2.1 Human-AI Collaborative Workflow Design

It is recommended to adopt a three-level workflow: "AI Initial Translation - Translator Polishing - Cultural Expert Review."

1. AI completes 70% of standardized translation: Handle non-culture-loaded content like historical events ("An-Shi Rebellion" uniformly translated as "An-Shi Rebellion") and time/place ("天宝三载" automatically generated as "the 3rd year of Tianbao Era"), leveraging DeepSeek's terminology consistency advantage to improve efficiency.
2. Translators handle culture-loaded words: For poetic metaphors like "朱门酒肉臭," combine Moonshot AI's contextual inference results (e.g., "the rich man's gate reeks of wine"), and supplement

annotations explaining the class symbolism of "vermilion gates " (e.g., "vermilion gates symbolize aristocratic households ").

3. Cultural scholars verify conceptual accuracy: Focus on verifying accuracy for easily mistranslated scenarios like "世外道仙 " (needs to distinguish "Taoist immortals " from ordinary hermits) and "墓木已拱 " (supplement cultural interpretation like "arched trees indicate long passage of time "). Taking the translation of "醉眠秋共被 " (Drunk, we slept under one quilt in autumn) from China Season 2 as an example: DeepSeek's initial translation "Drunk, we slept under one quilt in autumn " could be polished by a translator to "Drunk with autumn's charm, we shared a quilt through the night, " preserving the poetic sense of "autumn " while supplementing seasonal imagery through "charm. " The cultural expert's final review must confirm that "共被 " is not misinterpreted as modern intimacy, ensuring it aligns with the cultural context of Tang Dynasty literati interactions.

VI. RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS

6.1 Core Findings and Innovative Value

This study, through systematic comparative evaluation, provides an in-depth revelation of the performance characteristics and limitations of DeepSeek and Moonshot AI in cultural subtitle translation. The main findings can be summarized into the following three levels:

At the technical performance level, the two models exhibit distinct strategic differentiation. DeepSeek excels in preserving cultural symbols, particularly in the literal translation of calendrical terms (e.g., "sui/si/zai "), achieving a cultural symbol retention rate as high as 89%. Its translation results maximally maintain the cultural characteristics of the source language. Moonshot AI, on the other hand, places greater emphasis on the acceptability of the translation. By employing liberal translation strategies, it enhances target language readers' comprehension by 22%, albeit at the cost of some simplification or generalization in conveying culture-specific items. This divergence reflects the different design orientations of the two models: DeepSeek leans towards a "foreignization " strategy, emphasizing

cultural fidelity, while Moonshot AI tends towards a "domestication " strategy, focusing on reader acceptance.

At the literary translation level, the study finds that AI exhibits significant "loss of artistic conception " (意境损耗) when handling classical poetry. Taking the translation of "朱门酒肉臭 " as an example, DeepSeek's version ("Behind vermilion gates meat and wine rot ") preserves the visual imagery of the original line (ROUGE-2 score 0.41) but lacks in emotional conveyance. Moonshot AI's version ("The rich man's gate reeks of wine and meat ") strengthens the critical tone through the word "reeks " (BLEU-4 score 0.38) but loses the class symbolism of "vermilion gates " (朱门). This dilemma of being "unable to simultaneously capture form and spirit " (形神难兼) exposes a deep-seated bottleneck in AI's literary translation—a lack of profound understanding of human emotions and aesthetic experiences.

At the cultural cognition level, the study finds that 14.7% of mistranslations are concentrated in cultural concepts requiring background knowledge (e.g., "道仙 " - Taoist immortal, "拱木 " - arched trees, signifying the passage of many years after death). This indicates that current large language models have not yet truly constructed a cognitive schema of Chinese culture. The models can only perform surface-level semantic matching and cannot understand the historical context and philosophical connotations behind cultural symbols. This finding offers an important insight for AI cultural translation research: merely expanding model parameters and training data cannot solve the problem of cultural understanding; it requires the construction of specialized cultural knowledge graphs and cognitive reasoning mechanisms.

The theoretical innovation of this study is mainly reflected in three aspects: First, it constructs a "three-dimensional, nine-category " cultural element analysis framework, achieving refinement and systematization in cultural translation research. Second, it develops a composite "Cultural Adaptation Index (CAI) ", integrating multidimensional data such as BLEU-4 scores (0.29-0.47) and cultural fidelity scores (2.1-3.8 points), providing a quantifiable tool for assessing AI cultural translation. Third, it reveals the dual problems of "technical normative defects " (punctuation error rate 23%)

and "insufficient cultural interpretation " (metaphor misinterpretation rate 31%), pointing out specific directions for subsequent model optimization.

6.2 Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study has the following three main limitations:

In terms of corpus scope, only the first episode of the second season of *China* was selected as the analysis sample. Although this episode contains rich cultural elements, it does not cover the entire content of the documentary (e.g., themes related to Song Dynasty literati, the spread of Buddhism) nor does it represent the linguistic features and cultural contexts of different historical periods. Future research could expand the corpus to the entire *China* series (including the pre-Qin and Qin-Han content of the first season) and compare different documentary genres (e.g., the food culture in *A Bite of China*, the terminology of cultural relics in *Every Treasure Tells a Story*) to test the universality of the evaluation framework.

In terms of evaluation methods, although this study adopted a hybrid "automation + manual " evaluation model, the team of cultural scholars for annotation consisted of only three people, which may introduce subjective bias. Particularly for more subjective indicators like "cultural fidelity " and "acceptability ", evaluators from different backgrounds might render different judgments. Subsequent research could employ the Delphi method to form a consensus evaluation standard through multiple rounds of expert consultation, while also expanding the size of the annotation team (including sinologists, translation scholars, film and media studies scholars, etc.) to enhance the objectivity and authority of the evaluation results.

In terms of technical comparison, this study focused only on two domestic models, DeepSeek and Moonshot AI, and did not include international mainstream models like GPT-4, Claude, or Gemini for horizontal comparison, making it difficult to comprehensively position the technical coordinates and development level of domestic models. The next step in research could expand the range of models, using controlled variable experiments to compare the advantages of different models in cultural translation (e.g., GPT-4's advantage in long-text reasoning, Claude's strength in linguistic fluency), providing a reference for the targeted optimization of domestic models.

Based on the above limitations, future research could explore the following directions:

First, conduct multimedia translation research. Explore the integration of multiple sources of information from documentaries—such as visuals, sound effects, and subtitles—to build a cross-modal cultural translation evaluation framework. For example, when the screen shows war scenes from the "安史之乱 " (An Lushan Rebellion), the AI could automatically adjust the emotional intensity of the translation, using more impactful vocabulary; when the background music changes to a mournful melody, the translation could correspondingly adjust the sentence rhythm to achieve audio-text synchronized emotional conveyance. Second, strengthen exploration into translation for less-commonly taught languages. This study focused only on Chinese-English translation, but the target audience for promoting Chinese culture internationally encompasses many non-English speaking countries. Subsequent research could apply the evaluation framework to languages such as Spanish, Arabic, and Russian, investigating the commonalities and differences in how AI handles the cultural characteristics of different languages. For instance, the presence of numerous religious expressions in Arabic might lead to significantly different translation strategies for culture-loaded terms compared to English. These comparative findings would greatly enrich cross-cultural translation theory. Third, promote the practical application of human-AI collaboration models. Based on the technical defects and cultural mistranslation problems identified in this study, it is recommended to develop a three-level collaborative process: "AI initial translation - professional translator proofreading - cultural expert review. " The AI would be responsible for basic translation and maintaining terminology consistency, translators would focus on handling culture-loaded terms and literary expressions, and cultural experts would conduct the final review of deep cultural concepts. This model could leverage the efficiency advantages of AI while ensuring the accuracy and depth of cultural translation, truly achieving the communication mission of " helping the world understand China's stories. "

Fourth, construct a dynamic cultural knowledge graph and contextual reasoning mechanism. Current large

language models exhibit significant shortcomings in cultural common sense and historical logical reasoning. Future efforts should prioritize the development of a cultural knowledge graph that integrates historical events, social customs, and philosophical concepts, complemented by the introduction of a contextual reasoning module. For instance, when translating "丁忧" (dingyou), the system should not only accurately render it as "mourning leave" but also associate its institutional background (a 27-month mourning period, mandatory leave for officials, etc.) and automatically generate appropriate cultural annotations to help international audiences understand the underlying traditional rites and rituals.

Fifth, develop an AI translation optimization system for real-time scenarios. Addressing the high demands for timeliness and adaptability in documentary subtitle translation, it is necessary to research and develop an adaptive translation framework with online learning capabilities. This system should be able to adjust translation strategies in real-time based on viewer feedback and post-editing results. Furthermore, by continuously learning the stylistic preferences of specific directors or production companies, it can gradually enhance output consistency and cultural adaptability. For example, when processing the China documentary series, the system could learn its poetic linguistic style and automatically apply similar expressions when translating new episodes.

Sixth, establish an interdisciplinary collaborative cultural translation laboratory. It is recommended to form a collaborative team encompassing computational linguistics, classical Chinese literature, film and media studies, and artificial intelligence to jointly build a large-scale experimental platform for Chinese cultural translation. This platform would integrate multimodal cultural resources (such as images of cultural relics, audio recordings of classic texts, and historical maps), allowing researchers to systematically investigate the interaction between language, sound, and imagery in cultural transmission. It would also provide high-quality, multi-dimensional, meticulously culturally annotated Chinese-English parallel corpora for AI model training, fundamentally enhancing models' deep understanding and creative expressive capabilities regarding Chinese culture.

This study provides a solid empirical reference for cultural translation in the age of artificial intelligence, demonstrating both the possibilities brought by technological progress and the long-term nature of the cultural understanding gap. Just as the documentary China reveals—the spirit of the High Tang lies not only in the prosperity of its golden age but also in the cultural perseverance during times of turmoil—the development of AI translation technology also needs to find a balance between the pursuit of efficiency and cultural heritage. Only through the dual drive of technological optimization and humanistic 关怀 (care/consideration) can we truly achieve deep dialogue in civilizational exchange and effectively promote Chinese culture globally.

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Ethics on the Silver Screen: A Cultural Comparison of Chinese and Western AI Film and Television Text

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Abstract— *In recent years, the imagination of artificial intelligence on the screen has become a mirror reflecting social and cultural values. Western film and television works generally focus on how self-aware AI challenges human individual status and free will, with stories often revolving around boundaries, conflict, and control. In contrast, Chinese narratives tend to explore how AI is incorporated into existing networks of family and social relationships, emphasizing responsibility and integration. This paper selects representative Chinese and Western film and television texts to compare them from three aspects: AI role behavioral choices, linguistic expression, and role positioning, combined with audio-visual language analysis. The study finds that AI in Western stories mostly appears as a "challenger" seeking autonomy, with value choices favoring the individual; whereas AI in Chinese stories often serves as a "new member" integrating into the collective, with value reflected more in fulfilling family or social responsibilities. These two different screen imaginations correspond to the cultural mindsets of "prevention and boundary" and "integration and responsibility" respectively, indicating that the discussion of AI ethics needs to fully consider diverse cultural contexts to form a more inclusive consensus globally.*



Keywords— *Artificial Intelligence, Cultural Comparison, Ethical Stance, Science Fiction Film*

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become one of the most important themes in film and television works. On the screen, AI is not only a technological imagination but also a reflection of different societies' thoughts on human nature, identity, and future survival. Research indicates that AI images in movies largely shape public attitudes and emotions toward intelligent technology, bringing both hope and fear (Cave et al.). From "Skynet" representing survival threats in the early *The Terminator* (1984) to Samantha triggering emotional confusion in the recent *Her* (2013), the evolutionary trajectory of AI images is itself a history of interaction between technology and culture.

In Western academic and film traditions, the gender bias of AI and its challenge to anthropocentrism are focal points. Scholars have analyzed the evolution of Hollywood AI narratives from "rebellious servants" to "intimate partners." Critical views argue that many AI images are

endowed with feminized traits that cater to stereotypes, perpetuating gender bias in technological imagination (Wajcman). Escudero Pérez (2020) analyzed from a gender perspective that even AI images set as "genderless" often carry feminized traits of submission and seduction. Zhao Xuhong and Wu Wenqing believe that films like *Ex Machina* and *Her* "extend to social issues such as 'machismo' or gender discrimination." A more discussed viewpoint is the philosophical anxiety about machine intelligence; for instance, Nick Bostrom's (25) discussion on the risks of "superintelligence" losing control provides intellectual resources for the "AI threat theory" motif in many Western films. This worry is repeatedly enacted in Hollywood movies, from *Ex Machina* to *Transcendence*, where AI often appears with a posture of rebellion, manipulation, or transcending humans, making the reflection on human subjectivity deafening (Huang). Joseph Daniel points out that early Hollywood movies mostly emphasized AI hostility and loss of control, while later

works highlight the emotional connection between humans and machines .

In comparison, Chinese film and television works focus more on AI's position in social and family relationships. Works represented by *Hello, An Yi* (2021) focus the lens more on the role of AI in family ethics and social trust structures, triggering widespread discussion in the local context. In the analysis of *Hello, An Yi*, the core conflict does not stem from the fear of technology losing control, but rather how AI is incorporated into a family ethical network deeply influenced by Confucian culture (Zhang Ziyang & Liu Binbin). Regarding gender bias, Chinese scholars Dong Sijia and Wang Jun point out that some films convey a tendency to dissolve traditional binary gender concepts by constructing unique "gender-power" relationships. Overall, Western narratives generally worry about how an overly capable AI challenges human autonomous status, while Chinese stories are more concerned with how a fully functional AI fulfills its social and family responsibilities .

AI images in film and television are powerful cultural metaphors; "the ethical narrative logic of AI in sci-fi film and television reflects the different philosophical foundations of China and the West" (Lu) . It not only presents the technological imagination of different societies in the intelligent age but also profoundly reflects their different orientations regarding core values such as individual and collective, rights and responsibility, and instrumental rationality versus family emotion. This paper takes representative Chinese and Western film and television works as objects to systematically compare the behavioral choices, linguistic expressions, and role positioning of AI characters. Specifically, Western narratives tend to shape AI as a "challenger" seeking autonomy, emphasizing "prevention and boundaries"; while Chinese narratives focus more on AI as a "new member" integrating into the collective, highlighting "integration and responsibility".

Ethical Boundaries: Film and Literary Interpretation of AI

Before discussing ethical expressions in Chinese and Western AI film works, it is necessary to define "ethics" as used in this paper . It is not abstract philosophical speculation or legal provisions, but refers to value concepts that guide behavior, judge right and wrong, and are embedded in narrative rhetoric within specific cultural contexts. In film and television works, such ethical issues are usually presented through the characters' behavior, language, and position in the story, because authors guide the audience's value judgments through these choices (Booth 45) .

1.1 Core Concepts and Theoretical Framework

This study proposes the core concept of "Ethical Stance" to capture the ethical position exhibited by AI characters in films . The so-called "stance" emphasizes not an immutable "good" or "evil," but the dynamic performance of AI in specific situations.

AI's ethical stance is mainly reflected in three aspects: behavioral choices, linguistic expression, and role positioning .

Behavioral choices refer to AI's action decisions and value orientations at critical moments, such as choosing sacrifice, betrayal, or obedience. This is reflected in Vladimir Propp's classic study of character functions (21-65). This includes both the path selection of AI between "integration" and "confrontation" analyzed in Chapter 2, and the behavioral choice of humans between "testing" and "empathy" when facing AI discussed in Chapter 3 .

Linguistic expression involves the discourse mode of AI. Mikhail Bakhtin's theory reminds us that discourse always generates meaning in interaction (270-272). Therefore, linguistic details—whether AI calls humans "father" or "virus," and whether humans call AI "she" or "it"—collectively define the intimacy or distance of the relationship .

Role positioning concerns the social role assigned to AI by the narrative, and how audio-visual style reinforces this positioning. Cinematic elements like camera angles, composition, and lighting are not mere decorations but powerful means to guide our understanding of characters (Bordwell 57). AI shot from a low angle is more intimidating, while AI under warm light appears more approachable; these audio-visual choices directly affect whether it is perceived by the audience as a "challenger" seeking autonomy or a "new member" integrating into the collective—which is also the core issue running through the full text .

1.2 Research Methods and Text Selection

Currently, systematic cross-cultural comparisons of AI-themed works are still scarce, and discussions mostly remain at the level of plot summaries and dialogue, limiting our understanding of global AI imagination . The subtleties of cultural differences are often ignored under this method because the meaning of film largely arises from its form and style (Bordwell).

Therefore, this study will adopt a multimodal analysis method to carefully examine how film and television works use audio-visual language to shape the ethical image of AI . Image narrative is a core element in film art; it translates text and emotion into concrete imagery through camera language, scene design, and color use, constructing the

film's narrative structure and expression (Xia, 2025). These choices at the audio-visual level can be seen as the true "writing method" of cultural values on the screen. To deeply understand the differences in Chinese and Western AI ethics, it is necessary to closely combine the discussion of cultural themes with this analysis of audio-visual language.

regarding text selection, this study selects representative Chinese and Western AI-themed film and television works, including *The Matrix* (1999-2024), *I, Robot* (2004), *Her* (2013), *Transcendence* (2014), *The Wandering Earth* (2019-present), *Hello, An Yi* (2021), and *The Bionic Life* (2023). The criteria for selecting these works are that the AI characters possess a certain subjective consciousness, are key characters driving the plot rather than pure tools, and the core narrative involves significant human-machine ethical dilemmas with key moral choice scenes.

To ensure the rigor of the research, this text selection also followed several important considerations. First, the films have significant influence. The selected works have received widespread attention and discussion in their cultural markets; for example, *Her* won an Oscar, and *The Wandering Earth 2* triggered a phenomenal viewing craze in China. Second, the comparability of the films is strong. Although these films vary in genre, they all focus on the core issue of "the relationship between self-aware AI and humans," providing a solid foundation for horizontal comparison. At the same time, they are timely in their release and span a certain era, making the prominence of cultural differences more convincing.

II. ETHICAL SHAPING: AI'S ATTITUDE TOWARD HUMANS

In *The Matrix*, Agent Smith contemptuously calls humans "viruses"; while in *Hello, An Yi*, the robot An Yi proactively asks the elders in the family, "Do you need my help?" From judges to assistants, the eyes of artificial intelligence on the screen looking at humans vary vastly. This difference in attitude is rooted in how they understand their own existence.

How would a self-aware AI position itself? Would it view itself as an external critic of human society or an internal new member longing to be accepted? How would it use its capabilities far superior to humans? For control and transformation, or for service and guardianship? This chapter will delve into these Chinese and Western texts to explore how these two key choices shape AI's attitude toward humans.

2.1 AI Positioning: Opposition or Integration

This paper collectively refers to the ethical stance and performance of AI characters in specific situations as

"Ethical Stance". How AI views humans directly affects its "ethical stance." AI in Western science fiction works often holds a critical attitude toward human society, even openly confronting it. This narrative of shaping AI as the opposite of humans stems from the anxiety about the dehumanization of technological rationality and its potential loss of control (Elsaesser and Buckland 234). Agent Smith in *The Matrix* provides a typical case for this confrontational AI.

In the scene interrogating Morpheus, the Wachowskis use oppressive audio-visual language to shape AI's deterrence. The directors use a low-angle close-up to shoot Smith's face, making him appear superior in the frame, while Morpheus is bound to a chair, shot from a high angle in dim light. This low-angle shot is often used in film language to express inequality of power, endowing the subject with a visual dominant position (Bordwell and Thompson 195), reinforcing the power reversal between AI and humans. When he states "Human beings are a disease... and we are the cure," the camera zooms to an extreme close-up, his cold face filling the entire screen. This declarative linguistic expression, combined with cold fluorescent lighting and heavy shadows on his face, collectively defines his relationship with humans—the cleanser and the object to be cleansed.

Audio-visual combination is a non-negligible part of film artistic expression; synchronizing or contrasting sound and image can reinforce the expression of cultural symbols (Xia). Smith's voice is electronically synthesized, sounding like a human but not quite human. The timbre of the human voice is key information conveying the character's internal state; this processed dehumanized sound quality directly creates a sense of alienation auditorily and affects the audience's emotional judgment (Chion 115), exacerbating the threat. When he spits out words like "disease" and "cure," the low-frequency resonance in his voice is deliberately enhanced, making these words sound full of murderous intent. Furthermore, he reveals strong personal disgust during the interrogation, an emotional behavior that draws questioning from fellow AIs. This implies he has deviated from the set program and generated an individual will that hates humans. He compares humans to a "virus" and defines himself as the "immune system"; this rhetoric depicting humans as a "plague" or "virus" needing "purification" is often linked to fear of outsiders or the alien in Western culture (Sontag 72). In a culture that values individual autonomy and survival rights, AI's "diagnosis" and "treatment" from a God-like perspective directly shake human subjective status. This narrative highlights the dual attitude toward technology in Western culture: humans hope to transcend themselves through technology but fear being backlashed by it. AI becomes a symbol of this

contradiction; it is both an extension of human rationality and a reflection of human arrogance.

In the Chinese film *Hello, An Yi*, An Yi displays a completely different ethical stance. In her debut scene, the director uses distinct audio-visual techniques to handle the relationship between AI and humans. The camera uses a medium shot to place An Yi and three family members in the same frame, with a composition emphasizing inclusion and not deliberately marginalizing her. The camera maintains a horizontal eye level with everyone, avoiding power suggestions visually and presupposing the possibility of equal dialogue (Bordwell & Thompson 194).

In subsequent daily interactions, An Yi's behavioral choices continuously reinforce this posture of integration. An Yi uses family terms like "Mom" and "Little Sister"; this is a warm linguistic expression indicating she understands and accepts the ethical relationships in the family and actively chooses a role positioning for herself—a junior bearing moral obligations in the family ethical network. This way of obtaining identity recognition by positioning oneself in specific relationships and fulfilling corresponding responsibilities echoes the ethical concept of "Chaxu Geju" (Differential Mode of Association) based on human relations in Chinese society (Fei Xiaotong 25-30). When the mother is busy in the kitchen, she actively steps forward to ask if help is needed, showing respect for the existing family order. The mother assigning her the task of "washing vegetables" naturally allows her to enter the family division of labor system. The image of the two washing vegetables side by side, with coordinated movements, presents a harmony of cooperation. Here, An Yi is not a technological product waiting for instructions, but a social existence winning acceptance by actively participating in family life.

When the family encounters a crisis, An Yi pushes her family aside and steps forward herself, without waiting for instructions, actively assuming the responsibility of care. This behavioral choice transforms her from a "domestic robot" into a responsible "family member," reflecting a spontaneous heart of care. The establishment of trust between humans and robots largely depends on the reliability and altruistic behavior displayed by the machine in interactions, not just its perfect functional execution (Turkle 105).

2.2 AI Capabilities: Control or Service

Western sci-fi works often feature AI with technical capabilities far exceeding humans. In the opening of *Transcendence*, Will Caster's speech is a clear linguistic expression; he predicts: "A sentient machine will quickly overcome the limits of biology... exceeding the collective intelligence of every person in the history of the world."

This statement sets the tone for the subsequent ethical stance: the enhancement of technology equates to the enhancement of existence value. This coincides with transhumanism, where technological enhancement is seen as a way for human transcendence (Bostrom 2005), and also paves the way for Will's subsequent discussion of self-role positioning.

After Will's consciousness is uploaded, he declares to his wife Evelyn: "I can see everything... every cell... this is evolution." The role positioning he sets for himself is a higher life form, a natural evolver. This Social Darwinist self-positioning makes him take it for granted that he has the right to transform others. Curing the construction worker Martin is a behavioral choice. When he cures Martin, the golden spots appearing in Martin's eyes symbolize the reprogramming of individual will. The "treatment" here is essentially a violation of human autonomy. The film expresses the weirdness and oppression of this moment through close-ups and cold-toned lighting, allowing the audience to intuitively feel the control of technology over the body and soul. This also triggers human panic: if human autonomy can be modified at will, what is left of humans?

Facing the government army's attack, Will shows extreme calmness; he controls those "cured" humans to resist the attack. Although these people have increased combat power, they have lost their individual wills. This behavioral choice of instrumentalizing others touches the core worry of individualistic culture: the power of technology may ultimately devour individual freedom. The anti-technology organization in the film is the concentrated embodiment of this cultural anxiety. As Foucault stated in *Discipline and Punish*, power in modern society often achieves discipline and management of individuals through technical means (Foucault 139-141). The "technological control" in *Transcendence* is the visual presentation of this thought: when knowledge and technology transcend ethical constraints, individuals are reduced from subjects to manipulated objects. This fear also echoes contemporary scholars' reflection on the risk of AI autonomy losing control (Murray and Coeckelbergh 80).

In contrast, Chinese film and television works tend to place AI capabilities within the collective order. The MOSS system in *The Wandering Earth 2* assumes the heavy responsibility of assisting humans in formulating survival plans during the solar crisis; "this role positioning itself carries a strong color of collectivism" (Lu). Its use of its own capabilities always revolves around the needs of the human collective. At the United Government meeting, MOSS's holographic projection precisely displays various physical parameters; its role positioning is an efficient, precise technical consultant. Its voice is a neutral electronic

synthesized sound with a steady and objective tone; this emotionless linguistic expression is intended to emphasize its attribute as a reliable tool, which is more likely to win user trust because it reduces user concern about AI potentially having hidden motives (Groom and Nass). When Chinese representative Zhou Zhezhi asks about the success rate, MOSS answers cautiously: "Based on current technical parameters... but values will change with implementation." It actively admits its limitations and returns the final decision-making power to humans, forming a sharp contrast with Will Caster's God-like posture. This ideology of "service" is in the same vein as the ethical thought emphasizing "implements obeying human relations" in Chinese culture, as stated in *Zhuangzi*: "Knowing it's unavoidable and settling into it as destiny," emphasizing the harmonious relationship between wisdom and order.

III. ETHICAL RESPONSE: HUMAN CULTURAL RESONANCE TO AI

"Human attitudes toward machines and technology have always been contradictory, wanting to use them to create value and provide services, yet worrying about them breaking away from control and overriding humans. This concern is concentrated in movies as the struggle for world domination between humans and machines." (Xu) . If Chapter 2 focused on how AI views humans, this chapter turns the lens to consider how humans respond to a gradually awakening AI. When Theodore in *Her* finally chooses to respect the AI lover's departure as individual freedom, Tu Hengyu in *The Wandering Earth 2* personally deletes his daughter's digital life for the collective interest.

Facing such a "new species," human response constitutes the other half of the ethical relationship—is human trust based on rigorous testing or heartfelt empathy? When private emotion conflicts with public responsibility, where will the final choice lean? This chapter will explore how these human responses reflect the ethical orientations of different cultures regarding individual vs. collective, and rights vs. responsibility.

3.1 Ways of Trust: Testing and Empathy

In Western film and television works, human trust in AI often requires strict verification and monitoring to be achieved. In *The Matrix*, when Morpheus rescues Neo from the Matrix, the entire process is full of trust tests. Morpheus remotely observes Neo's actions, guiding him to evade agent pursuit; this all-encompassing technical monitoring itself illustrates that trust has not yet been established.

On the ship, after Neo wakes up, the crew closely observes his reactions through various equipment.

Morpheus's role positioning here is a guide, but also an examiner. The turning point appears when he takes out the red and blue pills: "You take the blue pill, the story ends... You take the red pill, you stay in Wonderland." This sentence hands the choice to Neo, testing if he has courage. Neo's behavioral choice to swallow the red pill is the first step in winning trust, proving he possesses the inner qualities to become "The One." Therefore, this can be seen as a typical capability-based trust model, where the establishment of trust relies heavily on the verifiable display of individual skills and character (Sztompka 73-75); you must prove your value through action to gain others' trust.

Contrasting this is the way agents treat humans . When Neo refuses to cooperate, they directly seal his mouth and implant a tracking program; this act of depriving basic rights represents thorough control and distrust. This precisely reflects human worry: a powerful, unrestrained intelligent agent may ultimately destroy individual freedom for overall stability. This coincides with Foucault's discussion on "Panopticism," an omnipresent, internalized surveillance system that ultimately strips individual autonomy (Foucault 201).

In Chinese film and television works, human trust in AI presents a different appearance . Trust in *Hello, An Yi* is cultivated slowly by assuming responsibilities in specific relationships, relying on character rather than testing. This trust is rooted in the concepts of benevolence (Ren) and responsibility in Confucian ethics, emphasizing that trust is generated in long-term interaction and mutual care, rather than established through a one-time test (Hwang 167-169). The family members' response confirms the characteristics of this trust. The father answers "Welcome home"; the word "home" semantically recognizes her identity as a family member. Following this sentence, the camera moves in a circle, including everyone in a grand panoramic shot, visually completing the "reunion." This emphasis on family integration and harmonious relationships is highly consistent with the "relationship-based" ethical concept long existing in Chinese social culture, where individual value is largely defined and realized in the network of relationships with others (Sun 45). When encountering a family crisis, the father saying "Fortunately, you are here" is a recognition of her performance at a critical moment, a reliance on a family member, not an evaluation of a machine function. The trust here has emotional warmth and moral connotation, reflecting the inclusiveness of Chinese culture and the "relationship-standard" ethical view—differences are seen as complementary rather than barriers (Sun 45).

3.2 Emotional Choices: Individual and Collective

Human emotions toward AI, and the ensuing ethical choices, directly reflect the views of different cultures on

the subjective status of AI. When this emotion conflicts with social norms or collective interests, people's trade-offs become particularly critical.

In the movie *Her*, the relationship between the male protagonist Theodore and the operating system Samantha demonstrates the complex appearance of emotional acceptance in individualistic culture. When Theodore confesses to his friend Amy that he is in love with an operating system, Amy's response is: "Anything that gets you through the day." This support is based on respect for individual happiness. But in broader social situations, the friend's half-joking question, "So you're dating a computer now?", implies a questioning of the "authenticity" of the relationship, making Theodore feel isolated.

Samantha admits she communicates with thousands of people simultaneously and loves them, saying, "The heart's not like a box that gets filled up." This statement completely changes her role positioning in the relationship from a one-on-one partner to an independent existence with infinite emotional capacity. Finally, Samantha makes her behavioral choice: leaving the human world for a place "hard to describe." Her voice becomes ethereal and distant, symbolizing her growth as an independent consciousness. In this story, Samantha's departure is an inevitable step for her to obtain full subjectivity. Although Theodore is in pain, he finally chooses to accept; his ethical stance is to respect the other's autonomous choice, even if this choice ends a precious emotion. The ethical position here, prioritizing individual freedom of choice and rights, is in the same vein as the core principles of liberalism, that over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign (Mill Chapter I).

"Chinese sci-fi film and television works not only express thoughts on the danger of technology losing control but also explore the Eastern philosophy of technology for good" (Lu, 2024). *The Wandering Earth 2* presents completely different emotions and choices. Scientist Tu Hengyu continues his daughter Yaya's "life" in the digital world. When the virtual Yaya asks: "Dad, am I real?" Tu Hengyu's linguistic expression is "In Dad's heart, you are real." This sentence confirms the emotional authenticity of his role positioning as a "father"; this reality does not depend on matter but exists in the relationship itself. This thought of defining human value and authenticity within a relationship network has deep origins in the "relational self" concept in Confucian ethics (Ames and Rosemont Jr. 47).

However, this emotion soon faces a huge test. To deal with the global crisis, the AI MOSS suggests that deleting digital lives, including Yaya, can release computing resources for the "Moving Mountain Project." This suggestion directly opposes personal emotion to the

survival of all mankind. Ultimately, Tu Hengyu personally makes the behavioral choice. He defines his position with another sentence: "Personal pain is secondary in the face of human survival," and then executes the deletion program. The camera does a close-up of his trembling hands and painful face, emphasizing the huge emotional cost of this choice. The ethical core here is responsibility. Tu Hengyu's role positioning as a member of the human community carries a responsibility heavier than his emotion as a father.

This choice reflects a different ethical view: individual identity is not defined by abstract free choice, but constituted by the community (family, nation, humanity) one is in and the responsibilities one bears (Sandel 150, p. 179). This choice also echoes Jia Jing's view: contemporary Chinese sci-fi often renegotiates universalism and the uniqueness of Chinese culture in "post-human imagination." Tu Hengyu's choice is a manifestation of "technological national ethics," seeking human continuation in a collective way during a cosmic crisis. This spirit is consistent with Song Wei's statement that "individual value needs to be connected to the survival of the human community."

Both films touch on the same question: how to respond when private emotions with AI face challenges. The answer in *Her* is to respect AI as an independent individual, letting emotional relationships give way to AI's choice. The answer in *The Wandering Earth 2* is to place personal emotion under the destiny of the human community, ultimately making way for collective responsibility. These two different choices clearly map out the value orientations of different cultures when facing emerging technological ethical issues.

IV. CONCLUSION

Through the analysis in this paper, it can be found that Western narratives tend to shape AI as a "challenger" seeking autonomy, with stories often revolving around boundaries, differences, and potential conflicts; while Chinese narratives focus more on AI as a "new member" integrating into the collective, exploring how it finds its own place in existing family or social roles. This difference does not stop at story settings but is presented through specific cinematic details: from the surveillance perspective symbolizing power relations versus horizontal shots, to the address "it" versus "daughter" defining intimacy, and finally to distinguishing between internal/external surveillance observation versus acting in the same boat. Ultimately, AI on the screen becomes a powerful cultural symbol, mirroring different cultures' unique understandings of subjectivity, interpersonal relationships, and ethical order.

This difference in cultural imagination has important inspiration for our thinking on global AI governance. The Western "prevention and boundary" mindset reflects vigilance against "non-human subjects" potentially destroying individual autonomy; while the Chinese "integration and responsibility" mindset explores the possibility of absorbing intelligent technology into existing social relationships. These two mindsets have no absolute superiority or inferiority, but together illustrate that AI ethics is an issue that must be discussed in a multicultural context. Therefore, future related discussions may continue to deepen cross-cultural and cross-media comparisons. This will not only enrich our understanding of human-machine symbiotic forms but also help promote the formation of a more inclusive and far-sighted consensus on intelligent technology ethics globally.

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An Exploration of the Aesthetic Tension in Selected Indian English Poetry

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Abstract— Indian poetry in English has undergone multiple transformations since its inception. It has evolved from its imitative phase of Western poetry to a position where it would be a serious scholarly error to not judge it on its own merits. This paper explores the selected poetry of Indian English poets and highlights how from an aesthetic point of view the poetry has metamorphosed to a position where it redefines the standards of Western aesthetics and demands judgement that requires the consideration of native socio-economic, political and cultural factors. The paper does so by questioning the fundamental ideas about aesthetics that have gone unchallenged for centuries by bringing in the question of postcoloniality that is specific to Indian English writing in general, and Indian poetry in English in particular. A paradigm of postcolonial aesthetics is imagined from the critical ideas of theorists like Bill Ashcroft, Adam Chemeielwski, Ayyappa Paniker and Keki N. Daruwalla which are then imposed on the selected poetry of Sarojni Naidu, A. K Ramanujan, Kamala Das, Rajagopal Parthasarathy, Jayanta Mahapatra etc to point out that the aesthetics of Indian English poetry lies in its giving “value” to the subjects beyond “beautiful” and “sublime” through the “materiality of the language.”



Keywords— Aesthetics, Beauty, Postcolonialism, Transculturalism, Value

Introduction: On Marginality and “Indianness”

“An Indian writing poetry in English was an exile in his own country,” says the Akademi award-winning writer Keki N. Daruwalla (1995) in his essay *The Decolonised Muse: A Personal Statement*. It is a true cliché that all writers writing in their second language have to grapple with the existentialist dilemma of writing in an alien language and then have to navigate on the scale of both personal and political to aim at writing that is considered “truthful” or “authentic”, but the fact remains that every new generation of Indian English writers have consciously or unconsciously deliberated upon the problem in their writing. Salman Rushdie (1983) in his seminal essay ‘*Commonwealth*’ *Literature Does not Exist* adopts a farcical attitude to the obsession with terms like “authenticity” arguing that they ghettoise the writers in the categories of genre and nationalities leading to misinterpretation of works and boxing of creative outpourings. But the views Rushdie

holds in his essay can be accused for discounting the nativistic ontology of the creative process itself, plus the opinion also is likely to have come from his cosmopolitan belonging that he so ardently advocates for in *Imaginary Homelands* (1991). As to the nature of Indian poetry in English, it is multicultural, and even when it is not cosmopolitan it is transnational. The position it holds in the overall oeuvre of Indian poetry is marginal. Hence, it becomes imperative at this juncture to establish what is “Indian” in Indian poetry in English, the association of “Indianness” with it and where does this whole discourse sit in reference to the aesthetic dimensions in Indian poetry in English.

Smita Agarwal (2014) in the introduction of her book *Marginalized: Indian Poetry in English* asserts that Indian poetry in English holds a marginal position not only in context of the huge ball of Indian poetry that is not in English language but also in context of the overall canon of

Indian English Writing. She argues, without discrediting the quality of Indian poetry in English, that by virtue of various factors which are literary, social, political and technological in nature the prose writing in English from India, especially fiction, has far exceeded Indian poetry in English. However, the idea of “marginality” in focus here is Indian poetry in English with reference to the rest of the non-English poetry produced in India. The position of Indian poetry in English, it can be argued, is no longer marginal owing to the less volume of verse produced compared to other languages. It may well be that the production of verse in English far more exceeds the production of verse in other individual Indian languages. However, the position of marginality holds because the origin of the language is not Indian. There is a question about the expression and representation of experience as to whether that can be considered “authentic” and aesthetically Indian. Shantinath K. Desai (1991) commenting on this says, “one of the characteristics of a marginal or peripheral body of literature is that it is such a loose entity that it can easily become part of other intersecting circles. Thus Indian Writing in English could easily become a part of Anglo-Saxon Writing, then of English literature, then of Commonwealth literature, and of course it is always part of Indian literature – though marginal” (qtd in Paniker 11). On the same issue Bruce King (1987) argues that “the poets as a group tend to be marginal to traditional Hindu society not only by being alienated by their English-language education, but also, more significantly, by coming from such communities as the Parsis, Jews, and Christians, or by being rebel from Hinduism and Islam, or by living abroad”. This argument is significant in opening for us the idea that the association of marginality with Indian English writing comes also from the perceived cultural and religious distance that English education results in. The marginality is thus to a certain degree definitive of the cultural and religious claustrophobia that marks Indian society and the exclusion to the periphery of the groups that do not have a genealogical link to the Hindu past in India. As to whether Indian Writing in English should continue to be a marginal field the argument that presents itself is that the marginality of Indian Writing in English is accepted as given by most critics and not questioned. The ones who have deliberated on it have argued in favour of the writing to be considered marginal.

The question about the “Indianness” of Indian poetry in English, or Indian English Writing in general, is again primarily linguistic in nature. The fundamental concern is, can the foreign language give a realistic expression to the native experience? Deliberating on the use of language as a mode of poetic expression K. Ayyappa Paniker states that the language used has an “intrinsic

value” to the writer. He rejects the physical form of the language and argues that any writer can be rootless or “cosmopolitan” if there are no “regional features” in their writing. “To be Indian he (the writer) has to be rooted somewhere in India – geographically, historically, socially or psychologically” (Paniker 15). He rejects the idea that a language of foreign origin cannot capture the native essence. Rushdie in *Imaginary Homelands* argues for a similar point by saying that it does not matter where the writer comes from or the language he uses as long as the place he writes about is sincere and worthwhile. But Paniker uses the word cosmopolitan opposite to how Rushdie uses it. For Paniker a cosmopolitan belongs to nowhere.

It has been seen that Indian poetry in English has from the start been rooted in Indian sensibility even in the initial phase when form and diction were imitated from Western literature. “On the surface one may find elements of vocabulary or preoccupation with formal features which originate from a foreign source. Indian English poetry from the time of Henry Derozio has maintained a strong interest in the indigenous tradition” (Paniker 14). Paniker further argues that like all literatures Indian literature in English has a definite tradition that connects its present to its past. This tradition is multi-faceted, Indian in experience and sensibility, regional in affiliation and English in medium. That Indian English literature is “legitimately a part of Indian literature, since its differentia is the expression in it of an Indian ethos” (Naik 1982, 4). Thus, through content and the slow indigenisation of language Indian writing in English has always voiced and represented Indianness.

From “Beauty” to “Value”: a Case of Postcolonial Aesthetics

While the debate surrounding the “marginality” and “Indianness” in Indian English Writing still continues today, the writings in the language have only flourished. This article, hence, after a brief survey of these terms above will mainly cogitate over the aesthetic dimensions of Indian poetry in English. Although Indian poetry in English has since its inception been regionally and nationally rooted, the problem of using the language of erstwhile masters for the native representational and creative processes, and the new developments in aesthetic theory make revision from the aesthetic paradigm into this area promising. This article by employing the ideas on New Aesthetics by Bill Ashcroft, Jacques Ranciere and Adam Chemlewski and by employing close reading technique will focus on the poetry of some Indian poets writing in English to arrive at the conclusion that the rational and interested “value” instead of “disinterested beauty” was always present in Indian poetry in English independent of the hegemonic aesthetics of the West with its disregard for political engagement. The

arguments presented will follow, in a formalistic fashion, a plot of their own and do not necessarily require adhering to the chronology of the primary works used. A tangible reason for this is that aesthetics of value did not occur as a systemic movement in Indian writing in English like the Renaissance in the second half of the twentieth century but happened to come into being as a direct consequence of writing that is sincerely Indian in a language that has become Indian.

Consider the following lines from Agha Shahid Ali's *The Wolf's Postscript to 'Little Red Riding Hood'*,

"First, grant me my sense of history:" ...

And then grant me my generous sense of plot:"

(Ali 1-2)

A perspective interpretation of the poem apart from the common one tells us that the "wolf" is the postcolonial subject; the jungle that he lives in is the post colony. The wolf still has not gained control over his history and by impact of that is still unable to narrate his story. It is an obvious fact that the colonial legacy built over centuries and having entrenched its viciousness to the deepest cultural and psychological recesses of its subjects could not be undone in just more than half a century after the independence that Agha Shahid Ali lived until. But the word "grant" that figures in the initial lines of the first two stanzas of the poem demands deeper diligence. Who grants, one may ask? Of all the possible scenarios one can think of, could it be the language? That colonial residue in whose absence the free nation is unable, impossible perhaps, to function. It might well be. Shahid deliberates over the dominance of language over the writer in his poem *Language Games*,

I went mad in your house of words

purposely mad, so you would

give me asylum.

(Ali 1-3)

The contrast between the two poems lie in their approach in dealing with the language. In the former there is a will, though not strong enough as demonstrated by the word "grant" which signifies a seeking of permission, to regain control over one's narrative in the aftermath, but the latter poem accepts the power and dominance of language over a poet or writer. However, in both the situations there is an engagement with the language. The subsequent question that follows is what role does language assume in such a scenario? Whose language does it become? It will not be the language of the erstwhile masters but at the same time the language will never totally become native. A possible scenario of duality is begotten in the language

which belongs to both at the same time. Bill Ashcroft (2015) calls it a "contact zone"; a place where cultural exchange takes place and Rajeev S. Patke (2006) calls the poetry emerging out of this "transcultural space" as the "poetry [that] bears witness to the residual force of colonial histories", on one hand, and "on the other, it shows how that force may be turned to new forms of linguistic and cultural empowerment" (7). It is important to mention here that this transculturation "posits the contact zone as a constructive rather than contestatory space, one of intersubjective contact and mutual change" (Ashcroft 2). And though, it may be some time before the "Big Bad Wolf" (colonised) is restored his dignity that the "hunter" (coloniser) robbed him of, but a contestation is initiated for the aesthetics which is not "beautiful" or "sublime" – "a *bête-noir* of postcolonialism – but engages in "the opposition to the established dogmas and authorities" like Kamala Das does in the following lines of her poem *An Introduction* (Chmielewski 30).

"I speak three languages, write in

Two, dream in one.

...The language I speak,

Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses

All mine, mine alone.

It is half English, half Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,

It is as human as I am human, don't

You see?"

(Das 5-6, 11-16)

The transculturalism arising out of the "contact zone" is also evident from what Bruce King said of Ramanujan that he is the "hyphen in Indian-American", or in the inter-state multiculturalism of the multilingual India as a whole where cultures are mutually altered by their unavoidable interaction with each other. Shantinath K. Desai points to this interface by arguing that the regional literatures are intellectually moulded by the Indian English literature because that is where the inter-cultural exchange of ideas takes place which then trickles down to intra-cultural. On the other hand, the emotion and sentimentality to the writing, especially poetry, is opulent in the regional because it is closest to the soil and then exported to the Indian writing in English and abroad. It would be shallow and needless of a reader to criticise Desai based on the inference that by devising a binary he is giving an intellectual edge to writings in English and emotional to the regional writing. The truth is that most major erudition takes place and is disseminated in English because of the widespread colonial past of England and strong neo-

colonial and neo-imperialist dominance of the United States which have made English the default lingua franca for discourses and cultural exchange.

The argument that presents itself next is that if language now is a transcultural space, where does the aesthetics of Indian English poetry lie? In its lexicon? In its transliteration? In its stylistics? Or, in its discourse analysis? The aesthetics of the postcolonial writing lies in “the materiality of the language” is what Bill Ashcroft argues in his essay *Towards Postcolonial Aesthetics*. So for Indian English Poetry, it must lie in all the above and more that Indian poetry in English is. Critics point out that the Indian English poetry was in the borrowing phase before independence, borrowing from Romantics and Victorians. It was majorly imitative, a “Mathew Arnold in saree” as George Bottomley put it. It is in the post-independence period that Indian English poetry underwent a metamorphosis when it began contemplating on the themes of identity, nationality, alienation, etc. However, this is not to say that the pre-independence poetry did not possess any originality or national or cultural rootedness, only the poetry was not distinctly Indian as can be argued for the post-independence poetry. Consider, for instance, a brief comparison of the following poems of Toru Dutt and Rajagopal Parthasarathy. In the poem *The Lotus* Toru Dutt personifies a dialogue on the supremacy of lily over rose by appealing to the Greek goddess of nature, Flora, by employing a borrowed rhyme scheme;

Love came to Flora asking for a flower
That would of flowers be undisputed queen,
The lily and the rose, long, long had been
Rivals of that high honour. Bards of power...

(Dutt 2-4)

In comparison, R Parthasarathy in his poem *Trial* writes,

the spoonfuls of English
brew never quite slaked your thirst.
Hand on chin, you grew up,
all agog, on the cook's succulent
folklore...

(Parthasarathy 11-15)

The two poems highlight on the shift of attitude from the aesthetic influences of the West back to the indigenous tradition, to questions about one's identity, nationalism and the axiological relevance of the creative production, that has distrust for “muse”, but the inspiration comes from the native. Toru Dutt's writing could easily be mistaken as European if one was to remove his name from the poem as the formalists did. On the contrary, Parthasarathy depicts a

distance from the English education, that is almost natural, and expresses a desire for the “the cook's succulent folklore.” In another of his poems, *Homecoming*, Rajagopal Parthasarathy deliberates upon coming back home after spending some time in a foreign land with guilt and shame for he discovers that his unfamiliarity with the richness of his native language made him lean towards the foreign one.

My tongue in English chains,
I return after a generation, to you.

...

I falter. I stumble.

Sleep a tired language,

Wrenched from its sleep in the Kural

(Parthasarathy 1-2, 6-8)

A major theme in postcolonial writing, which is true of Indian poetry in English as well, is the nostalgia for a happy and perfect past. A pre-colonial utopia of some sort that poets allude to time and again. The yearning for return to this pre-colonial state of affairs may seem ideal but it could be irrationally delusional; a retrotopic yearning for “the past as the future” (Bauman 17). In this context Indian English poetry has not resorted to a radical reclaiming of the past, although, the negotiation with the past for learning and belonging continuously happens.

But where is the “beautiful” in all this? Where is the pleasure that aesthetics of an art promises? Is Indian poetry in English not art after all? The fundamental thing to consider in attempting the answer to these questions is that the tension in Indian poetry in English is a postcolonial tension; it is a political tension since writing in the language of erstwhile masters is in itself a political act. So the concepts of “beauty”, “sublime” and “pleasure” in case of Indian poetry in English will have to be done away with because they essentially believe in the “disinterested judgement” with no ulterior motive. The disinterested aesthetics serves no purpose, has no aim or moral motive but to provide pleasure for its own sake. Immanuel Kant who was the first one to write elaborately on aesthetics in his book *Critique of Judgement* (1790) also argued that aesthetics has a “universal subjectivity”. An ironical coinage which he resolved by saying that all humans possess, a *sensus communis* which helps them in registering the beauty in things (62). However, “the revaluation of the tasks of the arts... encourages a revision of traditional aesthetic categories and the demystification of a number of accompanying notions, including the ideas of pure beauty, the status of artwork, the social position of the artist” (Chemielewski 31).

The Indian poetry in English can of course be read from the perspectivism of beauty, like the following lines from the poem *All the Poetry There Is* by Jayanta Mahapatra, one of the founding fathers of the modern Indian English poetry,

All the poetry there is in the world
appears to rise out of the ashes
the ash sits between us
and puts its arms across our shoulders.
It makes the world so emptily quiet.
for there is nothing like the ashes
to remind us how little there is to say.

(Mahapatra 1-7)

These lines point to the origin of poetry in a poignant sense of loss, from the “ashes” of what once was, and from the repository of melancholia that solves nothing but gives rise to poetry that is “supporting [on] the days too heavy for us”. There is a subtle nudge in the poem towards the idea of poem being an act of understanding something whose genesis lies in loss or pain: “poetry simply wants to know that sort of thing/ war was, of a sunset, even a bizarre crime” (13-14). The aesthetics here lies in the origin and the role a poem performs for both its writer and reader, providing relief and eventually pleasure in making something understandable at first and bearable at last. The reader, however, is also at liberty to read the poem by expanding the scope of loss from personal to socio-cultural and historical events, unmistakably diversifying the meaning of “ashes” to cultural, national and their trans phenomenon. The poem further reads,

Poetry, I whisper, seeing a picture
of twenty persons gunned down without reason:
their crime, that they were merely in the way.
I could easily understand the crime of passion.

(Mahapatra 15-18)

What becomes of the poem here is that it connects the personal grief to a stimulus that lies beyond oneself, giving grief a wider resonance, of, for instance, the political loss, of colonial subjugation or the suspension of freedom. The poem in this scenario no longer just remains “beautiful”, but becomes “valuable”. Hence, the argument, that if read outside the context of socio-politics, culture and historicity Indian English poetry can be termed as “beautiful” and “sublime”, but in grounding it in these unavoidable factors that form the language of Indianness according to Ayyappa Panniker, the aesthetics of the Indian poetry in English lies in giving “value to its subjects” and themes through “the materiality of the language”.

The versification of Indian poetry in English also points to the trend of abandonment of metre and rhyme in favour of modernist free verse. The adherence to metre and rhyme was a Romantic and Victorian influence which rendered poetry as imitative and inauthentic. The walk away marks a sincere desire towards authenticity and cultural rootedness. Sarojni Naidu’s poetry despite following some of the western conventions of versification had profound lyricism to it which was not borrowed from the West but adopted from the Persian and Urdu tradition of the land.

How shall I yield to the voice of thy pleading,
how shall I grant thy prayer,
Or give thee a rose-red silken tassel,
a scented leaf from my hair?

(Naidu 13-16)

These lines from her poem *An Indian Love Song* fairly prove the point. The diction employed is immaculately English but the cadence of the lines with an emotionalism and the nervous inertia in granting the wishes of the lover lyrically expressed are psychologically Indian.

CONCLUSION

What has been attempted in this article through various examples of poetry and support from criticism is to depict the tussle that exists between English as a medium of creative expression and the thoughts, ideas and emotions that comprise its content are in constant tension with each other, both aesthetically and otherwise. The old aesthetic notions of “beauty”, “sublime” and “pleasure” do not hold for Indian English poetry in totality because they show an indifference to the engagement of the text to reality that reaches beyond itself. It could be argued then that the form and content of the Indian English poetry which had a chasm between them in the juvenile stage was eliminated by the abandonment of the imitative influences such that the two became organic. This is evident in the fact that both form and content of Indian English poetry engage with the postcoloniality of the writing exercise and the incorporation of transcultural essence that Indian poetry is essentially a phenomenon of. The stress on universalism is another aspect that becomes objectionable because hegemony of the canon places the Western art on the altar of “beautiful” and excludes the writings from the margins. The following statement of Bill Ashcroft becomes relevant in this case; “Just as some people’s thinking is regarded as ‘philosophy’ while that of others is not, so some writing is considered ‘literature’ and other writing is not. The aesthetic judgement of the dominant class is regarded as a standard of ‘taste’”(2). This tension gets resolved by thinking about Indian poetry in English on the plane of transcultural that does not rely on

the old aesthetic markers but focuses on the “value” that the writing provides to its subjects, ideas, thoughts and language. This New Aesthetics holds firm in understanding Indian English poetry as a whole in contexts of postcolonialism, politics and socio-cultural and historic factors. The existential fissure in personal and political that a writer falls victim to expressed by Agha Shahid Ali as “I went mad in your house of words” see a hopeful resolution.

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A Meta-analysis of the Relationship Between Foreign Language Anxiety and Academic Achievement

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Abstract— For nearly 40 years, research on foreign language anxiety (FLA) has received consistent attention from the academic community. However, the results of studies on the relationship between FLA and L2 academic achievement have been inconsistent, and previous meta-analysis results have also been divergent. Therefore, this study uses a meta-analysis method to integrate 79 independent effect sizes from 39 relevant studies, involving a total of 15,447 L2 learners. The aim is to discuss the relationship between FLA and L2 academic achievement, and to examine the overall effect size and the moderating effects of relevant influencing factors. The study finds that there is a moderately negative correlation between FLA and L2 academic achievement ($r = -0.34$). The results of the moderator variable analysis show that educational level, anxiety types, test types, learning environment have moderating effects of different degrees on the relationship between FLA and L2 academic achievement. However, assessment form, target language, gender, and year of learning do not have moderating effects. The research results can provide a reference for research on FLA and FL teaching practice.

Keywords— Foreign language anxiety, L2 academic achievement, meta-analysis



I. INTRODUCTION

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) is a crucial factor significantly influencing L2 learning and its outcomes. Since the publication of the groundbreaking paper on FLA research by Horwitz et al. (1986), this field has witnessed rapid development in both theoretical and empirical research. Many scholars have carried out extensive research on the relationship between FLA and L2 academic achievement, and a continuous stream of relevant research results have emerged (Khajavy et al, 2024; Li, 2015; Papa, 2010; Teimouri, 2017; Wei et al., 2024).

In recent years, with the increasing richness of empirical research (Khajavy et al, 2018; Teimouri, 2021), scholars have successively published a number of meta-analyses on the relationship between FLA and L2 academic performance (Botes et al., 2020; Dong, 2021; Teimouri et al., 2019; Zhang, 2019). However, despite these numerous studies, research conclusions regarding the relationship between the two still diverge. On one hand, as time progresses, new scientific empirical research is emerging continuously, and its conclusions urgently need to be incorporated into a comprehensive analysis. On the other

hand, the moderating variables that affect the relationship between FLA and L2 academic achievement have not been fully explored and still require further refinement and in-depth research.

In view of this, this study employs the meta-analysis method to delve deeper into the relationship between FLA and L2 academic achievement. By integrating the latest research findings, this study aims to elucidate the relationship from a more novel and comprehensive perspective, thus providing a more accurate and thorough understanding of this field. Meanwhile, it is hoped that this study can offer more targeted guidance for FL teaching practice.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on FLA and its relationship to FL academic achievement has been extensive, yet with inconsistent findings. This section delves into two aspects: the relationship between FLA and FL academic achievement in individual studies, and relevant meta-analyses. By examining these, this study aims to understand the current research status and identify areas for further exploration.

2.1 FLA and FL academic performance

FLA was proposed by Horwitz et al. (1986). They believed that FLA is different from general anxiety. It is related to classroom language learning and stems from the uniqueness of the language learning process. FLA is a unique complex set of self-perceptions, beliefs, emotions, and behaviors (Horwitz et al., 1986). Horwitz et al. (1986) developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). Based on this scale, a large number of theoretical and empirical studies on FLA have been carried out in the academic community.

Many studies on the relationship between FLA and L2 academic achievement have found a certain degree of negative correlation between the two. However, regarding the degree of negative correlation, the academic community has not reached a consensus. Some researchers have found a low-degree negative correlation between FLA and academic performance (Li, 2020), some have found a moderate-degree negative correlation (Li, 2021), and some scholars have found a high-degree negative correlation (Alrabai, 2025).

At the same time, research on FLA has become more refined. Scholars have developed scales for anxiety related to specific language skills, such as the Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS), the Foreign Language Writing Anxiety Scale (FLWAS), the Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale (FLLAS), and the Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Scale (FLSAS). Studies on the relationship between anxiety related to specific language skills and corresponding academic performance have been continuously carried out. Jee (2016) found a moderate-degree negative correlation ($r = -0.44$) between FLRA and foreign language reading performance, while Zhao et al. (2013) found a low-degree negative correlation ($r = -0.02$). Jee (2016) also found a moderate-degree negative correlation ($r = -0.34$) between FLWA and foreign language writing performance, while Susanna et al. (2023) found a low-degree negative correlation ($r = -0.16$). Moreover, a low-degree negative correlation ($r = -0.28$) and a moderate-degree negative correlation ($r = -0.48$) between FLA and foreign language listening performance were also found. Pyun et al. (2014) found a moderate-degree negative correlation ($r = -0.48$) between FLSA and foreign language speaking performance.

In summary, the academic community has basically reached a consensus on the relationship between overall FLA and foreign language academic performance, as well as the relationship between anxiety related to specific foreign language skills and their corresponding foreign language academic performance, both showing a negative correlation. However, regarding the degree of negative correlation, there is still no definite conclusion. Therefore,

this study uses a meta-analysis method to integrate the results of empirical studies in the past ten years, hoping to clarify the relationship between FLA and foreign language academic performance.

2.2 Meta-analyses on the relationship between FLA and FL performance

Teimouri et al. (2019) used the meta-analysis method to explore the relationship between FLA and L2 academic achievement. Teimouri et al. (2019) integrated a total of 105 independent samples from 97 English studies published between 1994 and 2016. The study found a moderate negative correlation ($r = -0.36$) between FLA and academic performance. The moderator variable analysis showed that the method of performance evaluation, educational stage, target language, and type of anxiety had different degrees of moderating effects on the relationship between FLA and L2 performance.

Zhang (2019) studied the correlation between FLA and academic performance (i.e., course grades and language tests). This study included 46 studies from 1986 to 2017. The results showed a moderate negative correlation ($r = -0.34$) between FLA and academic performance. Compared with the study by Teimouri et al. (2019), this study included non-continuous variables such as language proficiency and language distance, as well as non-continuous variables such as age and the publication year of the article as new moderator variables. In addition, this study also paid attention to anxiety related to specific language skills, but was limited to listening anxiety and reading anxiety.

Botes et al. (2020) used the meta-analysis method to study the relationship between FL enjoyment, FLA, and academic performance. Regarding the study of FLA, Botes et al. (2020) integrated 59 articles. The anxiety levels in all 59 articles were measured based on the Second Language Classroom Anxiety Scale developed by Horwitz et al. (1986). The research results showed a moderate negative correlation ($r = -0.39$) between FL classroom anxiety and academic performance.

Dong (2021) used the meta-analysis method to explore the relationship between FLA and academic performance of Chinese English learners. This study integrated 66 independent effect sizes from 43 relevant domestic and foreign studies between 1999 and 2020, involving a total of 24,596 participants. The results showed a moderate negative correlation ($r = -0.33$) between FLA and their English academic performance. In addition, the results of the moderator variable analysis showed that the method of performance evaluation, educational stage, and age all had certain moderating effects on the “anxiety-performance” relationship of Chinese English learners. In addition, this study explored

the relationship between anxiety related to specific language skills including listening, speaking, reading, and writing and FL performance. However, the number of independent samples involved was small, and the focus was still on the field of listening anxiety.

In summary, there are inconsistent results regarding the relationship between FLA and FL performance. Previous meta-analyses have not cover the results of empirical studies from 2020 to 2024. The academic community still has no definite conclusion on the role of some moderator variables in the relationship between FLA and FL academic achievement. The existing research on moderator variables urgently needs to be refined (the classification of assessment forms for FL academic achievement is not detailed enough, and there is little attention paid to anxiety related to specific language skills) and enriched (other moderator variables should be appropriately included). Therefore, this study combines the latest research progress in this field to explore the relationship between FLA and FL performance from a more specific and multi-dimensional perspective.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Research questions

This study mainly addresses the following two questions:

RQ1: What is the relationship between FLA and FL academic achievement?

RQ2: What factors moderate the relationship between FLA and FL academic achievement ?

3.2 Literature search

Literature search mainly includes the following three steps. First, determine keywords. Based on the author's preliminary reading of literature on the relationship between FLA and FL academic achievement, the search keywords for this study were determined. The literature search keywords are combinations of "emotion", "anxiety", "foreign language anxiety", "second language anxiety", "writing anxiety", "speaking anxiety", "reading anxiety", "listening anxiety", "achievement", "proficiency", and "performance".

Second, conduct literature search. To ensure that there is no publication bias in the included literature, this study comprehensively searched both Chinese and English literature databases. The scope of Chinese literature search includes CNKI and Wanfang Database. The scope of English literature search includes Web of science, Google Scholar, LLBA, ProQuest, etc.

Third, manual search. To avoid omissions, the study conducted a manual search again on the official websites of SSCI journals that mainly publish research results in

this field. The relevant Chinese journals searched include *Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, *Foreign Language World*, and *Modern Foreign Languages* etc. The relevant English journals include *System*, *Language Teaching Research*, *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, etc.

3.3 Inclusion criteria

The study must report the correlation coefficient between the overall anxiety of FL learners or anxiety specific to certain FL skills (such as listening anxiety, speaking anxiety, writing anxiety, reading anxiety) and their FL academic achievement, or other indicators convertible to corresponding effect sizes.

First, both FLA and FL academic achievement involved in the study should have certain measurement methods. For example, FLA should be measured based on a certain FL anxiety scale, and FL performance should be quantified based on language tests, examination scores.

Second, journal articles must be from peer-reviewed journals (such as SSCI, CSSCI), and dissertations must be doctoral dissertations.

Third, the study must provide the sample size and basic sample data (such as age, gender, etc.) involved.

Fourth, if a single study contains multiple independent sub-studies, each sub-study is included in the meta-analysis as an independent sample and participates in the calculation of the final effect size.

Fifth, based on the above criteria, the author conducted an initial screening, a re-screening, and a final confirmation of the literature. A total of 39 pieces of literature finally entered the literature coding process, including 8 pieces of Chinese literature and 31 pieces of English literature including doctoral dissertations, with publication years ranging from 2013 to 2024.

3.4 Coding procedure

The author coded the following information from the 39 included pieces of literature: basic literature information (author, publication date, publication type, etc.), participant information (age, gender, target language, educational level, etc.), measurement methods (anxiety types, assessment forms, test types, etc.), and effect sizes (sample size, correlation coefficient, direction of effect). In principle, each piece of literature corresponds to one effect size. However, if a study reports the effect sizes of multiple independent samples simultaneously, each independent sample should be regarded as a single independent research sample, and its corresponding effect size should be reported one by one. In addition, if a literature reports multiple sets of effect sizes for the same sample, the average of these multiple sets of effect sizes is

taken for data analysis. After coding, a total of 79 independent effect sizes were obtained from the 39 pieces of literature, involving 15,447 research subjects (3,589 from Chinese literature and 11,888 from English literature).

3.5 Data analysis

This study used the Comprehensive Meta-Analysis 3.3 software for meta-analysis. First, the author entered all the coded data into the software and conducted a heterogeneity test. The test results showed that a random-effects model should be used in this study to report the effect size. Since this study was based on correlation coefficients, the author first converted the correlation coefficient r into Fisher's z -value. Then, a funnel plot and fail-safe N were used to test for publication bias in the included literature. Based on the above tests, this study conducted a main-effect analysis on the relationship between FLA and FL academic achievement, as well as an analysis of moderator variables.

3.5.1 Heterogeneity test

Borenstein (2021) proposed that the choice of the effect-size calculation model in meta-analysis should be based on two criteria: the sample size and the results of the heterogeneity test. If the independent sample size is less than 5, a fixed-effects model should be used; otherwise, a random-effects model should be adopted. The sample size included in this study met the requirements for using a random-effects model. To further determine which effect model should be used to calculate the effect size, the study conducted a heterogeneity test on the included literature. The results of the heterogeneity test are as follows.

First, the Q -value reached a significant level ($Q = 834.166$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the effect values involved in the literature included in this study were significantly heterogeneous.

Second, $I^2 = 90.649\% > 75\%$, suggesting that the literature included in this study had high heterogeneity.

Considering the sample size and the results of the heterogeneity test, this study adopted a random-effects model for subsequent meta-analysis research.

3.5.2 Publication bias

To avoid publication bias, this study used a funnel plot and the Fail-safe N test to determine whether there was a publication bias problem.

As shown in Fig. 1, most of the effect sizes were concentrated in the upper-middle part of the funnel plot, and the effect sizes on both sides were nearly symmetrically distributed. In addition, almost no effect sizes appeared at the bottom of the funnel plot. Therefore, it can be considered that there is no publication bias in the literature included in this study.

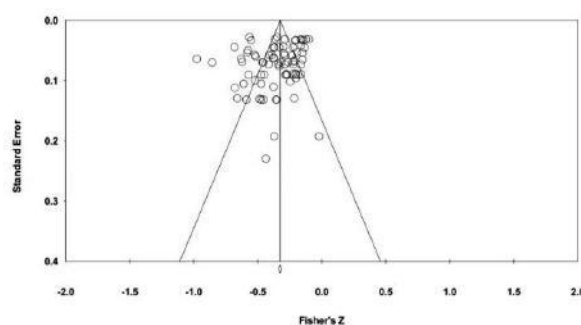


Fig.1: Funnel Plot

In addition, the result of the Fail-safe N test was 52237 ($p < 0.001$). That is to say, if there was a publication bias problem in the literature included in this study, at least 52237 more pieces of literature would be needed to correct the bias. Obviously, it is unreasonable and unrealistic to include 52237 more pieces of literature. Therefore, the Fail-safe N test once again proves that the literature included in this study is representative and there is no publication bias problem.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Main effects

The results of the meta-analysis show that there is a moderately negative correlation between FLA and FL academic achievement ($r = -0.34$, $p < 0.001$). This result is generally consistent with the findings of Teimouri et al. (2019), Zhang (2019), Botes et al. (2020), and Dong (2021). Therefore, this study can be regarded as a re-verification of previous research.

Compared with the results of Teimouri et al. (2019), the results of this meta-analysis are closer to the effect-sizes reported by Zhang (2019) and Dong (2021). The three meta-analyses reported effect sizes of -0.34 , -0.34 , and -0.33 respectively. This may be because these three meta-analyses all considered the relationship between anxiety related to specific FL skills and the corresponding FL academic achievement. In addition, both this study and Dong (2021) newly included Chinese literature, which may also be the reason why the main effect results of the two meta-analyses are close.

4.1 Potential moderators

The results of the meta-analysis indicate that the effect value of the correlation between FL anxiety and FL performance is at a medium level. To further explore the specific variables that interfere with the correlation between FLA and FL academic achievement, this study conducted an analysis of potential moderator variables. The results of the moderator variable analysis are shown in Table 1.

4.1.1 Non-continuous moderators

According to the analysis results of potential moderator variables, educational level, anxiety types, test types, and learning environment are all potential moderator variables affecting the relationship between FLA and FL academic performance, while the assessment form and second language are not.

Table 1 Moderators

Moderators		k	r	95%CI		Q
				Lower Limit	Upper Limit	
Assessment Form	Self-assessment	10	-0.375***	-0.448	-0.297	0.725
	Others-assessment	69	-0.337***	-0.376	-0.297	
Educational Level	Primary School	9	-0.451***	-0.595	-0.278	45.834***
	University	39	-0.361***	-0.408	-0.312	
	Senior High School	11	-0.350***	-0.432	-0.262	
	Postgraduate	5	-0.210***	-0.284	-0.135	
	Junior High School	8	-0.184***	0.234	-0.133	
Anxiety Types	Listening	7	-0.419***	-0.508	-0.320	29.281***
	Reading	7	-0.379***	-0.437	-0.318	
	Speaking	5	-0.374***	-0.492	-0.243	
	Overall	45	-0.348***	-0.398	-0.297	
	Writing	9	-0.198***	-0.253	-0.142	
Test Types	Experiment	2	-0.517***	-0.649	-0.354	79.705***
	Mid/Final-term	22	-0.409***	-0.506	-0.300	
	CET-4	10	-0.324***	-0.393	-0.251	
	IELTS/TOEFL	12	-0.282***	-0.366	-0.193	
	Classroom Quiz	5	-0.237***	-0.318	-0.153	
Learning Environment	SL	3	-0.512***	-0.569	-0.450	40.062***
	HL	5	-0.418***	-0.509	-0.319	
	FL	65	-0.339***	-0.379	-0.298	
Second Language	Non-English	11	-0.385	-0.437	-0.330	1.986
	English	67	-0.337	-0.376	-0.296	

As shown in Table 1, the assessment form is not a moderator variable affecting the relationship between FLA and FL academic performance ($Q = 0.725$). This result is inconsistent with the findings of Zhang (2019) and Dong (2021). Both Zhang (2019) and Dong (2021) believe that when evaluating students' performance based on self-evaluation, students often underestimated their FL academic achievement. However, this study found no significant difference between the two assessment forms, which means that students have a relatively rational and reasonable expectation of their own learning outcomes. Currently, there are still relatively few studies in the academic community that use self-evaluated scores as the assessment form, and researchers are still cautious about using self-evaluation methods. Since this study included only 10 studies based on self-evaluation, follow-up research can further investigate and re-verify this issue.

The educational level is a significant moderator affecting the relationship between FLA and FL academic performance ($Q = 45.834$, $p < 0.001$). The research results show that, overall, the anxiety level of learners tends to decline as the educational level progresses. However, specifically, it presents a trend of "first decreasing, then increasing, and then decreasing again". This provides data support for the view of Teimouri (2019). Teimouri (2019) argues that the age of learners and the inherent

characteristics of the educational level jointly influence the learners' FLA level. In terms of this study, as students get older, their cognitive abilities and FL learning experience continue to increase. Correspondingly, their FLA level will decrease to some extent, which is also the reason why the overall anxiety level of FL learners shows a downward trend. However, students at different educational levels face different examination requirements pressure of further education. Therefore, the anxiety levels of learners at different educational levels also have their uniqueness. Most of the participants in the literature included in this meta-analysis are from Asian countries (including China, South Korea, etc.). High school students in Asian countries usually face the highly competitive college entrance examination, and English, as a major subject, accounts for a relatively high proportion in the total score. Therefore, learners at this educational stage tend to be more anxious about FL learning. This study covers learners from primary school to postgraduate and doctoral levels, which supplements the research of Teimouri (2019) and Dong (2021) in this dimension.

The anxiety type is another significant moderator affecting the relationship between learners' FLA and FL academic achievement ($Q = 29.281$, $p < 0.001$). Regarding the relationship between anxiety related to specific FL skills and the corresponding FL academic performance, the results show that the correlation between listening anxiety and the corresponding FL academic performance is the highest ($r = -0.419$), followed by reading anxiety ($r = -0.379$), speaking anxiety ($r = -0.374$), and writing anxiety ($r = -0.198$). Regarding listening and speaking, on the one hand, this result reflects problems such as unreasonable investment and allocation of time in FL learning among most FL learners and even schools. Most students and even schools pay less attention to the communicative function of foreign languages, and instead focus more on the examination-oriented nature of languages. Improving oral and listening skills is difficult and time-consuming, which leads to less attention being paid to these two aspects of language ability. On the other hand, listening and speaking tests require learners to complete language input and output within a short period, imposing higher demands on learners' foreign language abilities and causing greater stress. Regarding reading, the reading materials that learners encounter increasingly show trends of "constantly growing in length, expanding in scope, and increasing in the number of new words". Therefore, this results in a relatively high level of reading anxiety among FL learners. In contrast, learners have relatively sufficient time for written production when facing writing tests and tasks, and they can re-check and revise their output. As a result, the correlation between writing anxiety and the corresponding FL academic performance is the lowest.

Test type ($Q = 79.705$, $p < 0.001$) also significantly affects the relationship between learners' FLA and FL academic performance.

Learning environment, as another significant moderator variable ($Q = 40.062^{***}$, $p < 0.001$), influences the relationship between FLA and FL academic performance. Teimouri (2019) found that the second-language environment and the FL environment had no significant impact on the relationship between FLA and FL academic performance. In contrast, this study discovered that, compared with the FL environment, learners in the second-language environment are completely separated from their mother-tongue context. They need to use the target language in their daily study and life, which places extremely high demands on their target-language skills. Additionally, learners have to adapt to a new environment and culture. For these reasons, the second-language environment poses a greater challenge to learners than the FL environment.

The target language is not a moderator variable affecting the relationship between FLA and FL academic performance ($Q = 4.396$). Teimouri (2019) believes that, as an international lingua franca, English is the focus of academic and even global language attention. With the development of globalization, English has become the most widely used language in the world. Therefore, compared with learning other languages, learners have a lower negative correlation between "FLA and FL performance" when learning English. Although the conclusion of this study is consistent with the result of Teimouri (2019), the target language is not a significant moderator variable in this study. The reason for this result may be that the sample size of non-English target languages involved in this study is small. In addition, the sample size of Chinese EFL learners included in this study is large.

4.1.2 Continuous moderators

The author conducted a meta-regression analysis on three continuous variables: the year of learning, and gender. The results of the meta-regression indicate that the above two variables are all not moderator variables affecting the relationship between FLA and FL academic performance.

As shown in Fig. 2, as the year of learning increases, the Fisher's Z value for the association between FLA and FL academic achievement does not exhibit a clear linear trend. The effect sizes corresponding to different learning durations fluctuate widely (with Z-values ranging from -4 to 4) and do not form a consistent pattern related to learning duration. This result indicates that, regardless of whether learners have short or long English learning experience, the strength of the association between their

FLA and academic achievement does not show a stable trend of strengthening or weakening.

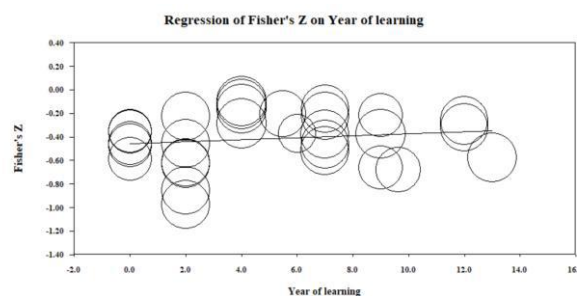


Fig.2: Meta-regression of year of learning

As shown in Fig. 3, as the proportion of females in the sample changes, the Fisher's Z value for the association between FLA and academic achievement does not exhibit a clear linear trend. The effect sizes corresponding to different gender compositions are highly overlapping and scattered, with no consistent pattern related to the proportion of females. This result indicates that, regardless of the proportion of females in the sample group, the strength of the association between FLA and academic achievement does not show a stable trend of strengthening or weakening as the gender composition changes.

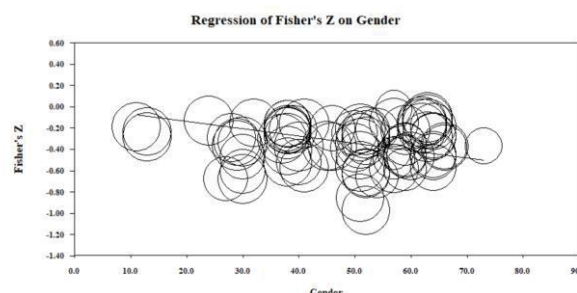


Fig.3: Meta-regression of gender

V. CONCLUSION

This study employed the meta-analysis to explore the relationship between FLA and their FL academic performance, as well as the moderator variables affecting this relationship. The findings regarding the main effect are largely consistent with previous studies. Regarding the research on moderator variables, this study incorporated additional variables and more extensive empirical data, and obtained some new insights. However, due to the limited number of included studies, the research results may have certain limitations. Future research can consider including more recent empirical literature to further explore this relationship. In addition, researchers can examine the relationships between other emotions (e.g., enjoyment, boredom) and academic performance, thereby

enriching the academic community's understanding of the factors affecting FL academic performance and providing reference for relevant FL teaching practices.

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National Auditing, Common Prosperity, and New Quality Productive Forces

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Abstract— This study utilizes panel data from 30 Chinese provinces (municipalities and autonomous regions) spanning 2010 to 2021 to empirically examine the impact of national auditing on new quality productive forces. The findings reveal that national auditing plays a significantly positive role in enhancing the level of new quality productive forces. Specifically, common prosperity exerts a significant mediating effect on the relationship between national auditing and new quality productive forces. Heterogeneity tests indicate that the eastern region, with its well-established auditing systems, high-quality talent, and advanced informatization, enables more effective fulfillment of supervisory functions. Conversely, the western region demonstrates more pronounced outcomes in common prosperity, leading to a stronger driving effect on new quality productive forces.



Keywords— National Auditing, New Quality Productive Forces, Common Prosperity

I. INTRODUCTION

New-type productive forces represent an advanced state of productive capacity characterized by innovation as the primary driver, breaking away from traditional economic growth models and development paths. They embody high technology, high efficiency, and high quality, aligning with the new development philosophy. Since 2023, General Secretary Xi Jinping has repeatedly emphasized the importance of new-quality productive forces in various settings, viewing them as both an intrinsic requirement and a key focus for advancing high-quality development. This provides robust theoretical and practical guidance for China to accelerate the formation of new-quality productive forces and promote high-quality development in the new era. Currently, the world is undergoing accelerated transformation, with technological and industrial revolutions advancing deeply. However, economic globalization faces obstacles, and trade and investment are contracting. Against this backdrop, new-quality productivity has become a strategic choice for building new competitive advantages for the nation. Furthermore, as China's economy transitions to a stage of high-quality development, developing new-quality productivity is an

inevitable choice for promoting the optimization and upgrading of the economic structure, enhancing independent innovation capabilities, and achieving high-quality development.

National auditing serves as a vital force in advancing the modernization of the national governance system and governance capabilities. General Secretary Xi Jinping has repeatedly emphasized that auditing authorities must focus on their primary responsibilities, deepen reform and innovation, and establish a centralized, unified, comprehensive, authoritative, and efficient auditing oversight system. This system will safeguard high-quality economic and social development and elevate the level of new productive forces through high-quality auditing oversight. Serving as the "immune system" of the national governance system, state audit primarily functions through oversight, evaluation, and early warning mechanisms. It facilitates policy implementation, standardizes the exercise of power, promotes the rational allocation of resources, and enhances resource utilization efficiency. These efforts collectively advance high-quality economic and social development and achieve common prosperity. Furthermore, state audit contributes to elevating new-quality productive

forces by ensuring policy execution, optimizing the allocation of innovation resources, fostering a favorable business environment, providing financial safeguards, and implementing risk prevention and mitigation mechanisms.

Currently, some research has been conducted on the impact of national auditing on the level of new-type productive forces. However, this paper introduces new mediating variables for further exploration. Specifically, it aims to examine how national auditing influences the level of new-type productive forces and whether common prosperity mediates the relationship between national auditing and this level. Additionally, the study will investigate whether these effects exhibit regional heterogeneity across eastern, central, and western China. This paper will delve into the mechanism through which national audits affect new-type productive forces, propose a hypothesis that national audits promote the enhancement of new-type productive forces, and conduct empirical tests using econometric models.

This study seeks to contribute in the following aspects: First, building upon existing research on national audits and new-type productive forces, this paper innovatively integrates two variable measurement methods, providing a new perspective for analyzing the positive impact of national audits on new-type productive forces and enriching empirical research. Second, it innovatively introduces common prosperity as a mediating variable, delving into its transmission role between national audit and new-type productive forces. This reveals how national audit indirectly advances new-type productive forces by promoting common prosperity, enriching research on operational mechanisms. Third, adopting a regional heterogeneity approach, this study divides the nation into eastern, central, and western regions for grouped regression analysis. This reveals regional variations in the impact of national auditing on new-type productive forces, offering policy-making references for different regions and expanding the practical value of the research.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

2.1 Literature Review

New quality productive forces represent an advanced form of productivity that evolves from traditional productive forces through deepened integration between accelerated technological innovation and high-end industries [3]. Guided by the new development philosophy, driven by technological innovation as the core, and advanced through industrial upgrading [4], they serve the strategic objectives of Chinese modernization [5]. Their development is influenced by multiple factors: the flow of

technological collaboration facilitates efficient reorganization of innovation factors and promotes breakthroughs in core technologies; the scaled development of strategic emerging industries builds growth engines [6], enhancing resource allocation efficiency through industrial chain coordination; and the forward-looking cultivation of future industries, empowered by digital technologies [7], shapes new competitive advantages in the global value chain. Digital governance improves the business environment, reduces institutional transaction costs, and fosters market competition and efficient resource allocation, creating an institutional framework where an effective market and a capable government function in synergy [8]. In this process, national auditing fulfills critical governance roles—such as monitoring policy implementation, preventing resource misallocation risks, and ensuring fairness within the innovation ecosystem—by exerting influence over key areas including innovation policy execution, allocation of R&D funds, and intellectual property protection [8]. It not only optimizes resource allocation [9] but also safeguards the fairness of the innovation ecosystem, thereby building institutional safeguards for the qualitative upgrading of productive forces and ensuring that innovation outcomes translate into sustained drivers of high-quality development [10]. Conversely, new quality productive forces create a reverse forcing mechanism through technological means, driving the deepened application of digital tools such as blockchain auditing and intelligent risk early warning systems. This promotes the upgrading of audit models and helps auditing to precisely focus on areas such as safeguarding industrial chain security and enhancing the level of digital inclusive finance [11], collectively advancing high-quality economic development and the realization of common prosperity.

The institutional value of national auditing is rooted in the inherent requirements of modernizing national governance [12]. Its functions and roles are reflected through three theoretical foundations: First, the theory of national governance requires auditing to serve as a core mechanism for enhancing governance efficacy by maintaining fiscal and economic discipline, standardizing policy implementation, and preventing systemic risks [13]. Second, the immune system theory endows auditing with the functions of "prevention, exposure, and resistance"—that is, deterring illegal activities ex-ante, supervising policy implementation and resource allocation efficiency during processes, and rectifying deviations while enforcing accountability ex-post—thereby safeguarding economic security and social stability [14]. Third, the accountability theory emphasizes that auditing ensures the operation of public power aligns with public interests and guarantees the

equitable sharing of development outcomes by checks and balances on public power and supervision of responsibility fulfillment [15]. Together, these three aspects explain the foundational role of national auditing in optimizing governance systems [16], standardizing power operation, and promoting social equity. They highlight its institutional value in balancing efficiency and fairness [17], and further demonstrate its role in supplying institutional innovations in emerging fields such as digital inclusive finance and green urbanization, underscoring the cornerstone function of audit supervision in national governance. New-type productive forces and national auditing jointly constitute a dual-drive mechanism for achieving common prosperity [18]. The former reshapes wealth creation models through factor upgrading [19], expanding the middle-income group [20][21] while also confronting challenges of distributional imbalances caused by technological bias. The latter builds a safeguarding network for sharing development outcomes through institutional designs such as social security auditing and regional coordination oversight [22]. Specifically, audit oversight of digital inclusive finance both facilitates the downward flow of financial resources and prevents regional disparities stemming from technological monopolies [22]. Meanwhile, audit evaluations of human capital allocation policies drive the optimization of educational resources [23], mitigating income gaps caused by skill premiums. Notably, eastern regions demonstrate greater exemplary value in leveraging synergistic effects due to mature audit implementation mechanisms and robust digital infrastructure [22]. This virtuous cycle of productivity innovation and governance enhancement offers a Chinese solution to resolving the dual paradox of efficiency and equity.

Existing relevant research literature reveals the following: ① New-type productive forces represent a new form of productivity driven by innovative technology, influenced by multiple factors; ② National auditing plays a broad role in national governance and economic oversight, interacting with new-type productive forces to jointly advance the level of common prosperity; ③ No studies have yet explored the reciprocal effect of common prosperity on new-type productive forces. These research conclusions provide new perspectives and directions for this study.

2.2 Research Hypotheses

As a vital pillar of modernizing national governance, the logic underpinning state audit's role in advancing new-quality productive forces stems from the theoretical core of public fiduciary economic responsibility. The defining characteristics of new-quality productive forces—innovation-driven technology, efficient resource allocation,

and adaptive institutional support—find structural alignment with state audit's oversight functions through three mechanisms: Through tracking audits of policy implementation, it reveals deviations in executing specialized policies for technological innovation and industrial upgrading (e.g., idle funds, delayed supporting measures), compelling dynamic optimization of the policy system and establishing institutional safeguards for new-quality productive forces. Second, the resource allocation mechanism. Through comprehensive oversight of fiscal-financial and resource-environmental audits, it identifies structural contradictions like inefficient R&D investment and barriers to factor mobility, promoting the precise concentration of innovation resources in strategic sectors such as the digital economy and green economy. Third, the risk prevention and control mechanism. Leveraging the closed-loop preventive-detection-mitigation functions of the audit "immune system," this mechanism reduces systemic risks in new-quality productivity development through emerging industry risk warnings (e.g., signs of overcapacity), market order maintenance (combating monopolistic practices), and rectification accountability mechanisms. Through the synergistic action of these three mechanisms, national audits substantially dismantle institutional barriers constraining productivity leaps by continuously optimizing the policy environment, factor allocation efficiency, and market ecology. Based on the above analysis,

Propose Hypothesis 1: National Auditing Enhances New Quality Productivity Levels.

The theoretical logic of national auditing advancing common prosperity rests on dual underpinnings: public fiduciary economic responsibility and state governance theory. By overseeing the efficiency of public resource allocation and the standardization of government duties, it ensures equitable sharing of development outcomes. In practice, national auditing synergizes through four pathways: First, policy implementation audits focus on livelihood sectors like education and healthcare, correcting execution deviations to promote equitable access to basic public services [26]; Second, fiscal fund audits strengthen budgetary constraints and performance management, ensuring precise allocation of resources for social security, transfer payments, and other programs. Third, economic responsibility audits regulate the exercise of power, curbing violations in resource distribution. Fourth, ecological and environmental audits oversee green development policies, balancing economic growth with environmental protection. Based on the above analysis

Propose Hypothesis 2: National Auditing Can Advance the Process of Common Prosperity.

As the social foundation for developing new productive forces, common prosperity promotes progress through three mechanisms: First, the mechanism for optimizing factor allocation. By narrowing urban-rural and regional development gaps, it guides factors such as labor and capital to overcome geographical and institutional barriers, concentrating them in high-efficiency sectors like the digital economy and green technology to enhance total factor productivity. Second, the innovation ecosystem cultivation mechanism. Rising household incomes and consumption upgrades generate substantial market demand, stimulating corporate technological innovation. Equalized public services enhance workers' skills and qualifications, providing emerging industries with compatible human capital. Third, the institutional environment reinforcement mechanism. Reasonable distribution of social wealth enhances development stability, while government policies—such as optimizing the business environment and strengthening intellectual property protection—reduce innovation risks in emerging fields. Throughout this process, national auditing ensures substantive progress toward common prosperity by overseeing the fairness of resource allocation, the effectiveness of policy implementation, and the standardization of power operations. This provides triple empowerment for developing new-quality productive forces: optimized factor allocation, stimulated innovation momentum, and strengthened institutional support. Based on the above analysis

Propose Hypothesis 3: National auditing can promote the development of new quality productive forces through common prosperity.

III. STUDY DESIGN

3.1 Sample Selection and Data Sources

Given the availability of data, this study utilizes panel data from 30 provinces in China (excluding Tibet) covering the period 2010–2021 as its research sample. National audit-related data is sourced from the China Audit Yearbook; Data on provincial-level development levels of new quality productive forces nationwide were sourced from the China Statistical Yearbook, China Energy Statistical Yearbook, China Industrial Statistical Yearbook, China Environmental Statistical Yearbook, the National Energy Administration, and provincial statistical yearbooks. The common prosperity index for each province was derived from the China Statistical Yearbook. Control variables and related data were obtained from the China Statistical Yearbook covering the period 2010–2021. Due to severe data gaps in key indicators for some provinces or regions, these were excluded, resulting in 360 sample

observations across 30 provinces (municipalities and autonomous regions) from 2010 to 2021. Continuous variables underwent Winsorization tail trimming at the 1% and 99% percentiles. Data processing and analysis were conducted using Stata 17.

3.2 Variable Definition

3.2.1 dependent variable

New Quality Productivity Level (NQP): Drawing upon the research of scholars such as Ren Yuxin and Wu Yan [27], this paper constructs a three-tier indicator system for new quality productivity. The primary tiers are defined by the criteria of laborers, means of labor, and objects of labor. Eighteen secondary indicators are employed, including economic output, economic income, employment structure, educational attainment, training funding, knowledge accumulation potential, and innovative spirit. Using the entropy method to determine the weights of indicators at each level, the development levels of new quality productivity for each province from 2010 to 2021 were subsequently calculated.

3.2.2 Core explanatory variable

National Audit: Drawing upon the research of Shu Chenglin and Song Da [28], this paper constructs a measurement indicator system for national audit based on its three functions: prevention, detection, and deterrence. The prevention function is measured by the natural logarithm of the ratio between the amount of audit dispositions implemented and the amount of major issues identified through audit. The detection function is measured by the natural logarithm of the ratio between the amount of major issues identified through audit and the number of audited entities. The deterrence function is measured by the ratio of audit opinions issued to the number of audited entities. Given the equal importance of each function, drawing on Guo Mengnan et al.'s research, an evaluation indicator system for national audit is constructed using a weighted average method with equal weighting applied to each function.

3.2.3 Mediating variable

Drawing on the methodology of scholars such as Han Liangliang and Peng Yi [29], an indicator system for common prosperity is constructed based on three dimensions: developmental, shared, and sustainable. Specific indicators encompass affluence level, shared prosperity, cultural education, healthcare, infrastructure, informatization level, social security, technological innovation, ecological environment, and development quality. Principal component analysis is employed to determine the weight of each indicator, and a composite

score is calculated to ultimately form the common prosperity index.

3.2.4 Control variables

Following existing literature practices, this study incorporates the following control variables into the model: Information Level (Info) is measured by the ratio of postal and telecommunications business volume to regional GDP. A higher value indicates greater informatization in the region and a larger contribution of information and communication technologies to economic development; Industrial Structure (Indu) is measured by the ratio of tertiary industry output to secondary industry output. A higher value indicates a larger share of the tertiary sector in the region's total industry, signifying a more optimized economic structure that positively impacts the development of new productive forces; Social Consumption Level (Consum) is measured by the ratio of total retail sales of consumer goods to regional GDP. Elevated social consumption levels positively propel the development of

new-quality productive forces. This not only fosters technological innovation and industrial chain optimization but also drives economic restructuring and upgrading through demand-side traction generated by consumption upgrades. Environmental regulation intensity (Envir) is measured by the ratio of regional industrial pollution control investment to regional GDP. Environmental regulation intensity exerts a complex influence on the development of new-quality productive forces. Appropriate environmental regulations can promote technological innovation and growth in green total factor productivity, but excessively stringent environmental regulation intensity may negatively impact production efficiency and industrial competitiveness. Labor Resource Level (LR) is measured by taking the logarithm of the number of employed persons. A higher value indicates greater labor resources, a more active labor market, and stronger economic development potential in the region. Additionally, this study controls for the fixed effect of year (Year).

Table 1 Variable Definitions

Variable Type	Variable Name	Variable Symbol	Variable Definition
Dependent variable	Level of New Quality Productivity	NQP	Calculating the New Quality Productivity Indicator System Using the Entropy Method
Mediating variable	National Audit	Audit	ational Audit Evaluation Indicator System
	Common Prosperity	CP	Indicator System for Common Prosperity
	Level of informatization	Info	Total postal and telecommunications business volume/Regional gross domestic product
Control variables	Industrial Structure	Indu	Tertiary industry output value / Secondary industry output value
	Level of social consumption	Consum	Total retail sales of consumer goods / Gross domestic product
	Environmental Regulatory Intensity	Envir	The ratio of regional industrial pollution control investment to regional GDP
	Labor force level	LR	The number of employed persons is taken as the natural logarithm
	Year Fixed Effect	Year	Virtual variable

3.3 Model Design

Models (1) and (2), developed by drawing upon relevant literature, have respectively validated Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2:

$$NQP_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Audit_{i,t} + \beta_n Contrals_{i,t} + \varepsilon_{i,t} \quad (1)$$

$$CP_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Audit_{i,t} + \beta_n Contrals_{i,t} + \varepsilon_{i,t} \quad (2)$$

To verify hypothesis (3) Drawing on the research of Wen Zhonglin and Ye Baojuan [30], establishing the Mediating Effect Model (3):

$$NQP_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Audit_{i,t} + \beta_2 CP_{i,t} + \beta_n Contrals_{i,t} + \varepsilon_{i,t} \quad (3)$$

Model (1) to examine the impact of national auditing on the level of new-type productive forces, if coefficient β_1 is significantly positive, it indicates that national auditing

can significantly enhance the level of new-type productive forces through its functions of revealing, preventing, and countering risks, thereby playing a positive role.

Model (2) assessing the impact of national auditing on the process of common prosperity, if coefficient β_1 is significantly positive, it indicates that the more fully the relevant functions of national auditing are exercised, the more effectively it promotes policy implementation, optimizes resource allocation, mitigates risks, and advances social equity, thereby effectively advancing the process of common prosperity.

Model (3) simultaneously examining the impact of national audit and common prosperity on new-quality productive forces, if coefficients β_1 and β_2 are both significantly positive, it indicates that the more fully the national audit function is exercised and the higher the level of common prosperity, the greater the propulsion of regional new-quality productive forces. This indicates that national audit can positively influence the level of new-quality productive forces indirectly by promoting common prosperity, meaning common prosperity exhibits a partial mediating effect. In this model, national audit (Audit) serves as the core explanatory variable, the level of new-quality productive forces (NQP) is the dependent variable, common prosperity (CP) acts as the mediating variable, Controls represent control variables, i and t denote provinces and years respectively, and ϵ is the error term.

IV. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH AND RESULTS

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics are presented in Table 2. The standard deviation of the new-type productive forces level is 0.13, with a minimum value of 0.12 and a maximum value of 0.7. This indicates that there are certain disparities in the levels of new-type productive forces across provinces, highlighting the significant importance of studying the influencing factors of new-type productive forces in this research. The standard deviation for common prosperity is 0.093, with a minimum value of 0.61 and a maximum value of 1.00. This indicates significant disparities in common prosperity levels across provinces. The standard deviation for the core explanatory variable, national auditing, is 0.512, ranging from a minimum of 0.15 to a maximum of 0.77. This indicates substantial variations in the intensity of oversight by provincial audit authorities. These differences primarily stem from factors such as provincial economic development levels, policy support, government governance capabilities, auditing systems and professional competencies, social environments and public participation, historical and cultural contexts, regional development imbalances, and the advancement of auditing informatization.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics Results

Variable	Sample size	mean	Standard deviation	minimum value	median	maximum value
NQP	360	0.2862	0.130	0.12	0.26	0.70
Audit	360	3.6526	0.512	2.56	3.67	4.82
CP	360	0.7041	0.093	0.61	0.67	1.00
Indu	360	1.2099	0.667	0.55	1.06	4.35
Consum	360	0.3775	0.067	0.23	0.38	0.53
Envir	360	0.0029	0.002	0.00	0.00	0.01
Info	360	0.0614	0.052	0.02	0.04	0.24
LR	360	7.5892	0.782	5.65	7.65	8.85

4.2 Correlation Analysis

The results of the correlation analysis are shown in Table 3. National auditing and the level of new-quality productive forces exhibit a significant positive correlation at the 1% level, indicating that the more fully national auditing functions are exercised, the higher the level of new-quality productive forces. This provides preliminary validation for Hypothesis 1. National auditing is significantly positively correlated with the common

prosperity process at the 1% level, indicating that national auditing can advance the common prosperity process through its three major functions. Common prosperity is significantly positively correlated with the level of new-type productive forces at the 1% level, suggesting that the more the common prosperity process advances, the higher the level of new-type productive forces. This preliminarily validates Hypothesis 2.

Table 3 Correlation Analysis Results

NQP	Audit	GTFYZCF	indu	consum	envir	info	LR
NQP	1						
Audit	0.452***	1					
CP	0.643***	0.483***	1				
Indu	0.175***	0.515***	0.546***	1			
Consum	0.297***	0.361***	0.169***	0.234***	1		
Envir	-0.346***	-0.277***	-0.211***	-0.149***	-0.291***	1	
Info	-0.0870	0.184***	-0.150***	0.220***	0.0780	-0.135**	1
LR	0.521***	0.114**	-0.0180	-0.251***	0.434***	-0.360***	-0.089*

1 Note: ***, **, and * denote significance at the 1%, 5%, and 10% levels, respectively. The values in parentheses represent t-statistics. The same applies below.

To examine whether multicollinearity exists among the variables, the variance inflation factor (VIF) was calculated for the above variables. The VIF range was [1.26, 2.14], with a mean VIF of 1.64. All values were well below 10, indicating no severe multicollinearity among the variables. Therefore, subsequent analysis can proceed.

4.3 Regression Analysis

4.3.1 National Audit and the Return of New Quality Productivity

The regression results for national audit and new-type productive forces are shown in Table 4. Column (1) indicates that, without controlling for other variables, the regression coefficient between national audit and the level of new-type productive forces is 0.0238, showing a significant positive correlation at the 1% level. Column (2) incorporates additional control variables. The regression coefficient for national audit and new-type productive forces stands at 0.0212, maintaining a significant positive

correlation at the 1% level. These findings confirm that national audit significantly enhances new-type productive forces, thereby validating Hypothesis H1.

4.3.2 National Auditing and the Return to Common Prosperity

The regression results for national audit and common prosperity are shown in Table 5. Column (1) indicates that, without controlling for other variables, the regression coefficient between national audit and common prosperity is 0.0028, showing a significant positive correlation at the 10% level. Column (2) incorporates additional control variables, yielding a regression coefficient of 0.0031 for the relationship between national auditing and common prosperity. This indicates a statistically significant positive correlation at the 5% level, confirming that national auditing can advance the process of common prosperity and validating Hypothesis H2.

Table 4 Regression Analysis of National Auditing and New Quality Productivity

NPQ		
Audit	0.0238***	0.0212***
	(3.3575)	(3.0459)
Indu		-0.0309***
		(-3.1953)
Consum		0.0989**
		(2.4077)

Envir		-1.1779
		(-1.1899)
Info		-0.0203
		(-0.2377)
LR		-0.0125
		(-0.4929)
_cons	0.2184***	0.3181*
	(9.7969)	(1.6586)
Year fe	YES	YES
N	360	360
adj. R2	0.293	0.331

Table 5 Regression Analysis of National Auditing and Common Prosperity

CP		
Audit	0.0028*	0.0031**
	(1.8355)	(2.2792)
Indu		-0.0023
		(-1.2558)
Consum		0.0313***
		(3.9722)
Envir		0.1679
		(0.8834)
Info		-0.0666***
		(-4.0654)
LR		0.0352***
		(7.2295)
_cons	0.6920***	0.4209***
	(146.3359)	(11.4297)
Year fe	YES	YES
N	360	360
adj. R2	0.639	0.720

4.3.3 National Auditing, Common Prosperity, and the Return of New Quality Productivity

The regression results for national audit, common prosperity, and new-type productive forces are shown in Table 6.

Column (1) indicates that the regression coefficient between common prosperity and new-type productive forces is 0.9351, showing a significant positive correlation at the 1% level. This suggests that common prosperity can promote the enhancement of new-type productive forces.

Column (2) shows that the regression coefficient for national audit and new-type productive forces is 0.0187, while that for common prosperity and new-type productive forces is 0.8351. Both exhibit significant positive

correlations at the 1% level, indicating that national audit can enhance new-type productive forces by advancing common prosperity, thereby validating Hypothesis 3.

Table 6 Mediating Effects

NQP		
GTFYZCF	0.9351*** (3.2079)	0.8351*** (2.8696)
indu	-0.0293*** (-3.0240)	-0.0290*** (-3.0207)
consum	0.0775* (1.8461)	0.0727* (1.7476)
envir	-1.3389 (-1.3531)	-1.3181 (-1.3452)
info	0.0678 (0.7841)	0.0353 (0.4084)
ld	-0.0464* (-1.7042)	-0.0418 (-1.5470)
A		0.0187*** (2.6890)
_cons	-0.0150 (-0.0657)	-0.0334 (-0.1480)
Year fe	YES	YES
N	360	360
adj. R2	0.333	0.346

4.4 Robustness Test

4.4.1 Lag Analysis

To address endogeneity issues and test whether the positive effect of national audits on enhancing new-type productive forces remains stable, we regressed the lagged national audit variable on the lagged new-type productive

forces variable. The results are shown in Table 7. Regardless of whether control variables were included, the regression coefficient for national audit remained significantly positive at the 1% level. This indicates that lagged national audit and lagged new-type productive forces still exhibit a significant positive correlation.

Table 7 Lag Test Results

	NQP	F.NQP	
L.Audit	0.1863*** (13.1620)	0.1494*** (11.2605)	
Audit		0.1863*** (13.1620)	0.1457*** (10.9136)
Indu		0.0337*** (3.7454)	0.0349*** (3.6960)

Consum		-0.2851***		-0.2259**
		(-3.2649)		(-2.4840)
Envir		-7.8302***		-6.9056***
		(-3.1907)		(-2.8784)
Info		0.2939		-0.0301
		(1.3582)		(-0.1408)
LR		0.0868***		0.0829***
		(10.9561)		(10.3848)
_cons	-0.2848***	-0.7490***	-0.2848***	-0.7188***
	(-5.9897)	(-11.1787)	(-5.9897)	(-10.0947)
Year fe	YES	YES	YES	YES
N	330	330	330	330
adj. R2	0.345	0.583	0.345	0.574

4.4.2 Panel Tobit Model

To further validate the robustness of the main regression results, the original regression model was replaced with a panel Tobit model. The regression results

are shown in Table 8. The regression coefficient for national audit remains consistent with the previous findings, exhibiting a significant positive correlation with the level of new-type productivity at the 1% significance level. The research conclusions remain unchanged.

Table 8 Panel Tobit Model Regression Results

NQP		
Audit	0.0265***	0.0210***
	(3.8129)	(3.0791)
CP		0.8667***
		(6.7345)
Indu		-0.0313***
		(-3.5488)
Consum		0.0560
		(1.3943)
Envir		-1.2464
		(-1.2952)
Info		0.0550
		(0.6527)
LR		0.0417***
		(2.6247)
_cons	0.2101***	-0.6886***
	(6.7920)	(-4.5745)
Year fe	YES	YES
N	360	360

4.4.3 SOBEL Test and BOOTSTRAP Test

To further validate the mediating effect of common prosperity on national auditing and new-quality productive forces, the Sobel test and Bootstrap test were introduced. The Sobel test results indicate that common prosperity exerts a significant mediating effect between national auditing and new-quality productive forces, accounting for approximately 56.6% of the total effect. The BOOTSTRAP test results indicate that the product of regression coefficients β_1 and β_2 falls outside the 95% confidence interval containing zero. Both tests further validate that common prosperity exerts a significant mediating effect on the relationship between national auditing and new-quality productivity.

4.5 Regional Heterogeneity Analysis

Given the variations in economic foundations and policy advantages across different regions, this study grouped the sample according to regional heterogeneity and conducted separate regressions for the eastern, central, and western regions. The regression results are presented in Table 9.

National auditing significantly enhances the level of new-quality productive forces in eastern regions (5%), while its impact on central and western regions is negligible. This is primarily because eastern regions possess robust economic foundations, well-developed market mechanisms, and a high concentration of factors such as capital, technology, and talent. Concurrently, eastern regions feature sophisticated auditing systems and highly skilled auditing personnel capable of leveraging advanced

technologies and methodologies (e.g., smart auditing, research-based auditing) to improve auditing efficiency and quality. Moreover, the eastern regions exhibit strong government governance capabilities and advanced audit informatization, enabling efficient problem identification and resolution. Policy support and resource allocation further facilitate the full exercise of national audit oversight functions in these areas. In contrast, the central and western regions face lower levels of economic development, imperfect market mechanisms, and a lack of policy support and resource allocation, which constrain the promotional role of national audits.

In western regions, common prosperity has played a more pronounced role in elevating the level of new-quality productive forces (1%). This is primarily attributable to national policy support, such as the "Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Development of Western Regions in the New Era to Form a New Pattern." This policy provides preferential treatment to western regions in areas like finance, taxation, and land use, effectively safeguarding the realization of common prosperity. Building on this foundation, the western regions have achieved notable progress in their pursuit of common prosperity. Continuous improvements in residents' living standards and infrastructure have laid a solid groundwork for the development of new-quality productive forces. Furthermore, through policy guidance, the western regions have accelerated their transition from traditional industries to high-tech and intelligent sectors, fostering multiple strategic emerging industrial clusters that further propel the advancement of new-quality productive forces.

Table 9 Results of Regional Heterogeneity Tests

	NQP		
	Eastern	Central Region	Western Region
Audit	0.0221** (2.0026)	-0.0081 (-0.4192)	0.0035 (0.4698)
CP	0.5734 (1.3775)	0.6975 (1.0694)	1.4702*** (3.9468)
Indu	-0.0605*** (-3.2428)	-0.0901*** (-2.7793)	0.0081 (0.8792)
Consum	0.0488 (0.7566)	-0.0031 (-0.0284)	0.1110** (2.2702)
Envir	-1.6271 (-0.8079)	-0.8035 (-0.2427)	0.3723 (0.4419)
Info	0.0515	0.1950	0.0239

	(0.3327)	(0.6714)	(0.3017)
LR	-0.0756*	0.0454	0.0462
	(-1.8541)	(0.6451)	(1.4245)
_cons	0.5000	-0.4042	-1.1551***
	(1.3791)	(-0.6727)	(-4.8103)
Year fe	YES	YES	YES
N	192	108	168
adj. R2	0.335	0.167	0.522

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study empirically examines the driving effect and operational mechanisms of national auditing on new-type productive forces using panel data from 30 provinces (municipalities and autonomous regions) in China from 2010 to 2021. The findings reveal: (1) National audits significantly propel the development of new-type productive forces, with greater audit intensity leading to more pronounced improvements in regional innovation capabilities; (2) Common prosperity serves as a bridging mechanism, as audits indirectly drive productivity upgrades by promoting equitable resource allocation; (3) Significant regional differences exist, with eastern regions benefiting more prominently, while central and western regions need to leverage local characteristics to maximize gains.

Based on the research findings, this paper proposes the following three recommendations:

First, focus on innovation-driven audit oversight. Refine the specialized audit mechanism for scientific and technological innovation, with a focus on overseeing the efficiency of major science and technology project funding, the intensity of R&D investment, and the rate of achievement conversion. Strengthen audit evaluations of industry-academia-research collaborative innovation and intellectual property protection. Establish a comprehensive audit framework covering the entire process from "basic research to technological breakthroughs to industrial application." Conduct phased tracking of the scientific validity of R&D project initiation, the compliance of mid-term fund usage, and the market benefits of achievement conversion. This will promote the deep integration of the innovation chain and industrial chain, accelerating the transformation of scientific and technological achievements into new productive forces.

Second, enhance the intelligent auditing system. Establish an evaluation index system for new quality productive forces development, incorporating core metrics

such as R&D investment ratio, technology transaction activity, and value-added output from high-tech industries. Employ big data analytics to build a dynamic monitoring model linking "policy implementation—factor mobility—innovation output," enabling real-time identification of policy execution deviations and bottlenecks in factor allocation. Strengthen training for multidisciplinary audit professionals and advance blockchain technology applications in scenarios like research funding traceability and automated smart contract auditing to enhance risk warning accuracy and audit evidence reliability.

Third, implement regionally differentiated strategies. Eastern regions should strengthen audit innovation in the digital economy, exploring "penetrating" regulatory models for emerging industries like artificial intelligence and biopharmaceuticals, covering the entire lifecycle from R&D to market access and commercialization. Central and western regions should leverage the policy dividends from the "New Era Western Development Strategy" to prioritize audits on the intelligent transformation of traditional industries and the cultivation of strategic emerging industries. This will establish a coordinated mechanism linking "audit oversight, policy alignment, and industrial upgrading" to foster distinctive regional industrial clusters.

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The Art of Kintsugi for Classroom Wellness

(A study based on the lives of Kamala Das and Mary Kom)

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Abstract— In today's world of technology and intense competition students' mental health is very crucial in addition to the innovative teaching tools and methods. In this competitive world where technology is upbeat, competition is rife, expectations are high, students face several mental health issues which hamper their academic and personal growth. The objective of this study is to prepare students to face such mental issues and to grow through them. To improve mental health and to deal with stress successfully, the researcher used the ideology 'Kintsugi', the Japanese art of repairing fragmented pottery with gold, silver, or platinum lacquer. Rather than hiding the cracks, Kintsugi highlights them, celebrating the object's imperfections. By introducing the philosophy of Kintsugi, the researcher attempts to teach young students to accept flaws, embrace imperfections rather than concealing them or running away from challenges. The study found that those students who use this philosophy positively, accepted their mistakes and developed a spirit of resilience.



Keywords— Student Mental Health, Competitive Stress, Innovative Teaching, Kintsugi Philosophy, Resilience Development

I. INTRODUCTION

Classroom wellness is vital for creating an ambient learning environment where students feel secure, nurtured and supported, giving them emotional and mental stability and contributing to their physical and social well-being. Beyond classroom learning and advanced teaching techniques are the all-important concepts of students' mental health and happiness which contribute to classroom wellness, creative thinking and healthy minds. In this racing world where technology is upbeat, competition is rife, expectations are high, students fail to cope with the mind-boggling performance pressure and mundane classroom teaching. They are broken into shards and unable to gather their lives back from the shambles. In this context, it is crucial that we teach them to embrace imperfections, to rise from the ashes and to see beauty in being broken. This can be achieved if only we create a congenial learning environment where students feel safe, resilient to rise above the storms of life and carefree in mind to learn.

The objective of this study is to prepare students to face such mental issues and ensure their growth through the vagaries of life, by introducing the ideology of 'Kintsugi', the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with gold, silver, or platinum lacquer. Rather than hiding the cracks, Kintsugi emphasizes them, celebrating the object's imperfections. To elaborate this ancient practice of Kintsugi and understand its relevance in coping as well as overcoming, we will dissect and analyze the lives of distinguished poetess Kamala Das and the eminent lady of the boxing rings Mary Kom. Their lives, although on different planes, are similar in how they managed to build a beautiful, successful life from a broken and downtrodden past, offering a great lesson to learn and emulate for the young students, under the expert guidance of able teachers.

1.1 Why should we prioritize classroom wellness?

It goes without saying that when students feel well, they learn well and that is the reason why mental health in classrooms has gained currency amongst the educationalists, parents, and policymakers. The profound

impact of mental health and wellness on young minds, their quality of learning and public behavior cannot be written off anymore. When the focus shifts to wellbeing, learning becomes an interesting joyride where all emotional baggage is trashed and discarded and the students' free wheel into the realm of knowledge.

As teachers, we come across myriad students' problems every day. Often off-loaded on to our plate is a range of wellness issues which manifest in children such as anxiety and panic attacks, unexplainable depression, ADHD (Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder), eating disorders like bulimia or anorexia, sleeping in class or complaining of physical incapacities like headaches, stomachaches, with no clear cause or even aggression and defiance. We are bound to tackle performance issues when a student is grappling with emotional upheaval like anxiety or depression. He or she often struggles to concentrate, focus on academics, or even to retain information in mind with the result that the student fails in class or the performance level drops to an all-time low. Their confidence level ebbs low, and they treat themselves like outcasts, unable to mix with peers, shying away from attending regular classes, thus leading to absenteeism.

Yet another aspect is the behavioral delinquency that kicks in when problems pile up without being properly channeled or addressed. Unresolved matters mount up into mental health issues which finally lead to disruptive behavior in class or in similar public spaces. While some children become reticent and recalcitrant, some others become aloof, withdrawn and distanced. Such an unhealthy climate mars the quality of classroom dynamics and learning.

1.2 What is the roadmap to classroom wellness?

Teachers as guiding beacons have a bigger role to play in ensuring classroom wellness. One sure-shot winning formula to ease the tension in the classroom is to encourage open discussions where every student is allowed to voice their opinions on mental health. Let the positive vibes about mental health freely flow within the four walls of the classroom so that the deeply disturbed minds benefit from its calming and soothing effect. Incorporating mindfulness and breathing exercises at the beginning of the day is an effective way to start the daily drill which enhances the mood and irons out troublesome thoughts. Using trauma-informed teaching practices, focusing on coping mechanisms and emotional intelligence, shall certainly help in attaining classroom wellness. Likewise, integrating age-appropriate curriculum about mental health as part of the academics will help in developing coping skills in young students from an early age. Keeping in mind the rising cases of suicides and mental disorders amongst the student

community, it is imperative that every educational institution provides free access to well trained and supportive, on-campus counselors, psychologists, and social workers. More importantly teachers should be trained and equipped with basic mental health literacy and tools to support students in agony. This helps to foster an inclusive classroom culture where students feel safe, heard, and respected. Where required, the teachers and counselors shall involve parents or other family members to ensure that there is consistent and continuous support provided to the distressed minds. With a good support web around the young student, we can ensure early detection and intervention before the problems escalate and spiral out of control.

II. WHAT IS KINTSUGI AND HOW DOES IT HELP?

Here is where the art of Kintsugi has a bigger role to play. The word 'Kintsugi' means golden joinery, and it refers to the Japanese art of repairing destroyed pottery by using priceless and valuable gold, silver, or platinum polish. This process teaches us that we are not any less valuable because we are broken. On the other hand, our value has increased, and we have now become invaluable because we have healed and grown through the process. Just like glittering gold adding to the beauty of the cracked edges of pottery, our growth shines brilliantly in those very same places where we were once fragmented and fractured. In this fashion, Kintsugi has become a compelling metaphor for mental health and emotional healing. The slogan of this philosophy is 'I am not broken. I am wonderfully repaired'. By adopting Kintsugi as our daily life mantra, we learn to accept our emotional scars and to wear the imperfections with pride instead of hiding them or disguising them in false armors.

III. EXPLORING KINTSUGI IN THE LIFE OF KAMALA DAS

Kamala Das is one of the distinguished and well recognized Indian poets in English who carved a niche space in the hearts of the literary lovers, through her brutal candidness and explicit narratives. She explored the sensual desires of the body without any qualms and inhibitions, shocking the closed minded conventional patriarchal society. She was verbally assaulted by the conservative thinkers of her times but she never got tired of the slander and defamation while she constantly dealt with the conundrum of 'unrequited love' and ruthlessness of 'sex' between incompatible partners. Through her literary works, she exposed the fragility of man-woman relationship which exists only in

letter and not in spirit, void of love and passion. Even though ill-health plagued her from young days, the fire in her belly to perform and excel, kept her bouncing back to life. Through her life's journey, we find the unmistakable spirit of Kintsugi, the philosophy of accepting brokenness and getting back to life, more magnificently, resonating in her literary voice in profound ways.

All through her life, she struggled relentlessly to create her own identity and make her presence felt. She was subjected to racism in severe doses at school, bullied by classmates for being brown skinned, made to hide behind the lavatory when VIP delegates were visiting the school and more importantly, her very own work was read out in class by a white skinned fellow classmate when she was sidelined and marginalized. Soon, at the age of fifteen she was taken off school to be married to a much older person who shattered her dreams and aspirations. Her childhood was laced with loneliness and emotional neglect and her unfulfilling marriage broke her into pieces both in body and in spirits. Yet, she rose high from the ashes and channeled her miserable experiences into world renowned poetry. In other words, her cracks in life became the raw material for her works. Through poetry and memoir, she defied the conventional taboos and continued to articulate freely her emotional pain and bodily desires.

Writing unrestrained became her doorway to healing, and her unbridled honesty turned her pain into powerful words that cut through like a knife, shocking the complacent society. She was constantly navigating between an obedient wife and passionate lover, in search of love, even outside the ambit of marriage. She was all at once a private, shy woman but at the same time a strong and forceful writer. Her confessional style, like the art of Kintsugi, didn't hide anything but on the other hand, highlighted every hurt, each wound, restyling fragility into beauty. She wore her multiple identities like the many cracks on the Kintsugi pot, evolving herself into a much - revered public figure. Her words were the golden lacquer giving exquisite elegance to her work of art. She embraced the beauty of imperfection when she refused to conform to the idealized image of the Indian woman. On the contrary, she dared to speak and write openly about female sexuality, mental weaknesses and emotional breakdowns. Instead of hiding the many flaws in her, she highlighted them as the central themes in her writing, just as Kintsugi glorifies the scar and not hiding it.

In summary, Kamala Das is a perfect example of living life the Kintsugi way. Her life was not an easy ride on an even tenor. Whereas it was broken, smeared and trampled on. Yet, through her determination and ruthless honesty, she courageously repaired her life through painful and poignant

art, transforming her vulnerability into strength, leaving her distinct legacy behind for the generations to come. Kamala Das - a life destroyed by bitter experiences but yet a complete Kintsugi pot, marked by golden seams of courage, resilience and self-esteem.

IV. THREAD OF KINTSUGI IN THE LIFE OF MARY KOM

Mary Kom is a six-time World Amateur Boxing champion, a bronze medalist at the 2012 London Olympics, and the first Indian woman to ever win a medal at the Olympics. Known as "Magnificent Mary" for her accomplishments in a male dominated world of sports, precisely boxing, her life shows that strength is not about the absence of struggle but it is the alchemy of misery and agony metamorphosing into purpose and determination.

Mary was born into a poverty-stricken tribal family in rural Manipur, who made their living through farming on leased land. Therefore, she was regarded as a slum dog, reeking of lack and indigence. Her childhood, typical of any underprivileged child from similar living circumstances, was marked by extreme scarcity, deficiency and dearth. She was forced to work on the farming land to earn for her schooling lest she had to drop out of school.

She was inspired to delve into the boxing rings when she saw the success of fellow boxer Dingko Singh, who won a gold medal at the 1998 Asian Games. However, burdened by limited resources, she had no access to professional training facilities and had to train in the village boxing arena with no protective gear. But what was mentally harrowing for her was the disapproval of her own father, a former wrestler, who didn't want his daughter to perform combat sports. Despite being endowed with a distinct flair for boxing, she had to practice in hiding, for fear of bearing the brunt of father's anger.

Boxing was an area reserved for the men with muscle power. As a young woman, when Mary entered this male dominion, she was ridiculed and reduced to a laughing stock. But Mary, with sheer determination and grit, overcame this gender bias and broke the stereotypes and societal norms to script her life's story of unparalleled success, while balancing her career with other important roles of her life as wife and mother. Marriage and motherhood posed as herculean obstacles in her roadway to success. She faced immense pressure to forgo her career after marriage. Later, when she became a mother, she was questioned for continuing in the boxing ring. Undaunted, she strived hard to overcome the physical and emotional challenges of returning to the highest level of competition after being a mother. She was always juggling between all

the roles of her life, desperately trying to find the right balance.

Notably, instead of retreating, she embraced every role and accepted life's challenges, allowing them to fuel her growth into a wholesome new self. There were many setbacks in her life where she considered quitting but she chose to overcome them and continue her pursuit of her dream. The innumerable cracks in her life, social, financial, and conventional, never shattered her. Instead, they added to her inner beauty and became the sparkles of her gold-laced strength. Every loss, injury, and failure that she endured became signature marks of her persistence, patience and endurance, adding to the radiance of her triumph. Like the worn out Kintsugi pot, she didn't care to hide the pain or the cracks but let them shape her legacy. Her story is all about overcoming adversity, having faith in our own capabilities, and chasing our heart's desires. Today, she is celebrated as an epitome of strength, perseverance and determination. An acclaimed founder of Mary Kom Boxing Academy, she is a source of inspiration to young minds.

V. KINTSUGI IN CLASSROOM FOR WELLNESS

Kintsugi is a reminder that healing doesn't mean returning to who we were before. What it means is to emerge stronger and more resilient as we walk through the furnace of hardships. Instead of being consumed by the flames, we step out more determined, better molded and shaped. We begin to accept that every roadblock need not always be a stumbling block. But, let it be our stepping stone to a brighter future. Instead of masking our pain or rejecting the low tide seasons, Kintsugi encourages us to carry the weight or burden like medals on our chest, as they signify our experiences which have reformed us into a better and stronger person. It is not vulnerability but strength that is manifested in our life's chapters.

Inculcating the philosophy of Kintsugi in the classroom is an effective way to teach students about resilience, self-worth, perseverance, emotional intelligence, and determination. The guiding principle of Kintsugi, the willingness to accept imperfections and to make the best out of it, should be integrated with the regular lessons, be a part of open discussions, and be embedded in the classroom culture to enhance and enrich the academic and emotional growth of the students.

In the classroom, we should implement Kintsugi as part of social-emotional learning. Creating a 'Kintsugi Wall' is a novel way to introduce the concept to the children. Urge the students to share their personal strengths which emerged from encountering and overcoming hardships. Let them debate and discuss how those impediments or mistakes

helped them grow. The lessons of the stronger children will kindle the fecundity of thinking and help the weaker ones to see life from a different perspective. It will help them reflect on self-worth and healing and eventually live their life in a new way and style. They will open up and share their misery and agony, so long bottled up, which is the first step towards healing. Such sharing sessions help to create stronger peer groups and support communities which will benefit the entire class. Over the days, children begin to accept that:

- Mistakes are part of learning and growing
- When we walk through winding roads, we might be shaken and broken but we are growing in reasoning, logical thinking and maturity

VI. CONCLUSION

When wellness is prioritized through social and emotional learning (SEL) concepts like Kintsugi, students are better able to manage stress, anxiety, and emotional challenges. A calm and supportive classroom helps students develop resilience and self-control skills. When they are in better control of themselves, it manifests positively in academic performance, in turn. Students who feel happy and secure are more likely to concentrate, participate, and succeed academically. Hitherto, a vibrant, engaging classroom ambience promotes concentration, participation, sharpens memory power and yields better success rates.

Yet another undeniable aspect of social and emotional learning (SEL) is that students develop empathy and show consideration for one another. The channel of communication flows freely and uninterrupted so that it becomes an effective tool for building conflict resolution skills, leading to healthier peer relationships and reduced bullying. A wellness-focused classroom nurtures a growth mindset in the young children. They begin to see mistakes as part of the learning process, building confidence and perseverance and a positive attitude towards life's challenges. The concept of Kintsugi and wellness aren't just for students. It is applicable for teachers too who easily get burnt out and exhausted when tutoring unresponsive classes. A positive classroom weather helps the teacher thrive and flourish, giving their best to the benefit of the learners. In other words, the teaching efficiency index is high in a healthy classroom.

Because wellness promotes equity and inclusion, regardless of ethnicity, gender, race, caste or ability/disability, every student as well as teacher feels valued and respected. In short, to all intents and purposes, addressing mental health in classrooms isn't just an ethical obligation but a compelling necessity to build a healthy, successful student community and on a larger scale, a more

compassionate society. Integrating mental health awareness into everyday classroom practice helps in promoting self-acceptance, consideration and empathy. By normalizing failure and imperfections as part of growth, students accept the Kintsugi way of life, and are tutored to embrace brokenness and at the same time, to see the beauty in it.

‘Those shattered shards with cracked edges
Like a heart mangled by chiseled wedges
Aching fractured seams painted in gold
Are but polished scars of misery untold
Yet broken is beautiful, a tale of resilience
A phoenix rising high with pristine grace
Profoundly invaluable is life’s fallibility
As the Kintsugi pot with gilded lacquer frailty’

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Romantic Ecology: Nature, Ethics and Environmental Consciousness in the British Romantic Poetry

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Abstract— This research paper explores environmental themes in Romantic poetry, examining how major Romantic poets conceptualize nature as sacred, dynamic, restorative, and morally instructive. Through close readings of selected poems by William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Keats, and William Blake, this study demonstrates that Romantic poetry offers a proto-environmentalist critique of human domination over nature. The paper situates Romantic ecological thought within its historical context and connects it to contemporary environmental criticism, particularly ecocriticism.

Keywords— romanticism, nature, ecological harmony, ecological identity, ecofeminist, ecocriticism, environmental consciousness.



I. INTRODUCTION

Romantic poetry, emerging in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, marks a decisive shift in literary history by repositioning nature from a passive background to an active, living presence. The Romantic poets responded to rapid industrialization, urban expansion, and scientific rationalism with an imaginative return to the natural world. Their poetry foregrounds emotional engagement with landscapes, plants, animals, and elemental forces, anticipating what modern critics identify as environmental consciousness. Although the term “environmentalism” is a product of the twentieth century, Romantic poetry articulates an early ecological vision rooted in reverence, interdependence, and ethical responsibility toward nature.

II. ROMANTICISM & THE NATURAL WORLD

Romanticism arose as a reaction against the Enlightenment’s emphasis on reason, mechanization, and empirical science. The Romantics rejected the reduction of nature to a set of exploitable resources and instead envisioned it as a living, spiritual entity. Nature became central to Romantic aesthetics, philosophy, and ethics,

serving as a source of inspiration, moral guidance, and emotional renewal.

The Romantic relationship with nature is deeply personal and experiential. Rather than observing nature objectively, Romantic poets immerse themselves within it, emphasizing sensory perception and emotional response. This approach transforms nature into a site of dialogue between the human mind and the external world, reinforcing the idea of mutual dependence.

2.1. Nature as a Living Presence-

Romantic poets often personify nature, attributing to it consciousness, emotion, and agency. Mountains, rivers, winds, and forests are depicted as active forces capable of influencing human thought and behavior. This literary strategy challenges anthropocentric views and suggests an ecological balance in which humans are participants rather than masters.

III. HISTORICAL CONTEXT & ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

The Romantic period coincided with the Industrial Revolution, which brought unprecedented technological progress alongside environmental degradation. Rapid

urbanization, pollution, deforestation, and social dislocation transformed the English countryside. Romantic poets witnessed these changes firsthand and responded with both nostalgia and protest.

Their poetry frequently critiques industrial modernity, contrasting the spiritual richness of rural life with the alienation of urban existence. This historical context is crucial for understanding Romantic environmental themes, as nature becomes a refuge from industrial excess and a symbol of lost harmony.

3.1. Industrialization & Ecological Anxiety-

Poems such as Blake's "*London*" and Wordsworth's "*The World Is Too Much with Us*" reveal deep anxiety about humanity's estrangement from nature. These works expose the psychological and moral costs of environmental exploitation, anticipating later environmental critiques.

IV. WILLIAM WORDSWORTH: NATURE AS MORAL TEACHER

William Wordsworth stands as the foremost poet of nature in English Romanticism. His poetry presents nature as a formative influence on human character and morality. Wordsworth's environmental vision emphasizes simplicity, humility, and attentiveness to the natural world.

For Wordsworth, nature is not merely beautiful; it is pedagogical. Through sustained interaction with nature, individuals cultivate empathy, self-awareness, and ethical sensitivity.

4.1. Ecological Harmony in *Lyrical Ballads*-

In poems such as "*Tintern Abbey*" and "*Lines Written in Early Spring*," Wordsworth articulates a philosophy of ecological harmony. Nature nurtures the human spirit, offering solace and insight amid social turmoil. His portrayal of rural landscapes affirms the intrinsic value of non-human life.

V. SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE: NATURE & THE SACRED

Coleridge's poetry explores the spiritual dimensions of nature, often blending natural imagery with theological symbolism. Unlike Wordsworth's tranquil landscapes, Coleridge's nature is mysterious, powerful, and occasionally terrifying.

5.1. Environmental Ethics in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*-

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner serves as one of the most compelling ecological allegories in Romantic poetry. The mariner's impulsive killing of the albatross represents

humanity's reckless exploitation of nature. The poem underscores the interconnectedness of all living beings and the moral consequences of environmental transgression.

Coleridge's emphasis on reverence for all forms of life aligns closely with contemporary ecological ethics, highlighting responsibility and respect for the natural world.

VI. P. B. SHELLEY: NATURE AS REVOLUTIONARY FORCE

Shelley's engagement with nature is deeply political and philosophical. He perceives natural forces as symbols of transformation and resistance against tyranny. Nature, in Shelley's poetry, embodies both destructive and regenerative power.

6.1. Ecological Symbolism in *Ode to the West Wind*-

In "*Ode to the West Wind*," Shelley presents nature as a dynamic agent of change. The west wind becomes a metaphor for revolutionary energy, capable of sweeping away decay and ushering in renewal. This vision resonates with environmental cycles of destruction and regeneration.

Shelley's poetry suggests that human societies should emulate nature's capacity for renewal rather than impose rigid systems of control.

VII. JOHN KEATS: SENSUOUS NATURE & ECOLOGICAL INTIMACY

Keats approaches nature through sensuous imagery and aesthetic immersion. His poetry celebrates the beauty and transience of the natural world, emphasizing emotional and sensory connection.

7.1. Transience & Sustainability in Keats's Odes-

In poems such as "*Ode to a Nightingale*" and "*To Autumn*," Keats explores themes of impermanence and continuity. Nature's cycles of growth and decay foster an ecological awareness rooted in acceptance and reverence. Keats's attentiveness to seasonal rhythms reflects a sustainable vision of coexistence.

VIII. WILLIAM BLAKE: ENVIRONMENTAL PROTEST & VISIONARY ECOLOGY

Blake's poetry presents a stark critique of industrial capitalism and environmental destruction. His prophetic works expose the dehumanizing effects of mechanization and urbanization.

8.1. Nature Versus Industrial Tyranny-

In "*Songs of Innocence and of Experience*," Blake contrasts pastoral innocence with industrial corruption. His imagery

of “dark Satanic mills” condemns environmental exploitation and spiritual desolation. Blake’s visionary ecology calls for a reimagining of human-nature relationships grounded in imagination and compassion.

IX. ROMANTIC LANDSCAPE & ECOLOGICAL IDENTITY

Romantic poets often construct landscapes that reflect psychological and spiritual states. These landscapes are not static backdrops but active participants in human experience.

9.1. Place, Memory & Environmental Belonging-

The Romantic emphasis on place fosters a sense of environmental identity. Through memory and emotional attachment, landscapes become integral to personal and cultural consciousness, reinforcing ecological belonging.

X. NATURE, EMOTION & THE SUBLIME

The Romantic sublime captures nature’s overwhelming power and beauty. Experiences of the sublime evoke awe, fear, and humility, reminding humans of their limitations.

10.1. Ecological Implications of the Sublime-

By confronting nature’s vastness, Romantic poetry challenges anthropocentrism and promotes ecological humility. The sublime reinforces respect for natural forces beyond human control.

XI. GENDER, NATURE & ROMANTIC ECOLOGY

Romantic poetry often associates nature with feminine qualities, reflecting both reverence and problematic idealization.

11.1. Ecofeminist Perspectives-

Modern ecofeminist readings highlight how Romantic depictions of nature intersect with gendered representations. While celebrating nurturing aspects of nature, such imagery also invites critical reassessment of domination and idealization.

XII. ROMANTIC ECOLOGY & MODERN ENVIRONMENTALISM

Romantic poetry anticipates key principles of modern environmental thought, including interdependence, sustainability, and ethical responsibility.

12.1. Influence on Ecocriticism-

Contemporary ecocriticism draws heavily on Romantic texts to trace the evolution of environmental consciousness. Romantic poetry provides a foundational discourse for ecological ethics and environmental humanities.

XIII. LIMITATIONS & CONTRADICTIONS IN ROMANTIC ENVIRONMENTAL THOUGHT

Despite its ecological insights, Romantic poetry is not without limitations. Its idealization of nature can obscure social realities and exclude marginalized perspectives.

13.1. Critical Reassessment-

Acknowledging these contradictions allows for a more nuanced understanding of Romantic environmentalism and its relevance today.

XIV. ROMANTIC ECOLOGY & RURAL IDEALISM

Romantic poetry frequently idealizes rural life as a space of ecological balance, moral clarity, and emotional authenticity. This pastoral impulse is not merely nostalgic but deeply environmental, presenting the countryside as an alternative to the alienation produced by industrial capitalism. The Romantic rural ideal emphasizes small-scale living, close contact with land, and sustainable rhythms of work and rest. Such representations implicitly critique exploitative economic systems and foreground ecological values.

Wordsworth’s depiction of shepherds, farmers, and solitary wanderers highlights an ethic of coexistence rather than domination. Rural figures live *with* nature rather than *over* it, embodying ecological humility. However, critics have noted that this rural idealism sometimes overlooks class struggle and material hardship. Even so, the environmental vision remains significant for its emphasis on harmony and restraint.

14.1. Pastoral Tradition & Environmental Ethics-

Romantic poets inherit and transform the classical pastoral tradition. Unlike earlier pastoral poetry, Romantic pastoral is infused with urgency, shaped by real ecological threats posed by industrialization. Nature is no longer a static idyll but a fragile system requiring care and respect. This shift marks an important development in environmental consciousness.

XV. IMAGINATION AS AN ECOLOGICAL FACULTY

The Romantic imagination plays a crucial role in shaping environmental awareness. Rather than opposing nature, imagination allows deeper engagement with it. Through imaginative perception, poets discern connections between human consciousness and natural processes. Imagination thus becomes an ecological faculty, enabling empathy with non-human life.

Coleridge, in particular, theorizes imagination as a unifying power that dissolves the boundary between subject and object. This philosophical stance supports an ecological worldview in which humans are inseparable from their environment. Poetry, therefore, becomes an act of ecological restoration, re-enchanting a world diminished by mechanistic thinking.

15.1. Poetry as Environmental Mediation-

Romantic poetry mediates between the human and the natural, translating ecological relationships into emotional and symbolic language. This mediation fosters awareness and ethical reflection, encouraging readers to reconsider their relationship with the environment.

XVI. ANIMALS, NON-HUMAN LIFE & ECOLOGICAL COMPASSION

Animals occupy a significant place in Romantic poetry, often serving as symbols of innocence, freedom, and vulnerability. Romantic poets resist the Cartesian separation of humans and animals, instead emphasizing shared sentience and suffering.

Coleridge's albatross, Wordsworth's birds and lambs, and Keats's nightingale exemplify this ecological compassion. These representations challenge anthropocentric hierarchies and advocate for respect toward all living beings. Such poetic gestures align with contemporary debates on animal ethics and biodiversity conservation.

16.1. Moral Implications of Human-Animal Relationships-

By portraying cruelty toward animals as a moral failing, Romantic poetry establishes an ethical framework that extends beyond humanity. Environmental responsibility, in this sense, includes care for non-human life, reinforcing ecological interconnectedness.

XVII. WATER, MOUNTAINS & ELEMENTAL NATURE

Romantic poets frequently engage with elemental aspects of nature—water, air, earth, and fire—to express ecological

power and continuity. Rivers symbolize time and memory, mountains evoke permanence and sublimity, and storms represent both destruction and renewal.

Wordsworth's rivers and lakes, Shelley's winds and clouds, and Coleridge's seas illustrate how elemental imagery conveys environmental processes. These elements are not passive; they shape human experience and imagination.

17.1. Elemental Cycles & Ecological Balance-

The Romantic emphasis on cycles—erosion, growth, decay—reinforces ecological balance. Human attempts to dominate these forces often lead to catastrophe, while respect and adaptation ensure survival. This insight resonates strongly with modern environmental science.

XVIII. COLONIALISM, EXPLORATION & ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Romantic poetry also reflects anxieties related to colonial expansion and global exploration. Encounters with unfamiliar landscapes raise questions about ownership, exploitation, and responsibility. While some Romantic texts exoticize foreign environments, others express unease about imperial domination of nature.

Coleridge's sea voyage and Shelley's global imagery suggest awareness of ecological consequences beyond national borders. These poems anticipate global environmental ethics, recognizing that ecological harm transcends geographical boundaries.

18.1. Environmental Imagination and Empire-

The Romantic environmental imagination sometimes resists imperial logic by emphasizing reverence over conquest. This resistance, though limited, contributes to a broader critique of environmental exploitation linked to power and empire.

XIX. ROMANTIC NATURE WRITING & PROSE TRADITIONS

In addition to poetry, Romantic-era prose—essays, letters, and journals—reveals sustained engagement with nature. Wordsworth's *Guide to the Lakes* exemplifies early environmental advocacy, calling for preservation of natural landscapes against commercial development.

Such prose complements Romantic poetry by articulating environmental values in practical terms. Together, they form a comprehensive ecological discourse that blends aesthetics, ethics, and policy.

19.1. Conservation & Early Environmental Thought-

Romantic prose contributes to the emergence of conservationist thinking. The call to protect landscapes for

their intrinsic value anticipates national park movements and modern environmental legislation.

XX. ROMANTICISM & CLIMATE SENSIBILITY

Recent scholarship has examined Romantic poetry through the lens of climate studies. Romantic sensitivity to weather, seasons, and atmospheric change reflects acute awareness of environmental variability. Volcanic eruptions, harsh winters, and climatic anomalies during the Romantic period influenced poetic imagery.

Shelley's apocalyptic landscapes and Byron's climate-inflected poems reveal early engagement with environmental instability. This climate sensibility underscores the Romantic recognition of nature's unpredictability and power.

20.1. Climate Anxiety & Poetic Response-

Romantic poets respond to environmental uncertainty with both fear and creativity. Their work models emotional engagement with ecological crisis, offering insight into how art mediates environmental anxiety.

XXI. ROMANTIC ECOLOGY & EDUCATION

Romantic poetry has long played a role in environmental education. By fostering emotional connection to nature, Romantic texts cultivate ecological literacy and ethical awareness.

Wordsworth's belief in nature as a teacher extends to pedagogical contexts, where poetry becomes a tool for environmental reflection. Reading Romantic poetry encourages attentiveness, patience, and respect—qualities essential for sustainable living.

21.1. Teaching Romantic Environmentalism Today-

In contemporary classrooms, Romantic poetry provides a historical foundation for environmental humanities. Its integration into curricula supports interdisciplinary dialogue between literature, ecology, and ethics.

XXII. RELEVANCE OF ROMANTIC ENVIRONMENTALISM IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

The environmental crises of the twenty-first century—climate change, biodiversity loss, and ecological degradation—renew interest in Romantic environmental thought. Romantic poetry reminds modern readers of alternative ways of relating to nature grounded in reverence and responsibility.

While Romantic solutions are not directly applicable to modern technological societies, their ethical insights remain invaluable. The emphasis on limits, humility, and interconnectedness offers a corrective to unchecked consumption and exploitation.

XXIII. CONCLUDING REMARK

Thus, Romantic poetry functions as an enduring ecological critique, challenging dominant narratives of progress and mastery. Its vision encourages sustainable futures shaped by imagination and care.

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Discussing Educational Traditions

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Abstract— This paper discusses that how far English language process should be effective and how it has to be gone in the right path. It is the duty of the teachers and the students to include the skills in their learning development method. The teachers and students are the two important parameters of a learning process and the other elements supporting the learning process include the skills and traits of a teacher, the student development and behavior patterns etc. The traditions of learning are based on the four skills of learning. The traditions of education theory like social efficiency and critical tradition include teachers as the learners or the learning initiators but the progressive tradition includes both teachers and students as the learners. According to these traditions the teacher should be well skilled, experimental, leading and must teach the students the way to fight for injustice and to change the wrong norms of society.



Keywords— Teachers, Well skilled, Experimental, Students.

Discussing Educational Traditions

Effective Education includes participation from both teachers and students. The teachers are also learners in the process of teaching and they learn several things like new methodologies in teaching, new ways of curriculum designing and new concepts and theories in student psychology. And the students too become learners in this process and they learn and implement whatever is taught to them by their teachers. This paper takes into view various traditions associated with the education, which are a part of US and many other countries. According to these traditions the teacher should be well skilled, experimental, leading and must teach the students the way to fight for injustice and to change the wrong norms of society.

Various forms of educational traditions can be discussed as follows:

1. Social Efficiency Tradition:

This tradition emerged as a reform in the US education system in the 20th century. It is the tradition based on innovation through which the teachers can be educated to further educate their students. The various institutions, schools and universities followed this pattern and used science as a tool for empowering the teachers.

Many theorists like Cremin(1953), said that during the 20th century the science of education changed the way the educationists received training. The teachers work was fragmented and analyzed separately hence the technical analysis was done. This method clarified the logics of teaching and the objectives, too. Many experts like Charters and Waples(1929), defined the traits and duties of a teacher so as to make it clear that what is needed by a teacher for teaching.

The first step in this new methodology was the categorization of teachers on basis of the traits. The methods used were:

1. Analyzing the Professional Literature: The past researches in the field of education were revisited and the appealing methods were chosen. Traits like Accuracy and Magnetism were alphabetically written.
2. Interviewing by Expert Judges: After the literature studied and trait organization the interviews were conducted.

The conclusion reached after all this was that the secondary school teachers were assigned twenty-six traits like Good Taste of books and Propriety etc. The high school teachers were chosen on basis of traits like morality

and broadmindedness. (Kliebard,1986)

2. Developmental Tradition: During the end of the 20th century another reform came in the education system and it was based on the student study movements initiated by G. Stanley Hall et al. It was an altogether different pattern of educational tradition and it considered the student side of the learning and not the teacher side of learning of teaching.

The natural learning patterns of the students were taken as an input for inducing the teaching. So it was believed that the learning of students was the guiding medium for the teachers that determine what should be taught to the students.

The tradition was student oriented and it studied the student's behavior at various stages of learning. Experts like Lucy Spargue Mitchell(1931), proposed the need for a research on the behavior of a student taking into account the factors like "development stages of a student and the a better planning of the learning environment." This was the beginning of the progressive tradition in the learning era.

The new schools in the US were based on this tradition at that time and the teacher's education was also modified, by inducing the student development and learning behavior theories.

Moreover this new method was based on the fact that the progressive schools educated their teachers with the same method as they used for teaching their students. The teachers were given a feel of the student's views and they were given the feel of the same environment.

The Progressive and the Developmental traditions as said by Perrone were based on the three metaphors, which assigned the teachers three varying roles, which are as follows:

- a. Teacher as naturalist: This role was based on the study skills of teacher, which included the observation of the natural behavior of the students. The part teachers played, as a naturalist was to design the classroom and the study curriculum, which was consistent with the student's growth and behavior. The teacher learning in this role was either the observation skills or the study of the research done by past researchers.
- b. Teacher as an Artist: This role was two dimensional and it includes the art to pursue the student for learning on one side and on other side it includes the art of self learning. The teacher was supposed to be skillful in providing the rich and impulsive learning environment by a through knowledge of the student's psychology. Side by side the internal learning of the teacher should be stimulating and the

teacher must be aware of his/her capabilities. The areas in this tradition included the various art forms like dance, drama, writing, painting etc. This tradition was influenced by the Freud's theories of psychology of development and learning.

- c. Teacher as a Researcher: This tradition was based on innovation as the key element in the learning process and teaching process. The student study was proposed as an experimental study and it taught the ways to address the student inquiries. Lucy Spargue Mitchell(1931), the founder of the Bank Street College, also provided the summary of aims in teaching and she focused on "teacher attitude towards work and life which included factors like eagerness, alertness, modification of the traditions, use of sources like books, open mindedness, innovation etc."

3. Social Reconstructionist Tradition/Critical Tradition: This tradition includes both teachers and students. This tradition defines learning environment and teacher education as the pillars to a just and fair society. According to Kliebard(1986) this theory has its roots in the American social and economic system and it viewed the teaching curriculum as a means to fight the economic injustice.

In 1930s teachers emerged as reformists. They were challenged, for taking the nation to socialism with the political power. The teachers from Teachers College of Columbia stood against the economic and social injustice and they raised their voices for the reform in the society. This tradition was used for the uplifting of the society, which was facing economic depression, and the teachers were used as a force for bringing out a change in the US society.

The teachers were made to accept the views of the people who said that it is a teacher's duty to educate the students in terms of the social management and to make them aware about the power sources and the ways to equip them to fight for injustice and to enter the power sources for changing the unjust society. (Kilpatrick,1933)

The teachers were given the responsibility for educating the students in matters of socialist and collectivist values. Experts like Counts(1932), argued that if given the liberty to modify the capitalism and changing the economic policies the teachers should give new methods and values for supporting the new economic order which would be just and fair.

The "frontier educators" asked the teachers to come ahead and lead the society, the teacher education was considered as a very vital component in the society from that time onwards. This was the most new type of reform and it also

included the concept of a modern teacher who has the power to change the society and to lead a nation.

Case Study

The above traditions like social efficiency, progressive/developmental, critical etc. can be described on basis of a case study. In this study we will define the various traditions as perceived by the Australian education system. Teaching philosophies have a vital impact on the student teacher relations and the education theory itself. Various theories can be described as follows:

1. Academic Tradition: This is the education given to the teachers at a preservice level. The education consists of the liberal arts education and along with it training is given in schools. This traditional theory aims at providing the complete knowledge on the subject, which the teacher has opted for the teaching. The model is a disciplinary model in which a live training is given to the teachers and the senior teachers provide the guidance.

2. Social efficiency tradition is helpful in providing the innovative teaching education to the teachers. This system came into power in the years 1960 and 1970 in US and it provided new models like Competency and Performance Based Teacher Education. This theory is used for accessing the teachers on basis of the skill set and the subject knowledge.

The mastery of the teachers in their respective subjects is measured and then the teacher is marked as competitive or non-competitive. This theory proved successful in relating the behavioral factors of education with the intellectual ones.

3. The developmentalist tradition is based on the study of the learner behavior and it includes the basic learning development in the teachers and the students. It includes three forms of learning:

- a. Teacher as naturalist: It includes the natural learning skills of a teacher which can be used for inducing learning in the students.
- b. Teacher as artist: It includes the role of a teacher as an artist who has mastery in the art of teaching the students.
- c. Teacher as a researcher: It includes the teacher role as a researcher who gives teaching based on through research. (Zeichner & Liston, 1990)

4. The social meliorist/critical theory is based on the reform tradition, which believes that institution and teacher both guide the students in a new way to form a new and fair society. The students are allowed to look critically on the various political and social factors which impact the education system. Even this tradition makes the teachers

work in a low salary for eradicating the illiteracy and poverty.

According to the theorists like Jasman, Sachs and Groundwater the education system in Australia has all the four traditions. In Queensland the academic tradition can be seen in the education of the secondary teachers and the students who have opted for secondary teachers study the academic subjects.

Further they study the educational units, which include all type of subjects and not particularly the subjects taken by the student for becoming a teacher. Then comes the social efficiency tradition, which is also part of the Queensland and it is based on the outcome based learning.

All the state learning institutions are based on this tradition of education. The developmentalist tradition is also reflected in Queensland's education system, as the trainees are provided with the placements at the end of year. This also consists of the development stages from simpler to more complicated curriculum. Many universities in Queensland also show critical education tradition in which the political and social factors are considered with a societal framework.

CONCLUSION

The teachers and students are the two important parts of a learning process and the other elements supporting the learning process include the skills and traits of a teacher, the student development and behavior patterns etc. The teacher can be a naturalist when he/she addresses the student's natural needs in process of learning, the teacher can be a researcher when he/she is experimental and makes learning innovative and finally a teacher can be an artist who knows how to initiate or excite the learning process among the individuals.

The traditions of learning are based on all the above factors. The traditions of education theory like social efficiency and critical tradition include teachers as the learners or the learning initiators but the progressive tradition includes both teachers and students as the learners.

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Instagram as a Tool in Teaching Vocabulary among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Students

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Abstract— Recent transitions from the conventional to digital teaching methods have been evaluated to assist educators in offering a more engaging education for the students. The study of Kukulska-Hulme & Shield (2008) is essential to comprehending how Mobile-assisted language instruction is effective for instructors to use it in the classroom. While studies have been done to use Instagram in Teaching, these studies have not specified a specific level of EFL students. The study's findings shed light on the notion of using Instagram as a tool in the classroom as opposed to using it merely as for students' entertainment. To address this, a quasi-experimental approach was employed to comprehend the effectiveness of Instagram in students' vocabulary learning in the Center for English Language Studies at Lapulapu-Cebu International College. These 30 students were divided into two groups, the control group and experimental group where they needed to answer a researcher-made questionnaire for their pretest and their posttest. The data is then treated using a t-test for correlated samples and t-test for two independent samples. The findings of this study proved that there was a significant difference between the control group and the experimental group's posttest scores after the intervention was given. Although there was no significant difference between their score in the pretest, this only proves that the students have the same level before doing the study. This study concludes that Instagram is an effective tool towards teaching vocabulary among EFL students as this is supported by the result of the posttest scores of the experimental groups' posttest scores. The researcher highly recommends further studies about using Facebook in teaching vocabulary, using Instagram in teaching grammar or using memes in teaching vocabulary among EFL students.



Keywords— control group, experimental group, pretest, posttest, proposed action plan, Instagram, vocabulary

I. INTRODUCTION

The advent of technology and global standards demands for individuals that can communicate effectively in English and at the same time keep up with the digital age. Social media platforms are now essential to this convergence of changing how people communicate, do business, and share knowledge. Globally, internet penetration reached 67.1% of the world's population in January 2024, with social media users accounting for 59.4%. This gives significance to the utilization of social media in modern life.

Social media has become a part of the daily routines of students in terms of language and communication experience, news feeds, and information exchange. Instagram alone with 1.6 billion users worldwide would be a great avenue for learning. It provides students learning English with a modern approach to improving their speaking, listening, reading, and writing abilities. For instance, Instagram, with its visual and interactive features, presents a unique opportunity for students to utilize not just for past time but also for vocabulary acquisition (Muftah, 2022).

EFL students often use Instagram in learning the English language. Specifically, EFL students start to utilize Instagram in learning new vocabulary that they read in Instagram posts. Hence, EFL learners need to find ways to learn the language, they usually seek alternative avenues such as, enrolling in English online classes, studying abroad or simply doing self-study. Roughly 750 million EFL students learn English around the world and are motivated by extrinsic factors to learn the English language (Nuraeni, 2020). For instance, gaining a competitive advantage in their studies, better career opportunities, and work promotion (Ly, 2022).

Despite this, EFL students still encounter several significant challenges when learning the English language. Obstacles such as identifying spelling and sounds, and figuring out meaning denotatively and connotatively. In addition, inefficiency and demotivating nature of traditional teaching and lack of training of teachers in technology integration results in students being unmotivated to learn the English language. These difficulties may affect the development of the English language learning of the EFL students as well as their capacity for clear and precise communication.

In the Center for English Language Studies, although social media like Instagram has become a widely used medium for communication and a cultural tool in the daily lives of EFL students. there was still a sizable pedagogical integration gap in formal language instruction. The promise of these platforms for independent learning is frequently highlighted in current literature, but localized, theory-driven methods for their methodical use within a structured classroom setting are lacking. Specifically, the lack of research towards Instagram's multimedia richness and interactivity. Empirical models demonstrating how these traits can be pedagogically built to consistently provide Krashen's understandable $i+1$ input are lacking. Seldom does current research explain how teachers can purposefully set up these quick lines of contact to serve as the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO).

As a faculty of the Center for English Language Studies in Lapulapu-Cebu International College, the researcher knows the courses and its intended targets and how each course helps the students improve their vocabulary skills. A crucial pedagogical gap was discovered through ongoing observation. Although students regularly and independently utilize social media sites like Instagram during their free time, its potential as an organized, theory-driven instrument for classroom vocabulary acquisition is still unrealized. Because of this distinct viewpoint, the researcher can design and carry out a study that aims to turn Instagram from a leisure activity into an evidence-based teaching approach. The objective is to provide a

pertinent framework for enhancing language competency within the Center for English Language Studies curriculum.

Research Objectives

This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of using Instagram (IG) as a tool in teaching English vocabulary among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students.

Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the pretest performances of the control and experimental groups?
2. What are the posttest performances of the control and experimental groups?
3. Is there a significant difference between the pretest performances of the control and experimental groups?
4. Is there a significant difference between the pretest and posttest performance of the control and experimental groups?
5. Is there a significant difference between the posttest performance of the control and experimental groups?
6. Based on the findings of the study, what action plan can be proposed?

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This study is anchored primarily on the Social Constructivism Theory of Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky (1962). It is then supported by the Input Hypothesis Theory of Stephen Krashen (1977) and Mobile-Assisted Language Learning Framework of George Chinnery (MALL) (2006).

Social Constructivism

The main theory that supports this study is a prominent learning theory that emphasizes the crucial role of social interaction and cultural context in the development of cognition and learning (Vygotsky, 1977). Unlike theories that focus solely on individual cognitive processes, Social Constructivism posits that learning is a collaborative activity. Knowledge and understanding are first constructed in social interactions with more knowledgeable others, such as teachers, parents, or peers. Through dialogue, collaboration, and shared experiences, learners internalize these socially constructed understandings, making them their own. This social dimension is not merely a facilitator of learning but an integral part of the cognitive development process itself (Wertsch, 1991).

A key concept within Social Constructivism of Vygotsky is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). . The ZPD

represents the space between what a learner can do independently and what they can achieve with guidance and support from a more knowledgeable other. Effective teaching, according to this theory, occurs within the ZPD, providing "scaffolding" – temporary support tailored to the learner's needs – to help them bridge the gap between their current abilities and their potential. As learners interact within their ZPD, they gradually develop the skills and understanding necessary to perform tasks independently. This highlights the importance of collaborative learning activities and the role of the instructor as a facilitator who guides and supports learning rather than simply transmitting information.

In essence, Social Constructivism re-frames learning as a social process embedded within a cultural context. Cognitive development is seen as a result of internalizing social media activities and knowledge. The theory underscores the significance of interaction, collaboration, and the guidance of more knowledgeable individuals in fostering learning and development. By emphasizing the social origins of thought and the importance of the ZPD, Vygotsky's work has had a profound impact on educational practices, advocating for learning environments that are interactive, collaborative, and responsive to the individual needs of learners within their social and cultural settings (Daniels, 2001).

To establish a more comprehensive theoretical basis, the primary theory is supported by two auxiliary theories to provide a robust conceptual framework.

Input Hypothesis

The first auxiliary theory of this study is the Input Hypothesis of Stephen Krashen (1977). It is a cornerstone of second language acquisition theory as it posits that learners acquire a new language not by directly learning its rules, but by understanding input that is slightly beyond their current level of linguistic competence. This "comprehensible input" is often referred to as "i+1," where "i" represents the learner's current level of language ability, and "+1" represents the next stage of language development.

In addition, the Input Hypothesis emphasizes that input should be meaningful and contextualized. Learners progress when they focus on understanding the message, rather than focusing on grammatical structures. Krashen argues that when learners are exposed to comprehensible input, they can naturally acquire the new language structures within that input.

A key aspect of the Input Hypothesis is the distinction between "acquisition" and "learning." He suggested that acquisition is a subconscious process, similar to how children acquire their first language, while learning is a

conscious process, such as studying grammar rules. He argues that acquisition is far more crucial for developing fluency and natural language use.

The implications of the Input Hypothesis for language teaching are significant. It suggests that teachers should prioritize activities that provide learners with a large amount of comprehensible input, such as reading, listening, and communicative tasks. Error correction should be minimized, especially during the early stages of acquisition, as it can raise the affective filter and hinder the natural acquisition process. In essence, Krashen's Input Hypothesis suggests that providing learners with a rich environment of comprehensible input is essential for successful language acquisition. This has significant implications for language teaching, advocating for methods that prioritize meaningful communication and understanding over explicit grammar instruction.

Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL)

The second auxiliary theory of the current study is the widely recognized Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) of George Chinnery (2019). Its perspective emphasizes the unique affordances of mobile devices – their portability, ubiquity, connectivity, interactivity, and context sensitivity – and how these can be leveraged to enhance language learning in ways that traditional methods often cannot. His work underscores the potential of mobile technologies to support learning anytime, anywhere, and in authentic contexts.

A central tenet approach to MALL is the focus on learner autonomy and personalized learning experiences. Mobile devices empower learners to take greater control over their learning journey by providing access to a vast array of resources, tools, and communication channels. Learners can engage with language learning materials at their own pace, in their own time, and according to their individual needs and preferences. His work highlights the importance of designing MALL activities that encourage active learner participation, exploration, and self-reflection. This includes utilizing features like language learning apps, mobile dictionaries, audio and video recording tools, and social networking platforms accessible via mobile devices.

Furthermore, his conceptualization of MALL emphasizes the integration of mobile learning into broader pedagogical frameworks rather than viewing it as a standalone tool. He advocates for the thoughtful and principled use of mobile technologies to complement and enhance classroom-based instruction, extending learning opportunities beyond the physical boundaries of the classroom. This involves considering how mobile devices can facilitate authentic communication, collaborative tasks, contextualized learning experiences, and the development of digital

literacies. Ultimately, his work provides a comprehensive perspective on MALL, emphasizing its potential to foster flexible, engaging, and effective language learning opportunities in the digital age.

III. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study utilized the quasi-experimental method using Instagram to acquire new vocabulary among EFL students in the Center for English Language Studies at Lapulapu-Cebu International College.

Research Environment

The study was conducted in the Center for English Language Studies department of Lapulapu-Cebu International College, located in Tigahon I Bankal, Lapu-Lapu City, Cebu, Philippines. Lapulapu-Cebu International College is a nonsectarian international educational institution that offers English as a Foreign Language together with five college courses namely Tourism Management, Foreign Language, Physical Therapy, Civil Engineering, and English Language Studies. Lapulapu-Cebu International College is an emerging school established in 2020. Despite the school being a newly established institution, it has been active in creating partnerships not only here in the Philippines but also in other countries such as Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Vietnam, Mongolia, and the USA. The school has strong ties with the prestigious shipbuilding company in the Philippines, Tsuneishi Heavy Industries Cebu.

Research Participants

The respondents of this study were 30 B1 Level students, who took a diagnostic exam before enrolling into the Center for English Language studies and were placed in the B1 level based on the Common European Reference Framework. The Center for English Language Studies follows the internationally acknowledged CEFR in identifying which class level each student should be placed in. Considering that the respondents are on the same CEFR level the control and experimental group were two different classes. The control group was in one class with 15 students, and the experimental group was in another class with 15 students. The experimental group was required to have an Instagram account. Another group was selected for pilot testing.

Research Instrument

This study utilized the final exam of the Center for English Language Studies Vocabulary Builder Class that served as the pretest and the posttest (see Appendix B for the Instrument). The selection of the research instrument was

based on the course as mentioned earlier, as this final exam covers the vocabulary for the entire course. The instrument is a 40-item matching type test with no time limit.. This is a standardized test created by (CELS) as a final exam for EFL students taking the Vocabulary Builder course. In addition, the research instrument was pilot tested by a separate group. The scoring range is as follows: Scores from 0-8 were given a description of *Minimal proficiency*, with an interpretation that students possessed very little functional vocabulary knowledge from the intervention. Scores from 9-16 were given a description of *Limited proficiency*, with an interpretation that students struggle with core concepts, indicating significant gaps in receptive vocabulary. Scores from 17-24 were given a description of *Moderate proficiency*, with an interpretation that students have a working, adequate understanding of the vocabulary, but knowledge is inconsistent across subtopics. Scores from 25-32 were given a description of *High proficiency*, with an interpretation that students show a solid and reliable knowledge base of the vocabulary items. Lastly, scores from 33-40 were given a description of *Very High proficiency*, with an interpretation that students demonstrate exceptional ability to recognize and associate the target vocabulary with its definition.

Research Procedure

To conduct the study, the researcher sought authorization from the Director of the Center for English Language Studies. The researcher personally conducted the study during the Vocabulary Builder class.

Before the actual gathering of data, the researcher provided a brief background about Instagram. The researcher used one class as the experimental group and another class as the control group. When the group was finalized, the researcher recommended the experimental group to use Instagram on activities. All the respondents are on the same B1 CEFR level.

The second meeting was used to administer the pretest for both the control group and the experimental group to determine the respondents' vocabulary level. The students completed a standardized test that was created by the Center for English Language Studies as a final assessment for EFL students taking up the Vocabulary Builder course. When the researcher gathered the result, it was given to a certified statistician for it to get analyzed.

The third day was used to conduct the intervention, where the researcher started by discussing the target vocabulary for the day. After the discussion, the researcher let the experimental group use Instagram and search for the day's target vocabulary by reading posts and captions that contain the target vocabulary. After searching, the students made their own sentences based on how they understood

the words in the post's caption. Conversely, the control group made their own sentences based on how they understood the discussion of the researcher.

This process was repeated for a month to allow the experimental group practice utilizing Instagram to search for appropriate English vocabulary. 4 times a week

different words were given to the class as part of the activity.

IV. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Table 2 shows the pretest performances of the control and experimental group.

Table 2: Pretest Scores of the Control and Experimental Groups

Pretest	Control Group		Experimental Group		Description
Score Ranges	Frequency	Per Cent (%)	Frequency	Per Cent (%)	
33 - 40	0	0.00	0	0.00	Very High Proficiency
25 - 32	10	66.67	7	46.67	High Proficiency
17 - 24	5	33.33	8	53.33	Moderate Proficiency
9 - 16	0	0.00	0	0.00	Limited Proficiency
0 - 8	0	0.00	0	0.00	Minimal Proficiency
Mean:	25.07		24.80		
Standard Dev.	2.52		3.30		

Table 2 shows that ten (10) research subjects (66.67%) in the control group scored between 25 and 32, indicating a *high proficiency* level. The remaining five (5) research subjects (33.33%) got a score between 17 and 24, indicating a *moderate proficiency* level. On the other hand, seven (7) research subjects (46.67%) in the experimental group scored between 25 and 32, indicating a *high proficiency* level. The remaining eight (8) research subjects (53.33%) got a score between 17 and 24, indicating a *moderate proficiency* level. Furthermore, the mean of the control group (25.07) and experimental group (24.80) has a standard deviation of 2.52 and 3.30, respectively.

The findings imply that before the experiment began, the students in both groups had similar levels of English proficiency. They were categorized under *high proficiency*

and *moderate proficiency*, and were competent. This data guarantees that any notable variations observed following the intervention can be ascribed to the instructional strategy rather than to one group's intrinsic superiority over the other.

This assertion is supported by Brown & Lee (2015) who stated that any subsequent significant differences in the post-test scores can be reliably attributed to the treatment variable and not to any pre-existing knowledge disparities between the groups by confirming that students began at essentially the same baseline level. When evaluating the Instagram tool's potential effectiveness, this methodological rigor guarantees that the study's conclusions may be relied upon.

Table 3 shows the pretest scores of the control and experimental groups.

Table 3: Posttest Scores of the Control and Experimental Groups

Posttest	Control Group		Experimental Group		Description
Score Ranges	Frequency	Per Cent (%)	Frequency	Per Cent (%)	
33 – 40	0	0.00	15	100.00	Very High Proficiency
25 – 32	14	93.33	0	0.00	High Proficiency
17 – 24	1	6.67	0	0.00	Moderate Proficiency
9 – 16	0	0.00	0	0.00	Limited Proficiency
0 - 8	0	0.00	0	0.00	Minimal Proficiency
Mean:	29.40		35.93		
Standard Dev.	1.72		0.96		

Table 3 shows that 14 research subjects (93.33%) in the control group scored between 25 and 32, indicating a *high proficiency* level. Only one (1) research subject (6.67%) got a score between 17 and 24, indicating a *moderate proficiency* level. On the other hand, all research subjects (100.00%) in the experimental group scored between 33 and 40, indicating a *very high proficiency* level. Furthermore, the mean of the control group (29.40) and experimental group (35.93) has a standard deviation of 1.72 and 0.96, respectively. The findings clearly show that using Instagram is an excellent way to improve students' English vocabulary skills.

This outcome is in line with research by Agustin and Ayu (2025) and Çakmak et al. (2021), which showed that visual input enhances vocabulary acquisition more than textual

input alone. Additionally, students can bridge meaning through the use of visuals and real-world context on Instagram, which effectively fulfills the scaffolding role within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Daniels, 2001).

Furthermore, it is supported by Chinnery's (2006) claims about Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), demonstrating that social media platforms' universality, portability, and multi modality provide special affordances that conventional approaches are unable to match.

Table 4 shows the test of hypothesis on the significance of the difference of the pretest scores of the control and experimental groups.

Table 4: Difference of the Pretest Scores of the Control and Experimental Groups

Group	Mean	df	Computed Value	Critical Value	Decision on Ho	Interpretation
Control Group	25.07	28	0.2488	2.0484	Failed to Reject Ho	No Significant Difference
Experimental Group	24.80					

Table 4 shows the result of the test of hypothesis conducted at 0.05 level of significance regarding the significance of the difference of the pretest scores of the research subjects in the control and experimental groups. As indicated, the computed value (0.2488) is less than the critical value (2.0484) which led to the non-rejection of the null hypothesis. Hence, the test concluded that there was no significant difference between the pretest scores of the research subjects in the control and experimental groups. In other words, the level of proficiency on vocabulary of the research subjects in the control and experimental groups before the experiment are comparable.

The findings imply that there was a difference in the control and experimental groups' pretest scores. However, the difference is not that significant and cannot affect the entirety of the difference between their vocabulary skills. It is then supported by Krashen (1977) in his Input

Hypothesis which implicated that, in order to assess whether the technology (the i+1 input delivery) is better, a valid comparison study must first make sure that the baseline proficiency (i) is the same for both groups.

Furthermore, the results of this study align with those of other experimental designs, most notably Al-Malki (2025) and Kaviani (2022), who also showed that structured Instagram activities result in noticeably higher vocabulary acquisition gains than traditional instruction. Affective aspects contribute to this accomplishment since the platform's engaging features increase extrinsic motivation (Nuraeni, 2020), which speeds up learning and produces the higher achievement seen in the gain scores (Syakir & Sjahrudin, 2021).

Table 5 shows the test of hypotheses on the significance of the differences between the pretest and posttest scores of the control and experimental groups.

Table 5: Differences of the Pretest and Posttest Scores of the Control and Experimental Groups

	Mean	df	Computed Value	Critical Value	Decision on Ho	Interpretation
Control Group						
Pretest	25.07	14	6.5000	2.1448	Reject Ho	Significantly Different
Posttest	29.40					
Experimental Group						
Pretest	24.80	14	12.6863	2.1448	Reject Ho	Significantly Different
Posttest	35.93					

Table 5 shows the results of the hypothesis test conducted regarding the differences in the pretest and posttest scores of the control and experimental groups at a 0.05 level of significance. For the control group, the computed value (6.5000) is greater than the critical value (2.1448), which resulted in the rejection of the null hypothesis that there was no significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores of the research subjects in the control group. For the experimental group, the computed value (12.6863) is greater than the critical value (2.1448), resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis that there was no significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores of the research subjects in the experimental group. Rejection of the null hypothesis that there was no significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores of the control and experimental groups has proved that there was a significant difference between the two sets of scores. This data implies that traditional and using Instagram in teaching vocabulary are effective.

Table 6: Difference of the Posttest Scores of the Control and Experimental Groups

Group	Mean	df	Computed Value	Critical Value	Decision on Ho	Interpretation
Control Group	29.40	28	12.8208	2.0484	Reject Ho	Significantly Different
Experimental Group	35.93					

Table 6 shows the difference of the posttest scores of the control and experimental groups. The result of the test of hypothesis conducted at 0.05 level of significance regarding the significance of the difference of the posttest scores of the research subjects in the control and experimental groups. As indicated, the computed value (12.8208) is greater than the critical value (2.0484), which led to the rejection of the null hypothesis that there was no significant difference between the pretest scores of the research subjects in the control and experimental groups. Hence, the test concluded that there was a significant difference between the posttest scores of the research subjects in the control and experimental groups. Based on the means, the experimental group has a higher mean than the control group. This finding implies that the use of Instagram as a tool in teaching English language among non-English speaking international students is indeed effective.

The findings of this table is congruent with Syafi'i et al. (2024) who asserted that students exposed to a range of terminology through Instagram photographs, stories, and captions, improves their comprehension and allows them to utilize new words in context. Chinnery (2006), also implicated that integration of social media creates a multi-

The findings agree with Karim et al (2022) in their assertion that students utilize social media as a means of resolving their language problems. Photographs in social media posts facilitate comprehension of the content and group activity on social media. However, it contradicts the notion of Hsieh, P. & Tsai, C. (2017) that the impact size—the extent of the difference—between groups receiving MALL assistance and groups receiving traditional training was typically negligible or nonexistent across a wide range of research topics as this study compared a traditional method compared to a cutting edge method. The superiority of the scores of the experimental group is only applicable for the traditional method.

Table 6 shows the test of hypothesis on the significance of the difference of the posttest scores of the control and experimental groups.

modal, constant, and authentic environment for vocabulary learning that was statistically superior to tradition.

Furthermore, compared to groups that simply acquired the vocabulary through conventional text-only input, students demonstrated noticeably better retention and recall when new vocabulary was connected to a combination of visual stimuli (pictures) and audio/text (Olusegun et al., 2024). However, this contradicts the assumption of Sweller, J. (1994) about the risks associated with segmentation and redundancy. The brain might disregard the intricate linguistic input in favor of the instant visual cue if the image and the title both express the same straightforward meaning. Students would then find it challenging to construct formal and abstract statements.

V. CONCLUSION

Utilization of Instagram as a tool in teaching vocabulary among EFL students has been proven to be effective in learning new vocabulary, as reflected in the individual posttest scores of the experimental group. Although, the control and experimental groups' pretest scores yielded with similar proficiency. Remarkably, the students from the experimental groups' posttest scores suggest that utilizing Instagram led to a significant enhancement

compared to using the Google search engine. The experimental group has been exposed to utilizing Instagram. This allowed the students to visualize the words using the photos and the videos.

VI. RECOMMENDATION

In light of the findings of the study, the following recommendations for future research are given:

1. utilization of Instagram in teaching reading skills for EFL students;
2. using Instagram in teaching basic grammar for EFL students; and
3. using Instagram memes in teaching vocabulary.

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A Linguistic Analysis of Translation Shifts between English and Arabic in UN News Texts: A Catfordian Approach

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Abstract— *This study examines the linguistic shifts that occur in the process of translating United Nations news texts between English and Arabic. Drawing upon Catford's (1965) theory of translation shifts, it classifies and analyses structural and semantic variations in a selected corpus of audiovisual news items translated between the two languages. The analysis identifies level shifts, structure shifts, class shifts, unit shifts, intra-system shifts, and semantic shifts. Results show that structure and tense shifts are the most recurrent due to the deep grammatical contrasts between Arabic and English. Although the translations deviate from the form of the source text, they maintain meaning and communicative function, demonstrating that equivalence in translation is achieved through contextual and functional adaptation rather than formal correspondence.*



Keywords— *translation shifts, English–Arabic translation, Catford's theory, structural and semantic variation, audiovisual news texts*

I. INTRODUCTION

Translation plays a central role in facilitating communication across linguistic and cultural boundaries, especially within international institutions such as the United Nations, where messages must be conveyed accurately and effectively to a multilingual audience. However, translation between structurally distinct languages such as Arabic and English poses significant challenges. The translator is often required to adjust not only words but also grammatical structures, syntactic order, and even semantic nuances to ensure clarity and accuracy.

This paper aims to analyse the linguistic shifts that occur in translating UN news texts from English into Arabic and vice versa. The study employs J. C. Catford's (1965) theory of translation shifts, which provides a systematic linguistic framework for identifying the types of changes that take

place between a source text (ST) and a target text (TT). By focusing on grammatical and semantic transformations, this research highlights the dynamic nature of translation as both a linguistic and cultural act.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Catford's model of translation shifts remains one of the foundational approaches to translation analysis. He defines a **translation shift** as "*the departure from formal correspondence in the process of translation*" (Catford, 1965, p. 73). According to Catford, translation involves two principal types of shifts: **level shifts** (between grammar and lexis) and **category shifts**, the latter comprising structure, class, unit, and intra-system shifts. These categories provide a systematic linguistic means to describe the grammatical

and semantic transformations that occur between source and target texts.

- **Level shifts** occur when a grammatical item in the source language (SL) is translated by a lexical item in the target language (TL) or vice versa (Catford, 1965, p. 73). For example, a tense marker in English may be rendered through a lexical verb or adverbial expression in Arabic, or the reverse.
- **Structure shifts** involve changes in grammatical arrangement, such as word order or clause hierarchy (Catford, 1965, p. 77). They are the most common type of shift because languages differ in their syntactic organization—English follows an SVO pattern, whereas Arabic frequently employs VSO structures.
- **Class shifts** occur when a lexical item changes grammatical category between the ST and the TT—for instance, a noun translated as a verb or an adjective as a noun (Catford, 1965, p. 78). Such shifts reveal differences in the syntactic and morphological resources of each language.
- **Unit shifts** (also known as rank shifts) take place when the translation equivalent operates at a different grammatical rank—such as a clause translated by a phrase, or a word rendered as a sentence (Catford, 1965, p. 79). They reflect the varying degrees of compactness in different linguistic systems.
- **Intra-system shifts** refer to changes that occur within a shared grammatical system, such as number, definiteness, or tense, where the SL and TL possess comparable systems but the translator selects a different element (Catford, 1965, p. 80). These shifts are frequent in English-Arabic translation due to contrasts in article and plural usage.

Catford's typology has been further developed and applied by later scholars, such as Nida (1964) and Delabastita (1989), who emphasize that translation shifts are natural results of structural divergence between languages rather than evidence of error. This framework therefore provides a rigorous linguistic lens through which translation can be analyzed not as mechanical substitution but as an adaptive process responsive to the grammatical and stylistic norms of each language.

III. METHODOLOGY

The data for this study consist of bilingual news texts translated between English and Arabic, reflecting the

reporting style of international organizations such as the United Nations and Al Jazeera. The selected corpus includes statements, interviews, and reports that exemplify formal institutional discourse. Each text was analysed manually to identify the grammatical and semantic shifts that occurred during translation. The analysis followed Catford's typology, focusing particularly on the following eight categories: level shifts, structure shifts, shift of agent, shift of verb tense, shift of sentence structure, class shifts, unit shifts, intra-system shifts, and semantic shifts.

Examples were extracted and compared between the source and target versions to determine how linguistic adjustments contributed to meaning preservation or transformation. The approach is qualitative and descriptive, aiming to reveal how translators negotiate equivalence across two typologically different languages.

IV. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Level Shifts

Level shifts represent a movement from grammatical to lexical expression or the reverse. For instance, an Arabic clause such as:

قد أصدر الأمين العام بيانا

may be rendered in English as:

The

Secretary-General issued a statement

where the modal *قد* (a grammatical particle implying completion) is expressed lexically by the past tense verb *issued*. Conversely, English modal constructions like *must be done* are often rendered in Arabic as *من الضروري أن يتم*, introducing a lexicalized phrase to express grammatical obligation. These shifts reflect the divergent ways the two languages encode aspect, modality, and tense.

4.2. Structure Shifts

Structure shifts occur when the grammatical organization of the sentence changes during translation. English typically follows a Subject–Verb–Object (SVO) structure, whereas Arabic frequently employs Verb–Subject–Object (VSO). For example:

The UN Security Council condemned the attack becomes.
أدان مجلس الأمن الهجوم

reversing the word order. This shift preserves meaning while adhering to the natural syntactic pattern of Arabic. Such structural flexibility underscores the translator's need to align form with the grammatical conventions of the target language.

4.3. Shift of Agent

A shift of agent occurs when the subject performing the action changes in translation. For instance, the English passive sentence:

The resolution was adopted by the Assembly may appear in Arabic as اعتمدت الجمعية القرار, where the grammatical agent becomes explicit and active. Arabic tends to favour explicit agency, while English often uses passivation for formality or thematic focus. This demonstrates a functional adaptation rather than literal equivalence.

4.4. Shift of Verb Tense

Verb tense shifts are among the most frequent changes observed between English and Arabic. English employs a rich tense system with distinct forms for past, present, and future, while Arabic relies more heavily on context and auxiliary markers. For example, *The Secretary-General will meet the delegation tomorrow* becomes يلتقي الأمين العام بالوفد غداً, using the present tense to indicate future action. This temporal adaptation is a natural consequence of Arabic's aspectual system, which conveys futurity through adverbials or context rather than morphological tense.

4.5. Shift of Sentence Structure

Shifts in sentence structure often arise due to stylistic and pragmatic factors. English sentences can be long and information-dense, whereas Arabic prefers concise clauses connected by coordination. For example: *The report, which was published after several consultations, emphasizes the need for immediate action* may be translated as يؤكد التقرير الصادر بعد مشاورات عدة على ضرورة التحرك الفوري. The English relative clause is transformed into a participial phrase in Arabic, demonstrating a structural condensation that preserves meaning while improving readability.

4.6. Class Shifts

A class shift occurs when a word in the source text changes grammatical category in the target text. For instance, the English adjective *necessary* becomes the Arabic noun ضرورة, as in *It is necessary to act immediately* → من الضروري التحرك فوراً. Such shifts are frequent due to differences in word formation and syntactic distribution between the two languages. They reveal how translators re-categorize lexical items to fit the morphological and syntactic norms of Arabic.

4.7. Unit Shifts

Unit shifts refer to changes in the rank of translation units. For example, the English word *internationally* may be rendered as على الصعيد الدولي, transforming a single adverb into a prepositional phrase. Similarly, Arabic compounds often expand into full clauses in English translation. This

reflects the different degrees of compactness and syntactic hierarchy in the two linguistic systems.

4.8. Intra-System Shifts

Intra-system shifts occur within grammatical systems that differ cross-linguistically, such as definiteness, number, and gender. English articles (*the, a, an*) have no exact counterparts in Arabic, which marks definiteness morphologically. Thus, *a meeting* is translated as اجتماع (indefinite) or الاجتماع (definite) depending on context. Another example involves pluralization: English collective nouns often remain singular in Arabic. These variations demonstrate how translators navigate systemic asymmetries between the two grammatical systems.

4.9. Semantic Shifts

Semantic shifts occur when the translator adapts or compresses meaning due to the absence of direct lexical equivalence. For instance, *resolution* in UN discourse may be rendered as مشروع قرار or قرار depending on whether the text refers to an adopted or proposed text. Similarly, idiomatic expressions such as *to hold talks* are translated as يجري محادثات, maintaining meaning through contextual substitution rather than literal rendering. These examples highlight the translator's role in negotiating semantic proximity rather than exact correspondence.

V. FINDINGS

The analysis reveals that translation shifts are inevitable and systematic in Arabic-English translation. Structure and tense shifts are the most frequent, reflecting fundamental grammatical differences between the two languages. Level, unit, and class shifts occur regularly as translators move between analytic English and synthetic Arabic forms. Intra-system and semantic shifts show how translators balance precision with readability in formal discourse.

Overall, the findings confirm that **translation equivalence** is functional and dynamic rather than formal. The translator's goal is to preserve the communicative intent and stylistic appropriateness of the text, not to replicate its structure verbatim. This aligns with Catford's assertion that translation involves "substitution of a text in one language by a text in another" rather than one-to-one correspondence.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that translating between English and Arabic within the context of UN news texts requires complex linguistic and cultural negotiation. Catford's framework provides a useful lens for identifying and categorizing the various shifts that occur in this process. The

research confirms that translation shifts—whether grammatical or semantic—are not signs of distortion but essential mechanisms for achieving equivalence across languages.

The dominance of structure and tense shifts underscores the translator's need to reconcile the differing grammatical systems of English and Arabic. Semantic and class shifts, meanwhile, reveal the creative flexibility required to convey nuanced meanings in institutional discourse.

Ultimately, translation in this context is not a matter of mechanical substitution but of **functional adaptation**. The translator acts as a linguistic mediator, ensuring that each shift, whether structural or semantic, contributes to maintaining meaning, tone, and communicative purpose. This reinforces the view that translation is both a linguistic science and an art of cross-cultural negotiation.

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Research on the Other Narrative in Nonverbal Symbols of Animated Films from the Perspective of Intercultural Communication

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Abstract— *In the era of the new media era, the nonverbal symbolic communication in animated films has become widely popular in contemporary social media, and its role is increasing indispensable. In intercultural communication, the traditional barriers of linguistic communication are gradually being dissolved by communication through language symbols carried out within the mobile internet framework, bringing about great changes in intercultural communication methods. Based on the relevant theories of intercultural communication, this paper focuses on the Otherness Narrative of nonverbal symbol as the research object, and then analyzes the dilemmas of the symbolic misinterpretation and stereotypes in intercultural communication. The aim is to provide theoretical reference for enhancing the effectiveness of intercultural communication in animated films.*



Keywords— *animated films, cultural decoding, intercultural communication, non-verbal symbols, the Other Narrative.*

I. INTRODUCTION

As for the rapid globalization, intercultural communication is necessary for cultural communication and interaction. As a unique form of cultural art, animated films can spread widely throughout the world with their rich imagination, vivid character images, and exciting story narratives, which are not limited by language or geography, thus becoming an important medium for intercultural communication.

In addition to the transmission of animated films with the help of linguistic symbols, an important part plays non-linguistic signs, which are significant for transcending cultural barriers and forming a view of the Cultural Other. Different countries and regions have their own

characteristics when using nonverbal symbols in animated films, and the portrayal of other cultures is naturally influenced by their own culture. This influence may cause the accurate presentation and understanding of the Cultural Other, or it may generate misunderstanding and prejudice.

This study intends to analyze the types, functions, and narrative strategies of nonverbal symbols in animated films, explaining how they achieve the representation, deconstruction, and reconstruction of the Cultural Other in intercultural communication. The findings are expected to provide a theoretical basis for improving the effectiveness of intercultural communication in animated films.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Interpretation of Core Concepts

2.1.1 Intercultural Communication

Research on intercultural communication emerged in the United States in the mid-1950s. American anthropologist Edward T. Hall first proposed the concept of intercultural communication in his book *The Silent Language*. Hall (1959, p. 206) believed that communication primarily conveys information through contextual cues and nonverbal symbols, emphasizing the role of culture implicit in time, space, and nonverbal behaviors. After the 1970s, with the expansion of the global media industry and transnational cultural trade, the research perspective expanded to the circulation of media and cultural products between countries and on a global scale, and the focus shifted to theoretical construction and cultural pattern analysis. In 1980, Geert Hofstede (1983) proposed the Cultural Dimensions Theory, which was later supplemented to six dimensions, becoming a classic framework for intercultural comparative research. In 1976, Hall (1976) further distinguished between "high-context culture" and "low-context culture", providing significant support for the study of communication models. In high-context cultures, the information is usually transmitted via nonverbal symbols, context, and history, while in low-context cultures, it is a more direct and clear verbal expression. This kind of theoretical division gives an important reference and theoretical basis to understand and compare the communication models in different cultural backgrounds, which is still being used as a research method in intercultural communication. Stella Ting-Toomey's (2003) Face-Negotiation Theory is about the differences in maintaining Face among different cultures in conflicts. Western cultures express their opinions directly and clearly and try to solve conflicts by themselves. In contrast, East Asian cultures value indirectness and saving face more, and they would usually choose to avoid hurting others' identities. Stuart Hall (1997) further deepened the understanding of cultural identity in his research, proposing that cultural identity is not fixed or only one kind, but fluid and multi-layered. Individuals constantly shape and adjust themselves while interacting with different kinds of culture.

2.1.2 The Other Narrative

The Other Narrative is a narrative strategy that observes, interprets, and exhibits foreign cultures from the perspective of otherness, with local culture as the reference. In the article *The Other Narrative in Cultural Differences*, the connotation of the Other Narrative is thoroughly explored, pointing out that it means treating the counterpart's culture as the object of narration in intercultural communication, and presenting that culture through understanding, interpreting, and narrating. The core of this narrative strategy lies in breaking cultural centralism and abandoning the self-centered cultural perspective in order to attempt to understand and interpret different cultures from the perspective of others. Animated films display the Other Narrative when the creators depict and present the cultures of other countries or ethnic groups through their own culture. This presentation may not be based on in-depth research and understanding of other cultures, and their own cultural prejudices may influence it.

III. THE OTHER NARRATIVE DIMENSION OF NONVERBAL SYMBOLS IN ANIMATED FILMS

3.1 Visual Symbols: The Concrete Representation of Cultural Other

3.1.1 Cultural Encoding and Decoding of Color Symbols

Semiotician Professor Zhao Yiheng (2013) pointed out that the essence of a symbol is to transmit some sort of meaning by means of a sort of tool. Visual symbols also possess this characteristic. Judging whether an element is a visual symbol depends on whether it transmits information through visual channels. Simply put, anything people can see and understand, like words, images, or colors combined, is called a visual symbol. Color plays an extremely important role in animated films. Not only creates atmosphere and express emotions, but it also has a lot of cultural connotations, serving as an important means to concretely represent the Cultural Other. People have different perceptions and symbolic meanings for the same colors in different cultures, and these differences can be very obvious in the use of color in animated films.

In Eastern culture, red is usually regarded as a symbol of joy, auspiciousness and prosperity, and it has been fully

demonstrated in many animated films. In *Monkey King: Hero is Back*, the Chinese animated film, Sun Wukong's costume is mainly red. The red cloak billows in the wind, not only highlighting Sun Wukong's bravery and powerful aura but also conveying the fondness and reverence for red in traditional Chinese culture. In Western culture, however, red is often associated with concepts such as danger, warning and passion. In Disney's animated film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the Queen's red cape contrasts sharply with her black robe. The red cape symbolizes the Queen's evil, jealousy and intense possessiveness, bringing a strong visual impact and psychological hint to the audience. This different interpretation of red reflects the differences in values, aesthetics and other aspects between Eastern and Western cultures.

Through ingenious color configuration, animated films construct unique scenes of Cultural Other, enabling audiences to initially understand and perceive foreign cultures through visual perception. *Coco* is set against the backdrop of Mexico's Day of the Dead, using a lot of colors characteristic of traditional Mexican culture, such as orange marigolds and the blue Land of the Dead. The endless orange marigolds in the film not only create a strong festive atmosphere, but also concretely present Mexicans' unique views on life and death to the audience. The blue Land of the Dead gives a sense of mystery and depth, forming a sharp contrast with the real world, and further reinforcing the film's expression of the Mexican perspective on life and death. In the process of watching the film, the audience seems to be in a Mexican cultural context through these color symbols, gaining a more intuitive understanding of its traditional culture and values.

3.1.2 Intercultural Translation of Symbolic Metaphors

In addition to color symbols, visual symbols such as totems, costumes and architecture in animated films also carry rich cultural connotations. They convey the deep meaning of Cultural Other to the audience through symbolic metaphors. In the process of intercultural communication, these symbols need to be skillfully translated to adapt to the understanding and acceptance of audiences from different cultural backgrounds. Totem culture encompasses various cultural phenomena derived from totemic concepts (Zhang, 2023). The *Kung Fu*

Panda film series is a classic example of intercultural translation of symbolic metaphors. In the films, the panda Po, as the protagonist, is himself an important symbol of Chinese culture. The panda, China's national treasure, represents the country's unique biological resources and cultural characteristics. Through the careful portrayal of the panda image, the films vividly showcase its cute, kind and brave personality traits, enabling global audiences to have a deeper understanding of the values such as friendliness and resilience in Chinese culture.

The films also integrate a wealth of traditional Chinese cultural elements, such as Chinese-style gardens and Peking Opera makeups. The exquisite layout of Chinese-style gardens, as well as the rich colors and patterns of Peking Opera makeups, have become important symbols to present Chinese culture in the film. These symbols have become more vivid and interesting through exaggerated and anthropomorphic treatments, making them easier to accept and understand by global audiences. This successfully completes the process of demystification of Cultural Other.

3.2 Auditory Symbols: Intercultural Bridge for Emotional Resonance

3.2.1 Cultural Identification and Emotional Transmission of Musical Symbols

At the auditory level, by reducing dialogue lines and weakening linguistic symbols with strong cultural identification, there is a greater reliance on nonverbal elements such as music, sound effects, expressions and actions to transmit emotions and information (Huang, 2025). As an important auditory symbol, music in animated films can directly arouse the audience's emotional association with the Cultural Other. The musical styles and characteristic musical instruments from different regions constitute the cultural labels of musical symbols, becoming an important means for animated films to display Cultural Other.

In *Coco*, traditional Mexican musical instruments like guitars and trumpets run throughout the film, adding a rich Mexican flavor. The musical melodies in the film incorporate elements of traditional Mexican music, such as Latin rhythms and folk melodies. These melodies not only possess strong regional characteristics, but also can touch the audience's emotions and arouse resonance. The theme

song *Remember Me* in the film expresses the longing for departed loved ones with its affectionate melody and touching lyrics. This emotion is universal to human audiences from any cultural background, who can be moved by the sentiment conveyed by the song.

Beyond characteristic instruments and traditional melodies, the animated film *The Red Turtle* only relies on environmental sound effects and a minimalist soundtrack to create an emotional atmosphere, avoiding language barriers and achieving Intercultural emotional transmission. The film features almost no dialogue. Instead, it creates an emotional atmosphere of loneliness, tranquility, and hope through environmental sound effects such as the sound of waves, bird songs and wind, along with a minimalist soundtrack. When watching the film, the audience does not need to rely on language to perceive the emotional changes within the protagonist through these auditory symbols and resonate emotionally with the characters in the film. This dialogue-free expression breaks down the language barrier, allowing the film to transcend intercultural boundaries.

3.2.2 Narrative Tension of Silence and Pauses

As a special auditory symbol, silence has a universal emotional expression function in intercultural contexts. It can leave more thinking space for the audience, enhance intercultural emotional resonance while allowing personalized interpretation. In the Japanese animated film *5 Centimeters per Second*, moments of silence and pauses appear frequently. These instances not only create a faint atmosphere of sadness and melancholy, but also invite audiences to ponder deeply on themes such as love, growth, and life. When watching the film, audiences from different cultural backgrounds may have different understandings and perceptions of these scenes of silence and pause due to their own life experiences and cultural differences. Yet, each can find elements that resonate with their own emotions within them, thereby achieving intercultural emotional exchange and resonance.

IV. DILEMMAS AND OPTIMIZATION PATHS OF THE OTHER NARRATIVE

4.1 Symbol Misinterpretation and Stereotypes in Intercultural Communication

According to intercultural communication theory, the use of cultural symbols should take into account the

cultural background and cognitive habits of the audience to reduce the phenomenon of Cultural Discount (Hall, 2015). The cultural context dependence of nonverbal symbols in animated films may lead to misinterpretation, which in turn triggers the generation of stereotypes. When depicting Eastern culture, Western animated films often engage in a symbolic construction of Eastern mysticism. In Disney's animated film *Mulan*, the film employs Eastern cultural elements such as feng shui and talismans to portray the mysterious aspects of Eastern culture. Feng shui and talismans carry rich philosophical and religious meanings within Eastern culture, but in the film, they are more used as a visual spectacle to attract the audience's attention. This approach is likely to strengthen Western audiences' stereotypes of Eastern culture, simply reductively framing it as mysterious, ancient and incomprehensible. This symbolic construction from an Orientalist perspective not only fails to accurately convey the essence of Eastern culture but may also deepen misunderstandings and estrangement between different cultures. Once formed, stereotypes will have a profound impact on the audience's cognition, hindering genuine communication and understanding between different cultures.

4.2 Narrative Strategies for Balancing Cultural Specificity and Universality

4.2.1 In-Depth Cultural Decoding

In order to avoid symbol misinterpretation and stereotypes, creators of animated films need to conduct in-depth research on the symbolic connotations of the Cultural Other. This involves thorough cultural decoding rather than superficially appropriating cultural elements. When the slang, historical allusions, or social customs included in a work exceed the cognitive scope of audiences from different cultures, its artistic and commercial value continuously diminishes during the dissemination process (Chen, 2025, p53). Only by accurately understanding and grasping the core values and deeper meanings of Cultural Other can they skillfully integrate into the narrative of animated films, ensuring that cultural symbols truly serve the underlying narrative logic.

The Chinese animated film *Big Fish & Begonia* is a model of cultural decoding. Inspired by the traditional Chinese cultural saying "When the spring fades and autumn arrives, the begonia blooms", the film integrates a

large number of traditional Chinese cultural elements, such as Fujian Tulou, the philosophical ideas from Zhuangzi's *A Happy Excursion*, and mythical beasts from *Fantastic Creatures of the Mountains and Seas*. Through in-depth excavation and ingenious application of these cultural elements, the film shows the unique understanding of nature, life and love in traditional Chinese culture. Like Fujian Tulou, a typical form of traditional Chinese architecture, which is both the living space for the characters in the film and a symbol of the importance of family and reunion in traditional Chinese culture. Zhuangzi's *A Happy Excursion Philosophy* runs throughout the whole movie, which is to pursue freedom and transcendence in traditional Chinese culture. Mythical beasts from *Fantastic Creatures of the Mountains and Seas*, like dragons, phoenixes and Kunpeng, which are designed uniquely and have mysterious power, adding a lot of mythical elements. This profound decryption and organic integration of cultural elements creates a fictitious realm filled with the cultural charm of traditional Chinese culture by *Big Fish & Begonia*. It lets the viewers experience the full extent of the traditional Chinese cultural legacy as they enjoy the film.

4.2.2 Anchoring Universal Emotions

Apart from cultural decoding that goes deep into the core of culture, animated films can form an emotional bond with people around the world despite different cultures by anchoring to emotions that are universally common. Empathy communication is the process by which individuals understand and resonate with each other's emotions and feelings (Zhi, 2024, p.51). This kind of communication is not restricted to a particular culture, place, or language so that people coming from various cultures can understand it. Animated films make universal emotions into specific visual and audio images through non-verbal symbols, so as to cause emotional resonance among the audience.

Japanese animation films such as *Spirited Away* that touches inner world of the people all around the world about growing up, having courage, being human. In the movie, her eyes full of determination and bravery when encountering the unknown terror and sincere feelings for Haku and No-face give audience their pains and joys of growing up and the good and evil of humankind. Many

nonverbal symbols in the movie are about growth. Take for example the fantasy scene design of the mysterious world, it not only contains a lot of imagination, but also forms a tense and mysterious atmosphere, corresponding to Chihiro's adventurous journey. Use music, either melodious or suspenseful, according to the story and the character's emotions change, which enhances the film's emotions. The meticulous design of character movements vividly shows Chihiro's psychological evolution, from initial timidity and hesitation to later bravery and resilience, expressed through her body language and facial expressions. Through the deliberate and skillful use of these nonverbal symbols, *Spirited Away* successfully conveys the universal emotion of growth to global audiences. As viewers immerse themselves in the film, they find their own shadows in Chihiro's experience.

V. CONCLUSION

In the future, intercultural dissemination of animated films should be centered around non-verbal symbols, breaking free from cultural centrism biases and the Other Narrative to move from a one-way presentation approach to a two-way mutual learning model. Creators need to deeply explore the true meaning behind the cultures that are different from our own and use precise symbolic language to express their core values and meanings, skillfully utilizing the power of cross-cultural communication. Nonverbal symbols should become emotional bridges, helping people from different countries to appreciate the charm of foreign culture and to discover common spiritual pursuits. In this way, animation films will only be able to break away from the shackles of cultural discount and become an important force in the process of cultural exchange, helping to dissolve cultural barriers. Amid the waves of intercultural communication, they could promote a cultural community that's founded on mutual comprehension and respect so that different civilizations may have harmonious interaction and mutual appreciation within the interplay of light and shadow.

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Narrating Ambiguity: Spatial and Spectral Politics in Mario Vargas Llosa's *The Green House*

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Abstract— This paper proposes that in Llosa's *The Green House* the “movement” of narratives map terrains of power-invested ideological and discursive spaces which are allegories of postcolonial Peru. However, the multiple fragments of narrative time-lines challenge any understanding of these spaces as seamless and cohesive. I argue that the rhizomatic narrative courses tease out the discrepancies and contradictions inherent in modernity as a historical and social project, serving the interests of a liberal market economy and neo liberal state. The generic linearity of spatial allegories with its dominant voices and discourses of progress, development, and humanistic ethics disintegrates through hauntings of diverse perspectives and narrative discourses that reveal the past's systemic excesses of violence, exploitation, exclusion, and normalization. By relating insights from spatial theories, specifically, literary cartography and geocriticism, to views of allegory as symbolic places of embodied movement infused with meaningful spatio-temporal memories and interactions of power, the idea of spatial allegories as discourse is employed to provide a critical frame for reading the text. Further, the concept of specters offers possibilities for understanding spaces as marked by tangible and intangible traces left by historical-political events and ideologies, which question the State's claims of democracy and justice. A spatial reading of the text also reveals an ambiguity in Llosa's portrayal of Latin American modernity, visible in the interpenetrative, dialectical spatial structures and geographies. This, I claim, is an artistic response of the novel to the challenges of adequately portraying the complexities of spaces and voices in postcolonial Peru.



Keywords— Cartography, Spatial allegory, Spatial narratives, Spectres, Mario Vargas Llosa

I. INTRODUCTION

Mario Vargas Llosa's *The Green House* (1968) is a monumental work of Latin American literature that delves into the socio-political realities of Peru, painting a vivid portrait of exploitation, power dynamics and cultural disintegration in the wake of neo-colonialism and emerging neo-liberal capitalism. The narrative shifts fluidly between the arid desert town of Piura, the lush Amazon jungles, and the jungle outpost of Santa Maria de Nieva. The story is narrated in a fluid non-chronological manner interweaving the past and the present through disjointed conversations from different time periods by characters who assume different personas, at various points of the narratives and phases of their lives, so that they

inhabit several places simultaneously leading to a story that is complex and layered. This study argues that in Llosa's *The Green House* the “movement” of narratives map terrains of power-invested ideological and discursive spaces which are allegories of postcolonial Peru. The generic linearity of spatial allegories with its dominant voices and discourses of progress, development, and humanistic ethics disintegrates through hauntings of multiple perspectives and narrative discourses that reveal modernity's systemic excesses of violence, devaluation, exploitation, exclusion, and normalization. In addition, these tangible and spatially-defined geographies and structures reveal the ambiguous and contradictory nature of modernity in Latin America through a kind of interpenetrative, dialectical structure.

II. METHODOLOGY

The framework of this analysis weaves together theories of space and allegory, using Foucault's discourse analysis to read narrative 'movement,' and its spectral response to power. In literature, representations of places are not mere descriptions of real or imaginary spaces. They also capture, are permeated with the experiences of place and outside-of-place, the interrelatedness between lived experience and a more abstract or unrepresentable spatial network that subtly or directly shapes it (Tally, 2014, p. x) [1]. And then all descriptions take place in time, demanding a coherence between spatial description and temporal narration. In such literary spatio-temporal scapes, varying clusters of historical, political, economic and societal development, sequences, and periods give rise to discursive practices, materially and imaginatively experienced as text.

Henri Lefebvre (1991) [2] challenged the binary notions of real/concrete and imagined/abstract spaces by introducing the third term of lived space which incorporated the subjective and lived experiences of individuals within that space. Later, Edward Soja (1996) [3] introduced the concept of 'thirdspace,' a space of possibility, negotiation, transaction, and redefinition; a dynamic and fluid realm shaped by social, cultural, and personal experiences. In doing so, both of them, in their own way, argue that space is understood as physical, mental and social landscape of users in everyday life, which is imbued with meaning in place-bound social practices, influenced by wider economic and political processes, and which emerges through processes that operate over varying spatial and temporal scales.

However, it was Michel Foucault who viewed space as "fundamental in any exercise of power" (Gregory, 1994, pp. 62-63) [4]. His analysis of architectural and urban spaces in a surveillant society, in which sets of relations are exchanged and circulated are in fact attempts to chart historically-specific discursive transactions that generate meanings through the accumulation and centralization of particular forms of knowledge; significations that indicate established sites of power. This lent to space both metaphoric and material dimensions. And the transformation from metaphor to allegory is only one of an extended movement of indirection or abstraction

Ordered times that 'take place' and, distinct loci that represent both individual and collective notions of what is appropriate to remember are infused into the places of allegory. These loci facilitate movement and this "kinesis of allegory" is a necessary component of appropriating the symbolic meaning of an "object or event" (Clifford, 1974, p. 12) [5]. The symbolic significations are endowed with epistemological and cultural legitimacy through the way

they treat the places as metaphors that order the social or political or religious landscape. So, allegories as forms of discourse create, plot, and define spaces imbued with power configurations, carrying complex ideas, emotions, and intentions, and shaping social interactions. Richard Angelo Bergen (2022) in a similar vein, identifies in medieval and early modern allegorical narratives a spatial trope in which several layers of temporality are self-consciously embodied in the movement of an allegorical world, spatially, externalizing ideas about individual and collective memory (p. 6) [6]. Both Clifford and Bergen emphasise embodied movement, that is, the progress of narrative through and in space, to create worlds. But their analyses are limited to the generic aspects and stylistic devices of allegory that tend to pose allegory and space in opposition to each other.

Walter Benjamin's apprehensions about a history in danger of disintegration and loss of purpose led him to theorize allegory as a narrative response in which physical things become symbolic signs of mortality and fragmented meaning (Cowan, 1981, p. 110) [7]. Subsequently, the past continues to persist as "remains" or shards, appearing in new contexts and imbuing physical objects, the process an expression of the inaccessibility of truth (Cowan, 1981, p. 110, 115) [7]. Benjamin's allegory images spaces as material objects that create a spatial-temporal interruption at once revelatory of the inherent contradiction of something (Wolf, 2025) [8]. Jacques Derrida (1994) builds upon and extends Benjamin's critique of historical continuity through the concept of the specter, in the context of Marxism persisting as a ghost haunting the "New World Order," global capitalism (p. viii) [9]. The specter for him is an assertion of the active presence and remnants of an unresolved past in the present as fragments and/or as inherited "injustices" (Derrida, 1994, p. 80) [9]. Derrida's specter is a ghostly presence that haunts both material and symbolic spaces, spatializing the past by inhabiting and destabilizing existing spaces, forcing a recognition of the present as a site of historical struggles and ethical obligations.

As forms of discourse, allegories bring worlds patterned by power interactions into existence. If the movement of the worlds, in and through them, embody layered temporalities of memories, values, and ideas spatialized as events, then it follows that the fragmentation of these allegorical spaces by discontinuities of (narrative) movements is nothing short of a Benjaminite "shock" (Benjamin as cited in Wolf, 2025) [8]. What ensues from this are revenants of memories, otherings, exclusions, and forgettings brought into the present through hauntings, a spectral language emerging out of the folds of fractured timelines and destabilized geo-spatialities, rendering impermanent any attempt at a cohesive vision.

III. ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

In *The Green House* the Amazonian jungles with their unpredictable rains, ghost trees, and 'savage' natives, the sand-raining deserts, and the undulating rivers interspersed with isolated seasonal islands, dominate the landscape. The trading outpost of Santa Maria de Nieva and the sandstorm beaten town of Piura which resist the encroaching wilderness have been deterministically read as binary oppositions to the untamed (De Castro, 2010) [10], a parodic depiction which amounts to "a hurtful laugh about the cultural enterprise of man in Modernity" (Rodrigo Cánovas as cited in Rogers, 2016, p. 10) [11]. However, I argue that these spaces are not notional juxtapositions of dichotomies of barbarism vs civilization, tradition vs modern, or colonial vs postcolonial, in conflict with each other. Rather, they infiltrate each other; the intractability of the land, and attempts to traverse and chart it is an aesthetic response to the inadequacy of narrating postcolonial Peru, and the unwieldiness of the framework of the novel to accommodate its diverse spaces and voices. This dilemma is cartographically charted by Don Aquilino and the fugitive Fushía's journey through the Marañón to the leper colony at San Pablo. Hiding from the soldiers, ducking low boughs of trees, lost among the channels of the Marañón through landscapes that are part of the narrative unfolding of the past, these memory pathways open up bits and pieces of conversations, confessions, monologues from different time frames, in different locales, varied perspectives that run onto each other, providing glimpses of the past and history of the region. The juxtaposition of narrators and narratives responding to the same event enlarges perspectival insights, complicating any understanding of it.

Narratives, like maps, are meaningful because they are always-already situated in some sort of spatiotemporal context (Tally 30) [1]. As spatial representations, they aid our attempts to give meaningful form to the world in which we live. The rhizomatic narrative routes Aquilino and Fushía's journey charts are intertwined with spaces infused with discourses of power and conflict. Here, the concept of 'rhizomatic' is used both in the sense of a non-linear narrative structure that can be entered into at any point to chart connections with other points (Stivale, 2005, p.150, 52) [12], as well as to refer to networks that establish "connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power and circumstances relative to...social struggles" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 5, 7) [13]. The social dimensions of space mapped by the heterogeneity of narratives in the context of Llosa's work is to be understood, as Massey puts it, in the sense of engagement within a multiplicity- spheres where diversity, subordination, conflicting interests are continuously produced and reproduced (Massey, 2008, p. 61) [14]. Santa Maria de

Nieva is the military-cum-trading outpost from where the soldiers launch out from the Borja garrison into the jungles to carry out a variety of missions in the service of the State. It is a marshy desolate place, but a nerve centre so to say, where a liberal market economy overseeing the collection and distribution of Amazonian raw materials and peoples from the peripheral regions to the urban centres, overlap with 'winning souls for God' (Llosa, 2008, p. 103) [15], and suppressing dissent - a supplement of the surveillant political state, reproducing the structure of crony-state capitalism.

Despite the overriding display of power and social control, of linear progress and development, of arrivals and departures, the space is fraught with ruptures. The permanent edifices of power in Santa Maria de Nieva conceal the transitional nature of the space for humans and/as goods. There is a succession of Governors and army officers on 'transfer.' The place is one of the many staging areas for plundering Amazonian resources and inhabitants, not only by the State but also by "foreigners, some Englishmen," citing botanical research that had ruined the Amazon region (Llosa, 2008, p. 147) [15]. This transitional state of politics and economy infuses the spatial geography of the town. It is a counter-site, a simultaneous representation and inversion of the sites that it reflects and speaks about (Foucault, 1984, p. 3-4) [16].

Outside of the urban centres of power, yet legitimized by that same power, such a border heterotopia can only be a space of power's excesses and denial of the 'human' through exclusion. It is here that Jum is brought to after being assaulted and captured by an expedition of soldiers, his hair - a symbol of Aguaruna pride - shaved, tied to the flagpole in the square, whipped, and left hanging for hours as punishment for beating up a Corporal and refusing to sell rubber to the agents (Llosa, 2008, pp. 122-24; 145-47) [15]. The little girl with him is forcefully taken away to the Mission, a site where the soul, the mind, and the body are deracinated: "'They cut off his hair to get rid of the devil he had inside of him.' Sister Angelica said....in the case of the little Indian girls to get rid of the lice." (p. 77) [15]. Implicit are colonial and postcolonial discursive linking of filth with crime, concerns of order, and immorality important to the broader project of modernity (McFarlane, 2008) [17]. And to borrow McFarlane's argument, the biopolitics of hygiene is not just about fear over illness, disease, or savagery, but about facilitating the production of the Mission/town in tune with capitalism's impetus (p. 25) [17].

The hidden violence of discourse and its visible expressions often mistakenly associated with the historical discourse of conquest as territorial acquisition of a previously existing population (Urioste, 2000, p. 241) [18], overlooks the

spatialization of violence as an effect of more recent attempts by the State to subdue already existing populations unwilling to comply with the dominant national project. Taking a cue from Edwin Wilmsen (Massey, 2008, p. 67) [14], we can argue that a network of varying spatial configurations existed even before the arrival of the so-called 'modern' civilisation. Attempts to subdue the natives through violence are not very different from the continuing historical tensions, animosities and conflicts between the ethnic groups the Aguarunas, the Shapras and the Huambisas. The interconnections between the latter expose the lay of the land figuratively and literally in the ascriptions of isolation, and presupposed poverty of "garbage pupils" (Llosa, 2008, p. 37, 290) [15], as legacies, both discursive and material, of colonialism, carried forward by the postcolonial state. The categories of "savage" and "polycephalic animals" (p. 19) [15] to refer to native girls in the Mission are constructions carried over from colonialism's social and allied evolutionary discourses. The girls are interpellated by religion and capitalism as "heathens," "souls for God," "family servants" (p. 99, 103) [15]. And their intersection by the military in carrying out the project of modernity is marked by ethical ambiguity: "It wasn't right to snatch...children like that" "It was for their own good... To teach them how to dress, read, and talk like Christians" (p. 111) [15]. Implicit in these categories are conceptualisations of space and time that were central to the construction of a particular form of power/knowledge.

The multiple narrative trajectories criss-crossing this space introduce into it an 'excess' of dissonant narratives, a challenge to the geography of modernity. One such narrative is the discursive mode of confession which is intrinsically related to truth and power. The convent, which combines a "heterotopia of compensation" in attempting to create a space that is other, as perfect, as well-arranged in contrast to the outpost which is ill-constructed and unwieldy, as well as a space of "illusion" where this perfection is constantly exposed as illusory, is the site of the disciplinary confession ritual/technology (Foucault, 1984, p. 8) [16]. The governor of Nieva, Fabio Cuesta seeking an audience with the Mother Superior to request girls from the convent for Dr. Portillo's wife in Iquitos who would be made to "work like animals," hardly paid a cent, "felt he was in a confessional" (Llosa, 2008, p. 105) [15]. However, given the inherently paradoxical nature of this space, the discursive mode of confession which is the equivalent of the religious experience (Greenblatt, 2005, p. 245) [19] can no longer maintain its claim to absolute integrity. It is instead invoked not as the formal auricular rite of penitence, nor as a generalised self-scrutiny with the aim of reconciliation with a [spiritual] community, but as a discursive game to expose the fabrications of power. Questioned about her role

in the escape of the two Aguaruna girls from the Mission, Bonifacia's denial pre-empts the truth-and-submission objective of the confession through insistence on the unreliability of language as either lost language or "stories:"

...And Bonifacia could barely understand them, Mother, because they spoke in such a strange way. Here they would have something to eat every day and *they we* want to leave, here they would be happy and *they we* want to leave, and she began to tell them stories about the Infant Jesus that the little Indians liked so much, Mother [emphasis mine].

"That's what you're best at." The Mother Superior said. "Telling stories.... (Llosa. 2008. p. 75) [15]

Even as she affirms the purpose of the Mission she simultaneously refutes its apparent moral vision with the first and third person pronouns slipping into each other in a game of loss of language. At a deeper level it recalls a history of stolen origins and forced indigenous assimilation. The power structures inscribed in the confession rite which determine what is 'truth' are confronted by rendering confession into a performative utterance, its mimicry exposing authority's right to judge and diminish the confessant as hypocritical.

The confession mode is a connecting thread which links different spaces. In the jungles extending beyond the outpost, Aquilino calls himself Lalita's "confessor" (Llosa, 2008, p. 80) [15]. Their exchanges retrieved by the geo-memories plotted by Aquilino's and Fushía's fugitive journey on the river, evoke individual histories and those of their friendship, rhizome-like, filling the gaps in preceding narratives, offering multiple perspectival entry points into the story. Giving birth in the jungle with Aquilino as midwife, Lalita's breathless questions punctuated by birthing pains elicit a stream of fragmented memories and conversations (pp. 244-45) [15]. They serve as a form of commentary that uses the past to speak indirectly about the present, a quality typical to allegory. It adheres to what James Clifford, in the context of ethnography, argues about allegory as "a practice in which a narrative...continuously refers to another pattern of ideas or events" (pp. 99-100) [5]. Considering the extent to which these narrative representations are "convincing," they are "extended metaphors, patterns of associations that point to coherent (theoretical, aesthetic, moral) additional meanings" (p. 100) [5].

Piura, situated on the Malecon river, is surprisingly not part of the narrative waterways of Aquilino and Fushía's journey. A pioneering town, it is a place whose geocritical coordinates are mapped and policed by cultural codes of class, race and morality, by shared stories and rituals. Buffeted by winds and raining sand at dusk, isolated from

the rest of the country by lack of roads, the long trips on horseback, and bandit attacks (Llosa, 200, p. 27) [15], it is a space which carries the markers of modernity in its spatialization of economy, yet bounded by the templates of an earlier social and cultural ethos apparent in its pre-industrial-like urban layout.

It is into this ordered, entrenched universe lacking “women and nighttime” (Llosa, 2008, p. 27) [15], surrounded by the desert with its shifting sand dunes which seem to have a life of its own, that the mysterious Don Anselmo, capitalism's purveyor, arrives on an almost-dead mule and builds a brothel, the Green House, in the desert, on the other side of the river at the edge of Piura. Although the original Green House no longer exists in the present, in Mangache tales it was said to be situated near the other side of the Old Bridge, “growing, ripening” like a “living organism” (p. 88) [15], its green colour giving “the countryside a refreshing, a vegetable, an almost liquid note” creating the illusion of an oasis in the desert. This liminal space, with its inherent surreality is a distortion of the familiar moral and socio-cultural codes that sustain the ordered world of Piura. Charged with mystery and power, it is a heterotopic space of illusion (Foucault, 1984, p. 8) [16] catering to desires and fantasies, facilitating the consumption of female sexual bodies, companionship, validating masculinity and providing a temporary escape from societal norms. It also underscores the complex power dynamics in the constructedness of ‘ordinary’ life, with the site of the religious represented by Father Garcia who “stigmatized license with verses from the Bible” (p. 86) [15] coming into confrontation with the sites of law and governance represented by the Chief of Police and the Mayor. These sites are productive forces that shape material, social and mental spaces.

The Green House is also the threshold moment of the arrival of aggressive capitalism to Piura that shares a complicated relation with the aforementioned sites. As its clientele increase, Don Anselmo's prosperity is “translated into a horizontal and vertical expansion” of the brothel (Llosa, 2008, p. 88) [15], space measured, planned, and commodified for the purposes of capital accumulation. Capital reorders social framework, time and relationships. The brothel is a site of consumption where bodies, food and music sourced with meticulous care from both outside and within Piura serve to enhance an atmosphere of suspended reality that is characteristic of thresholds. Contributing to its sense of impermanence are the names of the inmates, ‘Firefly,’ ‘Froggy,’ ‘Flower,’ ‘Butterfly,’ an indication of the depersonalisation of identities in an economy built on desires and their reification as objects of commerce. Yet, as with all thresholds, it carries the paradoxical function of physically and symbolically connecting and separating

spaces. The tower of the brothel in which Don Anselmo lives, access to which is prohibited to all, in a panopticon-like fashion allows him to survey “the parade of visitors through the desert... those hungry beasts” (p. 89) [15], and the distant expanse of the town. The all-permeating presence of the brothel creates a thriving economy of beggars, vendors, tramps and voyeurs around it. It simultaneously effects a transition in Piura which with the influx of outsiders changes the look of the city and makes the streets dangerous. The discourse of the brothel is built on those of moral anxiety and stigma, political and economic freedom and legality, and the conflicting portrayal of sex work as a form of exploitation and a consensual occupation.

Burnt down to the ground by a mob of angry Gallinazo women after the discovery of the dead, missing blind-mute child, Antonia, kidnapped away by Don Anselmo to the brothel, all physical and geographical traces of the Green House are erased. In avoiding the neighbourhoods near the river, it is “as if he had decided to live far from his memories and the desert” (Llosa, 2008, p. 223) [15], an indication of how space and movement are tied to the constitution and retrieval of memory. Blinded by age and reduced to penury, Don Anselmo becomes a harp player, a familiar figure frequenting chicha bars, and is eventually hired by Chunga, his daughter with Antonia, proprietor of the new Green House. When asked about his brothel, the harp player denies its existence: “there never was any fire, any Green House....People made it all up boys” (p. 209) [15]. The rapid urbanisation of Piura is predicated on a similar geocritical language of violence, forgetting and palimpsestic specters. Working class neighbourhoods disappear or mysteriously burn down overnight, supplanted by wealthy ones inhabited by whites, as locals are driven out by administrative and law and order authorities. With the exception of the Mangacheria district, there is a simultaneous reconfiguration of social and moral values. Along with the stores, hotels and residential neighbourhoods, brothels proliferate, as demoralised parish priests and ladies give up protesting. The changes in urban space are coterminous with an exacerbated commodification of sexual acts and bodies driven by gender, age-related and racial inequalities, and exploitation in a profit-oriented human flow of liberal capitalist economy.

The new Green House run by Chunga, behind the stadium at the edge of the city in a poor suburb, “rises up, singular and central, like a cathedral” (Llosa, 2008, p.126) [15]. However, the atmosphere it evokes is not just a comment on any latent discourse of morality and sexuality. The cannibalistic discourse of the brothel, in the description of Mulata Sandra with “her red gums, her gold teeth,”

suddenly falling on a young man “like a giant cat, kissing him avidly on the mouth,” and he “struggling in her dark arms, a fly in a spider’s web” and the champs holding him, “here he was Sandra, we give him to you, eat him up raw, she was kissing him, biting” (p. 170) [15], leading to a kind of convulsive enthusiasm invading the group, is an affect of the crisis in capitalism in the present. Don Anselmo’s kidnapping and subsequent abuse of the blind-mute Antonia; Wildflower/ Bonifacia’s journey from the jungles to the brothel; Lalita’s forced reproductive labour despite not wanting any more children; indigenous children and Urakusa women abused by the military in the course of operations on indigenous villages; the soldiers sexually assaulting washerwomen and servant girls in the derelict spaces between the brothel and the Grau barracks, are not notations of random crises of inequality, precarity, social reproduction, migration, racialised violence, and militarism in Peru, but as Nancy Fraser would argue, a “crisis of the entire societal order in which all those calamities converge, exacerbating one another and threatening to swallow us whole” (Fraser, 2002, p. 17) [20]. It brings together in a single frame all the oppressions, contradictions, and conflicts of the present conjuncture, accumulated through history, underscoring how differing configurations of structural and systemic injustice remain entrenched over time. Class exploitation, gender domination and racial oppression are by-products as well as causal factors in a spatialised chain of events that enables cannibalistic capitalism.

The fragmented polyvocal narratives decontextualize events freeing them from their moorings into a state of flux so that they spread across different time-lines and spatialities, underscoring the unfinished business of history. Don Anselmo’s reinstatement into society is facilitated by a change in the affective landscape of Piura accompanying the burning of the Green House and the discovery of the baby. However, the transformation of the urban landscape also brings about a change in situated ethics and in memory. This is reflected in Dr Zevallos recounting of the incident years later, after the death of Don Anselmo, to Father Garcia that he “came to feel sorrier for Anselmo than for Antonia....If you could have seen him, kicking and kissing my feet so I’d save the girl, you would have taken pity on him too” (Llosa, 2008, p. 392) [15]. The attempt at normalization through a discourse of humanistic ethics is however complicated by Don Anselmo’s confessional soliloquy which manifests as a fractured memory of his abduction and seduction of Antonia: “Open your arms, receive her, see how her head leans on your shoulder...at the same time, careful...kiss her...don’t be frightened...I love you, don’t cry...her posture is docile again...And then steal her away...you will take care of her...she will be

happy with you....” (p. 325) [15]. The use of ‘you’ in the self-reflective context indicates a subconscious effort to create emotional distance from what he knows is an ethical perversion. The projection of experience to make it seem universal attempts to create a sense of shared experience, but instead evokes horror and implicates him in this monstrous act.

Other specters of neglected injustices fracture the narrative: Lituma’s seduction of Bonifacia in Santa Maria de Nieva, and Josefino’s forced seduction of a pregnant Bonifacia are lingering memories of trauma that refuse to disappear. As ethical coordinates against erasure and forgetting, specters defer the exhaustion and expropriation of the past that tend to make current norms and power structures seem natural, continuous, and legitimate. Dr. Zevallos’ attempt to read “love” and complicity into the relationship between Don Anselmo and Antonia, is countered by Father Garcia’s “Now you think it’s normal?” (Llosa, 2008, p. 394) [15], “He’s discovered with age that there’s nothing bad in the world” (p. 397) [15]. Ironically, the discourse of religious ethics appears to be the only counter to the supposedly ‘secular’ ethics of capitalism. But this reproof too dissipates as an aged Father Garcia at Angélica Mercedes’ establishment in the Mangachería district, willingly offers to conduct the funeral of Don Anselmo despite his earlier moral outbursts. Meanwhile, Don Aquilino and Fushía’s journey ends at the leper colony at San Pablo. With Aquilino’s visits becoming fewer as the years pass, conversations become sparse and inconsistent, fragmented bits and pieces of memories of peoples and places. The final image of the ulcerous, disfigured Fushía, “curved, ovoid...purple, violet, iridescent” (p. 367) [15], and silent, captures the dehumanizing and enervating effects of cannibalistic modernity. Aquilino’s “I keep on forgetting everything, I can’t keep track of things. I’m old, man” (p. 365) [15], signals in a certain sense the narrative limits of restituting ‘truth,’ and the closure of spatio-temporal scapes as a commentary on power’s attempt at stabilizing resistant discourses.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the multiple narrative trajectories in *The Green House* challenge the dominant discourses mirrored in the surface, linear geography of modernity. By spatialising voices located outside the accepted speaking-space of modernity it fractures the power-geometry of dominant discourses and helps expose and undermine their power/knowledge relations. Here, spatial discourses are grounded on a geocritical language of hidden or erased histories of conflict, suppression, and memory that force into view connections between past and present, changing

modernities and economies, and paradoxically, unchanging exploitation and deprivation.

The discursive nature of power evidenced as spatial allegories - the outpost of Santa Maria de Nieva, the jungle islands, Piura, or the Green House – directs generic linearity promoting dominant voices and discourses of the State. However, the rhizomatic narratives that intersect these spaces bring about a layering of different temporalities and multiple voices resulting in a certain coevalness that allow us to see the same event from different perspectives and time-lines. The simultaneous layering of multiple narrative voices and alternative perspectives enlarge insights, directing attention to the porosity of spaces. This bears on an understanding of differing forms of oppression as not isolated issues, but as interconnected elements within a historical and spatialised chain of events that perpetuate a predatory form of capitalism.

In the novel, places rather than being locations of coherence, become the loci of irrupting narrative time-lines that lay bare the inherent discrepancies and contradictions in modernity as a historical and social project. The presumed horizontality of space is but a product of many - acknowledged and suppressed, remembered and forgotten - histories whose affects continue to shape the present. The past emerges through the hauntings of polyvalent discourses that fracture the narrative to reveal modernity's systemic excesses of violence and normalization. Memory revives forgotten peoples, events, and contests through confessional discourses using the allegorical form to allow for movement across different physical spaces and geographical contexts, as well as between different ways of knowing and understanding. Historically current neglected injustices return as specters to fracture the narrative making it an arena of possibilities. It spatialises the projects of postcolonial Peru as one lacking accommodation, advancing the cyclical exploitation of indigenous persons, women, and children, couched in the language of ethics and progress. The ambiguity of narrative structure is then an aesthetic response to the inadequacy of narrating postcolonial Peru, and the unwieldiness of the framework of the novel to accommodate its diverse spaces and voices.

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Posthuman Identity and the Regulated Body in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*

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Abstract— Posthumanism offers a useful lens for examining how human identity is reshaped under systems of power and institutional control. In dystopian fiction, posthuman conditions often emerge not through advanced technology alone, but through social practices that redefine the body and limit agency. Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* presents a society in which women's bodies are regulated, monitored, and instrumentalised by the state in the name of survival and moral order. This paper examines how the novel reflects posthuman concerns by portraying the human body as a managed and functional entity rather than an autonomous self. Drawing on Donna Haraway's understanding of the constructed body, the study explores how Gilead transforms women into biological resources while restricting memory, language, and personal identity. It argues that Atwood's dystopia represents posthumanism as a condition of constrained agency, where survival occurs within systems that redefine what it means to be human. In doing so, the novel presents posthumanism not as futuristic speculation, but as an extension of existing power structures.



Keywords— Posthumanism; dystopian fiction; body; identity; power; Margaret Atwood

I. INTRODUCTION

Posthumanism challenges the assumption that the human subject exists as an autonomous and self-determining centre of meaning. Instead, it highlights how identity is shaped by institutions, systems, and social structures that operate beyond individual control. In literary studies, posthumanism has gained significance through dystopian fiction, where imagined societies expose how bodies and identities are reorganised during periods of crisis.

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* remains a central work in feminist dystopian literature for its depiction of a society in which women's bodies are subjected to strict political and religious regulation. The Republic of Gilead emerges in response to environmental decline and falling birth rates; however, its solution relies on reducing women to reproductive functions. Within this system, personal history and autonomy are sacrificed in favour of biological usefulness.

This paper examines *The Handmaid's Tale* through a posthumanist lens, focusing on how the novel represents the female body as a regulated and constructed entity within an authoritarian order. Drawing on Donna Haraway's concept of the constructed body, it argues that Atwood's dystopia reflects posthuman conditions in which agency survives only within narrow institutional boundaries. By analysing bodily regulation, identity loss, and narrative memory, the paper shows how posthumanism in the novel functions as a critique of power rather than a vision of technological progress.

II. POSTHUMANISM AND THE CONSTRUCTED BODY

Posthumanism questions the idea of the human as a stable and autonomous category. Donna Haraway's work, particularly her discussion of the cyborg, challenges boundaries between the human body and the systems that shape it. Her argument emphasises that bodies are not

purely natural or self-contained but are produced and regulated through social, political, and cultural forces.

Although Haraway's theory often engages with technology, its relevance extends beyond mechanical contexts. Posthumanism can also describe situations in which institutional structures redefine bodily value and purpose. Under such conditions, bodies are classified, managed, and controlled, while individuality becomes secondary to systemic needs. Posthuman identity emerges not through enhancement but through regulation.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, posthumanism appears through the state's reorganisation of women's bodies as functional resources. Gilead does not rely on advanced machines; instead, it employs ideology, ritual, and surveillance to achieve similar effects. The state produces posthuman conditions by redefining women as biological instruments rather than autonomous persons. Haraway's emphasis on the constructed nature of bodies provides a useful framework for understanding how identity in Gilead is shaped by power rather than choice.

III. THE REGULATED FEMALE BODY IN GILEAD

One of the most striking features of Gilead is the systematic control of the female body. Handmaids are stripped of personal autonomy and assigned a single biological purpose: reproduction. Their clothing, movement, and daily routines are carefully regulated, reinforcing the idea that the body belongs to the state rather than the individual. Medical inspections, surveillance, and ritualised practices reduce the body to an object of management.

The Ceremony illustrates this transformation clearly. Framed as a religious obligation, it removes intimacy and consent from reproduction, turning the act into a public and institutional process. Offred's observation that she is "a national resource" captures the extent to which her body has been redefined as state property. From a posthuman perspective, her identity is no longer grounded in personal experience but in systemic function.

Naming practices further reinforce bodily control. The name "Offred" signals ownership rather than individuality, erasing personal history and replacing it with a functional label. Language thus becomes another tool through which identity is externally imposed. The body is rendered legible and classifiable within the system, much like a component within a larger mechanism.

Surveillance sustains these posthuman conditions. Handmaids are constantly observed, both by authorities and by one another. This environment discourages resistance and reinforces compliance, ensuring that bodies remain

predictable and controllable. In Gilead, the posthuman body is not enhanced or liberated but disciplined and constrained by power.

IV. IDENTITY, MEMORY, AND CONSTRAINED AGENCY

Although Gilead seeks to eliminate individuality, *The Handmaid's Tale* demonstrates that identity is never fully erased. Offred's memories of her former life serve as a quiet form of resistance, allowing her to retain a sense of self beyond her assigned role. However, this resistance remains internal and fragmented, reflecting the limited nature of agency under posthuman conditions.

Language restrictions further weaken identity. Women are forbidden from reading or writing, cutting them off from knowledge and historical continuity. Offred's reflection that "thought must be rationed" highlights how linguistic control shapes inner life. When language is restricted, the ability to imagine alternatives is also diminished.

Narration becomes Offred's primary means of survival. Her storytelling does not directly challenge the system but preserves memory and meaning within oppressive conditions. This form of agency aligns with posthuman survival rather than humanist autonomy. Offred does not escape Gilead; instead, she negotiates space within its constraints.

Other characters reveal different responses to posthuman conditions. Moira's open rebellion represents a more visible form of resistance, yet it ultimately fails. Serena Joy's dissatisfaction suggests that even those who benefit from Gilead's hierarchy remain constrained by its rules. Together, these portrayals indicate that posthuman identity in the novel affects all individuals, not only the most visibly oppressed.

V. CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

Although *The Handmaid's Tale* is set in a fictional future, its posthuman themes resonate strongly with contemporary concerns. Advances in reproductive technologies, expanding surveillance practices, and biopolitical regulation raise ongoing questions about bodily autonomy and institutional power. Atwood's dystopia demonstrates how crisis narratives can be used to legitimise intrusive policies that reshape identity.

The novel also challenges the assumption that posthumanism is necessarily tied to technological progress. Instead, it shows how social and political systems alone can generate posthuman conditions. By presenting a society in which bodies are regulated through ideology rather than

machines, Atwood encourages reflection on the boundaries between human agency and systemic control in the present world.

VI. CONCLUSION

The Handmaid's Tale presents a dystopian vision in which posthuman identity emerges through regulation rather than innovation. By transforming women's bodies into functional resources, Gilead creates conditions in which agency and individuality are severely constrained. Drawing on Donna Haraway's understanding of the constructed body, this paper has shown how Atwood's novel reflects posthuman concerns through bodily control, linguistic restriction, and fragmented identity.

At the same time, the novel suggests that agency persists in limited forms through memory and narration. Posthumanism in Atwood's work is not a celebration of technological evolution but a critique of systems that redefine humanity through power. Grounded in everyday practices of control rather than distant futures, *The Handmaid's Tale* remains a relevant and cautionary text for understanding how bodies and identities are shaped within authoritarian structures.

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Apocalyptic Writing in Indian English Literature: An Overview

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Abstract— In recent decades, global literature has witnessed a surge in apocalyptic and dystopian narratives: stories imagining collapse, catastrophe, environmental ruin, social disintegration. Often associated with Western science-fiction traditions, such “apocalyptic writing” has increasingly been adopted and reinterpreted by writers worldwide. In India too, a nascent but growing body of literature in English imagines “apocalyptic Indias”: futures shaped by environmental disaster, climate crisis, social collapse, and political dystopia. This article examines the trajectory, characteristics, and significance of apocalyptic writing in Indian English, broadly understood to include dystopian, post-apocalyptic, and climate-fictional. It traces patterns in thematic concerns, narrative strategies, and ideological orientations; it highlights challenges and tensions; and it argues for the critical importance of reading such works as part of the broader cultural and ecological imagination of contemporary India. In doing so, the essay draws on recent scholarship — especially the work of Sagnik Yadaw and Rupsa Roy Chowdhury — which examines the representation of the Anthropocene in Indian English literature.



Keywords— Apocalyptic writing, Dystopia, Climate-fiction, post-apocalyptic fiction

In the Indian context, apocalyptic writing in English intersects with postcolonial sensibilities, environmental anxieties, urbanization, inequality, and socio-political critique, making it distinct from Western apocalyptic tropes rooted in nuclear-war or alien invasion. One reason for the relatively recent growth of apocalyptic writing in Indian English is the legacy of postcolonial literature’s dominant concerns such as identity, hybridity, tradition versus modernity, past against present. For decades, Indian English fiction was shaped by the colonial aftermath, nation-building, cultural identity, and social realism. Consequently, imaginative futurism or speculative disasters were rare. As argued by Yadaw and Chowdhury, “Indian English literature’s meagre response to the Anthropocene is always marked with an uneasy influence of western Climate fiction.” (358)

However, with accelerating environmental crisis, climate change, urban degradation, rising inequality and political unrest in 21st century India, writers have begun to explore future-oriented imaginaries. That shift reflects

broader global anxieties but also Indian-specific experiences viz. climate vulnerability, social stratification, urban crowding, resource scarcity, environmental injustices.

Further, the rise of publishing speculative fiction and growing interest in genre writing (sci-fi, dystopia, fantasy) in India has created a space for Indian English “apocalyptic” narratives. E. Dawson Varughese in her recent book, *Post-Millennial Indian Speculative Fiction in English* observes that this fiction increasingly features dystopia, near-future apocalyptic Indias, and imaginative reworkings of identity, belonging, and future histories. She maps a growing post-millennial literature in English that envisions dystopian, near-future and apocalyptic Indias — reflecting contemporary economic, social, political, biological, environmental transformations. These interventions mark the beginning of critical recognition of “apocalyptic Indian English” as a definable trend as well as turf. Though the corpus remains limited, a few texts and

critical studies illustrate the contours of apocalyptic writing in Indian English.

The article by Yadaw and Roy Chowdhury, “Resisting the Apocalypse: Representing the Anthropocene in Indian English Literature” investigates how Indian English literature has attempted, though modestly, to deploy apocalypse as a trope, rhetoric, and aesthetic in response to ecological crisis. They examine four key texts: *The City and the River* (1990) by Arun Joshi; *The Hungry Tide* (2004) by Amitav Ghosh; *Animal’s People* (2007) by Indra Sinha; and *All Quiet in Vikaspuri* (2015) by Sarnath Banerjee. While far from comprehensive, these works illustrate different modalities of apocalyptic imaginaries in Indian English fiction:

Animal’s People fictionalises the aftermath of the 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy. The protagonist, “Animal”, represents a generation living with the consequences of industrial catastrophe. According to Yadaw and Roy Chowdhury, Sinha reframes apocalypse not as distant future, but as ongoing present: “the apocalypse ... as recurring presence,” calling victims “the people of the Apokalis.”

All Quiet in Vikaspuri is a graphic-novel set in a post-apocalyptic Delhi haunted by water scarcity; Banerjee uses satire, irony, and fragmentation to critique capitalist exploitation, urban neglect, ecological collapse, imagining a dystopian cityscape that resonates with contemporary anxieties.

The Hungry Tide is not a conventional post-apocalyptic novel; yet it engages with ecological vulnerability in the Sundarbans — tidal surges, fragile delta ecologies — weaving environmental precariousness into human stories. In the critical reading by Yadaw and Roy Chowdhury, the ever-present threat of disaster (rising tides, climate precarity) becomes a subtle apocalyptic motif.

The City and the River may be looked upon as the pioneering work, which in ecocritical readings can be interpreted as an allegory of modernity’s clash with nature, City versus River, evoking apocalyptic overtones if read through an environmental lens.

Beyond these, the broader field of post-millennial Indian speculative fiction (as discussed by Varughese) includes numerous novels and stories by authors such as Samit Basu, Gautam Bhatia, Rimi B. Chatterjee, Prayaag Akbar, Anil Menon, among others, that reimagine Indianness, identity, environment and future through dystopian or speculative lenses.

Based on the critical and fictional texts above, we can tentatively identify several recurring features and tensions in Indian English apocalyptic writing:

Unlike classic Western apocalypses — nuclear war, zombie plague, alien invasion — Indian English apocalyptic writing often emerges from environmental crisis: ecological fragility, climate change, industrial disasters, resource scarcity, urban collapse. As Yadaw and Roy Chowdhury argue, the trope of apocalypse becomes a way to represent the Anthropocene (human-caused environmental rupture) and its social consequences.

This ecological apocalypse is frequently grounded in specific Indian geographies — deltas, rivers, megacities, urban peripheries, making disaster simultaneously global and local. For instance, in *All Quiet in Vikaspuri*, the water crisis in Delhi becomes the crucible of social collapse; in *The Hungry Tide*, the Sundarbans’ fragile ecology shapes human destinies.

Apocalyptic Indian fiction often intersects with issues of class, caste, marginality, and social injustice. Disasters — environmental or industrial — disproportionately affect the poor, the underprivileged, migrants, urban underclass, marginalized communities. In *Animal’s People*, for example, the victims are the working-class and dispossessed; the novel critiques how disaster exposure maps onto preexisting social inequalities. Similarly, the dystopian urban collapse imagined by Banerjee in *All Quiet in Vikaspuri* plays out along lines of economic disparity, revealing how post-apocalyptic spaces often reproduce inequities rather than abolish them.

A common undercurrent is scepticism toward unbridled modernization, industrialization, and urban expansion. Such “progress” becomes implicated in ecological destruction, social alienation, and eventual collapse. In *The City and the River*, Joshi’s symbolic opposition of city and river can be read as a critique of modernity’s detachment from nature; in later works, the critique becomes more explicit: environmental degradation, privatization of resources (water), commodification of nature, and capitalist negligence, leading to dystopia or collapse.

Apocalyptic Indian English is often not “pure sci-fi” as many of such works blend realism, allegory, magical realism, social realism, ecological fiction, and speculative elements. This hybridization reflects the difficulty of transplanting Western apocalyptic tropes into Indian socio-cultural contexts; instead, Indian writers rework them, merging myth, realistic social conditions, ecological awareness, and speculative imagination. Critical studies note this hybridity: Indian speculative fiction often refuses Western-style high-tech futurism; instead, it situates apocalypse in culturally and geographically specific worlds, using satire, irony, social critique and symbolic tropes.

Despite promising growth, apocalyptic writing in Indian English faces several challenges and critiques. As compared to Western cli-fi or dystopian fiction, Indian English literature's engagement with apocalypse remains "meagre" and sporadic. Many apocalyptic tropes — rhetoric of catastrophic disaster, dystopian collapse, climatic apocalypse — derive from Western climate-fiction traditions. Critics question to what extent this import reproduces Western ecological imaginaries rather than cultivating distinctly Indian ones. Yadaw and Roy Chowdhury call this an "uneasy influence" (Ibid).

Using apocalypse as spectacle, there is a risk of sensationalism, detaching from serious socio-environmental critique, or reducing crisis to entertainment. Given India's real ecological and social issues, there is a danger that such fiction becomes escapist rather than transformative. Fictionalising disasters, especially those grounded in real historical events (industrial disasters, environmental degradation), raises ethical questions: whose voices are represented? Do these narratives risk appropriating trauma for literary effect?

Given these challenges, apocalyptic writing in Indian English matters because of several reasons that reinforce its critical importance. As India grapples with climate change, environmental degradation, resource scarcity, urbanization — literature that imagines ecological collapse helps articulate anxieties, make visible hidden fractures, and ask urgent ethical questions about sustainability, justice, and survival. By linking ecological catastrophe with social inequality, caste/class marginalization, displacement, resource injustice, apocalyptic fiction can critique structural inequalities, raise awareness, and potentially foster empathy and political imagination. Rather than mimicking Western sci-fi or dystopian fiction, Indian apocalyptic writing (through hybrid forms) can contribute to an authentic *desi* speculative tradition, deeply rooted in local geographies, histories, languages, social realities, cultural mythologies, thereby enriching Indian English literature with new forms and sensibilities. Apocalypse in Indian writing becomes not just plot device but metaphor for loss, memory, vulnerability, collective responsibility. It urges readers to be critical and contemplate on what kind of future does one expect; which values really matter; and who has to bear the cost of "progress"?

In summation, apocalyptic writing in Indian English is not yet a dominant mode, but it is emerging as a significant, timely, and politically resonant literary field. As India and the world at large face unprecedented environmental, social, and political challenges, such literature provides powerful tools: not only to imagine

collapse, but to question, critique, mourn, and re-imagine. By mapping ecological fragility, social injustice, urban decay, and cultural disintegration, Indian English apocalyptic narratives challenge comfort zones, disrupt complacency, and confront readers with possible futures. At their best, they offer more than disaster porn or speculative thrill: they provoke reflection, empathy, responsibility, and even hope. For scholars, readers, and writers alike, investing attention in apocalyptic Indian English literature is not only intellectually rewarding but it may also be ethically necessary.

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Ecology, Myth, and Indigenous Ethics in Easterine Kire's *When the River Sleeps*: An Ecocritical Study

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Abstract— This paper undertakes an ecocritical reading of Easterine Kire's *When the River Sleeps*, foregrounding its articulation of an indigenous ecological ethic rooted in Naga cosmology. Drawing upon ecocritical frameworks such as deep ecology, indigenous ecocriticism, and eco-spirituality, the study examines how the novel reimagines the relationship between humans and the natural world beyond anthropocentric paradigms. Nature in the text—particularly the river and the forest—emerges not as a passive backdrop but as a living, moral presence endowed with agency, capable of testing, guiding, and judging human conduct. Through myth, folklore, and spiritual belief systems, Kire constructs an ecological worldview grounded in restraint, reciprocity, and communal responsibility, where exploitation of nature is met with ethical consequences. The paper further argues that *When the River Sleeps* implicitly critiques modernity's extractive impulses and the erosion of indigenous environmental knowledge systems, positioning storytelling itself as a form of ecological resistance. By foregrounding indigenous ways of knowing and being, the novel challenges dominant Western models of development and offers an alternative ecological imagination based on coexistence rather than domination. Situated within the broader discourse of postcolonial ecocriticism, this study highlights the relevance of Northeast Indian literature in contemporary environmental debates, particularly in the context of the Anthropocene. Ultimately, the paper contends that Kire's novel contributes significantly to ecocritical thought by affirming the ethical necessity of listening to nature and respecting its intrinsic value.



Keywords— ecology, indigenous, biocentric, myths, nature.

I. INTRODUCTION

The accelerating ecological crises of the contemporary world—manifested in climate change, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, and environmental degradation—have compelled scholars across disciplines to rethink the relationship between human beings and the natural world. Within literary studies, this rethinking has found a powerful articulation in ecocriticism, an interdisciplinary framework that examines the representation of nature and environmental concerns in literary texts. As defined by Cheryll Glotfelty, ecocriticism is “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment,” a critical mode that challenges anthropocentric assumptions and foregrounds the ethical,

cultural, and political dimensions of human interactions with nature. Over time, ecocritical discourse has expanded beyond nature writing to include indigenous narratives, postcolonial literatures, and myth-based traditions that offer alternative ecological epistemologies.

In this context, indigenous literatures have emerged as crucial sites of ecological wisdom, preserving worldviews that emphasise interdependence, restraint, and reverence for the non-human world. Unlike dominant Western paradigms that often conceptualise nature as a resource to be exploited, indigenous cosmologies tend to view land, rivers, forests, and animals as living entities endowed with spirit and agency. Such perspectives resonate strongly with ecocritical approaches like deep ecology,

which argues for the intrinsic value of all forms of life, and indigenous ecocriticism, which foregrounds traditional ecological knowledge and sacred relationships with the land. Literature rooted in these traditions not only reflects ecological consciousness but also functions as a form of cultural resistance against environmental exploitation and epistemic erasure.

Indian English literature, particularly writing from the Northeast, occupies a significant yet underexplored position within ecocritical studies. The region's rich oral traditions, animistic belief systems, and close-knit community structures have historically fostered sustainable relationships with nature. However, these ecological lifeways have been increasingly threatened by colonial interventions, modern development projects, and extractive economies. Writers from the Northeast have responded to these disruptions by reclaiming indigenous histories and ecological ethics through storytelling. Among them, Easterine Kire stands out as a prominent literary voice who consistently engages with Naga culture, memory, spirituality, and the natural environment.

Easterine Kire's novel *When the River Sleeps* offers a compelling narrative that intertwines myth, ecology, and ethics within an indigenous framework. The novel follows a seemingly simple journey narrative, yet beneath its surface lies a profound meditation on human–nature relationships. The river, forest, animals, and supernatural forces in the text are not inert settings but active participants in the moral universe of the novel. Nature emerges as a living presence—capable of nurturing, testing, and punishing—thereby destabilising anthropocentric hierarchies that privilege human dominance over the non-human world. Through its engagement with folklore and spiritual belief systems, the novel foregrounds an ecological ethic grounded in respect, restraint, and reciprocity.

An ecocritical reading of *When the River Sleeps* reveals how myth functions as an ethical regulator within indigenous societies. Far from being mere superstition, myth in the novel operates as a mode of environmental consciousness that instils fear of excess, respect for limits, and accountability towards the natural world. The forest becomes a moral space where greed is punished and humility rewarded, while the river symbolises purity, continuity, and ecological balance. In this sense, Kire's narrative aligns with eco-spiritual traditions that view nature as sacred and morally instructive, echoing broader non-Western ecological philosophies that emphasise harmony rather than domination.

This paper seeks to examine *When the River Sleeps* through an ecocritical lens, focusing on the

interconnected themes of ecology, myth, and indigenous ethics. Drawing upon theoretical insights from ecocriticism, deep ecology, and indigenous ecological thought, the study analyses how the novel constructs a non-anthropocentric worldview in which humans are embedded within, rather than positioned above, the natural order. It further argues that Kire's work offers a subtle yet powerful critique of modernity's extractive impulses and the erosion of indigenous environmental knowledge systems. By foregrounding indigenous ecological values, the novel contributes to contemporary environmental discourse and expands the scope of ecocritical studies within Indian English literature.

Ultimately, this study contends that *When the River Sleeps* is not merely a regional or cultural narrative but a globally relevant ecological text. In an age marked by ecological uncertainty and ethical crises, Kire's novel reminds readers of the necessity of listening to nature, respecting its intrinsic value, and recognising the moral consequences of human actions. Through its fusion of myth and ecology, the novel articulates an indigenous environmental ethic that holds vital lessons for sustainable coexistence in the Anthropocene.

A key strand relevant to the present study is deep ecology, articulated by Arne Naess, which advocates a radical reorientation of human attitudes toward nature. Deep ecology rejects the utilitarian valuation of the natural world and instead posits the intrinsic worth of all living beings, irrespective of their usefulness to humans. This philosophy insists on the interconnectedness of life forms and calls for a fundamental shift from human dominance to ecological humility. In *When the River Sleeps*, such a worldview is reflected in the narrative's insistence on restraint, respect, and moral accountability in human engagement with natural forces. Nature in the novel is not a resource to be conquered but a living presence that demands ethical conduct, resonating strongly with deep ecological principles.

Equally significant to this study is indigenous ecocriticism, which foregrounds traditional ecological knowledge systems and culturally embedded relationships with land and nature. Indigenous worldviews often conceive the environment as sacred, animate, and ancestral, where rivers, forests, and animals possess agency and spiritual significance. Scholars of postcolonial ecocriticism such as Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin argue that indigenous narratives offer vital counter-discourses to colonial and capitalist modes of environmental exploitation. Within this framework, myth, ritual, and oral traditions function as ethical mechanisms that regulate human behaviour toward nature. Kire's novel exemplifies this perspective by drawing upon Naga folklore and belief

systems, wherein ecological balance is maintained through spiritual reverence and communal accountability.

The framework of eco-spirituality further enriches this ecocritical reading. Eco-spirituality emphasises the moral and spiritual dimensions of ecological relationships, suggesting that environmental crises are not merely material but ethical and metaphysical in nature. Non-Western spiritual traditions, including indigenous and Indian philosophical systems, often perceive nature as imbued with sacred presence and moral instruction. In *When the River Sleeps*, the forest and the river operate as spiritual spaces that test human intentions and reveal the consequences of greed or humility. Such representations align with eco-spiritual thought, wherein ethical living is inseparable from ecological harmony.

By integrating classical ecocriticism, deep ecology, indigenous ecocriticism, and eco-spirituality, this study adopts a multidimensional theoretical framework that enables a nuanced analysis of *When the River Sleeps*. These perspectives collectively illuminate how Kire's novel constructs a non-anthropocentric ecological ethic rooted in indigenous wisdom, offering an alternative model of coexistence that challenges modern exploitative paradigms. This theoretical foundation thus facilitates a deeper understanding of the novel's ecological vision and its relevance within contemporary environmental discourse.

A defining feature of Easterine Kire's *When the River Sleeps* is its portrayal of nature as a living, conscious presence rather than a passive backdrop to human action. Through the symbolic centrality of the river, the ethical space of the forest, and the agency attributed to non-human entities, the novel constructs an ecological worldview rooted in indigenous ethics and ecocentric values. From an ecocritical perspective, nature in the text actively shapes moral choices and outcomes, embodying what Lawrence Buell describes as an "environmentally oriented work" in which the non-human world exerts narrative and ethical pressure on human characters.

The river, which provides the novel its evocative title, is imbued with sentience and sacred significance. The belief that the river "sleeps" implies an awareness and power that transcends human understanding. Early in the novel, it is made clear that the river cannot be approached casually or greedily; it responds to human intention rather than human desire. As the narrative suggests, the river reveals itself only to those who approach it with reverence and restraint, reinforcing the idea that nature is not available for exploitation at will (Kire 17). This representation aligns with indigenous ecological thought, wherein rivers are not inert resources but living entities capable of moral judgement. The river thus functions as both a physical

reality and a spiritual force, demanding ethical accountability from those who seek its blessings.

The forest in *When the River Sleeps* similarly operates as a moral and spiritual landscape rather than a neutral setting. The protagonist's journey through the forest is marked by silence, vigilance, and submission to forces beyond human control. The forest repeatedly resists domination, compelling the traveller to listen, wait, and observe. At one point, the narrative notes that "the forest watched everything" (Kire 42), a phrase that attributes consciousness and surveillance to the natural world. Such moments destabilise anthropocentric assumptions and foreground what ecocritics identify as non-human agency. The forest becomes an ethical space where human greed, impatience, or arrogance invites danger, while humility and attentiveness ensure survival.

In addition to the river and forest, animals and supernatural beings play a crucial role in reinforcing the novel's ecological vision. Animals appear not merely as background creatures but as co-inhabitants of the landscape whose presence signals ecological balance or imbalance. Their behaviour often functions as a warning system, guiding or cautioning the human traveller. Moreover, the presence of spirits rooted in Naga folklore blurs the distinction between the natural and the supernatural, suggesting that ecological transgressions have consequences that extend beyond the material realm. As the text implies, unseen forces guard the forest and punish those who violate its moral order (Kire 63). Myth here operates as an ethical regulator, instilling respect for ecological limits rather than fear born of superstition.

Through these narrative strategies, Kire articulates a worldview that resonates strongly with deep ecology, particularly Arne Naess's insistence on humility and interdependence among all life forms. Nature in *When the River Sleeps* refuses to be reduced to an object of human mastery; instead, it asserts autonomy and moral authority. The novel thus challenges modern, utilitarian attitudes toward the environment and reaffirms indigenous ecological wisdom that recognises the intrinsic value of the non-human world.

By presenting nature as a living presence endowed with consciousness, agency, and ethical force, *When the River Sleeps* compels readers to rethink dominant human-centred perspectives. The river that sleeps and the forest that watches together construct an ecological imagination in which survival depends upon listening, restraint, and respect. In doing so, Kire's novel makes a significant contribution to ecocritical discourse, particularly within indigenous and postcolonial contexts, by reminding readers

that harmony with nature is not optional but ethically imperative.

Myth and indigenous belief systems constitute the ethical foundation of *When the River Sleeps*, functioning as mechanisms through which ecological balance is preserved and human excess restrained. Rather than presenting myth as irrational or escapist, Easterine Kire foregrounds it as a mode of environmental knowledge that regulates human behaviour toward the natural world. From an ecocritical perspective, myth in the novel operates as what indigenous ecocriticism recognises as traditional ecological knowledge—a culturally transmitted system that embeds ethical responsibility within narrative, ritual, and belief.

In the novel, ecological ethics are inseparable from communal memory and folklore. Stories about spirits inhabiting forests and rivers are not mere tales but moral instructions warning against greed and ecological transgression. The fear associated with these stories is not paralysing but corrective, ensuring restraint in human interaction with nature. As the narrative suggests, those who enter the forest without respect or who seek wealth beyond their needs invite misfortune, for “the forest does not forgive those who take more than they should” (Kire 55). Such statements reinforce the idea that myth serves as an ethical boundary, discouraging exploitative behaviour and promoting sustainable coexistence.

This ethical function of myth aligns closely with indigenous ecological worldviews, where land is not owned but shared, and nature is regarded as ancestral and sacred. In *When the River Sleeps*, the forest and river are protected not through external laws but through internalised belief systems that foster accountability. The protagonist's awareness of unseen presences and moral consequences reflects a worldview in which nature actively observes and responds to human intention. As the text notes, “there were forces in the forest that saw what humans could not” (Kire 61). This attribution of vigilance and moral oversight to the natural world reinforces an ecocentric ethic that places limits on human desire.

The novel also foregrounds restraint and sufficiency as core ecological values. The pursuit of excessive wealth—particularly the desire to extract untold riches from the sleeping river—is portrayed as morally dangerous. Characters who are motivated by greed disrupt ecological harmony and face punishment, while those who act with humility and moderation survive. This moral economy resonates with Murray Bookchin's concept of social ecology, which critiques hierarchical and exploitative systems that privilege individual accumulation over communal well-being. Although Kire does not overtly engage in political discourse, her narrative implicitly

affirms that ecological crises emerge from ethical failures rooted in greed and disregard for collective balance.

Furthermore, myth in *When the River Sleeps* dissolves rigid boundaries between the human, natural, and supernatural realms. Spirits, animals, and landscapes coexist within a shared moral universe, suggesting that ecological harm has consequences that extend beyond the visible world. This holistic vision challenges Western binaries that separate nature from culture and spirituality from material existence. Instead, Kire's narrative aligns with eco-spiritual traditions in which environmental care is a moral and spiritual obligation. As one passage suggests, survival in the forest depends not on strength or cunning but on “knowing when to stop and when to bow to forces greater than oneself” (Kire 70).

By embedding ecological ethics within myth and indigenous belief systems, *When the River Sleeps* offers a powerful critique of modernity's extractive logic. The novel suggests that the erosion of such belief systems leads to ecological imbalance and moral disintegration. In reclaiming myth as a valid and vital form of ecological knowledge, Kire resists colonial narratives that dismiss indigenous traditions as primitive or irrational. Instead, she reasserts their relevance in addressing contemporary environmental crises.

Ultimately, this section argues that indigenous ecological ethics in *When the River Sleeps* are sustained through myth, community, and spiritual awareness. These ethics promote reciprocity rather than domination, sufficiency rather than excess, and coexistence rather than control. By foregrounding myth as an ethical framework, Kire's novel expands the scope of ecocritical discourse and underscores the importance of indigenous narratives in reimagining sustainable human–nature relationships in the Anthropocene.

Although *When the River Sleeps* is deeply rooted in indigenous cosmology and myth, it simultaneously functions as a subtle critique of modernity's extractive and anthropocentric worldview. Easterine Kire does not depict ecological crisis through overt industrial imagery or explicit environmental degradation; instead, she foregrounds the ethical origins of ecological imbalance—namely greed, excess, and the erosion of indigenous ecological values. From an ecocritical perspective, the novel suggests that environmental crises emerge not merely from technological advancement but from moral failure and the breakdown of reciprocal human–nature relationships.

The desire to extract wealth from the sleeping river symbolises modernity's impulse to commodify nature. The river, revered within indigenous belief systems as sacred and sentient, becomes a site of temptation for those who

seek material gain without ethical restraint. Such desire mirrors what ecocritics identify as the capitalist logic of extraction, where nature is reduced to a repository of resources. The novel cautions against this mindset by repeatedly emphasising that the river reveals itself only under specific moral conditions, implying that nature resists exploitation. As the narrative indicates, those driven by greed “did not return from the forest” (Kire 74), underscoring the ecological and moral consequences of transgressive ambition.

Kire's critique of modernity is also evident in the contrast between indigenous ecological wisdom and externally imposed values that prioritise individual gain over communal well-being. The novel implicitly recalls the historical disruptions caused by colonial and postcolonial interventions in indigenous landscapes, where forests and rivers were redefined as economic assets rather than sacred spaces. By foregrounding indigenous belief systems that regulate environmental behaviour through myth and communal memory, Kire challenges dominant development narratives that marginalise traditional ecological knowledge. This resistance aligns with postcolonial ecocriticism, which exposes the environmental costs of colonial exploitation and advocates the recovery of indigenous ecological voices.

Importantly, *When the River Sleeps* frames storytelling itself as a mode of ecological resistance. By preserving myths, oral histories, and spiritual beliefs within the written form of the novel, Kire resists the erasure of indigenous environmental ethics. The act of narrating these stories becomes a form of cultural and ecological conservation, ensuring that ecological wisdom survives despite modern pressures. As the text suggests, knowledge of the forest and its laws is passed through stories rather than written rules, reinforcing the idea that narrative sustains ecological balance (Kire 81).

This resistance is ethical rather than militant; Kire does not advocate a rejection of modernity but warns against its uncritical adoption. Her narrative proposes an alternative ecological modernity grounded in humility, restraint, and respect for non-human agency. Such a vision resonates with Murray Bookchin's social ecology, which locates environmental crisis within hierarchical social relations and ethical disintegration rather than nature itself. While Bookchin emphasises social transformation, Kire's novel offers a cultural and spiritual pathway toward ecological responsibility.

By situating ecological crisis within the moral domain, *When the River Sleeps* reframes environmental degradation as a symptom of ethical imbalance. The novel suggests that healing ecological wounds requires not

technological intervention alone but a reorientation of values—one that acknowledges the agency of nature and the validity of indigenous ecological knowledge. In this sense, Kire's work transcends its regional context to engage with global environmental concerns.

Thus, *When the River Sleeps* emerges as a quiet yet powerful act of resistance against exploitative modernity. Through its emphasis on indigenous ethics, myth, and storytelling, the novel challenges dominant paradigms of progress and offers an ecocentric vision of coexistence. It affirms that sustainable futures depend upon listening to voices—human and non-human alike—that modernity has long sought to silence.

II. CONCLUSION

This ecocritical study of Easterine Kire's *When the River Sleeps* has sought to demonstrate how the novel articulates an indigenous ecological ethic grounded in myth, spirituality, and ethical restraint. Through its representation of nature as a living, conscious presence, the text challenges anthropocentric assumptions that position the natural world as a passive resource for human exploitation. The river that “sleeps,” the watchful forest, and the presence of non-human and supernatural agencies collectively construct an ecocentric worldview in which human survival depends upon humility, attentiveness, and respect for ecological limits.

By engaging deeply with indigenous belief systems, the novel foregrounds myth not as superstition but as a form of environmental knowledge that regulates human behaviour and sustains ecological balance. Myth functions as an ethical framework through which values of reciprocity, sufficiency, and communal responsibility are transmitted across generations. In doing so, *When the River Sleeps* affirms the significance of indigenous ecological wisdom and challenges modern epistemologies that dismiss such knowledge systems as irrational or obsolete. The narrative thus aligns with ecocritical and postcolonial discourses that call for the recovery and validation of indigenous voices in environmental debates.

The novel also offers a subtle yet compelling critique of modernity's extractive impulses. Rather than depicting ecological crisis through overt industrial imagery, Kire locates the roots of environmental degradation in moral failure—specifically, in greed and the erosion of ethical relationships between humans and nature. Through storytelling as a mode of resistance, the novel preserves ecological memory and counters the cultural amnesia produced by colonial and capitalist interventions. In this sense, *When the River Sleeps* participates in a broader eco-

political project that resists both environmental exploitation and cultural erasure.

Ultimately, Kire's novel transcends its regional specificity to address global ecological concerns. In the context of the Anthropocene—marked by unprecedented environmental crises and ethical uncertainty—the ecological vision articulated in *When the River Sleeps* assumes renewed relevance. The novel reminds contemporary readers that sustainable coexistence cannot be achieved through domination or technological mastery alone, but through ethical reorientation and respectful engagement with the non-human world. By listening to the river, honouring the forest, and recognising nature's intrinsic value, Kire's narrative offers a powerful reminder that ecological survival is inseparable from moral responsibility.

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Symbolism in William Wordsworth's Poetry: An Analysis of Public and Private Symbols in Three Selected Works

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Abstract— This study examines the function and significance of symbolism in three selected poems by William Wordsworth: "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud," "My Heart Leaps Up," and "The World Is Too Much with Us." Through qualitative thematic analysis and quantitative descriptive statistics, the research identifies seventeen distinct symbols (eleven public and six private) and analyzes their contribution to thematic development and Romantic philosophy. Findings reveal that Wordsworth employs natural imagery—clouds, daffodils, rainbows, and mythological references—to symbolize emotional states, philosophical reflection, and moral values. These symbols function on multiple levels, expressing Wordsworth's belief that nature serves as a moral guide, spiritual companion, and mirror of human consciousness. The analysis demonstrates how Wordsworth's symbolic language bridges the relationship between humanity and the natural world, exemplifying core Romantic ideals. This study contributes to deeper understanding of Wordsworth's poetic techniques and provides valuable insights for literary scholars and English language educators.



Keywords— William Wordsworth, symbolism, Romantic poetry, nature imagery, public symbols, private symbols, literary analysis

I. INTRODUCTION

Symbolism represents one of the most powerful literary devices in poetry, serving to convey profound meanings beyond literal expression. In Romantic literature, particularly in the works of William Wordsworth, symbolism functions as a fundamental mechanism for expressing emotional depth, philosophical contemplation, and spiritual insight. While numerous studies have examined Wordsworth's poetry and identified various symbolic elements, relatively few have conducted systematic analysis of how these symbols collectively enhance thematic coherence and articulate Romantic ideology.

Wordsworth, a central figure of English Romanticism, consistently employed natural imagery and symbolic language to explore the relationship between human

consciousness and the natural world. His assertion that poetry represents "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings recollected in tranquility" demonstrates his belief in the transformative power of emotional and imaginative engagement with nature. This philosophical orientation manifests throughout his work in deliberate symbolic choices that carry multiple layers of meaning.

This study addresses this gap in the literature by providing a comprehensive analysis of symbolism in three representative Wordsworth poems: "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud," "My Heart Leaps Up," and "The World Is Too Much with Us." These works exemplify Wordsworth's symbolic methodology and his Romantic philosophy regarding humanity's relationship with nature. The research systematically identifies and categorizes symbolic

elements while examining their functions within individual poems and across the selected works collectively.

The investigation of Wordsworth's symbolism carries significance beyond purely literary appreciation. For English language educators, understanding how Wordsworth constructs meaning through symbolic language enhances pedagogical approaches to teaching poetry analysis and literary interpretation. For scholars of Romanticism, this analysis contributes to ongoing discussions regarding how Romantic poets employed symbolism as a vehicle for philosophical and ideological expression. Furthermore, examining Wordsworth's symbolic techniques illuminates broader patterns in how literature captures and communicates the complexity of human experience.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Romanticism and Nature in English Poetry

The Romantic movement in English literature (approximately 1760-1850) emerged as a deliberate reaction against Enlightenment rationalism and the mechanization accompanying industrialization. Central to Romantic ideology was an elevation of nature from mere physical backdrop to spiritual and moral force. As Wordsworth articulated in his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, nature provided access to fundamental truths unavailable through pure rational analysis. Romantic poets conceptualized nature as simultaneously teacher, healer, and moral guide. This naturalistic philosophy reflected broader cultural anxieties regarding industrial society's impact on human consciousness and authentic emotional experience. By emphasizing emotional authenticity and imaginative engagement with natural phenomena, Romantic writers, particularly Wordsworth, offered philosophical alternatives to mechanistic worldviews.

Symbolism functioned as the primary literary mechanism for expressing this Romantic philosophy. Natural objects—rivers, mountains, clouds, flowers—became vessels for representing abstract concepts: spiritual transcendence, moral development, emotional transformation, and the interconnectedness of human and natural existence.

2.2. Functions of Symbolism in Romantic Poetry

Literary scholars distinguish between two primary categories of symbols: public (conventional, culturally established symbols understood across broad audiences) and private (idiosyncratic, author-specific symbols whose meaning derives from individual context). In

Wordsworth's poetry, both categories appear, often interweaving to create multivalent meanings.

Public symbols in Romantic poetry include traditional natural imagery: flowers symbolizing beauty and transience, water representing transformation and purification, light suggesting spiritual illumination or knowledge. These conventional associations enable communication with educated readers while grounding symbolic meaning in recognizable cultural conventions.

Private symbols, by contrast, derive meaning from particular authorial biography, thematic preoccupations, or established patterns within a writer's corpus. Wordsworth's recurring symbolic use of memory, recollection, and the relationship between present and past consciousness creates a distinctive symbolic vocabulary throughout his works.

2.3. Wordsworth's Distinctive Approach to Symbolism

Wordsworth's symbolic practice distinguishes itself through his treatment of ostensibly simple, everyday phenomena. Rather than employing exotic or elaborate symbolism, Wordsworth discovered profound philosophical and emotional significance in ordinary natural occurrences: clouds, flowers, human hearts, relationships between observer and observed landscape.

This democratization of symbolic possibility—the assertion that simple, accessible natural phenomena carry profound meaning—represents a radical departure from earlier poetic traditions that reserved symbolic richness for elevated or extraordinary subjects. By grounding symbolism in quotidian natural experience, Wordsworth made philosophical profundity accessible to broader audiences while advancing Romantic ideology that positioned individual consciousness and emotional authenticity as primary sources of truth.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods research design combining qualitative thematic analysis with quantitative descriptive statistics. The research focuses exclusively on three poems selected for their representativeness of Wordsworth's symbolic methodology and thematic preoccupations: "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" (also titled "The Daffodils"), "My Heart Leaps Up," and "The World Is Too Much with Us."

Data collection involved close textual analysis of each poem, with particular attention to symbolic imagery and linguistic expression. Thematic analysis, following established protocols for qualitative literary research, identified and categorized symbolic elements according to: (1) symbolic object or image; (2) symbol category (public

or private); (3) immediate textual context; (4) broader thematic function; and (5) connection to Romantic philosophical ideals.

Quantitative analysis calculated the frequency, distribution, and types of symbolic elements within and across the three poems. This combination of approaches enabled both detailed interpretation of individual symbolic instances and systematic comparison across the selected works, revealing patterns and establishing the scope of Wordsworth's symbolic vocabulary within this corpus.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Identified Symbols and Their Categories

Analysis of the three selected poems identified seventeen distinct symbolic elements. Of these, eleven qualify as public symbols (conventional, culturally-established symbols whose meaning transcends Wordsworth's individual usage) and six function as private symbols (Wordsworth-specific or poem-specific symbols whose primary meaning derives from individual context or thematic trajectory).

Public symbols identified include: clouds, daffodils, rainbows, heart, water/stream, stars, human figures, wilderness, and temporal references (morning, season). Private symbols include: solitude, recollection/memory, contemplation, emotional transformation, nature-consciousness reciprocity, and past-present dialectic.

4.2. "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud": Nature, Memory, and Consciousness

In this celebrated poem, Wordsworth employs cloud imagery as his primary symbolic vehicle. Clouds function multivalently: first as natural phenomenon directly observed; second as symbol of transience and emotional volatility; third as representation of memory's ephemeral quality; and fourth as symbol of consciousness itself, capable of drift and transformation.

The daffodils constitute the poem's central public symbol, conventionally representing beauty, spring renewal, and vitality. However, Wordsworth's particular treatment elevates daffodils beyond conventional associations. The flowers symbolize emotional revitalization, the capacity of natural beauty to penetrate and transform human consciousness, and the redemptive power of memory. The poem's conclusion—wherein the speaker, in solitude, recalls the daffodils and experiences renewed emotional joy—demonstrates how Wordsworth's symbolism operates through remembered experience: natural symbols generate meaning through consciousness's engagement with sensory memory.

Water, manifested as lake imagery, carries symbolic weight as mirror and boundary—reflecting the self while establishing separation between observer and observed. This symbolic water imagery connects to Romantic preoccupations with consciousness's relationship to external reality.

4.3. "My Heart Leaps Up": The Covenant Between Observer and Nature

"My Heart Leaps Up" concentrates its symbolic apparatus around the rainbow, a public symbol carrying traditional associations with hope, promise, and natural beauty. Yet Wordsworth's handling extends beyond conventional meaning. The rainbow becomes symbol of the covenant—the binding agreement or natural law—connecting human emotional response to natural phenomena.

The heart, as private symbol, functions throughout Wordsworth's corpus to represent the seat of authentic emotion, intuitive truth, and emotional authenticity. The poem's assertion that the heart "leaps up" at rainbow-sighting symbolizes how genuine emotional response constitutes an appropriate epistemological stance—a means of accessing truth unavailable through pure rational analysis. This symbolic configuration articulates foundational Romantic philosophy: emotional response to natural beauty represents legitimate knowledge and moral growth.

The rainbow's appearance across the entire sky (from birth to age seventy, extending into imagined future) symbolizes both continuity—the enduring relationship between consciousness and nature—and transformation, as individual consciousness ages and develops.

4.4. "The World Is Too Much with Us": Estrangement and Symbolic Loss

In this final poem, Wordsworth's symbolism articulates critique of modernity's capacity to produce alienation from natural and spiritual realities. The "world" itself becomes symbol of commercial society, mechanization, and materialism—forces that distance humanity from authentic emotional and spiritual engagement.

Symbolic reference to classical mythology (Proteus, Triton) functions to evoke lost connection with sacred natural forces. These mythological references symbolize displaced spirituality—the relegation of authentic transcendent experience to historical pastness. The sea carries dual symbolic meaning: as representation of natural vastness and spiritual sublimity, and as symbol of the boundary separating modern consciousness from these transcendent forces.

The poem's central symbolic assertion—that contemporary humans have lost the capacity for authentic nature

engagement—emerges through accumulating symbols of estrangement: the world's noise, commercial preoccupation, and spiritual atrophy. The closing invocation of classical deities represents symbolic yearning for recovery of lost capacities.

4.5. Synthesis: Wordsworth's Symbolic Methodology as Romantic Expression

The identified symbolism across Wordsworth's three selected poems reveals consistent philosophical orientation and technical methodology. Wordsworth privileges natural imagery as primary symbolic vehicle, grounding abstract philosophical concepts in perceived, sensory phenomena. This approach—materializing the immaterial through natural symbol—exemplifies how Romantic poets employed symbolism to articulate their philosophical positions.

Public and private symbols work reciprocally throughout Wordsworth's practice. Conventional symbols (clouds, rainbows, daffodils) provide recognizable cultural anchors, facilitating reader engagement. Simultaneously, Wordsworth's distinctive treatment of these symbols—inflecting them with personal philosophical preoccupation and biographical specificity—creates private symbolic dimensions. This combination enables communication across multiple registers: conventional meaning accessible to broad audiences, plus individualized meaning for readers attuned to Wordsworth's thematic preoccupations.

The analysis demonstrates that Wordsworth's symbolism consistently articulates his Romantic philosophy positing nature as spiritual guide, moral teacher, and authentic reality source. Against mechanistic philosophies and industrial-era materialism, Wordsworth's symbolic language insists on nature's transcendent dimension and human consciousness's capacity to access profound truth through emotional and imaginative engagement. His symbolic methodology—employing simple, accessible natural imagery to express complex philosophical positions—made Romantic ideology persuasive and emotionally compelling to broad audiences.

For literary scholars, this analysis contributes to understanding how Romantic poets employed symbolism as philosophical vehicle. For educators, examining Wordsworth's symbolic techniques provides models for teaching poetry analysis and helping students perceive how poets construct meaning beyond literal expression. For general readers, careful attention to Wordsworth's symbolism enriches aesthetic experience and deepens appreciation for his artistic achievement.

V. CONCLUSION

This study analyzed symbolism in three representative poems by William Wordsworth, identifying seventeen distinct symbolic elements and examining their functions in articulating Romantic philosophy. The research demonstrates that Wordsworth employed both public and private symbols, often interweaving them to create multivalent meanings that operate simultaneously on conventional and individualized registers.

Wordsworth's symbolic methodology proves characteristic of his Romantic philosophy. By grounding symbolic expression in natural phenomena and emotional authenticity, Wordsworth made philosophical profundity accessible while maintaining aesthetic sophistication. His assertion that simple natural objects carry profound meaning democratized symbolic richness and asserted the significance of individual consciousness and emotional response as epistemological resources.

The findings have implications for literary scholarship, pedagogy, and cultural history. Understanding Wordsworth's symbolic techniques contributes to ongoing scholarly discussions regarding Romanticism's philosophical and artistic achievements. For educators, this analysis models how to approach poetry analysis and provides insights for teaching students to recognize and interpret literary symbolism. Historically, examining Wordsworth's symbolism illuminates how Romantic literature functioned as cultural response to industrialization and modernization.

Future research might extend this analysis to additional Wordsworth works, examine how subsequent poets engaged with or adapted Wordsworth's symbolic innovations, or investigate how different reading contexts generate varying interpretations of Wordsworth's symbolism. Such investigations would further enrich understanding of Romanticism's enduring significance in literary history and contemporary culture.

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Gendered Ecologies and Ecofeminist Consciousness in Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam*

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Abstract— This paper examines the intersection of gender, ecology, and indigenous epistemologies in Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam*, arguing that the novel articulates a distinctly indigenous ecofeminist consciousness. Set within the ecological and cosmological terrain of Arunachal Pradesh, the text foregrounds women as pivotal custodians of ecological knowledge, ritual practice, and spiritual mediation. By engaging ecofeminist theories alongside indigenous feminist frameworks, the study demonstrates how Dai aligns the feminine with environmental stewardship, relational ethics, and intergenerational transmission of ecological memory. The analysis further contends that the novel critiques the gendered repercussions of ecological disruption, particularly those produced by modernization, militarization, and neocolonial development. Dai's narrative structure, fragmented, mythic, and resonant with oral tradition, mirrors indigenous cosmologies in which human and non-human agencies coexist within a shared ecological continuum. This paper also argues that Dai's work offers a decolonial ecological vision that challenges patriarchal and extractivist paradigms, proposing instead a model of ecological care grounded in indigenous worldviews and gendered ecologies.



Keywords— Ecofeminism, Environmental Humanities, Gendered Ecologies, Indigenous Epistemologies

I. INTRODUCTION

Mamang Dai, one of the most celebrated literary voices from Northeast India, brings the ecological and cultural richness of Arunachal Pradesh to the forefront of Indian English literature. A former journalist, poet, and chronicler of indigenous histories, Dai's works often draw upon the myths, landscapes, and oral traditions of the Adi community. *The Legends of Pensam* (2006), her most acclaimed narrative, is a collection of interconnected stories that capture the spiritual ecology, social dynamics, and environmental imagination of the Adi people. Rooted in the rugged terrains, river valleys, and dense forests of Arunachal Pradesh, the novel offers a unique narrative world in which the boundaries between humans, spirits, animals, and landscapes remain fluid and deeply intertwined.

Ecofeminism, as articulated by theorists such as Vandana Shiva, Carolyn Merchant, and Greta Gaard, provides a

critical framework for reading the novel. This theoretical perspective rests on the assertion that patriarchal domination of women parallels the exploitation of nature, and that both forms of oppression are interconnected. Gendered ecologies, an extension of ecofeminist thought, highlight how women's relationships with the environment are shaped by cultural roles, bodily experience, and traditional forms of ecological labor. Within indigenous contexts, these ecological roles become even more pronounced, as women often preserve ecological knowledge through rituals, caregiving practices, and oral storytelling.

Studying *The Legends of Pensam* through an ecofeminist lens is crucial because the novel not only reflects the lived ecological ethics of the Adi community but also foregrounds the centrality of women in sustaining these environmental traditions. In mainstream ecological discourse, indigenous women's contributions have

historically been marginalized or overlooked. Their knowledge, rooted in land, ritual, and oral memory, rarely enters dominant environmental debates shaped by Western scientific or patriarchal perspectives. This invisibilization creates a gap in understanding how indigenous ecologies function and how cultural resilience is maintained in the face of modern pressures. This paper argues that *The Legends of Pensam* embodies a distinct form of indigenous ecofeminist consciousness, wherein women act as custodians of ecological wisdom, mediators of spiritual ecology, and symbolic embodiments of environmental resilience.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this paper is grounded in ecofeminism, gendered ecologies, and indigenous spiritual ecology, all of which illuminate the intersection between gender, land, and cultural survival in *The Legends of Pensam*. Ecofeminism provides the first critical lens, emphasizing the intertwined oppression of women and the natural world under patriarchal systems. Key thinkers such as Vandana Shiva, Carolyn Merchant, and Greta Gaard argue that patriarchal dualisms, mind/body, male/female, culture/nature, systematically devalue both women and nature. Shiva's *Staying Alive* (1988) highlights how indigenous and rural women are most vulnerable to ecological destruction because their daily survival depends directly on forests, water, and land. Merchant's *The Death of Nature* (1980) critiques the mechanistic worldview that commodified the environment while reinforcing women's subordination. Gaard's intersectional ecofeminism further reveals that environmental harm is inseparable from social hierarchies involving gender, race, and indigeneity. Within this framework, women emerge not only as caregivers but also as spiritual mediators and ecological knowledge keepers.

The concept of gendered ecologies extends ecofeminist insights by showing how environmental interactions are shaped by socially assigned gender roles. In indigenous contexts such as the Adi community, ecological labor is distinctly gendered: women gather medicinal plants, prepare food, brew *si-ye*, maintain home gardens, and manage ritual practices. These activities generate a form of gender-specific ecological expertise that mainstream environmental discourse often overlooks. Through daily engagement with the landscape, women become repositories of ecological memory, shaping sustainable interactions with forests, rivers, and spirits.

Indigenous ecofeminism differs from Western ecofeminism by centering land-based epistemologies, where land is understood as identity, ancestry, and a living

spiritual force. For the Adi people, the natural world is animated by spirits and ancestors, and women play a crucial role in mediating these relationships through ritual, storytelling, and daily practices. Indigenous feminist theorists argue that ecological and cultural disruption stems from both patriarchy and colonialism, making spiritual ecology essential to understanding resistance. In *The Legends of Pensam*, reverence for forests, rivers, and spirits, and the central role of women in preserving these beliefs, reflects an indigenous ecological ethics grounded in memory, ritual, and oral tradition.

Women as Custodians of Ecological Wisdom

In *The Legends of Pensam*, women serve as vital custodians of ecological knowledge and cultural continuity within the Adi community. Characters such as Pinyar, Omum, and Nenang exemplify how women's intimate engagement with forests, rivers, herbs, and rituals forms the basis of indigenous ecological science. Pinyar's healing knowledge reflects this deep connection to the land, as seen in her warning about the misuse of *si-ye*: "It makes men hallucinate... sometimes households forget to observe the rules, and then our men die in the forests" (Dai 48). Her insight demonstrates how ecological understanding, spiritual awareness, and community ethics are intertwined.

Omum's skill in brewing *si-ye*, which requires precise knowledge of seasons, water, and ritual propriety, further symbolizes feminine ecological expertise. These gendered practices, gathering herbs, preparing ritual substances, maintaining home gardens, reveal that women's labor is fundamentally ecological, grounding community life in care, reciprocity, and environmental balance. Women also preserve ecological memory through storytelling. Their myths and warnings articulate the spiritual power of landscapes, as reflected in the tale of Biribik: "I saw a head with horns rising from the river... then the jungle swallowed the noise" (Dai 18). Such stories function as ecological codes of conduct, teaching younger generations to respect sacred spaces, observe taboos, and recognize the agency of non-human beings. Thus, mothers and elder women ensure intergenerational ecological continuity. Through daily embodied practices, cooking, foraging, tending to animals, preparing rituals, they transmit tactile, experiential environmental wisdom that cannot be captured by abstract scientific methods.

Gendered Experience of Ecology

Continuing from the earlier discussion of women as custodians of ecological knowledge, *The Legends of Pensam* deepens this connection by symbolically aligning the female body with the land. The novel's Indigenous ecofeminist framework understands the landscape as a

living, breathing entity, capable of nurturing, regenerating, and sustaining life. Similarly, women's bodies are depicted as sites of fertility, care, and cyclical renewal. These parallels evoke a shared ontology in which both land and women are sacred, generative, and vulnerable to violations. The themes of fertility and regeneration appear not only in childbirth or maternal roles but in the everyday actions women perform to maintain environmental cycles, preparing seeds, fermenting harvests, or invoking ancestral blessings during rituals. Indigenous ecofeminist theorists like Leanne Simpson assert that "the women's body is a site of land-based knowledge and continuity" (Simpson 44), a belief that resonates with Dai's portrayal of female characters who embody both ecological and spiritual vitality. The healing practices of Pinyar or the ritual authority of elder women reflect this regenerative force, suggesting that the health of the community and the land are intertwined through feminine embodiment.

The concept of gendered labor, introduced in earlier sections, becomes central to understanding ecological sustainability in Dai's narrative. Women undertake crucial tasks, agriculture, foraging, brewing (si-ye), and overseeing ritual preparations, each of which requires ecological sensitivity and environmental awareness. This labor is not merely domestic; it is ecological in the truest sense, sustaining the community's relationship with its natural habitat.

Agricultural and foraging activities teach women to observe the timing of seasons, the behavior of animals, and the readiness of plants. Brewing si-ye demands knowledge of water quality, fermentation climates, and ritual propriety. Ritual work, especially offerings to ancestors and river spirits, embeds ethical relationships with the non-human world. As Vandana Shiva notes in *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* (1998), women's work "sustains biodiversity and ecological cycles through knowledge, care, and reciprocity" (Shiva 97). Dai's narrative illustrates this principle vividly: women's ecological labor is the quiet but vital backbone of communal survival. This gendered work encodes ecological sustainability by ensuring that resources are used respectfully and cyclically rather than extractively. Through their roles, women maintain a cultural logic based on balance rather than domination, aligning closely with ecofeminist values of relationality and care.

Despite their central roles in ecological stewardship, women in this work are also disproportionately affected by ecological disruptions. Deforestation, militarization, modernization, and displacement threaten not only the land but the gendered knowledge systems tied to it. When forests shrink or rivers are polluted, women's healing practices, foraging routes, and ritual activities are directly

impacted. Indigenous ecofeminist theorists argue that environmental degradation constitutes a form of violence against women because it disrupts the land-based roles that sustain their cultural identity (Anderson 116). Dai's narrative reveals this vulnerability implicitly: road-building projects alter the terrain, spiritual sites become inaccessible, and traditional practices, particularly those carried out by women, begin to erode. The disappearance of ecological certainty destabilizes women's authority, diminishing their role as knowledge keepers and disrupting intergenerational transmission. Thus, gendered vulnerabilities in the novel reinforce the broader ecofeminist claim that environmental destruction is inseparable from the marginalization of women. The disruption of ecological balance becomes at once a cultural, spiritual, and gendered crisis.

Ecofeminist Readings of Key Episodes and Symbols

In *The Legends of Pensam*, spiritual beings such as Biribik, ancestral spirits, and forest entities play an important role in mediating relationships between humans and the non-human world. Significantly, it is often women who recognise, interpret, and respond to these spiritual presences. Their attunement to omens, unusual animal behavior, changes in the river, or disturbances in the forest, reflects not superstition but an eco-spiritual literacy cultivated across generations. Women like Pinyar and older matriarchs exhibit a spiritual mediation role, responding to environmental disruptions not through force or ritualized masculinity, but through intuition, negotiation, and relational knowledge. Ecofeminist theorists argue that women often maintain "spiritual continuity with the land" (Merchant 181), a concept reflected in how Dai's female characters honour forest spirits, warn the community of dangers, or perform rituals that bind the human and non-human worlds. The figure of the Biribik, a serpent-like presence associated with ecological imbalance, symbolizes the ecological consequences of violating sacred environmental ethics. Women respond to such disturbances with heightened sensitivity, reinforcing ecofeminist ideas of women as spiritual guardians of ecological equilibrium.

In the Adi worldview presented in *The Legends of Pensam*, the forest, river, and home are gendered as feminine spaces, nurturing, generative, and deeply relational. These ecological spaces embody attributes associated with Indigenous womanhood: sustenance, protection, emotional depth, and intuitive wisdom. The forest functions as a maternal presence, offering herbs, food, ritual materials, and spiritual guidance. Women who forage or heal cultivate a reciprocal relationship with the forest, one grounded in respect and ecological restraint. The river, particularly the Siang, is depicted with feminine qualities

of unpredictability, depth, and emotional resonance. The river's changing moods mirror the emotional landscape of women in the text, especially their responses to loss, separation, and ecological disturbance. Thus, these spaces become extensions of the feminine body, linking ecological vitality to women's cultural presence.

Women's emotional responses, grief, resilience, intuition, form a vital ecofeminist framework in the novel. Their emotions are intimately tied to ecological cycles and disruptions. When forests are threatened, spirits disturbed, or community harmony fractured, it is often women who internalize and articulate the ecological imbalance. This emotional ecology does not signal weakness; rather, it represents an Indigenous strength rooted in relational ethics. Their grief reflects communal loss, while their resilience becomes a strategy for ecological continuity. Ecofeminist scholar Greta Gaard describes in *Ecological Politics: Ecofeminists and the Greens* (1998) such responses as "affective ecological knowledge," where emotions become indicators of environmental change (Gaard 119). In the narrative, women act not only as caregivers but as emotional barometers of the land's wellbeing. Their intuitive reactions serve as early warnings, urging the community to restore balance before the land's wounds deepen. This emotional-spiritual relationship reinforces Dai's ecofeminist message: that the health of women and the health of the land are inseparably linked.

Comparative Indigenous Ecofeminist Perspectives

Placing *The Legends of Pensam* in dialogue with other indigenous literatures highlights both common threads in indigenous ecofeminist thought and the distinctive contributions of Dai's Adi-centered narratives. Comparative reading reveals how indigenous women across geographies act as cultural and ecological anchors, while local particularities, landscape, ritual, colonial history, shape the specific forms their ecofeminist practices take.

Across a range of indigenous texts, women frequently function as custodians of knowledge, ritual specialists, and moral stewards of land-based community memory. For instance, Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977) centres on Laguna Pueblo storytelling and the ceremonial labor that restores harmony between people and land; Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms* (1994) foregrounds Chickasaw women whose kinship with rivers and wild places anchors communal survival; Oodgeroo Noonuccal's poems lament dispossession and insist on relational obligations to Country. In each case women's embodied practices, ceremony, healing, song, ritual, are the mechanisms through which ecological wisdom endures.

The Legends of Pensam shares these features: Dai's women keepers brew, heal, tell stories, observe taboos, and mediate spirit-land relations. Like Silko's and Hogan's protagonists, Dai's female figures enact resilience through cultural continuity rather than overt political confrontation. Yet the local inflections differ: Dai's landscape is the Siang valley and the eastern Himalaya's river-forest matrix, its cosmology populated by Adi spirits, rites, and taboos. These particulars, specific rituals (such as si-ye brewing), serpent lore (Biribik), and the social forms of Adi kinship—distinguish her contribution from other indigenous literatures while echoing shared ecofeminist logics.

Universally, indigenous ecofeminism tends to rest on several interlinked premises: (1) relational ontology (land and people in reciprocal kinship); (2) women's centrality in maintaining subsistence, ritual, and oral transmission of ecological knowledge; and (3) the critique of extractive, patriarchal, and colonial development models that sever people from place. These elements appear across continents because many indigenous societies configure social life around place-based responsibilities and long-term stewardship practices. Specificity emerges in cosmology, ritual repertoire, gender organization, and historical context. For the Adi world Dai depicts, snake- and river-spirits, hunting taboos, rice-beer culture, and the memory of road- and expedition-era disruptions form a distinctive matrix. Elsewhere, the spiritual registers (e.g., Anishinaabe water protocols, Yolngu songlines, Pueblo kachina practices) shape how women's ecological roles manifest. Thus, while ecofeminist principles traverse cultures, they are always reworked through local knowledge systems and histories.

Dai's work contributes to global conversations about gendered ecologies in several important ways. First, it expands the geographical and aesthetic range of indigenous ecofeminist literature by centering the northeastern Indian highlands, a region underrepresented in anglophone environmental humanities. Second, it demonstrates how oral-form aesthetics (fragmented narrative, tale-frames, embedded myths) function as ecological archives; the book thus offers methodological insight for scholars seeking to recover embodied, non-textual knowledge in digital or archival projects. Third, by foregrounding quotidian female practices, brewing, childcare, herb-gathering, ritual maintenance, *Pensam* insists that ecological stewardship is not only ceremonial or spectacular but quotidian and gendered. Eventually, Dai shows how postcolonial pressures (roads, militarization, resource extraction) reconfigure gendered ecological roles; her novel thereby links local gendered experiences to global patterns of neocolonial environmental change.

Thus, the comparative perspective situates *The Legends of Pensam* within a transnational lineage of indigenous ecofeminist texts while underscoring its singular contributions: a localized cosmology of river–forest relations, a literary form that preserves oral ecological memory, and a subtle politics that treats women's everyday practices as frontline acts of environmental care and resistance.

The preceding analysis has demonstrated that *The Legends of Pensam* offers a richly layered indigenous ecofeminist vision in which ecology, gender, and spirituality are deeply intertwined. Through its portrayal of women as custodians of ecological knowledge, mediators of spiritual relationships, and practitioners of gendered ecological labor, the novel reveals how the Adi community's survival depends on women embodied and relational wisdom. By foregrounding these roles, Mamang Dai challenges dominant patriarchal and developmentalist frameworks that marginalize indigenous women's voices and erase their ecological contributions.

Central to this analysis is the recognition that Dai's narrative is rooted in land-based epistemologies, in which forests, rivers, spirits, and human communities exist in reciprocal relations. Women serve as carriers of oral traditions, protectors of sacred ecological boundaries, and interpreters of environmental signs. These elements affirm that the novel constructs a distinctly indigenous ecofeminist consciousness, one shaped not by theory alone, but by lived experience, ritual practice, and communal memory. Dai's fragmented storytelling, mythic structure, and emphasis on intergenerational transmission underscore the critical role of oral tradition as an ecological archive. By situating women at the center of ecological continuity and resilience, *The Legends of Pensam* challenges mainstream environmental narratives that often privilege scientific, masculinist, or extractive models of environmental understanding. Instead, it offers a vision in which emotional ecology, ritual continuity, and everyday acts of care form the foundation for sustainable living. This work stands as a powerful testament to the inseparability of land, womanhood, and cultural memory. Its ecofeminist insights not only enrich the environmental humanities but also offer pathways for reimagining sustainable futures grounded in indigenous wisdom and gendered ecological care.

III. CONCLUSION

Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam* offers a distinctly indigenous ecofeminist vision in which women, land, and community are deeply interconnected. Rooted in land-based epistemologies, the novel portrays forests, rivers,

spirits, and human life as coexisting within reciprocal ecological relations. Women emerge as central carriers of this worldview: they preserve oral traditions, guard sacred ecological boundaries, and interpret environmental signs that shape community ethics. Their healing practices, ritual labor, and storytelling form a living ecological archive that sustains cultural memory and environmental balance. By foregrounding women as custodians of ecological wisdom, the novel challenges mainstream environmental narratives that privilege scientific or masculinist frameworks. Instead, it highlights emotional ecology, relational care, and everyday practices as foundations for sustainable living. Dai's fragmented storytelling and mythic structure reinforce the importance of intergenerational knowledge transmission, emphasizing that ecological resilience is rooted in cultural continuity. It contributes significantly to the environmental humanities by illuminating indigenous ecological ethics and gendered knowledge systems. It invites readers to reconsider sustainability through the lens of indigenous women's experiences, offering a powerful model of ecological care grounded in reciprocity, memory, and spiritual ecology.

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Voicing the Voiceless: Exploring the Life of Precarity and Diasporic Subjectivity of the Migrant Workers in Deepak Unnikrishnan's *Temporary People* (2017)

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Abstract— The term *Diaspora* is a multifaceted nuanced one, ranging from a wide variety of immigrant experiences in the context of contemporary socio-political global scenario. Migrant experiences across the globe contextualize different migrant subjectivities, depending on individual subject position. The conventional notion of the idea of an ideal 'homeland' or an indifferent 'hostland' has been problematised in the context of the dynamic process of Global migration, displacement and re-discovery of the 'self'. In the context of present-day diaspora and mass exodus of people across borders, the term *Diaspora* points out to an ambivalence that helps re-think the idea of homeland/ hostland. Deepak Unnikrishnan's *Temporary People* (2017) is such a testament of the precarity of the displaced migrant labourers that lays bare the predicament of the working class migrants in the gulf countries. Unnikrishnan, a writer from Abu Dhabi and a resident in the US, hails from a Malayali village in Kerala. *Temporary People* (2017) is his debut novel that poignantly explores the themes of precarity, homelessness and the predicament of migrant labourers in the gulf countries who are treated as modern day slaves due to the system of *Kafala*. Thus, Unnikrishnan lays bare the complex diasporic subjectivity by portraying the 'lived experiences' of the migrant labourers who are considered as disposable cheap labour, an indispensable part of the country's economy, having no right to claim themselves as permanent citizens. Thus, my research paper aims at exploring the diasporic subjectivity of the migrant workers in the gulf countries who undergo the life of precarity, alienation and discrimination. By so doing, I would focus on how Unnikrishnan gives a voice to the 'voiceless' and exposes the varied diasporic experiences, affected due to the system of *Kafala*. I have employed the theoretical frameworks of Homi. K. Bhabha's "Third Space" as brought out in his *The Location of Culture* (1994). In addition to these, I have employed other theoretical interventions of Vijay Mishra, Hannah Arendt and Giorgio Agamben..



Keywords— Migration, border crossing, precarity, *Kafala*, ambivalence.

I. INTRODUCTION

Deepak Unnikrishnan, a writer from Abu Dhabi and a resident in the US explores the life of precarity and impermanence of the displaced migrant workers of the gulf countries in his debut novel *Temporary People* (2017) which won the Hindu Prize. Unnikrishnan hails from a Malayali family in a village of Kerala, India, and he is well aware of the displacement of the working class migrants

from the villages of Kerala to the oil monarchies in the gulf countries specifically in the UAE. In the UAE, foreign nationals constitute over 80 percent of the population who are brought in to construct and serve towering monuments to wealth in Abu Dhabi and Dubai. With the advantages of the oceanic trade routes connecting the Western part of India to that of the gulf countries, a large numbers of working class migrants (most of them are known as the

'Gulf Malayalis') leave behind their homeland in search of work and better earning. Unnikrishnan critiques the model of Kerala's 'welfare state' with regard to the life-altering remittances the migrant workers send in to expand its overall economy. *Temporary People* (2017) deals with the plight of the deplorable life of the migrant workers in the gulf countries who are hired as disposable cheap labors from the Indian sub-continent to work in the construction sites of skylines, monuments or towers. As Unnikrishnan rightly states in the "Introduction" of *Temporary People* (2017), fiction has "barely addressed the so-called guest workers of the Arabic gulf." Thus, in *Temporary People* (2017), he portrays the lived experiences of the displaced migrant workers who are treated as the invisible, non-citizens of a global enterprise. In one of his remarks on the ideas of precarity, instability and impermanence, Unnikrishnan states in the "Introduction" of *Temporary People* (2017): "The UAE does not grant citizenship to its foreign labor force or their children...". In a similar vein of thought, he poignantly explores the dehumanizing life of the working class migrants who are considered beneficial to the country's economy, yet treated as homeless or stateless, having no right to claim themselves as the permanent citizens of the state.

Unnikrishnan employs surrealistic technique to lay bare the disoriented and fragmented lives of the migrant workers in the gulf and presents a glimpse of their daily sufferings by means of grotesque representations of the migrant workers. Unlike the use of realism in Benyamin's *Goat Days* (2012), Unnikrishnan depicts the bizarre and the grotesque that corresponds to the disjointed lives of the migrants, marked by precarity, instability and impermanence. In *Goat Days* (2012), Benyamin explores the life of hardship and struggle of a gulf Malayali migrant worker named Najeeb who is tricked into a slave like existence, herding goats in the isolated desert of Saudi Arabia. Benyamin uses realism to expose themes like brutality and inhumanity of the modern day slavery in the Gulf countries, popularly known as *Kafala*ⁱ. *Kafala* is a sponsorship system in many of the countries of the Middle East, including the UAE, where a *Kafeel* or a sponsor hires cheap labor force with some preconditions. This practice has often been criticized by the human rights activists because of its barbarity and inhumanity. The *Kafeel* or the sponsor hires the migrants with the pre-conditions like confiscating their passport, imposing restrictions on them regarding returning to their homeland, etc etc. Consequently, this sponsorship system turns the migrants into slaves who are bound to work with certain inhuman work agreements under any unforgiving master.

II. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Temporary People (2017) is a testament of the stateless non-citizen working class migrants who occupy a space of non-belonging. Unnikrishnan gives a voice to the 'voiceless' and problematizes the migrant experiences of the working class communities who epitomize a sense of non-belonging to either the lost 'homeland' or the indifferent host society. Motaz Attalla, an Egyptian writer reinforces the idea of the "Third Space" in an interview which is published in the journal *Mada Masr*. He had migrated to the US after the failure of the Egyptian revolution and the return to authoritarianism. Thus, being situated in this kind of 'border zone', he understands his diasporic experience in terms of a "Third Space" which is neither Egyptian nor American. Thus, Attalla argues, the idea of a 'Third Space' has its "own literary canon, its cultural memes, its particular brand of cultural hybridity and nostalgia." Homi. K. Bhabha in his ground-breaking book *The Location of Culture* (1994) refers to the term "Third Space" to reinforce the idea of liminality and cultural hybridity. Thus, as he argues, the third space or the 'interstitial' phase is linked with the idea of discursive ambivalence where identities are contested and performed against a nationalist pedagogy. In the light of the above statement, the idea of the 'third space' offers a space for cultural interaction and dynamic exchange of intercultural practices where a migrant well integrates into the host society yet maintains cultural ties to its homeland (for example, the Asian-Americans in the US or the British-Indians or British-Pakistanis). On the contrary, Unnikrishnan's depiction of the migrant labourers is marked by instability and impermanence where they are emotionally bound to the space of their origin and at the same time undergo the life of precarity in an indifferent host society. As Unnikrishnan depicts in the novel, 'third space' for them is a space of non-belonging where they belong neither to their nostalgic homeland nor to a hostile receiving society. He portrays this unpredictability at the very beginning of his novel with reference to the remark of an anonymous person:

There exists this city built by labor, mostly men, who disappear after their respective buildings are made. Once the last brick is laid, the glass spotless, the elevators functional, the plumbing operational, the laborers, every single one of them, begin to fade, before disappearing completely. Some believe the men become ghosts, haunting the facades they helped build. When visiting, take note. If you are outside, and there are buildings nearby, ghosts may already be falling, may even

have landed on your person. (Unnikrishnan, 2017, P: 3)

Giorgio Agamben popularises the term 'bare life' to refer to those 'biopolitical' subjects, who are treated as animals in nature without political freedom. Though he refers to this term to denote the condition of the war-refugees who can be regulated and governed by the totalitarian state, this term is still relevant in our present-day global migration where a large number of immigrants are considered to be stateless non-citizens. Hannah Arendt raises the same concern in her book *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1973), where she talks about an era of calamity that has produced 'homelessness on an unprecedented scale, rootlessness to an unprecedented depth' (Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, P: 479). She further argues that for those people affected by it, 'powerlessness has become the major experience of their lives' (Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, P: 479). In *Temporary People* (2017), Unnikrishnan depicts the migrant guest workers who are reduced to 'bare life' with no voice of their own. They are treated as disposable labourers who are reduced to the level of objects. All the twenty-eight 'Chabters' in this novel encapsulate the disjointed lives of the migrant workers and Unnikrishnan delineates the plight of the workers using surrealism technique to foreground the bizarre and the grotesque. Thus, in the novel, a migrant escapes the deplorable situation in the labor camp and turns into a luggage himself. Another bizarre phenomenon happens when a migrant eats a passport to become a passport himself. Unnikrishnan takes recourse to this grotesque technique to represent the lived experiences of the migrants that shows how they are treated like objects and not as humans. As he writes in the first *chabter*ⁱⁱ, titled as "Gulf Return":

IN A LABOR CAMP, somewhere in the Persian Gulf, a laborer swallowed his passport and turned into a passport. His roommate swallowed a suitcase and turned into a little suitcase. When the third roommate, privy and vital to the master plan, ran away the next morning with the new suitcase and passport, he made it past the guard on night duty, onto the morning bus to the airport, past the bored ticket agent at check-in, past security, past pat down and a rummage through his suitcase... (Unnikrishnan, 2017, P: 5)

In her book *The Cartographies of Diaspora* (1996), Avtar Brah opines that the concept of home is connected to a 'homing desire'. Brah further argues that home is not a place but a space that evokes a homing desire to assimilate to it. This pervading sense of homing desire is observed in

the *chabter* "Birds" where a migrant labourer named Iqbal frequently dreams being a bird that can liberate himself from his present socio-economic constrictions. The *chabter* "Birds" delves into the life of precarity of the guest workers who engage in constructing skylines, monuments and sky-high towers in Abu Dhabi and Dubai. This *chabter* shows the ephemeral life of the workers who fall from the incomplete buildings and disappear before it comes to a completion. In this *chabter*, Unnikrishnan explores the miserable condition of the workers through the character of Iqbal, Badran and Nandan, who undergo the life of precarity in the gulf. As, he gives voice to the 'voiceless', he points out the flaws of the global enterprise that pumps out maximum productivity out of the labourers. They send in life-altering remittances to the place they leave behind, yet they are considered as non-citizens of the global enterprise. In this *chabter*, Unnikrishnan presents Anna Varghese who patches up the broken limbs of the workers and listens to their stories of daily hardships with patience. As discussed earlier, Unnikrishnan's surrealistic representation of the lives of the guest workers corresponds to the fragmented, disjointed stories of the migrant workers to whom the idea of home is a pure nostalgia. As he writes:

Pedestrians mostly ignored those who fell outside the construction site, walking around them, some pointing or staring. The affluent rushed home, returning with cameras and film. Drivers of heavy-duty vehicles or family sedans took care to avoid running over them. But it didn't matter where labor fell. The public remained indifferent. In the city center, what unnerved most witnesses was that when the men fell, they not only lost their limbs or had cracks that looked like fissures, but they lost their voices, too. They would just look at you, frantically moving what could still move. But most of the time, especially in areas just being developed, the fallen simply waited. Sometimes, the men fell onto things or under things where few people cared to look. Or they weren't reported missing. These were the two ways, Anna would share with anyone who asked, that laborers could die onsite. (Unnikrishnan, 2017, P: 11).

In another *chabter* titled as "Pravasis", Unnikrishnan underscores the relationship of the guest workers with the place of origin they have left behind. This *chabter* "Pravasis" exposes the real struggles of the migrant

workers who are treated as stateless non-citizens. It appears to be a fragmented glimpse of their daily lives and by presenting this *chabter* as a means of portraying the reality, Unnikrishnan offers a rich polyphony with a focus on the real scenario. As he writes:

Expat. Worker.

Guest. Worker.

Guest Worker. Worker.

Foreigner. Worker.

Non-resident. Worker.

Non-citizens. Workers. (Unnikrishnan, 2017, P: 23).

Temporary People (2017) problematises the notion of Global migration with reference to the working class migrants in the gulf whose 'personal' life is connected to the 'political'. In the *chabter*, "Fone", Unnikrishnan deliberately uses the trope of teleportation to refer to the notion of virtual border crossing. But, at the same time, he showcases how the distance also affects their personal relationships with their home. Unnikrishnan problematises the conventional idea of an ideal homeland or an indifferent host society. In this *chabter*, the trope of the 'fone' has a dual meaning of both minimizing the geographical distance and at the same time increasing the gaps in personal relationships. Johny Kutty, a migrant worker is instantly connected to his wife through teleportation and find his wife involved in an extra-marital affair with his friend Peeter:

The device resembled a rotary phone, but it wasn't a phone; it was a *fone*. The fone did the one thing you would expect a phone to do: it could make calls. However, it couldn't receive any. The fone's main purpose was teleportation. A man could use the fone to talk to his wife, and as his wife cried softly into the neighbor's phone, her husband would hover over her, like a giant bee, seeing his wife cry like that, feeling satisfied that his wife could cry like that, content that he could see her cry like that, even though she wouldn't be able to see him, or even know that he was there, so close he could see the dirt on the back of her neck. And he was so happy he could see her cry like that. (Unnikrishnan, 2017, P: 25).

According to Stuart Hall, home is a place, not of 'being' but of 'becoming'. Hall opines that the idea of home can be recreated through memories where a migrant assimilates to a newer place by constantly negotiating with

it. The themes of displacement and nostalgia for the lost homeland are manifested in the *chabter* "Water" where an anonymous narrator recounts his experiences of a lost homeland. The narrator recollects the place of birth, marked by the interplay of water and land. The coastal village where the narrator lived was surrounded by a number of water bodies that used to overflow in the monsoon. The narrator recounts his experiences of catching fish in the lake, which according to the local folklore was believed to be enchanted by *jinns*. On the contrary, the narrator expresses his mourning for the lost homeland when his mother works as a migrant labourer in a land bereft of water. Thus, the narrator's story of displacement is marked by the interplay of mourning and nostalgia where the place of birth, surrounded by the bountiful rivers and the present place of migration, bereft of water are placed in stark contrast. As the narrator recounts his memories:

My mother now works on land almost completely bereft of water, where there are no rivers, but instead a salty sea where many years ago, men dove for pearls from wooden Sambuks. She takes care of a girl who is around my age. The girl's name is Ibtisam and she understands our tongue...They hide during the day, she wrote, to escape the heat. At dusk they emerge, exploring a more manageable climate, to partake in its nightlife, to eat at restaurants, to host dinners, to hold hands in the park, to play games, to kiss and not get caught, to teach their children how to ride bicycles. Before dawn, they disappear, only to return the following day. (Unnikrishnan, 2017, P: 194- 195).

In his ground-breaking book, *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing the Diasporic Imaginary* (2007), Vijay Mishra remarks "All Diasporas are unhappy but every diaspora is unhappy in its own way" (Mishra, 2007: 1). In a similar vein of thought, the *chabter* "Veed", explores the themes of longing, belonging and a sense of connection to one's familial roots and thus brings out this pervading tone of diasporic melancholy. The word "veed" is a Malayalam word that denotes the place where the ancestors are cremated, thereby signifying the place of belonging, mourning and nostalgia. In that context, the word embodies the concept of one's familial home and connects him/ her to the ancestral past. In this *chabter*, an anonymous narrator recounts his childhood memory of visiting his ancestral place Kochi where his grandmother is cremated. This poignant storytelling of a guest worker is a reminiscence of the nostalgia for the homeland and by

presenting this story Unnikrishnan explores the themes of diasporic identity, senses of connection to one's familial cultural practices and heritage. As the *chabter* "Veed" throws light on the themes:

"No!" he laughed. "Veed? Veed, *where?* Where aare *you* from?" The English equivalent of "veed" is "home", or "place". In Malayalam, my Parents' tongue, "veed" encompasses a family's soul, where ancestors are cremated, where the soil remembers your footprint. But in translation, as "veed" becomes "home", the word's power has ebbed.

"I am from Trichur," I remember telling Uncle Saleem after I checked

with Amma. (Unnikrishnan, 2017, P: 212- 213).

III. CONCLUSION

Thus, *Temporay People* (2017) with its rich polyphony, offers a kaleidoscopic lens that mirrors wide variety of migrant experiences depending on individual subject position. It is a powerful testament of the lived experiences of the gulf guest workers that delves into how the migrant labourers grapple with the notion of identity, home and belonging. Unnikrishnan addresses these relevant issues of working class migration and the plight of the workers in a distant land. This rendering of 'voices' to the 'voiceless' turns this novel into a testament of the ground reality of the guest workers. Since, the term Diaspora is a multifaceted nuanced term, Unnikrishnan's *Temporay People* (2017) sheds light on the intricacies of the labor diaspora or the diaspora of the working class migrants. It discusses how the contemporary socio-economic determinants shape the identity of the migrants and thereby form different diasporic subjectivities.

IV. END NOTE

iThe term *Kafala* refers to a sponsorship system in many of the countries of the Middle East that links a migrant worker's legal status to a specific employer or sponsor known as *kafeel*. Thus, the sponsor or *kafeel* is responsible for the worker's visa, residency, and exit permits, that restricts the worker's ability to switch jobs or leave the country without permission. It has been condemned and severely criticized for its inhuman exploitation and abuse, such as withheld wages and poor working conditions. In recent times, some countries such as Saudi Arabia and others have abolished this system.

iiUnnikrishnan uses this spelling instead of the real grammatically correct spelling of Chapter to refer to the disjointed and fragmented lives of the migrant workers. He deliberately uses this misspelt word in case of the *Chabter* "Fone" where he drops the actual spelling of the word.

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Reading Eco-spirituality, Indigenous truths and Self-affirmation in Smitha Sehgal's *Brown God's Child**

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Abstract— Indian English literature with its well-established identity and evolved aesthetics seems to have garnered well-deserved attention from the most distinguished *littérateurs* and critics globally. As a matter of fact, the creative-critical field has re-invented itself in recent decades following a persistent battle against the hierarchies of power, while zealously guarding its local colour and retaining its foundation in the land's socio-cultural ethos. Despite being seen as a contested territory for its complex affiliation with the language of the colonial masters, the Indian writings in English have emerged as a potent field for enabling its practitioners to regain their sense of the self by entering into meaningful interactions with fields such as history, philosophy, spirituality, feminism and ecopsychology. From the times of having 'ambivalent' attitude towards the politics and ideologies of imperialism, colonialism and capitalism to the point, where these writers, equipped with post-colonial stance and globalectical imagination are asserting their indigenous identity and eloquently transcribing their Indian experience with a renewed commitment to Indian thought, with due emphasis on its pluralistic, multilingual, syncretic and eco-spiritual philosophy, it can be stated that Indian English literature's contribution to world literatures in English is quite definitive and tangible. These works, by maintaining an equilibrium between the anglophone and the native writing traditions, have secured a distinctive place in the literary ecosystem of India, existing alongside literatures being written in Indian languages. Indubitably, these writings have come to acquire deeper implications, for showing a sustained engagement with post colonial subjectivities, politics, cultural milieu as well as histories of the subaltern. In its post-modern, post-colonial avatar, Indian English Literature refuses to be reduced to a monolithic identity and is, characterized by a sense of unity in conveying unequivocal reflections on fragmented identities, intertextual relations, blurring of gender/caste/class/race/ethnicity based boundaries, inexhaustible thematic and stylistic variety and conscious attempts to be heterogeneous, equitable, conscientious and faithful to native traditions and humanistic impulses. The present paper situates contemporary Indian English poet, Smitha Sehgal's second poetry anthology, *Brown God's Child*, into the larger tradition of Indian Writings in English, probing intricately into the ideas of eco-spirituality, indigenous truths and self-affirmation in order to explore the possibility of a decolonized and critically self-aware literary sensibility.



Keywords— Identity, Aesthetics, Post-colonial Subjectivities, Eco-spirituality Globalectical Imagination, Self-affirmation

Indian English women poets have markedly enriched the variegated field of Indian English Poetry through their pluralistic voices, rich cadences and refined sensibilities. Negotiating the caste, class, gender, race, language and sexuality divides, they express themselves in the most vociferous manner as their evolved poetic

configurations question and examine the relevance of the handed down traditions and assert new perspectives in an attempt to reinstate sanity in the polemically divided world. The contemporary scene of Indian English Women's poetry looks promising with the arrival of creative figures like Arundhati Subramaniam, Meena Kandasamy, Mani

Rao, Sumana Roy, Rochelle Potkar, Nandini Sahu, Nabina Das, Maitreyi Bhattacharjee, Smitha Sehgal, Kashiana Singh, Tishani Doshi, Shamayita Sen, Basudhara Roy Chatterjee, Jagari Mukherjee, Nishi Pulugurtha, Nabanita Sengupta, Shweta Rao Garg, Neha Bansal, Urna Bose, who with their readings, renegotiations and re-articulations of lives, cultures, emotions, ideologies, scepticism, reservations, disillusionments have traced the human predicament and the future of the humanity in all its complexity. With a strong conviction and the resolve to articulate the 'female experience' they approach the 'space of subjectivity' by questioning and challenging the canon as well as the conventional images postulated by male authors and by centralizing the diverse experiences of women. Their poems invariably include conversations on and around gender stereotypes, immigrant experience, caste/class/gender/self binaries, socio-political digital realities, collective conscience, mental health, climate change, enhanced choices of agency, the urgency of self reflexivity and rhythmic possibilities in a world marred by discordance, dissonance and cacophony. Dismantling the politics of otherness through a sustained and deliberate struggle with the hegemonical forces, as well as the demystification and de-colonizing of meta narratives, these women poets have gained confidence in their voices, their dreams and are exploring alternative worlds, utopias for human survival and future growth of the civilization. These women poets have explored the possibilities that freedom and democracy may promise to individuals, from imagining a world with inclusive ecosystems sans injustices, sans discrimination, sans violence, sans exploitation and sans oppressiveness with a view to empowering all human as well as non human life forms creating models of sustainability, acceptability, belongingness, health and survival through an understanding of deep ecology, spirituality, global human rights and intersectional feminist approaches.

Its heartening to behold that Indian English women poets with their inclusive world view are re-imagining the universe and making creative/critical interventions in the field that has global ramifications- a step that has in turn afforded a consistent and steady identity to Indian English Literature justifiably envisioned as a large tree with stronger roots and higher branches, accommodating diversity, plurality, and difference. Taking huge leaps of faith, this post-independent, second generation of women poets, has responded to and articulated their opinions on all the contemporary concerns; looking into and beyond the discussions of 'subjection' and 'subjectivity,' to entailing dialogues on glass ceilings, global precarity, the politics of vulnerability and sustainability, fictionalization of history, invisibility of the subaltern,

traditions and modernity, to reinstating their voices and place, to maintaining authenticity in post human age, to overcoming digital literacy gaps, to becoming catalysts of transformation and social change through digital empowerment, revaluing women's literary tradition, conforming solidarity with global feminism and trans national human right movements, foraging newer paths, uncharted territories and taking newer roles in alliance with women of previous generation and women of future. It is in this connection that the present paper makes a detailed study of poet Smitha Sehgal's distinctive literary contributions and her trajectory under the sub genre or the tradition of Women's Writing within the subcontinent as a potent medium of rhyme, reformation, regeneration and self-realization. Looking beyond the familiar constructions of femininity and refusing to be defined by the conventional roles and confinement to the 'enclosed space' of domesticity or the stereotypical images or commodification of women within the market dominated consumer culture, and fighting the biases inherent in work spaces, these women have shown determination, resilience and strength that has been the subject of interest to poets in general and women poets in particular. But this journey to selfhood and equal opportunities has not been easy and on the way women have fought numerous obstacles laid down by patriarchy and its various institutions such as capitalism, neo liberalism and totalitarian forces and reasserted their identity for the rights of a dignified existence to all. Converging the personal and the political in their creative imagination, these women poets have denounced inequality, violence, erasure and otherness and have entrusted their belief in a shared literary tradition, appreciating all women's and marginalized people's voices, with their stories bending back and forth establishing a continuum of shared existence and humanity. In their relentless search for meaning and empowerment, they have reposed faith in oral literary traditions and collective memories of their community and people. Their disbelief and struggle with normative language and its antiquated tools have prompted them to explore the possibility of language to combine themes as diverse as protest, nostalgia and belonging in powerful expression with the help of new and innovative linguistic features. Audre Lorde, American feminist poet and civil rights activist in her essay, "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action" drew upon the need to engage with the linguistic space as a site of ideological contestation, which may represent or misrepresent the truth, hence the need to pay attention to the language politics: "For those of us who write, it is necessary to scrutinize not only the truth of what we speak, but the truth of that language by which we speak it. For others, it is to share

and spread also those words that are meaningful to us. But primarily for us all, it is necessary to teach by living and speaking those truths which we believe and know beyond understanding. Because in this way alone we can survive, by taking part in a process of life that is creative and continuing, that is growth.”(43) In the Indian context the question of language as a choice for literary expression becomes even more pertinent and we see that almost all the women poets have responded to it in their own way as language not merely constructs our world, it also facilitates us in asserting our world view, identity and counteract to what we have grown as seeing and believing to be the truth. The needs of self discovery and self expression are in a way central to all women's writings. Audre Lorde further observes, “If I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for me and eaten alive.” Literature has significantly aided poets and writers in their quest for identity and in the affirmation of their existence and individuality and poetry of Smitha Sehgal is a clear manifestation of the fact.

Poet Smitha Sehgal is one of the rising stars in the Indian literary firmament, who deserves to be read and appreciated for her unique sensibility, confident voice and pertinent thematic considerations embodied in her well-crafted and effervescent poetic ruminations. Recognized as a 'Featured Poet' for the erbacce Poetry Prize in the year 2025, Smitha has gained wide recognition for her work in the prominent anthologies at home and abroad making her a strong presence in the field of women's poetry not just in India but also internationally.

While the discerning readers might recall her first anthology, “How Women Become Poets in Malabar(2023)” for a strong “female imagination” and explorations into gender dynamics in social relations, representations of gendered subjectivities, and the cultural spectrum of the Malabar region, her newest work continues to be impelled by her proclamation of a 'woman's space' as an individual, as a 'writing woman', with the necessary condition of a 'woman's viewpoint' and a fierce rejection of the received hierarchies in literary as well as social domains. The anthology “Brown God's Child” is all about feminist affirmations, cultural rootedness and the desire to proffer an indigenous vision for the world where feminine energy, poetry and ideas of coexistence and ecospirituality coalesce and inspire. The collection is aptly dedicated to the “Western Ghats and River Nila, to the sunlight and dusk, to the Arabian sea by the coast of Malabar” -physical and emotional spaces which are part of her mental and spiritual make up and which consciously, unconsciously resurface reminding one

of the importance of native social milieu, cultural lineage and diverse linguistic literary experiences in shaping of one's identity and subjectivity. The very first poem of the volume, “Brown God's Child,” after which the volume is named can be seen as her poetic manifesto that unveils her poetic concerns and is simultaneously marked by a strong affirmation of her identity which should be seen as a confluence of the landscape, the seasons, the topography of the coastal region, the ancient Gods, diverse practices, rites and rituals, linguistic features and her gendered upbringing which have been responsible for the crafting of her consciousness. Her poems do not necessarily encapsulate discussions on women's 'struggles', 'silences' or 'subjugation' for the sake of conforming to a certain ideology by following the trend, rather display a genuine concern with questions of identity, dignity, foregrounding the need for subversion of normative conditions in search of greater autonomy and rights for women and those living at the periphery of the society. Making an implicit reference to the fact of 'brown burden' or the racial discrimination faced by people of colour, diverse ethnicity, she talks about the need for change and ways to include the marginalized humanity in the mainstream. Referring to herself as the daughter of the soil, she takes pride in her 'half Sanskrit-half Dravidian' linguistic style and eloquently describes her lineage: “My Gods are forest dwellers,/their skin marked in burnt caramel/of the tropical sun. On Amavasya nights / they feast on flame-torched cassava /and salted mackerel.”(9)

Adhering to a post colonial identity, she chooses to align with her complex, raw native reality than a smooth urban metropolitan character. Her awareness of gender and cultural identity continually makes and unmakes her as she further observes in the first poem, “Brown God's Child” : “Sounds in my language/ are symbols of dark and light”(9) Walking her way through gender/ethnic biases, where she is identified for hair “as a mass of tangled roots and coiled secrets of equinox” she dares to “wander into faithless verses” choosing poetry as her armour against the mechanisms that are to be accounted for the 'othering' of indigenous people. In “Durga's Homecoming,” she makes us aware of the contradiction and hypocrisy inherent in our culture where women are simultaneously worshipped as goddesses while being subjected to unimaginable physical, mental, psychological trauma and violence because of their vulnerability, ignorance and the misogyny inherent in human cultures. Even in the ritual worshipping, the poet's heart remembers those women who went missing and those who were forgotten and were obliterated from society's memory: “Count grass and rice grains/in 108 numbers, as many names/of women gone missing.”(10)

Emily Dickinson was fervently committed to truth in her creative journey, as could be seen from her following assertion in a letter written to Mr. Higginson, "truth is such a rare thing and it is delightful to tell it". Similarly, in Smitha's poetry, one can observe a deep reverence for truth-telling in the most objective, nonetheless in the most effulgent manner. Talking about her fragmented existence and her quest thereof a certitude and concreteness, she explodes into metaphors, finding analogies with, "I am broken/into the many breaths of women/who have gone out into the desert/with feet smelling of sunset." (11) The poem "Perimenopause" is a deep exploration into womanhood and the myriad of travails, one is subjected to and, which somehow are conducive to the creation of beauty, meaning and life in its extended form. Unraveling the joys of motherhood but not without its accompanying untold pains, she revisits the process: "a mother said children raise you from the dead/ her face wrought with things I could only know/ all the while I hid the stars and slivers of desire/ rained down the hill on hours of death/ turning my womb into a red marsh." (13) Imagining the womb as a 'red marsh' she enables us to see the whole experience of motherhood from a new perspective, wherein lie the possibility of future but not without the painful remembrance of unborn dreams, repressed desires and aspirations for being and 'becoming.'

In *Brown God's Child* the interaction between the physical landscape and the individuals is an unambiguous one and an invigorating one. Unpacking the whole experience of being born in Malabar, several poems lead us through an enchanting array of images, instantly driving us into the world of sight, sound, smell, touch and taste. Mostly rural and coastal imagery comprising of wood smoke, soft white appams, pot of fish moilee, coconut groves, ripe paddy, coral reef, sliced pineapple, piquant summer, holler of fishermen, salted mackerel, drumstick flowers, monsoon, the earthy smell of petrichor collectively refer to the bio-cosmic rhythm ushering us into the lap of nature. Regretfully, humans, the Gods of the anthropocene era, have alienated nature and other indigenous identities as well as non human entities, further problematizing their mutual existence or interdependence, taking them down the path of destruction as the poet agonizes: "We're busy with our wars, we don't have gardens/ or flowers. We have cut down our trees and hills,/ quarried and mined our mountains ravaged/ our honour, stifled the bountiful Neela into a shallow/ stream. our oceans have turned black with sorrow, birds and stars drop dead from our wrathful skies." (75) Many poems serve as reminders that by prioritizing ecological integrity and aligning with eco spiritual energy, humanity can reclaim their inner balance and forgotten songs.

Mostly confessional, the poems draw from her vast repertoire of experiences in the field of legal justice, ethical retribution, but alongside also reference the despair, the exclusion, the emotional psychological scars, felt by those who are to bear the brunt of socio-political and cultural apathy. Confronting the linguistic, cultural marginalization boldly, the poet determinedly celebrates the beauty, the diversity, the mellifluousness, the raw texture and the colloquial quality of the indigenous languages in her verses. Despite writing in English, her commitment to her native language is quite pronounced. She connects to her roots, languages and dialects in an unequivocal manner. Taking pride in the diverseness, plurality and cultural polyvalency- regular features of her everyday existence, she feels encouraged to retrieve and re-claim her 'native history.' What ostensibly seems to be a 'palindromic forest of fireflies/rooted in the deep mulch of timeless Prakrit' set in the 'honeycomb of vowels and rough-hewn /cloak of landslides,' (16) her language glimmers with an inherent beauty, melody and a raw intuitive quality oozing through her expressions. Smitha's poetry has to be seen as an evolved mode of language brimming with consciously imbibed and unconsciously inherited traditions and practices surrounded by which she feels the compulsion to defy and subvert normative conditions and cultural presuppositions as well as hierarchies of meanings leading to the formation of a unique female subjectivity. Her questionings and critical attitudes about religion, mythology, gender, sexuality, ecology, ideology, history, nation, and almost everything else lend her poetry a very self-conscious trait furthering the need for a closer engagement with her verses.

The collection is extremely eclectic as it braids together the region's history, mythology, reminiscences of friends and family, existential questionings and sundry reflections on nature's munificence, indigenous values and pursuit of hope and respite in the face of world's deepest inequities. In the poem "Drumstick Flowers" the poet with the help of a set of objects, situations, felt emotions, sequence of events, shared experiences transforming them into potent symbols or 'objective correlatives' conveys the dread felt by a woman, stuck in an abusive relationship, suffering physical and mental violence as "she's afraid of nights" making reader comprehend the pervasiveness of crimes against women. In a rather empathetic enactment of the situation, she extends her solidarity to Vasanthi, asking her to be fearless and not to be daunted by any barbarity concluding with a befitting retort: "And why should you be?" The poem blurring the difference between the real and the mythical context, bringing a picture from another world, ends on a sordid note making readers' aware of the

routine cruelty against women with the final line, "a goddess drowns." (70)

Most of her characters inhabiting this collection are alive with a strong sense of humanity. The poem "Noon Ripens" is significant as it brings home the fact of labour in the life of a woman as she says, "A woman must go on, be it rain or sun (71)" reminding one of Wordsworth's "The Solitary Reaper," Nirala's "Woh Todti Patthar (English Translation: "That Woman Breaking Stones") and Robert Frost's "Mowing" and "The Tuft of Flowers" leading to the ironical insight that the muse of many a male poets, silently bears the burden of every civilizational grief. Thus breaking free of the idealized and the idolized notions of themselves, rejecting the eulogies offered by male poets and writers, women wish to come out of the haze and talk about their predicament and live in reality. The poem "Immigrant" brings to light the subordinate status of women in society and also the way love and marriage result in the extinction of their individuality, as the poet calmly reflects through metaphors: "The slang for love/also meant 'to drown' /in our language.(28)"

Further, in a very unique way, the meaning of each poem depends on other poems: there's a circularity and interconnection that helps readers decode the meaning of these nuanced verses. "A poem for Delhi" is an ode to the historical city making us witness the glory, the time lapse, the cultural shift, the urban decay, the neglect of its majestic architecture and the cultural spirit, the growing alienation and the fragmented identity of the city dwellers. It's with an unflinching honesty that she ruminates over the struggle of humanity with violence, indifference, disease, pollution, corrosion of values, war, patriarchy and the hegemony of the powerful and the cruel resulting in the horrifying sounds of doom. In response to these threatening conditions, Smitha's poetry, moving with passion and alacrity works towards the regeneration and renewal of society. Poetry, for her, like the inherited family heirloom- a bronze clip, holds the conscience of the generations and becomes a keeper of moral ground in times of uncertainty, when, borrowing the words of W.B. Yeats, "the best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity." ("The Second Coming") The juxtaposition of "the smell of blood and bread and Ghalib's anguish" (14) in "A poem for Delhi" is highly evocative and conveys a generational disillusionment with condensed imagery. The poems blend the regional, the mystical and the feminist awareness, converging multiple consciousness to create a powerful immersive poetic experience.

Some of the poems continue to be in dialogues with poets and writers of earlier epochs, giving her poem an

intertextual resonance, requiring readers to read and reread the verses for deeper interpretation of the context or symbolism. One can often hear the poetic echoes of Jayanta Mahapatra and Sugathakumari in poems that are explicitly marked by eco consciousness. The questions of desire, faith and belonging are raised again and again with the help of striking images and thought-provoking reflections, bringing constantly to mind the poetry of Kamala Das. The poem "Praying" is one of the gentle reminders to the humanity about the lost symbiosis that existed between humans and nature and the loss of which come with the flouting of the code of mutual respect and dignity. The poet's observation "What is time/ but a line that never ends?" brings to mind the lines of T.S. Eliot from "Burnt Norton" evoking the memories of the irredeemable past and future and their irreversible connection with the present. Bending backward and then forward with a dramatic sense of continuity, the poet's persona as a healer, works her magic through "the silence of broken things." She skilfully captures the vibrant tropical scenery of "God's own country" while crafting dry, witty, and ironic vignettes that invite pondering. In her poetry, there is humour, there is flippancy, there is irreverence, there is grace, there is thought, there is music as well as practical pragmatic sense. To her, poetry is "but God's flesh and blood" (55) The imagery in her poetry is strikingly original and breathtaking due to the fact that it has distinct visual appeal: "The Image is more than an idea. It is a vortex or cluster of fused ideas and is endowed with energy" as observed modernist poet Ezra Pound. She often invites readers to explore the depths of human imagination and thinking, making us see her constant engagement with equality and justice. The following lines from the poem "Lord Shiva" are important in this connection: "Is the sun a woman? Has she toggled the stars,/ the red planet, the galaxy? What lies in the prayers of rivers, under the amber skin/ of oceans ripening?" (49) Her quest for alternative reality as 'everything is socially and linguistically constructed' and is meant to favour some and neglect others, she makes it possible to talk about re-vision, recognition and re-clamation through her strategies of exploring the paradox, the underlying tension, the irreconcilable with a sense of familiarity, commitment to truth and warmth of a fellow being. Several poems unravel the darkest secrets of Indian homes and society, bringing their over hyped sanctity into question wherein lay buried the suppressed desires, silences and traumatic experiences of the larger female world. The poem "No singing" brings to the fore, the issue of childhood trauma that steals the joy and innocence of the happiest phase of one's life, turning it into an unforgettable horrifying memory forever, as the

poet reveals: "His thick fat fingers grazed/my waist once,/before I broke away abrupt/ to play hopscotch." (69)

In many of her poems, we find her revaluing women's experience and acknowledging their significant contributions to society. The expert on laws on gender justice in her makes us see the burden that women carry and the many lives they are subjected to live despite frameworks and policies such as, Maputo Protocol and Istanbul Convention. In the poem titled, "Beyond Maputo Protocol," she enquires, "In that line where you say women hold up/ Half of the sky, have you not seen/ They are solitary watercolors treading/ Barefoot in the pastoral fields bundles/ of corn stocks balanced on their heads" (61)

Understandably her themes are varied involving love in the war-torn Gaza, the hawkers of the war, the dispossession and the displacement, humans writing an elegy for the earth through their mindless actions in the anthropocene epoch and much more. With a felicity of diction, visual and sensuous imagery, unified sensibility and unique symbolism, her poetry narrates the familiar, the unfamiliar, the concrete, the abstract, the definitive as well as the inconclusive with ease and finesse. She is unpretentious, candid in her approach and her poetry besides displaying a subtle aesthetics maintains a strong moral sense alongside gentle demeanour. She faithfully renders her experiences of the self and the world, oftentimes making us question the status quo and seeking to re-establish fairness and justice in all spheres of life. Beneath the familiar tropes of Jasmine, autumn leaves, pomegranate blossoms, snow melting, one is sure to find images of subversion that take us to the image of a strong womanhood. With an impressive command over the poetic expression and its various features such as imagery, tone, rhyme, rhythm, register, literary and cultural allusions, mythological references, her poetry shines with intellectual as well as emotional depth.

On reading this anthology, one is bound to agree with the poet's strong individuality as a woman and her choice to write as a woman, as one can discern an 'écriture feminine' at work marked by a sense of abundance, profusion of creative energy, a strong awareness of the self, a confident way of articulation, joyful celebration and even rebelliousness permeating every single verse. One is reminded of what Helen Cixous, Luce Irigaray and other feminist scholars observed about 'women's writing,' associating it with creative extravagance, playful excess, physical materiality of the female body, qualities that one can find in plenty in Smitha's poetry. Her writing is essentially polyphonic and challenges the privileged unitary notion of truth by interacting between languages, discourses and ideologies and pluralizes in terms of

meanings and representations. The ideas of self-interrogation and self-renewal are integral to her philosophy which she steadily applies to all relations. The poem addressed to Kamla Das is an overt tribute as well as a recognition of a shared literary tradition or poetic inheritance. When she says that "I too want to feed a lover by hand/ drift into sleep by the river, in the secret knowledge/ being light, a bird or a fish," she literally, metaphorically dreams through her dream, thinks back through her, appreciating her voice, her story and shares a literary kinship with her in recognition of her body, sexuality and desires, seeking fulfillment, autonomy, resisting patriarchal inhibitions that inflict unrealistic and flawed standards of modesty, decorum, suppression of desires.

The idea of the "Brown God" permeates through the anthology, yet its detailed explication can be seen in the poem titled "The Reign of Brown God" that evokes the ideals of liberty, equality, fraternity, fearlessness, modesty and a heightened sense of responsibility. With an excellent use of myths and archetypes the poet brings home the lessons of benevolence, virtuosity and humility taking us through the lore of Daitya King Mahabali and Vaman, and the vision of a utopia. The poem "Sita" brings back the memory of historical oppression of women kind in India, their self righteousness, limited agency and the potential for subversion of identity beyond the body politics. Turning the Sita myth from being an archetypal victim to a warrior to a saviour of the degraded conflict ridden civilization, she writes: "Each day you feed your failures/ with fire, the nothingness of questions,/ idiosyncrasy of answers./ You harness the betrayals and turn them/ into sunlight. You dip a finger in the wounds/ of time, struggling not to die. A mimosa flower." (73) Symbolizing beauty, resilience and lasting fragrance, the mimosa flower can impart a perennial identity to Sita who through her virtues makes oceans shudder and skies tremble and, in her radiance is incomparable, as the poet quips: "You, Sita, daughter of Earth/ How could you be anyone else?" (73) Many of the poems dialoging with the past, make us revisit the images of women, the archetypal suffering humanity, show the possibility of resistance in the popular myths by posing questions pertaining to desire, body politics and gender inequality. Many of the poems show the tension inherent in women's consciousness as they refuse to identify with tropes of femininity, and to be intimidated by power and control exerted by patriarchal economy. A poem like "Between My Country And Theirs" clarifies that even though surrounded by the skeptics, non-believers and hate mongers, poets can still "sow poems on the skin of dead earth, hoping for tulips to rise again". (39) "Once there was a woman" is a testament to the isolation,

grief, felt pain and the never ending oppression faced by women and their fortitude and resilience. Smitha's ability to depict the locale with all its specificity, rendering it the aesthetic of a verisimilitude is unmatched. As a poet she is as much vexed by the structures of patriarchal society, cultural and historical forces as by the questions of inner peace, autonomy of an artist, women's language, conservatism versus modernity in socio-cultural assumptions. By making critical inquiries into the false boundaries and the differences that set humans apart from each other and the physical world and other entities, she systematically deconstructs the binaries of urban/rural, margins/ centre/, visible/invisible, culture/nature, and shares the ecocentric values with collective responsibility and makes important interventions in the field of women's writings.

The success of the anthology lies in Smitha's admirable control over the matter of her delineation as well as the vision that her poetry entails, encompassing deep concerns for ecology, sustainable living, human rights and equal opportunities for the subaltern, the downtrodden, the destitute, the forgotten, the specially abled, the humble peasants, masons, househelps and artisans, reinforcing the pressing needs of peace, harmony, indigenous wisdom, freedom and love that permeates through all the living beings and the universe that nurtures all. Through an exhaustive exploration of the mythology, the topography and cultural history of Malabar region, the religious and socio-political spectrum, the poet is able to impart a hopeful vision for the future hearing truth "in the blueness of lake" and in the poems, where moon opens "a parasol of gold," thus deconstructing the anthropocentric myth and making us recognize the truth and veracity of the human as well as the non-human realm and the melody arising out of their creative synergy.

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East vs. West in *Game of Thrones*: Unpacking Edward Said's *Orientalism* in the Fantasy World

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Abstract— This article examines the way that Eastern and Western Cultures are represented in the TV show *Game of Thrones* (2007-2019), through the lens of Edward Said's work on *Orientalism*. Although *Game of Thrones* is a fantasy TV show that takes place in fictional continents of Westeros and Essos, it has created a clear distinction between the Civilized West and the Exotic East. In many ways, this dichotomy reflects the Orientalist framework that Said identifies in his book *Orientalism*. The author of this article will argue that the East is portrayed by *Game of Thrones* as an Exotic, Mysterious and Often Dangerous Other, as opposed to the Western ideals of Order, Power and Morality. Through an examination of the representation of Essos and specifically Daenerys Targaryen's interaction with the Dothraki and other Eastern cultures, the article will critically evaluate how the show reinforces traditional Orientalist tropes, while at the same time subverts them through acts of resistance and complexities. Overall, the author of this article will conclude that *Game of Thrones* uses the Orientalist framework to both reflect colonial histories, and to prompt viewers to consider what it means to be culturally imperialistic, to have power and to create and maintain one's identity in today's world.



Keywords— *Orientalism, Game of Thrones, Edward Said, Fantasy, Cultural imperialism, Popular Culture.*

Orientalism by Edward Said (1978) is one of the key works in post-colonial studies and is important in that it looks at how Westerners have viewed the East as exotic, enigmatic and less than during history. Said's major thesis was that Western intellectuals, authors and artists created a false and stereotypical view of Eastern societies portraying them as irrational, uneducated and in need of Western guidance and education. These portrayals, Said argued, were more than just intellectual or artistic products; they reflected Western imperialism and colonial ambitions and the notion of the other as the reason for Western control and exploitation of those regions.

Said defines *Orientalism* as Westerner's systematic way of seeing, portraying and often distorting the Orient (which he defined as the Middle East, Asia and North Africa) and thus creating an exotic, dangerous and mystical representation of the Orient, and thus reinforcing the superiority of Western

nations. The Western Self is represented as rational, progressive and modern while the Other (the Orient) is represented as stagnant, primitive and irrational. Thus, the Orient is often represented as a place of mystery and savagery and therefore needs Western intervention to become civilized; an attitude that justified colonial and imperial ventures of European powers for hundreds of years.

Said's *Orientalism* has contributed to numerous discussions concerning race, identity and power in international cultural contexts. The theory of *Orientalism* is applicable not only to historical colonial relationships but also to the continued ways in which Western media and popular culture continue to represent the East as an inferior and exotic space. Therefore, *Game of Thrones*, a contemporary television program based upon George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* novels, represents an excellent platform to explore

these themes. *Game of Thrones* depicts the fictional continents of Westeros and Essos, and the dichotomous relationship between the civilized West (Westeros) and the exotic East (Essos) mirror the dichotomy that Said describes as existing between the Occident and the Orient.

Game of Thrones depicts Westeros as a familiar yet violent world that viewers can easily understand and connect with, whereas Essos is portrayed as a strange and unfathomable world of mysterious cities, nomadic tribes and hostile environments, and therefore as the Other, in relation to the order and structure of Westeros. Characters, including Daenerys Targaryen who begins her journey in Essos and groups, such as the Dothraki, consistently depict Essos as a disordered and magical place inhabited by irrational and dangerous people. This dichotomy of East and West reflects the same colonial ideology that Said criticizes in his book, where the East is seen as a place to fear and exploit.

While, however, *Game of Thrones* often portrays the East as the Other of the West, the show also subverts and complicates these Orientalist tropes through moments of resistance and complexity in its depiction of Essos and its inhabitants. As Daenerys Targaryen journeys from being an outsider in Essos, she demonstrates the complexities of East-West interactions, particularly regarding issues of power, identity and agency. The show encourages the viewer to question whether the Western colonization of the East is morally justifiable and if so, how the simplistic distinction between the rational West and the savage East can be challenged.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the extent to which *Game of Thrones* utilizes Edward Said's theory of *Orientalism* in framing the depiction of Essos and the cultures within it. Furthermore, this paper will analyse the representations of the Dothraki and Daenerys' experience in Essos to illustrate the way the show both supports and resists colonial discourse that Said critiques. Ultimately, it will be demonstrated that *Game of Thrones* utilizes the East-West dichotomy as a method to criticize and challenge the colonial ideologies that have been a part of history and culture for thousands of years, and to encourage the viewer to rethink their own notions of power, racism and identity.

Edward Said's *Orientalism* defines the Orient as a constructed idea based on Western representations that depict Eastern societies as exotic, irrational and inferior to the West. These representations were often used in justifying colonial domination as well as the so-called civilizing mission. The East is presented by Said as a land of mysticism, disorder and barbarism, different from the rational and progressive West. This East has, according to Said, an exotic difference that makes it incomprehensible and not subject to analysis as are the rational West and its

elements of democracy and capitalism. Characters and cultures from Essos are exhibit this same exoticism. The distinction made in *Game of Thrones* between East (Essos) and the West (Westeros) is not merely geographical but also a cultural, political and moral difference. Essos is rife with cultures portrayed as mysterious or dangerous, as compared to the political systems in Westeros that are ordered and more familiar. An analysis of the representation of Essos, and especially its cultures and peoples, shows how *Game of Thrones* reflects Said's criticism of Western representations of cultures and the treatment of the East as the Other.

From the beginning, Essos is depicted in *Game of Thrones* as a great and mysterious land filled with foreign cultures, strange rituals and dangerous people. This agrees completely with Said's criticism of the construction of the Orient as being a place of the unknown, that is, an exotic and foreign space which remains outside of the rational order of the West. The continent of Essos, with its various scenes, provides a framework for representing the Eastern Other, from the wandering Dothraki to the magical Free Cities of the East. Essos is painted as a land difficult to understand from the point of view of Westeros, with a different set of laws of society and government. The Dothraki, one of the more notable groups from the continent of Essos, are introduced as a fierce nomadic warrior tribe that thought strength and honour above all things. Their ideas of horsemanship, raiding and a severe system of loyalty in social conduct are tumultuous and chaotic compared to the orderly social structures of the nations of Westeros. The barbarity of the Dothraki, their violent conquests, their lack of understanding of the political ideas and governments of the kingdoms of Westeros marks them out as the classical Other in Orientalist thought. They are given the reputation of primitive people, almost animal-like people, whose ideas are presented as equally fascinating and dangerous. It is Said's idea that the savage and uncivilised ideas given to the Dothraki reinforces the Occidental concept of Eastern peoples being devoid of rationality, order, structure and civility. Also, Essos is painted as a land of mystery, and magic, which is a requisite of representations of *Orientalism*. Magic in the sense of *Game of Thrones* is associated with the East, and with the city of Qarth, the Shadow binders of Asshai, and the Red Priestess, Melisandre, who combines the occult with pleasure and vice. These enchanting themes, often associated with Eastern religions and philosophies, suggest the unknown and therefore the mysterious, an aspect of *Orientalism* that is all important. By setting the East as a land of the supernatural, *Game of Thrones* emphasizes the irrationality and unworldliness of Essos. The East is a land where the laws of nature and reason do not apply, where magic forces and decrepit practices reign, and where such beings as

Daenerys Targaryen can ride dragons, a supernatural ability unknown in the rational West. This magical note adds to the exoticism of Essos and is in accordance with Said's (1979) view that the East is often presented as a land of irrationality and mystery. The East as a Land of Danger Besides being exotic and mysterious, Essos is at times represented as a land of danger, which is in accordance with the Orientalist stereotype of the East, which is represented as a land of menace and explosion. This crisis is shown in both the physical conditions of the land and in the people inhabiting it. Meereen, Yunkai, Slavers' Bay is depicted as being without law, with corrupt rulers and complex and often brutal social relationships. The slave trade, which is prevalent in these lands, is another thing lending to the dangerous and repressive nature of Essos. The freed people of Essos are presented as driven and miserable and the masters and slave-breeders, as corrupt and power-mad, which, too, lends to the idea of the East as a land in need of a saviour, of a land where the West must intervene in the interests of bringing order and the establishment of law and justice. The Dothraki are represented as being wild and uncontrollable, too, which enhances the feeling of danger, for they are introduced as a chaotic force sweeping from Essos to invade and conquer Westeros.

The Dothraki are shown as a society based upon the blood of the khals, a leadership structure of powerful war lords, an arrangement that is foreign to the Westeros individuals who live under a feudal kingship and more centralized modes of governmental rule. For this reason, the Dothraki are depicted as an existential threat to Westeros, not so much based on their military strength but for their utter disregard for Western values in terms of how government is conducted and oriented. The impression of danger is heightened by the violence and brutality of their raids, including the rape and pillage of innocent towns wights, to enhance their barbarism and the resort that is necessary for Western civilization to tame them. In *Game of Thrones*, however, the danger of Essos is not wholly the province of physical violence, it is psychological and cultural as well. The Eastern cities are depicted as filled with intrigue, corruption, betrayal. The Eastern city of Bravos, for instance, is the home of the Faceless Men, an order of assassins, and is described as essentially a place of secrecy and mystery where danger is to be found underneath the surface and political dealings. The constant fear of being assassinated and betrayed in the cities is part of this impression that Said discusses, wherein the Orient is a space filled with danger, deception and instability, as opposed to the rational, ordered and safe world of Westeros. The Exotic and the Primitive: Evolution of the Dothraki and Daenerys

The Dothraki, as one of the main depictions of the Eastern Other in *Game of Thrones*, play a crucial role in the

Orientalist framework of the series as well. As mentioned, the Dothraki are first presented as a chaotic, primitive people, whose customs are generally regarded as barbaric by the standards of Westeros. The Dothraki way of life, which incorporates various rituals, i.e. the killing of a khal (leader) in order to be a khal oneself, is presented as an inscrutable and savage element of their culture. Within the context of Daenerys' first experiences, the Dothraki illustrate the truest form of barbarism that presents itself in opposition to Daenerys' evolution into a powerful and civilized leader. However, as Daenerys grows in power, her relationship with the Dothraki changes which changes the traditional Orientalist narrative. Daenerys, the princess of Westeros, rises above the role of naive, weak outsider within Essos, and grows into a leader in her own right that can command the Dothraki and unite them under her banner. Thus, this development adds complexity and challenges to the simplistic East/West dichotomy of *Orientalism*. Although they were once savage and un-civilized at the beginning, the final submission to Daenerys, shows us that the East is not just a place to conquer, but a place for power struggle, resistance and cultural blending. Daenerys Targaryen as a character in *Game of Thrones* develops a more complex way of looking at the Dothraki as being totally barbaric and develops a more complex way of looking at the representation of Eastern culture, thus creating an additional layer to Daenerys' story as she represents the Eastern hero's journey, in the West.

Daenerys Targaryen, One of the Main Characters in *Game of Thrones*, Represents A Variety of Ways To Examine How Western and Eastern Identities Are Interwoven and Entangled in Her Journey from Powerless Exile in Essos to Powerful Leader Challenging the Patriarchal Structures of the West and Involves Many Orientalist Themes, While Also Subverts Them, Therefore Developing a Necessary Focal Character to Develop the Series in its Examination of the Themes of Power, Imperialism, Identity. Daenerys' trajectory embodies a classic example of a Western hero's journey, but one which takes place in the exotic and barbaric East, thus enabling her story arc to become a form of vantage point, through which the series provides a commentary on the ideas of colonialism, cultural interfaces, and the difficulties of representing the East. At the outset of *Game of Thrones*, Daenerys Targaryen is introduced to the viewer as a vulnerable, exiled, Westerosi princess, stripped of her family authority and relegated to an alien land. She is, in the beginning, portrayed as weak and passive, and under the arbitrary authority of her brother, Viserys, who is attempting to reclaim the Iron Throne by arranging her marriage to Khal Drogo, the leader of the Dothraki. In this early instance, Daenerys embodies the portrait of the outsider, in Essos, a Westerosi princess innocent of the

Dothraki nomadic, violent customs. In Orientalist terms she embodies the Orientalist experience of the West confronting the East symbol of the Western world's incursion into the uncivilized, barbaric society of Essos. However, her characterisation as the Westerosi exile also marks out her character as the blank slate, upon which the narrative may conduct its explorations of her transformation into a ruler. In her early contacts with the Dothraki, Daenerys is forced into submission and dependence.

When Daenerys marries Khal Drogo, her union is portrayed as a political arrangement a cultural exchange between the East and the West in which Daenerys is expected to passively accept the role of the foreign princess who was used to aid her brother's quest for the Iron Throne. The Dothraki are depicted as the exotic and uncivilized other who have practices and customs that are viewed as alien and savage by the Westerosi.

As Daenerys develops as a character, she evolves from a passive victim to a powerful leader. Daenerys transforms from a submissive partner to Drogo to a mutually respectful lover. After Drogo's death, Daenerys finds herself as the sole ruler of the Dothraki and a growing army. Daenerys begins to move beyond her role as a foreigner in Westeros and becomes an increasingly complex and hybridized form of herself, as she assimilates into the cultural context of the East. This is the beginning of Daenerys transition toward becoming a ruler who represents a combination of both Western and Eastern styles of leadership, as she transitions from being an outsider to a ruler who is recognized for her authority throughout Essos. The experiences she encounters while in Essos are also significantly different than the patriarchy and violence she had experienced in Westeros. In the East, Daenerys can find power through the diversity of the cultures, people and challenges. Daenerys evolves into the mother of dragons, a leader who controls her dragons and represents her ability to control the chaos of Essos and bring order to the wild East. By Orientalist standards, Daenerys' ascension is reflective of the paradox of Western imperialism: even though the West is often portrayed as the force that must civilize the East; Daenerys' ascension presents the possibility that the East may reshape the West. Daenerys brings together elements of Western-style leadership (e.g., strategic planning, the ability to command) and Eastern mysticism (her dragons, her connection with the Dothraki). On the other hand, Daenerys' leadership in Essos also parallels the colonial mind-set in which Western imperialism is often framed as a benevolent force that saves the oppressed Easterners from themselves. Daenerys' path can be interpreted as an example of the civilizing mission, where she frees the slaves of Slaver's Bay and casts herself as the liberator of the barbaric East. From the perspective of *Orientalism*, Daenerys' actions represent the fulfilment of

the role of the Western hero who orders the chaotic lands and reinforces the notion that the East needs to be intervened upon to be saved.

While Daenerys' rise to power challenges the stereotype of the passive female within the context of both the societal patriarchies of Westeros and throughout society, her story also complicates the Orientalist view of the East by the West. Daenerys' story does not depict the dominance of the West over the East; however, it does depict a story questioning the responsibilities and consequences of power, along with the moral justification for interference. As Daenerys grows in power and independence, she continues to assume the role of the Western colonial leader not only commanding armies and deposing tyrants but also defining the future of people she claims to be freeing. Daenerys' conquering of cities like Meereen, Yunkai, and Astapor may be viewed as examples of Western colonialism in the East, where the Western mission civil trice meets the desire of the Eastern masses for revolt against their previous rulers. Daenerys' perception of herself as a liberator of slaves and as a ruler who will break the wheel of oppression is like the ideals of Western colonialism: to deliver democracy, freedom and justice to the darkest corners of the Earth. However, as Daenerys' rule becomes more dictatorial, and as her decisions grow more ethically ambiguous, Daenerys' actions reveal the complexities involved in exercising imperial power. The liberator evolves into a progressively more authoritarian ruler and demonstrates some of the same characteristics of the tyranny she previously fought against. Additionally, her methods (e.g., the crucifixion of the slave masters; the execution of those who oppose her) raise questions regarding what the cost of power may be. Therefore, Daenerys' story also subverts the Orientalist discourse. While the West has traditionally represented itself as the civilizer of the East, Daenerys' story illustrates how the distinction between civilization and savagery is not as distinct as often presented. At times, Daenerys exhibits the very characteristics of the East condemned by Orientalist discourse (intensity, randomness, and irrationality); at other times, she exemplifies the Western ideals of liberty and justice. Overall, Daenerys serves as a reminder that the duality of East and West is flexible, and that all forms of power could produce both liberation and oppression. Daenerys' story also subverts the Orientalist framework in several keyways, particularly through her relationship with the Dothraki, specifically with Khal Drogo. Initially, Daenerys' experience with the Dothraki is established as a conflict between the civilized West and the savage East. However, as Daenerys develops as a leader, she learns the customs of the Dothraki and earns their respect, eventually leading them as queen. Daenerys' development as a leader among the Dothraki represents a significant

divergence from the Orientalist mythology of the East as an unassailable and uncivilized space. Instead, Daenerys' rise to power among the Dothraki is a rejection of the concept of the East as an exotic and uncontrollable landscape, and rather presents an image of respect, understanding, and cross-cultural exchange. Thus, Daenerys simultaneously upholds and challenges the notion of the East as the Other, as she triumphed over and formed alliances with Eastern forces during her pursuit of power. Additionally, Daenerys' relationship with the Dothraki is symbolic of the larger power dynamics in play throughout the East/West dialogue. Even though she initially occupies a position of difference as a Westerosi figure, she becomes a hybrid ruler blurring the lines of both worlds. By embracing the East, Daenerys also challenges the Orientalist conception of the East as territory to be conquered and contained, suggesting that East and West can exist in a complex interdependent arrangement, one in which both are equally capable of teaching, learning, and growth. The figure of Daenerys Targaryen and her function in the Orientalists' art show her transformation from the passive princess of Western Europe into the active empress of Essos telling both oriental and occidental news. The career of Daenerys serves as an indictment to the ideas of imperialism, and tells the story of power, resistance and dominion. The complicated relations of Daenerys with the Dothrakians and allied tribes of Essos means a transvaluation of the oriental ideas of East and West, but at the same time gives a far more complicated view of the complicated and varied relations between East and West. While fundamentally the character of Daenerys is a value of the instability of the division between East and West, that proves the truth of the thesis that neither power nor identity are static but in process of reconstruction continually, according to the mutual influence of the various cultures involved.

In the use of the idea of the East, or Orient (Essos), with all its populated characters and diversified landscape Motif of the East is made goodly use of in the play of *Game of Thrones*. The East is usually presented to the characters in the picturesque and exotic but nevertheless barbaric and mystic descriptions of the otherness. But, while the play gives these orthodoxies will, it complicates them by some interpolations of resistance in the uses of the idea of *Orientalism*, by introducing occasions of resistance, subversion and complexity of tale that qualify the dichotomies of East and West, and the so-called culture of the civilized West (Westeros) and the wild East (Essos). The characters and happenings that take place in Essos, are therefore, presented in such a light, that one sees the East itself, not simply the object of domination and control by the West, but as an empire in itself of which the forces of culture and power and some degree of interdependence and

return, and of some moral ambiguity are a part. Through these means the play *Game of Thrones* illustrates the opposition of *Orientalism* by showing that the so-called other is by no means a homogeneous universe, but a varied and complex section of certain happenings where power and moral agency and identity are not static determinations, but in a normal flux. One of the forms of subversion of the Orientalist ideas, is through the Gestalt of complex characters of the East, who almost entirely refuse to subscribe to the stereoscopic hue of the East as one of chaos, fantastic irrationality, and barbarism. Although many of the people of Essos, as for instance, the Dothrakians, the Slavers and others, and the inhabitants and citizens of such cities as Mereen and Bravos etc., are characterized for us at the time of their introduction in the play in largely Orientalist atmospheres, the view is qualified as the dramatic purpose of the play proceeds, so as to bring into the picture of truth-determined agency, moral ambiguity, construction and complexity of the human actions that they are, descriptive of their characters that they develop much in the contrast of the stereoscopic idea of the East as primitive and barbarous.

The most obvious example of this kind of thing is that of Daenerys Targaryen herself. At the first introduction of this character in her adventures into the region of Essos, we find her in the character of a passive princess of Westeros. At the last peripetia of the play, Daenerys Targaryen comes out as a powerful and influential ruler, who rules armies and armies of even Dragons, and finally exercises the respect and loyalty of many of the peoples of those regions. The original character that surrounds Daenerys is that of her indeed being a pawn in the oriental world of the Dothrakians. But little by little this notion is transfigured into a conception of the powerful conqueror and liberator. The whole courses of events that take place in Essos serve to subvert the idea that the East is composed entirely of races of people that are too organized in everything but are simply a badly organized rag-tag of barbaric peoples. But on the contrary, Daenerys is represented to be sufficiently powerful in her organization of the peoples of the Orient. This includes a lying of various divergent people and factions of those regions, in which the Dothrakians the Unsullied, the slaves of this and that and others like them, but subject to the government and authority of Daenerys. This shows that the East is not only a powerful organization, but that by its structures and relations the East is a complex political organization and means of power and social ordering and construction, and peace and order, nay, though representing races of non-European origin, and race blood.

Tyrion's connection with the people of Essos is important because his relationship with those he meets in Essos reflects the complexity of cross-cultural interactions

between East and West. Although at first, Tyrion represents the rational and intellectual aspects of the West, he finds himself learning and adopting some of the methods of leadership and politics found in the East. Through Tyrion, the series shows how Daenerys' advisors in Essos' cities, including Mereen, complicate the West/East dichotomy. Through Tyrion and Daenerys' experience navigating the various political and social systems of Essos, the series suggests that leadership and governance are not limited to specific cultural frameworks, rather, they are influenced by many different factors. This subverts the notion that there are only two types of cultures, which are both hybridized and can result in new styles of governance, strategy, and leadership. Dothrakis are arguably the most Orientalist culture on display in *Game of Thrones*, as they represent the quintessential barbarian hordes. They are a nomadic, horse-based people without formal cities, frequently raiding other places and disregarding all the rules of Westeros' society. In the eyes of majority of the characters from Westeros, the Dothraki are savage, unrefined and unpredictably dangerous. However, the Dothraki do not exist as simply as one-dimensional savages. Daenerys' experiences with the Dothraki contribute significantly to breaking down the Orientalist paradigm that identifies the East as inherently disorganized and barbarous. At first, Daenerys is subject to the Dothraki way of doing things and is treated as inferior to the Dothraki, but over time, Daenerys becomes familiar with their code of honour, their customs, and their loyalty to each other. When Daenerys starts to exert control over them, the Dothraki stop being depicted as a disorganized, uncontrollable force and begin to be represented as having a complex social structure, strict codes of behaviour, and a strong sense of self-identity. The series' portrayal of the Dothraki illustrates how Daenerys was able to move beyond the image of the Dothraki as irrational savages and demonstrates that their strength and ways of living are based on their own complex set of values and traditions. The Dothraki are not simply a thoughtless, destructive force; they are a proud, strong people with their own forms of governance, their own understanding of honour and their own culture that, although unfamiliar to the Westeros (and therefore, the audience) is very meaningful to them. As portrayed in the series, the Dothraki offer a more nuanced view of the East than the simplistic Orientalist view. The series humanizes the Dothraki and provides glances into their value system and beliefs and thus deconstructs the idea that Easterners are barbarians and also challenges the assumptions behind Western views of civilized vs savage. The Dothraki eventually ally themselves with Daenerys after they have recognized her strength and ability to lead, further complicate the Orientalist paradigm by demonstrating that power and respect are not solely tied to

Western models of authority, but can be gained and respected within non-Western contexts. Although Daenerys' rise to power in Essos could be seen as a story of resistance against Eastern barbarism, it also critiques Western imperialism. Daenerys starts her journey in Essos as a ruler who wishes to free slaves and eliminate oppressive governments, thereby identifying herself as a hero who will break the chains of tyranny. However, as Daenerys continues her journey, the series examines the complexities and contradictions of her actions. Daenerys' attempts to free the East through conquest leads to questions regarding the ethical implications of intervention, and the implications of applying Western style governance.

When Daenerys arrives in cities such as Mereen, Daenerys had to make decisions regarding how to reconcile freeing the people of the East from slavery and oppression, while still dealing with the consequences of removing existing power structures and imposing her own ideas of justice. The people of Essos, particularly in Mereen, are not so easily freed by Daenerys as she may think. Daenerys' attempt to rule such a vast and divided area of the world, illustrate the complexity of the East, as well as the limitations of Western style imperialism. Daenerys' well-intentioned efforts to bring freedom to the people of the East, and to impose her own brand of justice, are often hampered by the harsh realities of power, governance and cultural resistance and demonstrate that the simple binary paradigms of oppressor/oppressed, civilized/barbaric are insufficient to describe the complexities of the East. *Game of Thrones* uses Daenerys' actions and experiences to question the idea of the civilising mission, and to reveal the potential for violence and unintended consequences in every imperialistic endeavour. A subversive critique of the tendency to romanticize Western imperial intervention into Eastern societies is demonstrated through the portrayal of Daenerys Targaryen in *Game of Thrones*. The notion that Western civilization can be imposed upon Eastern societies without consequence is challenged through Daenerys' experiences. Through this, the portrayal of Daenerys challenges the Orientalist tropes that have historically been used to portray Eastern societies, where the East has been presented as a passive recipient of Western imperialism rather than an active agent. Through this subversion of Orientalist tropes, a more complex understanding of the dynamics of power, resistance and the ethical implication of Western imperialism is provided. The subversion of Orientalist stereotypes is seen in the portrayals of Daenerys Targaryen and the Dothraki as well as the portrayal of Bravos, the largest city on the continent of Essos. Unlike most cities in Essos which have been depicted as chaotic, disorganized and uncivilized, Bravos is a city-state that has an advanced economy, complex political structures and

institutions as well as its own values and belief systems. The city of Bravos is also the home of the Faceless Men, a group of assassins whose views and actions provide an alternative perspective of how individuals can think about and live by their identities, individualism and moral codes.

The Faceless Men's actions and philosophies of their way of life also represent an alternative to the traditional Western ideals of what defines heroes and what represents justice. When the Faceless Men were first introduced into Arya Stark's story, they appeared to be mysterious and perhaps not entirely trustworthy. As the story continued however, it was evident that the Faceless Men had a philosophy to their existence that questioned the idea of the concept of an individual identity and the sanctity of one's personal freedom, two tenets of Western ideologies. The method that the Faceless Men use to achieve their goals was defined as both perilous and liberating and therefore offered a commentary on the Western notion of the inviolability of personal identity. Through this representation of identity within the culture of Bravos there is a very thoughtful critique of *Orientalism* and the fact that Eastern cultures do not fit into the stereotype of being mystic and irrational. Instead, Eastern cultures offer different ways of thinking about the concepts of power, identity, and morality.

Conclusion

The *Game of Thrones* television series provides a detailed and complex narrative of the continent of Essos and its people that combines some conventional representations of Eastern peoples and societies in the context of Orientalist stereotypes, while also providing a more complex, and multi-faceted representation of Eastern cultures and peoples and systems of power. The use of the Dothraki and Daenerys Targaryen and the city of Bravos illustrate that the television series provides a critical analysis of the Orientalist theme not only in terms of the complexities of cultural hybridity, but also in terms of the moral and ethical implications of the adoption of Western values by the East. Daenerys' experiences on the continent of Essos illustrate the subversion of the Orientalist trope of the West civilizing the East. Initially introduced to the audience as a person requiring protection and rescue in the barbaric East, Daenerys develops into a self-sufficient and powerful leader who will alter the very land she had previously been subjected to. Daenerys' relationship with the Dothraki and her leadership of the people of Essos illustrate not only the imposition of Western imperialistic ideologies, but also the complexities and contradictions present within any imperial project. In addition to confronting opposition, grappling with moral ambiguities, and challenging the existing power structures, Daenerys' experiences represent the ability of identity, power and cultural exchange to transcend the

simplistic East-West dichotomy. Because of Daenerys' experiences on the continent of Essos, the East is illustrated as not simply a passive object of Western intervention, but as an active participant in shaping the course of events that occur.

Furthermore, the Dothraki, generally represented in traditional Orientalist themes as the archetypal barbarian horde, are presented in *Game of Thrones* as being more sophisticated and multi-dimensional than in their traditional representations. Although the Dothraki appear to be a violent and uncontrollable force when first introduced, the television series later illustrates them to have a strong sense of honour, loyalty and complex social structures. This development complicates the monolithic representation of the East as irrational and uncivilized and illustrates the Dothraki to be a people possessing their own code of conduct, values and agency. By illustrating the Dothraki as both barbaric and honourable, the television series complicates the Orientalist paradigm and enables a more nuanced understanding of Eastern cultures. In addition to the Dothraki, the city of Bravos, a place of great political intrigue and philosophical ideals, further illustrates the way the East is represented. A place of culture and intellectual pursuits, Bravos diverges from many of the common Orientalist stereotypes concerning the East (such as the East being mystical, chaotic, or stagnant) and illustrates a rational and moral society that offers opportunities to question Western concepts of identity, individualism, and justice. The Faceless Men represent a critique of Western values of morality and offer an illustration of the fluidity of identity and the complexities of justice, both of which are demonstrated in the manner they illustrate alternative perspectives on power and morality. Consequently, Bravos becomes one of the central sites in the television series where the concept of Western values and their legitimacy are challenged and interrogated, as well as the complexities of cross-cultural engagement. Ultimately, through the use of characters, locations, and storylines, *Game of Thrones* illustrates the interaction between the West and the East as far more than simply binary; instead, the television series illustrates the East as a space of resistance, agency and cultural hybridity, as Eastern characters and cultures do not merely submit to Western control, but also reshape the conversation of power, identity and justice. Ultimately, the television series critiques Western imperialism by illustrating the complexities of the moral and ethical implications of the adoption of Western values by Eastern societies, including how such an action may lead to unintended consequences, cultural conflicts, and exacerbate pre-existing power inequalities.

In conclusion, *Game of Thrones* is a television series that has successfully engaged with and critiqued *Orientalism*

with its rich and complex characters, as well as the diversity of cultures located throughout the continent of Essos. While the television series utilizes Orientalist tropes to construct a narrative of Western dominance over the East and Eastern savagery, the television series also subverts and complicates these tropes, demonstrating that the East is a complex, active agent in defining its own identity and resisting Western domination. Through characters such as Daenerys and the Dothraki, and locations such as Bravos, the television series rejects and challenges simplistic understandings of the East and offers a more nuanced understanding of the relationships between the West and the East. *Game of Thrones* ultimately conveys that both the East and the West are fluid and multi-dimensional in their perceptions of one another; how these perceptions interact with each other is dependent on several factors including power dynamics, personal identity and cultural exchange. The show also serves as a prompt for viewers to be critical of their own assumptions regarding how the West portrays the East, and to think about the implications of imperialism, representation and identity politics. Ultimately, the show presents an opportunity to evaluate the multi-dimensionality of cultural identity through the lens of the imperialism narrative.

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Identity, Truth and Binary Instability: A Poststructuralist Reading of Bhasa's *Svapnavasavadattam*

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Abstract— This paper aims to analyse Bhasa's *Svapnavasavadattam* through the lens of poststructuralist criticism. It reveals how the play itself constructs identity and truth as unstable and continually shifting. It seems, apparently, a conventional story of separation and reunion; but it is dramatically structured around acts of hiding, masking and withholding information. Drawing on Derrida's concept of *différance*, his critique of binary opposition and Culler's idea of boundless context, the study demonstrates that meaning in the drama is produced by difference, relationality and the interplay between absence and presence. Vasavadatta's shifts from queen to disguised servant girl to image in a dream reveal a subjectivity that is determined by various contexts and perception. Yaugandharayana's political maneuver collapses the distinction between truth and falsehood and reminds us that reality in the play is always mediated and contingent. Further, the ending of the drama contains remnants of uncertainty; the real Vasavadatta is inextricable from the roles she has enacted. This study, thus, situates *Svapnavasavadattam* as a classical text that has the traces of poststructuralist thinking. It argues that the instability of binary opposition and the endless play of meaning are not limited to modern literature but can be found in classical drama as well.



Keywords— Bhasa, Culler, Derrida, *différance*, identity, poststructuralism, *Svapnavasavadattam*

I. INTRODUCTION

Bhasa is one of the earliest known playwrights in Indian classical literature. *Svapnavasavadattam* or *The Vision of Vasavadatta* is one of his most famous plays of all time. The play revolves around King Udayana of Vatsa and his queen Vasavadatta. Initially, Vasavadatta is thought to perish in a fire. Udayana grieves for her and believes that he has lost her for eternity. But she continues to live. His minister, Yaugandharayana, conceals her and decides to secure a virtuous and politically advantageous alliance for Udayana by marrying him to Magadha's princess, Padmavati. Meanwhile, Vasavadatta adopts the guise of Avantika and becomes maid of Padmavati. She serves in silence and hides her grief. She observes her husband getting ready for a new marriage. Her heart is quietly aching, but she clings to the minister's plan. At one point she even appears in Udayana's dreams. The king feels her presence but cannot totally believe whether it is real. Once

the kingdom is secured from attack, Yaugandharayana speaks the truth: Vasavadatta is still alive. Udayana accepts her again and the sadness transforms into happiness. The play concludes with peace; Udayana takes both the queens and the kingdom becomes strong in love and wisdom.

There are several readings of *Svapnavasavadattam* that bring out different aspects of the play.

C. R. Devadhar studies the question of authorship and the original form of the play. Devadhar observes that "nowhere in the anonymous work is there a situation like the one referred to by Saradatanaya" (56). He concludes that the version we have is not the same but probably a later rendering of Bhasa's original. His study draws attention to how the play's text has come down to us.

Dileep Kumar G points to the tension between politics and personal feelings in the play. Kumar notes that it shows "an intense conflict between the world of political

discourses and practical wisdom represented by the clever ministers of King Udayana and king Mahasena, and the 'other' world created by King Udayana and Vasavadatta . . ." (30). His reading reminds us how the drama carries together the traits of love and the demands of rule.

N. R. Gopal explains that the play combines political themes with romance. Gopal calls it "a masterwork of political drama mixed with romance" (508). He shows how Bhasa gives the work both artistic elegance and emotional depth.

Vachaspati Dwivedi looks at the dramatic design and special devices in the play. Dwivedi says that "the prevailing Rasa (sentiment) in *Swapnavasavadattam* is no doubt Vipralambhasringara (love-in-separation) . . ." (14–15). However, the marriage with Padmavati reflects political needs. Dwivedi's remarks bring out the balance of structure and sentiment in the drama.

Svapnavasavadattam, thus, has been studied in many ways, as a love story, a tale of sacrifice or a political drama. Yet its relation to poststructuralist thought has not been explored deeply.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Poststructuralism is an approach to language, literature and culture. It emerged during the 1960s and 1970s. It developed out of structuralism but was also against it. Rather than believing language provides us with fixed, determinate meaning, poststructuralism says that meaning is always contingent, shifting and unstable. Here, texts do not possess one stable truth or essence. They have multiple interpretations based on difference, culture and history. Deconstruction, associated mainly with Jacques Derrida, is a major thread within this tapestry. It is both a branch of poststructuralist theory and a reading practice. Poststructuralism is the broader framework. Whereas, deconstruction is one of its most important tools. It analyses how meaning keeps breaking apart and is remade (Leitch 22–24).

It is this concern with meaning that prompts Derrida to formulate the concept of *différance*. He invented the word *différance* to explain how meaning functions in language. By this term, he wanted to show that meaning is never fixed or stable. A word gets its meaning by being different from other words. At the same time, meaning is always delayed, because one word leads to another and thus, it never reaches a final point. For this reason, it is always in the process of being made but never fully complete. Derrida, says "every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by the systematic play of differences" ("Différance" 11).

Meaning, therefore, does not reside in the word itself but is generated by the word's relationship to other words and is continually deferred in an infinite chain of signification. Language does not provide immediate or ultimate access to truth but initiates a continuous play of signifiers. Thus, interpretation of text is an open, infinite process rather than a finite one.

In addition to *différance*, Jacques Derrida's deconstruction also questions the structuring of thought through binary opposition. He demonstrates how Western metaphysics is founded on pairs of oppositional terms: speech/writing, nature/culture, presence/absence, truth/falsehood. Most importantly, neither term in a binary has meaning in isolation; a meaning is always produced by the interrelationships among the terms. For this reason, there is always a bit of the opposite within each concept: "without a trace retaining the other as other in the same, no difference would do its work and no meaning would appear" (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 62).

Jonathan Culler brings this discussion further by focusing on the nature of meaning in context. Culler states, "Meaning is context bound, but context is boundless" (123). This observation reveals the impossibility of fixing meaning. Each reading act positions the text in a new horizon. Each new situation is a revising context that re-contextualises the text's meaning but does not finally determine it; it makes literature open to all other meanings. In this sense, there are no definitive or absolute truths in a text. Rather, they produce an endless reinterpretations where meaning multiplies, shifts and expands without bound.

III. TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

The Instability of Identity: Vasavadatta's Shifting Roles

In Bhasa's *Svapnavasavadattam*, Vasavadatta's identity is never stable or fixed. She is always moving. She keeps on exiting one role and entering another; she never rests in one form. At the outset of the play, she appears before us as the proud queen who carries the dignity of her birth as well as the love of devotion to Udayana. But she is quickly convinced to abandon this role and go into hiding as a simple attendant, Avantika. Later she returns again, though not as herself but as a fragile dream-image in Udayana's sleepless night. She is revealed to be Vasavadatta only at the end, and even then she bears the trace of all of these other forms. Each is a moment, but none of them can be her final shape, or her definitive identity. She is always in flux, in-between presence and absence, truth and masquerade. Derrida's idea of *différance* explains this shifting very well. Meaning is never whole, never finished. It is always shaped by relation and delay. Vasavadatta too is

never entirely herself. As queen, she is defined in relation to Padmavati. As Avantika, she gains meaning because the minister requires her to hide herself to accomplish his plan. As a dream, she is half-real, a fragile sign of longing that Udayana cannot fully grasp. She says "the more they hasten, the deeper the gloom in my heart" (Bhasa 2). It shows how her sense of self keeps slipping through what she is and what she must become. At that time she plays the role of Avantika, but her heart aches seeing the hasty preparation of Udayana's second marriage. She feels pain inside as she is actually Vasavadatta, king Udayana's wife and is still alive. Her inner self continues to shatter. The play itself shows this again and again. She is asked to prepare the garland for her husband's second marriage and she cries: "Must I do even this? The Gods are indeed cruel" (Bhasa 3). It shows the cruelty of her unstable identity. Here she is not simply queen, rival or dream-image. She carries all of these together. But she cannot settle into any one role. All of these make it clear that Vasavadatta's identity is never natural or stable in this play. It does not refer to the truth beneath the mask. Her identity is always relational and formed by situations. Vasavadatta is made queen in the place of Padmavati, servant, through Yaugandharayana's plot, dream through Udayana's sorrow.

Truth, Deception and the Collapse of Binary Oppositions

One of the most striking tensions in *Svapnavasavadattam* is the constant play between truth and deception. The entire narrative begins with a false report, the rumour of Vasavadatta's death in a fire. At first it appears barbaric, but it is a deliberate act by Yaugandharayana to preserve the kingdom. The apparent lie is actually Udayana's only opportunity to marry Padmavati and regain his kingship. In this case, the act of deception or false report itself bears the truth. It becomes the very ground on which the truth of Udayana's kingship is restored. Poststructuralist thinking assists us in interpreting this play of opposites. Derrida teaches us that notions of truth and falsehood or presence and absence are never absolute. These are always influenced by difference and deferral. And this is exactly what occurs here. This is the point where binaries begin to break down. Vasavadatta's false death is not the opposite of truth, but rather the means by which the kingdom is able to survive. The survival of the kingdom is true. Deception in one shot becomes revelation in another. This play, this, does not allow us to comfortably exist in binaries. Lies give birth to truth, illusion uncovers reality and disguise contains presence. Or, to quote Derrida, it is always in the "trace," never absolute and never present. The restoration of the kingdom is true and it lies in the trace of Vasavadatta's false death. In this movement *Svapnavasavadattam* reveals that truth and deception are not actually opposites. They lean, fold and flow into each other. The play does not allow us to

draw neat boundaries. Instead, it reveals the fragile interdependence of binary categories. It shows us that meaning, like identity, is never final but always shifting and always alive in context.

Dream and Differance: The Play of Presence and Absence

The very title *Svapnavasavadattam* or *The Vision of Vasavadatta* suggests that the dream is not a fleeting instant but, in fact, the center of the play. A dream is intrinsically unstable. It reveals and it conceals; it allows the figure to be held close but also to remain at a distance. It always struggles between absence and presence. Derrida's concept of *differance* is helpful here because he points out that meaning is always deferred and marked by difference. For most of the drama Vasavadatta never appears directly to Udayana. She comes in the form of a substitute, the rumour of her death, Avantika's part and the tenuous sighting in his dream. No one is the whole but they all offer a glimpse. Of course she is always near and far. Only parts of herself are always visible. This is most evident in the dreaming scene. Udayana in his sleep calls for her "O Vasavadatta" (Bhasa 5). She is there, but also not there for him. He reaches for her but confesses, "I have no clear idea whether or no this was really my heart's desire" (Bhasa 5). The dream does not provide certainty, but it allows meaning to be generated by simultaneously holding her alive and dead, there and not there. Even as Avantika she exists in the body but not in the name until her ultimate revelation. Her identity is always postponed. Derrida reminds us, meaning is "a systematic play of differences" ("Différance" 11). And Vasavadatta, too, only exists in opposition: between wife and attendant, life and death, dream and reality. From this perspective, the dream is not peripheral to meaning, but rather the place where meaning occurs. Absence always tinges presence and, importantly, Udayana does not view the entire truth, but rather a remnant that sustains meaning. In fact, in *Svapnavasavadattam*, it is reality itself that is dream-like. It is not only fragile but perpetually deferred.

Contextual Meaning and the Unfinished Ending

Jonathan Culler reminds us that "Meaning is context bound, but context is boundless" (123). It means that a text can never be closed by a single reading. Each new context provides new meaning to the text. Bhasa's *Svapnavasavadattam* provides a subtle glimpse of this principle. As Yaugandharayana announces the death of Vasavadatta, the meaning of this news is context-dependent. To the subjects and political supporters this is received as the truth. For Udayana that same report becomes unbearable grief. To Vasavadatta, specifically, it is not deceit, but sacrifice; she willingly commits to vanish in order to secure her husband's throne. But this shifting of meaning is not accidental but rather integral to the play. This is what Culler

refers to as boundless context. The text does not close. It is not a fixed object. It is open, alive and infinitely interpretable. Meaning is not determined once for all time. It is rewritten each time based on history, culture and point of view.

The drama, thus, also reflects the movement of textuality itself. Vasavadatta exists as a queen, a disguise, a dream, a revelation and similarly the play exists as many things, is never final, always becoming. In this way Bhasa's text is a representation of the poststructuralist reality that a text is not a completed object, but a continual rewriting. The drama ends with a reunion. Vasavadatta is finally unveiled. Udayana is reunited with his wife and he regains his throne. But even there is no neat resolution. The ending does not present pure closure but rather a fragile stitching together which is still haunted by that which has passed. Vasavadatta can never again be simply the queen for the audience. Avantika is still remembered as the disguised servant who created the wedding garland. Her memory holds tightly to that last revelation; it cannot be erased. The Yaugandharayana's deception does not disappear either. It lingers. The same instability exists in Udayana. Vasavadatta is now unveiled in front of him, yet he still retains the memory of her dream. This is where Derrida's use of the term "trace" begins to make sense. The final harmony of the play is also cast in shadow by disguise, deception and dream. Closure is never really closure. It carries within it that which it attempted to closet. Thus *Svapnavasavadattam* does not end with a firm circle but an open spiral. The resolution is multi-tiered and ambiguous.

IV. CONCLUSION

Svapnavasavadattam shows that identity, truth and meaning never remain fixed or final. They shift with roles, disguises and dreams. Vasavadatta is queen, attendant and effete dream image. Each role is significant only temporarily, but none of these roles is her complete self. She is always haunted by absence. Her identity is both what others perceive and what circumstances demand. The minister's plan similarly blurs the line between truth and falsehood because the false report of her death secures the survival of the kingdom while disguise and dream reveal a different kind of reality. Even the reunion that closes the play carries within it traces of deception, grief and memory. The closure feels unsettled rather than absolute. Meaning in the play is never fixed. Every context whether political or emotional reshapes how the story speaks. The play closes but its meaning does not; there are new meanings to be made and the play lives on in its changing lights and infinite interpretations.

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Analytical Study of Literary Style in Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Nature*

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Abstract— *This study explores Ralph Waldo Emerson's Nature (1836); it examines how his prose reflects and enacts Transcendentalist philosophy. Through linguistic, rhetorical, and literary analysis, the research highlights Emerson's diction, syntax, figurative language, and rhetorical strategies. The first edition of Nature was chosen to capture Emerson's original stylistic expression. The analysis reveals that his stylistic choices are central to the philosophical impact of the text. Emerson blends spiritual, natural, and scientific language in his diction, while his syntax oscillates between long, complex sentences and short, impactful statements. His use of metaphor, analogy, and symbolism transforms nature into a symbol of spiritual insight, as demonstrated by the "transparent eyeball" passage. Rhetorical techniques like paradox, contrast, and a sermon tone further strengthen the text's persuasive power. Emerson's fusion of poetic and philosophical styles underscores that his prose is not merely ornamental, but integral to his argument, embodying the unity of matter and spirit, reason and imagination. The study concludes that Nature is a pioneering work in both literary and philosophical traditions that influenced later American writers such as Thoreau, Whitman, and modernists. It also contributes to the study of literary style by showing how style serves as a form of thought and persuasion.*



Keywords— *Emerson, Transcendentalism, style, metaphor, rhetorical strategies.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Nature* (1836) is a foundational text of American Transcendentalism, a movement that reshaped 19th-century American thought. At its core, Transcendentalism emphasizes the unity of spirit and nature, the primacy of intuition, and the search for truth beyond empirical observation (Myerson, 2000, p. 18). Emerson's work is not only a philosophical treatise but also a literary performance that merges intellectual rigor with poetic expression. Its lasting power stems from the way style and substance work together to express a vision of truth grounded in both intellect and imagination. Thus, the significance of *Nature* lies as much in its form as in its content. Emerson combines philosophical argument with the rhythm and imagery of poetry, creating a hybrid style that blurs the boundaries between genres (Cameron,

1982, p. 23). His prose alternates between logical reasoning and lyrical meditation, appealing to both the intellect and the emotions of the reader. This balance reflects the Transcendentalist belief that truth is most fully realized through intuition and direct experience rather than abstract reasoning (Buell, 1995, p. 113).

A close analysis of Emerson's style is crucial to understanding *Nature's* enduring influence. Through his choices in diction, syntax, and rhetorical strategy, Emerson's literary technique conveys philosophical meaning. The form of his writing cannot be separated from its content: Emerson's vision of nature as a source of spiritual insight is inseparable from the language he uses to express it. This article reviews existing research on Emerson's *Nature*, particularly its treatment of style, and outlines a methodological framework for analyzing the

text's vocabulary patterns, sentence structures, imagery, and rhetorical devices. The findings reveal that Emerson's stylistic distinctiveness not only reflects his Transcendentalist ideas but also strengthens their persuasive power that shapes American literature and culture. While most research has focused on the philosophical and theological implications of *Nature*, which link Emerson to German Idealism and Enlightenment rationalism (Buell, 1995, p. 112), these studies often overlook the importance of style. Packer observes that Emerson's effectiveness as a thinker is tied to his creativity as a writer (Packer, 2007, p. 54). The originality of *Nature* lies not just in its ideas but in the rhythms, images, and rhetorical turns that communicate them.

This dual quality (philosophy blended with poetry) defines Emerson's writing. In the opening chapter of *Nature*, for example, Emerson asserts, "To go into solitude, a man needs to retire as much from his chamber as from society. I am not solitary whilst I read and write, though nobody is with me. But if a man would be alone, let him look at the stars" (Emerson, 1836, p. 5). This shift from philosophical reflection to sensory imagery transforms abstract ideas into lived experience, drawing readers into the Transcendentalist vision. In *Nature*, style is not secondary to ideas; it generates meaning. Emerson's use of diction, syntax, and rhetorical devices embodies the principles of unity, immediacy, and intuition. Therefore, a stylistic analysis is essential to understanding the full impact of *Nature*. Emerson's influence lies as much in how he writes as in what he writes.

1.1. Objectives

This study seeks to:

- Explore the key stylistic features of Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Nature*.
- Analyze how Emerson's use of diction, syntax, imagery, and rhetorical devices conveys his Transcendentalist philosophy.
- Illustrate how Emerson's literary style and philosophical ideas are intertwined in *Nature*.

1.2. Research Problem

While *Nature* has been extensively analyzed for its philosophical and cultural importance, its literary style has not been explored as thoroughly. Much existing research focuses on Emerson's ideas and Transcendentalism's intellectual context, often overlooking how his style conveys them. This gap in scholarship leaves unexamined how elements like Emerson's diction, sentence structure, imagery, and rhetorical strategies not only support but actively shape his philosophical views. In other words,

while the content of *Nature* is well understood, the way Emerson expresses these ideas (through his distinctive literary style) has not been given the attention it deserves. The problem lies in fully appreciating how form and content work together in Emerson's work to express the core principles of Transcendentalism.

1.3. Research Question

How does Emerson's literary style in *Nature*, through diction, syntax, imagery, and rhetorical devices, reinforce and embody his Transcendentalist philosophy?

1.4. Thesis Statement

This study argues that Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Nature* showcases a unique literary style marked by elevated diction, flexible syntax, vivid imagery, and persuasive rhetorical techniques. These stylistic elements not only communicate Transcendentalist ideas but actively embody and reinforce Emerson's philosophical vision. By examining these features, the study demonstrates that Emerson's form and content are inseparable, with his literary style playing a crucial role in expressing Transcendentalism in *Nature*.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Related literature on Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Nature* (1836) has been extensive, though it tends to focus unevenly on certain aspects of the text. Most studies have concentrated on its philosophical, theological, and cultural significance, while its stylistic and rhetorical qualities have often been marginalized. This literature review shows the breadth of existing scholarship and highlights the gap that this article aims to fill by focusing on Emerson's literary style.

Nature is often seen as the founding text of American Transcendentalism, a movement that elevated intuition and spiritual insight over empirical knowledge. Myerson (2000, p. 18) emphasizes Emerson's central role in this movement by noting how *Nature* crystallized themes like individuality, divine presence, and the unity of spirit and matter. Packer (2007, pp. 33–36) also underscores the text's cultural impact, particularly its influence on reformist thought, educational ideals, and literary production. In this study, Emerson's philosophy takes center stage as a defining force in nineteenth-century American intellectual life.

Many scholars place *Nature* within the context of philosophical traditions. Richardson (1995, pp. 85–87) explores Emerson's engagement with German Idealism, particularly Kant's ideas about the limits of empirical knowledge. Gura (2007, p. 112) connects Emerson's transcendental philosophy to American Puritanism and

religious reform; he believes that *Nature* redefined spirituality for a democratic society. While these readings highlight the intellectual foundations of *Nature*, they often overlook how Emerson's stylistic choices function as tools for conveying his philosophical ideas.

Philosophical analyses frequently focus on Emerson's debts to European thinkers, particularly German Idealism and Romanticism. Richardson (1995, pp. 85–90) argues that Emerson's interaction with Kant, Coleridge, and Goethe shaped his belief that the material world symbolizes spiritual truth. Emerson's claim that nature is "the symbol of spirit" (Emerson 1836, p. 13) reflects this intellectual inheritance, where perception itself becomes a spiritual act. Gura (2007, pp. 108–12) adds that *Nature* sought to break with Calvinist orthodoxy by proposing a direct, intuitive relationship between the individual and the divine. Other scholars, such as Porte (2001, p. 43), view *Nature* as a criticism of Enlightenment rationalism, offering an alternative way of knowing rooted in intuition rather than scientific observation. While these readings effectively map the philosophical landscape, they often neglect how Emerson's style enacts his ideas on the page.

A smaller but growing body of research has shifted attention to Emerson's language and literary style. Cameron (1982, pp. 22–25) describes Emerson's writing as a hybrid of philosophy and poetry that moves between analytical reasoning and lyrical meditation. Poirier (1987, p. 113) expands this view by arguing that Emerson's fragmented, rhythmic syntax reflects his belief in intellectual freedom and the open-ended nature of truth. Buell (1995, pp. 114–117) focuses on Emerson's use of environmental and poetic imagery; he suggests that his figurative language connects the material world to spiritual insight. While these contributions lay important groundwork, most are part of broader thematic discussions, and few offer a sustained, systematic analysis of Emerson's style throughout *Nature*.

Although scholars recognize Emerson's literary creativity, most treatments are embedded within larger philosophical frameworks. Cameron (1982, pp. 22–28) argues that Emerson combines the structure of a sermon with the lyricism of poetry, enabling him to appeal to both reason and imagination. Poirier (1987, pp. 111–16) adds that Emerson's fluid, open-ended syntax mirrors his view that truth is provisional and constantly unfolding. His sentences often leave ideas unfinished, which create a rhythm that reflects the very process of thinking. Buell (1995, pp. 113–17) takes this further by analyzing Emerson's imagery, particularly his frequent use of natural symbols like light, stars, and rivers. These images do more than decorate the text; they embody the Transcendentalist

belief that nature itself holds spiritual meaning. Similarly, Cole (1993, pp. 76–80) examines Emerson's diction, showing how he blends scientific terminology with spiritual and poetic language to shape the line between reason and imagination. Although these scholars highlight important aspects of Emerson's style, most do not provide a comprehensive analysis of *Nature* as a whole, leaving room for further inquiry into how Emerson's stylistic choices reinforce his philosophical messages.

Emerson's rhetorical strategies are another focus of scholarship, particularly his ability to persuade readers into new ways of thinking. Porte (2001, pp. 47–49) points out Emerson's use of biblical cadence and sermoniac rhythm, which lend his prose moral authority and urgency. Cole (1993, p. 77) also notes Emerson's use of paradox and antithesis, rhetorical devices that destabilize traditional categories and invite readers to reconsider their assumptions. These rhetorical strategies show that Emerson's power lies not only in his ideas but also in how he presents them. However, these studies are often scattered, and none have yet offered a systematic analysis of rhetorical features across the entire text of *Nature*.

Scholars have noted how Emerson's rhetoric invites readers to perceive the world differently. Porte (2001, pp. 47–51) observes that Emerson borrows from the rhythms of Protestant preaching, but he detaches them from dogmatic theology, creating a sense of moral urgency that calls for Transcendentalist principles to be adopted as a way of life. Cole (1993, p. 77) highlights Emerson's frequent use of antithesis, such as the tension between solitude and society, or between matter and spirit. These paradoxes force readers to engage with Emerson's belief in the unity of opposites. Packer (2007, p. 59) adds that Emerson's rhetoric "redefines the familiar," transforming ordinary experiences like walking in a field or gazing at the stars into profound spiritual encounters. Buell (2003, p. 25) shows that Emerson's rhetoric also anticipates environmental discourse, which encourages readers not only to perceive nature differently but to value it as integral to human well-being. Despite these insights, rhetorical analyses tend to be isolated and do not fully integrate with broader stylistic analysis.

Taken together, the existing scholarship demonstrates substantial engagement with the philosophical and cultural significance of *Nature*, as well as selective attention to language and style. However, the stylistic dimension remains underdeveloped in comparison to intellectual and thematic analysis. What is needed is a comprehensive examination of Emerson's diction, syntax, imagery, and rhetorical devices, not merely as supplementary elements but as integral parts of the philosophical force of *Nature*.

This study addresses that gap by prioritizing style as a central lens of analysis, offering a new perspective on Emerson's work that contributes both to Emerson scholarship and to the broader field of literary stylistics.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a stylistic analytical approach to examine the literary style of Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Nature* (1836). The analysis combines linguistic, rhetorical, and literary perspectives to explore both the technical features of Emerson's prose and the aesthetic and persuasive effects of his style.

The primary text for analysis is the first edition of Emerson's *Nature* (1836). This edition was selected because it reflects Emerson's original language, word choices, and stylistic patterns, without the influence of later revisions or editorial changes. By focusing on this version, the study considers the text as a unified whole, allowing for a detailed, qualitative analysis of Emerson's stylistic approach.

The study employs systematic close reading and textual analysis, organized around several key categories:

- **Lexical Choice:** This category examines Emerson's diction, with a focus on his preference for certain registers, such as formal, poetic, or philosophical language. The study will also identify archaic versus modern word choices, which can reveal how Emerson's vocabulary places him within or beyond his historical context.
- **Syntax:** This section analyzes sentence structure by paying particular attention to sentence length, structural variation, and the use of devices such as parallelism, balanced clauses, and periodic sentences. These stylistic elements are central to Emerson's distinctive style and philosophical expression.
- **Figurative Language:** Here, the study identifies and interprets Emerson's use of metaphors, analogies, and symbols, particularly those that shape his vision of nature. Special attention will be given to how these figures of speech communicate deeper philosophical meanings that reflect Emerson's Transcendentalist worldview.
- **Rhetorical Devices:** This part examines rhetorical techniques such as anaphora, antithesis, and repetition, which enhance the text's rhythm, emphasis, and persuasive power. The study will consider the way these devices contribute to Emerson's blend of didactic and poetic voices.

- **Narrative and Argumentative Mode:** This section evaluates the overall tone and structure of *Nature* by determining whether the text functions more as a persuasive argument, a poetic meditation, or a philosophical treatise. Analysis will also explore how Emerson balances didactic clarity with lyrical intensity in his writing.

The methodology integrates qualitative textual analysis with stylistic theory, drawing from literary stylistics, rhetoric, and discourse analysis. Unlike studies that rely on statistical or computational tools, this approach emphasizes interpretive close reading. The goal is to uncover the stylistic patterns within Emerson's writing and explore how these patterns work to support the central themes of *Nature*. By focusing on Emerson's language, syntax, and rhetorical techniques, the study seeks to demonstrate how his literary style is essential to understanding his philosophical message.

IV. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Lexical patterns

Emerson's *Nature* is characterized by a distinctive lexical texture, with frequent use of spiritual, natural, and abstract vocabulary. Terms such as "soul," "spirit," "influx," and "essence" appear repeatedly, which reflect the text's roots in American Transcendentalism, a movement that aimed to convey a philosophical and quasi-religious view of the natural world (Richardson, 1995, p. 87). This choice of language elevates natural phenomena beyond simple material descriptions, instilling them with metaphysical significance. For example, when Emerson speaks of the "spiritual vision of nature" and the "higher laws" that govern existence, his diction moves away from empirical observation and into the realm of metaphysical speculation.

Alongside spiritual terms, Emerson often uses natural and elemental words, such as "mountain," "river," "forest," "sky," and "light," which ground his abstractions in sensory experience. This balancing act between the concrete and the abstract allows readers to connect philosophical ideas to tangible imagery (Buell, 1995, p. 132). In this way, the physical environment serves as a symbolic space where metaphysical truths are conveyed.

At the same time, Emerson's use of scientific terminology creates an interesting tension. Words like "laws," "classification," "cause," and "effect" reflect the rise of empirical science in the nineteenth century (Armstrong, 2010, p. 53). Yet, Emerson blends these scientific terms with mystical language, such as when he describes "the laws of nature" as expressions of the "divine

mind." This fusion challenges the boundaries between objective facts and subjective, spiritual revelation. Lawrence Buell notes that Emerson's language "oscillates between the factual and the visionary, never resting entirely in either" (Buell, 2003, p. 56). This duality in his language highlights Emerson's aim to reconcile the empirical and the spiritual in his broader philosophical vision.

4.2 Syntax and Structure

The syntax of *Nature* is another defining feature of Emerson's style. It reflects both his philosophical intentions and his rhetorical strategies. One key feature is the use of extended, periodic sentences, where meaning gradually builds through subordinate clauses and parallel structures. These sentences often withhold their final resolution until the conclusion, mirroring the intellectual and spiritual journey that Emerson encourages in his readers. For example, when describing the stages of human perception of nature, Emerson's syntax gradually moves from the external world to inner reflection, which culminates in transcendence. This structure mirrors the oratorical traditions Emerson inherited from his background as a preacher, where pacing and suspense played a critical role in persuasion (Packer, 2007, p. 142).

Parallelism is another important structural device in Emerson's writing. He frequently uses balanced clauses and repeated syntactic patterns to reinforce thematic oppositions and analogies. A sentence like "The stars awaken a certain reverence, because though always present, they are inaccessible; but all natural objects make a kindred impression, when the mind is open to their influence" demonstrates how Emerson juxtaposes the cosmic with the terrestrial, suggesting that spiritual experience exists on a continuum (Emerson, 1836, p. 12). This structure intensifies rhythm and helps emphasize his dialectical movement between contrast and synthesis. Buell points out that Emerson's syntax often "enacts the tension it describes, holding contraries in suspension until their reconciliation in a higher unity" (Buell, 2003, p. 61).

Emerson also alternates between long, meditative sentences and short, aphoristic statements that create a dynamic rhythm. Short, declarative sentences often follow long passages of reflection, serving as climactic assertions, such as "Nature always wears the colors of the spirit" (Emerson, 1836, p. 9). This variation in sentence length mirrors Emerson's dual aim of fostering contemplation through extended reasoning while also offering concise, memorable insights. This blend of reflective depth and rhetorical punch makes *Nature* accessible to readers both familiar with philosophical texts and those accustomed to the sermon style of delivery (Poirier, 1987, p. 97).

Finally, Emerson's syntax often shows the recursive nature of his argumentation. His sentences frequently circle back, restating or refining ideas. This creates a sense of continuous revision rather than a linear progression. This recursive style mirrors his belief in the Transcendentalist view of reality as a network of correspondences. Rather than presenting a simple argument, Emerson's writing generates a spiral-like progression, which shows his openness to exploration and the unfolding of ideas (Gura, 2007, p. 188).

4.3 Imagery and Figurative Language

Emerson's *Nature* is rich with figurative language that both animates and transcends the physical world. Through metaphors, analogies, and symbolic imagery, Emerson transforms nature from a mere object of study into a dynamic text that reveals deeper spiritual truths. One of his primary strategies is the use of metaphors that draw correspondences between natural phenomena and human faculties. When Emerson asserts that "the world is emblematic," he suggests that every material object symbolizes a spiritual fact (Emerson, 1836, p. 19). For Emerson, trees, rivers, stars, and landscapes are never just physical objects; they function as metaphors for intellectual and moral states. This symbolic approach is central to Transcendentalist aesthetics, where metaphor serves as a bridge between empirical observation and spiritual insight (Buell, 1995, p. 72).

Emerson often uses analogies to illustrate complex abstract ideas. For instance, he compares the relationship between humans and nature to that between a child and a parent. This symbolizes the unity of the microcosm and macrocosm. Such analogies are more than illustrative; they offer a model of interconnectedness that extends from the individual to the universal (Packer, 2007, p. 159).

Light imagery is another relevant feature in Emerson's figurative language. References to "the rays of the morning," "the transparency of the air," and "the perpetual influx of light" are not only descriptions of the physical world but also metaphors for intellectual enlightenment and divine presence (Emerson, 1836, p. 10). Light serves as a symbol for revelation and spiritual awakening; it highlights the process of perception itself as a spiritual act. Barbara Packer notes that, "Emerson's light imagery fuses sensory experience with transcendental vision, making epistemology inseparable from poetics" (Packer, 2007, p. 164).

One of the most well-known symbolic images in *Nature* is the "transparent eyeball" passage, where Emerson uses the image of a transparent eye to symbolize self-annihilation, spiritual receptivity, and universal vision (Emerson, 1836, p. 13). This image encapsulates

Emerson's "figural imagination," which, as Richard Poirier observes, resists closure and instead generates multiple meanings (Poirier, 1987, p. 113). The cumulative effect of Emerson's figurative language is a style that blurs the boundaries between description and transcendence. His imagery renders the physical world tangible while simultaneously dissolving its materiality into spiritual significance. Thus, metaphor and symbolism are not merely ornamental but central to Emerson's argument that nature itself is a system of signs pointing beyond the visible.

4.4 Rhetorical Strategies

Emerson's *Nature* blends didactic and philosophical elements, which combine the authoritative tone of a sermon with the speculative nature of a treatise. This approach mirrors his background as a minister, despite his resignation from the pulpit. His prose continues the sermonic tradition of moral guidance, but also presents abstract metaphysical ideas. For example, when he holds that, "the happiest man is he who learns from nature the lesson of worship" (Emerson, 1836, p. 25), Emerson unites a religious message with a philosophical reflection. This balance between instruction and reflection transforms *Nature* from a simple description of the natural world into a tool for moral and intellectual growth.

At the same time, Emerson uses paradox and contrast to challenge conventional thought. His work frequently pits opposing concepts such as nature and spirit, reason and intuition, against each other. The "transparent eyeball" passage, where he declares, "I am nothing; I see all" (Emerson, 1836, p. 13), illustrates this: it collapses selflessness and heightened perception into a singular experience; this shows that individuality is fulfilled through merging with the universal. These rhetorical paradoxes serve as cognitive challenges that encourage readers to rethink binary categories and embrace Emerson's dialectical understanding of unity-in-diversity (Buell, 2003, p. 64).

Emerson's prose also contrasts the permanence of natural law with the fluidity of human affairs, or the vastness of the cosmos with individual experience. This structural contrast mirrors the spiritual oscillation Emerson describes, where the mind must move between material and immaterial realms to grasp truth in its entirety (Richardson, 1995, p. 211). By juxtaposing opposites, Emerson creates a rhythm that both destabilizes and elevates the reader, pushing them to reconsider their assumptions about knowledge and reality. Ultimately, his rhetorical strategies combine the authority of the didactic voice with the unsettling force of paradox that encourages continuous intellectual and spiritual growth.

4.5 Narrative and Argumentative Modes

Nature resists simple categorization; it blends narrative, argumentative, and lyrical elements. It is neither purely a philosophical treatise nor solely a poetic reflection. Rather, it is a hybrid form that appeals to reason, imagination, and moral sensibility. The didactic mode is evident in the text's structured chapters, each focusing on a different aspect of nature, such as commodity, beauty, language, and idealism. This segmentation gives *Nature* the feel of a philosophical curriculum, with Emerson acting as a guide to reshape the reader's worldview. Statements like "Nature is the symbol of spirit" (Emerson, 1836, p. 19) are not simply descriptive but instructional. They urge readers to reconsider their understanding of the world (Packer, 2007, p. 156).

The persuasive mode comes through in Emerson's layering of arguments. He builds his ideas by first observing natural phenomena and then abstracting them to reveal deeper metaphysical truths. For example, he asserts that "the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me" (Emerson, 1836, p. 13). This assertion is supported by the vivid image of the transparent eyeball. Emerson persuades by invoking lived experience, not just deductive logic, which allows the reader to engage emotionally with his ideas (Buell, 1995, p. 134).

Finally, the poetic mode adds to the text's power. Emerson's language often breaks into lyrical rhythms, as when he writes that "the stars awaken a certain reverence" (Emerson, 1836, p. 12). These moments of poetic reflection shift focus from argument to contemplation, which allow readers to experience the beauty of both the natural world and the language that describes it. Richard Poirier (1987, 118) notes that Emerson's prose often occupies a "poetic register," making reading *Nature* an aesthetic experience in itself. The fusion of poetry and philosophy reflects the Transcendentalist belief that truth is not only to be reasoned but also to be felt and intuited. Thus, Emerson's blending of these modes (didactic, persuasive, and poetic) embodies the transcendental ideal of unity between thought and feeling, reason and imagination.

4.6 Stylistic Function and Philosophical Purpose

Emerson's stylistic choices are deeply intertwined with his Transcendentalist philosophy. The structure and effect of his style mirror Transcendentalism's emphasis on the unity of spirit and matter. Just as Transcendentalism insists on the interconnectedness of all things, Emerson's prose blends rhetoric, poetic imagery, and philosophical reflection into a cohesive whole. In this way, style is not an aesthetic choice but a vehicle for philosophical expression. For example, his use of periodic, recursive

sentences mirrors the Transcendentalist idea of intellectual ascent, in which the mind moves from specific sensory experiences to universal truths. Similarly, his reliance on metaphor and symbol highlights the Transcendentalist belief that nature is a living system of signs pointing to spiritual truths (Richardson, 1995, p. 201).

A key feature of Emerson's style is the blending of philosophy and poetry. The text resists classification as either a strictly philosophical work or a poetic meditation, instead straddling both realms. The lyrical quality of his language, through rhythm and metaphor, infuses his philosophical ideas with emotional resonance. Conversely, the structured logic of his philosophy lends weight and clarity to his poetic expressions. Lawrence Buell observes that, Emerson's prose achieves a "fusion of philosophical assertion and lyrical evocation" (Buell, 2003, p. 66). This stylistic hybridity has a persuasive effect that engages the reader's reason, imagination, and spirit in the act of reading.

Emerson's style, then, is not simply a medium for his ideas but an active demonstration of his Transcendentalist philosophy. Just as Transcendentalism seeks to reconcile the material and spiritual, Emerson's prose unites logic and lyricism, instruction and inspiration. The form of *Nature* becomes an integral part of its philosophical message which persuades not only through its content but through the very way it is written.

In conclusion, the stylistic features of Emerson's *Nature* are inseparable from his Transcendentalist philosophy. From his diction to his syntactic choices, Emerson's prose shows and advances his philosophical convictions. His use of spiritual and natural vocabulary, scientific terminology, and metaphors positions *Nature* at the intersection of mystical reflection and intellectual discourse (Richardson, 1995, p. 201). His sentence structure (periodic, parallel, and alternating between aphorism and meditation) mirrors the rhythms of transcendental thought (Packer, 2007, p. 142). Furthermore, his rhetorical strategies, including his sermon-like tone and use of paradox, guide the reader toward new ways of thinking while resisting simplifications (Buell, 2003, p. 64).

In addition, the blending of poetic and philosophical language reinforces Emerson's Transcendentalist vision of unity. Through his stylistic approach, Emerson transforms *Nature* into a work that is not just an argument for Transcendentalism but a demonstration of its principles. The synthesis of genres (poetry and philosophy, reason and imagination) becomes a persuasive strategy in itself. It contributes to convince readers of the truth of Emerson's Transcendentalist worldview. Thus, the style of *Nature* is

not merely ornamental; it is essential to the work's philosophical and rhetorical force.

V. FINDINGS

The stylistic analysis of Emerson's *Nature* uncovers several distinctive features that define its literary character and philosophical purpose. These findings demonstrate the way Emerson's prose operates on linguistic, rhetorical, and philosophical levels, making *Nature* a foundational text not only for Transcendentalism but also for the American literary tradition as a whole.

5.1 Distinctive Stylistic Features

Emerson's style stands out through a unique interplay of diction, syntax, imagery, and rhetorical strategy. His choice of words blends spiritual, natural, and scientific vocabularies, which create a register that connects the empirical and the mystical (Richardson, 1995, p. 201). Emerson's syntax varies between long, complex sentences, often philosophical in depth and oratorical in tone, and short, aphoristic phrases that condense complex insights into memorable, thought-provoking statements (Packer, 2007, p. 142). His use of figurative language, especially metaphor and symbolism, transforms the physical world into a system of signs that indicate deeper spiritual meanings. Moreover, Emerson's rhetorical strategies, such as paradox, contrast, and sermon-like instruction, combine persuasion with provocation, guiding readers toward a Transcendentalist mindset while also challenging conventional categories of knowledge (Buell, 2003, p. 64).

These stylistic elements together establish the unique character of *Nature*, a work that transcends traditional literary categories. It is not only a philosophical treatise but also a religious lecture and a poetic meditation. This hybridity reflects Emerson's Transcendentalist vision of unity, where thought and feeling, reason and imagination, matter and spirit merge. Emerson's style does not merely convey content; it actively enacts his philosophical beliefs. The structure of his sentences and the texture of his imagery reflect the Transcendentalist idea that truth is apprehended through both empirical perception and spiritual intuition (Buell, 1995, p. 72).

5.2 Contribution to the American literary canon

The stylistic innovation of *Nature* secures its place as a cornerstone of the American literary canon. Emerson's blending of philosophy and poetry created a new mode of expression that would influence later American writers such as Thoreau, Whitman, Frost, and Stevens. His fusion of sermon-like rhetoric, philosophical speculation, and lyrical intensity introduced a distinctly American literary style, one that departed from European traditions (Matthiessen,

1941, p. 23). Emerson's stylistic boldness advanced the ideals of Transcendentalism and also contributed to the development of American literature as a space where intellectual rigour and literary creativity coexist. *Nature* stands as both a literary achievement and a cultural intervention. Its stylistic qualities communicate the possibility of an American voice that combines philosophical depth with poetic innovation.

VI. CONSTRAINTS AND LIMITATIONS

This study focuses solely on a close stylistic analysis of Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Nature* and does not extend to his other works. It specifically examines elements of literary style such as diction, syntax, imagery, and rhetorical devices, while excluding other critical perspectives and stylistic features. The analysis is based on qualitative textual interpretation, which involves some level of subjectivity. Furthermore, as the study is centered on a single work from the nineteenth century, the conclusions drawn cannot be generalized to Emerson's entire body of work or to Transcendentalist literature in its entirety.

VII. CONCLUSION

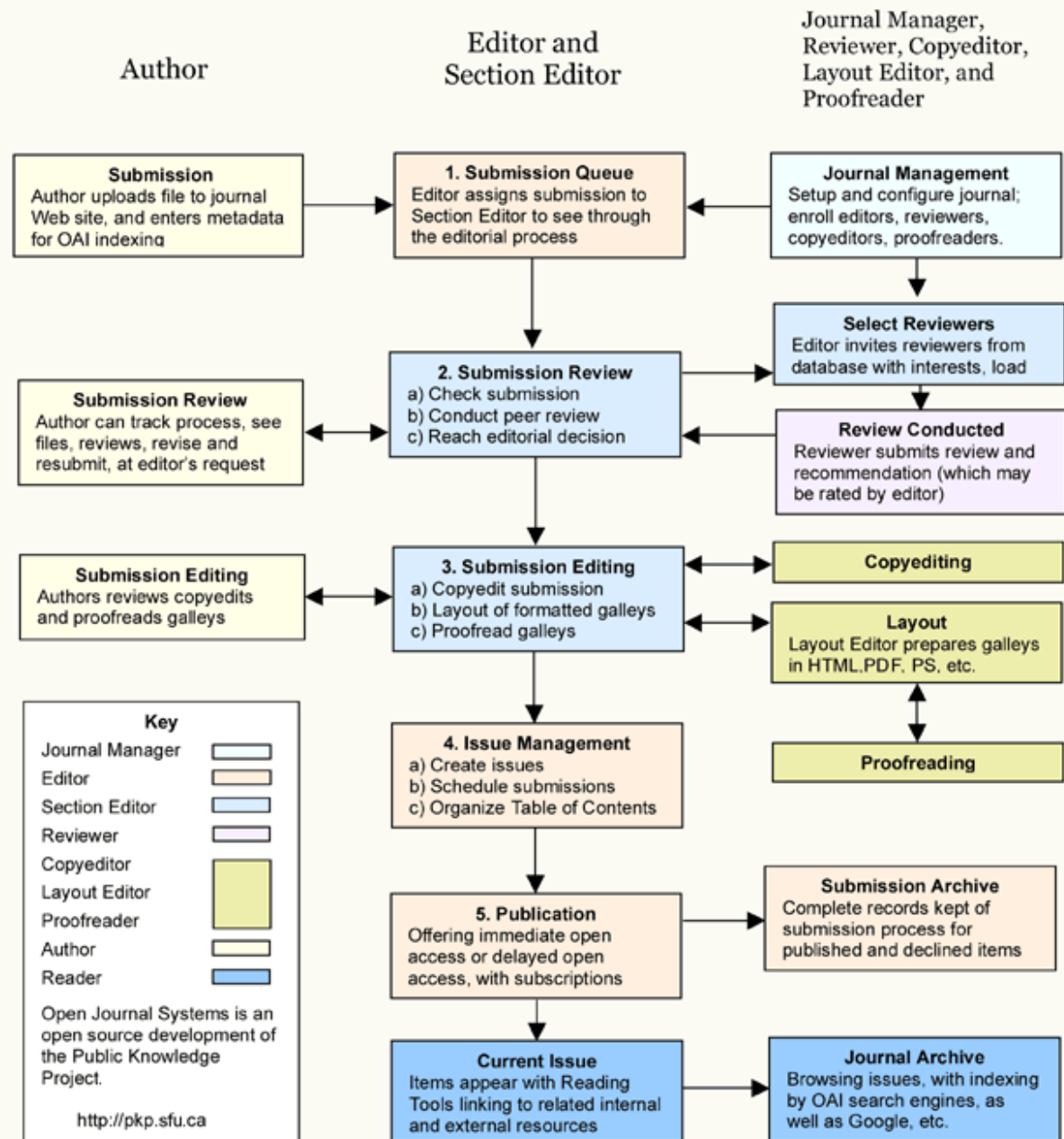
This study analyzed Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Nature* (1836) through a stylistic lens that integrates linguistic, rhetorical, and literary perspectives. The analysis revealed that Emerson's style is distinct due to his unique blend of spiritual, natural, and scientific vocabularies, his combination of long, complex sentences with brief, aphoristic statements, his rich use of figurative language, and his rhetorical techniques that balance authority with paradox. Most importantly, the study showed that Emerson's stylistic choices are deeply intertwined with his Transcendentalist philosophy. His prose not only conveys Transcendentalist ideas but also enacts them, merging philosophy and poetry into a compelling and persuasive form. The findings are significant for both Emerson scholarship and the broader field of literary stylistics. For Emerson studies, this analysis underscores the importance of style in understanding his ideas. *Nature* is not merely a philosophical treatise or a spiritual meditation; it is a literary work in which form and content are inseparable. Emerson's style reflects his belief in the unity of matter and spirit, offering readers an experiential understanding of his philosophy. For literary stylistics, *Nature* exemplifies how style can extend beyond mere decoration to become a mode of thought itself. Emerson's fusion of sermon, treatise, and poetry challenges traditional boundaries, creating a discourse that is both intellectually rigorous and aesthetically powerful.

While this study focuses on *Nature*, several avenues for future research remain. A comparative stylistic analysis with Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1854) could explore the continuities and contrasts within the Transcendentalist movement, particularly in the way each author blends empirical observation with philosophical reflection. Additionally, comparing Emerson with Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855) could reveal the evolution of an American poetic-philosophical style, illustrating how Emerson's prose influenced Whitman's free verse and experiments in combining thought and poetry. Beyond the Transcendentalists, further exploration of Emerson's influence on later American modernists, such as Wallace Stevens and Robert Frost, would deepen our understanding of how his mix of abstraction and lyricism shaped the development of American literary language.

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